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Pathos, Performance, Volition:
Melodrama's Legacy in the Work of Carl Th. Dreyer

by

Amanda Elaine Doxtater

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Scandinavian Languages and Literatures

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Film Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Sandberg, Chair

Professor Linda Rugg

Professor Linda Williams

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Abstract

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This dissertation reads melodrama as an important influence in Carl Th. Dreyer's work and *oeuvre* and shows that his work demonstrates melodrama's relevance to the tradition of Scandinavian art-house, modernist cinema. Dreyer's work has come to embody a stern and severe aesthetic seen largely as the epitome of artistic restraint rather than indicative of melodramatic expressivity. Dreyer began his career in cinema, however, at the Danish studio Nordisk Films Kompagni in the 1910s when the company became synonymous with early Danish film melodrama and other spectacular, mass-produced, popular fare. Scholars have subsequently labeled this decade "The Golden Age of Danish Melodrama." Although the standard reception of Dreyer's work predicates his status as a masterful auteur director upon his decisive break with the company's production model, its themes, and popular-culture ambitions, this dissertation argues that asserting such a break occludes intriguing continuities in Dreyer's *oeuvre*.

The rich proliferation of melodrama scholarship in decades following Dreyer's death in 1968 has radically expanded what can be understood as "melodrama," allowing important affective concerns in Dreyer's work to come to light. Melodrama scholarship allows us to characterize Dreyer's innovation of cinema not only on formal terms, but now also through his developing representations of human suffering, volition, interiority, and emotion. No longer exclusively a genre, style, or theatrical tradition, melodrama is now better understood as a powerful and adaptable *mode* that informs a variety of media, ranging from soap operas to novels by Henry James. The connotations of melodrama available to earlier scholarship and to Dreyer himself could not avoid its strongly pejorative sense; more recent work has made clear the pervasive presence of the mode as

a productive category in both “high” and “low” forms of culture. Consequently, Dreyer’s unique inflection of melodrama reflects his simultaneous relation of repulsion and of attraction to the mode, driven by his perceived need to distance himself from melodrama’s low-art stigma. To negotiate this paradox Dreyer continually reimagines and pressures the mode while remaining sympathetic to its core interests: its depictions of suffering, its humanist faith in art’s capacity to convey something about existence, and its existential desires to recuperate meaning in a world shaken by modernity’s upheaval of traditional cosmologies. Neither fully modernist nor fully submissive to realism’s illusions, melodrama provides a productive framework for understanding both the aesthetic ingenuity and more conservative elements of Dreyer’s modernism.

The first chapters of this dissertation outline advances in melodrama scholarship relevant to the project and then trace the category of “melodrama” through the standard reception both of silent-era Danish film melodrama at Nordisk and in Dreyer reception more generally. The final chapters parse out Dreyer’s innovation of melodrama in three of his major works, *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (The Passion of Jeanne d’Arc, 1928), *Vredens Dag* (Day of Wrath, 1943), and *Ordet* (The Word, 1955) by comparing his “mature” films and by drawing upon key moments in the melodramatic scenarios he wrote at Nordisk. In *Jeanne d’Arc* Dreyer innovates corporeal spectacle, the ethical interaction and thrill of performance, and exploits the limits between “live theater” and film by conflating phenomenological and semiotic performing bodies. *Day of Wrath* extends and heightens melodramatic tensions surrounding domestic melodrama’s conveyance of interiority through expressively charged bodily surfaces. Dreyer uses the body and psychological interiority of his protagonist, Anne (whose will and desire are stifled by relationships in the domestic sphere), to evoke a melodramatic worldview rife with epistemological uncertainty and ambiguous causality. In *The Word*, Dreyer juxtaposes elements of maternal melodrama with intense depictions of male suffering and tears to create art-house melodrama’s version of a male-weepie. This film also bears traces of Dreyer’s persistent interest in the materiality of the filmed body and in depicting gradations of consciousness, drawing on multiple precedents in early Danish film melodrama. In conclusion, Dreyer’s *oeuvre* vitally broadens our understanding of the potentials of the melodramatic mode and the specific tradition of “Scandinavian art-house melodrama.”

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INTRODUCTION

“In all art, it is the human being that is most crucial.”
Carl Th. Dreyer¹

As Denmark’s most distinguished auteur film director, Carl Th. Dreyer (1889-1968), is best known as a paragon of serious European art-house cinema. His work has become synonymous with artistic restraint, control, and uncompromising cinematic virtuosity. Though Dreyer created relatively few feature films during his long career, each comprises a wealth of immaculately composed images and introspective psychological portraits. His unique vision of the human predicament—brought forth through slow, stylized dialogue and minimalist *mise-en-scène*—has become known as the acknowledged fare of tried cineastes and connoisseurs, but the bane of popular audiences. Absent from this picture, however—out of frame as it were—is the story of Dreyer’s emergence from one vibrantly boisterous tradition of Danish melodrama and his inspiration for another: Nordisk Films Kompagni (Nordisk) and Denmark’s *enfant terrible*, Lars von Trier, respectively. Dreyer learned all facets of filmmaking at Nordisk during the Golden Age of Danish film melodrama in 1910-1920. Dreyer cut his teeth, in other words, working on Nordisk’s spectacle-packed, multi-reel “social melodrama” full of “intrigues and espionage and thefts and swindling and betrayals, [...] the ‘social’ element of sinking and rising in society, leading the wild life and going to the dogs” (Neergaard, *Historien* 36-7). During its heyday between 1911-1917, the company dominated Denmark’s domestic film industry and distributed films all over the world as well. Only the French companies Pathé Frères and Gaumont surpassed its production.² Though Nordisk films initially enjoyed a positive reputation for high production values, nuanced dramatic stories in cosmopolitan settings, and titillating love stories, the company soon came to embody a model of mass-produced, simplistic popular culture. Carl Th. Dreyer’s career began at Nordisk, but many scholars would later contend that it only truly began after he left the company in 1921. In their critical readings, the two films Dreyer directed at Nordisk (the only feature-length works he directed there), *Præsidenten* (*The President*, 1919)³ and *Blade af Satans Bog* (*Leaves from Satan’s Book*, 1921), stand as the first of a series of uncompromising aesthetic experiments as a burgeoning director determined to raise film to a high art and unable to do so in Nordisk’s “film factory.” Dreyer’s artistic reputation has been cast in opposition to all that Nordisk represented: its production model, its desire to cater to popular audiences, and its melodrama.

Following Dreyer is Lars von Trier, whose films *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) have garnered him both praise and critique as art-house, postmodern melodramas. Though Dreyer might well have criticized von Trier (less for his films than for his immodest public antics), together, the two Danish directors form a dominant genealogy in European auteur cinema. The Danish Film Institute’s introduction

¹ “I al kunst er det mennesket, der er det afgørende” (“Filmstil” 75).

² See Thorsen, “Rise and Fall” 53.

³ In what follows I introduce each of Dreyer’s films using their original titles and then refer to them afterward by their English titles.

to an article by Peter Schepelern about the two geniuses declares their fundamental connection, “The two great Danish filmmakers, Carl Th. Dreyer and Lars von Trier, are bound by an artistic kinship (*kunstnerisk slægtskab*). Women suffer, and are tortured and burned at the stake, but even as far down as individual shots in some of von Trier’s earliest films, you can see traces of Dreyer’s style.”⁴ Unlike the work of von Trier, however, critics have conscientiously avoided calling Carl Th. Dreyer’s mature work melodramatic. In this dissertation, I argue that Dreyer’s *oeuvre* provides a key link in this genealogy of art-house, modernist melodrama that very much begins at Nordisk, where Dreyer encountered a surprisingly alluring iteration of the melodramatic mode from which to draw.

Standard accounts of Dreyer’s development that posit a radical break between his early years making melodrama and his later years making “art film” occlude important (melodramatic) continuities in Dreyer’s *oeuvre*. The off-hand reference to female suffering above, establishing an artistic link between Dreyer and von Trier, is one example. Dreyer’s career-long interest in depicting suffering demonstrates his sustained engagement with the melodramatic mode. In an interview from around 1965, Dreyer describe the subject of woman’s suffering as one of his lifelong (artistic) interests. When asked about “love” in *Gertrud* (1968), Dreyer responds modestly (in English) that while it may not have been intentional, he has “always been attracted to people’s sufferings (sic) and particularly woman’s suffering.”⁵ In an interview for the Danish newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad* in 1964, Dreyer says, referring to Jeanne d’Arc, “It is suffering which is the theme in many of my films. Suffering always means ennoblement” (Drum and Drum 25). One critic even identified “a woman’s lonely suffering in an evil world” as the pervasive current running through Dreyer’s *oeuvre*, from beginning to end (Neergaard, *Bog om Dreyer* 103). Scholars have attributed Dreyer’s interest in pathos to tragedy, enlisting tragedy’s cultural cachet to bolster Dreyer’s. Alternatively, it has been read as transcendental, as Dreyer’s psycho-biographical confrontations with the mother who gave him up for adoption, or as the obvious proof of Dreyer’s seriousness, and then simply left at that. But as melodrama scholar Linda Williams writes, “sympathy for another grounded in the manifestation of that person’s suffering is arguably a key feature of all melodrama” (*Racecard* 16). Suffering is not the exclusive domain of melodrama, but neither are serious images of meaningful, moving, sometimes violent suffering (physical and psychological alike) the exclusive domain of tragedy or “high” art. I take Dreyer’s innovation in the depiction of pathos to be as an artistic ambition undertaken as seriously as his innovation of cinematic style. Melodrama offers an excellent interpretive framework within which to understand the range of spectatorial pleasures evident in Dreyer’s films. Much more than cerebral puzzles for patient cineastes, Dreyer’s depictions of betrayed lovers, sacrificial mothers, physically and emotionally tortured victim-heroines have much to offer broader audiences. Dreyer’s desire to establish film as the seventh art and his humanist convictions are entirely compatible with a desire to

⁴ “De to store danske filmskabere, Carl Th. Dreyer og Lars von Trier, er forbundet af et kunstnerisk slægtskab. Kvinder lider, tortureres og brændes på bålet, men også helt nede i det enkelte billede i nogle af von Triers tidligste film, kan man se spor af Dreyers stil” (Schepelern “Dreyer til Trier”). Schepelern most likely did not write this introductory statement, but his article discussing Denmark’s two major filmic geniuses does refer to depictions of suffering female characters as an artistic interest shared by the two directors.

⁵ This interview is available on-line at: <<http://www.mastersofcinema.org/dreyer/resources.htm>>

reach broad audiences. Dreyer reception has consistently underestimated his interest in popular audiences, but I contend that Dreyer was an aesthete with popular-culture aspirations.

If von Trier repurposed the melodramatic style of Dreyer's films, it is only because Dreyer had already adapted and reimagined in his own films the melodramatic mode that he had inherited from Nordisk. Nordisk suffering, for instance, could be overtly corporeal, or more psychological. The company excelled in sentimental depictions of heartbreak, betrayal, and tears. Nordisk also utilized images of spectacularly corporeal suffering that one might find in Victorian stage melodrama, subjecting victim-heroes and -heroines to a wide array of exciting situations of physical duress and harm. They were tied to railroad tracks, abducted, sent plummeting to their deaths from circus trapezes, or expired on blazing theater stages. Dreyer drew upon both physical and mental forms of suffering. Versions of all of the major concerns of Dreyer's later work: pathos, volition, psychological interiority and its expression on exterior surfaces, authenticity, performance, art, love, betrayal, will, loss, and sacrifice can be found at Nordisk. Rather than predicate Dreyer's status as an artist on a rupture with the company, I argue that his cinematic innovation of melodrama began there. Even before he began directing, the Nordisk scenarios Dreyer wrote reveal a deep engagement with melodramatic themes, worldview, and strategies for eliciting affect (melodrama's ideational complex). As David Bordwell writes, "Even before we study the films, Dreyer invites an unusual interest. For one thing, his career spans the mature development of the cinema from 1912 to 1968, from (to put it melodramatically) *Musketeers of Pig Alley* to *La Chinoise*" (*Films of Dreyer* 9). Danish melodrama from Nordisk to Dreyer (to von Trier), invites unusual interest as well, as a compelling hybrid tradition inflected by the Scandinavian Naturalist Theater and its unique modernist-melodramatic sensibilities. Often Dreyer's work has been held to be most innovative by contrasting it to a "norm" of Hollywood continuity editing conventions. The Scandinavian context I propose affords an alternative perspective from which to appreciate new innovations and continuities in Dreyer's *oeuvre*. This study contributes to genealogies of art-film melodrama and Scandinavian melodrama, an iteration of the mode that integrates psychological interiority, violent corporeal spectacle, and stylistic innovation.

Dreyer's work has not yet been *put melodramatically* for several reasons. The lowbrow stigma shared by Nordisk and melodrama led Dreyer to distance himself from both, and Dreyer scholars have by-and-large followed suit. (Melodrama, as Dreyer understood it, was incompatible with the stylistic nuance and gravity requisite to elevate film to the status of other fine arts, a pursuit he took very seriously.) Also, the melodrama that Dreyer took up at Nordisk—being already inflected with influences like Ibsen and Strindberg—differed from other traditions of melodrama, making it more difficult to see melodrama in Dreyer's work. The worldview of Nordisk melodrama doesn't, for instance, posit a strictly Manichean universe of polarized moral categories of good and evil. Nor does it work exclusively to *clarify* such positions, preferring instead a surprisingly ambiguous worldview within which to examine human volition and consciousness. Dreyer's melodrama has also fallen victim to a tendency in film scholarship to position melodrama as the abject categorical other, both to "classical" Hollywood cinema and to the auteur tradition of European art film.

A blossoming of melodrama scholarship in recent decades has complicated these binaries and lessened melodrama's low-culture stigma. The reach of the term has expanded to include melodramatic stylists like Douglas Sirk and Henry James, whose trajectory of artistic development (outlined in Peter Brooks's now-canonical work, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and The Mode of Excess*) bears intriguing parallels to Dreyer's. Though I read melodrama in Dreyer's work not as excess, but rather as the part of the backbone of Danish art film, Dreyer also undertakes to develop the melodramatic concerns of his early work into more complex iterations. To say that Dreyer developed melodrama is perhaps to underplay Dreyer's vital *struggle* with the mode. Unlike Henry James, who adored Balzac, Dreyer never embraced his melodramatic inspiration openly, despite faithfully continuing to engage with its central premises, conflicts, and affect. Constantly having to deny melodrama in order to be taken seriously as an artist, however, became a productive force in Dreyer's *oeuvre*. The persistent need to deny "melodrama" at every stage of his career signals its presence as a vital enough charge to remain a never entirely contained threat to Dreyer's reputation. More than that, his films figure and dramatize this struggle in different ways. Dreyer's artistic process—denying it openly while continuing to experiment with its central premises and conflicts and even dramatizing his struggle with the mode—adds another case for understanding melodramatic auteur cinema.

What I call Dreyer's *attraction and repulsion* toward melodrama manifested itself also as his recurring discomfort with the ethical implications of images of (female) suffering. Making moving, realistic depictions of suffering in order to end suffering could paradoxically entail using extreme measures with his actors, causing them harm. By including the reactions of diegetic spectators, the elaborate scenes of torture and interrogation that Dreyer returns to again and again incorporate a subtle indictment of the pleasures of watching melodramatic suffering. Blurred distinctions between acting and non-acting in Dreyer's films raise other ethical quandaries. Far from entailing the exclusive over-identification with a suffering protagonist, Dreyer's melodrama incorporates an element of reflection on the prospect of being moved by images of another's suffering, an attraction-repulsion to it. The imbrication of estrangement and emotional identification in Dreyer's work becomes another melodramatic pleasure that Dreyer picked up from Nordisk. Frequent, spectacular theater scenes there raised similar questions about the art of watching suffering and played with the limits of stage performance. Juxtapositions between "live" theater, performance, and film provided creative energy for Nordisk as well as for Dreyer's "final cut."

I read Dreyer's more-and-less subtle estrangement of melodrama through experiments with cinematic form as consistent with an attempt to differentiate himself from melodrama's more direct enunciations. David Bordwell's masterful formalist reading of Dreyer's *oeuvre* from 1981 brought important attention to Dreyer's work and established him as a modernist. "Working with a conservative aesthetic and a production practice modeled on a Romantic conception of the artist, Dreyer created some of the most radically modern films of his period" (*Films of Dreyer* 24). But Dreyer's modernism is unconventional. Dreyer's late work in particular doesn't demonstrate the radical experimentation with cinematic form found in either *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) or *Vampyr* (1932). Dreyer's films exist in a peculiar territory between avant-garde art film and "classical" Hollywood. Melodrama can help account for this unconventional

modernism. Work on Henry James or Douglas Sirk has shown melodrama to be capable of irony, with a style that disrupts or puts pressure on the plane of representation without declaring representational systems to be utterly illusory.

If it is counterintuitive to call Dreyer's late work melodramatic, this is in part because it pushes the boundaries of what has been called melodramatic. The stylized dialogue, the slow, deliberate movements of his actors, and the almost hyperbolic staginess of a film like *Gertrud* embrace the estranging artistry of the European art-film without ever shattering the veneer of realism. *Gertrud* exerts immense pressure on the mechanisms by which it represents a story, without ever going so far as to expose them entirely. Dreyer's films shed light on European art-house cinema that has simply not yet been called melodramatic. Ben Singer's illustrates this in his discussion of Visconti's highly pathetic art-house piece, *Death in Venice* (1971).

Like sentimental melodrama, *Death in Venice* revolves around the pathos of desire for unrealizable love, the pathos of enduring pain caused by forces beyond control, of loss that can never be regained, of the irreversibility of time. Nevertheless, I doubt anyone would categorize the film as part of the melodramatic genre, or even as an example of a 'melodramatic mode.' (*Melodrama and Modernity* 57)

Singer considers several reasons for this, citing the naturalism of Dirk Bogarde's acting style, the absence of overwrought or excessive emotion, the relative universality of the character's situation and suffering, and the way in which it prompts contemplation about the human condition. The complex psychological motivation demonstrated by the characters in *Death in Venice* resembles the characters in Douglas Sirk's films, however, which confuses matters. Singer writes, "Why a film like *Imitation of Life* is a melodrama, but a film like *Death in Venice* is not, remains an open question" (58). Considering Dreyer's *oeuvre* in relation to early Danish film melodrama will help shed light on precisely this question.

Chapter breakdown

In Chapter One, "Forays into the Melodramatic Field," I present an overview of recent scholarship on melodrama, highlighting its key issues and numerous intersections with Dreyer's long career in film. Chapter Two "Early Danish Film Melodrama At Nordisk," provides historical background about Nordisk's production model to give a sense of Dreyer's time at the company. I then consider how the company came to be equated with and stigmatized by melodrama, looking particularly at the way in which melodrama functions in Dreyer reception. The final section of this chapter moves beyond the stigma by looking at hints of modernism and Naturalist Theater in what I call Nordisk's "Victim-Sacrifice" (*Offer*) Films. The three following chapters are case studies in which I explore Dreyer's varied encounters with melodrama. In each, I draw from Dreyer's early Nordisk scenarios and films to highlight melodramatic features in his late work: what he embraces, repurposes, attempts to change or stage, and consider what contributions this makes to melodrama and Dreyer scholarship. In Chapter Three "Authentic melodrama: *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*," I explore how Dreyer exploits corporeal and performance spectacle prevalent at Nordisk and making melodrama "authentic," in part by transforming the set into a performance situation. Dreyer galvanizes interactions between audience and performer, conflating the distance between role and performing. In *Jeanne*

d'Arc, Dreyer's conflict with the mode expresses itself in a desire to strip melodrama down to its most affectively charged core, bringing to light affinities with avant-garde performance art. Chapter Four, "Inheriting melodrama: *Day of Wrath*" (*Vredens Dag*, 1943) reads the film as a domestic melodrama in which Dreyer refigures his interest in depicting psychological interiority on the bodies of his characters. Despite Dreyer's assertions that the *Day of Wrath* project produced new depictions of psychological depth in its protagonist, actually the film demonstrates compelling continuities with Dreyer's earlier depictions of stifled desire and interiority in his Nordisk scenarios. In *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer's attraction and repulsion to melodrama emerges in the elaborate juxtaposition of direct and indirect melodramatic characterization embodied in the film's depictions of intergenerational conflict between its strong female characters. Dreyer represents this conflict in a way that figures his own artistic process and identity—by which he confronts his (melodramatic) past in order to recreate or renew cinema as an art. In *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer injects domestic melodrama with ambiguous epistemology and uncertain causality, establishing an ambiguous worldview upon which its reputation as modernist art-house cinema has been grounded. I recuperate this ambiguity and epistemological uncertainty, however, through reference to Nordisk's melodramatic worldview, which also revolved around questions of the constrictions and exertion of *volition* and often withheld clear narrative resolution and happy endings. Additionally, *Day of Wrath* can be seen as recreating the stylized, charged-and-reflective worldview of secondary melodrama that Peter Brooks reads in Henry James's late fiction. In Chapter Five, "Melodrama Resurrected: *The Word*" (*Ordet*, 1955), I consider the film's depiction of Inger's hyper-innocent melodramatic suffering in relation to scholarship on the woman's film and maternal melodrama. Drawing on feminist scholarship, I suggest that Dreyer's reputation as an art-house auteur has actually shielded his work from legitimate feminist critique. Ultimately, Dreyer juxtaposes an idealized, stereotypical depiction of female suffering with compelling depictions particularly of male suffering and psychology. Dreyer's creation of what is effectively an art-house, male melodrama provides an important contribution to discussions of gender and the melodramatic mode. Similarly, the elaborate and extended paroxysm of pathos with which the film ends shows Dreyer's ability to put temporal and formal estrangement (through the film's exceedingly long takes) in the service of producing affect in his spectators.

Although it may at first seem counterintuitive to understand Dreyer's work as engaging with and innovating the melodramatic mode, reading his *oeuvre* in this light at once expands our understanding of melodrama's capacities and creates new perspectives from which to comprehend Dreyer's genius. More than just a consummate formalist, Dreyer aspired to cultivate strong emotional and aesthetic experiences in his spectators. Just as Dreyer believed that film had been unfairly excluded from the canon, so too has melodrama been underrepresented in discussions of Scandinavian art-house cinema. This dissertation understands Dreyer's work to play a vital role in remedying this omission.

CHAPTER 1

FORAYS INTO THE MELODRAMATIC FIELD

“Melodrama” has been used to describe works as disparate as Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* and Stallone’s *Rambo*.¹ Deciphering melodrama’s crucial features, charting its historical and formal developments, and sorting through the veritable explosion of melodrama scholarship written in recent decades can be a daunting task. Scholars hardly agree on what *it* even is. What came into its own as a form of popular French theater in the 19th century has since been analyzed as genre, narrative mode, or dramatic sensibility present in a wide array of media including theater, music, literature, the pictorial arts, silent film, sound film, and television. The term has been used to numerous rhetorical ends as well. Until fairly recently, critics usually referred to melodrama pejoratively to indicate, as James Smith notes, “any machine-made entertainment dealing in vulgar extravagance, implausible motivation, meretricious sensation and spurious pathos,” in what amounted to “a blanket term of abuse and contempt” (6-7). This reputation developed in part because of melodrama’s association with mindless escapism and the unreflective consumption of popular culture by callow spectators who over-identified with what they saw, whether on stage or screen. When scholars or critics did pay attention to melodrama, it was often in the name of establishing it as vulgar or inferior to other more elevated dramatic forms, such as tragedy or realism.²

The veritable explosion of melodrama scholarship that began in the 1960s and 70s continues to expand melodrama’s semantic reach. Christine Gledhill writes,

Melodrama exists as a cross-cultural form with a complex, international, two-hundred-year history. The term denotes a fictional or theatrical kind, a specific cinematic genre or a pervasive mode across popular culture. As a mode melodrama both overlaps and competes with realism and tragedy, maintaining complex historical relations with them. It refers not only to a type of aesthetic practice but also to a way of viewing the world.
 (“Field” 1)

No longer exclusively pejorative, melodrama has actually attained critical prestige on several fronts. Cultural studies has embraced it as both engaging with and transforming real-world experience, reflecting the experience of ideological contradiction by absorbing, questioning, and re-presenting social values operative in a given time and place. Scholars attribute the mode with the subversive potential to play “a cultural role in mediating socio-political change and its interdisciplinary critique” (Bratton, *Introduction* 1).

Still primarily an aesthetic form, melodrama has become a vital tool in reassessing binaries between high and low culture—particularly to the extent these categories have historically disparaged affect and sentiment. Scholars no longer see melodrama as the absolute antithesis of classicism, realism, or tragedy, but rather as a form constituting what Gledhill calls a unique, “third way” aesthetic that makes visible

¹ On Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* (a *scène lyrique* performed in 1770) as the first melodrama, see Smith 1; for a discussion of male action melodrama in *Rambo* films [*First Blood* (1982) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) directed by George Cosmatos], see Williams “Revised” 64-6.

² Victor Hugo describes melodrama as both vulgar and inferior to comedy and tragedy, qtd. in Carlson 213.

the shortcomings of realism and modernism alike.³ Thanks largely to Peter Brooks's now canonical work *The Melodramatic Imagination*, melodrama has ceased to be understood exclusively as popular culture. It stands as a vital mode informing "high culture" stylists from Henry James to expressionist drama and the historical avant-garde.⁴

Although initially a dramatic form, melodrama has attracted considerable attention in film studies, engaging with "almost all of the key theoretical ideas within the discipline, from questions of genre and authorship, to issues surrounding representation, aesthetics and the ideological function of cinema" (Mercer 1).⁵ Work on melodramatic form has shown its vital mechanisms to operate through the complex variation of reflection and emotion, contributing to melodramatic readings of auteur directors like Douglas Sirk, Pedro Almodovar, Lars von Trier, and Michael Haneke.⁶ Film melodrama has also been recuperated as an essential element of "Classical" Hollywood narrative instead of remaining its excessive, narratively inefficient "other." In this context, Linda Williams has shown D.W. Griffith's melodrama to be congruous with rather than antithetical to his pioneering innovation of cinematic form. Melodrama can no longer be easily discounted as an archaic, unchanging, or unrealistic form of escapist entertainment.

In this chapter, I highlight several key issues in this rich body of scholarship to argue that Dreyer's particular Scandinavian inflection of the mode deserves to be part of the discussion. Dreyer is an interesting case study. His long career intersects with several historical moments upon which melodrama scholarship concentrates, from sensational action melodrama of the silent era to "Sirkian" melodrama of the 1950s. His uncompromising demands for realism and aesthetic stylization have combined to give him a reputation as an auteur director *par excellence* of European art-house cinema, but his work also combines significant influences of popular cinema (ranging from Danish film melodrama and D.W. Griffith in the teens, to Hollywood cinema in the 40s and 50s). His work also draws influence from several theatrical practices, including Scandinavian naturalist theater, the sensational *varieté* stage, and avant-garde performance, each of which entails its own melodramatic affinities. Dreyer's *oeuvre* provides, in short, an excellent opportunity to study Scandinavian art-house cinema's melodramatic inheritance. I have chosen melodrama as the methodological framework for this project out of two sincere convictions. The first is that Dreyer's fundamental aesthetic interests, representing human experience (especially suffering), eliciting strong emotion in audiences, exploring the dramatic and ethical charges underpinning a world in which values fluctuate, and working within conventions of representation that are not entirely adequate (but not so inadequate as to cast them out entirely), are issues central to much

³ For a discussion of Christine Gledhill's "third way" see "Christine Gledhill on 'Stella Dallas'" 44-48.

⁴ See Richard Murphy's chapter "The Poetics of Hysteria: Expressionist Drama and the Melodramatic Imagination" (142-179).

⁵ For a discussion of melodrama's role in the development specifically of film theory with an emphasis on Hollywood melodrama, see Mulvey "It Will be a Magnificent Obsession" 121-133. For excellent overviews of the field, see Gledhill "The Melodramatic Field" and Williams "Revised." For a comprehensive introduction to melodrama debates in film studies as genre, style and sensibility, see Mercer. For anthologies on melodrama see, Gledhill *Home is Where the Heart Is* and Landy *Imitations of Life*. For an interdisciplinary "second generation" melodrama anthology that draws upon a variety of disciplines in the visual arts, film, music and theater, see Bratton.

⁶ See for instance Brigitte Peucker's chapter "Violence and Affect: Haneke's Modernist Melodramas" 130-158.

contemporary melodrama scholarship. The second being that Dreyer's late work demonstrates compelling continuities with early Danish film melodrama that deserve renewed scholarly attention.

Understanding Dreyer's engagements with melodrama will contribute to this body of scholarship as well. Dreyer's *oeuvre* grapples particularly with melodrama's paradoxes including its simultaneous development and nostalgic conservatism as well as its complex juxtapositions of emotion and intellect, authenticity and artifice. Dreyer's melodramatic trajectory is less smoothly developmental than it is episodic. Each of the major works in his *oeuvre* (*Jeanne*, *Day of Wrath*, *Ordet*) that I consider in this dissertation accomplishes a unique experimentation with different facets of melodramatic characterization, temporality, and aesthetics. A single film might demonstrate a remarkable continuity with his early film scenarios in terms of characterization, for example, while at the same time significantly reimagining the situation in which such characterization occurs. All of this will broaden our understanding of how melodrama manifests itself in various historical and cultural contexts.

Setting the stage: Tracing 19th-century French stage melodrama in Dreyer

Although some scholars find melodramatic plot narratives in classical Greek texts or trace melodramatic stylistics in medieval popular theater that incorporated music, most accounts of melodrama's origins begin with Pixérécourt's codification and proliferation of the form in early 19th-century French Boulevard theater. This tradition, which I will call classic melodrama, provides a starting point from which to approach melodrama scholarship and melodrama's later Danish iterations. Although the Danish national theater avidly invited in all forms of traveling productions in vogue on the continent, Denmark did not have the strong native tradition of popular stage melodrama that both France and England did. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century, a version of classic melodrama had made its way into Copenhagen's cosmopolitan imagination in the new Vesterbro entertainment district, where its prime manifestations were the "*variété*" stage and sensational circus spectacles.⁷ As I explore more in subsequent chapters, even without a tradition of melodrama, the *variété* would pervade the imagination of the early Danish film industry that came into its own in the first decade of the 20th century, and that informed Dreyer's early years making film.

Dreyer's other affinities to classic melodrama that I parse out in this project come more circuitously. Classic melodrama provides the starting point for Peter Brooks's seminal work *The Melodramatic Imagination*, the influence of which he traces through Balzac to James. We can see certain parallels between Dreyer's early career fascinations and James's; while employed at Nordisk Dreyer even adapted Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* for the screen (as I discuss in chapter four). We can also link Dreyer back to classic melodrama through work on "sensational melodrama" that concerns itself less with morality and more with melodrama's ability to produce shock or pathos in audiences watching performers incur bodily harm, as I return to below. Here melodramatic spectacle and avant-garde performance art circulating around Paris in the 20s draw upon the same roots in performance and religious ritual.

⁷ For a discussion of Vesterbro's development as entertainment district for museological, theatrical, and cinematic spectatorship, see Sandberg *Living Pictures* 9-17.

The skeleton of classic melodrama

Russian formalist Sergei Balukhatyi's *Poetics of Melodrama* (1926), a genre analysis of classic French melodrama, will serve as an entry point into the mechanics of melodrama in that melodrama's main goal, as Balukhatyi understood it—to create intense feelings in his audiences—immediately resonates with Dreyer's core aesthetic ambitions. As Balukhatyi describes it “All elements in melodrama—its themes, technical principles, construction, and style—are subordinate to one overriding aesthetic goal: the calling forth of ‘pure,’ ‘vivid’ emotions. Plot, character, and dialogue, working in unison, serve to elicit from the spectator the greatest possible intensity of feeling” (qtd. in Gerould 121).⁸

We can see something approximating the bones of Balukhatyi's melodramatic skeleton (sometimes wearing new flesh) animating Dreyer's *oeuvre* in its production of powerful, universal feelings in its audiences by incorporating shocking and dramatic material, topical facts from everyday life into scenes of violence, joy, and immediately recognizable pathos. Classic melodrama employs schematic characterization in which each character embodies a single, clear moral position and these are in turn vividly juxtaposed with one another in expressive interrelationships. It propels its plots forward by ever-heightened, exciting episodes, and dynamic plot reversals prompted by the blockage and revelation of secret knowledge rather than by character development. Emotion in melodrama, Balukhatyi writes, serves to reestablish a perfect system of rewards and punishments and seeks to make the world of the play a “natural reflection of the basic ‘laws of morality’” (qtd. in Gerould 123).

Brooks's formulation of what he calls melodrama's “aesthetics of astonishment” rests upon similar mechanisms of contrast and juxtaposition, and upon the presentation, persecution and then revelation of virtuous suffering to create pathos. But whereas Balukhatyi analyzes melodrama according to genre conventions, in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Brooks contextualizes this basic aesthetic core of melodrama as a mode that can be found in other media as well, such as literature. Melodrama's characteristic use of “hyperbole, excess, excitement, and ‘acting out’” develops as a response to censorship undertaken by a postrevolutionary French bourgeoisie government that banned the production of classical (including tragic) repertoire outside of all but four sanctioned government theaters. Melodrama's origins thus show it (paradoxically) to pursue formal innovation (creating new, large dramaturgy and a new system of theatrical gesture to adapt to the constrictions and blockages placed upon it) in reproducing familiar scenarios (unsanctioned boulevard theaters staged the “same” classical productions but replaced dialogue, thus technically complying with official sanctions). Thus deprived of the use of dialogue, classic melodrama developed other tools to convey narrative information and to create effect in the audience. These include musical accompaniment, heightened stock gesture large enough to be legible from the back of the house, written banners, and climactic tableaux used to punctuate the end of each act and crystalize important relationships. The need to be legible without the use of voice or dialogue contributed to the convention of over-identifying each character with a single, unified emotion and moral position in the world depicted on stage. The French theater produced pathos

⁸ Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a full translation of Balukhatyi's *Poetics* into English and as the Russian remains inaccessible to me, I rely on Gerould's translation and synopsis. Balukhatyi describes much the same melodramatic moment that Peter Brooks does in grounding his analysis in *The Melodramatic Imagination*.

through the configuration and interactions of these “pure” elements (the villain is purely sinister while the heroine is innocence incarnate), the unadulterated feeling or action that Robert Heilman would refer to as monopathy (85) and which Brooks would later map onto a Manichean worldview (*Imagination* 36).

Although both Brooks and Balukhyati considered melodrama to be a valuable object of study in its own right (Balukhyati is decisively ahead of his time in this regard), many critics in the forties and fifties would draw upon these same features in their attempt to characterize Dreyer’s early work (and much of early Danish cinema more generally) as outdated and unrealistic. The stigma that such criticism fossilized, of a form lacking in psychological complexity and nuance; reliant on exaggerated gesture and spectacular plot twists that disregarded any claim to plausibility; and subsisting on sensational subject matter, would force Dreyer to distance himself from his melodramatic inheritance. There is little doubt in my mind, however, that Dreyer would have been quite sympathetic to Brooks’s revisionist rereading of melodrama, and it is to this that I now turn.

Melodrama’s response to a post-sacred world, values in crisis

Brooks’s recuperation of melodrama as a vital and nuanced aesthetic response to the experience of a post-Enlightenment, post-sacred crisis in values resonates with the epistemological uncertainty of the worlds that Dreyer depicts in his films. Classic melodrama, in Brooks’s reading, addresses the crisis in values brought about by the French Revolution, which upended the legitimacy of the sacred world and its earthly representatives (in the aristocracy, church, and the state) and placed new emphasis on the individual as the center of political and social meaning. Responding to this experience of uncertainty, melodrama posits a world of decisive—if initially concealed—moral clarity. Brooks summarizes his project: “melodrama is a form for a post-sacred era, in which polarization and hyperdramatization of forces in conflict represent a need to locate and make evident, legible, and operative those large choices of ways of being which we hold to be of overwhelming importance even though we cannot derive them from any transcendental system of belief” (1995 Preface viii).

Melodrama scholarship has expanded upon Brooks’s idea that melodrama exists to articulate the moral crisis brought on by the disenchantment of the modern world, by showing it to be a response to crises in social values more generally conceived. Thus expanded, melodrama thus becomes recognizable across very diverse historical contexts. In *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, Linda Williams relates the emergence of American melodrama in the 1800s to the void left as the dominance of Calvinist morals waned (18-19). Operating at broad social levels, melodramatic narrative that establishes the moral authority of suffering victims would become the “fundamental mode by which American mass culture has ‘talked to itself’ about the enduring moral dilemma of race” (Williams, *Racecard* xiv). In *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, Ben Singer reads American spectacular melodrama as a “cultural response to the moral insecurity and material vulnerability people felt as they faced a world no longer moored by stable structures provided by monarchic, feudal, and religious authority” (11) resulting in particular from the shock of rapid modernization.

Most studies of melodrama in Scandinavia follow a similar logic and recognize melodrama as a response to the reduced (moral) legibility caused by social upheavals consequent with Scandinavia's relatively late modernization and industrialization in the later half of the 19th century. Marguerite Engberg argues that the Danish erotic melodrama of early cinema reflected struggles for gender equality that had begun in Denmark in the 1870s and which culminated around the early teens, (women got the vote in Denmark in 1915, for example). Maria Karlsson situates melodrama in Selma Lagerlöf's novels as a similar response to modernization, and Christine Hamm reads Amalie Skram's novels and critical writings as a melodramatic response to artistic and social debates of the Modern Breakthrough. Hamm draws a further parallel between Skram's work about the changing role of women in society during this period and Cavell's genre designation, "the melodrama of the unknown woman" in *Contesting Tears*. (Although Cavell derives his genre from Hollywood films in the 1940s, he also sees Ibsen's Nora from *A Doll's House*—the play that opened the floodgates of Modern Breakthrough debates in Scandinavia—as an archetypical "unknown woman."⁹) Looking at more contemporary cultural production, Andrew Nestingen argues that a perceived crisis in the Scandinavian welfare state (and the values of equality and security that it had previously assured) has created what he calls "melodrama of demand"—an iteration of melodrama prevalent in contemporary Scandinavian cinema since the 1990s.

Mapping melodrama onto the Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavia raises interesting questions about melodrama's capacities for reflecting, but also sublimating, ideological debates in the public sphere. The Modern Breakthrough called for literature, as Georg Brandes put it, to "put problems up for debate,"¹⁰ in other words, implicitly asking for literature to alter the status quo. The straightforward cause and effect of this equation puts pressure on melodrama's general preference for troubling the status quo while carefully (and conservatively) preserving it. That being said, the tendency for Modern Breakthrough literature to locate its social debates in the domestic sphere coincides nicely with melodrama's other preference for displacing broad social conflict onto drawing-room dramas. We might also consider the public debates during this period as providing Scandinavian melodrama with a particularly vibrant pool of what Gledhill calls "timely" material for its realizations ("Between" 132-33).¹¹ The intellectual currents of positivism, naturalism and Darwinism pulsating in Scandinavian artistic production of the period undoubtedly informed the conventions of realism within and against which melodrama would operate.

⁹ Stanley Cavell's philosophical reading of melodrama in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* derives the genre designation "Melodrama of the Unknown Woman" from the negation of another, "The Hollywood Remarriage Comedy," delineated in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. Cavell brings Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy to bear on Hollywood melodrama by reading melodrama's depictions of marriage, partnership, and divorce as inextricable from fundamental concerns of skepticism, such as how one can know another's experience of suffering. Most of Cavell's melodrama relates to melodramas of 1940s Hollywood (putting it just beyond the scope of this project in its present form). Along with reading Nora as an archetypical "unknown woman," he also offers an interesting reading of Henry James's novella "Beast in the Closet" in *Contesting Tears* in which the novella's "closet" becomes a parable for analytical philosophy's melodramatic denial of the everyday in its philosophical endeavors.

¹⁰ "sætter Problemer under Debat" (18).

¹¹ For a sense of "realization" as Gledhill uses the term, see Meisel 3-13.

Dreyer's melodrama reflects a similarly conflicted relationship with the public sphere and with "timeliness" in general. Most of Dreyer's films are set in the past and appear to strive for a kind of timelessness. His attention to fin-de-siècle works decades after they had premiered ("Gertrud" premiered as a play in 1907 but Dreyer makes his film in 1964) suggests that Dreyer preferred temporal alterity and an appeal to the universal rather than material that immediately reflected his own day and age. (It also suggests that Dreyer could take the impetus for a project and develop it over long periods.) Dreyer never claimed any aspiration to making overtly political, or socially critical films in a way that might have satisfied Brandes's call. At the same time, Dreyer's films often curiously resonate with times contemporary with their production. *Gertrud* for instance, did spark newspaper debates and raise critical questions about the fate of individuals in the institution of marriage in the 1960s. (Dreyer's consistent interest in collecting such newspaper clippings throughout his career consequently also calls into question the assumption that he enjoyed estranging popular audiences in a quest to make transcendent art films.) Ultimately, although he never abandons a desire to make socially relevant art, Dreyer emphasizes an aesthetic and circuitous approach to social critique, preferring instead to engage with melodrama's more universal humanist concerns.

Dreyer's aesthetic perspective does not, however, exclude him either from discussions of melodrama or of Modern Breakthrough melodrama. Peer E. Sørensen's recent work on Herman Bang identifies a more aesthetic, almost decadent vein of Modern Breakthrough melodrama. This less overtly socio-critical response to modernity's crisis in social values goes a long way in describing Dreyer's interest in texts by Bang [*Mikaël*] and Hjalmar Söderberg [*Gertrud*]. In Chapter Three I return to this aesthetic inflection of the melodramatic mode and its alternation between pathos and irony that emerges particularly in moments of performance. That Danish film melodrama (and Dreyer in turn) drew upon this genealogy of melodrama helps explain its particular investments in performance and paroxysm of pathos that distinguish it, for instance, from the sensational American tradition that Singer analyzes as an American response to a similar historical moment of rapid modernization.

Another aspect of Brooks's argument—the moral occult—needs less adjustment to resonate with Dreyer's work, with its repeated intimation of unseen powers animating the world in his films (a sensibility that has spawned a strong tradition of Dreyer scholarship focused on transcendence and spirituality). Brooks defines the moral occult as "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality ... [It is] not a metaphysical system; it is rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth" (*Imagination* 5). Melodrama, which seeks above all else to articulate and make present the moral occult, offers a suggestive framework for addressing the "otherworldly" forces that animate Dreyer's films, whether witchcraft in *Day of Wrath* or miracles in *The Word*. Melodrama exerts pressure on the depictions of everyday life (its representational surfaces) making "the 'real' and the 'ordinary' and 'private life' interesting through heightened dramatic utterance and gesture that lay bare the true stakes" (*Imagination* 14). Similarly, everyday events cannot always be explained rationally in Dreyer's work, which combines realism with a prevailing sense of impersonal causality and coincidence. Individual agency and volition remain ambiguous in Dreyer's worldview; characters "will" themselves to die or will others dead and corpses awaken, but never in a way that fully precludes rational

explanation. What Dreyer scholarship has attributed to a transcendent impulse or religious spirit might be seen as a melodrama's particular response to modernity's epistemological uncertainties.

Aesthetic sensibilities and "significance"

Melodrama scholarship has shown the mode to have deeply aesthetic implications as well, and these figure prominently in this project due to Dreyer's indisputable ambition to use art to communicate something about the human predicament. In Brooks, this aesthetic sensibility comes about through the moral occult's demand for articulation, making it essentially a drama of semiotics. Tom Gunning summarizes this position: "For Brooks, melodrama reveals itself as a play of signs, moving from their eclipse by the powers of evil to their final visibility and acknowledgment. Melodramas, rather than being plays of blood and thunder, sound and fury, are in fact dramas of significance, and even *significance*, the construction of meaning" ("Horror of Opacity" 50). Melodrama's desire to express all, including that which cannot be expressed in linguistic or verbal registers, often means that it is less concerned with virtue *per se*, than with virtue's enunciation, articulation, repression, and recognition. To see melodrama as merely about the "persecuted innocence and virtue triumphant" (26) (assuming that the plot resolves happily, with these things rewarded) or merely to elicit pathos and thrills, Brooks argues, is to underestimate the extent to which melodrama revels in the misprision and revelation of signs.¹²

Put another way, melodrama seeks to address dual epistemological crises, one being an uncertain grounding for ethical action (a fragmentary moral cosmology), the other a related crisis in aesthetic representation *per se*. We can think of this as the same crisis to which modernism responds. Nostalgic, yet not naïve in its use of semiotic systems, melodrama is not blind to the fact that its representations are necessarily provisional—this knowledge is part of what makes melodrama a *modern* phenomenon—but whereas *modernism* seeks insistently to reveal the construction of any aesthetic representation, and *realism* strives to conceal the construction of its illusion, melodrama never fully surrenders its faith in representation so as to expose its representations as such. Paradoxically, melodrama exerts more pressure upon verisimilitude by demanding presence and authenticity that can never be fully proven or represented. Dreyer's late films in particular, in that they are formally estranging without abandoning their narrative ambitions or realistic veneer, have been read as modernist, but their approach bears a strong resemblance to what Christine Gledhill identifies as melodrama's unique approach between modernism and realism. I quote Gledhill at length:

As I read the Brooks argument, melodrama emerges as a response to an implicit gap in bourgeois epistemology, which realism ignores in its confidence in the causal explanations of the human sciences and modernism seeks obsessively to expose. Melodrama takes a different stance; it both insists on the realities of life in bourgeois democracy—the material parameters of lived experience, individual personality and the fundamental psychic relations of family life—and, in an implicit recognition of the limitations of the conventions of representation—of their repressiveness—proceeds to insist on, force into an aesthetic

¹² For significance in Brooks, see *Imagination* 27-8, 24-55.

presence, desires for identity, value, and fullness of signification beyond the powers of language to supply. Melodrama deals with what cannot be said in the available codes of social discourse; it operates in the field of the known and familiar, but also attempts to short-circuit language to allow the 'beneath' or 'behind'—the unthinkable and repressed—to achieve material presence. This dual recognition—how things are and how they are not—gives popular culture much of its strength, suggesting the way it may be drawn to occupy gaps in political, ideological, and cultural systems, and how the subordinated may find a negotiable space in which certain contradictions and repressed desires are rehearsed. ("On 'Stella Dallas'" 45)

Dreyer's films alternate between reluctant suspicion of and childlike faith in cinematic representation, to which Bordwell's reading of *Gertrud's* systematic evacuation of meaning attests (*Films of Dreyer* 171-190). Dreyer's simultaneous mastery of and discomfort with the means of representation resembles the push and pull in the way that Henry James's writing—in which Brooks finds classic (or what he calls primary) melodrama reflected, sublimated, made ironic, or become the stuff of consciousness—subtly draws attention to (and troubles) the semiotic systems upon which he depends. Dreyer's distilled, stylized dialogue too becomes heavy with the supreme inadequacy of language to express truly the fullness of his characters' desires. In his 1989 monograph, *Speaking the Language of Desire: The Films of Carl Dreyer*, Raymond Carney notes the way Dreyer, like James, uses highbrow stylization and irony to underline the inadequacy of language to convey the fullness of experience. What makes Dreyer more melodramatic than modernistic is that he never completely abandons hope of art's potential to communicate. When Carney explains how Dreyer can "make his text a representation of the 'soul,' 'spirit' or 'imagination'" or represent "energies that are at odds with social and verbal representation," (71) he draws openly upon Brooks's work. Brooks might well have been describing Dreyer's sparse, everyday *mise-en-scène* or dialogue when he praises "James's capacity to invest his confrontations with revelatory excitement without apparently violating decorum and the surface of manners, though imprinting on the objects and gestures rendered the stamp of hyperbolic and theatrical meaning" (*Imagination* 162-3). Typical of the persistence of the stigma against melodrama in Dreyer scholarship, however, even though "the language of desire" (Carney 68) is a direct quotation from *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Carney never explicitly concedes the possibility that Dreyer's genius, like James's is of a melodramatic persuasion.¹³

Ethical implications of aesthetic suffering—reflection and identification

I have suggested that melodrama scholarship provides useful tools with which to understand Dreyer's aestheticism, but this is not to divorce it from what I see as his sincere engagement with the ethical issues that arise when suffering is represented aesthetically, whether in film, the pictorial arts, or on stage. Melodrama scholarship no longer automatically assumes that melodrama's worldview is Manichean nor that melodrama's moral coordinates remain fixed over time. Equating melodrama with specifically Manichean, moral polarization has caused it to be discounted as archaic and

¹³ For a discussion on the radical designs on knowledge, seeing, and feeling shared by Dreyer and James, see Carney 71.

antithetical to more “realistic” representation, but this misunderstands the way we now understand that the recognizable trappings of “villainy” (as with any of melodramatic characterization) change and adapt over time. The tradition of Danish melodrama is a case in point. Even in the teens, its negotiation of the ethical implications of human suffering, innocence, and victimization is too ambiguous to be easily categorized as Manichean. This ambiguity often emerges in situations in which aesthetic “frames” within the diegesis (the play within the play, or the painter painting subject matter that comments upon the narrative) reflect upon the narrative and trouble or shift its appeals for identification.

These scenes of shifting identification take on ethical import when they include diegetic audiences who must decide how to act when faced with this suffering. All of this sets the stage, so to speak, for the way that Dreyer’s films present depictions of suffering in theatrical situations, thereby eliciting emotion and identification in his cinema audience through via similar responses in depicted diegetic audiences. The reactions and decisions of these diegetic audiences (and by this I include onlookers, spectators, and judges) about what to do in the face of suffering, contribute to the cinema audience’s overall experience of these scenes. This was generally true of the early Nordisk studio films. At Nordisk, ethical, aesthetic spectacle often occurred on the *varieté* stage (as a play within a play) in a way that remained anchored within a realistic diegesis, while raising similar questions about the ethical boundaries between “real” suffering and the (aesthetic) frame in which it is represented. The operative charge produced by such situations of pathos in Danish film melodrama is ethical rather than moral. In other words, the use of pathos does not reinstate categorically polarized systems of morality, good (virtue) and evil, but rather seeks to parse out questions of agency, ethical responsibility, and legibility of suffering. We can put this in the context of the kinds of questions that suffering in *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* raises (questions that I address in more detail in later chapters). Can we consider Jeanne a victim of persecution or an agent of her own fate, “choosing” to sacrifice herself? When does her suffering appear real and who recognizes it as such? Does the public spectacle of her suffering (all throughout her trial, and in her public immolation) produce a beneficial affect in its spectators that outweighs the harm she incurs? Has her torture converted her accusers and judges? And what ethical responsibility do these judges have to step in and halt Jeanne’s suffering? *Jeanne d’Arc* alternately asks us to empathize with Jeanne’s suffering, to judge her judges, and to consider how we as spectators might be implicated in the beautiful spectacle of Falconetti’s tears.

As an elaborate series of play-within-the play scenarios, *Jeanne d’Arc* offers an extreme constellation of identification and reflection that further supports Gledhill’s argument that melodrama’s mode of address cannot be equated with over-identification as it traditionally has been. [As Alan Thompson wrote in his 1928 account, “The typical audience of melodrama is particularly simple-minded, and particularly capable of child-like identification with the action on the stage. It thus is able to find in that action ... a vicarious expression of its desires, an escape from reality, a fictitious wish-fulfillment, a satisfaction for emotional hunger” (814).] Instead, melodrama produces pathos by giving the spectator a privileged knowledge of different constellations in a way that precludes simple over-identification with any individual character. Williams characterizes Gledhill’s contribution in the following way. “She argues that if a melodramatic character

appeals to our sympathy, it is because pathos involves us in assessing suffering in terms of our privileged knowledge of its nature and causes.” Scenes that allow the film audience a privileged position from which to see the impact that misrecognitions have on a sympathetic protagonist work because,

the audience is outside a particular point of view but participating in it with a privileged knowledge of the total constellation. Pathos in the spectator is thus never merely a matter of losing oneself in ‘over-identification.’ It is never a matter of simply mimicking the emotion of the protagonist, but, rather, a complex negotiation between emotions and between emotion and thought. (“Revised” 49)

Gledhill recuperates melodrama from the myth of melodrama’s naïve, unreflective spectator (essentially something like a rube figure), which has contributed significantly to melodrama’s pejorative valuation in past decades. Although early Danish film melodrama has often been associated with naïve over-identification, actually, the schemes of identification that this tradition sets up, its layers of diegetic performance situations—from which Dreyer will draw—demonstrate a quite complex interaction between reflection, identification, and communication between spectator and actor.

Melodrama has probably always incorporated more or less conspicuous breaks in the diegesis in a way that impeded over-identification. Nineteenth-century stage melodrama presumed a relatively active participation between the audience and the actors on stage. Characters would turn to the audience to comment on the plot, actors responded to catcalls, and the cast might freeze into tableau at the end of each act, violating conventions of naturalistic behavior, even at the time (Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* 179). As Brooks remarks in his 1995 Preface to *The Melodramatic Imagination*, melodrama has probably never been taken “straight.” Of interest to this project is the way in which such diegetic breaks—moments during which the audience becomes aware of itself as a watching audience or aware of the bodies of actors performing roles—have also been subsumed under the umbrella of modernist and avant-garde performance practices. Following early Danish melodrama, Dreyer exploits these intersections in which over-identification and reflection, diegetic and non-diegetic performance blur.

Often, these tensions become most pronounced in depictions of sensationally suffering bodies, where melodrama and avant-garde performance share overlapping affective and ethical concerns. Both classic melodrama and the historical avant-garde create affect by putting characters in harm’s way, thus blurring the distinction between the character’s body (the semiotic body) and the actor’s body (the phenomenological body). Erica Fischer-Lichte describes how in avant-garde performance situations this produces an ethical dilemma in the spectator who must decide whether to step in and intercede because performance has ceased to be representation and has become real. We see a similar thrilling effect in the sensational American stage melodrama around the turn of the century that Ben Singer analyzes in *Melodrama and Modernity*. Pulling *real* saws or locomotives on stage to depict scenes in which characters faced peril had the effect of threatening the bodies of the actors instead, and in doing so produced a thrilling awareness of the mechanisms of stagecraft, a break in identification with diegetic events, and an interesting identification with the “real” fate of the actor or actress instead. Often Dreyer’s films have been judged masterfully realistic as cinematic representations

achieving great verisimilitude but, as I argue in chapters to follow, Dreyer's pursuit of authenticity frequently entailed violating this sort of illusion.

Dreyer's fascination with the "real" bodies of his actors and actresses will be an important part of his pursuit of authentic melodrama. This performative "realism," as it were, while certainly contributing to a film's verisimilitude, is of a different order than the notion of realistic illusionism upon which Nicolas Vardac's argument in *From Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film: David Garrick to D.W. Griffith* from 1949 is based. In one of the first works to offer a detailed documentation of 19th century American stagecraft and the tradition of American film melodrama that would emerge from it, Vardac argues that cinema's capacity for photographic realism made pictorial staging obsolete because cinema better satisfied audience demand for plausibility. Underlying Vardac's claim that cinema's realism would make stage melodrama look "fake" is the implicit assumption that spectators found most pleasure in the persistence of realistic illusion, rather than the moments in which this veneer lay in peril. Singer, who takes issue both with Vardac's vaguely defined realism and his overestimation of the audience's desire for it, critiques Vardac's presumption that engrossing, absorptive pictorial realism was melodrama's main aspiration, suggesting instead that "the conspicuous mechanical contrivance of stagecraft may not have been a glaring deficiency but rather one of the amusement's key attractions" (177).¹⁴ Dreyer, I argue, tries to produce a similarly thrilling effect by making conspicuous the "stagecraft" of an actor's body. We find this performance of realism all over early Danish film melodrama in the pleasure it took in foregrounding theatrical acting (again, the play-within-the-play) to establish the diegetic realism of the rest of the plot. In other words, it wasn't the simple realistic illusion of these performance scenes that delighted audiences, but its combination of plausibility with spectacular inauthenticity. Dreyer in turn would make this combination more subdued (Gertrud, for instance, performs in the drawing room rather than in the footlights of the *variété* stage), but will still blur the boundaries between performance (contrivance) and realistically depicted "real life" to elicit emotion. Further, we can see Dreyer's fascination with material objects (from architectural structures for sets, to actual historical objects and the material bodies of his actors—their hair, limbs and blood) as continuing this fascination with materiality, evoking something of "blood and thunder" stage melodrama's experimentation with real horses, real saws and real (or potentially real) bodily harm.

Corporeal spectacle and body genre

Melodrama has been undeservedly excluded from discussions of the recurring moments in Dreyer's work in which as Bordwell writes, "Carnality asserts itself, grotesquely and intermittently, in images of pain" (Bordwell, *Films of Dreyer* 195). Formalist approaches to Dreyer's work (Bordwell's included) have trouble accommodating Dreyer's use of what I call corporeal spectacle—i.e. physically suffering, weeping, moaning bodies. Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane, among others, have used the word "spectacle" to refer to the particular evacuation of female agency, and objectification of female figures accomplished by the "masculine" gaze in mainstream cinema. In this project, "spectacle" will refer to sensational performance situations more reminiscent of classic melodrama or

¹⁴ For a critique of Vardac's notion of pictorial realism vs. the pleasures of melodrama's conspicuous realism, see Singer *Melodrama and Modernity* 169-188.

early sensational film melodrama in which bodies risk incurring harm. Such moments, I argue, are integral to a work rather than in excess of its narrative ambitions. I expand this idea of spectacle to include sensational subject matter in Dreyer's films like corpses rising from the dead and human beings burned alive, fainting, or experiencing strong emotion. This spectacle relies on the materiality of bodies, by objectifying them to in some way to produce shock, emotion, concern or pathos, but need not in my analysis entail a specifically gendered objectification by cinematic apparatus.

This notion of corporeal spectacle dovetails with the way in which the body provides a crucial site of semiotic legibility (whether of affect or moral virtue) in melodrama, playing an essential role in the production and communication of meaning. Melodrama's characteristic use of "expressions of personality embodied in physical being and gesture" to indicate moral positions, the revelation of morality through personality (also indicated in body and gesture) provide "the key to both emotional and moral truth" in melodrama and make it fundamentally modern (Williams, "Revised" 77). As an expressive mode, melodrama makes interiority communicable on the body. Melodrama conveys an "aesthetics of embodiment, where the most important meanings have to be inscribed on and with the body" (Brooks, "Body, Revolution" 17). Its reliance on the body has caused scholars to liken it to hysteria, which also externalizes psychic conflict in symptoms to be deciphered. As Peter Brooks writes,

there is a convergence in the concerns of melodrama and of psychoanalysis—and indeed that psychoanalysis is a kind of modern melodrama, conceiving psychic conflict in melodramatic terms and acting out the recognition of the repressed, often with and on the body. ... the hystericized body offers a key emblem of that convergence, because it is a body preeminently invested with meaning—a body that has become the place for the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere, and cannot be articulated verbally. (1995 Preface xi)

Though Dreyer maintained an interest in popular psychology, hysteria, and neuroses in different historical contexts, I see this as part of his more fundamental fascination with the way the human body makes legible interior emotions and pain. Dreyer's use of tears, for instance, proves authenticity of feeling in a way that coincides with Charles Affron's theorization of melodramatic tears as proof of interior experience in his article, "Identifications." Emotional authenticity is simply another aspect of the authenticity that Dreyer pursued in all facets of his work.

To the extent that it features the repeated "spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion" (Williams, "Film Bodies" 4), we can think of Dreyer's work as inflecting *body genre*, a term Carol Clover coins to refer to film that privileges the sensational body ("Her Body" 189).¹⁵ Clover explores horror and pornography as iterations of body genre, which Linda Williams then expands to include melodrama, with its depictions of profusely weeping bodies. Dreyer was interested in the physical responses of spectators watching his films, and body genre also presupposes the interaction between bodies of the actors (or the filmed representation of these bodies), with the bodies of spectators. It sets out to produce bodily sensation in spectators that mimics what they see on screen, whether horripilation (horror), ejaculation (pornography), or in melodrama, tears. Steve Neale identifies a similar interaction in

¹⁵ For a revised version of Clovers body genre argument, see *Chainsaws*.

melodrama's "ability to *move* its spectators and in particular to make them cry" (6) as crucial to melodrama's ambitions. With the possible exception of *Vampyr*'s hair-raising aspirations, tears function as the main proof that the characters (and actresses) in Dreyer's films experience intense emotion and sensation.

Body genre's ability to produce bodily sensations in its spectators incorporates something of the communicative charge of corporeal spectacle from stage performance, which also links the bodies of live actors and the bodies of their spectators watching. As I discuss more in the following chapter, scenes of such theatrical interaction occur frequently in early Danish melodrama, and I see one of Dreyer's desires to invest film with a similar, though purified more intense, charge. Dreyer's scenes of vivid physical suffering use peril to shock audiences and produce a kind of "pure," emotional interaction between actor and audience that is not directly in the service of reestablishing clear morality. Tom Gunning identifies a similar effect in a tradition of stage melodrama he calls "melodrama of sensation" that uses sensation to produce non-cognitive affects (thrills, excitement, suspense) in way that may work in dialectical relation to achieving cognitive and moral significance, but not necessarily. Dreyer's work occupies an interesting grey zone by at once striving to produce such pure affect while at the same time questioning this pursuit—not in terms of a moral order that such scenes may or may not reestablish, but rather by revealing them as moments when an observer may be converted, changed, or moved to actively hinder further suffering, a question of ethics.

Body and melodrama's historiography

Dreyer's use of the body throughout his films provides a key topos from which to gauge the continuity and change in his approach to melodrama. Melodrama scholarship has similarly used the body to trace melodrama's historiographical shifts from classic melodrama into its more contemporary iterations. In "Signs of Melodrama," Christine Gledhill adopts categories very much coinciding with semiotic and phenomenological bodies when she suggests that the interaction between the body of melodrama actors and the development of their star persona (consequent with the emergence of the star system) helps explain how melodrama passes from the Victorian stage to film and television ("Signs" 207). Balukhatyi (who was also ahead of his time in conceiving of melodrama as an adapting rather than archaic form) describes melodrama's core mechanisms a "skeleton" that constantly develops new variations and varieties and is thus given *new flesh*.

In its 'pure' aspect, melodrama acts directly through its constructional and emotional forms, but melodrama can also be found in many other types of drama in which its 'pure, primordial' principles are masked, weakened, and complicated by other aspects, such as realistic portrayal, psychological motivation, or ideological dialectics. ... it is possible for a melodramatic skeleton to become covered with the solid flesh of realistic material and concealed beneath an elegant layer of psychology and ethical, social, or philosophical content. We thereby lose the feeling of melodramatic style and accept the play as a 'higher' genre. (qtd. in Gerould 129)

Balukhatyi's melodramatic skeleton will return as a metaphor throughout this project, as I trace Dreyer's varied engagements with what Danish film historian Ebbe Neergaard once

referred to as “the backbone” of the Danish film industry, Nordisk’s famously successful erotic melodrama of the teens and early 20s.¹⁶ The implication that, as bones and skeleton, melodrama can provide a structuring influence yet still grow and change contributes beautifully to the idea that melodrama is an integral (though not static) part of many other dramatic, cultural, and aesthetic forms including film. Melodrama’s bones grow and develop, which paradoxically allows for more developed and less developed iterations, while avoiding casting melodrama as a form of childlike, arrested development. Some might object to the implication that melodrama’s integrity is lost through transformation into a “higher” genre, or argue that describing melodrama in this way simply relegates it as the abject other of something more legitimate. But considering melodrama as a skeleton grants it a compelling centrality very different from the way in which it is often merely written off as excessive or superfluous.

As I mentioned above, Dreyer’s engagement with melodrama is episodic rather than smoothly teleological, a series of different applications and removals as it were, of flesh. Melodrama does not have the pejorative term for me that it had for Dreyer, but neither is it unambiguously rosy. Balukhatyi’s skeleton captures this dissonance. Flesh can be added, but also—and this will be crucial in looking at Dreyer—be stripped away. Dreyer’s melodrama skeleton encompasses at once “elegant layers” of psychology and also the violence of melodramatic suffering. This is another way of picturing Dreyer’s fascination with the relationship between interiority and exteriority, emotion and expression.

Melodramatic innovation: Dreyer and Griffith

Standard accounts of Dreyer’s career trajectory bear affinities to D.W. Griffith’s in that his innovation of cinematic technique has been held up as proof of the decisive break he made with his early days making melodrama (origins that I discuss in more detail in the following chapter). Dreyer, like Griffith, has been read as espousing cinema’s superior capacity for realism, and ridding film of theater’s various exaggerations. This is consistent with the standard trajectory by which theater (and melodrama) have been seen as primitive forms for cinema to transcend either artistically or technologically or both. Griffith’s genius, according to Vardac, was his ability to portray Romantic sentiment and themes more “realistically” through camera technique, the development of continuity editing, the use of the close-up, and a more restrained acting style.

Linda Williams contests this account of Griffith’s by showing melodrama to be inextricable from Griffith’s innovation of the “essential language of film” that would become “classical” Hollywood narrative. In “Melodrama Revised,” Williams outlines five key melodramatic qualities in Griffith’s *Way Down East* (1920). I include them here as they provide the contours of an American early film melodrama that in some capacity contributed to Dreyer’s early conception of “artistic film” and also provide a baseline from which we can talk about differences in the Danish tradition: [1] Being a fundamentally conservative and nostalgic form, melodrama “begins, and wants to end, in a space of innocence” (65). Narratively, melodrama shows this innocence, then takes it away to either be regained (against all odds) or lamented (if permanently lost). As is not

¹⁶ “1911 betyder altså en alvorlig omkalfatring inden for Nordisk og dermed inden for filmindustrien overhovedet. De blev det både i stof og menneskeskildring. Og filmindustrien fandt hermed sin store hovedgenre, der er dens ryggrad den dag i dag: kærlighedsmelodramaet” (Neergaard, *Historien* 38).

uncommon, *Way Down East* links this nostalgia for a lost innocence with the maternal, an absent mother. [2] Melodrama uses victim-heroines and their virtuous suffering to orchestrate moral legibility. Recognition of suffering, whether through vivid depictions of suffering or a combination of suffering and deeds is also crucial to the mode. [3] “Melodrama appears modern by borrowing from realism, but realism serves the melodramatic passion and action” (68). [4] American melodramatic narrative works to attain moral legibility and produce tension by using different combinations of “paroxysm of pathos” and “the exhilaration of action” (69). (In the paroxysm of pathos variation, victim-heroines “achieve recognition of their virtue through the more passive ‘deeds’ of suffering or self-sacrifice,” (59) but both tendencies can be embodied in a single protagonist.) This involves producing emotion through alternation between “too late” and “in the nick of time.” This feeling that something important has been lost suffuses melodrama and coincides with what Brooks describes as the longing for a fullness of being of an earlier, still sacred universe. [5] “Melodrama presents characters who embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichean conflicts between good and evil” (77).

Interestingly, Griffith will play a more concrete role in the mythology that surrounds Dreyer’s development as an artist; ironically, it was Dreyer’s dizzying first encounter with *Intolerance* (made in 1916, but arriving in Nordisk’s screening room in 1918) that supposedly inspired Dreyer to abandon melodrama and make artistic film. The story goes that Dreyer, who had recently completed *The President*, stumbled home from the screening in the wee hours, stunned by this introduction to film’s artistic potential. Later, Dreyer would clarify that it was the modern episodes of Griffith’s epic, with their close up shots of Mae Marsh’s expressive face that most captivated him, and that Griffith’s other films, *Broken Blossoms* (1919) and *Way Down East* (1920) had inspired him as well (Kau 31). The important implication of Dreyer’s looking to Griffith as a model for artistic film is less that he became utterly beholden to replicating American action sequences or depicting conflict as either polarized or Manichean, and more that artistic film was from the start a category expansive enough to include melodrama’s deeply pathetic images of motherhood and suffering victim-protagonists as well as its pervasive sense of nostalgia and loss.

Against a “classical” realist norm

Dreyer’s *oeuvre*, like melodrama in general, has been read against the norm of “classical” Hollywood continuity editing, most prominently in David Bordwell’s influential monograph, *The Films of Carl-Theodore Dreyer*. Casper Tybjerg summarizes Bordwell’s project in this way,

What Bordwell is concerned with in his book is, first and foremost, to present a very detailed analysis of Dreyer’s use of particular cinematic devices, of his use of camera movement, image composition, as well as his use of narrative structure. ... Bordwell stresses how Dreyer’s technique, particularly in the later pictures, very deliberately distances itself from the classical Hollywood norm. Also, unlike the stories of Hollywood films, which are driven by the goals and actions of characters, Dreyer’s narratives are said to be driven by absent, impersonal causes. Set against the classical norm, Dreyer’s way of doing things is ‘defamiliarizing.’ (“Sense” 190)

For Bordwell, the defamiliarizing stylistics of Dreyer's films substantiate the innovation of his approach to cinematic expression and ground his genius. But the ways in which Dreyer's films deviate from this "classical" norm dovetail in curious ways with melodrama's own "deviations" from the same norm. Drawing from theorists of classicism from 17th-century French neoclassicists to work by Bordwell and Kristen Thompsen, Rick Altman characterizes the classical text in literary and film contexts as including "omniscient narration, linear presentation, character-centered causality, and psychological motivation" (15) and particular to film, "invisible editing, verisimilitude of space, and various devices designed to assure continuity. . . . In David Bordwell's use, 'classical' means harmony, unity, tradition, rule-governed craftsmanship, standardization, and control" (15). In contrast, melodrama employs episodic narrative to advance the plot rather than causality motivated action. "Compared with the classical narrative's logical cause-and-effect structure, melodrama has a far greater tolerance, or indeed a preference, for outrageous coincidence, implausibility, convoluted plotting, deus ex machina resolutions, and episodic strings of action that stuff too many events together to be kept in line by a cause-and-effect chain of narrative progression" (Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* 46). Melodrama expresses a character's motivation instead through visual metaphor that compresses action visually into sequences of images that do not immediately appear to advance the plot and often feature victim-protagonists who are acted upon rather than who actively pursue their narrative goals.

Dreyer's oeuvre demonstrates many of these non-"classical" features (which I return to below), including many protagonists who demonstrate little character development through the narrative and, in traditional melodramatic fashion, more or less stand in for a single position (usually of innocence). But many of these same films feature a central character (or characters) who does act, or who at least gains knowledge of the extent to which they are acted upon. This inclusion of complex characters has been cited as evidence that Dreyer's work is realistic or "classical" rather than melodramatic, but a significant vein of scholarship on melodrama has eroded the binary between melodrama and the "classical" realist text on precisely the question of characterization, showing melodrama to have figured centrally in 'the great tradition' of realist characterization all along. Rick Altman argues that melodrama provides timeless archetypal elements (crowds of stereotypical, recognizable characters for instance) that then produce tension when they interact with a realistic protagonist (one who demonstrates psychological development and who acts). Much of Altman's argument resonates with the variety of characterization in Dreyer's oeuvre and helps account for Dreyer's interest in timeless, archaic characters.

Although sympathetic to Altman's deconstructive project, in "Between Melodrama and Realism" Christine Gledhill objects both to Altman's theorization of melodrama as archaic and timeless subversion of realist narrative, persisting "as a constant source of provocation and resistance" (131), as well as to the equivalent subversion that Bordwell and Thompson enact when they associate melodrama with "the subordination or elimination of elements incompatible with the demands of classic narrative" (131). Gledhill takes a radically different approach to melodrama's paradoxical temporality by arguing that it is fundamentally timely rather than archaic. In other words, it actively adapts and contributes to the "realization" of reality at a given place or time and responds to a specific experience of the world rather than persisting as an archaic

strain within an ever-developing realism. For Gledhill, characterization becomes one of three sites where melodrama works within conventions of verisimilitude shared by (social) realism: narrative logic (cause or consequence), personalization (character or personification), and *mise-en-scène* (visual and verbal registers) showing how these appear different depending on how social conditions and goals are experienced differently in different traditions.

Dreyer's work, with its paradoxical aspiration to a kind of timeliness of eternal figures (Dreyer once justified the relevance of his "Medea" screenplay by citing a contemporary article in the newspaper about a mother who had killed her children), fits neither model of melodrama perfectly, but does allow another opportunity to investigate melodrama's intricate and occasionally paradoxical interaction with the realist text.

Douglas Sirk and "sophisticated melodrama"

Much film studies work on melodrama has (for better or worse) produced a distinction between what one might call high and low melodrama. Seen from this perspective, Dreyer's work *does* resemble some Hollywood films, such as those of Douglas Sirk or Max Ophüls. Or to put it more precisely, Dreyer's stylistic "estrangement" resembles the way in which Sirk has been theorized as estranging "classical" Hollywood norms by imbuing them with melodrama's stylistic "excesses." In 1972, Thomas Elsaesser's seminal article, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," facilitated film melodrama's blossoming into a "legitimate" object of critical attention. Sirk's background in Brechtian theater in Germany informed the ideological critique of bourgeois America he conducted within the artistic constraints imposed upon him as a contract director at Universal studios in the 1950s by making apparently ideologically complicit films that could be read "against the grain" to reveal social critique within the depicted status quo.¹⁷ By the 1970s, Neo-Marxist and French Structuralist aesthetics had radically reoriented film studies in America (by critiquing auteurism as ideologically naïve, and earlier attempts to elevate Hollywood along traditional humanist-realist lines as "misconceived liberalism"), setting the stage for melodrama to emerge as an ideal point at which to study "capitalist commodity production of both high and mass culture and the intimate connection between signification and ideological reproduction" (Gledhill, "Field" 6). In stark contrast to the realist-humanist tradition that had privileged aesthetic coherence and unity, then, this wave of neo-Marxist aesthetic critique "looked to stylistic 'excess' and narrative disjuncture for their 'exposure' of contradictions between a mainstream film's aesthetic and ideological programmes" (Gledhill, "Field" 6). Elsaesser's formulation of Sirk's aesthetic, ironic, and subversive melodrama would have a lasting effect on melodrama studies as it would develop in the 80s and 90s and helped establish the genre of the "family melodrama" as melodrama's most dominant manifestation.¹⁸ For some, melodrama's capacity for social critique in readings against the grain that expose contradictions of the dominant ideologies of its production remains its defining feature.

¹⁷ For a critique of Sirk's recuperation of melodrama as a postmodern Film Studies readymade, see Ray 29-63.

¹⁸ For a reading of melodrama of 1950s Hollywood melodrama (Sirk included) as the epitome of the evolution of the genre, see Schatz.

Sirk offers an interesting point of comparison for Dreyer. Although both directors were consummate cinematic stylists, to my knowledge, Dreyer never articulated any overt aspiration to ideological or political critique. I doubt that Dreyer would have ever described his work as exploiting the ironic use of cliché, for instance. And although Dreyer possessed as acute an awareness of his public persona as the critically savvy Sirk did, Dreyer never performed a retrospectively melodramatic recuperation of his own earlier work. Allowing that we can in fact divorce Sirkian aesthetics from its ambition to subvert dominant ideologies, scholarship on Sirkian melodrama is important to this discussion of Dreyer because with Sirk, melodrama ceases to be the unsophisticated or unaesthetic antithesis to artistic film. In other words, Dreyer's aesthetic and highly stylized treatment of the domestic sphere resonates with the way Sirk treated conservative subject matter with an elaborate (what some call excessive) cinematic style. Sirkian style is distinguished by its use of elaborately composed (somewhat claustrophobic) *mise-en-scène* in which each detail or object is laden with symbolic meaning; the expressive or symbolic use of lighting and color; music that expresses mood in contradiction to narrative situations, and the frequent use of long- and mid-range shots to produce a stage-like impression. Melodrama can now accommodate Dreyer's aesthetic sensibility as manifested in his willingness to spend endless hours researching his stage-like *mise-en-scène*, composing shots and lighting schemes in order to compress action into visual metaphor. We can think of both directors developing this mastery of imbuing surfaces with meaning during the silent era when directors, as Elsaesser puts it, developed, "an extremely subtle and yet precise formal language (of lighting, staging, décor, acting, close-up, montage, and camera movement), because they were deliberately looking to compensate for the expressiveness, range of inflection and tonality, rhythmic emphasis and tension normally present in the spoken word" (75). With sound, too, voice and dialogue simply became additional scenic elements (additional plasticity) to manipulate.

The staging of Dreyer's films, which (like Sirk's or Ophüls's), place universal, humanist concerns in the domestic sphere in a way typical of melodrama's origins in post-Enlightenment liberalism, by which large-scale social uncertainty found its expression in personalized, emotional terms and intergenerational conflict. As Elsaesser conceives it, the family melodrama too invests normal life with "an intensified symbolisation of everyday actions, the heightening of the ordinary gesture and a use of setting and décor so as to reflect the characters' fetishist fixations" (79). Elsaesser calls this "displacement-by-substitution" and attributes a certain false potential for false (or apolitical) consciousness to it, while Dreyer (as I mentioned above in relation to Henry James) invests the everyday with heightened drama with a less clearly politically subversive intent. Dreyer's characters often suffer from the constriction of their agency and the inability to realize their desires. Dreyer, like Minnelli, puts "a pervasive psychological pressure on the characters" (Elsaesser 76) whose desires remain unvoiced or unrealized, present and almost palpable, but barely contained. The immaculately detailed surfaces in Dreyer's films produce, like Minnelli's, "An acute sense of claustrophobia and decor and locale translates itself into a restless and yet suppressed energy surfacing sporadically in the actions and the behavior of the protagonists ... with hysteria bubbling all the time just below the surface" (Elsaesser 76). Dreyer says as much in relation to *Day of Wrath* when he writes, "And isn't it true that the great dramas are played out in silence? People hide their feelings and avoid showing on their faces the

storms that are raging inside them. Tension lies underneath the surface and is only released the day that catastrophe hits. It's this latent tension, this smoldering unease behind the daily life of the pastor's family, that has been imperative for me to extract."¹⁹

Dreyer's interest in protagonists that demonstrate psychological development (a seeming violation of classic melodrama's monopathic characterization) has been held up as proof of his non-melodramatic aspirations. Elsaesser's work on Sirk, however, has expanded melodramatic characterization to include the more complex and "psychological" kinds of characterization that are consistent with Dreyer's films. Typical of the family melodrama as Elsaesser defines it, many of Dreyer's films show the failure of protagonists "to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the stifling social milieu. The world is closed, and the characters are acted upon" (79). They also include the intricate alternation between constellations of *dramatis personae* and identification with a single, central protagonist that Elsaesser sees in Sirk (but which arguably exists in all melodrama). In other words, the family melodrama tends to "place a victim hero/ine at the centre of the narrative and afford them privileged audience identification and knowledge" (Mercer 15), but also distributes victimhood onto a whole constellation of characters. Elsaesser writes,

One of the characteristic features of melodramas in general is that they concentrate on the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way that they manage to present *all* of the characters convincingly as victims. The critique – the questions of 'evil', of responsibility – is firmly placed on a social and existential level, away from the arbitrary and finally obtuse logic of private motives and individualised psychology. (86)

Such juxtaposition between individual protagonists and constellations of characters (taking action to an abstract level) occurs throughout Dreyer's *oeuvre* and in Danish film melodrama as well. Dreyer's juxtaposition (even in his late films) between protagonists who demonstrate psychological complexity and characters who simply do not will be a key melodramatic trait that I explore in subsequent chapters.

Anecdotally, the fact that Dreyer sought work in Hollywood at several points during his career or and that he admitted to admiring Nicholas Ray's *East of Eden* (1955) and chose to screen such psychologically engaging, quality Hollywood films in his years running the Dagmar theater in Copenhagen (where 60s art-house fare was conspicuously absent), further establishes links to this Hollywood melodrama and away from Dreyer's exclusive identification as an art-cinema auteur. Although we might trace certain affinities between Dreyer's late work and Sirkian melodrama to currents of influence in the 40s or 50s—and this "application" of Sirkian melodrama to Dreyer's *oeuvre* would be an interesting project in its own right—more interesting to my mind is the idea that Dreyer and Sirk are somehow drawing upon a shared, European tradition of melodrama with its own mechanisms of identification and estrangement. Better understanding Dreyer's relationship with his early roots in early Danish film melodrama might allow us to see Sirk's work as part of a larger European tradition as well.

¹⁹ "Og er sandheden ikke, at de store dramaer udspilles i det stille? Menneskene skjuler deres følelser og undgår at vises på deres ansigter de storme, der raser i deres indre. Spændingen ligger under overfladen og kommer først til udløsning den dag, katastrofen sker. Det er denne latent spænding, denne ulmende uhygge bag præstefamiliens hverdag, det har været mig magt påliggende at få frem" (Dreyer, "Filmstil" 75).

Slippages

This project seeks to situate Dreyer's *oeuvre* as part of a vital tradition of Danish film melodrama that incorporates its own sort of irony very early on, rather than further "elevates" it by association with "high" Sirkian melodrama. Dreyer's *oeuvre* might also help complicate the slippage by which Sirkian melodrama has largely become synonymous with "melodrama." The majority of family melodramas produced in Hollywood in the fifties, as Gledhill argues, did not seek to produce a *Verfremdung* effect in audiences, and the continued insistence upon such an effect has brought about an unfortunate division between affective (bad) melodrama that implicates its spectators and makes them cry; and ironic, excess, stylistically subversive (good) melodrama that made for a critical spectator. "The two audiences for Sirkian irony can be further specified: one which is implicated, identifies and weeps, and one which, seeing through such involvement, distances itself" ("Field" 12). Most importantly, the dominance of the Sirkian model has perpetuated an underestimation of melodrama's goal of producing strong emotions in its audiences. Linda Williams details a similar ghettoization of melodramatic emotion resulting from feminist debates in the 1970s about "the woman's film" and its subgenre "maternal melodrama" (i.e. films that featured female protagonists, typically focused on the domestic sphere, and were specifically marketed and created for female audiences) by establishing melodrama as the particular domain of female audiences. This further relegated its emotional register as the excessive, hyperbolic other to Hollywood's "classical" realist norm, distracting scholars from appreciating the rhetorical power inherent in identifying with suffering victims. Most importantly, "this so-excessive-as-to-be-ironic model rendered taboo the most crucial element of the study of melodrama: its capacity to generate emotion in audiences" (Williams, "Revised" 44).

The case of Sirk illustrates the immense capacity for semantic and rhetorical slippage around the term melodrama, slippages that will be important in tracing Dreyer's work with melodrama while denying it rhetorically. Bearing in mind that what is called melodrama *can* coincide with contemporary film practices, but often depends more on the retrospective glance of film scholars, we can parse out the particular slippages that occur in the Danish context (something I attempt in the next chapter). The "sophisticated melodrama" norm (or what came to be understood in the 1980s and 1990s as melodrama) diverged significantly from the film practices in Hollywood up to that point. Seen from the perspective of earlier patterns of genre designations, advertisement, film cycles (by which positive audience response influenced future film production), and writing by contemporary critics and historians, melodrama looked quite different. In his article, "Melo talk," Steve Neale shows that up until the 1970s "melodrama" was used in the trade press could include thrillers with fast-paced narratives, episodic story-lines featuring violence, suspense and death-defying stunts. These cowboy films, gangster films, crime thrillers and horror movies were strategically marketed as melodramas in the trade press. Mercer and Shingler sum up this phenomenon writing,

Ironically, what Film Studies has come to regard as 'melodrama' since 1970 are films with more words than action, inactive male protagonists, active and even domineering female characters, and anything but clear-cut and easily identifiable villains. In other words, the conception of 'melodrama' arrived at by film scholars after 1970 is almost diametrically

opposed to the conception of ‘melodrama’ that circulated in the American film industry trade press in an earlier period. (Mercer 6)

Understanding melodrama’s paradoxical potential to encompass diametrically opposed practices opens up the possibility of reading similar fluctuations over Dreyer’s long career in film, spanning from the teens to the sixties. But although we can recognize many of the same issues in the Danish context as the American, the terms of its various slippages differ somewhat.

Melodrama and the art film, modernist melodrama?

An implicit binary operating in Dreyer scholarship as it developed in the fifties and sixties is the melodrama and art-house cinema. During this period and the decades that followed, Dreyer’s unquestioned status as an art-house cinema auteur, modernist filmmaker and formalist (all categories presumed antithetical to melodrama) helped secure that he was too much of a high-art stylist and serious artist to make melodrama. Katherine Woodward’s essay “European Anti-Melodrama: Godard, Truffaut, and Fassbinder” epitomizes the position in which modernist art film and the affect elicited by melodrama are not only mutually exclusive, but deemed good and bad. The former elicits critical consciousness, the latter false consciousness. Many modern European films, as modernist films, Woodward argues, seek to combat the “passive emotional identification elicited by the melodrama” (586) to encourage reflection instead and reveal melodrama as perpetuating false consciousness. As I see it, melodrama’s capacity for *Verfremdung*, authorial expressivity and ambiguity, and ideological critique have actually brought it into a certain proximity to the modernist art film. “Modernist melodrama” and “melodramatic art film” have ceased to produce an immediate contradiction in terms, particularly regarding their capacity for ideological critique. Christopher Orr, for instance reads Bergman’s *Persona* (1966) as a melodrama that lays bare class relations in Sweden by reflecting and speaking “to crises within the social order, laying bare the anxieties created by a perceived gap between individual needs and the structure of society.”²⁰ Most melodramas ultimately contain these anxieties, thereby resolving their conflicts without threatening the status quo” (89). More germane to this project, melodrama scholarship (such as Gledhill’s, mentioned above) has shown emotion and reflection not to be antithetical at all. Mercer and Shingler locate art-house cinema (i.e. the art film) as an important site for continued scholarship on the melodramatic mode (which they call sensibility). I quote them at length because of the way Scandinavian cinema exemplifies their “art-house” cinema.

It is not just popular cinematic forms ... that demonstrate the manifestations of a melodramatic sensibility, however. The work of Ingmar Bergman for example, usually categorised outside of the mainstream of popular cinema as ‘art-house’, frequently deals with thematic concerns and demonstrates a stylistic aesthetic that might be understood as articulating a melodramatic sensibility. Films like *Persona* (1966) with its theme of muteness, or the claustrophobic atmosphere evoked in *Cries and Whispers* (1972), both featuring female protagonists, are especially good examples of the ways in which Bergman’s cinema could be read as melodrama. Equally the films of the Dogme 95

²⁰ For a discussion of the art film as genre (upon which Orr draws) see, Bordwell “Art Cinema.”

movement such as *Festen* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) and, especially, *Breaking the Waves* (1996), *The Idiots* (1998) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) (all directed by Lars von Trier) whilst utilising a scrupulously realist aesthetic, deal with highly-charged emotional states and situations, seemingly pushing the boundaries of realism to its limits in ways that can provoke extreme discomfort in audiences. Once again this cycle of films that challenge audience expectations and have the ability to elicit strong emotional responses through their charged dramatic register are prime examples of the melodramatic sensibility at work in contemporary cinema outside of the Hollywood mainstream. ... Much of the scholarly work into the ways in which a melodramatic sensibility inflects cinema outside of Hollywood is yet to be done but this small sample of examples indicates some of the interesting directions that these investigations may take in the future. (96-7)

Dreyer is conspicuous in his absence from this list of famous Scandinavian directors, as if his unquestioned affiliation with a formalist, art-house cinema, has resulted in the underestimation of his desire to elicit emotional response in his audiences using scenes of vivid suffering. This is a key aspect of my investigation and an important intervention in Dreyer scholarship.

The gender of suffering

Inextricable from Dreyer's depictions of suffering is the way they are gendered. Dreyer's art-house reputation has also to some extent shielded him from discussions about the centrality particularly of female suffering in his films, not unlike debates in the seventies surrounding "the woman's film."²¹ Feminist scholars have yet to praise or condemn Dreyer directly in the way that they do von Trier, even when the two auteurs are considered to be working in the same tradition. Dreyer's status as art-film auteur, combined with the modesty of his artistic persona, has shielded him from the kind of criticism that von Trier seems to invite with his overtly provocative depictions of female suffering and sacrifice and his performative approach to publicity. Dreyer's work certainly produces an "attraction-repulsion to the pathos of virtuous suffering" (Williams, "Revised" 45) and raises a slew of questions about what kind of a subject position these films allowed female spectators. Dreyer's films, like melodrama, pose interesting challenges to feminist spectators, both attraction and repulsion to depictions of female suffering. On one hand, Dreyer's films show an overrepresentation of female protagonists who suffer, which suggests that Dreyer was very much a man of his time. The images in Dreyer's films sometimes walk an uncomfortable ethical line in that, being aesthetically beautiful, they verge on idealizing female suffering. On the other hand, Dreyer had aspirations to depict something of the universal human experience, and in this light the fact that female bodies represent the universal becomes a progressive stance. Or one might say that Dreyer at least aspired to show the injustice that women often experience in traditionally patriarchal institutions. Questions of whether female spectators react

²¹ For an overview of feminist critique of melodrama in the 1970s, see Cook 248-262. Other works that contribute to the debate about "the woman's film" include: Williams "Something Else" 307-330; Doane, *The Desire to Desire*; Modeleski "Time and Desire"; and Kaplan "Mothering, Feminism and Representation."

critically or reflectively to clearly idealized images of motherhood and how female spectators identify with images of female suffering are less interesting to this project than trying to understand Dreyer's own identification and response to these ethical questions.

In summary, Dreyer's work has never been treated as an extended engagement with melodramatic themes, aesthetics, emotional registers or ethics. Melodrama scholarship can, however, help us parse out Dreyer's peculiar contribution to world cinema as a filmmaker who aspires to give the cinema a level of "classical" prestige and employs a precise realist aesthetic to do so, but who also at the same time estranges it in a way that approaches art-house modernism. Dreyer neither wholeheartedly embraces Hollywood continuity editing (although again and again demonstrating the cinematic competence for it), nor "modernist" art film (that resembles Bergman in the sixties, for instance). After making *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Vampyr*—arguably the Dreyer films most easily read as estranging and modernist—Dreyer returns to more conventionally narrative filmmaking, aligning himself with melodrama's commitment to worldly verisimilitude rather than the complete revelation of film *as* mere representation. Even the seeming nonconformity of what might be called Dreyer's modernist period can be read as his adaptation of Nordisk's melodramatic skeleton. The first step to understanding Dreyer's inflection of this melodrama will be to get a better grasp of what melodrama actually meant at Nordisk, and it is to this I now turn.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY DANISH FILM MELODRAMA AT NORDISK

“From the turn of the century through to the 60s melodrama had been conceived in predominantly pejorative terms. [...] [M]elodrama was at the beginning of the century constituted as the anti-value for a critical field in which tragedy and realism became cornerstones of ‘high’ cultural value, needing protection from mass, ‘melodramatic’ entertainment.”

Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation”¹

“Even by his first film, Dreyer had achieved results that corrected exactly what would come to be Nordisk Films weak point. Melodramatic style.”

Ebbe Neergaard, *En Filminstruktørs Arbejde*²

Few would question Carl Th. Dreyer’s inclusion in the canon of world cinema, as Denmark’s first major international auteur. As The Danish Film Institute’s Dreyer website puts it, “Carl Theodor Dreyer is the most important director in Danish cinema. In international film history, too, he ranks as one of the greatest artists of all time” (Nissen “Biography”). Dreyer’s relationship to his native film industry, however, is more complex than this statement conveys. Dreyer’s artistic genius has often been set in stark opposition to his historical and national contexts. Raymond Carney’s otherworldly praise for Dreyer’s genius is a dramatic example,

Dreyer’s cinematic style takes its place alongside the styles of Shakespeare, Milton, Beethoven, Henry James and George Balanchine as a breakthrough to a new way of knowing, a way of understanding our experience as unprecedented as if it were the gift of an alien being descended from the skies or a god suddenly come down to live among us.
(54)

Carney’s description might be extreme, but it demonstrates a pervasive tendency in Dreyer scholarship to underplay the contributions of Danish cinema to the formation of Dreyer’s artistic genius. Often, Dreyer’s Danish origins figure as the obstacles that he had to overcome to reach prominence in world cinema. As Danish filmmaker Henning Carlsen writes in his 1968 obituary for Dreyer, “Carl Th. Dreyer’s importance as a film artist was international, and his stature must be measured by a yardstick we have not really got in this country” (Carlson 4).³ Referring to *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (made in France), Ebbe Neergaard, the first historian of Danish film wrote, “It was created in other words, outside of a Denmark in which film art had no home at that time, and it gave a Dane worldwide recognition as an outrageously single-minded director whose strength was and continues to be made of an uncompromising will to artistic autonomy and

¹ See Gledhill “Field” 5.

² “Allerede med sin første film havde Dreyer nået resultater, der korregerede netop det, som skulle vise sig at være Nordisk Films svage punkt. Den melodramatiske stil” (Neergaard, *Bog om Dreyer* 19).

³ Or consider, “Rendre la vision d’un grand artiste tributaire du cadre géographique la futile cruellement. Place sur les films de Dreyer l’étiquette *cinéma danois*, cela ne repose sur rien. La patrie artistique d’un cinéaste, c’est le cinéma” (Sémolué 9-10).

professional independence.”⁴ Again and again, the standard reception of Dreyer’s *oeuvre* casts his roots in Danish cinema as too provincial, too commercial, or too artistically constrictive for him.

Dreyer remained close to the scholarly construction of his artistic persona throughout his life. Neergaard, a professor of literature and theater and an early Danish proponent of film as a serious art form, became Dreyer’s friend (ironically perhaps) after writing a less than favorable review of *Jeanne d’Arc* in 1928. Neergaard would go on to write several early and influential books on the art of film: *Hvorfor er Filmen Sådan?* (Why is Film Like That? 1931), and on Danish film history: *Historien om Dansk Film* (The History of Danish Film, 1960). His monograph on Dreyer: *En filminstruktørs arbejde: Carl Th. Dreyer og Hans Ti Film* (A Film Director’s Work: Carl Th. Dreyer and his Ten Films, 1940), when reissued in English in 1950 as part of the British Film Institute’s Index Series as *Carl Dreyer*, did much to put Dreyer back in the limelight in Denmark, where he hadn’t made a film since 1932, and perhaps more importantly, to introduce him to an English-speaking audience.⁵ Dreyer’s friendship with Neergaard also imbues the historian’s work with a kind of authority as work to which Dreyer likely contributed, and which Dreyer implicitly acknowledged as an authoritative account of his own development.⁶ Neergaard’s initial characterizations of Dreyer’s relationship with Nordisk continue to have a prominent presence in scholarship on Danish film.

Underlying Neergaard’s account of Dreyer’s artistic genius is the stigma that the Danish film industry came to be saddled with around the time that Dreyer began his career. Dreyer got his start in film at Nordisk Films Kompagni, which dominated the Danish film industry at a time when Denmark was an international player in world cinema, but also where film art supposedly “had no home.” In the teens, the company enjoyed a worldwide reputation for high-quality films, but it also came to be synonymous with mass-produced, sensationalistic, and profitable productions. According to a recent collection, *Nordic National Cinemas*:

The melodramatic subjects, the spectacular plots the bold erotics and the descriptions of crime provoked a debate in wide circles, not only in Denmark. In Sweden many of these films were totally banned, and ‘Danishness’ became an abusive word referring to all films that were considered offensive to good taste. (Soila, Söderbergh-Widding, and Iversen 9)

As this citation suggests, melodrama played a key role both in the Nordisk’s success and its stigmatization. The company’s financial successes and mass production of mass entertainment came to be considered anathema to directors with true artistic ambitions.

⁴ “Den blev altså skabt uden for et Danmark, hvor filmkunsten på den tid var hjemløs, og den skabte en dansker verdensberømmelse som en forargende egensindig instruktør, hvis styrke bestod og består i stejl vilje til kunstnerisk selvstændighed og arbejdsmæssig uafhængighed” (Neergaard, *Historien* 98).

⁵ *En filminstruktørs arbejde* was reissued in English in 1950 as *Carl Dreyer* (part of the British Film Institute’s Index Series no. 1.) and then in an expanded edition as *Ebbe Neergaards Bog om Dreyer* in 1963. For a discussion of how Neergaard’s book revived Dreyer’s career, see Engberg “Elementer.”

⁶ Neergaard’s *Historien om Dansk Film* (1960) includes a preface written by Dreyer in which he writes of the debt he owes to his recently deceased friend. The revised edition of *Ebbe Neergaards bog om Dreyer* (1963) also includes a short epilogue by Dreyer acknowledging how much Neergaard meant for film art and how much his friendship meant to Dreyer.

Ebbe Neergaard takes this position in his 1960 history of Danish film, in which Dreyer and Benjamin Christensen are held up as uncompromising artistic “wills.”

Both of these ambitious individualists, working within an often spiritually-mechanized industry, have frequently stood in opposition to the narrow-minded commercial film industry, and both have had difficulties settling down in the area inside the borders of a small country’s production conditions.⁷

To a large extent, Dreyer’s reputation as an art-house director derives from the story of his insatiable desire for directing as personal expression, in the face of Nordisk’s industrial and artistic constraints, essentially, its demand for melodrama.⁸

In this chapter I contextualize Dreyer’s early years at Nordisk and examine the way melodrama became imbricated with the stigma associated with the company. I then consider more fully the way Dreyer scholarship persistently establishes the artistic merits of Dreyer’s production against Nordisk and early Danish film melodrama. Dreyer, who was well aware of this, never openly embraced “melodrama” as such during his lifetime, yet his films suggest that he was continually attracted to it. The tension between his attraction and his rejection of the mode was actually productive for Dreyer. Neither melodrama nor Nordisk now suffer quite so acutely from the stigma as they did during Dreyer’s lifetime, allowing us to read his “mature” work as engaged with his formative experiences at the company, rather than rejecting them outright. In the final part of this chapter, I suggest that Nordisk melodrama was a fascinating and rich iteration of the melodramatic mode (though full consideration of the company’s melodramatic output is beyond the scope of this project). Part of the reason Dreyer’s *oeuvre* has yet to be fully considered as the part of Nordisk’s melodramatic tradition is that complexities of early Danish melodrama have received so little attention. Moving beyond the stigma of Nordisk/Danish melodrama stigma opens up intriguing possibilities for better understanding Scandinavian melodrama, and for considering this melodrama’s formal and affective contributions to European art-house cinema, with which Dreyer has become synonymous. Nordisk’s melodramatic imagination, in short, was vivid, complex, and moving enough to ignite Dreyer’s.

The Nordisk formula

Between 1911-1916, Nordisk became well known for the feature-length genre films that it distributed all over the world. Only the French companies Pathé Frères and Gaumont surpassed the company’s production.⁹ Nordisk established its reputation by producing a steady stream of quality films with high production values and dramatic plots. Nordisk advertised that “1. elegant acting, 2. good plots, 3. superb cinematography” set its product apart.¹⁰ Ole Olsen, the innovative and charismatic entrepreneur who founded the

⁷ “Begge de ambitiøse individualister inden for en ofte åndeligt mekaniseret industri, tit har de stået i opposition til den ensidigt kommercielle filmindustri, og begge har de haft vanskeligheder ved at finde sig til rette inden for det lille lands grænser på produktionsvilkårenes område” (Neergaard, *Historien* 94).

⁸ Neergaard characterizes Christensen and Dreyer as both fellow competitors (*konkurrenter*) but also fellow sufferers (*lidelsefæller*) for their cause (*Historien* 93-4).

⁹ For comprehensive account of the company’s rise to dominance and its subsequent decline, see Thorsen “Rise and Fall” 53. For a comprehensive business history of the company, see Thorsen *Isbjørnens Anatomi*.

¹⁰ “De slår også fast, at det, der udmærker deres produkter er: 1. det elegante spil, 2. den gode handling, 3. det superbe fotografi” (Engberg, *Store År* 439).

company in 1905, developed a system for producing films with a broad, international appeal, such that they could be easily consumed all over the world. Nordisk films were often set in non-Scandinavian, ambiguously continental locations and featured characters with British, German or American names. Nordisk actually ceded the Danish market to Fotorama as part of the judicial case resulting from the plagiarism, but that mattered little to Nordisk, for foreign markets supported the bulk of its production. The company's production would become virtually synonymous with early Danish cinema. Around WWI the company experienced a significant decline and lost its dominant position in the world market. Critics in the 1920s associated the company's financial downturn to its failure to move beyond the generic formulas upon which its fortunes had been made. More recently, scholars attribute the downfall to Nordisk's loss of large sections of its extensive distribution network during WWI, and its problematic alliances with Germany where the company had establish strong distribution channels. This, combined with competition from newly formed UFA in Germany and an influx of films from Hollywood, signaled the end of the Danish Golden Age, although the company still operates today.¹¹

Kunstfilm

Up until to 1910, Nordisk had produced short, mostly non-narrative films such as travel or newsreel reportage, pictures of the royal family, and nature films. In 1910, however, the Danish film industry was changed forever when Fotorama (a competing company later subsumed by Nordisk), produced the wildly successful, 700-meter long [add runningtime], *Den hvide Slavehandel* (*The White Slave Trade*, 1910). Typical of Olsen's commercial savvy, he capitalized upon the success of the film by plagiarizing it in detail.¹² (Nordisk later bought out Fotorama.) The film would have a more wide-reaching effect on Nordisk than Fotorama, however, in that it prompted Nordisk to restructure its production model to focus on feature-length films. Previously, Nordisk's distribution affiliates had been skeptical about the willingness of their audiences to sit through a film longer than one reel. Up until that point, it was rare to screen multi-reel films at a single sitting in Denmark and Germany. The company tended to distribute films serially, one reel at a time, with the exception of filmed theater productions.

The *kunstfilm*, as these multi-reel features were called, played a key role in Nordisk's phenomenal successes in the teens, both financial and artistic. Although literally meaning "art film," *kunstfilm* was originally used to designate all multi-reel films. The longer format would have artistic implications for the films produced, however, for in contrast to the one-reel films (only a small fraction of which had been fiction), the longer format allowed Nordisk to develop characters and experiment with more complex narrative structures. This would lay the groundwork for Nordisk's great combination of humanistic stories, psychologically interesting drama, and sensational spectacles. The company delivered a feast of wronged lovers, prodigal sons, criminals, aerial acrobatics, car crashes, devious divas, recently bankrupt nobility, orphans, thieves, deceived lovers, circus performers, *variété* spectacles, revolvers, white slave trade operators, fires, explosions, car chases, tightrope walks, dance numbers, drowning victims, love triangles, hypnotists and extended, heart-felt kisses.

¹¹ See Thorsen "Filmsfabrikken i Valby" 93-111. For an informative overview of the company's first one hundred years of operation through collected essays, see Larsen and Nissen *100 Years of Nordisk Film*.

¹² For an account of the plagiarism, see Engberg "Plagiarism" 73-79.

The golden age of “melodrama” and scholarly slippage

Historians refer to this period in Danish film history as the Danish Golden Age, and often categorically equate films of the period with melodrama. Peter Schepelern’s recent sketch of Danish film history on the Danish National Filmography website refers to 1910-1920 as both The Golden Age of Danish film (*den danske filmens guldalder*), and as The Era of the Melodrama (*Melodramaets tidsalder*). Schepelern’s history includes colorful genre iterations reflecting the company’s diverse output. He calls *Atlantis* (August Blom, 1913)¹³ an artist melodrama (*kunstnermelodrama*), *Døds-Spring til Hest fra Cirkus-Kuplen* (*The Great Circus Catastrophe*, Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen, 1912)¹⁴ a circus melodrama (*cirkusmelodrama*), and *Hævnens Nat* (*Blind Justice*, Benjamin Christensen, 1917)¹⁵ a crime melodrama (*forbrydermelodrama*). Schepelern’s designations indicate a pervasive slippage that occurs in recent scholarship on Danish silent film and the practices at Nordisk during this period when the company neither advertised its films as melodrama nor associated itself with melodrama per se. “Melodrama” remains conspicuously absent as an overt genre description at Nordisk during its golden age of melodrama. The three “melodramas” mentioned above were billed as a drama (*drama*), a sensation (*attraktion... drama*), and a play in six acts (*skuespil i 6 akter*). The programs that accompanied Nordisk’s films at the height of its golden age of melodrama attest to a veritable flurry of genre combinations usually combining the theater (*skuespil, drama*) and novel (*roman*).¹⁶ I have not found the term used at all in material from this period.¹⁷ In other words, the Golden Age of Danish melodrama acquired its status retrospectively. Whereas Steve Neale has shown that a wide range of American films were marketed as “melodramas” during the 1920s and 1930s, the word seems to be absent from Danish film marketing.¹⁸ Neale argues that the stigma of melodrama and its association with women’s films has been overestimated. However, Nordisk evidently sought to associate itself with more culturally legitimate forms.

Urban Gad’s watershed “melodrama” *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*, 1910), starring Asta Nielsen, offers an example of slippage in the application of the term to early Danish film history. Though not a Nordisk film (it was made by Fotorama), *The Abyss* had great impact on Nordisk and Danish cinema. When the film came out, contemporary critics heralded Nielsen’s performance as evidence that film could incorporate more nuanced expression than the theater. *The Abyss* established a new standard for photographic realism. The film’s spectacular gaucho dance and its emotionally murderous ending

¹³ See Schepelern “Filmhistorie.” The program for *Atlantis* advertises it as a “Drama i 7 Akter og 100 Afdelinger” (Drama in 7 Acts and 100 Sections).

¹⁴ The Program for *Dødspring fra Hest til Cirkus-Kuplen* (Death-Jump from Horse to Circus Arena) as “Sæsonens største attraktion” (the season’s greatest attraction) and a “Drama” (drama) by Alfred Kjerulf.

¹⁵ The poster for *Hævnens Nat* (*Blind Justice*) bills it as a “Skuespil i 6 akter” (Play in 6 Acts).

¹⁶ I have only found one contemporary reference to “melodrama” as a genre designation at Nordisk, this in an internal company invoice (not public in any way) regarding the purchase of different endings for *Et Kærlighedsoffer* (A Victim/Sacrifice of Love, Robert Dinesen, 1914). I thank Isak Thorsen for bringing this to my attention. I have not been able to determine whether the suicide off the balcony ending of *Kærlighedsoffer* that I watched at the DFI was the melodramatic ending or not.

¹⁷ Even Marguerite Engberg, for whom melodrama would seemingly be an important marker in her analysis of the erotic melodrama remarks that the term was absent in Nordisk’s material. For Engberg’s discussion and definition of melodrama at Nordisk, see *De Store År* 439-64.

¹⁸ See Neale “Melo Talk.”

proved a great hit. A critical and popular success, *The Abyss* convinced the relatively conservative theater establishment in Denmark of film's potential for artistic expression, and it solidified the feature-length film as a model for Nordisk to follow. Ole Olsen, with August Blom, his new artistic director at Nordisk, eagerly capitalized upon this artistic and commercial potential to transform the industry. As film historian Marguerite Engberg would put it much later,

The Abyss was a success both at home and abroad... And more than that: *the Abyss* introduced a new film genre; the erotic melodrama. The plot of the film is melodramatic, and the erotic aspects are clearly demonstrated. We have for instance the long drawn-out kisses, a Danish invention in films, soon to become a cliché in the films of other countries. A dance scene between Magda, played by Asta Nielsen, and a cowboy, played by Poul Reumert, is also very explicit [sic] sexually. So with this film we have fully fledged erotic melodrama, the genre which soon was to become a Danish speciality [sic]. From 1911 Nordisk Films Kompagni decided to produce almost exclusively erotic melodramas of feature length. ("Erotic Melodrama" 66)

Engberg further described erotic melodrama as typically depicting a love story or love triangle incorporating some element of class conflict, often with independent female protagonists and weak-willed male characters that demonstrate "modern man's fear of the modern woman." Most retrospective accounts of the film's innovation were shaded by a pervasive lowbrow stigma inextricable from melodrama. This assessment in the 1971 *Levende Billeder i Danmark* (Moving Images in Denmark) is typical of the way scholars have differentiated and elevated realism over melodrama. "Despite how melodramatic the story was – a young piano teacher (Asta Nielsen) murders her faithless lover (Poul Reumert), just when she was about to be reunited with her first love (Robert Dinesen) – it was still, when compared to the other products of the time a so 'socially' realistic drama, that it attracted well-deserved attention."¹⁹ This citation also gives a sense of the way in which early Danish cinema is represented as a popular culture backwater out of which artistic works struggle to emerge.

As far as I have been able to determine, Neergaard is the first film historian or scholar to link Nordisk with melodrama. In his influential work, *Historien om dansk film* (*The Story of Danish Film*), the first history of Danish cinema, published in 1956, Neergaard attributes Nordisk's (and by extension early Danish cinema's) fate of what he calls the multi-reel social melodrama (*Det lange sociale melodrama*).²⁰ Neergaard uses the category of social melodrama less as a genre marker than as a broader thematic description of popular entertainment that focused on depictions of class difference, offering glimpses into the lifestyles of the upper class and, spectacularly, those living on the fringes of society. The "social melodrama" provided "a distinctive impression of that interesting, raw and wild life, presumably led in spheres that they [cinema-goers] had

¹⁹ "Hvor melodramatisk historien end var – en ung spillelærerinde (Asta Nielsen) myrder sin troløse elsker (Poul Reumert), netop som hun var ved at blive genforenet med sin første elskede (Robert Dinesen) – var det dog ved siden af tidens øvrige produkter et så 'socialt' realistisk drama, at det vakte berettiget opsigt" (Nørgaard 56).

²⁰ *Historien om dansk film* was written in 1956, but published in 1957. As I return to below, Neergaard used melodrama to describe Nordisk even earlier in his book on Dreyer.

likely heard of but never encountered: among thieves, apaches, demimondes, entertainers, circus carnies, actors and other artists.”²¹ Neergaard acknowledges Nordisk’s innovations in the use of the close-up, evocative lighting, composition, and especially a nuanced acting style (having successfully gleaned Denmark’s acting talent from the stage),

A filmic kind of acting emerged which perhaps, when all is said and done (*når det kommer til stykket*), will end up being the point by which Danish film brought film art the biggest step forward. One discovered how much can be said in a close up or through a gesture with few means, that filmic acting is based more upon being than on taking action and acting (*aktion og ageren*).²²

Neergaard also acknowledges the company’s melodramatic skill, citing Benjamin Christensen’s early films, *Det hemmelighedsfulde X* (*The Mysterious X*, 1914) and *Hævnens Nat* (*Blind Justice*, 1916) (both of which Dreyer admired) as *good* melodramas, technologically modern and aesthetically advanced. “Through camera positioning and editing Benjamin Christensen lifts the melodrama in both of these aged films up to be a narrative relevant to us, the people and things live.”²³ Embedded in Neergaard’s praise is the idea that “old” melodrama can be refreshed and brought to life again through revised cinematic technique. Neergaard praises Nordisk’s talent for eliciting affect in audiences that demanded that for their money’s worth.²⁴ Neergaard appreciates *Evangelieemandens Liv* (*The Candle and the Moth*, Holger-Madsen, 1915), which he regarded as a quintessential social melodrama, for intricately combining artistic and affective strengths. “The light creates a mood, composition of the image places the actor: emotion was the point of the production, ranging from the propelling sentimental to forcefully shocking to authentically pathetic.”²⁵ Nordisk’s ability to elicit a range of affect, from shock to

²¹ “et tydeligt indtryk af det interessante rå og vilde liv, der åbenbart føres i kredse, som de nok har hørt om, men aldrig har truffet på: blandt tyve, apacher, demimonder, gøglere, cirkusfolk, skuespillere og andre kunstnere” (Neergaard *Historien* 39). The films Neergaard analyzes as social melodrama do not actually advertise themselves as such; the program for *Evangelieemandens Liv* (*The Candle and the Moth*, Holger-Madsen, 1915) for instance, which Neergaard calls a quintessential “social melodrama” labels it a “folk play” (*Folkeskuespil i 3 Akter*) in three acts.

²² “Der opstod en filmisk form for spil, som måske, nå det kommer til stykket, vil vise sig at være det punkt, hvor dansk film bragte filmkunsten det længste skridt framad. Man opdagede, hvor meget der kan siges i et nærbillede eller gennem en gestus med få midler, at filmisk spil snarere bygger på væren end på aktion og ageren” (Neergaard *Historien* 55-56).

²³ “Gennem kameraindstillinger og klipning hæver Benjamin Christensen i begge disse ældre film melodramaet op til at blive en os vedkommende fortælling, menneskene og tingene lever” (Neergaard *Historien* 93).

²⁴ “om man ikke ligefrem gav af sit hjertes og sin fantasi overflod, så mente man dog, at folk skulle have noget for deres penge, og det var måden man kunne give det på” (Neergaard *Historien* 54).

²⁵ “Lys giver stemning, billedkomposition placerer skuespilleren: det følelsesmæssige var pointen i produktionen, rangerende fra det drivende sentimentale over det kraftige chokerende til det ægte patetiske” (Neergaard *Historien* 55). Neergaard associates the artfulness of Nordisk’s social melodrama with the unfortunately short but immensely successful international career of actor Valdimar Psilander whose talents were showcased in such early artistic successes as *Evangelieemanden* (*The Candle and The Moth*, Holger-Madsen, 1915). At the same time Neergaard uses the term melodrama to refer to the artistic deficiencies in A.W. Sandberg’s *Klovnen* (*The Clown*) from 1917, which he sees as inferior to Psilander’s earlier efforts. He associates the melodramatic exaggeration of an earlier time with clasp one’s heart or forehead or collapsing completely to express sorrow (*Historien* 53).

“authentic” pathos, rarely comes through in accounts about the company’s melodrama, and is all but absent in accounts of Dreyer’s work.

Ultimately, however, Neergaard’s critique of Nordisk melodrama for its *lack* of artistic merit would overshadow his praise for the company. Although melodrama’s commercial potential remained clear, the connection between Nordisk’s Golden Age output and artistic expression would become increasingly tenuous in Neergaard’s account, and he was not alone. In the teens, contemporary critics depicted the company’s financial successes as gained at the expense of artistic advancement. These critics argued that artistic expression was automatically incompatible with mass production. As the company declined around WWI, Nordisk melodrama became a scapegoat in public discourse symbolizing the general ineptitude of a Danish film industry to keep up with the times and embrace film as serious art.

One might ask how the production fairytale could have such a sad ending, but one would be hard-pressed to find an answer. It is likely nothing more than the fact that Ole Olsen was a strong and dominating man, who effectively inspired and initiated as long as it was a matter of a fairly decided, quite primitive product like the ‘social’ melodrama, but that he didn’t understand how to allow the freedom and encouragement that creates great artists.²⁶

Compounding the downturn in the Danish film industry and Nordisk around WWI was the rise of a new Swedish production model in the late teens and early 20s, which consisted of a small number of high-budget, artistically-accomplished films per year. The dichotomy between Danish and Swedish national cinemas after WWI played an important role in establishing the Danish film industry and Nordisk melodrama as deplorably inartistic.²⁷ Dreyer too contributed to the vociferous public debates in the Danish press about how the Danish film industry should compete with Sweden, and more importantly, with Hollywood. Dreyer and others held up Denmark’s mass-production of films against Svenska Biografteatern policy, adopted around 1917 after the success of *Terje Vigen* (Victor Sjöström, 1917) by which it sought to make fewer, more expensive, more “artistic” films, frequently based on literary adaptations.²⁸ In his 1920 article “Svensk film,” Dreyer disparages “the time of the ‘Count and Countess’ films (‘greve’

²⁶ “Man kan spørge sig, hvorfor det skulle ende så trist med produktionseventyret, men man har svært ved at finde svar. Der er vel intet andet, end at Ole Olsen var en stærk og dominerende mand, som virkede inspirerende og igangsættende så længe det dreyede sig om et ganske bestemt ret primitivt produkt som det ‘sociale’ melodrama, men at han ikke forstod at give den frihed og opmuntring, der skaber store kunstnere” (Neergaard *Historien* 85).

²⁷ Leif Furhammar has complicated this high culture (Swedish) low culture (Danish) binary, from the Swedish side, arguing that the golden age of Swedish cinema (largely epitomized in scholarship by Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström) was actually a more diverse, popular culture period than scholars have usually assumed. See Furhammar 11-89.

²⁸ For a discussion of *Terje Vigen*’s impact on the Swedish production model, see Forslund 54-63. Ebbe Neergaard attributes Nordisk’s eventual failure to compete on the international market to its misguided attempts to internationalize its melodrama. Instead of following the Swedish model, which focused on the Swedishness of its literary material and films, according to Neergaard Nordisk mistakenly put its efforts into a series of clumsy Danish adaptations of Dickens, and several semi-fiasco projects such as *Atlantis* (August Blom, 1913) and *Himmelskibet (A Trip to Mars)*, (Holger-Madsen, 1918). See *Historien* 81-82. Of course, with the coming of sound technology, even the Swedish model could not stand up to competition from Hollywood.

filmenes tid’)” in Denmark, writing, “But alas! not all that glimmers is gold.”²⁹ Debates boiled down to the question of whether quality or quantity would better allow Denmark to compete internationally.³⁰ Although Nordisk also adapted literary works (something Dreyer worked on at the company), Dreyer saw Sweden as raising the cultural status of film and praised Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller as directors who had succeeded in making soulful films expressing their artistic vision.³¹ In his article, Dreyer calls Sjöström “the father of the Swedish *art* film” in the same breath that he expresses little optimism that Denmark, with its factory-like film production (“in Denmark films have always been *manufactured*”³²) will ever claim any place in film history: “On the road that traces the evolution of film, there is no monument that reminds us that *here* Danish film culture cut new paths” (“Svensk Film” 15).³³ In 1913, Urban Gad had referred to Nordisk as “the film factory” (*filmfabriken*) referring to specialization the company had undergone starting in 1910-11, and the name stuck.³⁴ Nordisk’s outdated sensationalism had little to do with what Dreyer considered film’s real calling, namely to become “a medium for true and genuine human representation.”³⁵ Although Dreyer mentions neither melodrama nor Nordisk by name in the article, later scholars use melodrama to designate that which Dreyer spurns at Nordisk, “By 1920, in [Dreyer’s] view, Danish film production as a whole had become cliché. He cited in particular the Nordisk nobility films and criticized their reliance upon such melodramatic devices as ‘revolvers, jumps from the fifth floor, and similar sensationalisms’” (Bordwell, *Films of Dreyer* 24)³⁶ Few scholars acknowledge that Dreyer’s mastery of the Nordisk’s commercially successful, popular-

²⁹ “Men ak! – ikke alt, som glimrer er guld” (Dreyer “Svensk Film” 15). I take the English translation “Count and Countess films” from the translation of Dreyer’s article in *Dreyer in Double-Reflection* (22). Unless otherwise noted all translations from Danish are my own.

³⁰ Nordisk’s collected newspaper clippings surrounding the release of *Leaves from Satan’s Book* demonstrate a lively public newspaper discussion about whether Nordisk’s artistic merits (or often its lack thereof) will allow the company to compete on the international film market. Debates about film as an art form and Dreyer’s role as an artist were part of public discourse in Denmark and not limited to cineastic publications. Importantly Dreyer was not the only director thought to be capable of being Denmark’s artistic hope. A.W. Sandberg, who filmed several Dickens adaptations in the 1920s, is also considered in the same discussion. Mette Hjort’s work on Lars von Trier, Dogme 95, and small nation cinema can be seen as an extension of the still unresolved issue about how individual artistic ingenuity and small national cinemas compete on international markets.

³¹ Victor Sjöström made several films based on the work of Selma Lagerlöf, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1909. While not considered a melodramatic author in her day, recent work on Lagerlöf has fruitfully considered melodramatic aspects of her work. See Karlsson.

³² “faderen til den svenske *kunsth*film” “i Danmark er filmen altid blevet fabrikerede” “På den vej, der betegner filmens udvikling, står ingen støtte, der erindrer om, at *her* brød dansk kultur filmen nye stier” “gøre sig til tolk for sand og ægte menneskefremstilling” (Dreyer “Svensk film” 15). Dreyer does cite Benjamin Christensen as an important exception to his widespread aspersion of early Danish film direction. Interesting also, Dreyer credits Griffith (as emblematic of American film) with advancing film technique (realism, the close-up etc.) but at the expense of its soul. This English translation is from *Dreyer in Double Reflection*.

³³ English translation from *Dreyer in Double Reflection*.

³⁴ For an account of Nordisk’s business model as it transitioned into making feature films intended mostly for worldwide distribution, see Thorsen “Nordisk Films.”

³⁵ “gøre sig til tolk for sand og ægte menneskefremstilling” (“Svensk film” 19). English translation from *Dreyer in Double Reflection*.

³⁶ While Bordwell uses melodrama rhetorically to symbolize a style of filmmaking that Dreyer transcends and against which he rebels, he does not theorize melodrama *per se*.

culture formulas might have had a formative effect on Dreyer's future work or that his films would engage in any significant way with what he picked up there. Edvin Kau is the rare exception when he suggests that Dreyer's mastery of everything from the action of the criminal chase to melodrama's "high-voltage emotion"³⁷ opened up the space for Dreyer not to eradicate melodramatic stories outright, but rather improve upon them. Referring to *The President* Kau writes,

Not only was melodrama a cornerstone in the company's production, it became a part of the company's tradition. Dreyer knew the patterns of these love-, downfall- and rescue stories, and with his experience with the production apparatus and daily work on the studio's stages he must have believed that he could bring the production of these stories a little further.³⁸

Kau's articulation highlights the diversity of the melodramatic tradition from which Dreyer would draw and the key role it would play in defining Danish filmmaking. It also insightfully opens up the possibility that Dreyer's art built upon this tradition by furthering it, rather than renouncing it outright.

"Dreyer's childhood" in film, his start at Nordisk

Standard accounts of Dreyer's artistic development cast his early years at Nordisk (from approximately 1912 to 1920) as his cinematic "childhood." Nordisk functions as the didactic environment where Dreyer tried his hand at all aspects of filmmaking, and paradoxically also as the murky melodramatic backwater against which Dreyer's glimmer of artistic brilliance will grow increasingly bright. Dreyer worked at Nordisk in many different capacities, as a screenwriter, editor, and eventually as a director. Dreyer began working part-time for Nordisk in 1912, at age of twenty-three, writing intertitles. Eventually his duties expanded to include writing scripts and acquiring rights to adapt literary works for the screen (Neergaard, *Historien* 94). By June 1913, he had signed a contract to work as a scenarist in the company's newly established story department, where he came to specialize in adaptations. In 1915 Dreyer came to work full-time for Nordisk.³⁹ In 1918, he was given the chance to try his hand at directing (though he did not abandon scriptwriting). The only two feature films Dreyer directed at Nordisk were *The President* (1919), a film based on the novel *Præsidenten* by Karl Emil Franzos (for which he had earlier acquired the rights) and *Leaves from Satan's Book* (1921). Disputes with the company over funding and artistic differences during the production of *Leaves from Satan's Book* prompted Dreyer to leave the company and seek funding opportunities

³⁷ "Fra Nordisk Films Kompagnis produktion af drømme til verdens markedet kendte han såvel melodramaet som kriminalintrigen; såvel følelsesfuldhedens højspænding som forbryderjagtens action" (Kau 17). Kau's monograph begins with Dreyer's first two feature films and traces the development of his cinematic style, which is the primary focus of the work.

³⁸ "Ikke mindst melodramaet var en hjørnsten i selskabets produktion, det var blevet en del af selskabets tradition. Dreyer kendte mønstrene i disse kærligheds-, fortabelses- og redningshistorier, og han må med sine erfaringer fra produktionsapparatet og daglige gang på studiernes scener have ment, at han kunne bringe produktionen af disse historier lidt videre" (Kau 17).

³⁹ The company established a story department in 1911. For a comprehensive account of scriptwriting at Nordisk see, Schröder. Schröder also manages an extensive database of Danish film scenarios—accessible at <<http://danlitstummfilm.uni-koeln.de/>>

abroad. Between 1920 and 1930 Dreyer went on to make seven feature films, five of which were completed outside of Denmark.

Working at Nordisk afforded Dreyer the opportunity to learn the nuts and bolts of collective, fast-paced, efficient filmmaking. Nordisk allotted little or no time for rehearsals. Bordwell has argued that being employed in so many different capacities at Nordisk actually gave Dreyer an artisan-like attitude toward filmmaking and a desire to have a hand in all facets of production. Working at Nordisk allowed Dreyer the opportunity to “become intimately involved with the whole process of creating a film” (Drum and Drum 45). Working at Nordisk also, somewhat paradoxically, instilled in him the romantic ideal of the filmmaker as an autonomous, marginalized craftsman who insists on having a hand in every aspect of filmmaking, from choosing locations to personally deciding props for each scene.⁴⁰ Although the company’s system was designed to produce a great number of films quickly, it did also allow its directors artistic input on some unexpected aspects of the production including choosing sets, casting their films, determining props, and helping devise lighting schemes. This insistence on control over every aspect of the film would influence Dreyer to become an early free-lancer who sought funding opportunities abroad. He preferred to go for extended periods of time without making film at all rather than compromise his artistic control.⁴¹

Dreyer’s dispute with Nordisk over *Leaves from Satan’s Book* (1921), his second and last feature directed there, often performs the rhetorical function of a teenage-like tantrum break with Nordisk in Dreyer scholarship, establishing his reputation as an uncompromising artist whose ambition had been stifled by the company’s popular-culture production model. (Dreyer’s inability to raise funds for another film project in Denmark until 1926 also contributes to this reputation.) Supposedly inspired by Griffith’s *Intolerance*, *Leaves from Satan’s Book* combined spectacle with moralizing didacticism. Although Nordisk had already attempted large-scale filmic projects around WWI, production costs became a point of contention between Dreyer and the company. Filming had already begun when Dreyer requested additional funding, raising his budget from 150,000 to 230,000 kronor. A blunt refusal from Nordisk, however, prompted Dreyer to write a letter to Director Stæhr in March 1919, in which he stakes out his aesthetic ambitions of the project, calling *Leaves from Satan’s Book* the best scenario that Nordisk has yet had in its hands. Dreyer declares that he will settle for nothing less than creating “a film work that can come to be called a paragon work. That is my goal,”⁴² and concludes his letter with an ultimatum that he will take his production to Sweden should his demands not be met. Nordisk stood fast on Dreyer’s contractual obligations and

⁴⁰ For an excellent sketch of the environment at Nordisk, see Bordwell *Films of Dreyer* 15. Bordwell also suggests that Dreyer’s notion of craftsmanship originates in his having experienced the various forms of craftsmanship in Denmark, a country in which industrialization occurred relatively late and would have been something Dreyer continued to experience during his lifetime.

⁴¹ Dreyer did develop a reputation for being difficult a difficult man with whom to collaborate. Some of Nordisk’s company memos from around 1943, when Dreyer was negotiating with the company to produce *Day of Wrath* (then called “Anne Pedersdotter,” a project that would eventually go to Palladium) depict Dreyer as a peculiar fellow who made peculiar films. Interestingly, even though the company privately called Dreyer “peculiar,” it recognized the potential for profit in producing Dreyer’s comeback film. See NORDISK: DFI/NFK VIII, 19:106. For a discussion of these memos, see Tybjerg “Occupation” 142.

⁴² “et filmsværk, som kan blive nævnt som et standardværk. Det er mit mål” (Kau 38). For an extended discussion of Dreyer’s letter, see Ernst.

Dreyer eventually “crawled to the cross,” as Kau puts it, to complete the project.⁴³ Isak Thorsen has since thrown light on this “no love lost” relationship between Dreyer and Nordisk by describing how several directors left Nordisk in the decline following WWI (a fact that likely contributed to Dreyer’s getting the chance to direct in the first place), and notes that Dreyer actually maintained a friendly relationship with company executives (Thorsen “Nordisk Films”). Nevertheless, the encounter helped to form Dreyer’s reputation as an intense and uncompromising artist.

Melodrama enters into this equation as synonymous with Nordisk’s callow childhood. According to Neergaard: “But within naïve, childishly overloaded melodrama, Nordisk exerted itself considerably and its exertions were rewarded with success.”⁴⁴ Nordisk and Dreyer reception share a similar trajectory of cinematic development in which melodrama symbolizes the childhood (more or less equated with the silent era) from which a mature “art” form will eventually grow and abandon. Linda Williams writes:

...narrative cinema as a whole has been theorized as a realist, inherently masculine, medium whose ‘classical’ features are supposedly anathema to its melodramatic infancy and childhood. Whereas silent cinema as always been recognized as melodrama at some level, the ‘essential’ art and language of cinema has not. Rather, melodrama has been viewed either as that which cinema has grown up out of or that to which it sometimes regresses. (“Revised” 50)

Mastering the essential language of film has traditionally meant “growing up” by embracing more “realistic,” “plausible” narrative forms and breaking decisively with melodrama’s histrionic archaisms. Until recently melodrama was presumed incapable of change. Neergaard’s work again plays an early, influential role in establishing Dreyer’s reputation as a strong-willed artist whose maturity begins with a decisive break especially with Nordisk’s flawed, *inauthentic* melodramatic style.⁴⁵

Even by his first film, Dreyer had achieved results that corrected exactly what would come to be Nordisk Films weak point. Melodramatic style. Through his work with *milieu* as it appears through decorations, minor characters and extras, he sought to create the first foundation for filmic *authenticity*.⁴⁶

Neergaard’s monograph on Dreyer established melodrama, alongside Nordisk, as that which Dreyer corrected to become an artist. Correction would further be articulated as outright rejection.

⁴³ “kryber til korset” (Kau 38). Dreyer’s retraction actually concedes that a smaller, more modest production would have more dramatic impact than an expensive epic. Kau includes the entire flurry of correspondence between Dreyer and Nordisk in the filmography of *Dreyers Filmkunst* 392-394.

⁴⁴ “Men inden for det naive, barnligt overlæssede melodrama gjorde Nordisk sig megen umage, og umagen blev lønnet med succes” (Neergaard, *Historien* 54).

⁴⁵ Dreyer has been considered the main “strong will” in Danish film history, but he was not the only one. For a discussion of Olaf Fønss and Benjamin Christensen as other strong-willed artists, see Neergaard *Historien* 89-97.

⁴⁶ “Allerede med sin første film havde Dreyer nået resultater, der korrigerede netop det, som skulle vise sig at være Nordisk Films svage punkt. Den melodramatiske stil. Gennem sit arbejde med *miljøet* som det tegnes gennem decoration og bipersoner og statister, søgte han at skabe det første grundlag for filmisk *æghed*” (emphasis in the original) (Neergaard, *Bog om Dreyer* 19).

The chief problem which Dreyer identified hinged upon film's status as an art. [...] [T]he issue was serious, with implications for both production practice and aesthetic theory. How could a medium so obviously mass-produced, so dependent upon a mass audience, and so ruled by commerce offer the individual a chance to express an artistic vision? How could a medium so tied to pulp literature and melodrama ever become one of the 'high arts'? (Bordwell, *Films of Dreyer* 10)

I agree that Dreyer's early conflicts with Nordisk melodrama played a crucial role in Dreyer's artistic identity. I would even go so far as to include this rejection as a key element of his artistic production. While most acknowledge Nordisk's formative (and life-long) influence on Dreyer as a model to be rejected, this is just one side of the coin. Establishing Dreyer's artistic identity exclusively "by virtue of Dreyer's refusals—his aversion to mass-production filmmaking, his distaste for popular genres, his stiff rejection of the audience" underplays the way that Nordisk's stigma colored many of Dreyer's public statements about his work (Bordwell, *Films of Dreyer* 24). Actually, there is much to suggest that his statements rejecting popular audiences belied an underlying desire to make artistic film that would speak to broader audiences. Dreyer's films often enjoyed more success among critics (and often retrospectively) than at the box office, and he could say things like, "Consciously, I don't do anything to 'please' the public. I only think of working my way to a solution that satisfies my own artistic conscience,"⁴⁷ but Dreyer definitely did consider the way that his films would be experienced by non-cineastes. Preben Thomsen, who worked with Dreyer on his unrealized *Medea* project, relates that Dreyer sought to create a *Medea* such that "Miss Jensen" working at a dairy shop in Copenhagen would identify with her plight (298). In an interview at age 75, in response to the question of to what extent he takes his audience into consideration when making a film Dreyer remarks, "I never think about my audience while I am working – I really don't—aside from that I am very engaged in creating film so that it is easy to comprehend. But I do that out of an interest in the work itself, because one instinctively aims for perfection."⁴⁸ Comprehensibility—presumably something a wide viewing audience might appreciate—goes hand in hand with a work's artistic perfection. Artistic perfection, for Dreyer, did not automatically equate with estrangement of his audience. Later in the same interview in response to the question, "Should all film be art?" (*Bør al film være kunst?*) Dreyer responds with an admonition not to underestimate the role of popular film,

Film and films are many things, like books and plays are. In our desire to create film of an artistic cut we shouldn't despise the broader, popular films that I believe have a great mission. Average people (*de småfolk*), who sit in cramped apartments, and who long for a ray of sunlight to reach into their soul, they can probably live on such a film for a whole week.

⁴⁷ Qtd. by Bordwell from *Dreyer In Double Reflection* 146.

⁴⁸ "Jeg tænker aldrig på publikum under mit arbejde, det gør jeg virkelig ikke – ud over at jeg er meget optaget af at tilrettelægge filmen, så den er let forståelig. Men det gør jeg jo i værkets egen interesse, fordi man uvilkårligt stiler efter fuldkommenhed" (Ninka and Bendix 157).

[...] It would be foolish and arrogant to only think about art-film– doing so would make the world boring to live in.⁴⁹

These sentiments make sense in relation to the collection of sometimes moving, sometimes charmingly quotidian fan letters from “average” viewers that Dreyer collected over the years. The roster of films that Dreyer screened during his sixteen years as director of the Dagmar Theater would also indicate that he appreciated solid, entertaining Hollywood films. These dominated the repertoire, while art-house fare such as the French New Wave and Bergman were distinctly underrepresented or absent.⁵⁰

Critical reception of Dreyer’s first Nordisk feature, *The President* (1918), illuminates the need to reexamine Dreyer’s supposed rejection of “pulp literature and melodrama” in the name of individual artistic vision. Critics could be harsh in their estimation of Dreyer’s melodramatic debut. In 1971, Tom Milne criticizes the film’s multitude of rolling eyes, histrionic gesture and “clumsy attempts to imitate Griffith’s more skittish moments” (*Cinema of Dreyer* 35). Again, the stigma against melodrama has caused Dreyer scholars to undertake strange contortions to locate Dreyer’s “non-melodramatic” artistry amid all the melodrama Nordisk more or less “required” him to make. Eager to document Dreyer’s burgeoning auteur vision shining forth against Nordisk’s murky popular culture, critics typically dismiss melodrama in *The President* as Nordisk, while attributing the film’s artistic technological experimentation and realism to Dreyer’s authorial mark. Drum and Drum cite melodrama to discount what is typically un-Dreyer about the film in order to recuperate it as the first serious aesthetic experiments by a burgeoning auteur director.

Obviously melodrama was the watchword from beginning to end in this plot [*The President*], but Dreyer was sure that he could extract from it some possibilities, and he set to work with the intensity that was to characterize his later film directing... Even *The President*, though in many ways a rather weak film even for its time, suggests a creative genius in its director that gives a clue to what is to come. (47)

Dreyer’s use of a pared-down mise-en-scène and real locations, rather than painted backdrops also served as early inklings of his artistic vision. Other critics identify an emerging sense of visual composition reflected in scenes like the one in which two lovers steal a kiss in a rowboat floating on a reflective pond, while criticizing melodramatic

⁴⁹ Dreyer’s response in its entirety reads, “Film og film er mange ting, ligesom bøger og skuespil er det. I vort ønske om at skabe film af kunstnerisk snit skal vi ikke foragte de brede, folkelige film, som jeg tror har en stor mission. De småfolk, som sidder i trange boliger, og som længes efter et solstrejf ind i sjælen, de kan måske leve på en sådan film en hel uge. (new paragraph) Herhjemme taler man hånlige om Morten Korch-film, men det skal man nu alligevel ikke gøre. De mennesker, der er fortrolige med den slags film, føler sig måske næste gang tiltrukket af film på et højere plan, og næste gang af film på et endnu højere plan, og er således vundet for filmen. (new paragraph) Det ville være tåbeligt og arrogant kun at tænke på kunst-film – så ville verden være kedelig at leve i. Og for os andre består noget af glæden måske netop i at se over hovedet på dem, der ikke er så gode! Med slet dulgt misundelse at kikke over på det fulde huse med de folkelige film. (new paragraph) Endelig giver disse film teknikere og forfattere muligheder for at prøve kræfter inden for en ramme, hvor de ikke kan lave ulykker, fordi filmen er økonomisk forsvarligt funderet. En forfatter skal se sin film færdig, før han kan lære af den. Derfor bør man være taknemmelig hver gang, der laves en film, selv om der er ting, man ikke selv kan synes om” (Ninka and Bendix 159).

⁵⁰ Dreyer received his state license to run the Copenhagen film theater in 1952 and ran it until his death in 1968. The position granted him a financial stability that allowed him (for better or worse) to spend much of his time on his *Jesus* screenplay in lieu of pursuing other film projects. See Nissen “Dagmar.”

acting, implausible plot structure, and heavily made-up actors. Echoing scholarly assessments of his work, Dreyer too later distanced himself from his “unfortunate” choice of subject matter, though he explained that the repetition in the plot’s three generations allowed him to experiment with flashbacks.⁵¹

But even though Dreyer left Nordisk, he continued to engage with its themes, subject matter and pathos, suggesting that his attractions to the melodramatic mode as he had absorbed it at Nordisk complicated his ostensible rejections of it. Milne writes:

Dreyer’s first two films, after a five-year apprenticeship as titlewriter, scriptwriter and editor with Nordisk films, were pretty much what one might expect of a tyro film-maker who had just seen Griffith’s *Intolerance* and was determined to lift the Danish cinema into dignity by the scruff of its neck: ambitious, literary, technically deficient, and with a clumsily passionate seriousness which makes them look almost like cruel parodies of *Day of Wrath* or *Ordet*. (“Early Works” 291)

Embedded in Milne’s retrospective mockery of Nordisk melodrama is an implicit acknowledgement of what I argue is melodramatic continuity in Dreyer’s *oeuvre*. This is typical of the way in which Dreyer scholarship focuses on his repulsion to melodrama without fully giving credence to his continued attraction to it. Establishing Dreyer’s status as an artistic filmmaker exclusively on his use of cinematic style cannot account for the fact that even as a self-willed auteur, Dreyer continued to refigure Nordisk’s figurations of melodramatic pathos.

Critics brush aside any aspirations toward pathos in *The President* as the unfortunate consequence of its being a Nordisk picture. The film follows three generations of aristocratic men who seduce and abandon their lower-class lovers as well as their resulting illegitimate children. Neergaard writes: “*The President*, which premiered on February 9, 1920, was characterized by Nordisk Film’s particular fondness for the melodrama. [...] That which first and foremost leads to *The President* still belonging in the old ‘Nordisk’ style, the strongly melodramatic, is the film’s fable and the actors’ performances in the big emotional scenes.”⁵² But few consider that big emotional scenes might have appealed to Dreyer or that they might have influenced his decision to choose *The President* for his first project to direct. Dreyer could describe the director’s task in very affective terms, “He [the director] is the man behind the work. It is he, who makes the writer’s words to resonate, so that we listen, it is he, who causes feelings and passions to burst into flames (*blusse*) so as to seize and move us. It is he, who imprints

⁵¹ Bordwell’s recent reading of Dreyer’s first feature *The President*, redeems the film on account of its technological innovations, which he argues generally outshine its pedestrian subject matter and its use of outdated conventions (such as overly made up male actors). Bordwell argues that Dreyer’s use of editing and his cinematic construction of space reveal his interest primarily in the continuity editing practices coming into prominence in Hollywood at the time, and that Dreyer’s efforts to move film beyond the prevalent tableau-editing style that had been the norm in Europe and at Nordisk have by and large been underestimated. Thematic concerns (melodramatic or otherwise) are generally de-emphasized in Bordwell’s research, which seeks to establish production norms and standards against which to recognize Dreyer’s formal innovations. For a discussion of how Nordisk’s tableau-aesthetic complicates the company’s reputation for cheap and uninteresting popular culture films, see Bordwell “Generation.”

⁵² “Præsidenten, der havde premiere den 9. februar 1920, var præget af Nordisk Films særlige forkærlighed for melodramaet...Det, der først og fremmest bevirker, at Præsidenten endnu hører til indenfor den gamle ‘nordiske’ stil, den stærkt melodramatiske, er fabeln i filmen og skuespillernes spil i de store følelscener” (Neergaard, *Bog om Dreyer* 16).

the film with the inexplicable something that we call style.”⁵³ As his later films attest, Dreyer did not see the aspiration to produce heightened emotion in his audience as antithetical to personal artistic vision.

Dreyer’s attraction-repulsion to melodrama becomes apparent in one of the few instances in which Dreyer does refer specifically to melodrama. He dismisses melodrama in the same breath as he advocates for its emotional appeal. In his article, “Behind *The Boulevards of Paris*” (*Bag Paris’ Boulevarder*), a review of Bernard Deschamps’s 1935 film by that name (released in Denmark in 1936) he uses melodrama to express his disappointment at the second half of an initially promising film. Dreyer praises the performances of its child actors and its depiction of middle class (*småborgerlige*) life, but criticizes the film’s lack of a coherent plotline, which may or may not contribute to its eventual lapse into sentimentality and “melodrama.”

As a director, Bernard Deschamps does not have a great wingspan. He neither plunges into the ravines of emotions nor rises to the peaks of poetry. He flies low and makes his observations, which he then, with infinite exertion, strings onto the very thin red thread that is the plot of his film. A niggling work, a meticulously crowded collection of hundreds of details that please and bore us at the same time. A summing-up with modest results, because the combined quantities are all small. A film that pretends to be a slice of life but is not so because the director indulges in (*forfalder til*) sentimentality and melodrama.⁵⁴

Dreyer is not particularly precise in his use of “melodrama,” but does seem to contrast it with naturalistic representation and associate it with the unsuccessful depiction of a “slice of life.” Presumably the film’s lack of success corresponds to an insincere emotional appeal. At the same time, however, Dreyer condemns Deschamps for failing to take grandiose forays down into emotional abysses or up to poetic heights—narrative swoops more apt to be associated with melodramatic reversals or with “excess” than with naturalistic representation. Effectively, Dreyer uses “melodrama” here to highlight Deschamps’s inability to extract dramatic impact from everyday events. This somewhat ambiguous passage indicates Dreyer’s disapproval of insincere or inauthentic emotion (something which unfortunately gets associated with melodrama—his pairing of melodrama and sentimentality is telling) alongside an equally decisive demand for affective impact. Critics who latch onto Dreyer’s disparaging use of the term melodrama miss the contradictory gestures of the review, which also very much conveys his attraction to the mode. The key issue here is that Dreyer never viewed the demand for heightened emotion as antithetical to personal artistic vision. Dreyer could not *but*

⁵³ “Han [instruktøren] er manden bag værket. Det er ham, der får digterens ord til at lyde, så vi lytter, det er ham, der får følelser og lidenskaber til at blusse, så vi gribes og bevæges. Det er ham, der præger filmen med dette uforklarlige noget, der kaldes stil” (“Filmstil” 102).

⁵⁴ “Bernard Deschamps som instruktør har ikke det store vingefang. Han dukker hverken ned i følelsernes slugter eller hæver sig til poesiens tinder. Han flyver lavt og gør sine iagttagelser, som han bagefter med uendelig møje trækker på den såre spinkle rode tråd, der er handlingen i hans film. Et pillerarbejde, en minutøs sammenstimlen af hundreder af detaljer, som glæder og keder os på samme gang. En opsummering med et beskedent facit, fordi de sammenlagte størrelser alle er små. En film, der prætenderer at være et udsnit af livet, men ikke er det, fordi instruktøren forfalder til sentimentalitet og melodrama” (“Bag Paris’ Boulevarder” 47).

distance himself from the stigma of (Nordisk) melodrama, but he remained drawn to its ambition to create strong emotional experiences in its audiences.

The question of tragedy

The tendency for scholars to read Dreyer's work as tragedy illustrates another facet of melodrama's stigma. When scholars do acknowledge Dreyer's fascinations with plunging emotional heights and devastating abysses—what I could call melodramatic affect—they name it tragedy. As Ib Monty asserts in his introduction to Dreyer's Jesus script, published in 1972, "Carl Theodor Dreyer was the master of the tragic film" (3). From the perspective of melodrama scholarship, Dreyer's relationship to tragedy becomes more complex. The evidence Monty presents in asserting Dreyer's tragedy—protagonists who suffer martyrdom and struggle alone, but dignified, against an unremitting and unalterable evil in the world—might now be seen as more indicative of a melodramatic worldview. Perhaps more importantly, the worldview Monty evokes as Dreyer's could also apply to Nordisk's interest in suffering and martyrdom, "Not merely because his films often lay greater emphasis on man's suffering and martyrdom in this world, but chiefly because his heroes, and more particularly his heroines, have to wage their struggle against the world's evil singlehanded" (3). Dreyer acknowledges his inadvertent experimentation with Aristotelian tragedy in his introduction to *Four Films*, "I ended up in a dramatic form, that in my opinion has features in common with the casting of tragedy (*tragediens støbning*) – without, however, having consciously aimed at this."⁵⁵ He notes that *Jeanne d'Arc* fulfills Aristotle's demand for unity of time and place, while *Day of Wrath* meets another Aristotelian demand for "a great central scene, in which one of the main characters, through the experience of an unexpected and shocking event discovers something about another of the main characters and is thereby confronted with qualities he hasn't before encountered in the person in question."⁵⁶ He continues to describe how the central scene (which remains ambiguous in Dreyer's account, but presumably is the scene in which Anne's "power" to wish her husband dead "causes" his death) then sets the stage for the impact of the film's climactic, dramatic final scene (*sidsteaktens højdramatiske slutningseffekt*).⁵⁷ Dreyer gestures equally toward some version of tragic *anagnorisis* and the heightening possible through melodramatic climax.

Dreyer approached making tragedy timely and relevant to contemporary audiences in the same way that he sought to rework Nordisk melodrama to make it authentic and "modern," although he did not articulate his project in that way. The introduction illustrates that more important to Dreyer than proving resemblances with Aristotelian tragedy is his conviction that film needs to develop a new, *cinematic* form of tragedy rather than trying to replicate classical tragedy on film. Tragedy for Dreyer possessed both universal relevance and the potential to adapt to the constraints of

⁵⁵ "Jeg havnede i en dramatisk form, der efter min mening har træk tilfælles med tragediens støbning – uden at jeg dog bevidst har stilet mod dette" (Dreyer, *Fire Film* 7).

⁵⁶ "en stor central scene, i hvilken en af hovedpersonerne ved en uventet og chokerende hændelse gennemskuer en anden af hovedpersonerne og derved konfronteres med egenskaber han ikke før har mødt hos vedkommende" (Dreyer, *Fire Film* 7)

⁵⁷ Dreyer's comments here seem to contradict those he made two decades earlier in his article "A Little on Film Style" (1943) in which he talks about this project as one of "de-theatricalizing" the play. Or if they are not contradictory, they at least raise the question of how Dreyer imagined tragedy in relation to "de-theatricalization."

different media, and renew its forms. This would have been another strike against melodrama as such, which Dreyer likely presumed to be an archaic form incapable of adapting to address contemporary audiences. Dreyer's work on his unrealized "Medea" script reveals a striking interest both in capturing daily life in ancient Greece while making the production relevant to contemporary audiences. His research materials include extensive research about Greek stagecraft and correspondence with a classics professor detailing the interiors of Greek houses, but also newspaper clippings with images of modern, abstract dance performances and theatrical productions like Eugene O'Neil's "Mourning Becomes Electra," which experimented with setting ancient tragedy in more contemporary times. (I can only guess at what Dreyer might have had in mind when with the clipping of Elvis he included in this file.) Dreyer's drive to modernize tragedy accords with the way melodrama scholars consider melodrama to develop in relation to realism, by constantly giving suffering and pathos a new *mise-en-scène*. Even placed in a tragic framework, film should be relevant to broad audiences. Preben Thomsen, who worked with Dreyer on the Medea script, writes that,

Dreyer was insistent that all who saw the film should be able both to understand and sympathize with her. There must be something moving and gripping in his Medea, he would say. [...] He wanted above all that Medea should be 'relevant'. [Dreyer showed a clipping from a French newspaper that a young woman had killed her children out of jealousy to show that it could have happened today.] [...] It was an aspect of Dreyer's rather aristocratic approach as an artist, yet at the same time an expression of his idealistic dream of translating an old Greek tragedy into his own clear and concise imagery for quite ordinary people of today, thereby opening their eyes to the mythological drama in their own inner world.
(16)

More than signaling an interest in tragedy per se, Dreyer's use of tragedy indicates an interest in taking old material and reimagining it in such a way as to move contemporary audiences—which is precisely what I argue he is doing with the equally pathos-laden material of Nordisk melodrama.

Moving beyond the stigma: technical recuperations of Nordisk

In recent decades, scholarship on Nordisk and early Danish cinema has recuperated the company and the tradition, establishing Denmark's reputation as an extraordinary productive and popular early cinema tradition—a financial and cultural phenomenon in its own right. Marguerite Engberg brought scholarly attention to Nordisk with her two volume work *Dansk Stumfilm*, published in the 1970s, and later with her multi-volume reference work, *Registrant over danske film* completed in the period between 1977-1982. In 1986, *Il Giornate del Cinema Muto* brought early Danish cinema to the attention of international silent cinema scholars and cineastes by featuring it among *The Pioneers of Scandinavian Cinema 1896-1918*. Danish cinema has also been featured at subsequent festivals, both in 1999, with *Nordic Explorations Into the Twenties*, and most recently when the festival commemorated Nordisk's 100-year anniversary, in *Nordisk 100* in 2006. Scholars have also done much to restore the company's reputation as an international phenomenon in the silent era. Ron Mottram's *The Danish Silent Cinema Before Dreyer*, published in 1988, takes seriously the highs and lows of early Danish

cinema and provides insight especially into its reception in the American trade press. Film historian Casper Tybjerg has documented Denmark's contribution to cinema history in numerous academic articles and commentary essays for DVD releases. Isak Thorsen's recent business history of the company (a project facilitated by Lisbeth Larsen's meticulous cataloguing of the company's extensive collection at The Danish Film Institute) has documented the company's innovative entrepreneurial efforts.

Along with respecting Nordisk as an entrepreneurial powerhouse or a popular-culture phenomenon, film scholars have paid attention to Nordisk's cinematic technique and formal merits, often comparing it to Hollywood practices of continuity editing as a norm. David Bordwell's article "Nordisk and the Tableau Aesthetic" for instance, offers an insightful reading of the company's innovations in horizontal composition and blocking, arguing that Nordisk represents some of the best of European filmmaking. Nordisk, he argues, epitomizes a European style of cinema that developed parallel to its sister system in Hollywood, which relied more heavily on editing to advance the narrative. Mark Sandberg's treatment of this Nordisk tableau aesthetic offers something of an alternative genealogy, situating it in particularly Scandinavian traditions of museum collecting and display practices.⁵⁸

Questions of "authorship" and creativity at the factory: Dreyer's Nordisk scenarios

Dreyer's status as an auteur has accomplished certain recuperations of Nordisk as well. Until recently, scholarship on Dreyer paid little attention to the scripts and other film work he did before *The President*, partly because it is difficult to know what work to attribute to him (the bulk of Dreyer's early script work is lost, unrealized, or impossible to attribute to him) but partly also because it is not generally considered to bear Dreyer's authorial mark. The Danish Film Institute, however, now includes Dreyer's Nordisk scenarios in the filmography on the recently launched official Dreyer website. Dreyer almost certainly wrote many more scripts than the approximately twenty-five with which he is credited on the Danish National Filmography but for which he received no writing credit. But scenario writing did also allow Dreyer to put his authorial mark on films. Some scenarios bear Dreyer's signature their front covers, but for both *Gillekop* (August Blom, 1919), and *Grevindens Ære* (*Lace*, August Blom, 1919) Dreyer actually receives a writer's credit on the cover of the film's published program, suggesting that the Nordisk film factory may not have been quite as anonymous as Dreyer and others have made it out to be.

Including Dreyer's early filmwork with in his feature *oeuvre* raises interesting questions about whether or how his work at Nordisk relates to the company's production as a whole. Dreyer's scenarios, several of which he completed around the time that he began directing, do contribute to the picture we have of his early understanding of film and shed a softer light on his relationship to the company. Dreyer's scenarios frequently contain notes regarding suggestions about mise-en-scène, props and visual effects that demonstrate that Dreyer clearly imagined how these films would eventually be shot. Even in an early scenario like "Chatollets Hemmelighed" (The Secret of the Bureau), filmed in 1913, Dreyer suggests potential shooting locations. In his script "Ned med Vaabnene!" (Lay Down Your Arms!), which includes a scene of railroad platforms full of wounded soldiers, Dreyer's scenario cites newspaper sources in which the director might

⁵⁸ See Sandberg, *Living Pictures*.

find photographic images of soldiers returning from the Balkans. Dreyer's scenarios also occasionally include personal quips, such as in "Gillekop", a film featuring several newspaper reporter characters. One line in the script remarks parenthetically that "you can find lots of examples of such cub reporters at Expressen," the Danish newspaper where Dreyer himself had worked. Dreyer's scripts can bear quite literal markings of his future interests as a director: mise-en-scène, temporality, and setting his pictures in the past without turning them into period pieces. On the front page of his "Esther" scenario (*Den hvide Djævel/The Devil's Protégé*, Holger-Madsen, 1916) scenario, Dreyer signed a modest note to Nordisk producers deferentially recommending that the film avoid showing modern technologies like telephones and automobiles in order to give the impression of a passed era without resorting to the costumes and trappings of a costume drama. Writing scenarios provided Dreyer a creative outlet to imagine filmmaking even before he began directing.

Although many Nordisk scripts (particularly the early ones) are only barebones, functional descriptions of action with only scant reference to dialogue (or what might eventually be included on an intertitle), camera set ups, or mise-en-scène many others present a distinctive artistic personality. Some include detailed descriptions of all of these things, or illuminating accounts of character motivation, gesture, and reaction, as if the textual material behind these films allowed an aspect of creative elaboration beyond any actual expectation that the film might capture it. Even if we might never know for sure which version of the script ended up being closest to the final cut (the Nordisk collection frequently has several versions of a scenario for a single film) the manuscripts document an interest in character motivation and expressive effect.⁵⁹ Frequently they describe a character's rapidly shifting interior states and designate how a psychological experience should ideally register on an actor as facial expression or gesture. While some of this novelistic psychological description might be chalked up to the use of literary source material at Nordisk the scenarios document dramatic concerns about characterization, motivation and gesture that provide insight into the way melodrama worked at the Nordisk.

Dreyer's scenarios are among the most literary I have found at Nordisk. They indicate that Dreyer's exploration and experimentation with melodrama begins with his scenario work. Scenarios that Dreyer adapted from literary sources in particular contain extensive descriptive passages that indicate what Dreyer thought was important, more than what he thought could be easily captured on film. Nordisk's film factory production model meant that, at least initially, Dreyer didn't need to worry about how the passages he contrived would be filmed, and I argue this granted him a bit of artistic leeway. Even Dreyer's much later *Jesus* script seems to bear traces of this practice in its extraordinary descriptive passages that enlighten the reader with information about daily life in biblical times, but which were clearly never intended to be filmed as such. At their best, Dreyer's work resembles the best work of Nordisk's other talented scenario writers, including Harriet Bloch and Robert Dinesen, whose dramatic and spectacular scenarios are also immensely good reads. By a good read, I mean a scenario that displays the personal innovation of a conscious stylist working within the expectations of Nordisk conventions.

⁵⁹ When possible I used the typed versions of scripts, particularly if they included written indications that they had actually been used in shooting. Sometimes the names of characters vary between script and program. In these cases I refer to the character names listed in the program.

Dreyer was not a lone creative wolf at the company, but rather one of several talented stylists there. The innovation that I suggest was operative at Nordisk echos Sirk's elaboration of melodrama style, which Elsaesser describes as actually benefiting from the creative obstructions of Hollywood's studio system. Elsaesser writes that commercial necessities, political censorship, and the various morality codes impinging on Hollywood melodrama in the 40s-50s actually benefitted melodrama by providing a thematic parameter for artistic expression that "encouraged a conscious use of style-as-meaning, which is a mark of what I would consider to be the very condition of a modernist sensibility working in popular culture" (77). Nordisk made around 2,000 of features and early short films of varying aesthetic quality during its Golden Age, before WWI, which in itself is interesting as a sociological or historical phenomenon. Approximately 150 are still extant. The films I consider most aesthetically interesting are those that manipulate the expectations of melodramatic formula in inventive ways. Nordisk accomplished this through plot twists, gloriously elaborate spectacle. The use of play-within-the-play scenarios in particular put subtle pressure on the plane of representation by drawing attention to a film as a film or film as different from theater or painting. The use of performer figures in early Danish melodrama pressured the body too as a plane of representation, adding pleasurable semiotic layers to decipher. Its thrilling and entertaining depictions of seduction, hypnosis, suffering, death, or heartbreak, I would argue, belie an acute fascination with the issue of representing human consciousness and interiority. All of this contributes to what I suggest is "a certain modernist sensibility working in popular culture." Even though many Nordisk films are no longer extant, their scenarios and programs provide immense imaginative (viewing) pleasures that illuminate this. More than simply boiling melodrama down to plot structure, Nordisk's textual material conveys evidence of its own quasi-modernist iteration of melodrama's ideational complex.

Historiographical issues: primary and secondary melodrama and proto-modernism

Taking another look at Dreyer's work in conjunction with Nordisk adds another wrinkle in deciphering melodrama's historiographical paradoxes and identifying what remains constant or how this adapts over time. Brooks describes melodramatic development in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, a trajectory from Pixérécourt to Balzac to Henry James in terms of transmutation. James *transmutes* the core ideational complex of "primary" melodrama [that Brooks defines as "the confronted power of evil and goodness, the sense of hazard and clash, the intensification and heightening of experience and desire" (*Imagination* 155)] into more subtle, "secondary" melodrama. Brooks also describes this transmutation as going from simple melodrama to complex, overt melodrama to indirect. Although Brooks is not interested in establishing James's melodrama by appealing to the stylized modernism of his prose, secondary melodrama nevertheless shares certain affinities with modernism. Both, for example, share a suspicion of realism's whole-hearted, unproblematic use of representation and language although each manifests this suspicion differently. According to Brooks's trajectory, James transmutes non-modernist, primary melodrama into something approximating modernist melodrama. On one hand, this trajectory is useful in figuring Dreyer's relationship to Nordisk melodrama. Dreyer continues if not to entirely transmute, then at least to engage with the ideational complex, something approximating modernist melodrama. At the same time, Nordisk melodrama

already showed signs of hybridity (both primary and secondary melodrama) and a proto-modernist impulse upon which Dreyer would draw.

Nordisk melodrama often employs the direct, overt articulations of feeling through big gesture that Brooks associates with primary melodrama. It explicitly “facilitates the ‘circuit’ of desire, permits its break through repression, [and] brings its satisfaction in full expression” (*Imagination* 154). Nordisk frequently evokes the primary melodrama of Balzac, particularly its use of the theater—everything from dressing rooms to the front of the house—to reflect the “real world.”

The theatre, object of Balzac’s repeated ambitions and possibly the key metaphor of the nineteenth century experience of illusion and disillusionment, is also the metaphor of Balzac’s methods of melodramatic presentation. The theater is the fascination, light, erotic lure of the scene; and also the wings, the world of backstage, which is both disenchanting and more profoundly fascinating [...] In its double aspect, the theatre seems to offer the possibility of both representation and machination, of play on the great stage and manipulation of the roles represented from the wings. (Brooks, *Imagination* 122-3)

But Nordisk melodrama also departs from primary melodrama in decisive ways. While Nordisk’s drama clearly strives to heighten experience and desire, it does so without insistently appealing to Manichean categories of good and evil. The melodramatic worldview operating at Nordisk instead incorporated aspects that one might associate with the transmuted, secondary melodrama of James’s later work, including epistemological uncertainty and the heightened emphasis on volition.

Dreyer’s late works incorporate much that could be considered secondary melodrama. Secondary melodrama, as Brooks describes it, generally uses less explicit expressions of victimhood (emphasizing psychological rather than physical distress), puts increased pressure on the plane of representation to yield meaning, and incorporates a potential for irony, all of which contribute to the highly stylized, subtitled melodrama of consciousness in James’s later work. Like James’s late work, Dreyer’s late melodrama can be latent and not register overtly on the plane of outer representation, reflecting on and cultivating the threat of melodramatic outburst, making it indirect and dramatized—barely containing it, all the while dangerously just below the veneer of social propriety. Dreyer would have been sympathetic to the ambition of directing a melodrama of consciousness, and his references to depicting drama of interiority with the *Day of Wrath* project echo James’s supposed transmutation of external melodrama to internal. Brooks writes, “If in *The American* we feel to a degree the outer manifest melodrama working to shape the dimensions of Newman’s final inner choice, later in James’s career we sense the inner melodrama reflecting upon and charging the outer action” (*Imagination* 158). If primary melodrama makes itself manifest in a clear, bodily way and secondary melodrama can even be latent, Dreyer clearly shared James’s interest in making melodrama more complex, indirect, and psychological.

Dreyer presented the psychological complexity of his films as being in contradistinction to Nordisk’s supposedly more superficial, un-psychological techniques. Differentiating Dreyer’s work from Nordisk by calling the former psychological and the later non-psychological would be to reiterate the caesura in received Dreyer reception that I am arguing against. Nordisk contributed a more complex aesthetic model than

Dreyer could acknowledge. It was not un-psychological and had established techniques for making psychological interiority legible and reproducing the “depths of the mind.” Nordisk characters could appear monopathetic, but could also demonstrate interior conflict. One might say that Nordisk’s dramatic irony (writ large) and psychological interiority (made largely manifest) in effect are evidence of a very bold form of *secondary* melodrama. Nordisk and Dreyer both shared aspirations of interiority and used bodily surface to articulate melodrama’s circuits of repression and titillating censorship of desire, conflicts that reemerge throughout Dreyer’s *oeuvre*.

Further complicating matters, primary melodrama (with its direct, literal bursts of dramatic or violent action) remained a vital presence in both James’s and Dreyer’s later work, which unsettles any simple developmental trajectory of transmutation from primary to secondary. This is somewhat under-theorized in *The Melodramatic Imagination*. Brooks justifies the presence of dramatic and violent endings in James’s mature work: “such action best correlates to and delivers, over the footlights as it were, the intensity of his melodrama of consciousness” (158). This explanation risks underestimating the powerfully direct appeal to pathos elicited by such scenes, but also leads to interesting questions about their relationship. Can secondary melodrama, for instance, repurpose primary melodrama by keeping its direct impact, but re-contextualizing it, dramatizing it, having characters reflect upon it? Can we see the recurrence of old patterns and characterizations as another facet of melodrama’s nostalgia and conservative longing for a pre-lapsarian world? Or can advancements in cinematic technique be enlisted to make nuanced a scene that would essentially be a direct-appeal effect? Brooks writes that in the moments during which primary melodrama emerges in his late work, James “has his melodrama and denies it,” something Dreyer arguably also does. The presence of highly dramatic witch burning and torture sequences in *Day of Wrath* suggests that Brooks’s model of transmutation cannot entirely capture the relationship between primary and secondary melodrama in Dreyer’s films and that the variations by which they might coexist are more extensive than melodrama scholars have previously considered.

In what follows, I enlist primary and secondary melodrama as relative, heuristic terms to outline the contours of early Danish film melodrama. The extent to which “primary” and “secondary” melodrama coexist and interact in the Danish context highlights continuities that unsettle the narrative of Dreyer’s decisive break with Nordisk on purely artistic grounds, and allows us to imagine Dreyer’s innovative reconfiguration of the two.

Figuring melodramatic imagination at Nordisk: methodology

The widespread retrospective attribution of melodrama to this large swatch of Nordisk’s production during the teens (the slippage I mentioned above) posed certain challenges for my project of pegging down the ‘melodrama’ that Dreyer would have worked with at the company. In a sense *anything* could be melodramatic. A comprehensive analysis of the many films that Nordisk made during its Golden Age from about 1910-1920 is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project. In an attempt to establish a baseline of melodramatic concerns that informed the “formula” that Dreyer mastered at Nordisk, however, I first watched all of the still extant Golden Age Melodrama available on Danish Film Institute DVDs and digitalized versions on the National Filmography. In an

attempting to get to the heart of this formula, I decided to track figurations of victim-sacrifice. I found approximately 25 films that explicitly used some variation of the melodrama's key figure of "victim-sacrifice" (*Offer*) in either the film's main title, its scenario title, or in one of its distribution titles. *Offer* in Danish denotes victim and sacrifice simultaneously (often providing a layer of elegant interpretive ambiguity to the films), so I also included Nordisk films that included either "victim" or "sacrifice" in their English or German distribution titles. To the best of my knowledge I have watched every extant Nordisk *Offer*-film, and have consulted all existing *Offer*-scenarios, programs and stills. None of the *Offer*-films were advertised as melodrama, spanning instead a wide variety of genre categories, including as tragedy. Nordisk also had certain ambitions to raise the company's cultural cache and appealed to culturally respected forms of theater and literature to do so. Included in this cross-section of Nordisk victim-sacrifice (*Offer*) scenarios are all of the scenarios currently attributed to Dreyer. Although none were technically *Offer*-films, many feature figures of victimization and sacrifice. The rhetoric of victim-sacrifice was also commonly found in films not specifically billed as *Offer*-films.

The robust presence of suffering, sacrificing victim-heroes and heroines in this case study provides initial evidence of their melodrama, justifying my own retrospective use of the term for Nordisk's filmmaking. Between 1909 and 1917, Nordisk produced *Offer*-films with such pithy titles as *Den Hvide Slavehandels Sidste Offer* (The White Slave Trade's Last Victim/Sacrifice *In the hands of impostors* (No. 2) August Blom, 1911), *Barfodsdanserindens Offer* (The Barefoot Dancer's Victim/Sacrifice, not distributed internationally, director unknown, 1912), *Børsens Offer* (The Victim of the Stock Exchange, Alexander Christian, 1912), *Privatdetektivens Offer* (The Private Detective's Victim/Sacrifice, Sophus Wolder, 1913), *Hvor Sorgerne Glemmes (Søster Cecilies Offer/Sister Cecilia/Sister Cecilie's Victim/Sacrifice*, Holger-Madsen 1915), *Kornspekulantens Forbrydelse (Kornspekulantens Offer/The Victim of The Speculative Grain Trader*, Robert Dinesen 1916) and *En Kvindes Offer* (A Woman's Victim/Sacrifice, Martinius Nielsen, 1916).⁶⁰ Apart from one "Fi and Bi film" (a Danish Laurel and Hardy duo) from 1924, potentially a parody of Nordisk melodrama, all of the *Offer*-films I found were made between 1910 and 1916.⁶¹ Even in this small sample of Nordisk's immense output during this decade, suggestive contours of a tradition of melodrama upon which Dreyer would continue to draw.

Innocence and ambiguity

Contributing to the fact that Dreyer's repeated depiction of suffering victims hasn't been considered melodramatic is that victimization is often ambiguous in his work. Dreyer's compelling female protagonists like Jeanne d'Arc, Anne, or Gertrud, suffer neither passively nor clearly. There is psychology to their suffering; their will always comes into play. Linda Williams describes the importance of virtuous suffering and innocence as important in defining American melodrama, for instance:

If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is

⁶⁰ For a list of the *Offer*-films used in this study, see Appendix B.

⁶¹ This Fi and Bi film (the Danish equivalent of Laurel and Hardy comedy duo) is called *Ole Opfinders Offer* (Lau Lauritzen, DK 1924) No program, script or stills exist for this film, only posters.

ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and action, then the operative mode is melodrama. In cinema the mode of melodrama defines a broad category of moving pictures that move us to pathos for protagonists beset by forces more powerful than they and who are perceived as victims. Since the rise of American melodrama on the mid-nineteenth-century stage, a relatively feminized victimhood has been identified with virtue and innocence. At least since Uncle Tom and Little Eva, the suffering victims of popular American stage and screen have been the protagonists endowed with the most moral authority. (“Revised” 42)

Traditionally, Manichean melodrama locates goodness with the moral authority of virtuously suffering victims. Although the suffering figures in Dreyer’s films definitely enjoy a privileged status, their suffering doesn’t necessarily clarify or reestablish categories of good and evil in the depicted worldview. The ambiguous morality of suffering and lack of obvious villains in Dreyer’s *oeuvre* has grounded claims that it is not melodramatic. But Nordisk melodrama is not clearly Manichean either. Often Nordisk seems to prefer devising situations in which moral categories must be deciphered rather than clearly named through happy narrative resolution. Nordisk often created alternative endings for a film in order to appease the tastes of different markets. Although this makes narrative resolution (both happy and unhappy) an unstable category upon which to base some assessment of melodrama, moral ambiguity persists in either category. Even a white-slave-trade film, where one might expect good and evil to be clearly expressed, can produce situations of decided moral ambiguity. At the end of Robert Dinesen’s white-slave-trade *Offer*-film, *En Skæbne* (Den hvide Slavehandels sidste Offer/The White Slave-Trade’s Last Victim, 1915), the white-slave-trader character exacts a deathbed revenge that ruins the marriage prospects of the female protagonist who had once *nearly* entered the trade. In fact the film establishes no single clear victim; several characters could plausibly be considered innocent victims who suffer, depending on how one interprets its tangle of deaths at the end. Early film melodrama at Nordisk frequently culminated in flurries of deaths and suicides of “innocent” and less innocent figures alike and could even elicit unexpected feelings of pathos for the plight of relatively despicable characters.

The word *Offer* in Danish denotes not only victim, but also sacrifice, which both provided another source of pathos and other potentials for ambiguity for the company. On one hand, early Danish melodrama elicited pathos through fairly straightforward depictions of self-sacrifice and maternal self-sacrifice. Many *Offer*-films elicit pathos through the familiar trope of a female protagonist who relinquishes her own desires (usually for a man with whom she has fallen in love) in order to put the needs of others before her own. One typical instance of a female protagonist who sacrifices her dignity for love is *Selskabsdamen* (*En Kvindes Offer*/A Woman’s Sacrifice, Martinius Nielsen, DK 1916), in which a bright young medical student, recently bereft of her financial support, must give up her studies with the young professor with whom she has fallen in love. Suddenly destitute, she suffers a variety of humiliations in seeking gainful employment as a governess in the household of the professor’s despicable (rich and adulterous) wife. Ultimately, her virtuous sacrifices are rewarded with marriage. As with the victim category, sacrifice at Nordisk did not reliably restore moral categories in the

world. Sacrifice could be utterly futile as in *Princesse Elena* (Holger-Madsen 1913), distributed in Germany as *Opfer einer hohen Frau* (The Sacrifice of a Noblewoman), in which Princesse Elena (played by renowned stage actress, Betty Nansen) nobly but conflictedly commits suicide so that her cowardly lover (an officer in an enemy army) might flee. Much like Anne or Gertrud in Dreyer's later films, Elena is a strong female protagonist who sacrifices everything for an ideal love, only to suffer grave disappointment. While such sacrifice might produce pathos through its beauty, the suffering it entails serves no clear moral function. Dreyer's use of characters that display psychological conflict and divided psyches rather than the unified monopathetic characterization traditionally associated with melodrama has also helped exclude him from the mode of melodrama in the eyes of most scholars. But just as the Nordisk worldview is not clearly Manichean, the Nordisk *Opfer* characters that inhabit this world are often not clearly monopathetic.

Worldview, causality, and volition

While some traditions of melodrama strive to restore shaken cosmologies by making moral contours utterly unambiguous, strong inflections from the Naturalist/Realist Theater granted Scandinavian melodrama a greater tolerance for it, particularly if ambiguity had dramatic repercussions for individual characters. Nordisk entertained something of the epistemological uncertainty that Brooks attributes to secondary melodrama. Otherworldly powers frequently undergirded a largely naturalistic domestic universe in this context, both in high literary production as well as in popular culture reverberations such as early Danish film melodrama. One need only to look at Ibsen's sundry combinations of domestic *mise-en-scène* and the ambiguous supernatural powers that course through his domestic interiors; the persistence of sickly, inherited secrets and inevitable repetitions of past domestic configurations (*Ghosts*); or "soul murder" undertaken to assume the primary domestic role played by another (*Rosmersholm*), to glimpse a culturally legitimate, but still decidedly spectacular cultural inheritance to which Dreyer might have been drawn. Along with his earlier, more naturalist works, Strindberg's chamber plays, which premiered only a few years before Nordisk melodrama began to flourish, also depicted modern anxieties related to upended hierarchies using a potentially occult domestic sphere. Strindberg readily mapped existential anxieties onto intergenerational, social conflicts, and trials of individual volition. In addition to exposure to these cultural forces, Dreyer had also worked through all of the fundamental configurations of dramatic conflict in *Day of Wrath*—otherworldly and quotidian alike—at Nordisk. It was at Nordisk that he became well-versed in adulterous (and incestuously intergenerational) love triangles; psychic murder (the ambiguous yet fateful exertion of hypnotic control over another); power struggles between generations over domination of the domestic sphere; potent secrets (hidden, gnawing, and inevitably divulged to great effect); guilty crimes, powers, and curses passed down from one generation to the next. The melodramatic worldview is riddled with heightened occult forces, forces never implausible enough to fully defy rational explanation, yet powerful enough to indicate underlying cosmological (and epistemological) crises.

The melodramatic worldview at Nordisk revolved around exploring various ways in which individual agency and volition could be constricted. In many ways this looked

like the kind of emphasis on choice that Brooks associated with secondary melodrama. Neergaard emphasizes that Nordisk's social melodrama grappled with questions of individual freedom rather than categories of goodness and evil, guilt and innocence. He writes that in early Danish film melodrama, the word *social* referred not so much to the mutability of social class, but rather its fixity as a framework both limiting and informing the conditions for human action. Existential concerns manifested as concrete preoccupations with fate (*skæbne*):

the opposition between life in the upper class and in the lowest levels of society, depicted not as a social (changeable) phenomenon, but rather as a *fate*, which might be changeable for some individual people, who can sink or be saved, respectively, but which for the most part is based on secret laws that cannot be changed, for they are part of human nature.⁶²

Instead of appreciating the possibility that popular culture also reflects existential concerns (whether on the personal or mythical level), Neergaard brushes aside the idea. "The incessant recurrence of this theme [fate] cannot of course be attributed to any conscious 'philosophy' or *conscious* purpose of propaganda, but rather because the subject was of interest to audiences at the time."⁶³ Dreyer's later work suggests that he too was in the audience at the time. The melodramatic worldview that Neergaard outlines, in which individuals struggle within secret laws of human nature and the world, engages with the same concerns with causality and volition that emerge in Dreyer's late films, particularly *Day of Wrath* and *The Word*.

Even depictions of victims in Nordisk's white slave trade films—where one might expect to find clear-cut depictions of innocence and villainy—demonstrate a preference for exploring particular infringements on will. Questions of volition are key to the way that Nordisk figured questions of fate. Depicting nuances of incapacitated volition was as important as depicting spectacular rescues and resolutions. The Slave Trade films naturally capitalized on depictions of innocent, naive people being (brutally) abducted so as to be rescued in thrilling spectacular (and spectacularly delayed) feats. But its victim-protagonists did not elicit pathos simply by being innocent victims. A key pleasure in the films involved reading the varying shades of their incapacitation—the spectacle of consciousness compromised in various ways. *Den Hvide Slavehandels Sidste Offer* (The White Slave-Trade's Last Victim), a typical slave-trade film, carefully signals the effect of Edith's abduction on her consciousness and will. The film's program signals that her will has been compromised by grief over her recently deceased mother, a state that facilitates her abduction. In other instances, Edith confides in the motherly slave-trader "halvt ufrivilligt" (*half unwillingly*), she is "numbed" by unexpected events, and her incapacitation is punctuated by frequent fainting spells. The program curiously equates Edith's ever-threatened innocence as a "performance" of which she remains unaware. In an instance of what might be called authentic performance, when Edith is given a frilly dress to put on to dress for dinner (actually to be introduced to potential

⁶² "modsætningen mellem livet i overklassen og i de laveste samfundslag, skildret ikke som et socialt (foranderligt) fænomen, men som en *skæbne*, der vel er foranderlig for det enkelte menneske, som kan henholdsvis synke ned eller reddes, men som i øvrigt er baseret på hemmelige love der ikke kan ændres, da de ligger i menneskenaturen" (emphasis in the original) (Neergaard, *Historien* 39).

⁶³ "Når dette tema genfindes ustandselig, skyldes det naturligvis ikke nogen bevidst 'filosofi' eller *bevidst* propagandahensigt, men at emnet er interessant for tidens publikum" (emphasis in the original) (Neergaard, *Historien* 39).

“buyers”) and she declines, the program describes it ambiguously as a “modest, but unconsciously noble performance.”⁶⁴ The word “un-willfully” (*uvillkaarlig*) occurs frequently in Dreyer’s and Nordisk scenarios to describe situations of “natural” performance, i.e. gesture, action or emotional reaction that cannot be feigned. The semantic scope of this term has shifted somewhat since the 1910s, but at the time it indicated a movement, change in feeling, or reaction in a human being not subject to conscious thought or reflection.⁶⁵ The most intriguing questions surrounding Edith’s status as a victim revolve around how to decipher the extent to which her consciousness has been compromised. Edith has been abducted against her will, but the intrigue of the film derives as much from exploring how the abduction registers on her as from the anticipation of her rescue. Nordisk often figured issues of volition and agency in terms of seduction and hypnosis as well. Harriet Bloch’s unfortunately no longer extant scenario, *Viljeløs Kærlighed* (literally translated as “will-less” or “unwilled love” filmed by Hjalmar Davidsen DK 1916, distributed in Great Britain as *Hypnotist’s Victims*), includes an extraordinary “love” scene between a male eye-doctor and a female *variété* performer, both hypnotized victims of an evil hypnotist. (*Offer*-figures were not exclusively female. Youthful, naïve, upper-class men often fell victim to the seductive and hypnotic wiles of *variété* demimondes.) A key seduction sequence in the still extant *Mormonens offer* (*A Victim of the Mormons*, 1911) shows how Nordisk blurred the line between willing and unwilling victim in intriguingly expressive ways. The charismatic Mormon preacher Andrew (Valdemar Psilander) tries to convince Nina (Clara Weith) to follow him to Utah. Pictured in a mid-length shot, Nina listens to Andrew whisper in her ear as her face registers a series of conflicting emotions within her. Again, the film’s printed program describes Nina’s decision in terms of altered consciousness, “half in ecstasy, half in hypnosis [...] She is in other words, completely spellbound by him.”⁶⁶ Although when she later changes her mind, Andrew will drug Nina to abduct her—violating her will in a very obvious way—her initial seduction is much more ambiguous. While Nordisk often relied upon the supplementary accounts published in a film’s program to draw attention to shifts in awareness and consciousness, Dreyer will bring about similar shifts and explorations in the bodies of his actors by exclusively cinematic means. Several years later, Dreyer exploited Weith’s expressive prowess in Siri’s climactic close-ups in the Finnish episode of *Leaves from Satan’s Book*. In this sequence Weith’s face demonstrates similar variations between ecstasy, pain and dismay as she commits suicide for Finland. Nordisk’s figurations of victimhood and volition echo throughout Dreyer’s *oeuvre* in ways literal and figurative. In *Glomdalsbruden* (*The Bride of Glomdal*, 1926) when the male protagonist, Tore decides to save himself from the river rapids in which he finds himself, an intertitle describes that he doesn’t want to become a “willing victim.” Jeanne’s heart-wrenching martyrdom in *Jeanne d’Arc* can be seen as an extreme test not only of faith, but rather of will. And Anne effectively exerts hypnotic powers of influence

⁶⁴ A great number of Nordisk programs are available on-line through the Danish National Filmography (*Nationalfilmografien*).

⁶⁵ The general idea is that *uvillkaarlig* encompasses notions of involuntary, as well as immediate (inevitable), and unconditional or absolute “action”. See The Danish National Dictionary [ODS ordnet.dk].

⁶⁶ “halvt i Ekstase, halvt i Hypnose [...] Hun er med andre Ord fuldstændig bjærgtagen af ham.” Program, *Mormonens Offer*

over Martin and Absalon in *Day of Wrath*, as I will discuss in some detail in a later chapter.

Staging innocence: imagination of performance

Nordisk exploited situations of performance to great effect. By incorporating *Offer*-figures into its many play-within-a-play scenarios, it blurred distinctions between victim and sacrifice, sometimes making the term ironic. Depictions of theater and the other arts in Nordisk films verged on demonstrating a proto-modernist awareness of medium that also sometimes entailed the spectacular conflation of being and representing. Nordisk betrays an insatiable curiosity with the aesthetic representation of “real” life in contrast to and combined with depictions of performance broadly-conceived: circus acts, *varieté* (something like a burlesque, boulevard type of theater) sideshows, dance numbers, musical acts and scenes in the National theater. Although Denmark could not claim the same robust tradition of boulevard theatre of England or France, images of popular theater in particular nevertheless dominate Nordisk’s melodramatic imagination. Often naïve, middle-class women find themselves suddenly orphaned and destitute, leaving them no other recourse for survival than to become a performer in the *varieté*. With very little plot motivation at all, a protagonist at Nordisk might suddenly succumb to the desire to flee to the capital and have a go at the national stage. Artist and performer characters recur across Dreyer’s entire *oeuvre* as well, from his early Nordisk films such as *Elskovs Opfindsomhed* (Love’s Ingenuity, Sofus Wolder, DK, 1913), in which an actress cross-dresses as a man in order to “seduce” an older woman into allowing a younger couple to marry, to the eponymous divas in *Den skønne Evelyn* (*Evelyn the Beautiful*, A.W. Sandberg, 1916) and *Lydia* (Holger-Madsen, 1918) and to opera singers and composers in *Gertrud*.

When Williams writes that melodramatic narrative trajectory is most concerned with “a retrieval and staging of innocence” (above) the implication is that innocence needs to be retrieved, pronounced, and clearly articulated to restore moral categories in a world in which “goodness” has been obscured. Nordisk, in contrast, often revels in *staging* per se, often with disregard for retrieving or clarifying. Broadly speaking, staging at Nordisk could contribute to the ambiguity of its worldview. At Nordisk, deciphering bodies during a performance seemed to be an end in and of itself. In early Danish film melodrama, victimhood and sacrifice are often faked, performed and staged in a way so as to make them pleurably ambiguous and even ironic. Performance might reveal innocence, but it might just as well reveal the lack of any clear category of innocence at all. *Et Kærlighedsoffer* (A Victim/Sacrifice of Love, Robert Dinesen, 1914), to which I will return in my discussion of *Jeanne d’Arc* in Chapter Three, plays with melodramatic expectations for the staging of innocence in a very literal sense by showing its actor-characters in many several different performance situations. The still-extant film showcases Nordisk’s fascinations with theater and mimesis by featuring scenes in which actor characters put on and remove their make-up backstage, attend rehearsals, perform a play, and finally “perform” the role of a count. The pleasures for spectators revolved around deciphering layers of dramatic irony. Spectators were alternately allowed insider access to ensuing deceptions and then denied it. The disguises and revelations in the climactic murder-suicide ending of *Et Kærlighedsoffer* definitely exploited the ambiguity of the term *Offer*. Several characters could reasonably be called both innocent victims

and self-sacrificing characters in its climax, resulting in a sophisticated, ironic scenario that left spectators (inside as well as outside the diegetic world) to decipher rather than nominate either victimhood or innocence.

Nordisk's depictions of theatrical scenes of performance also put pressure on the distinctions between "real" and "feigned" by conflating the two for great dramatic effect. *Livets Genvordigheder* (Alexander Christian, *The Bowl of Sacrifice* [GB] 1916), stages "sacrifice" in what must have been an extraordinarily spectacular *variété* scene called "The Golden Bowl of Sacrifice" and set in an Indian temple full of priestesses. Although the film no longer exists, the scenario describes how the ritual performance of sacrifice will become threateningly real for the main character, Phyllis, when her jealous former lover (also an actor at the *variété*) enters the stage in costume with a knife. Presumably, neither the cinema audience nor the diegetic audience, nor Phyllis herself could know for sure whether John's menacing actions were scripted or not. Phyllis stumbles toward him, imploringly, but her actions could also potentially be readable as part of the act. John trips on a rug (presumably an unscripted stumble) and the bowl of sacrifice topples over, filling the stage with smoke and flames. The excitement of this staged sacrifice derives from the blurring of the *real* spectacle of people being sacrificed with the *feigned* spectacle of being sacrificed. In all likelihood, the spectacle threatened to overshadow the fact that the fire reunited Phyllis with her childhood crush, a doctor sitting in the audience.

Danish melodrama could also frame sacrifice and suffering in diegetic performances of *tableau-vivant*. *Hvor Sorgerne Glemmes* (a film also distributed as *Søster Cecilies Offer/Sister Cecilie's Sacrifice*, Holger-Madsen 1915) includes a scene in which the film's sacrificial protagonist, the eldest daughter of an infirmed and impoverished countess, is forced into service as a lady of the court to support her family. The film no longer exists, but its surviving production stills and scenario reveal that upon arriving at court, Cecilie performs a series of tableaux of famous religious paintings with her siblings, including most famously, "The Holy Saint Cecilia." Such overt framings draw attention to the film's own framings and status as representation, giving *Hvor Sorgerne Glemmes* a modernist sensibility. Surviving stills further suggest that the film juxtaposed the performance of such *tableaux-vivants* of sainthood with the film's use of more naturalistic tableau framings in its diegesis. One production still shows a glowingly haloed composition of the countess lying on her deathbed, Cecilie laying her head on her chest crying, and a veritable herd of angelic siblings surrounding them. One young child looks imploringly upward, into the light, as she wipes a tear away. (Consequently, Cecilie becomes if not a saint, at least a nun when her spurned composer fiancé and the husband she had to marry end up dead in the same forest cottage, on the same day—the former from a broken heart and latter from a hunting accident.⁶⁷) At the very least this use of tableau created suggestive tensions between "real" sainthood and artistic depictions of sainthood, the pathos of which Dreyer too will exploit in *Mikaël* (1924), which draws

⁶⁷ Saint Cecilia is the patron saint of music who discovered her desire to marry God on the night of her earthly wedding, posing distinct problems for the retention of her chastity. Complicating the outright clarity of Cecilie's virtue in *Livets Genvordigheder* is the fact that, despite this young woman's repeated willingness to sacrifice her own happiness for that of those around her, and despite the heavy-handed assertion of her innocence and purity, she somehow still ends up being an (albeit accidental) *femme fatale* figure when by the end of the film she finds herself praying over the bodies of her husband from the court and her old fiancé.

upon the iconography of Catholic hagiography to depict saintly, self-sacrificing characters and painted representations of their suffering.

Though Dreyer would be among those who call Nordisk's overt theatricality inauthentic, associating Nordisk out of hand with inauthenticity gravely underestimates the way in which performance in the company's melodramatic imagination worked within and against diegetic layers depicted as more "real." Early Danish melodrama fully embraced the *play* of authenticity and inauthenticity. Consequently, while Dreyer would fault early Danish melodrama for not being serious enough about these distinctions, he reimagined its melodrama not by abandoning inauthenticity, but by heightening its contrast with the real. Dreyer's modernism draws upon the proto-modernist sensibilities already present in Nordisk melodrama.

Nordisk melodrama, modernism and Ibsen

Toril Moi reads this same tension between performance and authenticity as being at the heart of Henrik Ibsen's modernism, which raises interesting possibilities for exploring connections between Scandinavian naturalist theater and Nordisk melodrama. Moi writes, "Ibsen's double perspective, his awareness of the impossibility of either choosing or not choosing between theatricality and authenticity, stands at the center of Ibsen's modernism. It is the reason why his theater is so extraordinarily rich in depth and perspective" (240). Scholars who draw upon Ibsen's massive influence on Scandinavian culture to describe anomalies in Nordisk melodrama usually do so to draw attention to the company's naturalistic inflection of melodrama rather than to highlight its modernism. Ron Mottram attributes the company's more psychologically nuanced melodrama to Ibsen's influence (as a key author responsible for artistic changes ushered in by the Modern Breakthrough).⁶⁸

With this change came a strong influence from the theater on the style and subject of films. Unlike the American Cinema, however, the theatrical influence was not from melodrama but from a more naturalistic drama, in line with the changes brought about by the plays of Henrik Ibsen. The film subjects were still melodramatic, but their focus was on the erotic and the psychological rather than on action. *Afgrunden* [*The Abyss*] became the prototype for this kind of film. (81)

Further complicating things, melodrama scholars have more recently recognized melodrama in Naturalist and Realist theater texts that definitely would have been part of the well of cultural inspiration from which Nordisk would draw. Mercer and Shingler cite Scandinavian examples extensively as evidence of the widespread diversity of the melodramatic mode (as conceptualized by Brooks) as a modern phenomenon.

Peter Brooks' work on theatrical and literary melodrama, for example, argues that a melodramatic sensibility manifests itself across theatrical and literary texts and is in fact a singularly modern rather than an 'old-

⁶⁸ Referring to *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*, Urban Gad 1910) Mottram goes on to characterize Nordisk's (i.e. Danish) social melodrama of the period between 1910-1914 as showing a particular interest in psychology and the representation of social classes. He describes the Nordisk melodrama as emphasizing *mise-en-scène* by placing action mainly indoors, in realistic sets, often using actual furniture and shooting in deep focus. Often mirrors functioned to expand playing space by reflecting characters that were not directly visible in the action of the frame. Mottram cites the gradual solidification of Nordisk's style into mere formula as a possible reason for the company's eventual decline during WWI.

fashioned' mode of expression. One has only to look at the pioneering examples of realist theatre such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* or Strindberg's *Miss Julie* to see that melodramatic situations are repeatedly used in plays that scandalised contemporary audiences due to what was regarded as their frank subject matter and 'realistic' portrayal of contemporary life. To modern audiences by contrast, Nora dancing the tarantella in a desperate bid to distract her husband in *A Doll's House*, Hedda throwing Lovborg's manuscript in the fire and finally committing suicide in *Hedda Gabler*, and the almost ritualistic portrayal of the master/servant relationship in *Miss Julie* are not dissimilar, in either register or treatment, to the conflicts, tensions and hysterical climaxes of the Hollywood family melodramas of the 1950s. (95-96)

Although not ready to embrace Ibsen's modernism as fully melodramatic, Moi reads Nora's performance of the tarantella *A Doll's House* as a quintessentially melodramatic spectacle within the play she calls "the first full-blown example of Ibsen's modernism" (225). Moi writes,

The tarantella scene is melodramatic in all the usual meanings of the word. It provides music and dance, and it is staged in order to postpone the discovery of a secret, a discovery that Nora believes will lead to her death. Nora, moreover, dances her tarantella motivated by fear and anxiety, and gives a performance that is explicitly said to be violent or vehement (*voldsom*) (8:334). (236-7)

An important modernist effect of putting Nora "on stage" in a play-within-the-play scenario (though she performs the tarantella in the family home) is that the spectacle allows the theater spectator not only to watch Nora's performance, but to read the variety of reactions in the spectator-characters watching her, each of whom has a different understanding of what they see. Nordisk and Dreyer both will construct scenarios with the kind of complex array of voyeuristic, objectifying, and exceedingly sympathetic gazes that imbue the tarantella scene with an element of modernist reflection.

A vital difference, however, is that such performance scenarios at Nordisk incorporate a fundamental humanist optimism about the potential for theater to unite people (actors and audiences), in stark contrast to Moi's more pessimistic definition of theatricality. Moi ultimately cannot relinquish the dehumanizing potential of a theatricality that she equates both with melodrama and the disingenuous playacting that goes on in Torvald and Nora's dollhouse marriage. Such performances, Moi argues are the antithesis of authentic, healthy interaction between marriage partners who recognize the humanity in each other as true equals.⁶⁹ Nordisk, on the other hand, sets up the theater as a more immersive and interactive space of performance than that allowed by the Naturalist Theater's voyeuristic fourth wall. In early Danish melodrama, the *variété* space extends from the actual stage in all directions. *The Abyss*, grants the cinema spectator access to the Gaucho dance not from the point of view of an audience spectator, but rather from the wings. The other off-stage performers remain visible behind the two main dancers. But far and away the most important fixation of this Nordisk's melodramatic

⁶⁹ "...Helmer's idealism and Nora's unthinking echoing of it make them theatricalize both themselves and each other, most strikingly by taking themselves to be starring in various idealist scenarios of female sacrifice and male rescue" (Moi 226).

imagination is the performance space leading out into the audience. Nordisk reveled in the dramatic potential for spectator and performer to interact, through persistent and determined violations of the invisible fourth wall. At Nordisk, performers spill down off the stage and into the audience, instigating even more dramatic scenes among audience members—scenes that by comparison are coded as “real.” Spectators fall in love with actor performers mid-scene, and actresses on stage could readily halt mid-performance and point an accusatory finger at a nemesis suddenly detected in the audience. Couples fall in love, steal each other away, and become otherwise cursed or transfixed, all in violation of the fourth wall. Spectators also scramble up on stage to save performers from spectacles that they suspect have gone awry.

In transmuting the energy of Nordisk’s framed or staged *varieté* scenes into forms he believed to be more culturally legitimate, Dreyer would try to galvanize precisely these relationships between performer and spectator. But the indirect questions Nordisk raised about the truth of human performance and performers, the same questions that Moi raises about Nora’s performance in *A Doll’s House*, could be asked of Nordisk melodrama. Returning to the play-within-the-play gaucho dance in the *The Abyss* raises the same questions: To whom do we actually attribute the suffering we perceive during the famous gaucho dance? The actress-character Magda, the character Magda performs on stage, and even Asta Nielsen herself are all valid answers. Similarly, how can we compare Magda’s “suffering” expression on stage to the expression of “suffering” she bears in the final shots of the film, in the climactic final scene (coded as “real”) in which police lead Magda away? The blurring of performance scenarios in this melodramatic tradition raises the question of how a spectator watching might recognize human suffering in another. Moi’s reading hits on one of melodrama’s core paradoxes. Melodrama strives for the most authentic expression of human experience—that which cannot be articulated in language. It is the only true expression of Nora’s despair, for instance. But the same time, melodrama potentially evokes the opposite, as the distorted exaggeration of true human emotion through insincerely heightened expression. Dreyer’s engagement with this paradox illuminates his attraction and repulsion to the melodramatic mode. Recuperation of Nordisk’s artistry has largely banked on the logic that innovations in cinematic technique somehow compensate for its dubious, spectacular or lowbrow subject matter. But the robust ideational complex of the company’s melodrama deserves to be reconsidered as well. As Brooks writes,

We know about [melodrama’s] limitations, its easier effects, and its more inauthentic thrills, but we have also learned that it is an exceptionally supple and adaptable mode that can do things for us that other genres and modes can’t. [...] It has the flexibility, the multifariousness, to dramatize and to explicate life in imaginative forms that transgress the traditional generic constraints, and the traditional demarcations of high culture from popular entertainment. (Preface xii)

Similarly, Nordisk provided a vital, multifaceted aesthetic model to which Dreyer inventively returned, again and again.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHENTIC MELODRAMA: LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC

“Dreyer had chosen the variety show actress Marie Falconetti for the role of Jeanne d’Arc. When liberated from make-up, she became capable of displaying the naked, soulful face that Dreyer wanted.”¹

La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc (1928) is perhaps Dreyer’s most acclaimed contribution to cinema history with Renée (Maria) Falconetti’s extraordinary performance as Jeanne as one of the most captivating ever to be filmed. *Jeanne d’Arc*’s reputation as a masterpiece has been established over the years through a variety of readings from avant-garde and modernist, to historical, mystical, and religious.² Dreyer’s characterization of the film as embodying “realized mysticism” for instance, helped spawn an interpretive tradition centered on the transcendental depiction of martyrdom.³ *Jeanne d’Arc* also enjoys a unique status in the context of Dreyer’s *oeuvre*, as the most vibrant and sometimes confounding example of Dreyer’s experimentation with cinematic form. The film’s rapid camera movements: tilts, swish pans, zooming close-ups; its wildly interspersed high and low angle shots; its placement of action at the edge of the frame; its disjointed editing and Eisenstein-like montage; the extreme abstraction of *mise-en-scene*, lack of establishing shots, and general aspersion of conventional practices for depicting cinematic space and time, have all contributed to critics calling it more stylistically artistic than anything Dreyer had undertaken previously or subsequently in his career (with the possible exception of *Vampyr*). In his early review of the film in *Politiken* shortly after its premiere, Ebbe Neergaard describes *Jeanne d’Arc* as one of the most peculiar films he has ever seen, citing Dreyer’s emphatic and relentless use of the close-up as typical of the film’s utterly “untraditional” status.⁴ A series of influential formalist readings of the film in the seventies and eighties has done much to further this line of critique, establishing *Jeanne d’Arc* as incommensurate with Dreyer’s early film work and solidifying its status as a seminal document of Dreyer’s artistic development (a

¹ “Til rollen som Jeanne d’Arc havde Dreyer valgt varieteskuespillerinden Marie Falconetti, der befriet for sminke netop var i stand til at vise det nøgne, sjæfulde ansigt, som Dreyer ønskede” (Nørgaard 126).

² For a formalist reading of *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* as a symbolic narrative consistent with the French narrative avant-garde, see Abel *French cinema* 486-500. For a reading of the elements of transcendental style in *Jeanne d’Arc*, see Schrader 121-126.

³ See Dreyer’s article, “Realiseret Mystik.”

⁴ Neergaard’s closing passage in the article originally published in *Politiken*, May 4, 1928 reads, “Jeanne d’Arc is one of the most peculiar films that has ever been shown; as with all works created by a single-mindedly determined, distinctly monomaniacal psyche, it is unforgettable –unforgettable in its combination of spectacular results and almost pathetic-seeming deficiencies. There’s no doubt that our film people will be able to reap knowledge, both positive and negative, by studying this above-all untraditional film.” (“Jeanne d’Arc er en af de særeste film, der nogensinde er vist; som alle værker skabt af en ensidigt indstillet, udpræget monoman psyke er den uforglemmelig – uforglemmelig i sin blanding af storslåede resultater og næsten patetisk virkende mangler. Der er ikke tvivl om, at vore filmfolk vil kunne høste lærdom, både positiv og negativ, ved at studere denne i alt fald utraditionelle film.”) (Neergaard, *Bog om Dreyer* 51) Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Danish are my own.

development cast largely in formal terms).⁵ As David Bordwell writes, “With respect to the style of Dreyer’s previous films and the norms of the classical cinema *Jeanne d’Arc* powerfully rejects dominant relationships between narrative logic and cinematic space” (*Films of Dreyer* 66). In this prominent vein of Dreyer scholarship, *Jeanne d’Arc* embodies modernist film’s conscious split of “narrative structure from cinematic style so that the film constantly strains between the coherence of the fiction and the perceptual disjunctions of cinematic representation” (Bordwell *Art Cinema* 722-23), effectively aligning the film with modernism’s drive to expose representational systems as more or less arbitrary.

All of these readings of *Jeanne d’Arc* share the underlying conviction that Dreyer was a director concerned first and foremost with making the film’s final cut coincide with his personal vision of cinematic art. The film’s unconventional stylistics, in particular, often serve as evidence that by this point in his career, Dreyer had whole-heartedly abandoned making film for broad, popular consumption and had instead devoted himself to creating elaborate discursive puzzles more suited to cineastes and avant-garde elites. Multiple strains of Dreyer scholarship have thus woven together to establish *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* as the unquestionably elevated antithesis of popular culture—as Dreyer’s most profound and decisive renunciation of his roots in popular culture and by extension, melodrama.

But readings of *Jeanne d’Arc* that rely too insistently on the strict differentiation between high art and low art, or that privilege Dreyer’s formal cinematic experimentation at the expense of his broader affective ambitions and theatrical experimentation, occlude important continuities in Dreyer’s *oeuvre*. Such strict delimitation unnecessarily suppresses discussion of how Dreyer’s *oeuvre*—and *Jeanne d’Arc* in particular—puts strains on such distinctions. Dreyer could state quite vociferously that the attention paid to *Jeanne d’Arc*’s formal eccentricities had unfairly overshadowed his more populist aesthetic ambitions with the project. In an introduction to a screening of the film at the Danish Film Museum in 1950, many years after the film’s original release, Dreyer claimed, “My film about Jeanne d’Arc has unjustly been called an avant-garde film, which it absolutely is not. It is not a film intended for film theorists, but rather a film of universally human content, intended for a broad audience and with a message for any open human mind.”⁶ Abel Gance’s epic and emotive bio-pic *Napoleon* (1927), the set of which Dreyer had visited only a few years before filming *Jeanne d’Arc*, likely provided a model for experimenting using cinematic technique to populist ends. Many battle sequences in *Napoleon*, such as the snowball fight, use much more rapidly edited, nearly abstract images than *Jeanne d’Arc*’s eruptive final sequence. Dreyer’s desire to convey universal human experience authentically to broad audiences, definitely also involved affective sensibilities that could transcend (or at least unsettle) experimentation with cinematic technique. In an interview for *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1965 Dreyer would

⁵ For a reading of the film’s visual, dramatic and thematic elements through formal alternations between abstraction and concreteness, see Bordwell *Filmguide* 22-59. For a reading of the film’s strange disruptions of representational systems, see Bordwell *Films of Dreyer* 66-92. For a detailed elaboration of the film’s use of cinematic technique, see Kau 142-98.

⁶ “Min Film om Jeanne d’Arc er med Urette blevet kaldt en Avant-garde Film, hvad den absolut ikke er. Det er ikke en Film bestemt for Filmteoretikerne men en film af almenmenneskeligt Indhold, bestemt for det brede Folk og med Bud til ethvert aabent Menneskesind.” Unregistered DFI document from the Dreyer Collection, marked “Dreyer 1950” found in a file labeled, “DREYER UDKLIPSMAPPER Jeanne d’Arc.”

remark, “Ce qui m’intéresse – et cela passe avant la technique – c’est de reproduire les sentiments des personnages de mes films. C’est de reproduire, aussi sincèrement que possible, des sentiments aussi sincères que possible” (Delahaye 234). Here Dreyer casts his characteristic passion for authenticity as an ambition to achieve emotional sincerity, an ambition he seems to distinguish from experimenting with cinematic technique as an end in and of itself. Formalist readings of *Jeanne d’Arc* can also struggle to account for Dreyer’s extensive on-set experiment with *mise-en-scène*—the renunciation of make-up, the elaborate construction of inhabitable sets, and shooting in sequence—that in many ways exceeded what could be captured in a final cut. All of this suggests that in addition to Dreyer’s experimentation with cinematic form, in making *Jeanne d’Arc*, Dreyer undertook a parallel, and equally ambitious experiment in “authentic” performance. The medium consciousness of Dreyer’s experiment in artistic process and the pressure he put upon his actors, draw the *Jeanne d’Arc* project into an intriguing conversation with avant-garde performance practice.

In this chapter, I attempt to broaden our appreciation of *Jeanne d’Arc*, and by extension Dreyer’s *oeuvre*, by reading the film as another of Dreyer’s diverse engagements with popular culture and melodrama, specifically, in its use of performing bodies and spectators watching them. Reading Dreyer’s artistic development as transcending melodrama to attain “high art” (whether defined in terms of increased authenticity, purity, sincerity, realism, psychological nuance, tragic seriousness, or even formal experimentation) undersells melodrama as both static and automatically antithetical to these categories. That being said, the *Jeanne d’Arc* project tests the limits of melodramatic performance, including its use of pathos, authenticity and its tolerance for formal experimentation. *Jeanne d’Arc* calls into question intuitive distinctions between affect and formal experimentation. In doing so, it unearths subterranean connections between avant-garde performance and spectacular melodrama, both of which thrill and create ethical transformation by conflating *being* with *representing*.

The film’s melodrama emerges primarily through a shift in methodological emphasis by which I take thematic continuities between *Jeanne d’Arc* and Dreyer’s early film scenarios at Nordisk as vital indicators of Dreyer’s aesthetic ambitions. Dreyer’s innovation of early Danish film melodrama’s ideational complex (its themes and figures), as well the melodramatic technique by which they are dramatized, deserves to be considered in accounts of the film’s contribution to cinema history. I employ theatrical terminology intentionally here, for the melodramatic continuities I see in *Jeanne d’Arc* demonstrate a strong engagement with theatrical aspects of film melodrama at Nordisk. The theatrical through-lines that I trace in this chapter include: Nordisk’s quite elaborate play with the legibility of bodies by conflating layers of representation (performance) with “authenticity” to thrilling and dramatic effect, especially in scenes of corporeal spectacle; the dramatic stripping of artifice (including make-up, disguise, and dissimulation) in order to reveal, with great pathetic flourish, what is true and authentic; and “live theater” as a site of affective interaction, dramas of recognition, and ethical engagement between performers and spectators.

As will be the case with each of Dreyer’s melodramatic encounters that I examine in the chapters of this dissertation, Dreyer’s innovation of melodramatic technique in *Jeanne d’Arc*—for instance his insistence that Falconetti be “liberated” from her make-up—has often been misunderstood as signaling his departure from the mode, rather than

his deep engagement with its core mechanisms. Dreyer encounters his melodramatic past with a posture of attraction and repulsion. His exploration of melodramatic process and form in *Jeanne d'Arc* consequently pushes melodrama's capacity for change to the very brink, bringing to light a brutal side to melodrama's claims to depict "universal human experience," in turn raising ethical questions about depictions of human suffering. Seen as a critical grappling with and revision of the melodramatic mode as inherited from Nordisk (rather than its utter eradication), *Jeanne d'Arc* brings to light intriguing connections between early Danish film melodrama, avant-garde performance, and modernist or European art-house cinema.

Thematic continuity

Jeanne d'Arc demonstrates continuity with moments in Dreyer's film and script-writing projects depicting stories of human suffering, a fact not surprising if we take seriously his professed interest in "universal human content" (*Almenmenneskeligt Indhold*). Although suffering victims of these earlier Nordisk scenarios might be more easily associated with melodrama, Jeanne's corporeal suffering and tears link her with the *offer* (victim-sacrifice) protagonists that pervaded early Danish film melodrama. Margaret Maddox, who compares different filmic representations of the maid of Orleans (to what we know of the historical Jeanne), categorizes Dreyer's account as one that emphasizes her victimization. "Dreyer's Joan is first and foremost a victim, a Christ-figure that suffers and dies at the hands of persecutors who insist on being the arbiters of what one is permitted to believe about oneself" (131). The possibility that Jeanne is a figure of persecuted innocence puts the film immediately in conversation with Dreyer's earlier work and with melodrama broadly conceived, connecting her, for instance, with Dreyer's many other incarcerated, interrogated, or tortured female characters. *The President* features generations of female victim-protagonists put on trial after experiencing various betrayals by men. The French Revolution episode of *Leaves from Satan's Book* depicts several young imprisoned women. In the Spanish inquisition episode, the innocently imprisoned Isabella is interrogated and later led out, her body limp in a swoon, to be burned at the stake. Jeanne is actually only one of several female characters in Dreyer's *oeuvre* fated to die spectacularly in flames as people look on. Herlofs Marthe (to whom I return in the following chapter on *Day of Wrath*) will suffer torturous interrogation and burning. The *bål* (pyre)—a term that in Danish encompasses both burning at the stake and ritual sacrifice—will provide a site of spectacular pathos that Dreyer exploits throughout his career, both early and late, from *Lydia* (one of Dreyer's scenarios at Nordisk) to *Day of Wrath*.

Like many of Dreyer's female protagonists, Jeanne's suffering has a distinctively corporeal aspect to it, whatever its ultimate spiritual or psychological ambitions. Dreyer's Jeanne (like his own Christ-figure in the Jesus manuscript, for that matter) is human rather than ethereal; her body records the evidence of her suffering. She weeps, shudders, and faints. Her feet are bound; her arm is twisted, punctured, and bled. Her cheek is spat on, her hair shorn, and her body burned. *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Vampyr*, which at first appear as the embodiment of Dreyer's abandonment of all things Nordisk share thematic ties with early Danish melodrama as works in body genres featuring suffering female characters who are strapped down, for example, and bled. *Vampyr* can be seen as an extended meditation on victimization (the book on vampirism guiding Allan Gray

provides a veritable manual of victim-sacrifice [*Opfer*] in its German intertitles), or as a hauntingly beautiful expansion of Nordisk's penchant for stifling volition through abductions, titillating incapacitations, and play with states of consciousness (hypnosis). Although *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Vampyr* stand out in Dreyer's oeuvre as particularly modernistic, stylized, graphic, shocking, and eerily haunting depictions of suffering "victim" figures, this stylization stands as part of an ongoing re-imagining of body genre and Nordisk's primary melodrama—not as Dreyer's decisive departure from it. The gravity of the suffering innocence depicted in *Jeanne d'Arc* has been attributed to Dreyer's serious ambitions for the medium, but pulling back a bit, Dreyer's images of spectacularly suffering bodies appear as part of larger cultural trends in which such depictions of spectacular and performed suffering were (for better or worse) a staple of early Danish film melodrama.

Making primary melodrama real

Acknowledging that Dreyer remains interested in the melodramatic mode and body genre at the same time that he expressly distances himself from it raises the question of what exactly Dreyer undertakes in reimagining the mode. With *Jeanne d'Arc*, Dreyer essentially undertakes to create secondary melodrama by making primary melodrama real. In "Realized Mysticism," an account published in 1929, not long after the film's release, Dreyer sets the *Jeanne d'Arc* project up as a break with tradition (*Jeg brød også med traditionerne*) accomplished through extreme measures of renunciation in the name of truth (*for at give sandheden*) ("Realiseret Mystik" 31). Doing so implicitly casts traditional filmmaking (we can substitute early Danish film melodrama here) as less truthful and even insincere or artificial. The many accounts of the film's austerity, seriousness and rhetoric of purification that accompanied it have more or less reified the notion that Dreyer's relentless quest for authenticity purged the film of any trace of what might be called melodramatic *excess* and in so doing created a completely different animal. The way in which Dreyer often expressed this pursuit of authenticity in filmmaking—as the eradication of theater's artificiality—further contributed to the tenacious binary by which theater (and by association, early cinema and melodrama) are cast as inauthentic, particularly in contrast to "artistic film." In his article, "The Real Talking Film" ("Den Virkelige Talefilm") from 1933, Dreyer articulates his dislike of "inauthentic representation" in terms of theater. In language echoing the critique he leveled earlier at the inauthenticity of "count-and-countess" films at Nordisk, Dreyer writes,

A theatrical performance is a picture seen from a distance. In order for the overall effect to be life-like, it has to be painted with a coarse brush— the color has to be applied in thick dollops. All details have to be made coarse and enlarged— exaggerated. In the theater everything is inauthentic, and everything depends on bringing the inauthentic details in such an agreement with each other, that all together it produces a colorful illusion of reality, while film presents reality itself in a rigorous black and white stylization ... The distance between theater and film amounts to the distance between *representing* and *being*.⁷

⁷ "En teaterforestilling er et billede set på afstand. For at helhedsvirkningen skal blive livagtig, må der males med grove pensel – farven må lægges på i fede klatter. Alle detaljer maa forgroves og forstørres –

This passage indicates Dreyer's complex relationship with the theater, drawing it near so as to exploit its cultural capital while at the same time distancing himself from it so as to establish film art on its own terms. (Dreyer could also defend theater as its own art while stressing the need for the cinema to be other than filmed theater.) But although the passage above might initially seem damning to theater, it also unsettles the simple equation of theater with inauthentic *representation* and film with (presumably more authentic) *being*. Rather than exclusively indicating Dreyer's desire to disrupt established practices of film continuity, the formulation opens the door to the possibility that *Jeanne d'Arc*'s formalist acrobatics are actually part of an authenticity project in which radical close-ups signal the desire to collapse the distance between the spectator and the stage-picture by making more subtle the details that combine to create the theater's true-to-life-ness. Or alternately, that Dreyer's cinema projects aspire not to increase the distance between theater and film, but rather to annihilate it.

Cinema and theater produce a productive tension in Dreyer's *oeuvre*, largely because Dreyer's utterances on the inauthenticity of the theater misrepresent his interest in (and dependence on) the *being* of acting bodies—an actual presence taken for granted in the theater—to achieve any cinematic stylization of reality. The presence of performing and spectating bodies is a constitutive part of what Erika Fischer-Lichte refers to as a performance event in her reading of avant-garde performance art of the 1960s in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Fischer-Lichte outlines an aesthetics of performance that moves away from a hermeneutic or semiotic model of interpreting performance as a “work of art” and toward understanding performance as ephemeral, transformative event between the performers and audiences who are physically present and in constant (often subtle) negotiation of being and representing. For Fischer-Lichte, meaning in performance is created in a space shared by performer and audience, during (never previous or subsequent to) the duration of the performance. Performance relies on the material interrelationship of bodies present and interacting with each other. Fischer-Lichte's theorization of performance thus approaches Dreyer's tension between film and theater from another perspective, for to film or otherwise record a performance event necessarily destroys it—performance demands presence.

Questions of authenticity, truth, being and representation, film and theater all also arise in relation to early Danish film melodrama's varied engagement with what I argue approximates a performance event. Associating Nordisk's iteration of primary melodrama with artificial pathos and *Jeanne d'Arc* with authentic pathos, for instance, is problematic in that it underestimates the compelling ways in which Nordisk's primary melodrama also exploited artifice to experiment with and reveal authenticity. Part of Dreyer's complicated relationship to theater likely derived from Nordisk's practice of putting suffering figures into diegetic stage and performance scenarios to produce what might be considered cheap thrills in feigned suffering. But such scenarios importantly also raised titillating questions (not in the least for Dreyer) about the ontological status of suffering bodies in the theaters depicted in the frame of the film. Diegetic spectators were left to wonder whether an actress character was an actual victim (experiencing pain), or

overdrives. På teatret er alt uægte, og alt går ud på at bringe de uægte detaljer således i overensstemmelse med hinanden, at det tilsammen frembringer en farvelagt illusion af virkelighed, medens filmen præsenterer selve virkeligheden i en streng sort-hvid stilisering... Afstanden mellem teater og film er givet ved afstanden mellem *forestille* og *at være*” (“Den Virkelige Talefilm” 32).

simply feigning distress. That Nordisk *filmed* scenarios involving performers and live audiences further compounded the thrill of reading victimization and sacrifice cloaked in performative layers.

In my reading, *Jeanne d'Arc* becomes an experiment in secondary melodrama (rather than non-melodrama), or in other words, by making Nordisk's primary pathos more "real" in order to achieve a greater affective impact on the cinema spectator. To this end, Dreyer heightens, intensifies, and distills melodramatic technique already integral to early film melodrama at Nordisk, including stripping it of "feigned" suffering and approaching *real* suffering on set. Dreyer galvanizes primary melodrama's thrills of corporeal legibility and its dramas of recognition, raising the stakes for interactions between performing (suffering) bodies and spectators. He transmutes Nordisk's experiments with filmed theater, devising an on-set performance event to be filmed. Looking at the film from this perspective shifts the interpretive scheme from one categorical difference (*Jeanne d'Arc* is not melodramatic because it is modernist) to one of degree. In this case, secondary melodrama involves a depiction of suffering that comes closer to actual suffering. Melodrama scholarship no longer easily accepts that melodrama exists merely in some kind of inauthentic excess to be discarded, and this opens up the possibility of reading melodrama within exchanges of authenticity and artifice contrived to elicit pathos—fluctuations already present in early Danish film melodrama.

"Her essence is absolutely sympathetic": performance in Esther

Dreyer's early Nordisk scenarios provide an interesting precedent for the questions of authentic performance and theater that the *Jeanne d'Arc* project sets up both on screen, and importantly, on set. Although no longer extant as a film, Dreyer's Nordisk scenario "Esther" (later filmed as *Den hvide Djævel/The Devil's Protégé*, Holger-Madsen, 1916) demonstrates how performance and authenticity often intertwined in melodrama. An adaptation of Honoré de Balzac's novel *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*,⁸ Dreyer's scenario exchanges Esther, Balzac's courtesan with a heart of gold, for an innocent soul encased in the trappings of the *Variété* stages of Parisian suburbs upon which she dances to support herself and finance her brother's education. Dreyer's script establishes her as a true-heart enduring the adversity of a shoddy theatrical world epitomized by the costuming she is compelled to wear,

She is a young and healthy woman, who despite the fact that for a long time now has earned the livelihood for herself and her brother by performing in *variétés* on the outskirts of town, has in no way been infected by the vice (*last*) that has surrounded her for so long. On the contrary, the impoverished, feigned elegance in which she is dressed betrays (*røber*) her profession. Her essence is absolutely sympathetic.⁹

Dreyer's Esther is the epitome of a true-heart character whose innocence, virtue, and willingness to sacrifice for her brother—though initially disguised—still ultimately

⁸ *Splendeur* is part of *La Comédie Humaine*, which Balzac published in four parts between 1838-1847.

⁹ "Hun er en ung og frisk Kvinde, der til Trods for, at hun i snart lang Tid har klaret Udkommet for sig og sin Broder ved Optræden i Forstædernes Varieteer, ikke paa nogen Maade er bliven smittet af Lasten, der i al denne Tid har omgivet hende. Derimod røber den fattige, forlorne Elegance, hvormed hun klæder sig, hendes Metier. Hendes Væsen er absolut sympatetisk" (Dreyer, "Esther").

transcend the vulgarity of her surroundings. In other words, her costuming enables the revelation of her absolutely sympathetic nature. The scenario constitutes her goodness, in other words, in juxtaposition to her *métier*. At the same time that Esther's performance is signaled as artificial, her mimetic abilities contribute to her innocence. The role she steps on stage to perform facilitates and accentuates the performance of her virtue. This effect is concentrated in Esther's highly performative scene of suffering, the spectacle of "Marguerite and the Golden Calf" (*Marguerite paa Guldkalven.*) (Dreyer's scenario doesn't provide detail about what this 'Marguerite' scene would look like, but in Gounod's opera *Faust*, at least, it included an orgiastic ballet scene in the fifth act in which Marguerite is held in a prison for the murder of her child amid an orgiastic Wallpurgis night gathering of witches and courtesans. In this version, Mephistopheles tempts her with forgiveness, but she steadfastly refuses, opting instead to mount the scaffold and leave her fate to God. At the last moment a chorus of angels announces triumphantly that God has saved her.) We can only speculate how the filming of this play-within-a-play scene would have depicted the distance between the *performed* scene of Marguerite's virtuous spurning of temptation on the scaffold and the performance of Esther's own *actual* suffering (the sacrifice of herself for her brother's livelihood) that she undertakes simultaneously. Perhaps Marguerite's endurance of cosmological hardship on stage would have reinforced Esther's plight in "real life." Perhaps the spectacle of her last-minute salvation would have compounded the pathetic impact of her later suicide from which no chorus of angles will save her. What is clear, however, is that the scene's affect would have been predicated upon this melodrama's intricate play of corporeal legibilities. Diegetically, the seduced Baron watching the spectacle from audience must decipher or conflate real and performed suffering. The cinema spectator is then treated to a filmed performance event that would have also included reading the Baron's reactions to the spectacle.

In this instance at least, Dreyer's appetite for staged theatrical spectacle might have exceeded Nordisk's. In *Den hvide Djævel*, Nordisk's final version of Dreyer's scenario, Dreyer's eponymous heroine and pillar of virtuously performative sacrifice has been deleted entirely. The film's program and stills reveal that Dreyer's love quadrangle (culminating in a double brother and sister suicide) had been simplified to a more conventional triangle of exploitation in which a destitute Lucian falls in with miscreants and dies as a fairly straightforward, pitiable victim-hero. *Esther*, as Dreyer's early treatment of Balzac, offers a quirky, early link between Dreyer and the melodramatic trajectory presented in Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination*. But more than that, Dreyer's scenario demonstrates the way in which Nordisk film melodrama could exploit the artifice of performance situations to reveal and enhance a state of real (suffering) coded as more authentic.

The theatrical spectacle in *Esther* also typifies the way in which Nordisk could depict theatrical space or the performance event as a humanized, immersive space of (sometimes idealized) communication between live human beings—a space facilitating interactions that thrillingly violated the naturalist theater's voyeuristic fourth wall, metaphorically challenging the film image to achieve equal interaction. The scene offers a dramatized take on one of melodrama's core features, "the drama of recognition," which Peter Brooks defines as the mechanism of "virtue misprized and eventually recognized" or "virtue made visible and acknowledged" (*Imagination* 27). Added layers

of costuming heighten the fundamentally melodramatic question of how one is to *recognize* and reveal innocence, rephrasing it as a kind of liberation from make-up and disguise. The theatrical setting also injects melodramatic *signifiante* with identification. The Baron, detecting something in Esther's performance that draws him to her, illustrates theater's potential for affective communication and active spectatorship. The Baron combines identification and empathy with an active differentiation between the semiotic and phenomenological orders of Esther's performance. Implicit in my reading of *Jeanne d'Arc*'s experimentation with performance is the conviction that Dreyer never fully abandoned his fascination with this vital theatrical interaction—particularly the interactions that occur around the spectacle of a body incurring harm—and that he sought to replicate it in film. Although Dreyer could refer to filmed theater in particular as false or illusory, his deprecating words belie a persistent interest in the drama of recognition, and its affective conveyance between its theater's live participants. That situations of performance have valuable potential for the transmission of experience—the basic notion that art can move or influence others—is very much in keeping with Dreyer's humanist ambitions for art. The *Jeanne d'Arc* project is a particularly insightful example of Dreyer's process-oriented experimentation trying to capture on film the charge and authenticity of live, performing bodies—both those suffering and those watching suffering. Dreyer's protestations about theater's artificiality can be understood as part of his desire to bolster film as the seventh art, yet they must not be taken at face value, for they misrepresent the importance of intense theater practices in Dreyer's filmmaking process. Dreyer's films can express a distinct desire for the cinema to recuperate the immediacy (presence, materiality) and impact of live performance—to annihilate the cinema audience's knowledge that projected bodies are not *actually* there in front of us, in pain or incurring risk, potentially suffering.

Denuding melodrama, melodramatically

In *Esther*, the Baron sees beneath her costume; in *Jeanne d'Arc* Dreyer undertakes to remove them entirely—to *strip* melodrama down to its most intense affect, a severity that he achieves melodramatically. I read *Jeanne d'Arc*'s minimalist aesthetic (its austere mise-en-scène, subdued costumes, and prohibition of make-up)—its stripping, denuding, and even purification as a grave iteration of melodrama's semiotic play of disguise and disclosure to reveal virtue. The opening intertitles of the film frame Jeanne as a true-heart figure whose goodness and humanity are initially occulted or unrecognized. The film proposes to disclose the real Jeanne, “simple and human,” as she appears underneath her armor. Dreyer would also express this idea of denuding the saint in his 1950 introduction to the Danish Film Museum screening (mentioned above), in which he described his intention to “to strip Jeanne d'Arc of her halo and formal attire of a saint and find a way into the actual little, woman-child, who suffered death at the stake for her faith.”¹⁰ Jeanne's humanity has been concealed by the material accouterments of religion and in order to access it, Dreyer attempted to remove them. Dreyer's formulation lends itself easily to melodrama's discourse of victimhood. “Into the actual little, woman-child” (*ind*

¹⁰ “at afklæde Jeanne d'Arc for hendes Glories og Helgenskrud og finde ind til selve det lille Kvindemenneske, der led Døden paa Baalet for sin Tros skyld.” Unregistered DFI document from the Dreyer collection, marked “Dreyer 1950” found in a file labeled, “DREYER UDKLIPSMAPPER Jeanne d'Arc.”

i selve det lille kvindemenneske), a vaguely condescending diminutive rather difficult to convey in English, pointedly evokes a figure of pathos as opposed to, for example, an armed and gleaming warrior for her faith. Dreyer strips and undresses (*afklæder*) Saint Jeanne, removing her halo and formal garb so as to see her true self, grafts her misprized virtue concretely onto her physical, human body, offering a further link to the melodramatic mode. In contrast with a modernistic heightening of artifice that would reveal representation itself as illusory, Dreyer strips away the martyr's armor to reveal the truly pitiable human beneath, a decidedly melodramatic ambition.

Viewing the film melodramatically helps to situate its peculiar opening emphasis on the physical appearance of the angels in Jeanne's visions. One monk inquires how St. Michael appeared to her, "Was he wearing a crown?" "Did he have wings?" "Was he dressed?" "How did you know if it was a man or a woman?" "Was he naked?" Jeanne replies, "Do you think God was unable to clothe him?" Another exchange foreshadows the cutting of Jeanne's own hair later in the film, "Did he have long hair?" (She responds, "Why would he have cut it?") This intense negotiation of bodily surfaces confirms the film's decisive reliance upon corporeality (to achieve a depiction of spiritual transcendence). Jeanne demonstrates her faith with her body; she makes her faith in God legible through her refusal to wear women's clothing. Given that she cannot express her innocent faith directly lest she incriminate herself, Jeanne's body becomes an important surface upon which to read her suffering. This emphasis on the body helps establish Jeanne's goodness as something present to be read corporeally, melodramatically.

In this interrogation sequence, Dreyer has removed any overtly identifiable theater space in *Jeanne d'Arc*, coding the trial as more real than theatrical, yet he still exploits the critical interaction of a performance event (between suffering performer and interrogating audience), enacting a drama of recognition. The opening exchange of the interrogation—which at first seems a peculiarly mundane collection of inquiries about clothing, hair and their recognition—actually initiates an elaborate play of recognition, both in terms of Jeanne's ability to recognize goodness, but also the film's larger question of whether her judges persecuting her (and by extension the cinema audience) will eventually recognize her as a martyr in men's clothing. The heretical traps that the monks lay down before Jeanne question her ability, in essence, to read and recognize the bodies in her visions. Later in the film the judges will accuse Jeanne of not recognizing a good angel from a bad. "Don't you see that it is the devil who has tricked you and betrayed you?" one judge pronounces. Such questions of seeing through disguise resonate with Dreyer's other dramas of recognition including, *Leaves from Satan's Book* in which Satan roams from one historical epoch to the next in search of the true-heart capable of seeing through his disguises and recognizing his temptations so as to denounce them for the spurious "evil" that they represent. Although *Leaves from Satan's Book* presents itself in a much more episodic and allegorical form, both films are propelled by a similar melodramatic thrill of revelation. Not unlike the performance spectacle in *Esther*, in these cases, choosing "goodness" relies on the presence of artifice to be seen through.

The recognition of Jeanne's virtue will ultimately also be revealed on her body rather than through her clothes. In so doing, Dreyer intensifies melodramatic disclosure. *Jeanne d'Arc*'s main drama of recognition will ultimately take place at the level of skin, hair and tears, rather than costume *per se*. Melodrama's disguise is given physiognomic form, as seen in the caricature-like (though naked) faces of the actors cast as monks.

Herman G. Weinberg's eloquent interpretation of production accounts (published around the release of the film) paints the *Jeanne d'Arc* project as an elaborate mimetic experiment, taking place precisely at the level of skin and flesh.

For four months, giving proof of their artistic conscience without parallel in the history of the screen, shaving their heads to have a real tonsure bathed in an atmosphere of silence and moral corruption where each one felt his modern personality leaving him, these artists in *Jeanne d'Arc*, the monks and the soldiers, thought, worked and played in the zeitgeist of the fifteen century which was inculcated in them by the director, Dreyer. Every hour of every day, the actors in *Jeanne d'Arc* assumed their roles as monks—not as one puts on a doublet and vest—but as one gets underneath another's skin, heart and soul. It is this which is beautiful, great and true... (60)

Weinberg's vision of the set as a densely populated, immersive space in which actors present around the clock quite literally inhabited the bodies of thinking, playing, working monks and soldiers from the past seems orchestrated to engender numerous *real* dramas of recognition. The passage importantly also illuminates the humanist goals motivating such a project. Beneath the hinted-at willfulness of Dreyer's "inculcation" of his cast (an implicit desire to get under their skin), is an elegantly physiognomic iteration of humanism's fundamental aspiration to find truth and beauty in the recognition of humanity in another human being, using mimesis to do so.

Weinberg's account is typical of the way in which the many eyewitness accounts of the filming (put into circulation both by Dreyer and his cast and crew) constituted these on-set spectators as a proxy audience for the cinema spectator. Valentine Hugo's account of the scene in which Falconetti's head is shaved is particularly vivid in this regard,

In the silence of an operating room, in the pale light of the morning of the execution, Dreyer had Falconetti's head shaved. Although we had lost old prejudices [against short hair on women] we were as moved as if the infamous mark were being made there, in reality. The electricians and technicians held their breaths and their eyes filled with tears. Falconetti wept real tears. Then the director slowly approached her, gathered up some of her tears in his fingers, and carried them to his lips. (Bordwell *Filmguide* 19)

Dreyer's gesture performs a symbolic blessing of Falconetti's sacrificial performance (and perhaps also a symbolic purification of any complicity he might have felt in bringing it about). But the tears of the assembled audience attest to a kind of transformation of the audience watching. Their tears (tears that will be caught on the film as well) stand in for the out-of-frame tears shed by the crew, and by extension, by the eventual members of the film audience. Not only did such "audience" accounts contribute to the rhetoric of authenticity surrounding the *Jeanne d'Arc* project, they fed a desire for the physical presence possible in a live performance scenario, and also for the cinema's need to compensate for such absence.

Extra-filmic accounts of Dreyer's casting of the role of Jeanne, intended to bolster the project's serious artistic credentials, effectively made "real" another drama of recognition and revelation, this time with Dreyer as spectator and Renée (Maria)

Falconetti as a pure-heart *variété* performer. Just as the Baron first spied Esther during her performance, Dreyer first spied Falconetti (at the time a young actress of the Comédie-Française) while performing the light comedy, *Lorenzaccio*, one evening in Paris.¹¹ From his seat in the audience, Dreyer glimpsed (or read) some aspect of Falconetti's humanity underneath her thick costuming and make-up. Although a subsequent interview with the actress in his apartment—during which Dreyer first read the *actual* suffering inscribed upon Falconetti's bare face—is invariably recuperated as striking proof of Dreyer's penetrating genius, it comes about through melodramatic disclosure. Relating the story of Falconetti's visit to his apartment, Dreyer says in an interview with Delahaye, “‘It was a beautiful woman with a coquettish smile who sat facing me. Her makeup was perfect—in itself a work of art.’ But Dreyer saw a different woman underneath: ‘Behind that makeup, the pose, behind that modern and ravishing appearance, there was something. There was a soul behind that façade.’” (qtd. in Bordwell *Filmguide* 15). As Neergaard relates the encounter, Dreyer intuited (*anede*) that Falconetti had experienced true adversity and suffering (*Bog om Dreyer* 50). In Drum and Drum's account, the encounter becomes invested with a kind of mystical, wordless transmission between Falconetti and Dreyer,

How Carl Dreyer was able to see beneath that surface to something deeper and more profound, was able to strip away the makeup, the urbanity, the sophistication and see the simple power and intensity of Joan, no one can say, not even Dreyer. He only knew that he had found his face; to him it was right, an immediate intuition, an almost automatic reflex. (128)

Dreyer's famous prohibited make-up on the set of *Jeanne d'Arc* attracted the attention of nearly every contemporary critic. Swedish film critic Gösta Werner's perhaps slightly embellished account of Dreyer's prohibitions is suggestive of the way in which the rhetoric of nakedness could accompany accounts of Dreyer's artistic ambitions.

Dreyer placed—for the circumstances at the time—very strict demands on the filming and its realization. Firstly, none of the actors were allowed to wear make-up [...] He wanted to see into naked faces with the camera. This would be especially troublesome for Falconetti. She had never ever – not even in private—appeared without make-up.¹²

Dreyer would continue to strip Falconetti of her make-up, after this initial screen test, as part of a prohibition of all make-up on set. We can see Dreyer's redemption of the *variété* star (her performance elevated to among the best ever captured on film) as a key extra-filmic sign of the film's artistry as well as its engagement with melodramatic technique and theme. Dreyer's recognition of suffering and his desire to uncover it achieve this elevation melodramatically, for melodrama, I argue, resides not in make-up (or excess) discarded, but rather in the recognition and juxtaposition of “authentic” within “inauthentic” –in the thrill of a true-heart disguised, and revealed.

Critics often cite Dreyer's insistence on more naturalistic make-up (or that old characters be played by old actors, or that non-actors) as evidence that Dreyer's artistic

¹¹ For an account of Falconetti's other known film performance, see Beylie and d' Hugues 259.

¹² “Dreyer ställde -- för den tidens förhållanden – mycket stränga krav på inspelningen och dess genomförande. För det första fick inga skådespelare vara sminkade [...] Han ville med kameran se in i nakna ansikten. Särskilt besvärligt blev detta med Falconetti. Hon hade aldrig någonsin – inte ens privat – uppträtt osminkad” (121).

demands for naturalism (and authenticity) were incompatible with Nordisk's demands for theatrical artifice. While it is certainly true that from very early on (with the possible exception of *Gertrud's* epilogue), Dreyer sought to use make-up more naturalistically or to cast actors whose faces looked made up without make-up or disguise, "make-up" and disguise did not categorically indicate insincerity at Nordisk. Make-up, disguise, and mimesis were not the exclusive purview of villain-characters. Nordisk often deliberately foregrounded the use of make-up and disguise by benevolent actor-characters to bring about coup-de-theatre revelations of true identity. Mimesis, in other words, could also be beneficent or ambiguous. To cite one early example, in *Et Kærlighedsoffer* (A Victim/Sacrifice of Love, Robert Dinesen, 1914), Jan, an actor-character employed by the national theater, deliberately disguises himself as the count whom his love (Anja) has vowed to murder. (She has vowed to avenge her father's unjust incarceration and untimely death.) In other words, Jan disguises himself—performing a role in "real life"—in order to prove his wife's innocence. In the film's climactic final scene Anja (mistaking him for the count), plunges a dagger into her disguised husband. With a sweeping gesture, he rips off his disguise and falls to the floor, dead. Further complicating the flurry of performing victims and innocents misprized, Anja then commits suicide, jumping off of the ballroom balcony. This scene typifies Nordisk's general preference for investing in spectacular impact, negotiation of corporeal legibility, and pathos, rather than clear moral coordinates. Both main characters reveal themselves as virtuously sacrificial victims, albeit to different degrees. The scene illustrates how disguise and make-up (deception) can be intentionally placed in the narrative so as to reveal it to produce affect. Although of a different order, the deception that Jeanne's judges subject her to serves a similar purpose. That Jeanne initially succumbs to the feigned kindness of her judges, succumbing to their strategies of deception, but then ultimately recognizes their ruse, heightens the affect produced by Jeanne's decision to recant and face the stake.

Real tear-jerking

Dreyer's use of tears intensifies primary melodrama's bodily disclosures by taking them down to skin. Pulling off disguise, in Dreyer's intensification of primary melodrama, entails drawing forth tears as impossible-to-feign-proof of authentic interiority and emotion. Although of course not the exclusive domain of melodrama, tears (along with the swoon perhaps, which Jeanne also performs in the face of torture) epitomize melodrama's inflection of body genre. The profusion of tears that Jeanne sheds in *Jeanne d'Arc*, some of the most vivid and moving to be captured on film, have become iconic of the film; as Jeanne weeps and shudders. Tears cloud her vision. Tears course down her cheeks as she lifts her head to peer upward, whether toward her persecutors or her God. In melodrama, tears provide legible evidence of a body undergoing extreme emotional experience, whether discomfort, suffering or joy. Jeanne brushes tears away with her dirty fingers, but the tracks they have stained down the flesh of her cheek persist as a bodily trace of her experience to be read. We can see Dreyer's repeated return to tears as an iteration of what Brooks calls melodrama's "text of muteness" (*Imagination* 56). A quintessentially expressive form, melodrama mobilizes tears as one way to exteriorize emotion that cannot be articulated in verbal registers. Although Jeanne's artful verbal dodging of self-incrimination during her trial complicates somewhat the film's use of this

melodramatic technique, Jeanne's tears nevertheless indicate that language has not fully articulated the immensity of her suffering.

Jeanne's tears, and their conveyance by means of insistent, percussive close-ups, also form a key component to Dreyer's ambitions for affective sincerity in *Jeanne d'Arc*. Dreyer uses the close-up to bring the cinema spectator closer to Jeanne's tears than would have been possible in a conventional theater space. The close-up's ability to focus and frame the spectator's perception in a way impossible in the theater has prompted scholars to read the profusion of close-ups in *Jeanne d'Arc* (particularly those featuring Falconetti) as epitomizing its status as cinema—a gesture aimed at securing the film's transcendence of conventional or theatrical corporeality. Dreyer's emphatic use of the close-up has been seen as too avant-garde and estranging to be associated with melodrama's presumed identifications, or too naturalistic and psychological to accord with melodrama's (assumed) reliance on characterization and conventional gesture. Charles Affron, although sympathetic to melodramatic affect, establishes the photorealism of the close-up as melodrama's necessary limit. Affron refers to the cinematic close-up “with its insistence on the uniqueness of the performer” as the cinema's decisive departure from melodramatic dramaturgy, which he argues (drawing on Brooks) is based on perception of a type rather than an individual body. “A victimized, unwed mother who baptizes her dying baby is a melodramatic configuration, but it ceases to be that when she is Lillian Gish in close-up performing that act in *Way Down East*. . . the photographic naturalism of cinema proves to be particularly intolerant of melodrama” (110). Others have found *Jeanne d'Arc*'s experimentation with cinematic form too experimental to imagine including it in melodrama's “requisite” (over-) identification and demand for embodied legibility, in effect arguing that the film's editing severs its bodies too decisively to be melodramatic. The close-ups of Jeanne's weeping face have thus been read as signaling a different, psychological or spiritual order that affords a humanistic antidote to the (depictions of) suffering bodies in Dreyer's work. Bordwell, for instance, after enumerating the disturbing, rigidly carnal poses of the tortured and bound bodies of the female characters in Dreyer's *oeuvre* (moments during which “flesh becomes a raw material to be sculpted through torture” as in *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Day of Wrath*) writes, “Only a facial shot, the close-up, can cancel such disturbing images. In the face (and all treatment of it through lighting and narrative context of tragic self-sacrifice), the feminine body finds its just characterization. The channeling of corporeal into physiognomic energy sustains Dreyer's avowedly psychological cinema” (*Films of Dreyer* 195). In a similar vein, Bodil Marie Thomsen argues that through the luminosity of the close-up Dreyer's imagery transcends itself as a medium to become real flesh—a far cry from melodrama's semiotic demands. In Thomsen's reading of Dreyer's distinctly non-melodramatic project of creating haptic imagery, he creates images of flesh that transcend “the exclusion of (female) bodies from the written, dry *logos* of history” (53) through their connection to spirit. Thomsen writes,

In Dreyer's films the passion of the heroines is almost always situated within their bodies, but the filmic style does not deliver the body as a visual representation of ideas, one of the melodramatic genre's most common traits. Instead the body and the face become flesh, concrete and real through the preference for extreme close-ups of skin and facial expressions. (44)

Tears, however, being both phenomenologically of the flesh as well as a key feature of melodrama's investment in signs (its *signifiante*), in effect bridge these two orders. This duality allows us to read Dreyer as undertaking formal experimentation (even the close-up's severing of the face from body) so as to intensify of the affective impact of bodily suffering rather than negate its affect through psychology. Dreyer's percussive use of close-up shots of Jeanne's (or Falconetti's) suffering face and the profusion of tears mark his attempt to bring the shock of corporeal spectacle to film, to make spectacle stronger by exploiting melodrama's conflation of being and representing—of performing body and role—through greater proximity to flesh. In this context, experimental film form serves as a kind of make-up that Dreyer applies in order to tear it off and reveal “real” flesh beneath.

Affron's use of the Lillian Gish example above is insightful because it assumes that identifying (or acknowledging) Gish's individuality breaks with melodrama's immediately recognizable typologies, but this underestimates the way in which melodrama very much exploits the authenticity of its real bodies performing roles. Spectacular stage melodrama exploited the real flesh of its performing actors to elicit pathos. Fascination with and concern for the phenomenological body of actors performing a role has been a source of melodramatic pathos from its early experiments with sensational realism on stage (a phenomenon to which I return below). Part of what moves us about Jeanne's tears is the fear that they cannot *but* be Falconetti's, and that being the case, they document (in a magnified, heightened, framed and focused way) some *actual* ordeal endured by Falconetti's body. Such cognitive empathy for Falconetti's probable duress, the negotiation of phenomenological and semiotic orders, identification and active spectatorship in no way inhibits affect, nor does it negate the close-up as melodramatic. Quite the contrary, the potential for us to weep at whatever caused Falconetti to be able to “act” so convincingly at the same time that we weep at what befalls Jeanne, is part and parcel of melodrama's potential to collapse the distance between the body of the actor and the body of the character. Rather than understate corporeal spectacle through naturalistic detail, these weeping close-ups actually make spectacle bigger, more shocking for its spectators.

Spectacle improved

Dreyer's reputation as a modest but intense film artist belies his sustained interest in the ability of live theater to move its spectators not only through increasingly naturalistic or subdued depictions of human psychology (as one might expect), but also by using shocking spectacle to elicit intense emotional experience. His 1939 article, “Two Plays that Fell Flat: Was the Staging to Blame?” (“To Skuespil, der Faldt”), Dreyer expresses his disappointment in the final scene of Folketeatrets production of Robert E. Sherwood's play *Idiot's Delight* that culminated in a single, ear-splitting explosion representing a bombing raid on the Alpine spa where the play was set. After the explosion, the curtain slowly descended in the dark and silent theater. Dreyer writes that the explosion came so unexpectedly and with such intensity that it was as if the bomb had fallen in the theater itself. The audience experienced “a real and tangible fright” (*en ægte og håndgrikelig skræk*) that only released its grip upon them when the house lights came up. Considering the combination of Dreyer's reputation both for nuanced representation and his passion for authenticity, one might expect Dreyer either to condemn the production's appeal to

such cheap and exaggerated shock tactics, or alternatively, to endorse the production's realism (Dreyer does, after all, remark that it felt as though the bomb had *actually* landed in the theater itself).¹³ Instead, Dreyer criticizes the performance for producing a feeling of sheepish awkwardness in spectators who felt embarrassed at having been fooled by such an abrupt ending. He writes that as the lights came up, the frightened audience looked around at each other as commiserating victims of the same cruel joke. The problem for Dreyer, however, is not the use of big effects *per se*, but rather their inadequate use. The single annihilating bomb dropped at the end dispersed too quickly the anguish that the play had so elegantly constructed during its previous two acts. Dreyer's solution to staging the scene is not to eliminate the obliterating explosion altogether, but actually to include more of them. He proposes a crescendo of six or seven explosions to be accompanied perhaps by the sound of an approaching bomber, heightened dialogue, and, finally, the cutting of the electricity. Only then would the audience be properly prepared for the climactic, final, decimating encounter between the two main characters consisting of a lone voice in the darkness, sobbing in vain after a dead lover. Dreyer describes his staging in the following way, "—a fear of death settles over the two— the din of an airplane propeller just overhead— and now the blow to the hotel itself—one last, the futile cry of one already dying – weeping – one word, one single, the last one. And it's all over."¹⁴ While one might attribute Dreyer's flirtation with violently climaxing aeronautical effect to his residual passion for flying machines, it also illustrates Dreyer's conviction that spectacle could elaborate and extend pathos to elicit identification rather than estrangement in the audience, emotional appeal rather than a *Verfremdungseffekt*. In this review, Dreyer effectively muses about how to employ melodramatic spectacle to the greatest affective ends. It's not about getting rid of spectacular emotion, but rather channeling it, focusing it, and addressing it to the other senses so as to use it strategically for optimal affect. We can think of the critique Dreyer raised about the use of spectacle at Nordisk as being similar, namely, that it lacked the proper narrative foregrounding, appeal to realism, or that it was too disguised or diluted to produce an appropriately intense affect. This lends weight to the idea that Dreyer sought to change the magnitude of early Danish film melodrama's spectacle, not its fundamental presence or mechanisms.

Many years later, Dreyer would refer to *Jeanne d'Arc*'s rapid-fire close-ups as if they had thrown the film out of balance, as if the explosions failed to achieve the effect he desired, and that he had shocked film audiences too abruptly. Speculating on the objections to the technique that Neergaard had raised in his review of the film, Dreyer would write, "In all likelihood what happened with Neergaard was this: My close-up shots functioned as intended, namely as a virtually uninterrupted succession of startling shocks, and it was probably that, that Neergaard didn't like: to be startled. No intelligent person does, and the one who does the startling, enjoys no sympathy."¹⁵ That Dreyer's

¹³ Alternately, one might speculate that Dreyer would have deemed such bombing provocative or distasteful in light of political tensions in Europe at the time.

¹⁴ "—dødsangsten sætter ind hos de to – propelstøjen af flyvemaskingen lige over hovedet – og nu nedslaget i selve hotellet—et sidste, en dødendes forgæves kalden – en hulken – et ord, et eneste, det sidste. Og alt forbi" ("To Skuespil" 61).

¹⁵ "Det, der er sket med Neergaard, var rimeligtvis dette: Mine nærbilleder virkede efter hensigten, nemlig som en næsten uafbrudt række af overrumplende chok, og det er nok det, Neergaard ikke har kunnet lide: at

later films would be significantly subtler in their formal experimentation suggests that Dreyer saw the project as failing to achieve the desired (pathetic) response in his spectators.

Many accounts of *Jeanne d'Arc*, however, document responses of both deep and conflicted pathos attributed to the film's formal attributes. In my reading, this attests to the project's success at galvanizing melodrama's pathos in a way that reveals melodrama's constant negotiation between identification and estrangement to have interesting ethical implications not immediately associated with the mode. In her review of the film, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) elegantly documents the film's push and pull as a formally experimental project eliciting a strong, somatic identification in the cinema audience and an awareness of its cruelty at the same time. H.D. notes that her hands still inevitably clenched at the memory of the film's images, a residual response to her torturous attraction-repulsion to the film's strength and brutality, "we are left pinned like some senseless animal, impaled as she is impaled by agony" (41). The film's powerful depiction of suffering comes about through and with an awareness of its formal eccentricities, however, not despite them. H.D. writes, "Do I *have* to be cut into slices by this inevitable pan-movement of the camera, these suave lines to left, up, to the right, back, all rhythmical with the remorseless rhythm of a scimitar?" (41). Interestingly, *Jeanne d'Arc* sparked not only an awareness of H.D.'s experience as an individual, embodied film spectator, but also an awareness of the presence of her fellow spectators as well. H.D. evocatively individuates Dreyer's desired "broad audience" (*det brede Folk*),

...I am defiant for this reason (and I have worked it out carefully) and with agony I and you and the baker's boy beside me and Mrs. Captain Jones-Smith's second maid and our own old Nanna and somebody else's gardener and the honeymoon boy and girl and the old sporting colonel and the tennis teacher and the crocodile of young ladies from the second pension to the left as you turn to the right by the market road that branches off before the stall where the old lady sells gentians and single pinks and Alpenrosen each in their season (just now it is somewhat greenish valley-lilies) are in no need of such brutality. No one of us, not one of us is in need of this stressing and stressing, this poignant draining of hearts, this clarion call to pity. (41)

The implication that such a democratized audience (even one exhibiting an "open human mind," as Dreyer had put it) might object to depicting suffering bodies in the name of ending human suffering, suggests that melodrama's *signifiante* (whether taking the form of a drama of recognition brought about in a diegetic theatrical performance, or in slashing camerawork depicting weeping faces), might have ethical implications for the spectator. This potential has been under-theorized in melodrama scholarship. That *Jeanne d'Arc*'s pulls melodramatic performance and spectatorship toward its ethical limits can contribute to understanding the attraction-repulsion of melodrama's consumption.

"Ethics" of theater spectacle at Nordisk: Lydia

Nordisk could also stage this ethical push-pull between identification with a performing body and a simultaneous awareness of one's watching status as a spectator. A case in

blive overrumplet. Det er der ingen intelligente mennesker, der kan, og den, der overrumpler, nyder ingen sympati" (Neergaard, *Bog om Dreyer* 54-55).

point is Dreyer's Nordisk scenario "Lydia" (directed by Holger-Madsen in 1918), a heady tale of overlapping love triangles, forgery, murder, suicide, and scenes of debauched theater life. Though billed as a "Tragic Play" (*Tragisk Skuespil*), the film in many ways typifies Nordisk melodrama, particularly in its culminating scene of theatrical spectacle, the thrill of which derives from a performer's being injured on stage while her adoring spectator-lover must determine when or if to intercede and save her. The film no longer exists, but Dreyer's scenario (along with stills and the film program) documents how Karl Fribert (Valdemar Psilander), a man blinded by love for the temperamental diva Lydia and having murdered the cad playboy who has impregnated her, goes to see her perform one last time before turning himself in to the authorities. The performance happens to be the world premiere of her death-defying "fire dance" (*Ilddans*). As in spectacular stage melodrama, the thrill and beauty of the performance are inextricable from the risk undertaken to perform it. (A production still of this scene, does not show conclusively that Nordisk had an actual fire on-set, but actual smoke was not an uncommon prop in fire scenes at the company.) The glowing light of the fire above which Lydia is raised, appears more real than the expressionistic stage sets that evoke painted flames. Lydia takes the stage to perform her dance of ritualistic sacrifice [described in the program as "an adoration of fire" (*en Tilbedelse af Ilden*)], but at some point in her performance, perhaps finally appreciating Fribert's sacrifices for her, her performance becomes real and she *actually* sacrifices herself to the flames, committing suicide on-stage. This scene creates pathos in the thrilling conflation of her phenomenological body and semiotic body. Fribert's experience watching and deciphering Lydia's performance (which we can speculate would have been conveyed through a typical Nordisk reaction shot of the audience from stage center)—including his shock at realizing that Lydia's death is about to become "authentic"—adds layers of affect to the scene, doubling the interplay of pathos and identification for the cinema audience. Lydia *actually* throws herself into the fire, but the cinema audience most likely would have also watched Fribert's confusion in reading Lydia's performance as an act of suicide. Without reading too strong of an ethical claim in this scene, it nevertheless again models spectatorship as active rather than based on over-identification. Fribert, like so many other Nordisk protagonists, actively eschewing all fourth-wall conventions of how a spectator should behave, crashes through to make theater space immersive and vitally interactive. This charges spectatorship in *Lydia*'s climactic final sequence with interesting ethical implications. In the film, when faced with the potential harm, Fribert ceases to consume the spectacle passively and rushes instead to save Lydia from the flames. Fribert recognizes actual suffering in the guise of theater and makes an ethical choice in trying to stop the "performance." Such life-or-death interaction between audience and performer—a surprisingly common pleasure in early Danish melodrama—can be seen as a primary melodrama's take on art's potential to both thrill with and communicate something about human suffering. The film ends in a final pathetic flourish with Fribert struggling to reach Lydia amid the chaos of the burning theater. He reaches her finally and carries her fast-expiring body up to the roof where she briefly revives, asks for his forgiveness, gives him a final kiss, and then dies. Distraught, Fribert throws himself down off the roof into the panicked crowds on the street below.

Jeanne's spectators

Dreyer's interpretation of Jeanne d'Arc's trial, while emphasizing victimization, importantly also alternates these depictions of suffering with the reactions of the different groups of diegetic spectators that watch, reflect, and react to it. Dreyer's removal of the diegetic stage from the performance situations fits with his authenticity project, expunging early Danish melodrama's overt references to theater while retaining its interactions. Dreyer relocates "theater" in the "real" performance contexts of the courtroom, the interrogation hall, and the stage-like platforms in the town square on which Jeanne will publically sign her confession and later be burned. (Dreyer will continue to explore spectator reaction to immolation in the similar sequence in *Day of Wrath*.) Although the crowds depicted in the affective frenzy of the montage sequence concluding *Jeanne d'Arc* react too late to save her body, their reaction nevertheless depicts the potential for suffering to galvanize its spectators. This interaction between performer and *moved* spectator results in an individualized mass erupting into chaos. (Perhaps this is Dreyer's attempt to *appropriately* bomb the audience?) Suffering in this case has the potential not only to move its masses to tears, but to incite them. Dreyer orchestrates *Jeanne d'Arc*'s film-trial and immolation spectacles as an experiment studying the use (both ethical and affective) of human suffering. Dreyer puts melodrama on trial in the guise of historical authenticity. The absence of a diegetic theater in *Jeanne d'Arc* makes its motivating questions appear more direct and true. Yet such questions as, "Can the physical suffering of a young woman convince, convert, affect or even transform the spectators watching her?"; or "What happens in the presence of this suffering? What does it achieve?"; or importantly, "What transformation it can engender?" actually form a vein of continuity in Dreyer's *oeuvre*. *Jeanne d'Arc* illustrates melodrama's capacity to reflect upon its depictions of suffering through its depictions of diegetic spectators experiencing the attraction-repulsion that it can sometimes provoke in its cinema spectators, whether in the converted monk who sheds a tear as Jeanne's head is shaved, or ultimately in "the broad public" that we see erupt in frantic, distraught pathos at *Jeanne*'s immolation.

Jeanne d'Arc also makes melodrama's attraction-repulsion particularly apparent in the focused reactions of individual, morally ambiguous spectators who, though initially seem sinister, are converted by Jeanne's suffering and demonstrate this by shedding their own tears. Dreyer hones in on the strange beauty of Massieu's (Antonin Artaud) attraction-repulsion to the spectacle of Jeanne's suffering self-sacrifice. Initially, he acts to save Jeanne's life (trying to convince her to recant), but ultimately finds himself in the somewhat lamentable position of having to kill a young woman to create a saint. It is not surprising, considering *Jeanne d'Arc*'s investment in authenticity, that Dreyer would (though perhaps not intentionally) replicate such ethical quandaries and interactions of the trial on set by extending melodramatic interaction to the proxy spectators (cast and crew) inhabiting the stage-set. The intensity of Falconetti's experience and the possible ethical boundaries that might have been broached in filming it have become an understood part of Dreyer's elevation of the pure-hearted, melodramatic starlet to tragic artist. Bordwell's account is typical in this respect,

Indeed so intense were Dreyer's demands that some have accused him of immersing Falconetti *too* deeply in her role, of torturing her no less cruelly than the judges tortured Jeanne. It is hard to see how else Dreyer could

have elicited from an actress celebrated for light comedies a performance of unequalled tragic power. (*Filmguide* 18)

Accusations of Dreyer's misconduct in pursuit of authentic images of suffering could go so far as to accuse him of deriving sadistic pleasure in achieving them. Paul Moor's 1951 article, "The Tyrannical Dane" is a key example,

Dreyer's major works have all been concerned with anguish and horror, and his methods of achieving these effects have caused some hard feelings among his actors. The commonest charge against Dreyer is that he is a sadist. He has been known to pinch an actor cruelly in order to get a desired expression of pain. When Maria Falconetti played 'Joan' for him, Dreyer ordered all her hair cut off; Falconetti pled, raged, and, finally, conceding, wept bitterly; Dreyer not only filmed her weeping, but there were among those present some who swear he derived an uncommon enjoyment from the spectacle. (35-36)

As I have argued elsewhere, Dreyer did not take kindly either to the implication that he derived pleasure in producing a spectacle of suffering on set. He adamantly declared that he never put his actresses through anything that they did not willingly agree to do.¹⁶ Dreyer never took Falconetti's tears lightly. Referring to Falconetti's collaboration on the *Jeanne d'Arc* project, he would declare categorically that her tears were of her own free will. But while calling Dreyer a sadist oversimplifies his relationship to creating depictions of pain, Dreyer did also believe that film was an endeavor worth undergoing significant duress, intense experience, and perhaps even real suffering to create. Dreyer's sometimes uncomfortable conviction that real suffering must occur (whether self-willed or not) in order to capture it on film, so that art might (paradoxically) play some part in ending suffering, symbolizes Dreyer's attraction-repulsion toward melodrama. We find a correlate in *Jeanne d'Arc* as well, in which the destructive yet sweet adoration we see Massieu perform toward Jeanne, embodies Dreyer's conflicted relationship to the mode. A beautiful *rassonneur* character standing in for Dreyer, Massieu looks lovingly and in awe upon the young woman, helping to cause her earthly discomfort in order to facilitate its transcendence. Like Dreyer, who brings one of Falconetti's tears to his lips after filming her shaved head, Massieu is the only one in *Jeanne d'Arc* ever to wipe Jeanne's tears away.

Jeanne's shaven head: theater and film collapse

When Drum and Drum write of *Jeanne d'Arc*'s iconic head shaving sequence ("The ultimate act of reality for the film is of course the shaving of Joan's head," 139), they intuitively acknowledge the scene's unique (*ultimate*) status within the film. In my reading, this scene marks the culmination of Dreyer's experimentation with transforming the set of *Jeanne d'Arc* into a performance event. Jeanne's haircut sequence moves us differently than the public spectacle of her immolation, which we know must ultimately have been accomplished with a doll rather than a human body. Whereas the immolation might have been shot over and over if need be, the thrill and pathos of the haircutting scene capitalizes on the biological limits of performance such as we have in the theater—a *real* haircut cannot be (easily) re-shot. During this corporeal spectacle the film comes closest to being able to convince a concerned cinema spectator of the presence of these

¹⁶ For a discussion of Dreyer's fascination with harm incurred through performance on-set, see Doxtater.

bodies, enough to step on-stage and intervene. This pathos derives from the annihilation of all distance between being and representing. Our concern for Falconetti's duress is inextricable from Jeanne's.

Dreyer had begun experimenting with the pathos that could be produced by depriving an imprisoned protagonist of her locks several years earlier. In the French Revolution episode of *Leaves from Satan's Book*, Marie Antoinette (played by the famous opera singer Tenna Kraft) nobly endures having her hair unceremoniously snipped in preparation for her execution. Marie Antoinette suffers the loss of her hair perhaps a bit too nobly; unlike Jeanne, she doesn't shed a tear. While the imprisonment and impending execution of Jeanne and Marie Antoinette link them together thematically, Dreyer's graphic and vivid shearing of Falconetti's hair constitutes a decided magnification of the scene. Marie Antoinette's haircut is shot entirely from behind, allowing no reaction shot of her face. Any pathos that Dreyer hoped to generate would have been assembled in the spectator's imagination as the *Leaves from Satan's Book* image itself offers no visual indication of its effect on Marie Antoinette or the actress playing her, Tenna Fredriksen [Kraft]. (It is not entirely clear from the shot that it is Kraft's hair that is cut.) In *Jeanne d'Arc*, Dreyer magnifies the same scene by positioning the camera in front of Jeanne and then offering shot after shot of scissors cutting bare tracks into a scalp that can only be Falconetti's. We witness the wispy scraps of hair fall across her forehead and cling to her tear-stained cheeks. The *Jeanne d'Arc* sequence shocks and moves because it documents (in deliberate, extended duration) Falconetti's head *being* sheared rather than *representing* a haircut.

The intensity with which Dreyer's pushed this ideal of "being" on-set— including the strong signal it sends about Dreyer's extreme media-awareness—is part of what makes the *Jeanne d'Arc* project look avant-garde. But the similarly corporeal spectacle of stage melodrama also exploited such extreme realism, using "real" props to conflate semiotic and phenomenological orders and produce pathos and thrill. Spectacular stage melodrama too conducted thrilling experiments with authentic performance, for instance by pulling actual steam engines or authentic chainsaws on stage and putting live, (human) bodies in their way. By tying its heroines up to be sawed in half by an *authentic* log saw, or crushed by an *authentic* locomotive brought on stage, audience concern shifted back and forth from the actor's own body and the role she played. As Singer writes of stage melodrama's audiences, "They feared for the actor's flesh, not the protagonist's. This form of spectacular realism shifts the frame of attention from a believable diegetic realm, the frame one would expect realism to foster, to the material circumstances of the theater. Indeed, this is the precondition for the spectacle's effectiveness as a thrill" (*Melodrama and Modernity* 185). Arguing against the misconception that stage melodrama was a space of pure identification and feeling, Singer asserts that it has reflective aspects built in from the beginning. The spectator's recognition of the material circumstances of the theater is one manifestation of this. Melodrama, like avant-garde performance, can estrange and break with the illusionistic frame of the performance to elicit powerful feelings of pathos and empathy—for the performers involved. Singer's explanation further unsettles the claim that melodrama feeds over-identification, and supports the idea that melodrama spectatorship initiates complex negotiations of its legible orders.

The *Jeanne d'Arc* project follows in this vein of experimentation with the material conditions of the stage. Dreyer had undertaken several during his early career,

particularly if we trace it back to his scenarios as Nordisk. He devised several immersive environments for his actors to experience and inhabit. He filmed *Prästänkan* (*The Parson's Widow*, 1921) in the actual buildings of Norwegian open-air museum Maihaugen, and equipped the set in *Du Skal Ære din Hustru* (*Master of the House*, 1925) with four sides and running water. *Vampyr* would also be shot in found locations intended to spook the cast that more or less inhabited them. Neither was *Jeanne d'Arc* the first project in which Dreyer exposed his actors to duress or potential harm. For *The Bride of Glomdal*, Dreyer put his protagonist's bodily well-being at risk to capture an authentic shot of a man struggling to swim against rushing river rapids. These projects show the desire for realism, for shocking thrill, and the more subdued thrill of reading performing bodies to be entirely consistent.

The accounts of actors and cast who inhabited the small medieval town-set during the *Jeanne d'Arc* project attest to Dreyer's heightening and intensifying this drive toward spectacular realism. With the head shaving scene in *Jeanne d'Arc*, Dreyer undertakes to distill melodramatic spectacle to exploit its purest effect and take melodrama's mechanisms to a "higher" order. Jean Renoir's rendering of Jeanne's haircutting scene, for instance, imbues Dreyer's orchestration of virtue revealed with the aura of religious ritual. Renoir's religious language transforms the revelation of a *varieté* starlet's virtue ("the very heart of his subject") into a rite of religious purification with transformative influence on the film's spectators. Renoir writes,

The sight of this admirable face deprived of its natural adornment plunged Dreyer into the very heart of his subject. This shaven head was the purity of Joan of Arc. It was her faith. It was her invincible courage. It was her innocence, even stronger than the knavery of her judges. It was the resistance to oppression and tyranny; it was also a bitter observation of the eternal brutality of those who believe themselves to be strong. It was the ineffectual protest of the people. It was the affirmation that in human tragedies it is always the poor who pay; and also that the humility of these poor people makes them closer to God than the right and the powerful could ever be. That shaven head said all this and much more to Dreyer. It was and remains the abstraction of the whole epic of Joan of Arc. What is miraculous is that this is also the case with the spectators who continue to come and purify themselves in the pure waters of Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*. (44).

Renoir's abstraction of the sequence into hyperbolic, near Manichean categories: a battle between innocence and eternal brutality, between the poor who suffer and the powerful who never pay their share, interweaves melodramatic juxtaposition and religious transformation. Just as Dreyer brought aspects of the trial's interrogation to the filming, he also orchestrated a parallel religious ordeal that it sought to portray. The filmmaking process took on aspects of the religious transformation it sought to depict. The haircutting sequence is a climactic moment here as well; it is when Jeanne is stripped of her hair that there ceases to be any question that she has stops performing the role of a saint and becomes one—it instigates visually Jeanne's recantation. Although the scene of her immolation will officially confirm her martyrdom, it is during the shaving of her hair that she recognizes her own true heart.

Dreyer adds an intriguing cinematic layer to this climactic sequence in his curious decision to intercut the haircutting spectacle (Jeanne's body undergoing religious transformation) with shots of sideshow players performing a variety of bodily spectacle for the masses gathered outside. On one hand, the shots of a sword swallower thrusting a sword through his mouth and down into the length of his body, or of a contortionist sculpting the flesh and bones of his limbs into shapes that for most would be excruciatingly painful, accentuates the corporeality of Jeanne's ordeal. These shots embody corporeal performance as its most pure, non-representational form. Circus sideshow spectacle elicits awe, wonder, and concern in its audiences that witness "the unusual physical and mental powers of the performers" (Fischer-Lichte 14). The authenticity of these performing bodies lies in the thrill of their unavoidable mortality (in *Jeanne d'Arc*, this is symbolically reinforced by the unearthing of a skull); bodily risk is integral to circus art. Dreyer's likening of the riskiness and the *being*-ness of Jeanne's and Falconetti's combined ordeal to the *being*-ness of contortionists and sword-swallowers makes a bold gesture toward affirming the authenticity of performance. We can presume that, like Falconetti, the sword swallower actually swallowed a sword on-set, as opposed to pretending to do so. On the other hand, in making this parallel cinematically, Dreyer cuts away from the scene of the haircut—interrupting its ontological claims to theatrical presence. Cutting to the scene going on outside severs the immersive experience of duration of the haircut by introducing cinema's suturing presence or contemporaneity; editing brings interior and exterior shots together as contemporaneous. On one hand, Dreyer's inclusion of circus spectacle takes melodrama back to the kind of vital, interactive, expressive, public performance of sideshow spectacle that French Boulevard melodrama and later early Danish film melodrama would incorporate (tight-rope stunts from church towers, sets on fire). On the other hand, he accomplishes this by exploiting cinema's potential as cinema. Editing in the circus performers doubles the corporeality of the haircutting spectacle—heightening the primary, direct appeal to spectacle, at the same time that it draws the spectator away from it. Dreyer's sequence concedes another attraction-repulsion here, asserting film as film and at the same time longing for theatrical presence. We are prohibited from actually witnessing Falconetti's hair and tears fall to the ground. Unlike Dreyer or Artaud or Valentine Hugo or the extras watching Jeanne go up in flames, the cinema spectator cannot be present to catch one of Falconetti's tears on her finger.

Looking at the sequence from another perspective shows Dreyer's iconic scene as setting in motion—cinematically—the kind of oscillation between religious ritual and circus sideshow that Fischer-Lichte attributes to avant-garde performance practice and its investments in spectacular realism. In eliciting pathos, Dreyer draws upon the same sources—religious ritual and circus performance—that would inspire avant-garde performance art of the 1960s. Fischer-Lichte has outlined how in seeking moments of conflation between being and representing, avant-garde performance art (in the 1960s) drew upon religious ritual and sideshow spectacle as contexts in which an audience might expect that a "performer" could inflict physical pain on him or herself. Again, this relies on *actual* harm, not the representation of harm to be inflicted upon any character. Avant-garde performance, according to Fischer-Lichte, like religious ritual, seeks to engender (religious) transformation both in the body of the participant undergoing the ritual and in the audience. In the context of an art gallery or installation piece, this might entail the

transformation of a spectator from passive voyeur to active participant (or vice versa), imbuing the performance situation with an implicit ethical charge. Fischer-Lichte reads the oscillation between religious ritual and fairground spectacle in Marina Abramović's performance piece, *Lips of Thomas*, which took place in the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck on October 24, 1975. Over the course of two hours, the naked artist ingested large amounts of wine and honey, used a razor to carve a star into the skin of her abdomen, flagilated herself, and then after drawing a star-shaped frame around a photograph of a man with long hair who resembled her, lay down, bleeding, atop a huge cross of ice. A radiator suspended above her both melted the ice cross and thinned her blood so that she bled more profusely. The collection of gallery observers watching this grew uncomfortable with watching the artist's physical suffering and finally stepped in to remove her from her icy cross. Inflicting harm upon herself pressed Abramović's audience to make the ethical decision to stop consuming the spectacle and intercede to end her performance and her (self-inflicted) physical harm. As Fischer-Lichte describes the way this avant-garde performance event incorporated elements of religious ritual and circus performance.

...Abramović's performance notably exhibited elements of ritual as well as spectacle, that is to say, it hinted both at a religious and a fairground context. In fact, it constantly oscillated between the two. It was ritualistic by virtue of engendering a transformation of the performer and certain spectators but lacked the publically recognized change in status or identity, as it often the case with rituals. It resembled a spectacle by virtue of eliciting awe and horror from the spectators, shocking and seducing them into becoming voyeurs. Such a performance eludes the scope of traditional aesthetic theories. It vehemently resists the demands of hermeneutic aesthetics, which aims at understanding the work of art. In this case, understanding the artist's actions was less important than the experiences that she had while carrying them out and that were generated in the audience. In short, the transformation of the performance's participants was pivotal (16).

Fischer-Lichte's phenomenology-based aesthetics of performance poses interesting problems for film spectatorship. Although watching a film might cause reactions, visceral and otherwise, in the spectators watching it, the occasion of watching film, for her, cannot by definition constitute performance because it cannot react to its audience as live performers necessarily do. The question remains whether Dreyer's (unconscious) project to strip early Danish film melodrama down to its barest bones—unearthing its skull, as it were, to exploit its most primal affective charge—constitutes a piece of avant-garde performance art in and of itself. The vital mixture is there on film and on set: religious transformation in performer and audience, and the *being* of the contortionists. Considering Jeanne d'Arc as both being and depicting performance event unearths interesting subterranean connections between avant-garde performance and melodrama. *Jeanne d'Arc* stands as an extraordinarily galvanized version of the kind of performance scenes commonly found in Nordisk melodrama.

Most importantly, Dreyer attempts to use film to create theater's capacity to communicate pathos through tears. Dreyer seeks to use film to engender the transformation possible between live, performing bodies. Dreyer imagines film's utmost

capacity for moving its audiences as bringing them to tears. Crucial to Dreyer's affective ambitions in *Jeanne d'Arc* is the fact that the cinema audience is not the only witness to her suffering; diegetic spectators also witness Jeanne's tears, recognize her suffering, and weep. The abundance of affective interaction in *Jeanne d'Arc* immediately sends the film into melodrama's territory and secures its place in body genre. As Charles Affron writes, arguing that melodramatic affect should be valorized in judging the interaction between a film text and a reader, "If we consider the movies to be a meaning-generating body of art, we cannot afford to dismiss proof that meaning has in fact been generated. Tears are that proof." (98) Not only are tears an immediately recognizable and communicable symbol of pathos, when they occur in an audience (both for the cinema audience as for the diegetic crowd watching her immolation), they serve as important evidence that a wordless transmission of meaning has occurred. Not only does Jeanne perpetually cry, she causes others to cry. One judge swallows an unexpected tear at the sight of Jeanne's hair being shorn off. The climactic sequence of Jeanne's immolation produces an extended, eruptive paroxysm of pathos as the camera pans across face after face of weeping peasants. Tears provide evidence of human communication; Jeanne's suffering has not been in vain.

Buñuel's effusive response to *Jeanne d'Arc*—which focuses on the film's capacity for pathos and pushing ethical boundaries rather than its formal estrangements—echoes Dreyer's own conflicts with melodrama. Buñuel created both melodrama and avant-garde films, providing another model (along with Abel Gance) for Dreyer's combination of the two. Buñuel's response encapsulates, I think, Dreyer's attraction and repulsion to watching images of suffering and the potential to imbue melodrama with an avant-garde sensibility. Buñuel writes,

And the humanity of the Maid of Orleans spills forth from this work of Dreyer's more than from any other performance we have seen. We all wanted to give her a little thrashing just to be able to hand her a sweet right after. Not letting her have dessert to punish her childish integrity, her transparent stubbornness—that we could see; but why burn her? Spotted with tears, licked by flames, hair cropped short, dirty as a street urchin, she stops crying for one moment to watch pigeons alight on the church cupola. Then she dies. (122)

While drawn to images of Jeanne's suffering—condoning a diminutive thrashing, a hint of sadism to bring them forth, Buñuel bears witness to their pathos—but he also questions their ultimate purpose. The question, "why burn her?" seems to give Dreyer his own little thrashing for not interceding on Jeanne's behalf. This capacity for eliciting strong affect and shock, incorporating reflective breaks in the diegesis, and exploration of ethical boundaries bring melodrama into curious connection with the avant-garde and modernism. But Buñuel's imagination of Jeanne's tears evokes precisely the kind of immersive performance experience that Dreyer desired to bring about in film: "We have kept one of her tears, which rolled down to us, in a celluloid box. An odorless, tasteless, colorless tear, a drop from the purest spring." A tear rolling down into the audience provides the most exquisite proof of film's capacity for pathetic communication, the perfect transformation of film into a performance event. Buñuel's effusive reaction to *Jeanne d'Arc*'s tears as a source of pure innocence and affect—evidence of humanity

extinguished—designates the tear as a spring of inspiration from which melodrama and avant-garde alike will draw.

CHAPTER 4

INHERITING MELODRAMA: *DAY OF WRATH*

In the standard trajectory of Dreyer's development as an artist, *Day of Wrath* stands as the first in his suite of late, "mature" films (alongside *The Word* and *Gertrud*). Although Dreyer had long propounded his desire for film to be a medium of individual artistic vision—an essential part of elevating film to the status of the other arts—Dreyer's rhetoric around *Day of Wrath* accentuates this, as if to indicate that he has finally come into his own as a filmmaker. The pressure to use *Day of Wrath* to assert his identity as a maker of artistic film would have been exacerbated by the fact that the film was to be Dreyer's comeback after an 11-year hiatus from feature filmmaking. (Between *Vampyr* in 1932 and *Day of Wrath* he would make only one short film.) Public debates about the status of film in Denmark had often conflated Dreyer's career with the fate of the national film industry as a whole, but releasing *Day of Wrath* in 1943 raised these stakes even higher. A film made by a Danish director in occupied Denmark easily became a symbol of national pride. In his article "A Little on Film Style" (1943) ("Lidt om Filmstil"), a detailed account of his ambitions with the *Day of Wrath* project, Dreyer establishes the director's artistic personality as a crucial factor in redeeming film from the factory-like production environment of early Danish cinema and moving it forward as an art. He writes, "we directors [have] a great responsibility. It is in *our* hands to raise film from industry to art. If film as an art form is not to stand still, we must seek to create films that are marked with style and personality. Only from them can we await renewal."¹ As this passage suggests, Dreyer's inspiration for renewal was never exclusively forward-looking. Elsewhere in the article he writes that imbuing film with one's personality and artistic vision entails confronting the influence of two residual forces from the past: the silent cinema and the theater. Film must extricate itself from each. Dreyer laments that sound film still bears traces of silent era rhythm in which editing that exceeded narrative purposes went too fast, resulting in numerous flourishes of empty action such as actors flying across the screen. Dreyer describes the problem as, "actually a legacy (*arv*) from the silent era—a legacy, that sound film has yet to shake off."² Silent film, as Dreyer refers to it, used rhythm for rhythm's sake to compensate for a dearth of artistic content—empty intertitles and subject matter alike. These statements, which seem to certify Dreyer's break with his early career, actually illuminate a central paradox in Dreyer's *oeuvre*, namely that his cinematic renewal is instigated by his repeated and productive engagement with the vital (melodramatic) past he has inherited.

Although Dreyer never explicitly articulates his inheritance as a melodramatic one, it is no great leap to link this undesirably empty rhythm to what Dreyer elsewhere describes as early Danish film melodrama's overuse of antiquated histrionics, general implausibility, and lack of artistry. In one sense, *Day of Wrath* is a curiously dated choice for a project of renewing cinema. *Day of Wrath* was adapted from the Norwegian play

¹ "vi instruktører [har] et stort ansvar. Vi har det i vor hånd at løfte filmen fra industri til kunst. Skal filmen som kunstart ikke stå stille, må vi søge at skabe stilprægede, personlighedsprægede film. Kun fra dem kan vi vente fornyelsen" ("Filmstil" 72).

² "i virkligheden en arv fra stumfilmens tid – en arv, som talefilmen endnu ikke har rystet af sig" ("Filmstil" 74).

Anne Pedersdotter written by Hans Wiers-Jenssen in 1908, but its action was set much earlier in the seventeenth century. Also, Dreyer's initial inspiration for the film was a stage production of that play he had seen over twenty years before he sought to film it. Seen in conversation with melodrama's own historiographical paradoxes, however, as a mode both nostalgic and insistently adaptive, timely and timeless—*Day of Wrath* makes more sense. Looking at *Day of Wrath* as a document of Dreyer's artistic development illuminates his reaction to and re-imagining of the melodramatic mode.

Dreyer's depiction of individual will set against influential figurations of the past in *Day of Wrath* provides an opportunity to consider his attraction and repulsion to the mode. Although Dreyer certainly resists the temptation in *Day of Wrath* to hurl bodies frenetically across the screen (with the possible exception of Herlofs Marthe's plummeting descent into the flames), he clings tenaciously to other aspects of his melodramatic past to propel cinema forward. The professed desire to shake off melodrama suggests the persistence of its stigma for Dreyer, who, in contrast to both Douglas Sirk and Henry James, never embraced it openly during his lifetime. At the same time, Dreyer's perceived need to shake the past off at all also indicates melodrama's tenacious presence in his *oeuvre*. *Day of Wrath* figures Dreyer's struggle to assert his individual identity as an artist in relation to a seductive, powerful form to which he is drawn, but from which he must distance himself for fear of its potentially dangerous (stigmatic) consequences. Melodrama helps to illuminate central paradoxes in Dreyer's artistic production, and his immensely productive grappling with the melodramatic mode also broadens our understanding of how the mode develops.

It is telling that Dreyer opted to make a psychologically rich, spectacularly occult domestic melodrama for his comeback film. In seeking to elevate *Day of Wrath* as either art-house cinema or tragic, critics have glossed over the film's undeniable domestic melodrama: its spectacular subject matter (witchcraft, soul murder, love triangle) and use of the domestic sphere to stage its intrigues. The psychological complexity displayed by the film's characters, the film's intent exploration of interiority, and its narrative ambiguity (the lack of clear causality or happy resolution) have been used to further distinguish the film from any trace of domestic melodrama. In the first section of this chapter I argue that depicting psychological interiority and the constriction of desire in the domestic sphere had been an interest of Dreyer's already at Nordisk. The use of surface, depth, and "binding" in *Day of Wrath* displays an intriguing continuity with Dreyer's early scenarios at the company and shows his artistic process to be imbued with melodramatic elements as well. I consider recurring themes of *lace* (including needlework, spinning, and fabric) as added surfaces upon which to read the psychological dismay of young protagonists to show *Day of Wrath* to be a stylish reconfiguration of domestic melodrama's alternation between expressivity and censorship. I then consider *Day of Wrath*'s insistent fascination with Anne's smoldering eyes, visuality, and tears—the manifestation of her psychological suffering, stifled desires and constricted volition—as another point at which to mark Dreyer's continued interest in issues of interiority and embodiment also present at Nordisk.

In many respects, the stylized restraint with which Dreyer revisits themes and concerns of early Danish film melodrama in *Day of Wrath* makes it look like what Peter Brooks calls secondary melodrama. Brooks reads a general developmental trajectory of primary to secondary melodrama in James's *oeuvre*, through which the charge of overt,

direct melodrama is restrained and reflected to create an indirect, more nuanced melodrama of consciousness. This corresponds to a general transition from depicting outward action to reflect inner states to depicting internal states so as to reflect outer action. Brooks writes of James's career, "If in *The American*, we feel to a degree the outer, manifest melodrama working to shape the dimensions of Newman's final inner choice, later in James's career we sense the inner melodrama reflecting upon and charging the outer action" (*Imagination* 158). According to Brooks, James transmutes the elemental charge of his early, primary melodrama into a stylized, secondary melodrama. Dreyer's aesthetic aspirations for *Day of Wrath* align well with secondary melodrama's use of complex, reflective depictions of human experience and interaction. Like the melodrama of James's late work, Dreyer too heightens and intensifies depictions of everyday life seeking to create dramas of consciousness that bring about cataclysm without ever violently rupturing the surface of propriety. Also consistent with secondary melodrama, conflicts in Dreyer's film revolve less around questions of good and evil and more around an intense ethical imagination—a preference for impossible choices and grave betrayals.

But *Day of Wrath* cannot simply be labeled secondary melodrama, for Dreyer also extensively draws upon the kind of bold, direct appeals to suffering and corporeal spectacle at the heart of primary melodrama. *Day of Wrath*, figures a rich tangle of primary and secondary melodrama, much like Nordisk, which also incorporated both direct and indirect melodrama. This makes *Day of Wrath* an intriguing document of melodrama's potential hybridity and raises questions about the applicability of Brooks's trajectory to the Danish context. Reading Dreyer's film in conjunction with his work at Nordisk (which also combined elements of primary and secondary melodrama) provides a fascinating test case for Brooks's largely unexplored observation that even James's nuanced, late melodrama of consciousness frequently incorporated "strong and violent action" that "correlates to and delivers, over the footlights as it were, the intensity of his melodrama of consciousness" (*Imagination* 158). Whereas Brooks describes James's project as a transmutation of melodramatic materials and techniques—more or less abandoning primary for secondary melodrama—the dramatic conflicts in *Day of Wrath* dramatize and illuminate a variety of potential ways for generations of melodrama to relate. This ranges from outright conflict and uneasy cohabitation, to the potentially dangerous, invisible-yet-embodied transmission of melodramatic powers from one generation to the next. Looking at melodramatic technique in relation to its *own* earlier iterations—as opposed to seeing it as relating and adapting exclusively within conventions of realism—offers a new way of thinking about melodrama's development as self-referencing. In other words, what might be read as a hybrid combination of melodrama and realism, or melodrama and tragedy, can be read as melodramatic hybridity. After considering the creative hybridity of Dreyer's melodramatic characterizations in *Day of Wrath*, I conclude the chapter by reading the ambiguous causality in the film's diegetic world as Dreyer's art-house inflection of domestic melodrama.

Psychological interiority

In seeking to establish the artistic merits of *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer and his critics appealed to its new psychological depth, complexity and interiority. In production materials

accompanying *Day of Wrath*, for instance, Christen Jul (who had collaborated with Dreyer on the *Vampyr* script) predicates Dreyer's seriousness as a filmmaker upon his ability to depict psychological interiority.

Carl Th. Dreyer returns to Danish film! What could be better? We need him! For the reason that this Danish man is known the world over is simply that he was one of the very first to teach the world that film is something to be taken seriously. He was a part of raising it from tomfoolery (*Gøgl* lit. a kind of circus performance) to art, showing what depths of the mind and what great arenas of the imagination film is capable of depicting.³

Underlying Jul's remarks is the assumption that the Nordisk *Gøgl* that Dreyer had made previously had neither the ambition nor ability to depict complex interior states. Jul rehearses a familiar binary that sets up "the depths of the mind" (*Sindets Dybder*) as antithetical to melodramatic superficiality. Dreyer too embraced this binary, aligning realism, tragedy, and high art with nuanced psychological depth, while associating popular culture, Danish silent film (and by extension its melodrama) with easy, "external," overt drama. In "A Little on Filmstyle" Dreyer uses psychological penetration to outline his artistic ambition, describing the desire to penetrate beneath appearances, to grant the film spectator the kind of tension (*Spænding*) that stems less from external drama (*udvendig Dramatik*) than from the course of the conflict between souls or psyches (*sjælelige Konflikters Forløb*). It is his protagonist Anne's interior and psychological drama, her inner experiences that we want to experience (*sjælelige Oplevelser, vi vil opleve*). "We want to fathom, to infiltrate, the people we see."⁴

Dreyer's avoidance of "external drama" actually sets in motion intricate interactions between interiority and exteriority, producing melodramatic tension. Dreyer uses legible *surfaces* in *Day of Wrath*—understood to include a general urge to expressivity, theatrical gesture, histrionic action, or the direct address of "external," overt drama—to imagine depth. Depth must be made legible on bodily surfaces. Melodrama scholarship since Dreyer has shown the mode to be quite adept at investing such surfaces with (psychological) meaning in order to convey the conflicts festering beneath them. Dreyer's enduring interest in psychology and neurosis shares many points in common with the way melodrama scholars have incorporated the psychological. Brooks has made the parallel between melodrama and Freudian psychology explicit, allowing Dreyer's attempts to make non-melodramatic, psychological film entirely compatible with innovations in melodrama's investment in surface. Brooks writes:

Psychoanalysis can be read as a systematic realization of the melodramatic aesthetic, applied to the structure and dynamics of the mind.

Psychoanalysis is a version of melodrama first of all in its conception of the nature of conflict, which is stark and unremitting, possibly disabling, menacing to the ego, which must find ways to reduce or discharge it. The

³ "Carl Th. Dreyer vender tilbage til dansk Film! Hvad kunde være bedre? Vi har Brug for ham! Thi Grunden til, at denne danske Mand er kendt Verden over, er den simple, at han var en af de allerførste, der lærte Verden, at Film er noget, der skal tages alvorligt. Han var med til at løfte den fra Gøgl til Kunst og at paavise, hvilke Sindets Dybder og hvilke vældige Fantasiens Omraader, Filmen formaar at skildre" (*Day of Wrath* Program, Dreyer Collection, DFI: 1A Vredens Dag, 20-21).

⁴ "Vi ønsker at trænge ind på og ind i menneskene, som vi ser på lerredet" ("Filmstil" 75).

dynamics of repression and the return of the repressed figure the plot of melodrama. (*Imagination* 201)

Surfaces in *Day of Wrath* harness emotion through the meticulous repression of affect in a way different from *Jeanne d'Arc*, however. In contrast to Jeanne's pervasive tears, Anne's tears are carefully withheld through most of the film, instigating the circuits of expression, censorship, and revelation in the melodrama of James or Sirk. The intensely stylized mise-en-scène of *Day of Wrath* bears strong affinities to Elsaesser's reading of the way Sirk and Minelli, among others, represent the psychological conflict of their characters indirectly in elaborate mise-en-scène. Compare for instance Sirk's comments regarding his use of color and deep-focus lenses in *Written on the Wind* ("I wanted this to bring out the inner violence, the energy of the characters which is all inside them and can't break through" [68]) with Dreyer's articulation of similarly repressive tensions in *Day of Wrath*,

And isn't it true that the great dramas are played out in silence? People hide their feelings and avoid showing on their faces the storms that are raging inside them (*i deres indre*). Tension lies under the surface only to be released the day that catastrophe strikes. It is this latent tension, this smoldering unease behind the daily life of the family at the parsonage, that I have been compelled to convey (*få frem*).⁵

Dreyer's interest in catastrophe's release of latent tension, a melodramatic expression of depth, also serves Dreyer's humanist aspirations for art to shed light on what it is existentially to be human in the world. Interiority becomes important for Dreyer as an authentic source of humanity proceeding from the manifestation of inner truth, an aim shared both by psychoanalysis and melodrama. At stake is the attempt to understand how humans exteriorize interiority: "our study of melodrama immediately suggested that the form exteriorized a world within" (Brooks, *Imagination* 202). And further: "Since Diderot, it has been evident that the uncovering and exploitation of the latent content of mind would bring melodramatic enactments, and that melodramatic enactments would, in their breakthrough of repression, carry the message of our inner selves" (Brooks, *Imagination* 202). Dreyer associates interiority (that which is underneath and hidden) with what is most true, in part to distance himself from Nordisk's purported inauthenticity. The external drama at Nordisk, he would argue, yielded its truths too easily by making them too immediately available and visible. Actually, melodrama's circuits of censorship and the question of how best to represent them had preoccupied Dreyer long before *Day of Wrath*. The term by which Dreyer evokes the interiority (*indre*) of his characters frequently occurs in his and other Nordisk scenarios. The challenge of depicting interiority is not what drew Dreyer away from melodrama, but rather what brought him back to the mode again and again.

Day of Wrath is in many ways a stereotypical domestic melodrama that elicits pathos by depicting a young female protagonist who experiences the awakening of her desires and then must repress (constrict, hide, or misrepresent) them in the face of relationships and intergenerational family intrigue that forbid them. In and of itself this

⁵ "Og er sandheden ikke, at de store dramaer udspilles i det stille? Menneskene skjuler deres følelser og undgår at vises på deres ansigter de storme, der raser i deres indre. Spændingen ligger under overfladen og kommer først til udløsning den dag, katastrofen sker. Det er denne latent spænding, denne ulmende uhygge bag præstefamiliens hverdag, det har været mig magt påliggende at få frem" ("Filmstil" 75).

provides a strong tie to Dreyer's earlier melodramatic endeavors; many of Dreyer's female protagonists suffer in marriages that inhibit the full expression of their will, agency, or desire. Scholars from Ebbe Neergaard onward have tended to underplay the tangle of domestic conflict in *Day of Wrath* and its melodramatic circuits of repression by reading the film as a broader cautionary tale against intolerance. But typical of melodrama's individualization and dramatization of conflict, *Day of Wrath* stages larger social conflict (persecution and religious intolerance) in a decidedly personalized domestic sphere, as Dreyer puts it, the pastor-family's daily life (*præstefamiliens hverdag*).

Alternatively, the film's domestic melodrama has been underplayed in favor of its cinematic style. When Bordwell writes of *Day of Wrath*, "A tale of witchcraft, passion, and murder, it has more melodramatic appeal than *Ordet* and *Gertrud*" (*Films of Dreyer* 117), he draws attention to its spectacular subject matter, largely in order to emphasize Dreyer's transcendence of it through his masterful use of cinematic form and ambiguity. Even though Dreyer's interest in the domestic sphere is readily apparent throughout Dreyer's *oeuvre*, its presence is underrepresented in Dreyer scholarship, putting me in the position of reading *Day of Wrath* somewhat obviously as an iteration domestic melodrama. Although I would agree that part of *Day of Wrath*'s melodramatic appeal derives from its depictions of domestic conflict (connecting it with *Ordet* and *Gertrud*), the domestic sphere is not the exclusive, defining feature of melodrama in this film, but rather a vehicle for exploring volition and the limitations on individual freedom experienced by a compelling female protagonist. Many of Dreyer's early melodramatic scenarios from Nordisk also feature protagonists who must test their will in "shaking off" dark, domestic secrets and hidden propensities of their ancestors. *The President*, for example, revolves entirely around the question of whether the protagonist Carl Victor can ever shake off his inheritance and break with his patrilineal "destiny" (that of falling in love with young girls of a lower class and then abandoning them and their offspring or marrying them unhappily). Dreyer's scenario *Ned med Vaabnene! (Lay Down Your Arms!* Holger-Madsen, 1915), adapted from Bertha von Suttner's 1889 novel, *Die Waffen nieder! Eine Lebensgeschichte*, presents a similar question another way, in terms of whether women, Martha and her sister Rosa (as wives and daughters) can stop their men (husbands, fathers, brothers) from perpetuating generations of "honorable" if destructive war-making behavior. All of this is to say that Dreyer's selection of *Day of Wrath* for his artistic comeback shows that, unlike most later scholars of his films, he clearly did not see depictions of dramatic intrigue in the domestic sphere as in any way incommensurate with the cinematic innovations of a director of artistic film.

Constrictive continuities: lace

Day of Wrath is at once a reiteration of the Nordisk's domestic melodrama and an attempt to "elevate" it by distilling its core conflicts. Dreyer had reimagined the conflicts arising among marital ties, oppressive familial secrets, and individual desire many times before. The protagonist and psychological suffering in Dreyer's Nordisk scenario, "Kniplinger" (Lace)⁶ from around 1919, adapted from a novel by the same name by Paul

⁶ The second version (b) of "Kniplinger" scenario deviates substantially from the version c, which has different page numbers and scene numbers. I use version "b" in my analysis because its plot aligns most closely with the plot description in the film's program.

Lindau later that year directed by August Blom as *Grevindens ære* (distributed in Great Britain as *Lace*) in 1919 bear a striking resemblance to those in *Day of Wrath*. Dreyer saw a performance of the play text *Anne Pedersdotter* at about the same time, which might help explain the parallel. That over two decades would elapse between that performance and his production of *Day of Wrath* proper further suggests that the revision of early work was an important part of Dreyer's artistic process. *Grevindens Ære* no longer exists as film, but Dreyer's scenario "Kniplinger" includes much what Dreyer found superficial about Nordisk's count-and-countess films that he had criticized in his article "Swedish Film" ("Svensk film") written about the same time, in 1920. *Day of Wrath* is distinctly void of the numerous minor characters that scurry through the "Kniplinger" scenario in a tangle of subplots and intrigues. In "Kniplinger," servants conspire to steal from their aristocratic employers, lovers get caught in clandestine meetings, a devious newspaper editor eager to sully the reputation of the noble house brings about a public trial for perjury, and a nobleman dies in a spectacular duel, during which the fatal bullet pierces not only his heart, but the revelatory letter concealed in his breast pocket. At the same time, foreshadowing the strong female leads that will be so intriguing to Dreyer in *Day of Wrath* and *Gertrud*, "Kniplinger" features a precocious, willful, 18-year-old countess named Julianne who marries a man many years her senior. "Kniplinger" even includes a version of Anne's proto-feminist accusation of Absalon that he married her and stole her youth without ever asking her whether she had returned his love. Julianne writes in her diary, "You have nothing to do with me. I haven't given you my youth and my love of life merely to receive food and clothing from you. I have grand claims, and you know that. I'll tell you this much: I will not have my life destroyed!"⁷ Both works set up an older husband, and the marriage he symbolizes, as constricting a young woman's desires and each young protagonist experiences true love in an affair that ends poorly.

Lace is a magnified melodramatic sign in "Kniplinger," in other words, an object whose surface is imbued with symbolic, over-determined meaning. "Kniplinger" makes literal the relationship between lace and both the ties of marriage as well as the unraveling effect of adulterous love. The fate of one very famous piece of lace, the beautiful and desirable Lamorale Lace, ties together many strands of plot and subplot. Originally a gift to King Philip on the occasion of his wedding to Mary [Marie] of England, the Lamorale carries with it a curse that dooms the marriage of whoever possesses it and brings misery to adulterers. In "Kniplinger," lace graphically intertwines Julianne's marital disappointments and fate with the lace as it is stolen, forged, and sewn into other pieces of handicraft.

In both "Kniplinger" and *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer also makes bodies the bearers of magnified signs when the denial of true love prompts the interiorization of disappointed desire. Dreyer makes emotion legible and manifest on Julianne's body when her recourse to verbal systems of expression is stifled. (Julianne sacrifices her own love—keeping it secret—so as to preserve the happiness of her young cousin. In *Day of Wrath*, Anne's "confession" in the culminating shots of Absalon's funeral instigates a similar muteness.) In part simply by virtue of being a silent film scenario, "Kniplinger" grants overt access

⁷ "Du behandler mig slet. Jeg har ikke skænket dig min Ungdom og min Livsglæde blot for at faa Mad og Klæder for dem. Jeg har store Fordringer, og du ved det. Og dette siger jeg dig: Jeg vil ikke have ødelagt mit Liv!" ("Kniplinger" 14).

to the emotional experience of Julianne's interior (*Indre*). A complex series of flashbacks shows Juliane articulating her deepest thoughts as she writes or reads her journal (thoughts and feelings likely also made readable as intertitles). Dreyer's scenario also provides indications of how Juliane's reactions should be made legible through conventional, bodily gesture. The scene in which Juliane finally relinquishes her lover reads, "She has risen and held out her hand to him, as if paralyzed. Now she stands, staring at the door, as it closes behind him, she founders suddenly, but straightens herself and walks with a hardened, bitter smile toward the door. A somnambulant bearing comes over her."⁸ Somnambulant (*søvngængerisk*) was a common stage direction used at Nordisk used to convey shock, profound emotional disturbance or situations of altered consciousness like hypnosis (an effect not unlike Johannes's bodily posture in *Ordet*). Some of the most striking passages in Dreyer's scenario depict Juliane's suffering (compounded by the unfortunate demise of her former lover in a dual) as a neurotic state pictured as *lace* constricting her from the outside-in. Dreyer imagines Juliane's horrible headache as a mass of lace, possibly visible in a very literal way (perhaps through superimposition?), "a compact mass, that presses down upon her brain in the form of a heap of lace."⁹ The characterization of Juliane's straightening and "smoothing out" the heap of lace to relieve her symptoms becomes a visual analogy to the talking cure, smoothing out a narrative of neurosis to relieve symptoms. "She has made it her mission to untangle the heap and smooth it out. After she has successfully accomplished this, the unbearable pressure will also disappear."¹⁰ All of this is to say that "Kniplinger" aspires to convey Juliane's interiority from the outside in; it is a scenario with aesthetic ambitions as psychological as *Day of Wrath*. It achieves these ambitions by drawing on spectacularly legible and overt manifestations.

In reimagining Juliane's conflict in *Anne*, Dreyer retains lace as a magnified sign in *Day of Wrath*, even granting its symbolic constrictions a similar manifestation in Anne's needlework and analogous iterations of spinning and needlework. Although it may not weave the film's plot together as tightly as in "Kniplinger," "lace" imbues bodily surfaces in *Day of Wrath* with added layers upon which to read the constriction of female desire. Quotidian activities as spinning and needlework in the film help establish the veneer of domesticity overlaying the interpersonal conflicts smoldering in the parsonage. Anne's spinning and humming—chastised by Merete—also grants an initial glimpse into the extent to which Anne's desire has blossomed. Anne's defiant flick of her spinning wheel speaks volumes about the threat her desire poses to the status quo. But the weight of "lace" upon Anne's desires will achieve its most manifest cinematic expression in the sequence depicting Anne's embroidery scrim. Martin's line, "Anne, what's to become of us?" still hangs in the air as the two lovers scurry quickly to either side of the scrim, struggling to act naturally after a passionate embrace. Anne's answer to the question is legible in the figure of mother and child—her desire for a family with Martin. All that remains to be stitched in is the child that Absalon is incapable of giving her.

⁸ "Hun har rejst sig og givet ham Haanden, ligesom lammet. Nu staar hun og stirrer mod Døren, der lukker sig bag ham, sinker saa pludseligt sammen, men retter sig og gaar med et stivnet, bitter Smil hen mod Døren. Der er noget af en Søvnngængeriske over hende" ("Kniplinger" 5-6).

⁹ "en kompakt Masse, der ligger og trykker paa hendes Hjerne i Form af en tyk Bunke Kniplinger" ("Kniplinger" 40).

¹⁰ "Hun har gjort det til sin Opgave at lose denne Bunke op og glatte den. Naar dette er lykkedes for hende, vil ogsaa det utaalige Tryk forsvinde..." ("Kniplinger" 40).

Dreyer conveys this constrictive lace in a way that draws attention to its cinematic nuance, while retaining the melodramatic legibility of the psychology depicted. The shot of Anne's face smiling sweetly at Martin from through her needlework adds a cinematic surface to the image that evokes the drama beneath the veneer of everyday life at the parsonage. This surface separates Anne visually from her love and the life that she envisions. One of Martin's POV shots shows Anne's non-stitching hand pressed against scrim as if caught behind it. Martin's POV shots will double the impression of Anne being boxed in by the frame in which the handiwork is held, further evoking a sense of Anne's entrapment. This frame is readily visible in Martin's POV shot, yet absent in the reverse shot (Anne's POV of Martin). Seeing Anne through the scrim accomplishes a kind of revision of the more overtly superimposed bolt of lace in "Kniplinger." The framing of Anne's face in middle close-up draws attention to the filmic frame. This highly medium-conscious moment—Dreyer adds the surface of the scrim to the shot—can thus be recuperated both through a modernist framework, as Dreyer's overt experimentation with form, but also in terms of reworking melodramatic surface to make legible Anne's desires. Only a neglect of melodrama's sophisticated play of surface and depth has allowed the lace to function purely as a modernist emblem of surface in Dreyer scholarship.

The sight of Anne's face through a lacy scrim can be seen as part of *Day of Wrath*'s more broad use of cloth "surface" to cultivate the film's pervasive environment of self-denial and censorship. Dreyer wraps the bodies of his actors in weighty costumes, stiffly starched collars and heavy, woolen cloaks. Only a few moments of bodily "escape" in the film will punctuate the almost palpable oppression of the parsonage. We sense the possibility of escape when Anne and Martin's airy indiscretions blossom as they romp around outside the parsonage wall, or in the sight of Anne's hair, freed and flaming through heavy top-lighting in the climactic scene in which she wishes Absalon dead. (I return below to the most brutally denuded body in the film, in Herlofs Marthe's interrogation sequence). Dreyer's use of imminently unrevealing attire and strong key lighting that bathes the parsonage in heavy shadow further limits expressive surfaces to exposed hands and faces.

This use of enveloped bodies to convey the experience of restriction in *Day of Wrath* can be seen as the intense distillation of the exteriorizations of such repression in "Kniplinger." The final scenes of Juliane's struggle to contain her emotion had fascinatingly graphic potential and verge on being masochistic. Lace, as Dreyer writes it, becomes the physical manifestation of Juliane's psyche. As the embodiment of her suffocated thoughts and dreams, it stifles her breath, draws a noose around her neck, and presses down upon her chest and body with the weight of a death cloak, silencing her.

Miserable, Juliane thrashes back and forth on her bed. (sic) with a terrible smoldering fever. Reality and dream, and even more awful images of what might happen, blend in and out of one another and become some insufferable, compact thing that in her excited mind takes on the form of the Lamoral lace. It soon binds her mouth like a muzzle, soon winding itself like a noose around her neck, soon coiling her chest together like an awful compress, and finally spreading out like a shroud over her stiff limbs. And she groans and incessantly repeats the old verse:

Dentelle Lamoral
Ecrase la moral,
Puis donne la mort a l'
Adultere fatale.

She repeats it incessantly throughout the long, endlessly-long night. . . .”¹¹
Vividly masochistic passages such as the one above might indicate Dreyer’s (and likely also Nordisk’s) early interest in the limits by which psychological conflict could be exploited for melodramatic impact without violating conventions of plausibility. Neither the program for *The Countess’s Honour* (*Grevindens ære*, as “Kniplinger” would be filmed) nor any of the remaining stills for the film indicate whether or how this scene was filmed or in what capacity its graphic charge was conveyed. One might imagine a shot of a fever-drenched woman, tossing about, grasping frantically at her hair and neck while growing increasingly paralytic, as a superimposed iris shot in medium close-up in the corner depicts alternate flashbacks of lace and better times spent with her former lover. Perhaps the scene would have culminated with an intertitle bearing the words of the curse. What is clear is that the scenario allowed Dreyer an early opportunity to contemplate the task of depicting psychological duress without recourse to sound or recorded voice.

The vivid corporeal imagery of the “Kniplinger” passage, with its intimations of death cloaks over paralyzed limbs and constrictive wrappings about the neck foreshadows the concrete contraptions—the naturalistic, historically accurate ones—that Dreyer will enlist to contain bodies in *Day of Wrath*. The way in which “Kniplinger” ties together the garb of the living with the wrapping of corpses resonates visually with the final scene in film in which Anne appears, at Absalon’s funeral, condemned by Merete’s accusations, to be undefended and abandoned by Martin. With no recourse to defense, Anne’s white mourning garb draped around her might as well be the wrapping of her own corpse. Even her hands remain swaddled and hidden in the satiny fabric that envelops her as she sits on the edge of Absalon’s coffin. Like the lace in the “Kniplinger” scene, Anne’s garb more or less silences her voice as well. She does not defend herself. Filmed without superimposition or editing, the entire blow of Martin’s fatal betrayal must register upon her face. In the final shot in which Anne appears, in close up, only her face remains visible; the last expression still available to her is her tears. Her impending doom makes her suffering uncomfortably beautiful and moving yet still decidedly manifest. In making Anne’s suffering psychological, Dreyer does not relinquish melodramatic surface, he consolidates it to be within the surface of Anne’s face.

Day of Wrath ends unhappily and ambiguously, which has caused it to be read as tragic. In Nordisk melodrama, however, ambiguity often went hand in hand with climactic appeals to pathos. The ending of “Kniplinger” will also foreshadow *Day of Wrath* in this way. In “Kniplinger,” Juliane ends her days alone and childless. Unlike

¹¹ “Den ulykkelige Juliane kaster sig frem og tilbage paa sit Leje. (sic) i en forfærdelig Feberglød. Virkelighed og Drøm, og endnu frygteligere Billeder af, hvad der kan ske, blander sig imellem hverandre og bliver til noget utaaleligt, kompakt noget, der i hendes ophidsede Fantasi antager Lamoral-Kniplingens Skikkelse og snart binder hendes Mund som en Knebel, snart slynger sig som en Strikke om hendes Hals, snart snorer hendes Bryst sammen som et frygteligt Bind og endelig breder sig som et Ligklæde over hendes stivnede Lemmer. Og hun stønner og gentager stadig det gamle Vers: Dentelle Lamoral Ecrase la moral, Puis donne la mort a l’Adultere fatale. Hun gentager det stadig i den lange-uendeligt lange Nat. . . .” (“Kniplinger” 37).

Anne (but evoking Gertrud in many ways) Juliane does not die, but rather sacrifices her own happiness for that of her young cousin and lives out her final days in a kind of neurotic, yet morally redeemed isolation, obsessively making lace. Her suffering, and the sacrifice of her own desires, however, has made her more beautiful and noble. In a scene in which she works to unravel her knotted psyche, her former lover and his new love appear before her mind (likely in a superimposed iris shot). “Close-up of Juliane, who, sitting on her sickbed sees an image gradually emerging (*tone frem*) (Medium close-up of Alix and Ulrich dancing at the Hedderdorf Ball). A wistful smile sweeps over her illness-ravaged features. There is something of the martyr’s feeling of joy in it.”¹² In the scene, as Dreyer has written it, Juliane’s suffering manifests itself directly on the surface of her body—her hair turns gray overnight—but also in her ambiguous expression, which vacillates between pain and a smile, embodying the paradoxical contentment of martyrdom. “Physically, she has recovered entirely. Her beautiful, luxuriant hair has become entirely gray, granting her youthful face the character of a head from the Rococo period. Her cheeks have once again grown full, but her eyes have taken on a peculiarly melancholy expression. Her pupils have dilated intensely.”¹³ The nobility and beauty of Juliane’s sacrifice of her own desire sets up a melodramatic resemblance to the self-martyrdom of Master Zoret in *Mikaël* and even visually, to *Gertrud*’s epilogue in which Gertrud appears aged thirty years, as a dignified old saint whose hair has also suddenly turned white. Juliane, like Gertrud, ends her days physically transformed into an elegant-if-ambiguously neurotic hermit. Each of these films culminates with the same ambiguity, ending unhappily (Juliane’s desires remain fundamentally unfulfilled), while at the same time raising the question of whether the beauty of noble suffering trumps happy narrative resolution. As these examples indicate, melodrama allowed Dreyer to experiment throughout his career with producing pathos not only through identification with effusive, tearful explosions of affect (such as in *Jeanne d’Arc*’s culminating montage sequence), but also through depictions of deliberately restricted expressivity.

Interestingly, Dreyer exacts a similar bodily containment in the limbs of his actors that he does in his protagonist, whose limbs are tied (visually), hindering her full range of gesture, motion, and expression. Echoing the on-set experimentation that he undertook with the *Jeanne d’Arc* project, Dreyer extends his pursuit of affect through constriction on-set with *Day of Wrath* as well. His account of his collaboration with cast and crew for *Day of Wrath* includes language rife with emotional denial, resisted temptations, and forceful deprivations of the expressive, gestural tools available to the theater, “the actors and I [have] in a good, unified effort worked to ‘de-theatricalize’ the film’s intrinsically very tense and concentrated scenes.”¹⁴ In a sense, Dreyer’s description of forcing externalized emotion inward echoes the transmutation of primary melodrama to secondary that Brooks reads as James’s project. De-theatricalization to achieve art here,

¹² “Nærbillede af Juliane, der paa sit Sygeleje ser et Billede tone frem (Brystbilledet af Alix og Ulrich dansende paa det Hedderdorfske Bal). Et vemodigt Smil farer over hendes af Sygdommen hærgede Træk. Der er noget af Martyrens Lykkefølelse i det” (“Kniplinger” 42).

¹³ “I lægkelig Henseende er hun kommet sig fuldstændig. Hendes smukke, yppige Haar er jævnt graaet over det hele og giver det ungdommelige Ansigt Karakter af et Hovede fra Rokokotiden. Hendes Kinder er atter blevne fyldige, men Øjnene har faaet et sælsomt tungsindigt Udtryk, Pupillerne har udvidet sig stærkt” (“Kniplinger” 44).

¹⁴ “skuespillerne og jeg [har] i god forening arbejdet på at ‘afteatralisere’ filmens i sig selv meget spændte og fortættede scener” (“Filmstil” 76).

involves the complicated, somewhat paradoxical choice of highly-dramatic material and spectacular subject matter so as to cultivate effect through the denial of its easy expression. Constriction, for Dreyer, results in a more focused, “truthful” affective appeal. He writes:

There is no shortage of internal (*sjælelige*) conflicts in ‘Day of Wrath.’ On the other hand, one would have to search for a long time to find material that tempts one to external drama to the same degree. I – and I dare say my actors with me – have chosen not to fall for this temptation. We have been equally zealous in our hunt of false exaggeration and established clichés. We forced ourselves to the truth.¹⁵

In effect, Dreyer cultivates melodramatic charge through *binding* affect into and onto bodies in *Day of Wrath*. Doing so, he figures a very deliberate interiorization of melodramatic surface to charge depth. This relationship of potentially volatile containment, self-censorship, and repression of desire has repercussions not only for individual actors or characters, but interestingly also for the director himself. The active restriction of surface in *Day of Wrath* offers a compelling visual allegory for Dreyer’s personal artistic project, namely inviting in and then denying large, expressive gesture, and emotion in order to constrain it within more artistically legitimate surfaces. Though Dreyer was either unable or unwilling to censor direct melodrama entirely, he implicitly acknowledged the artistic potential of melodramatic self-censorship. Henry James, in his late work, will have his melodrama and deny it; Dreyer has his melodrama *by* denying it.

Creative re-visions: eyes and visuality

Along with “lace,” eyes and visuality in *Day of Wrath* provide another point of continuity between depictions of melodramatic interiority in Dreyer’s late work and his early scenarios. *Day of Wrath* makes repeated reference to Anne’s eyes to indicate her interior experience, but eyes were also an important site of volition, consciousness, and interiority at Nordisk. The variability of Anne’s eyes attests to the psychological complexity of her character and a dividedness that contributes nuance to her character. Merete asks Absalon whether he has ever seen into Anne’s eyes, seen the way they burn. Merete sees only wickedness and desire, the proof that Anne is possessed, as her mother was before her. (The lighting on Merete’s eyes, in this scene in the parsonage following Herlofs Marthe’s death, makes them appear black and inhuman, like granite.) Shortly thereafter, Anne clings to Absalon and passionately implores him to hold her and make her happy. Absalon refuses, as he has much to talk to God about, but before leaving, demands that she look him in the eyes. Key lighting on her face shows them to be sparkly and reflective. Despite her having demanded that he hold her tight, he sees only the child that she once was, “Your wonderful eyes. So pure, innocent, and clear.” Then again, after calling Martin to her, he wipes away her tears of joy, looks deeply into her eyes and sees not the childlike innocence that his father had moments earlier, but passion. “No one has eyes as you have,” he says, adding in a voice trembling with desire, “They are deep, mysterious, but I see to their depths” (lit. I see to the bottom of them). There he sees a

¹⁵ “Der er ingen mangel på sjælelige konflikter i ‘Vredens Dag’. På den anden side skal man lede længe efter et stof, der i den grad frister til udvendig dramatik. Jeg – og jeg tør sige mine skuespillere med mig – har valgt ikke at falde for denne fristelse. Vi har været lige ivrige i vor jagt på falsk overdivelse og fastslående klichéer. Vi tvang oss til sandhed” (“Filmstil” 75).

quivering flame. “That you have lit,” is Anne’s reply. And they flee out to the birch grove. Dreyer uses Anne’s eyes to indicate that her interior, true character is psychologically complex, changing—multi-pathetic (rather than monopathetic) and this in turn has been taken as distinguishing her character from earlier (melodramatic) protagonists.

Dreyer had already envisioned this psychological complexity within the world of Nordisk melodrama, however. Lengthy descriptive passages in Dreyer’s Nordisk scenarios document the development of his (melodramatic) imagination by experimenting with interiority and the kind of divided characterization that he would later incorporate into the films he directed. His work with Nordisk scenarios was a more creative endeavor than Dreyer’s aspersions of his time there indicated. Dreyer’s scenario “Den Røde Enken” (The Red Widow/*Rovedderkoppen/The Spider’s Prey*, August Blom, 1916), which in many ways is a conventional criminal thriller, shows a curious interest in the psychology of the devious criminal mastermind, Fru Valentine Kempel, the red widow. Dreyer’s scenario shows a deep interest in her interior (*indre*)—the same word that he will use to describe Anne’s interiority in “A Little on Film Style”. Even though Valentine is irredeemably evil, Dreyer imbricates her seductive capacities with her mimetic abilities, setting up a delicate display of distinct-yet-related expressive nuances that might have proven challenging to convey within acting and lighting conventions of the time. Dreyer’s scenarios often seemed to exceed what was technologically possible at the time at Nordisk, as if urging the company to adopt some of the more expressionistic, experimental lighting schemes that Benjamin Christensen had used in *Hævnens Nat* (*Blind Justice*, 1916). Lighting schemes in *Day of Wrath* accentuate the sparkling depths of Anne’s expressive eyes, while low-key lighting allows Merete’s eyes to appear as dark, inhuman holes in contrast. Dreyer used technological innovations in sound and lighting to convey more persuasively mechanisms already prevalent at Nordisk, making melodrama’s pathos legitimate through cinematic innovation.

Although one would expect Valentine to epitomize a one-dimensional evil villain character, in “Den Røde Enken” her villainy is not actually that simple. Like Anne, Valentine has exceedingly variable (*spillende*: playing, performing) eyes. Every nuance that flashes in “the widow’s” eyes incorporates a new malevolence with which to seduce her unwitting victims. “She is an unusual, somewhat exotic beauty whose black, playing eyes can shift through all nuances, from catlike unctuousness to wild defiance and willfulness, and the cruelest hate.”¹⁶ Valentine’s devilish mimetic abilities set her external expression entirely at odds with her ulterior motivation. “Her face is a mask that never betrays her interior (*Indre*). She is a consummate actress. Even in the most dangerous moments she maintains her presence of mind.”¹⁷ This passage demonstrates, as I discussed in Chapter Two, that Dreyer’s early scenarios provided a space in which to work through melodramatic issues. This treatment of exterior surface and interiority cuts into one of the central dilemmas of melodramatic *signifiante* and recognition, one that will echo in *Day of Wrath* as well, namely, that the body is at once the most authentic expression of the soul (like a symptom), but potentially also a surface of dissimulation.

¹⁶ “Hun er en sjælden, noget eksotisk Skønhed, hvis sorte, spillende Øjne kan spille i alle Nuancer, ligefra katteagtig Sleskhed til vild Trods og Magtvilje og det grummeste Had” (“Den Røde Enken” 2).

¹⁷ “Hendes Ansigt er en Maske, der aldrig forraader hendes Indre. Hun er en fuldendt Skuespillerinde. Selv i de farligste Øjeblikke bevarer hun sin Aandsnærværelse” (“Den Røde Enken” 2).

The variability of Anne's eyes in *Day of Wrath* can also be read as Dreyer's repurposing Valentine's devious mimetic abilities to make their melodrama more indirect, reflective. The shifting of Anne's eyes—unlike Valentine's, which are all shades of evil seduction—embody a kind of sparkly blankness upon which other characters project their own desires. Instead of helping to define Anne, her eyes instead grant insight into each peering member of the constellation of characters with which she interacts. Even though the fact that these characters pronounce overtly what they see (as if a direct, primary melodramatic solution to the fact that Dreyer cannot *actually* control what the cinema audience will read there), the interaction as a whole makes subtler the enigma of Anne's character. Brooks associates blankness with secondary melodrama's capacity to present an increasingly illegible world. James uses this subtilization of primary melodrama in his late work, by making "evil" (of the kind depicted, for instance, in "Den Røde Enken") never fully specified or announced—all the more oppressive for being "unnamed, undesignated, detectable only in its effects. Evil is a kind of blankness into which we read the content that we need" (Brooks, *Imagination* 166). In *Day of Wrath*, the ambiguous "blankness" of Anne's eyes, particularly in the film's final shot of her, which shifts the impetus to "read her" onto the cinema audience (we must decide whether we see in her eyes the squelched desires of a young woman or the smoldering, occult powers of her possessed mother) is melodramatic precisely because of its ominous ambiguity. Indicative of the way in which primary and secondary melodrama blended and interacted at all points of this melodramatic tradition, such blankness or variability was also a factor in the world of early Danish melodrama.

Reading *Day of Wrath* in the context of Dreyer's early work at Nordisk suggests that in the Danish context, differentiating primary and secondary melodrama very decidedly does *not* involve tracing the development of a non-psychological form to a psychological one (to do so would reiterate the caesura in received Dreyer reception that I am arguing against), but rather identifying new vacillations between the two. Although Dreyer would like to claim *Day of Wrath* as a project uniquely invested in depicting interiority, he undertook the challenge of representing (and exteriorizing) internal drama at every phase of his career, including at Nordisk. Dreyer's attempts to make melodrama subtler in *Day of Wrath* (by repressing too blatant depictions of self-censorship) reimagines interactions of interiority and exteriority already at play in early Danish film melodrama.

Direct and indirect pathos

Also complicating Dreyer's aspirations to make film art psychological is the way in which *Day of Wrath* incorporates very direct, surprisingly exteriorized pathos in Herlofs Marthe, the film's immensely sympathetic character who is tortured and burned as a witch. Anne and Herlofs Marthe form a certain polarity in the film. Anne represents psychological, more subtly exteriorized suffering while Herlofs Marthe represents overtly manifest, intensely corporeal suffering. Herlofs Marthe's virtually monopathetic characterization becomes emblematic of the presence of an older generation of melodrama that Dreyer sets out to abandon, but can't resist. Herlofs Marthe fits into melodrama's long tradition of spectacularly persecuted innocents; she is the final character in Dreyer's *oeuvre* to be burned at the stake. Calling Herlofs Marthe innocent—despite the fact that in her first scene we witness her embracing of the powers of evil

(“There is power in evil” [*der er kraft i det onde*] she will admit to the woman she attempts to heal)—is to assume, as I think Dreyer does, that “witchcraft” is misprized neurosis or female desire, and its persecution is retrospectively reprehensible. Although Herlofs Marthe definitely embodies a core impulse of monopathy in the film, a characterization I attribute with primary melodrama, it is not an unadulterated innocence. Typical of innocent victim figures at Nordisk, she is not utterly helpless. Though partially a figure of persecuted, mute pathos to the extent that she would rather be tortured than betray Anne’s secret, we know that Herlofs undertakes this in the hopes of saving herself. And when mute pathos fails to influence Absalon’s decision, she acts to curse him and Mæster Laurentius for their hypocrisy. Like other figures of persecuted innocence in early Danish film melodrama, Herlofs Marthe’s suffering can be adulterated with flashes of ambiguously motivated volition; she is a willful character.

Similarly, Herlofs Marthe’s emotional responses are neither entirely monopathetic nor entirely naturalistic. She acts and reacts with what I call serial monopathy.¹⁸ In keeping with primary melodrama, she declares her feelings outright, as when she states to Absalon, “I have such an agonizing fear of death!” But over time, her character expresses several unified emotional positions (as opposed to a single one exclusively) that actually contradict each other in a way that appear especially unnaturalistic when compared to Anne’s more psychologically motivated expressions of emotion. Herlofs Marthe’s serial monopathy is most evident in the scene in which, finally alone with Absalon in her cell, she confronts him with his hypocritical refusal to save her from the flames (as he had Anne’s mother). When Absalon insists that he is saving her soul, she responds with a fantastic array of emotional outbursts, each discrete and monopathetic (emotion, response, and gesture are intimately unified here), yet delivered in rapid succession. Within the span of a couple of moments she expresses everything from despair to anger to adamant pride, in successive, contained outbursts. The effect is a highly stylized, non-monopathetic emotional complexity made melodramatically evident on the body in a way that complicates the film’s understood high-art naturalism.

Anne too demonstrates certain hybridities that suggests her animation by a melodramatic mode that Dreyer is intent on transforming. Anne and Herlofs Marthe might in one sense embody new and old melodrama respectively, but Anne also bears distinct traces of melodrama past. Although her psychological complexity is based on her capacities for development (from unknowing to knowing, innocent to desirous), Dreyer instigates this development melodramatically, with a sudden reversal that brings a secret to consciousness. As he describes in a pre-production sketch of the four main characters in the film, Anne’s psychological awakening amounts to a violent, emotional *coup de theatre* instigated by Martin’s sudden arrival. The 20-21 year old Anne embodies innocence and naiveté; she is literally undeveloped [*uudviklet*] and child-like, a simple, friendly, tender, and helpful young wife.¹⁹ Lacking self-awareness, she is ungrateful

¹⁸ The stylization and unnaturalistic acting style in *Day of Wrath* was brought to my attention through discussions with Anders Lundorph, director of the project *Sorten Nat*, a theatrical adaptation or “theater-take” of *Day of Wrath* in April 2009 presented by Eventsministeriet, a division of the Royal Danish Theater. Lundorph conceived of the re-theatricalization of Dreyer’s screenplay—one based on Dreyer’s scenario, but which incorporated elements of the film text— as an experiment in high melodrama (*høj melodrama*).

¹⁹ “Der er i Begyndelsen af Filmen noget uudviklet, næsten barnligt over hende. Iøvrigt

neither for her husband, nor for her marriage of obligatory kindness and “love” [*Pligtgodhed og Pligtkærlighed*].²⁰ Only Martin’s sudden arrival in the parsonage will shock her into being aware that Absalon has never managed to “awaken the woman in her.”²¹ As Dreyer describes the fateful encounter,

She goes around in this world with a dream—unbeknownst to her. When Martin arrives at the parsonage, the dream becomes conscious, and when he holds her tightly in his arms the dream becomes reality—in the same instant, the child becomes a woman. Her emotional life is awakened as well, and is so violent in its strength, that with one blow it transforms her psyche and brings forth predispositions in her character and spiritual abilities that up to that point had been hidden to her and for others.²²

In describing Anne’s development, Dreyer employs the language of extreme dramatic reversal—dream flashes to reality, unconsciousness begets consciousness, and a child instantly becomes a woman. Cinematically, Dreyer signals Anne’s violent transformation into a desiring woman in her stunned expression when she first lays eyes on Martin. Anne’s image dominates the sequence depicting this first encounter. (Dreyer resists showing Martin’s reaction shot). She has seen Martin’s face before, as she puts it, in her thoughts. Her entranced expression bears witness to the transformation occurring within her. Dreyer will overlay this love-at-first-sight reversal with an impulse to reflection (her self-recognition), making it secondary, but its instigation is primary.

Undeniable presence of primary melodrama

Despite certain hybridities in her character, Herlofs Marthe’s presence in the film elicits an undeniably direct appeal to pathos in a way that Anne’s character does not. *Day of Wrath* makes little effort to understand Herlofs Marthe’s interior (*Indre*); her character shows no real evidence of development, and her suffering is overwhelmingly corporeal and visceral. From her initial arrival at the parsonage where she appeals to Anne to grant her refuge from the mob pursuing her, her disheveled hair signals her distress, eliciting sympathy for her plight. Although not made visible to the cinema audience, drops of her blood on the stairs (the bodily traces of her suffering) lead the townsmen to her hiding place in the attic above. In the scene in which Absalon attempts to extract a confession, Absalon commands her to fall to her knees and be silent. As with the conflation of Falconetti’s phenomenological body with her character in *Jeanne d’Arc*, Dreyer exploits the fact that Anna Svierkier falters when attempting to rise to her feet again. Dreyer creates a direct appeal to identify with Herlofs Marthe’s suffering, for when Absalon

virker hun er som en ganske almindelig ung Kvinde, enkel, beleven og venlig, med Træk af Ømhed og Hjælpsomhed” (Pre-production materials, Dreyer Collection, DFI: 1A Vredens Dag, 59).

²⁰ “Pligtgodhed og Pligtkærlighed,” *ibid.*

²¹ “han har ikke kunnet vække Kvinden i hende,” *ibid.*

²² The final two paragraphs, in Danish read, “I Almindelighed er hun stille af sig, maaske endda lidt sky. Til Værn mod Mor Meretes Naalestik har hun bygget sig en egen Verden, i hvilken hun hygger sig med sine Tanker. [new paragraph] I denne Verden gaar hun rundt med en Drøm – sig selv uafvidende. Da Martin ankommer til Træstegaarden (sic), bliver Drømmen hende bevidst, og da han slutter hende i sine Arme bliver Drømmen til Virkelighed, og i samme Øjeblik bliver Barnet til Kvinde. Da vækkes ogsaa hendes Følelsesliv, og saa voldsomt er det i Styrke, at det med eet Slag omformer hendes Psyke og fremdrager Karakteranlæg og sjælelige Evner, der hidtil har været skjult for hende selv og for andre,” *ibid.*

commands Herlofs Marthe to kneel, he stares straight down at her—straight into the camera—bringing the spectator to her knees as well, to peer up at him and plead for her life. It is the only such overtly subjective moment in *Day of Wrath*.

Although Dreyer extracted a range of tortured confessions at different moments in his *oeuvre*, from *Leaves from Satan's Book* to *Jeanne d'Arc*, the immense pathetic charge that Dreyer derives from Herlofs Marthe's "beautiful confession" (*smuk bekendelse*), as one churchman refers to it, is unprecedented. Its existence in a film of psychological conflict is remarkable. A slow, tracking pan shot across the hyper-clothed bodies of the male judges persecuting her reveals Herlofs Marthe's naked torso as she lies on her side. Verbal cues issuing from within the room further indicate the brutality of her experience. She has until then been suspended, her limbs stretched by the executioner. The extreme close-up of Herlofs Marthe's face immediately following, in which the camera tilts up as she rises to sitting, is arguably one of the film's most affective moments. Tears glisten on the older woman's cheek, physical evidence of her anguish. Her disheveled hair creates an aura glowing around her head as she gazes imploringly up at Mæster Laurentius. In the following shots in which Laurentius exacts her "willing" confession, she sobs softly as he looms over her in the upper right half of the screen. Absalon will also loom over her in a similar framing. And the literal binding of Herlofs Marthe's body in the torture chamber and again when tied to the ladder upon which she will be immolated are in some ways more overt than the psychological bindings in "Kniplinger."

Dreyer uses sound to heighten this appeal to pathos while at the same time legitimizing its spectacle as stylistically innovative. *Day of Wrath* is Dreyer's first feature film to incorporate sound technology in a comprehensive way (*Vampyr* being an initial, partial experiment). Attesting to Dreyer's interest in body genre, he uses it not to make expression subtler, but rather to amplify the impact of corporeal suffering in the film. This is unexpected, considering the way in which in "A Little on Film Style," Dreyer emphasizes sound film's innovative capacity for both authenticity and subdued gesture and cites its ability to capture actors' natural voices and subtle gestures. He writes, "This is the great advantage of the film over the theatre—that the actor can let his voice rest in natural position; yes, he can whisper if the role demands it."²³ Although much *Day of Wrath* does rest in a decidedly muted register, Dreyer exploits Herlofs Marthe's blood-curdling screams to punctuate this register, exemplifying melodrama's use of non-verbal sound to express pure suffering not able to be articulated in language. "Aurally, excess is marked by recourse not to the coded articulations of language but to inarticulate cries of pleasure in porn, screams of fear in horror, sobs of anguish in melodrama" (Williams, "Film Bodies" 4). The only character in the film to perform in this heightened, non-verbal register, Herlofs Marthe stands apart as a remarkably forceful embodiment of primary melodrama.

Dreyer attempts to justify the spectacular inclusion of these screams and Herlofs Marthe's suffering as necessary illumination of Anne's psychological turmoil. The first screams of terror that Herlofs Marthe emits from the attic as she is captured will echo within Anne throughout the film—she remarks as much to Martin outside the sacristy saying, "I keep hearing her screams." Anne's utterance hangs in the air a moment, as the eerily innocent boys choir sing behind them, before it is answered cinematically by the

²³ "Det er filmens store fordel fremfor teatret, at skuespilleren kan lade stemmen hvile i sit naturlige leje – ja, han kan hviske, hvis rollen kræver det" ("Filmstil" 78).

screams that initiate the sequence of Herlofs Marthe's torture. These screams are meant to reverberate through the mind of the cinema spectator as well, and produce a kind of subjective aurality that Dreyer will attempt again in the final scene of *Två människor* (*Two People*, 1945). Here the sounds of sirens and bells meld together both in the minds of the protagonists and the audience. Dreyer uses sound to enhance the corporeality of primary melodrama in part as if to compensate for the absence of the bodies on screen. Dreyer underscores Herlofs Marthe's bodily suffering in the film by withholding sight of her body while we hear it in pain. Delaying this sight heightens the effect of its eventual revelation. Voice, in *Day of Wrath*, offers proof of interiority and presence the same way that the tear does in *Jeanne d'Arc*. Both contribute to Dreyer's broader interest in authenticity. This voiced appeal to authentic interiority and presence will become most acute when Dreyer includes the actual recording of Birgitte Federspiel giving birth to her child in *Ordet*. Dreyer's innovation of cinematic technique goes hand in hand with innovations in melodramatic technique.

Corporeal spectacle revisited: identification, recognition, and juxtaposition

The scene of Herlofs Marthe's immolation arguably constitutes *Day of Wrath*'s most climactic scene. Dreyer's treatment of this corporeal spectacle, a scene that occurs off stage in Wiers-Jenssen's playtext, suggests his enduring attraction to melodrama's affective potential, as well as the need he feels to resist and constrain it. Dreyer repurposes primary melodrama in this sequence, by making corporeal spectacle legitimate, subtle, and reflective. Like James, Dreyer includes violent drama and action (above the footlights) in his mature, psychological work.

Having his primary melodrama while simultaneously denying it entails directing the cinema spectator's focus to the reactions of diegetic spectators watching. *Day of Wrath*, like *Jeanne d'Arc*, weaves together an elaborate web of ricocheting looks and reactions among onlookers. Although he will subject the cinema audience to the gruesome, quick shot of a body landing face first in the flames, Herlofs Marthe's demise is ultimately of shorter duration than its sister sequence in *Jeanne d'Arc*, in which Dreyer's culminating montage repeatedly returns to shots of melting "flesh." Focus is on reactions to the burning rather than the burning itself. Even the initial encounter between Anne and Herlofs Marthe in the parsonage establishes that Herlofs Marthe's suffering has been included in the film to elicit important reactions from other characters. As Herlofs Marthe is captured upstairs we see its effect on members of the household listening below; her struggle registers on Anne as she buries her face in Absalon's chest.

Using Herlofs Marthe's physical suffering to suggest Anne's vicarious experience of it, Dreyer spares Anne the same overt, physical tortures, while ensuring that the repetition of her fate will be equally grave. Dreyer presents Herlofs Marthe's spectacle mainly for Anne's eyes. Preparations for the burning are conveyed through a series of her POV shots, emphasizing Anne's role as a witness to Herlofs Marthe's final moments. As each character reacts to the burning in a way that illuminates his or her character, multiple points open up for the cinema audience to identify and judge those participating. Absalon and the other church fathers stare in staid contemplation, while Martin shows compassion—he can't bear the sight of the flames—by joining Anne.

Although Dreyer's interest in spectator reflection produces an effect not unlike the immolation scene in *Jeanne d'Arc*, it elicits pathos through restraint of affect.

Whereas in *Jeanne d'Arc*, immolation produces frenzied emotion exuded by masses that erupt with emotional condemnation, cry effusively, and scurry in every possible direction with the camera following them wildly, in *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer enacts a massive constriction of this revolutionary potential. In perhaps the most incisive censorship of external drama that Dreyer undertakes in the film, this immolation sequence excludes the masses and all female spectators entirely. Anne is sequestered in a room above the square, and in the background of the shot in which the boys' choir files in, an official-looking figure shoos away a curious townswoman. In every respect, Dreyer carefully binds the potentially violent energy of this scene, denying its effusive—too easy, too early—release in tears and dismay, and instead harnesses it for the final sequence.

Still, Dreyer cannot resist including a shockingly direct glimpse of Herlofs Marthe careening face-first into the fire. In one interview Dreyer defends the somewhat controversial shot saying that it was imperative for Anne to see so that later on, when it occurs to her that she too may be a witch, the idea terrifies her. Anne actually looks away from the scene though still exposed to the full force of Herlof's Marthe's death-scream, offering a strong indication of Dreyer's desire to unleash the affective power of spectacle first and foremost on his cinema audience. When all is said and done, Dreyer cannot fully relinquish the kind of melodramatic charge of corporeal spectacle that primary spectacle does so well. Herlofs Marthe may largely be present in *Day of Wrath* as an older form of melodrama symbolically in service of a newer one, but despite technically being a supporting character in the film (she dies a third of the way through) her suffering contributes centrally to the film's emotional charge. Although he tries to abandon the corporeality and heightened expressivity of Nordisk's primary melodrama—its directness and visual suffering—Dreyer can't deny its powerful draw. As primary melodrama embodied, Herlofs Marthe's presence elicits emotion potentially strong enough even to challenge Anne's pathos in the film.

Similar to the way in which he embeds corporeal spectacle, Dreyer also elegantly repurposes other quite elementary conventions of primary melodrama. That Anne coincidentally happens to *overhear* a vital exchange of information between Herlofs Marthe and Absalon (that Absalon spared Anne's mother so that he might marry Anne) shows that Dreyer still willingly avails himself of melodrama's accidental causalities to advance his plot. At the same time, Dreyer makes subtle this melodramatic trope of chance "overhearing" by drawing cinematic attention to the fact that he has repurposed it. The sequence in which Anne opens the door to the sacristy where she will observe and overhear a vital conversation between Herlofs Marthe and Absalon is preceded by a long, elaborately sweeping, tracking shot overlaid with an inordinately suspenseful soundtrack. The camera follows Anne with columns punctuating her approach to the door. Before she climbs the few steps where she will eavesdrop, she pauses, glances slightly (perhaps knowingly?) toward the camera, which has now pulled around in front of her. (Herlofs Marthe also offers a possibly advertent glance toward the camera in a similarly extended tracking shot in her first scene, as she pauses before fleeing to the parsonage.) This elaborate prelude to a conventional plot device makes legible Dreyer's conflicting desire to avail himself of melodramatic contrivance while making it beautiful, more suspenseful, and rhythmic. The shot might also suggest a desire to acknowledge in some small way that he was not employing it naively, or that he enlisted primary melodrama in order to exert pressure on it.

Constellations of primary and secondary characterization

The formidable shadow that Herlofs Marthe casts across *Day of Wrath* does not succeed in obscuring Anne as the focal point of Dreyer's psychological project. Her perspective and point of view dominate *Day of Wrath*. That Anne's psyche develops and acquires a kind of self-knowledge has prompted some to read her as a tragic figure. She can in no way be said to occupy a single, unique moral position in the world of the film; she is no figure of unadulterated innocence persecuted. Although *Day of Wrath* seems to defend Anne's pursuit of the pure love fundamentally denied to her by her marriage, the fact of her pseudo-incestuous adultery with her husband's son, especially when compounded by the potential soul murder of her husband, at the very least muddles the question of her innocence. Anne's psychological development actually hinges upon a certain loss of innocence. Rather than propelling her out of melodrama and into tragedy, such self-knowledge and recognition, I argue, firmly establish her among the cadre of nuanced, psychological heroines populating French and Hollywood melodrama of the 40s. Anne bears the transformative potential of a character like Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper 1942), or the combination of innocent love and restrained passion in Lisa Berndle in Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948). Anne, in other words, belongs to a new generation of female protagonists that Dreyer would have seen in the "recent French and American psychological films"²⁴ that he praises in "A Little on Film Style" (for their use of facial expression), films that have since been heralded in scholarship for their melodrama as well.

Day of Wrath makes an interesting contribution to understanding this melodramatic psychology, however, for Anne's complexity shines forth against the relatively stable characterization of the figures of Herlofs Marthe and Merete. Dreyer's film presents conflicting approaches to depicting female subjectivity. Anne's relationship with Herlofs Marthe is just one instantiation of the film's curious constellation of characters who demonstrate a range of melodramatic characterization (from monopathetic to divided psyches). Female characters dominate *Day of Wrath*. Although Dreyer imbues the male characters in the film's constellation of characters with a certain psychological complexity (they suffer pangs of conscience at regrettable decisions that must be kept secret, for instance), Dreyer invests the thrust of the film's pathetic energy and dramatic conflict in relationships between Anne and her formidable female predecessors. Martin and Absalon, although technically the representatives of a patriarchal church authority we know to possess the "power" to persecute innocent women as witches, both appear weak-willed compared to their female counterparts. Absalon, as Dreyer puts it in one production sketch, never fully succeeds in severing the umbilical chord attaching him to his domineering mother.²⁵ And although Martin sparks the flame of Anne's desires and self-knowledge, he still abandons her (very much at Merete's admonishment) in the film's culminating sequence, proving himself to be as swayed by Merete as his father was. The relatively monopathetic characterization of

²⁴ "I de senere års franske og amerikanske psykologiske film er mimiken igen kommet til ære og værdighed, og det er godt det samme" (76).

²⁵ See pre-production materials, Dreyer Collection, DFI: 1A Vredens Dag, 59.

Merete and Herlofs Marthe does more than simply provide a foil for Anne's psyche. In reimagining melodrama's psychology in *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer positions these strong female characters—symbols of melodrama's vital past—for his new protagonist to engage with seriously.

In *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer creates dramatic tension by staging a conflict between strong female figures of two generations, using more monopathetic characterization to depict female characters of an older generation while imbuing Anne with more psychological complexity. Dreyer's melodramatic hybridity imbues an intense (but not atypical) instance of intergenerational conflict with additional temporal repercussions. Dreyer uses melodramatic characterization to heighten his youthful protagonist's struggle to define herself in relation to the past. Generally speaking, the maternal figures of Herlofs Marthe and the stolid matriarch Merete function in a way more typical of primary, or classic melodrama of the 18th century French stage, in which characters occupied a discrete symbolic position in the world represented, one usually associated with a single moral position. Although not entirely monopathetic, (neither Herlofs Marthe nor Merete performs a unique moral position in a morally polarized cast of *dramatis personae*, nor would we expect them to, for early Danish film melodrama tended to present a world less insistent on moral polarization), their psyches are nevertheless relatively unified. They exhibit neither the development nor divided psychology that Anne does. Instead, they serve an important symbolic function, as emblems of an older generation embodying possible positions available to Anne. Herlofs Marthe represents the suffering and dangers that coincide with a life performing the darker arts (a position intimately associated with the position we understand Anne's mother to have filled), and Merete represents the powerful position of matriarch in the parsonage that Anne would reasonably have expected to inherit, had Martin not interfered.

In his article, "Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today," Rick Altman characterizes this kind of juxtaposition, between a more naturalistically represented protagonist and a collection of melodramatic characters whose relative lack of psychological complexity illuminate the development of that protagonist, as evidence that melodrama has always mattered to "classical" realist narrative. In Altman's reading, melodrama serves as a stable, archetypal force, as a sign indicating what the naturalistic protagonist has outgrown. As I discussed in Chapter One, critics like Gledhill have applauded Altman for demonstrating melodrama's presence in "classical" realism, but have been more critical of the way this reading fails to ascribe melodramatic background characters with any means of themselves developing. As such, these characters are understood implicitly to be less interesting. Melodrama, in Altman's reading, once again becomes that which does not change, as that outdated presence that exists to show how realism *does* change and develop.²⁶ My reading of Anne as a more naturalistically depicted melodramatic figure aligns in one respect with Brooks, Gledhill and Williams's contention that melodrama develops and adapts to conventions of realism as they adapt. But I shift the terms of the discussion somewhat to consider whether *Day of Wrath* might be dramatizing melodrama's capacity to develop in reaction to earlier forms of *melodrama* rather than conventions of realism. Dreyer adopts a mechanism of juxtaposition not unlike the one Altman outlines, but juxtaposes primary melodramatic

²⁶ For Gledhill's critique of Altman and her subsequent account of how melodrama changes and adapts with realism, see "Between."

figures with a central figure of secondary melodrama. Whereas Altman sets up melodramatic characters as a passive backdrop for the naturalistic protagonist, Dreyer's embodiments of primary melodrama take a much more active role: each threatens Anne in different ways. Herlofs Marthe suffers to an extent that challenges Anne's ability to elicit pathos, and Merete's ferociously protective mothering will send Anne to the stake. Seen as a document of melodrama in transition, *Day of Wrath* contributes an intriguing take on understanding the paradoxical co-presence of melodrama's continual development in the face of nostalgia. Archetypal impulses in Merete and Herlofs Marthe signal the need for melodrama to contend with its own powerfully conservative impulses.

The unyielding presence of Merete

Although a perhaps less sympathetic figure than Herlofs Marthe, Merete asserts an equally substantial corporeal presence in *Day of Wrath*. Dreyer gestures cinematically at the parallel status of the two older women (who are never actually pictured in the same shot) through a match on action linking their first scenes in the film. After realizing she has been accused of being a witch, Herlofs Marthe flees through a low door in her house, crouching out into the animal paddock. Without any establishing shot, we find ourselves suddenly in the parsonage into which Merete enters from the right, announcing orders to Anne. Only a quick fade to black separates Herlofs Marthe's exiting off the left-hand side of the frame and Merete's entering on the right.

Like Herlofs Marthe, Merete's character shows no significant development through the film. She begins and ends a stalwart emblem of tradition and propriety, declaring Absalon's new marriage shameless, openly calling Anne a bitch, and going to extreme lengths to protect (or avenge) her family and her position in the parsonage. Whereas Herlofs Marthe's presence allows Anne to suffer the vicarious effects of corporeal spectacle, Merete's presence blocks Anne's desires. Merete's fundamentally unmovable body, on which she contentiously bears the keys to the parsonage is itself a magnified sign, the physical manifestation of the domestic and social preconditions that restrict Anne's will. The girth of her black-clad figure moves slowly in and out of the planes of dense shadow in the parsonage (especially apparent at night), accentuating the fact that she is an architectural fixture there. Merete preceded Anne's own arrival at the parsonage (Anne plays the role of second wife, second-daughter-in law, and second "mother" to Martin) as a monopathetic force occupying the home, the prime real estate of domestic melodrama.

Dreyer accentuates the melodramatic conflict between Merete and Anne by forcing them into close spatial proximity, reaping the tension produced by their inhabitation of the discrete space of the same film. From the first glimpse of life inside the parsonage, it appears rife with conflict. Merete asserts her position in no uncertain terms, with a scowling glare toward Anne and the declaration that she alone will bear all the keys. Merete exists as a fixture in the parsonage; she is never pictured in any exterior shot. Intervening between his distressed young wife and his stubborn mother, Absalon entreats Merete to show Anne a bit more kindness, reminding her that, "It's not easy for a young wife to come to an old house." With this line of dialogue, Dreyer frames the conflict between Anne's "new" generation and Merete's "older" generation architecturally, setting the two up as uneasily cohabiting the same artistic enclosure. We

can read this conflict symbolically also, as two competing historical iterations of the melodramatic mode forced to interact in the delimited space of a single film.

Married life and the domestic sphere provided a key melodramatic mise-en-scene for Dreyer's intergenerational domestic intrigues, and we can situate Merete's conflict with Anne among the many battles of will he depicted therein. In *Der Var Engang* (*Once Upon a Time*, 1922), an overt taming-of-the-shrew narrative, a disguised prince tames his feisty princess through rough domestic work. *The Bride of Glomdal*, one of several Norwegian domestic melodramas to be produced in Norway in 1926, tells the tale of a sparky young female protagonist who defies the wishes of her father to marry her poor lover. An illness she suffers eventually brings about the social reconciliation of their families and her own domestication at the same time. In *Master of the House* (1925), a "tyrannical" father and husband protagonist learns not to take his wife's virtuous, willing sacrifice and suffering for granted when a strong matriarchal authority figure (his sympathetic-but-strict nursemaid) moves back home to assume the role of both wife and mother. Merete is but one of several formidable matriarchs inhabiting Dreyer's *oeuvre* who raise questions of relationship between past and future. Generations do not necessarily flow smoothly into one another, but produce overlaps and repetitions. Several of Dreyer's matriarchs endure the passage of time along with the architectural spaces to which they carry the keys. In this sense, *Day of Wrath* bears a striking resemblance to *The Parson's Widow* (*Prästankan* 1921). Both revolve around an intergenerational marriage dominated by an architectural structure dominated, in turn, by a widow. As the embodiment of past tradition, the widow inhibits a young couple's happiness. In *The Parson's Widow*, Margrethe Pedersdotter has outlived three husbands and will marry Sofren according to the tradition by which a new pastor in the parish must marry the next widow of the previous (should she happen to have outlived her husband). Sofren, who is already engaged, brings his fiancée, Mari, to the farm by having her pose as his sister. Even *The Parson's Widow* is a re-imagining of an earlier domestic melodrama for Dreyer had experimented with this domestic scenario much earlier on, at Nordisk. In Dreyer's scenario "Elskovs Opfindsomhed" (*Love's Ingenuity*, Sophus Wolder, 1913), two young lovers play similar tricks on a tough-but-sympathetic matriarch and owner of property who has forbidden their marriage. In "Elskovs Opfindsomhed," the would-be groom enlists the help of his sister, a professional actress who dresses like a man in order to seduce the old proprietress into granting the couple's wish to be married. Whereas Dreyer's 1913 scenario ends with a happy resolution (the matriarch's feelings are smoothed over at the end and the couple marry), *The Parson's Widow* ends more ambiguously as Margarethe, in an act that secures her status as a sympathetic character, wills herself to die, allowing for Sofren and Mari to cease masquerading as brother and sister, be married, and begin their own inhabitation of the parsonage. The joy with which this couple might have embarked upon their life together, however, is tempered by the narrative necessity for the older generation to give way so that a new generation might take over inhabitation both of the building, and the positions in institutional structures (both marriage and the church).

Dreyer uses architecture to heighten the charge of domestic melodrama by making its physical structures analogous to the influence and constriction of stubborn past generations. Setting Anne's individualized melodramatic psychology against earlier figurations of melodrama in this space can be seen also as dramatizing the melodramatic

inheritance that Dreyer attempts to shake off. Melodrama offers a rich-but-bounded model of artistic production. My reading of different generations of melodrama cohabiting *Day of Wrath* dovetails with Mark Sandberg's insightful reading of Dreyer's use of performative architectural inhabitation in *The Parson's Widow*. Dreyer's fascination with architecture's influence had important thematic repercussions, but also affected Dreyer's artistic process, i.e. on pro-filmic, material performances on set. Sandberg's assessment, "the plot problem all along has been that of *gjengangere* [ghosts, or dead who do not remain dead], of the dogged persistence of tradition, bodies and objects that do not make way for the new...his [Dreyer's] further intellectual interest in the story was finding a way out of the simple repetition of the past" ("Mastering" 37) illustrates the film's use of architecture and human figuration to depict the passage of time.

The fact that *Day of Wrath* presents a similar plot problem demonstrates the dogged persistence of melodramatic tradition and raises the question of whether to read such repetition in Dreyer's *oeuvre* optimistically or pessimistically. Many critics have read the ending of *The Parson's Widow* pessimistically, with Margrete's self-willed death, the couple's inheritance of the parsonage, and particularly the culminating sequence in the film when Mari appears wearing Margrete's attire, as proving the film's somber and oppressive circularity—the inevitable and unfortunate repetition of tradition. Sandberg, in contrast, finds a tentative optimism in it.²⁷ Reading the final scenes of *The Parson's Widow* through Dreyer's faith in artistic agency, Sandberg allows these culminating scenes to become an allegory for Dreyer's artistic process. Margrete's self-willed exit from the cycle of institutional repetition provides an optimistic opening in the binary logic of mastery and subjugation. Sandberg describes Dreyer's process as "a meticulous immersion in reality, followed by a casting off" ("Mastering" 39), citing Dreyer's article "Thoughts on my Craft" for *Sight and Sound*, in which he describes aesthetics as both inspired by reality, but then ultimately trumped by the director's aesthetic sense. In *The Parson's Widow*, Dreyer accomplishes this casting off through Margrete's "voluntary farewell" and the subsequent folkloric steps taken to ensure that she will not haunt the parsonage (cohabitation here is not an option). *The Parson's Widow* thus proposes a tentative liberation for the individual from the oppressive repetition of the cycle of marriage and social constraint (albeit through the ambiguity of willed self-sacrifice), without ultimately altering or upending the cycle itself.

Reading *Day of Wrath* as a re-imagination of the conflicts in *The Parson's Widow* raises the question of what the two films (as one example of very wide-spread repetitions and continuities) can divulge about the fate of melodrama in Dreyer's *oeuvre*. In one sense, Merete's domestic stolidity and the resoluteness with which she commands her parsonage in *Day of Wrath* makes her a kind of incarnation of Margrete. Both represent the persistence of intransigent social institutions. Unlike Margrete, however, Merete offers no self-willed retreat. Merete doesn't hesitate to assert her own will and commit Anne to the flames. As primary melodrama's immensely material ghost, Merete will neither die nor relinquish the power she derives from domestic precedent. Marriage and architecture provide synonymously constrictive structures in these films, with *Day of Wrath* calling into question the relationship between marriage, true love and cohabitation as equals. (*Gertrud* will continue to explode the idea that real love and mutual

²⁷ For a synopsis of these pessimistic readings of the scene, see Sandberg "Mastering" 38.

cohabitation can be accomplished within marriage.) Ultimately, the melodramatic inheritance that Merete and Margrete each embody (even if Margrete is a more sympathetic version) is not easily cast off. *Day of Wrath* culminates in similarly grave, pessimistic repetitions; Anne will perish as Herlofs Marthe did, and the previous generation seems to prevail in *Day of Wrath*.

But perhaps Dreyer achieves an opening precisely through the very practice of large-scale repetitions in his *oeuvre*. The ability to conjure up and reimagine melodramatic scenarios in film after film—controlling and adjusting variables and outcomes each time—illuminates the creative agency that Sandberg reads in *The Parson's Widow* from another angle. Art can be trusted, as Sandberg writes of Dreyer's agency as a director, "to keep the dead at bay, to keep tradition in its proper place, and to allow for a meaningful performance of inhabitation" ("Mastering" 39). I suggest that Dreyer delights not only in putting the dead to rest, but bringing them to life again and again. (I explore the desire and temporal implications of melodrama's resurrections in the following chapter on *The Word*.) The persistence of melodramatic matriarchs who tenaciously inhabit Dreyer's *oeuvre* suggests that artistic renewal and the shaking off or casting off of the past are never accomplished in one go (if ever), but again and again. This provides a model of artistic production very much in accordance with melodrama's aesthetic creativity within constraint, creating an episodic narrative structure at the level of a director's entire *oeuvre*. Melodrama inhabits precisely this tenuous position between repetition and innovation. "Openings" in melodrama's development are always tenuous. Melodrama's "third way," as Gledhill theorizes it, both remains within frameworks of realism, obeying their constrictions (conventions), while always subtly disrupting them. Melodrama's peculiar power lies in simultaneously depicting what is and what is not. Although possessing the power to imagine and refigure the world, melodrama does not ultimately strive to upend the status quo. As Brooks writes, "Melodrama cannot figure the birth of a new society—the role of comedy—but only the old society reformed" (*Imagination* 205). Dreyer's re-imagining of melodrama, of which *Day of Wrath* is one example, problematizes human agency and free will within a melodramatic worldview bounded by artistic constraint (whether realism, figures of domestic institutions, or architectural structures) always without fully razing these structures. Reading Dreyer's work within melodrama's conceptual framework illuminates Dreyer's constant problematizing social constrictions on individual volition without ever advocating outright for their radical change.

Dreyer adeptly exploits the tension produced by the struggle of an individual will in the face of constrictions to create affect as Anne's final scene in *Day of Wrath* illustrates. Anne's submission to the flames amounts to a pessimistic closure, yet it also provides an "opening" by which we can imagine Anne brought to life again later in the *oeuvre* in the figure of Gertrud, for instance. The visual impact of Anne's white shroud establishes her as both deathly and transcendent at the same time. The subliminal effect of her glowing image at the end signals her resurrection even though we know her to be (temporarily) defeated.

Dreyer leaves an important ambiguity to be read in Anne's final scene. Her final "confession" might constitute an aesthetic "opening" of sorts, by which the pathos ushered in through glorious martyrdom trumps the closure of Anne's impending death. It is as if we are allowed visual access to Margrete's self-sacrifice in *Day of Wrath*, and this

access reveals that melodrama's suffering has been made even more beautiful and compelling. Anne has loved truly and truly suffered betrayal, and virtuous suffering always trumps justice in melodrama. Ultimately, Dreyer ends *Day of Wrath* with an enduring and powerful moment of melodramatic *signifiante*. Dreyer leaves the audience to peer into Anne's tear-filled eyes in lingering close-up and judge what is there. This *signifiante* does not constitute a break with Nordisk melodrama; it is important to keep in mind that happy endings and resolution were never guaranteed at the company. (As I discussed in Chapter Two, Nordisk melodramas often culminated in climactic narrative tangles that substituted narrative [i.e. happy] resolution for an elaborate narrative and moral tangles left for audiences to decipher. Persecuted innocence, in other words, was not always revealed as such, and unsympathetic characters [not unlike Merete] often prevailed.) This privileged final shot of Anne in the film raises the important question of whether the aesthetic, emotive power of her tears trumps the pessimism of the film's ending. The film's ambiguous opening is emblematic of the melodramatic mode's paradoxical innovation within repetition.

We can imagine Dreyer's attraction and repulsion toward the mode also animating Anne's final scene. Again Dreyer creates ethical complications for his humanist project of depicting suffering by making suffering beautiful. Melodrama's affective potential—its witchery—if you will, poses dangerous but ultimately irresistible temptations for Dreyer also for his self-conception as an artist. The powers that Anne inherits from her mother in *Day of Wrath* bear an intriguing resemblance to the powers that Dreyer will ascribe to the director of artistic film. He characterizes the relationship between director and film in language laden with enthralled embodiment. The film becomes a body into which the director must breathe life and to which he grants his own face. "It is through style that he breathes the soul into the work, that makes it art. It is he who is responsible for giving the film a face – namely his own."²⁸ Anne's final close-up then can be seen as a metonymic representation for the film as a whole. Her eyes are those of the director who must possess the power to "get others to see the material through his eyes." The style with which a director vivifies his film mystically permeates and saturates it, all the while remaining invisible and indemonstrable.²⁹ Dreyer's director of artistic film is a sorcerer who possesses telepathic powers of transmission reminiscent of Anne's power "to call" people to her, casting his humanist project of eliciting affect in his spectators in near mystical terms. "It should be his feelings and moods that color the film and arouse corresponding feelings and moods in the mind of the spectator."³⁰ Similar connections will secure the correspondence between external expression (legible signs on the body) and internal experience; gesture has the bewitching power to communicate emotions directly into others. Dreyer writes, "Gesture has a direct effect on us and calls forth our feelings without any thought at all as an intermediary. It is gesture that imbues the face with a soul."³¹ The tears that Anne sheds in her final scene epitomize a direct, purely expressive communication of her interior experience, but this comes about,

²⁸ "Gennem stilen inpuster han værket den sjæl, der gør det til kunst. Ham tilkommer det at give filmen et ansigt – nemlig sit eget" ("Filmstil" 72).

²⁹ "Den gennemsyrrer og gennemtrænger det, men er dog usynlig og upåviselig" ("Filmstil" 71).

³⁰ "Det bør være hans følelser og stemninger, der farver filmen og vækker tilsvarende følelser og stemninger i tilskuerens sind" ("Filmstil" 71-72).

³¹ "Mimiken virker direkte på os og kalder vore følelser frem uden noget tankearbejde som mellemlid. Det er mimiken, der forlener ansigtet med sjæl" ("Filmstil" 76-77).

somewhat paradoxically, through the constriction of her will and her self-censoring sacrifice. Raymond Carney reads a similar constriction and expression as underlying Dreyer's artistic project. Carney—who undertakes his own self-censorship in *The Language of Desire* by never explicitly using the term melodrama to describe Dreyer's work—also sees Anne figuring Dreyer's conflicted attitude toward his expressionistic project and the means by which he might achieve it:

All of Dreyer's mature work is built around a doubt – a doubt about whether we can represent our finest and freest energies in the practical expressive forms of the world. In a sense this great realistic filmmaker makes each film in order to deny the doubt. He remains daringly committed to cinematic realism as the means of expressing imaginative energies that war against realism. And yet his films repeatedly seem to tell him otherwise – to tell him that we cannot finally express ourselves in the world. Like Inger and Gertrud later, Anne figures Dreyer's ambivalence about his vexed expressive project. She figures his fear that her energies will not be lived, or that if lived, they will be destructive of all social systems and understandings. (167-8)

In Absalon's funeral scene, Anne reluctantly confesses to Merete the "truth" (*sandhed*)—a "truth" which is coerced, if not utterly false. The line causes Dreyer's declaration that he and his crew "forced" themselves to the truth (*Vi tvang os til sandheden*) also to ring somehow false. The language of film may "fail" Dreyer as it fails Anne, but at the end her face expresses more truly in tears than what could ever have been uttered in words. In struggling to deny the melodramatic inheritance he perceives as binding him, Dreyer reveals in its dark attraction-repulsion something creative, human, and productive.

Witchcraft, worldview and melodrama's unseen causes

Dreyer's choice of witchcraft to represent Anne's desires might be enough to establish that melodramatic sensation is alive and well in the film. The ambiguity ushered in by a tenuous chain of cause and effect in *Day of Wrath* (its heavy reliance on parallel editing, lack of clear narrative closure, and disruptions of unity of cinematic space) has helped secure its status as an art film. Bordwell reads its pervasive ambiguities as further evidence that Dreyer's primary ambition with the film was to disrupt (artistically) the conventions of Hollywood continuity editing by exploiting inconsistencies in narrative continuity and by using unconventional schemes for depicting space and time. Bordwell claims that despite its popularity, *Day of Wrath*, is in fact not popular film broadly conceived. "*Day of Wrath* is probably Dreyer's most popular film, which already indicates something of the problems it poses" (*Films of Dreyer* 117). Effectively, *Day of Wrath*'s narrative ambiguity and its epistemological uncertainties trump the film's melodramatic subject matter. Bordwell and Thompson state, "In films like *Day of Wrath*, the questions we ask often do not get definite answers; endings don't tie everything up; film technique is not always functioning to 'invisibly' advance the narrative. [...] As a narrative film, *Day of Wrath* depends on cause-and-effect relations, but what strikes us immediately is its unusual number of parallels" (*Film Art* 49). Visual parallels such as shadows filtering across the faces of Anne and Herlofs Marthe might link the fates of the two characters, but "However clear such parallel relations may seem, the chains of narrative cause and effect lead us straight to ambiguities. The uncertainty revolves around

the problem of witchcraft” (*Film Art* 250). Implicit in this reading are the dual assumptions that depicting melodramatic subject matter in an ambiguous way makes it unmelodramatic, and that narrative ambiguity and uncertain causality are fundamentally inconsistent with the melodramatic mode.

Day of Wrath raises interesting challenges to these assumptions, however. One can account for the ambiguity of the world depicted in *Day of Wrath*, on one hand, by deferring to proximate models of Scandinavian culture (both as “high” and “low” texts), as I touched on in Chapter Two. Ibsen, Strindberg, and Bang provided potent Scandinavian models of uncertain causality that would have been familiar to Dreyer. Cast in this light, rather than from the perspective of Hollywood continuity editing practices, *Day of Wrath* appears a luminous example of a popular culture tradition that absorbed and reiterated works that grappled with the uncertainties accompanying modernity in Scandinavia. But Dreyer’s subtilization of witchcraft (his conflation of it with female desire) and the pressure he will put upon Anne’s body to convey her ineffable suffering at the end of the film, however, raise epistemological questions that demonstrate Dreyer’s own grappling with melodrama. “Coincidences” such as Absalon dying precisely as Anne has reveals to him her affair with Martin conjure up a melodramatic worldview that presses upon the limits of realistic (cause and effect) representation. *Day of Wrath* only ever offers tenuous proof or knowledge of Anne’s powers, preferring instead to heighten effects while allowing their causes to remain ambiguous. The cross-cut simultaneity of the sequence in which Anne whispers inside the parsonage “If he were dead” and Absalon feels death brush by him on the heath contributes to the film’s melodramatic worldview in which coincidence reigns, characters suffer from strange feelings of disease, and death can hold your hand. In this world, like James’s psychological melodrama in the 1880s and 90s in which “good” and “evil” become increasingly tenuous, effect merely *evokes* cause. As Brooks puts it:

It creates a large and portentous menace that evokes a tremendous cause. It is as if James had discovered that to maintain the melodramatic terms of his vision and his presentation, in particular to maintain the conflict of polarized moral conditions, while at the same time escaping the limits of overt, explicit melodrama (of the type of *The American*), he must make his confronted terms rich in perceived and felt possibilities, emanations, effect, while elaborately refusing designation of their ontology. (*Imagination* 167)

Absalon’s ambiguously *caused* death tests the limit that effect can be privileged at the expense of realistically motivated cause. Melodrama’s coincidental causality emerges in *Day of Wrath*, revealing inadequacies of realistic representation to account fully for experience of uncertainty in the world. Witchcraft allows Dreyer to pressure, melodramatically, the conventions of realistic representation.

Melodrama, as an aesthetic response to the evacuated certainties of modern secular culture, offers another way to understand the presence of ambiguity in Dreyer’s work. Like James, Dreyer sought to represent the experience of uncertain causality in his work. This involved both attempting to reinvest a secular world with meaning, while also subtly calling into question the representational systems by which this “meaning” is accomplished. Bordwell has read the narrative ambiguity in Dreyer’s early work as indicative of a lack of mastery of Hollywood conventions for representing a spatially and

temporally coherent world. To this end, Dreyer drew imposing impersonal, unseen causal schemes in his films to ensure narrative coherence in the absence of continuity editing. Thus *Leaves from Satan's Book* and *Jeanne d'Arc* impose the sequential linearity of a book to order elements of the narrative together. Such "unseen causes" compensated for the lack of coherence that continuity editing would later secure. Bordwell and others read the ambiguity in Dreyer's later work as the more intentional estrangement of continuity editing practices. Impersonal cause in this context denotes on one hand Dreyer's preference for non-protagonist driven causes to advance his plots, and on the other hand his modernist deconstruction of aesthetic certainties by exposing their unreliability. In one sense, melodrama and modernism both respond to uncertainties in the world and share certain suspicions of aesthetic representation (albeit to different degrees). Unlike modernism, melodrama's response to the upheavals of a modern world doesn't entirely preclude faith in representing this experience of upheaval. Throughout his *oeuvre*, Dreyer continues to impose (tentative) structures of intelligibility onto an uncertain world and this constitutes a fundamentally melodramatic practice. Brooks reads melodrama as a response to the unsettling experience of a world riddled with uncertain causality and treats unseen forces in the world in terms of the moral occult,

Such fictions are both frightening and enlivening, suggesting the overt presence in the world of forces we sense within ourselves. We both want to believe, and yet cannot wholly credit, that we live on the brink of the abyss, the domain of occult forces which, for 'bliss or bale,' infuse an intenser meaning into the life we lead in everyday reality. Popular melodrama daily makes the abyss yield some of its content, makes us feel we inhabit amid those forces, and they amidst us. (*Imagination* 205)

In using witchcraft to investigate the intricacies of individual psychology, volition and inheritance, Dreyer makes Brooks's "occult" literal. Bordwell uses Anne's individualized psychology as a similarly structuring, organizing force that exerts an "authoritative intelligibility" over the film's ambiguous worldview. Individual psychology, imbricated with her concessions to powers that are stronger than she, however, makes Anne's fate tragic for Bordwell:

Individual psychology validates the narrative structure; when, in the end, the tragic heroine accepts her fate, her essential nature crystallizes for her; her acceptance corroborates the motive force of the plot, which is in turn corroborated by the outcome. Dreyer's claim that his films center upon psychology and are nonetheless ahistorical now becomes intelligible. In his tragedies, human psychology seeks to become defined through resignation to the inevitability of an impersonal causal scheme. (*Films of Dreyer* 194)

Conceding a melodramatic worldview, however, helps resolve Bordwell's difficult reconciliation between an impersonal causal scheme and individual psychology. Melodrama has always used individual bodies to make cosmological forces legible, a practice that looks different depending on conventions of realism. Referring to the impersonal causal scheme in *Day of Wrath* as tragic, Bordwell uses tragedy's cultural capital to impose meaning on melodrama's ambiguous worldview.

Seen from the perspective of contemporary melodrama scholarship, this tragification raises other important issues about the relationship between tragedy and

melodrama, and whether modern tragedy is even possible. Modern tragedy must ultimately contend with the same cosmological disruptions (modernity's unseen causes and upended hierarchies) that engender melodramatic response. From the perspective of melodrama, Anne's fall (or perhaps her resignation to an impersonal causal scheme) can only be spuriously labeled tragic as it "does not bring a superior illumination, the anagnorisis that is both self-recognition and recognition of one's place in the cosmos" that it is the purpose of tragedy to reconstitute with every performance (Brooks, *Imagination* 205). Anne's suffering does not automatically generate meaning on a higher order, nor bring about a superior illumination, nor an experience of community capable of making meaningful her sacrifice. Anne's experience is fundamentally melodramatic in that, as melodrama does more generally, "it offers the nearest *approach* to sacred and cosmic values in a world where they no longer have any certain ontology or epistemology" (Brooks, *Imagination* 205).

Tragedy also poses structural prohibitions on elements of individual psychology. Oedipus does not suffer because of the choices he makes due to his own conflicted psychology; he suffers so that, by the end of the play the appropriate hierarchy between Gods and humans has been restored. With Anne's ambiguous inheritance of witchcraft (the power of her absent, invisible, yet immensely potent mother) Dreyer embodies the tenuous causality of melodrama's worldview in the space of an individual character. Her interior experience charges the depicted world with added repercussions for volition. Not only must Anne come to know her inheritance, she must choose to use it. Early Danish melodrama also exploited the "individual" as a vessel through which to embody the unpredictable forces (chance, fate, inheritance, destiny), charging the worldview of naturalist drama.

It explains much about Dreyer's *oeuvre* to read the ambiguity of Anne's choice to "use" witchcraft as a sign that Dreyer has taken Nordisk melodrama's investment in volition and aligned it with secondary melodrama's ambiguities. Rather than instigating questions about whether Anne is good or bad (although the general "evilness" of witchcraft hangs in the air), *Day of Wrath* invests more interest in her *choice* to practice it. This is secondary melodrama. Brooks, for instance, writes that the fundamental interiorization of the conditions of individual choice differentiates James's early work from his late. Whereas his early, more overt work could establish guilt and innocence or good and evil as clear categories (following the logic of the excluded middle: it is all or nothing, no compromise), the secondary melodrama of his later work imagines "a world of cosmic forces in clash where choices of courses of action and ways of being are absolute. What has changed from the world of primary melodrama is that we no longer know how to choose because of our epistemological doubt: we no longer can or need to identify persons as innocence or evil; we must respond instead to the ratios of choice themselves" (Brooks, *Imagination* 168). The already less polarized world of early Danish melodrama lends itself readily to such heightening, and in *Day of Wrath* this ratio of choice takes several forms. Anne chooses whether to utter the words her mother used to call people to her; Martin chooses to abandon Anne; and Merete declares to Abasalon that the day has come for him to choose between God and Anne. In *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer formulates these questions in Anne, implicitly and indirectly. Even the frame of witchcraft allows Dreyer to raise questions of female desire in a circuitous way. Dreyer imagines the refusal to designate ontology in terms of individual bodily experience as an

instance in which recognition becomes both hyper-individualized and unknowable. Similarly in Brooks's account, conflicts in secondary melodrama become "so delicate, obscure, submerged that they cannot be embodied in direct statement but only gestured toward" (Brooks, *Imagination* 178).

In conclusion, with *Day of Wrath* Dreyer moves decisively toward melodrama of consciousness, while also demonstrating a creative melodramatic hybridity in which past and future paradoxically coexist, neither decisively eradicating the other. The intergenerational conflict depicted in the film evokes the drama of multiple generations of domestic melodrama inhabiting the space of a single film. The film suggests that melodramatic development might be contentious and potentially uneven rather than developing along Brooks's developmental trajectory. Read as an allegory for Dreyer's personal struggle to carve out an artistic identity in relation to his melodramatic past, *Day of Wrath* illuminates his artistic process as involving painful-but-productive self-constrictions and repetitions. In *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer vivifies key aspects of early Danish melodrama to both heighten and sublimate it, creating the kind melodramatic affect that will animate "Classical" Hollywood in the 1940s and 50s.

CHAPTER 5

MELDORAMA RESURRECTED: THE WORD

“But her body. I loved her body too.”
(Mikkel, *The Word*)

Dreyer’s second-to-last film, *Ordet* (*The Word*, 1955) stands as a combination of the ethereal and the quotidian. The film’s pervasive religious themes and climactic resurrection scene have made it a key film in reading Dreyer, as “a more or less uncorporeal (*ulegemlig*), angel-like (*engelagtig*) artist, with a direct connection to the divine, --an artist, who concerns himself above all with spiritual (*sjælelige*) problems, as if that sort of thing could be perceived as entirely independent of the body and society,”¹ as film scholar and theologian Martin Drouzy puts it. Similarly, in *Transcendental Style In Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (to which I return below), Paul Schrader argues *The Word* is the film in which Dreyer comes closest to achieving transcendental style. This is ethereality achieved, in other words, by stylistic means. For Bordwell, the quotidian setting for *The Word*’s relatively clear-cut Christian analogy poses problems not unlike *Day of Wrath*. Too-easily legible subject matter sets the film at odds with the estrangement it undertakes formally. Bordwell writes, “*Ordet* may be about a mystery, but in many ways it’s the most obvious film Dreyer ever made. Avowedly, ‘symbolic,’ *Ordet* is easy to read: it declares itself to be about the clash of different kinds of religious faith and their reconciliation through a simpler, ‘natural’ faith” (*Films of Dreyer* 144). Spatial and temporal systems operating in the film become meaningful within and against this Christian framework, challenging its easier legibility. Each of these readings of *The Word* subordinates its depiction of lived, embodied experience to something else.

But *The Word* also displays an insistent and compelling interest in corporeality. This can be quite quotidian. The unassuming inhabitants at Borgensgaard tend to their nursing sow and cut reeds. They meet children as they come home from school, bake cookies, and bring coffee. Dreyer’s depiction of everyday life in pastoral Denmark in many ways evokes the farmers he admired many years earlier in Victor Sjöström’s *Ingemarssönerna* (*The Sons of Ingmar*, 1919)—the sincere artistry of which derived from Sjöström’s fearless embodiment of farmers plodding weightily across the screen (“Filmstil” 74). Within this existence, Dreyer also uses corporeality to highlight “everyday” human existence, the experience of sorrow, pain and joy as well more spectacular transitional moments such as birth and death. In this chapter, I argue that Dreyer’s use of religious themes (body and spirit), even when used as explicitly as in *The Word*, provide the garb or guise that allows him to address life’s deeper relationships through an aesthetic of body and consciousness. *The Word* explores human experience in part by asking his characters (and the cinema audience too) to read bodies and decipher them. This is a particularly embodied inflection of melodrama’s play with signs and meaning. As Tom Gunning writes, “Melodramas, rather than being plays of blood and

¹ “en mere eller mindre ulegemlig, engleagtig kunstner, med direkte forbindelse til det guddommelige, --en kunstner, som fremfor alt er optaget af sjælelige problemer, som om den slags kunne betragtes som held uafhængige af kroppen og samfundet” (Drouzy, *Født Nilssen* 18). This is my translation from the Danish.

thunder, sound and fury, are in fact dramas of significance, and even *significance*, the construction of meaning” (“Horror of Opacity” 50). In *The Word*, Dreyer experiments with making emotion legible. He also sets up more elemental states of human consciousness to be read. Characters examine bodily expression to determine whether another is hysterical or traumatized; insane or sane; living, sleeping, or dead. In this environment of heightened corporeality, Dreyer also brings in motherhood’s particularly laden embodiments and overlays the film with a melodramatic worldview replete with maternal fantasies of reunification, psychosexual longing, and nostalgia. *The Word* presents a significant investment in reading the body of its protagonist Inger, as a virtuous, innocent mother who suffers an agonizing childbirth, dies, and becomes a beautiful corpse, to be miraculously resurrected. The presence of such a direct appeal to melodramatic pathos in Dreyer’s late *oeuvre* makes it all the more intriguing. Melodrama’s corporeal *significance* plays a more important role in *The Word* than scholars have acknowledged. Readings of transcendent elements in Dreyer’s *oeuvre*, like readings of Dreyer as a practitioner of formalism-for-formalism’s sake, underestimate Dreyer’s simultaneous fascination with expressions of and reactions to human suffering. As Dreyer’s inordinately materialist depictions of Jesus’s miracles in his *Jesus* script seem to confirm, in *The Word*, Christianity allows Dreyer the means to imagine not the absolute transcendence of life, but rather the miracles of its fundamental human embodiments.

In what follows, I consider corporeality in *The Word* in light of different melodramatic contexts to bring forth occluded continuities in Dreyer’s *oeuvre* and to suggest ways in which this director innovated the mode. I first consider ways in which the strong maternal presence in *The Word* relates to the category of the woman’s film as discussed in the first flush of melodrama studies in the 1980s, during which Hollywood melodrama came to be problematically synonymous with figures of suffering and sacrificial women (usually mothers). In addition to these clear figurations of sacrificial mothers, *The Word* also demonstrates a nostalgia and feeling of (maternal) loss initially consistent with maternal melodrama, but which more recent melodrama scholarship has connected with the mode more broadly conceived. I also consider the way this nostalgia has been explained by appealing to Dreyer’s psychobiography. In the second part of this chapter I account for Inger’s peculiarly uncomplicated innocence this late in Dreyer’s career. After considering the corporeality of Inger’s childbirth scene, I draw on extant Nordisk scenarios to argue that the ideational complex of melodrama operative in early Danish melodrama also pleasures in corporeal *significance*. In other words, Nordisk melodrama undertook to represent a wide spectrum of human consciousness on the body and Dreyer continued in this tradition. I then consider the way that Dreyer embodies innocence in a triumvirate of figures: Inger, Johannes and Maren (a core “reconfigured family”) to instigate a series of reactions, concerns and reflections in the other male characters. The film’s emphasis on the male psyche, male tears, and Johannes’s hysterical paralysis convince me that *The Word* contributes to the understanding of male melodrama. I look at questions and problems raised by the film’s gendering of innocence and suffering. In the final part of the chapter I consider further strategies of bodily *significance* at work in the film and read Dreyer’s elaborate construction of paroxysm of pathos—to enhance, prolong and accentuate emotion in the film’s climactic ending.

Corporeality in *The Word* reveals the film's melodrama, as in *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Day of Wrath*, and contributes to a tradition of Danish melodrama rather than transcends it.

Mother in heaven, mother on earth: The Word as maternal melodrama

Inger's innocent suffering as a sacrificial mother and caretaker constitutes an unavoidable, if a somewhat traditional, melodramatic impulse in *The Word*. Dreyer alternates and combines an ethereal, "maternal" presence in the film and a very concretely embodied figuration of motherhood in Inger. Melodrama scholarship can recuperate both impulses. *The Word* stages this juxtaposition between earthly and ethereal mothering as a kind of competition in a curious scene between Johannes (who believes he is Jesus) and his niece Maren (to whom he has promised that he will raise her mother from the dead after she dies). The scene occurs just over halfway through the film, as Inger lies in a nearby room, still agonizing in childbirth. Johannes and Maren calmly discuss whether it is better to have one's mother in heaven or on earth. Maren wishes her mother to die so that she can be resurrected; Johannes explains that the others (the unbelieving adults on the farm) won't allow him to, but reassures her that her mother will go to heaven, which is better. Johannes says, "Little girl, you don't know what it's like to have one's mother in heaven." to which Maren answers, "Is it better than having her on earth?" Johannes describes the protective presence of a mother in heaven, felt everywhere, near, with one at all time. Maren prefers to have her mother living, and always near as well. In contrast to Johannes's disembodied maternal presence, Maren's mother is material. She cares for her when she gets hurt, washes the floors, does the dishes, and milks the cows. (The dead, as Maren points out, are spared housework.) Dreyer conveys earthly mothering in an initial long shot with a fixed camera showing Maren initiating the conversation by coming up to kneel behind Johannes on the chair where he is sitting, staring at the ground. The subsequent shot traces the bulk of the exchange, however. The camera has been moved to the other side of Johannes, and a slow, smooth tracking shot traces a half-circle around the two as they exchange views. The camera movement enacts a slow, sweet voyeurism, as if granting the spectator a POV shot of Maren's dead, heavenly mother as she watches over him, perceived but invisible. Each notion of motherhood designates a melodramatic presence in the film.

The film's scenes preceding Inger's childbirth and "death" provide ample evidence of Maren's "mother on earth." Inger's domestic prowess and seemingly endless caregiving energies show her to be a strong maternal presence gently dominating the home. In this her position resonates with maternal melodrama as framed by early melodrama scholarship that initially framed discussions of melodrama in terms of genre and "the woman's film." For instance, E. Ann Kaplan's work on the woman's film of the 1930s and 40s, "Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-1940," traces representations of motherhood and mothering from 19th century France to the US, through popular literature and psychoanalysis, to inform categories of both maternal melodrama and the woman's film in Hollywood. To the extent that Inger embodies domestic reconciliation, the domesticity occupies the same moral high ground that it does in the woman's film as Kaplan outlines it. Positions of domestic feminism in the woman's film, including values of domestic work and strong mothering, are depicted as morally superior to "a male public order that is either corrupt or inadequate" (126). *The Word* clearly elevates the goodness of Inger's work in the

home—she is an untiring force of reconciliation—over the squabbling pettiness of the film’s patriarchs and rational authority figures (the doctor and even the pastor). This domestic version of the woman’s film that Kaplan outlines as operating in Hollywood in the 1920s, exacts a subtly transgressive potential by making explicit a cognitive dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures. This raises interesting questions about whether it is possible to discern anything approximating a cognitive dissatisfaction with patriarchy in Dreyer’s film. The beauty of the film’s domestic sphere seems to cast a soft haze over any claim that the film offers a criticism of patriarchy *per se*, especially if we need this critique somehow to be recognized in Inger’s character. In contrast even to Dreyer’s *Master of the House*, which is more in keeping with this model of the woman’s film given its explicit treatment of gender roles in the domestic sphere (the gentle self-awareness of a self-sacrificing young housewife and the domestication of a patriarchal “tyrant”), nothing in Inger’s disposition betrays the least frustration with or desire to change the (presumably patriarchal) status quo. Further, *The Word* even confirms the caretaking mother as a role decidedly subject to slot substitution, further dispelling any suggestion of critique. Despite the immense loss that Inger’s death stands to wreak upon Borgensgaard, she is also (almost) immediately replaced. Distraught at the prospect of losing his wife, Mikkel declares to Borgen that he cannot go on without Inger. In the next breath, however, he implores his father to do everything in his power to arrange the marriage between Anders and Anne so that she might be brought to Borgensgaard and be a mother to his children. Inger’s domestic benevolence does not serve any conspicuously critical function in *The Word*.

Thematic similarities between *The Word* and the woman’s film, however, raise interesting questions about how domesticity would have been consumed by the film’s intended audience. As Mary Ann Doane has written, the woman’s film in Hollywood is defined as much by specific production and advertising practices in Hollywood as by its thematic content. The woman’s film, as Doane introduces it, is targeted specifically toward female audiences:

The label ‘woman’s film’ refers to a genre of Hollywood films produced from the silent era through the 1950s and early ‘60s but most heavily concentrated and most popular in the 1930s and ‘40s. The films deal with a female protagonist and often appear to allow her significant access to point of view structures and the enunciative level of the filmic discourse. They treat problems defined as ‘female’ (problems revolving around domestic life, the family, children, self-sacrifice, and the relationship between women and production vs. that between women and reproduction), and, most crucially, are directed toward a female audience. (Doane 3)

It is highly unlikely that *The Word* would have either been created for or marketed specifically for a female audience. The Danish national cinema-going audience would have been too small to afford excluding men, and it is unlikely that the film’s production company Palladium would have imagined the film’s cineaste, high-art film festival audiences as specifically female. (*The Word* won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1955.) This leaves open the suggestive possibility that *The Word*’s deliberate combination the domestic *mise-en-scène* and *male* suffering and tears (so evident at the

film's enunciative level) might have been designed as male melodrama for art-house cinema audiences.

When Johannes describes his mother in heaven as a pervasive, comforting presence despite her absence, he gives voice to nostalgia and feeling of loss that pervades *The Word*. Johannes foreshadows the film's most concise expression of longing for what is lost to be restored—Inger's death and resurrection. The longing to regain a lost plenitude and presence against all odds informs many iterations of the melodramatic mode. Arguably, much of what has been described as the film's longing for transcendence or otherworldliness can be recuperated in melodramatic terms as maternal melodrama. Kaplan describes the maternal melodrama, a subset of the woman's film, in the following way:

It is significant that in general the woman's film, by virtue of being a resisting form, shows more sensitivity to social concerns than does the maternal melodrama, which situates itself more firmly in the terrain of unconscious Oedipal needs, fears and desires. The woman's film on the other hand puts more stress on the cognitive/conscious level, often foregrounding sociological issues and dealing more frequently with social institutions. (126)

Kaplan goes on to describe how the association of goodness with mothering has been theorized as the maternal melodrama's drive to fulfill the young boy's Oedipal fantasy of reunification with the Mother. Inger's extraordinarily unadulterated mothering, as innocence both hyper-embodied and sacrificed bears a distinct resemblance to images of pure motherhood that Kaplan finds in D.W. Griffith's early films *Mothering Heart* (1913), *True Heart Susie* (1919) and *Way Down East* (1920), which "featured Lillian Gish in what was to be a series of roles as a self-sacrificing, pure, passive Mother figure" (125). As in Griffith's work, the good woman is always associated with the good Mother, which might not hold true for all of Dreyer's female protagonists, but it certainly resonates with Inger's character in *The Word*.

But whereas early melodrama scholarship on the woman's film grappled with the dilemmas that such passive figures of female suffering posed for female spectators, more recent scholarship has focused on the broader narrative implications of melodrama's loss. Theorists have identified a conservative, nostalgic impulse in melodrama's desire to return even as it continually adapts and changes. Brooks describes melodrama's narrative trajectory by which it establishes a space of innocence in the beginning of the play, overturns this (as when a villain intrudes upon the idyll), and then creates a pervasive feeling of loss and the desire to restore this state of innocence by the end of the play. As Williams describes this effect in Griffith's *Way Down East*, "Nostalgia for a lost innocence associated with the maternal suffuses this film. Pathos arises, most fundamentally, from the audience's awareness of this loss" ("Revised" 65). This longing backward, toward a lost space of innocence rather than a new one, William continues, "is the fundamental reason for melodrama's profound conservatism. The most classic forms of the mode are often suffused with nostalgia for rural and maternal origins that are forever lost yet—hope against hope—refound, reestablished, or, if permanently lost, sorrowfully lamented" (65). *The Word* offers an extreme example of this narrative trajectory; Inger is an ideal mother who dies and then is impossibly, miraculously,

climactically restored to life. Reading *The Word* as the fantasy of maternal plentitude offers another framework in which to understand the “transcendent” mood of the film.

Martin Drouzy’s psychobiography of Dreyer, *Carl Th. Dreyer né Nilsson* from 1982, casts this fundamental fantasy of maternal reunification directly onto Dreyer’s biography. Drouzy reads Dreyer’s *oeuvre* as a repeated, personal grappling with the trauma instigated by the loss of his mother. As the second monograph on Dreyer after Neergaard’s, Drouzy’s work continues to influence perceptions of Dreyer. (Originally written in French and translated into Danish, the work has perhaps not reached the wider audiences it otherwise might have.) Its emphatic insistence on the maternal in Dreyer’s work resonates in many ways with the underlying loss of maternal melodrama. Dreyer was an illegitimate child whose birthmother gave him up for adoption and not long afterward died during an attempt to terminate another pregnancy. This, compounded by what Drouzy documents as Dreyer’s de-stabilizing, early bouncing around between foster parents and the not exactly cruel, but fundamentally unloving, adoptive parents with whom he ended up, combined to create the arch-formative experience motivating Dreyer’s life-long artistic production.

The dramatic circumstances, that had marked (*præget*) the filmmaker’s birth and childhood, formed the background for his entire production. That trauma, that the little Carl Theodor had suffered (*pådraget på sig*) as a very early point in his life, made it possible, if not to explain, then at the very least to better understand, why his films were the way that they were.²

Drouzy goes so far as to claim that some of the peculiarities of Dreyer’s films (*Vampyr* for example) can only be explained with recourse to understanding his biographical trauma. What initially began as a socio-historical project for Drouzy, who sought to counterbalance the dominant myth of Dreyer as “the director of the invisible” (*det usynliges instruktør*) (*Født Nilsson* 17), became, in the face of incontrovertible evidence, a psycho-biographical exploration the extended impact of Dreyer’s early childhood trauma. Peter Schepelern among others has critiqued Drouzy’s approach for providing neither a great biography nor a satisfying analysis of Dreyer’s work. (Schepelern found the material well-suited to that of a “semi-fictional, biographic novel about an artist” [*en semi-fiktiv biografisk kunstnerroman*].³) Although I appreciate the intriguing way that Drouzy represents Dreyer melodramatically, eliciting emotion by defining his experience first and foremost in terms of victimhood, I find it ultimately more reductive than necessary. That being said, Drouzy’s work raises interesting questions about the relationship between Dreyer’s individual artistic agency and the narratives of loss, longing and desire (for the maternal, among other things) that melodrama accounts for. Drouzy makes an important intervention in pointing out that Dreyer’s creative process was not exclusively forward-looking, and his desire to account for female suffering and longing in Dreyer’s films is spot on.

² “De dramatiske begivenheder, som havde præget filmskaberens fødsel og barndom, dannede baggrunden for hele hans produktion. Det trauma, som den lille Carl Theodor havde pådraget sig på et meget tidligt tidspunkt af sit liv, gjorde det muligt, om ikke at forklare, så dog i det mindst bedre at forstå, hvorfor hans film var, som de var” (Drouzy, *Født Nilsson* 16).

³ See Schepelern “Biograf-problemer.” For Drouzy’s response to Schepelern’s critique in the same volume, see Drouzy “For og imod” 149-164.

The line between the socio-historical project that Drouzy abandons and personal artistic expression might be less distinct than he claimed. Whatever Dreyer's personal investment in the maternal, or in the experience of suffering, longing, or loss, he would have found ample opportunity to graft it onto and into melodramatic narratives.

Anecdotally, Dreyer's early scenario "Chatollets Hemmelighed" (*The Secret of the Bureau*, Hjalmar Davidsen 1913) provides a suggestive example that Nordisk scenario-writing might have allowed him to imbricate elements of his own biography with melodramatic narrative. The scenario opens with a rich countess on her deathbed gesturing feverishly toward her bureau in the corner. Unfortunately, she dies before she can communicate to those present that hidden in a secret compartment in the bureau is a document that, as we will later learn, reads,

If I die before I have mustered the courage to confess the error I made in my youth, this document shall verify that I have a son, who was born on February 3, 1884 but who was given up for adoption to the Fang Family and given the name Arthur. This family has since disappeared completely, but, but if my son is found, then he is, in other words, my only sole rightful heir. –Countess de la Garde.⁴

Dreyer grants his true-heart protagonist—the countess's illegitimate son but rightful heir—his own birthday, February 3, seeming to support Drouzy's reading of Dreyer's filmwork as a place to work through his adoption traumas. But whereas *The Word* will culminate in a paroxysm of pathos over Inger's dead body, in *Secret of the Bureau*, Dreyer dispenses this iteration of "his" mother more quickly than one might anticipate. Her death at the very beginning of the film quickly shifts emphasis from the pathos that that death might have produced, to its exciting repercussions for the protagonist and the document, whose fates are now intertwined. At play in *Secret of the Bureau* are several other nascent melodramatic interests that I argue emerge in Dreyer's *oeuvre*. The scenario foreshadows the question of how one's true inheritance will come to the surface, a device that Dreyer will reimagine in *The President* and *Day of Wrath*. The revealing document, a common trope in melodrama, provides a melodramatic reading of Dreyer's recurring fascination with using documents to unify narratives.⁵ Speckled amid the fantastic chase to retrieve the will (which naturally has been stolen by the wrongful heir) are indications that Dreyer took interest in how to represent bodies experiencing extraordinary falls from great heights and smashed up at the bottom of a cliff. Dreyer's scenario provides details for accomplishing daring feats. It also includes unusual directions for accomplishing a tree-climbing scene, suggesting that the actor be equipped with a pair of the kind of boots that telephone repairers wear to climb telephone poles. And Dreyer's instructions for capturing a scene in which the false heir falls off a cliff while clinging to a tree that has been chopped down by the hero suggest an enduring interest in material bodies and the limits for representing bodies on film. "The tree falls, but as calculated, out over the water. He sees von Høfft's shape, possibly a dummy,

⁴ "Hvis jeg inden min Død ikke har faaet Mod til at vedgaa det Fejltrin jeg begik i min Ungdom skal dette Dokument stadfæste at jeg har en Søn, der fødtes 3' Februar 1884 men bortadopteredes til en Familie Fang og fik Navnet Arthur, denne Familie er senere fuldkommen forsvunden, men findes min Søn er han altsaa min eneste retmæssige Arving. –Grevinde de la Garde" (Dreyer "Chatollets Hemmelighed" 2).

⁵ For a discussion of serial queen "document" or "weenie," see Singer "Female Power." For a reading of Dreyer's use devices of written language, word, and the book as a narrative device, see Bordwell *Films of Dreyer* 34-36.

clinging to it tightly.”⁶ Nordisk provided a rich array of melodramatic concerns, expansive enough to incorporate (personal) fantasies of maternal resurrection and suffering sacrifice with spectacular explorations of representing material bodies.

The perfect mother

While *The Word* shows distinctive ties to the ideational complex of Nordisk melodrama, the embodied innocence of its core pathetic triangle, Inger, Martin and Marin—who form the heart of the film—also appears in many respects to enlist a more primary melodramatic impulse than the Nordisk films did. Together the three characters embody unambiguously virtuous maternal suffering, innocent hysteria as a response to trauma, and childlike naiveté. Through this triumvirate of hyper-idealized innocence, Dreyer repurposes the virtuous suffering of primary melodrama to instigate reflection in a constellation of male victims. *The Word* instigates a full-blown exploration of fractured male psyches and tears.

Inger personifies motherhood in a way more innocent and uncomplicated than in many Nordisk silent melodramas. Looking at the cross-section of Nordisk melodrama (including *Offer*-scenarios, Dreyer’s extant Nordisk scenarios, and the still-extant films, as described in Chapter 2) indicates that mothers served a variety of narrative functions in melodrama’s ideational complex at the studio. Mother characters could elicit pathos in fairly traditional roles as virtuous victim-heroines who “achieve recognition of their virtue through the more passive ‘deeds’ of suffering and sacrifice” (Williams “Revised” 59). August Blom’s 1911 film, *Ekspeditricen* (The Shop Girl), for instance, features a young woman of a lower class who gets pregnant by an upper-class lover who later abandons her. Like Inger, the main character also dies in childbirth. (Deathbed scenes were a reliable source of pathos for Nordisk to exploit.) But mother figures could also elicit pathos by sacrificing their desires, ambitions, or lives (reminiscent of maternal sacrifice in “classical” melodrama of Hollywood in the 40s and 50s), only to have this suffering revealed as perhaps virtuous, but also utterly in vain. In *Modern* (Robert Dinesen DK, 1914, distributed in the UK as *A Mother’s Sacrifice*), for instance, a widowed mother sacrifices her own chance for happiness and love to her (ungrateful) teenage daughter who has fallen for the same man. *A Mother’s Sacrifice* ends ambiguously when the young engineer (the object of desire for both mother and daughter) plummets to his death on an ambitious mountain expedition. By the time the heartbroken mother delivers the news to her daughter she is already engaged to another.⁷ Mothers could also be actively agents of reconciliation at Nordisk. They pursued and retrieved their callow wayward sons from the grips of seedy *varieté demimondes*. And although *The Word*’s final scene is spectacular in its own right, “maternal” could be intriguingly complicated at Nordisk. In *Massøssens Offer* (The Masseuse’s Victim/Sacrifice, Alfred Lind, 1910) Henry Vinge, another naïve son recently relocated to big-city Copenhagen, falls in with shady women is so comprehensively seduced that the poor lad can no longer recognize his own mother’s face when she arrives to help him. Affecting a spectacular Oedipal whirlwind,

⁶ “Træet falder, men mod Beregning ud over Vandet. Han ser v. Høffts Skikkelse, evt. en Dukke, klamrende sig fast” (Dreyer “Chatollets Hemelighed” 21).

⁷ The pity we feel at this woman’s maternal sacrifice is compounded by its utter lack of recognition by her daughter. One might contrast this to Sirk’s climactic ending to *Imitation of Life* (1959) that culminates in the “ungrateful” daughter’s tearful recognition of her mother’s sacrifice that comes too late.

however, his mother disguises herself in the figure of a “Lady of the World” (*Verdensdames Skikkelse*) and “seduces” him back to propriety.⁸

If Inger’s character stands out as strikingly simple against the backdrop of motherhood at Nordisk, she appears equally distinct from Dreyer’s own female protagonists in his late films (*Day of Wrath* and *Gertrud*). Inger lacks psychological complexity. Apart from her generosity and willingness to nurture others, the audience learns scant information about her own personality, dreams or desires. Inger nurtures not only her own two children, but the entire household. Those she cares for come first, whether this means filling Morten Borgen’s pipe, providing visitors with endless cups of coffee, making cookies, reminding slightly-soured old men of the goodness of their sons, making sure everyone dresses warmly, meeting children as they return from school, reminding Mikkel to take pity on his mad brother, Johannes, or advocating for the cause of young lovers.

Despite her harrowing ordeal, Inger doesn’t *change*. Jeanne struggles with the violent spiritual repercussions of her decisions and recants; she changes her mind. Anne gains self-knowledge about her powers and desires, and develops awareness of being betrayed. Gertrud, fully aware of the risks, falls into a naïve love. When this fails, Gertrud withdraws from the larger world; she decides, she hardens. Inger, in contrast, remains unwavering and constant. She is pure, possessing the same childlike faith in goodness, life and a loving God as her daughter who never doubts that her mother will be brought back to life. Unlike Anne, Inger remains utterly unaffected by the epistemological uncertainties and crises of faith in the men around her, for whom these tensions drive the entire plot. When Bordwell enumerates Dreyer’s heroines in his major works who grapple with self-knowledge (something which he argues makes them tragic figures), Inger is conspicuously absent.

Of even greater use is a conception of tragic self-knowledge. In *Jeanne d’Arc*, *Day of Wrath*, and *Gertrud*, the tragic protagonist at first misunderstands herself, failing to synchronize her actions with her ‘authentic’ character. But as martyrdom approaches, the protagonist’s acceptance of her fate signifies her recognition of her essential identity. (*Films of Dreyer* 194)

Although as I have argued in previous chapters, self-knowledge and psychological complexity have ceased to be the exclusive claim of tragedy, there is something especially “un-tragic” about Inger’s character.

Inger’s self-sacrificing motherhood in *The Word* glows pure against the numerous self-sacrificing mothers in Hollywood melodrama of the 50s. In the cluster of films that includes Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* and Vidor’s *Stella Dallas*, motherhood becomes such an immense project of self-sacrifice that it takes on a slightly ominous hue. The potential of sacrificial mothering to stifle its offspring threatens to pollute its virtue. (One contributing difference is the fact that Inger’s offspring are small children rather than young adults with more developed psychosexual identities that give them more impetus to react to their mothers.) It is as if, with *The Word*, Dreyer sought to provide an antidote to Anne’s pessimistic fate in *Day of Wrath* by allowing a gorgeously nostalgic (if temporary) indulgence in pure melodramatic fantasy. On one hand, *The Word* fully

⁸ The program of *Massøsens Offer* reads, “I en elegant Verdensdames Skikkelse opsøger hun [the mother] ham [her son] under et natlig Sold og forsøger at faa ham til at interessere sig for hende.”

acquiesces to the fantasy of reviving sweet goodness in the form of a departed mother, making it an intriguing and beautiful concession in Dreyer's ongoing conflict with the mode. On the other hand, Dreyer works hard to reassert her corporeality.

Framing the maternal

Dreyer's inclusion of Inger's strikingly graphic childbirth scene, the first of two corporeal spectacles that Dreyer incorporates in *The Word* (the second being Inger's resurrection), attests to his interest in pathos elicited through depictions of bodies enduring pain. As with Herlofs Marthe's scene of immolation in *Day of Wrath*, the birth scene occurs off-stage in the text of Kaj Munk's play, which reports it in dialogue rather than showing it directly. Dreyer notes the importance of staging the childbirth scene in an article he wrote many years earlier after seeing a staged production of *The Word*. As he recounts in "The Real Talking Film" ("Den Virkelige Talefilm") in 1933, the coming and going of actors into and out of the sickroom would (if filmed) create a certain rhythmic unease (*en vis rytmebunden uro*) characteristic of good film. Dreyer's discussion of the scene in terms of "unease" underplays the impact he certainly imagined possible by including shots of Inger herself. Much like the scenes of Herlofs Marthe's torture and suffering in *Day of Wrath*, the childbirth sequence presents both a direct and indirect appeal to pathos. On one hand, the images and sound Dreyer included were graphic enough for The Danish State Censor's Office to deem the birth scene too frightening and disturbing for children and rate the film accordingly.⁹ On the other hand, Dreyer's cinematic rhythm, as he puts it, in which as much happens outside of the stage as on stage ("*helst lige så meget 'uden for' scenen som 'på' scenen*"¹⁰), is also a recipe for cultivating and eliciting pathos. The childbirth scene clearly demonstrates his fascination with more and less direct techniques for conveying the experience of intense discomfort and pain.

By "direct" here I refer largely to visual evidence of Inger's suffering that is included in the frame, "on stage". Dreyer also uses "indirect" framings that delay giving unimpeded visual access to Inger's suffering body, whether through editing techniques like cross-cutting or by interrupting the immersive duration of suffering with reaction shots of those watching Inger. Dreyer uses very few shots in *The Word*, with some lasting several minutes. The childbirth sequence, like the resurrection sequence later, avails itself of more complicated editing. This ties the two together as privileged, related moments of pathos. As Drum and Drum write,

The birth scene had aroused a good deal of comment, but Dreyer defended it. 'People have complained that the long birth scene had nothing to do with the miracle, but it does. All the women in the audience must identify with Inger and the men with Mikkel. If they do that they will also experience the same passion as Inger and Mikkel and they will hope that the miracle will occur, and so the miracle will come as a liberation for both those on the screen and those in the audience.' (233)

Even within the childbirth sequence Dreyer arranges delaying techniques to create urgency and the desire for characters (as well as for the cinema audience) to *see* Inger's body, the source of suffering. The sound of Inger's pained cries anticipates the sight of her body. In the scene in which Morten (Borgen) and Anders visit Peder the tailor to

⁹ For a discussion of the filming of *The Word*, see Drum and Drum 221-243.

¹⁰ See Dreyer "Den Virkelige Talefilm" 33.

address the subject of Anders's rejected proposal, the two arrive during a prayer meeting in which the congregation sings, "Sinner, cover not your ears. Open up for the voice of the Lamb. Hear how it calls, full of grace. Come to rest at my chest." The voice that the cinema audience hears next, however, will be Inger's sighs of labor pain (the voice of a different lamb). As the gathered worshippers conclude these four lines, the screen fades to black and then fades in to the parlor at Borgensgaard. Before we glimpse Inger, we hear her moans from behind Mikkel as he emerges from her room to call on the doctor again. The sound of Inger's voice establishes the presence of her body in the room beside. Dreyer further delays the spectator's entry to Inger's bedside by cutting to Peter the tailor's home. He answers the phone and slowly reacts and recounts that Inger has fallen ill. Then, echoing Anne's power to "wish" another person dead in *Day of Wrath*, Peder "wishes" Inger dead in the hopes that such an awful test will bring Borgen closer to God, and the two men scuffle. Dreyer further accentuates Inger's impending peril by intercutting shots of Borgen and Anders rushing home in their carriage with images of Inger going into labor. This cultivates suspense and anticipation of what they will find when they arrive home.

Even at the level of the individual shot, Dreyer heightens the eventual revelation of Inger's body in pain by withholding it from sight. As with Herlofs Marthes torture sequence, the spectator's initial exposure to Inger's pain is through aural cues. She moans in agony from out of frame as we see the Doctor put on his gloves, slowly, as if perplexed, and walk toward her. The camera pans left to follow him, and then finally pulls back to reveal Inger's full body, lying on her back, her right hand gripping the table in pain, her left gripping tightly to Mikkel. Her head tilts back in subdued agony. The view then cuts to Anders and Borgen racing homeward. In one of the first close-ups of the film, the camera (now placed above Inger's head), shows her face upside down. As she peers toward Mikkel, the camera tilts up to follow, following her gaze to reveal Mikkel's expression of deep concern as he peers down at her. The interaction between the two encapsulates the combination of loving interaction, identification (for male and female spectators), and pathos that Dreyer envisioned for the sequence.

But the childbirth sequence goes significantly further to affirm that Inger undergoes significant physical pain. Somatically, her ordeal bears a certain resemblance to the physical torture that Jeanne and Herlofs Marthe undergo as if Dreyer intended to shock audiences as well as move them. We see Inger's legs lying open and quivering on the table (her face now off screen); her hand falls limp as she loses consciousness; the doctor walks slowly back and forth between bed and his tray to retrieve increasingly gruesome instruments for cutting; and we hear the doctor's brutal scissors clamp down upon the fetus that won't come out any other way. Inger's moans and sighs overlay the entire never-ending shot. Later dialogue in this sequence also reinforces the materiality of the bodies involved. At one point, Mikkel has been sent out to fetch some linen in the parlor where Borgen is waiting. "Has the child come?" he asks, to which Mikkel replies, agitated and upset, "yes," for which Borgen praises God—but too soon. "...it's lying in a tub cut into in four pieces," Mikkel responds, distraught. The effect is not unlike early stage melodrama, which sought to articulate everything, but also perhaps illustrates Dreyer's feeling out the limit of what could *actually* be shown. Inger's childbirth scene dispels any trace of aspirations to transcendence, clearly eliciting pathos for Inger's bodily experience as well as for Mikkel and others who watch her suffer. But its

investment in melodrama's semiotics sometimes seems to exceed this goal of pathos, as if Dreyer's interest in orchestrating the signs of physical suffering threatens to become an end rather than a means.

In one sense, Inger's hyper-innocent suffering becomes another of Dreyer's authenticity projects, not unlike the conflation of being and representing he sought in Falconetti's body in *Jeanne d'Arc*. Birgitte Federspiel's body is also a site of authenticity and (maternal) presence. According to Federspiel's account, Dreyer was overjoyed that she was *actually* pregnant during the shooting of the film. When she gave birth shortly after the film company returned to Copenhagen, "the sounds of the birth of the baby were recorded at the maternity clinic and used in the sound track of the film" (Drum and Drum 232). Voice and aural cues became crucial tools for Dreyer to convey the authenticity of this bodily presence. Instead of making an entire film set "real" (as with *Jeanne d'Arc*), with *The Word* the filmmaker moves invisibly around to capture the sound of "real" drama in real homes, or in this case, a real hospital room. As Dreyer wrote in "The Real Talking Film" (the article in which he discusses rhythm in *The Word*, above), about the possibility for new documentary realism that the sound technology provided, film sound must be ripped out of the hands of theater directors, whom he claims use it in an exaggerated way, and put into the hands of stealthy filmmakers.

The real talking film must give the impression that a film photographer, equipped with camera and microphone, has sneaked unseen into one of the homes in the town just as some kind of drama is taking place within the family. Hidden under his cloak of invisibility, he snaps up the most important scenes of the drama and disappears as silently as he came.¹¹

In *The Word*, Dreyer attempts to overcome the recordedness of film by overinvesting in the authenticity of the "actual" birth recording of Federspiel's voice, at the same time transforming the birth of Federspiel's actual baby into a recorded performance.

Inger's childbirth scene also attests to the strongly material humanism that went hand in hand with Dreyer's authenticity projects. *The Word* is another example of in which Dreyer uses religious themes as a guise within which to explore very material, embodied human suffering—the rawer moments of melodramatic *significance*. This is consistent with the humanization of Jeanne d'Arc in which her sainthood allows Dreyer to explore the limits of her human experience. Particularly telling in this respect is Dreyer's unrealized magnum opus, the *Jesus* script, which includes even more graphic examples of the materiality of human suffering and would undoubtedly have allowed Dreyer to further experiment with the limits of depicting human pain. Some have suggested that *The Word* offered Dreyer the opportunity to work through issues in preparation for the Jesus picture. In his book about meeting Dreyer during the summer he shot *The Word*, Jan Wahl recounts Dreyer saying, "In a way, this [*The Word*] will be an 'in-between' experience for me. I want to see how people will react to a miracle, since the Christ film will be full of them" (Wahl 13-14).

Spectacular *bodily* miracles in Dreyer's "Jesus" screenplay are readily forthcoming. Early on, after the rumors of Jesus's powers of healing have begun to

¹¹ "Den virkelige talefilm må give indtryk af, at en filmfotograf, udstyret med apparat og mikrofon, uset har sneget sig ind i et af byens hjem, netop som et eller andet drama udspilles inden for familien. Skjult under sin usyndlighedskappe knipser han dramaets vigtigste scener og forsvinder lige så lydløs, som han kom" (Dreyer "Den Virkelige Talefilm 32).

spread, a young man carries his father who is lame in both legs. The fact that the father must be carried in suffices to prove the need for a miracle. Dreyer offers the following display, “Another son uncovers the legs of the father and demonstrates that the muscles are loose and flabby. He says / *Look.* / He takes a long needle and drives it into the calf of his father’s leg. Philip addresses the lame man. PHILLIP: *You feel no pain?* / LAME MAN: *None at all.*”¹² Like Inger in the final scene of *The Word*, this man will also kindly be commanded by Jesus to rise and will miraculously be able to do so. Inger’s traumatic childbirth, as a “needle in the calf” scene, serves similar dual functions. Her childbirth sequence both moves the audience to feel sympathy for the suffering woman, and also helps to prove (by showing) that Inger actually dies, something of which the audience must be convinced in preparation for her resurrection. Dreyer offers further “proof” that she has died by showing her official death certificate, followed by other textual inserts from newspaper’s certifying her death all in preparation for *The Word*’s resurrection-miracle.

Interestingly, Dreyer’s “Jesus” screenplay also culminates by emphasizing materiality. Where one might have hoped for a resplendent visual resurrection sequence, “Jesus” ends with Jesus suffering and dying on the cross. Roman soldiers pierce him to ensure that he is dead, and then sit down to eat their lunch around him, a historical practice that Dreyer carefully points out, “The centurion and a soldier approach the cross. It was the duty of the centurion to make sure that those crucified were really dead and he motions to the soldier to pierce the side of Jesus with his spear. The soldier does so and ‘forthwith came there out blood and water’” (*Jesus* 292). Unfortunately one can only speculate how much Dreyer might have tempered the rather gruesome materiality of Jesus’s corpse had he actually filmed this culminating sequence. Perhaps Dreyer might have sought to temper the script’s stark materiality through a cinematic resurrection. As written, however, Jesus’s only resurrection as is accomplished through the voice-over narrator’s accounting of his deeds. “NARRATOR: Jesus dies, but in death he accomplished what he had begun in life. His body was killed, but his spirit lived. His immortal sayings brought to humanity all over the world the good tidings of love and charity foretold by the Jewish prophets of old” (*Jesus* 292). The voiceover would have had the effect of the final intertitle of *Jeanne d’Arc*, proclaiming the continued effect of her martyrdom on France even today.

The question of gender

The suffering of such a stereotypically “pure,” hyper-embodied female protagonist as Inger, raises important questions about the use of gender in Dreyer’s *oeuvre*. Inger’s character itself enacts an intriguing—but also problematic—conflation of being and representing, a fundamental lack of reflection. Her goodness is never hidden or in doubt. It infuses her body entirely (even her pregnancy marks her plentitude in a way that cannot be hidden). As a hyper-innocent *Offer* (victim/sacrifice) character who never displays internal conflict, Inger plays an intriguing melodramatic function in Dreyer’s late *oeuvre*. Whereas Jeanne’s status (as a saint) is subject to dramatic misrecognitions and doubt (her own as well as that of those around her), which produces a melodramatic revelation

¹² Although Dreyer’s “Jesus” screenplay was first published under the title, *Jesus fra Nazaret* in Danish in 1968, it was written originally written in English. The English version I cite is based on Dreyer’s original version, written during his stay in Independence, Missouri in 1949-50.

allowing her innocence to be gloriously revealed and restored, Inger never endures any misprision. This makes her unique, for her resurrection validates a goodness that has never actually been called into question. Her innocence is arguably even interesting as an “authenticity” project in and of itself. It is not easy to represent pure goodness convincingly, and from a feminist perspective, Inger poses problems.

Past critics who have addressed gender in Dreyer’s work have rehearsed traditional gender dichotomies. Tom Milne, for instance, mythologizes the suffering of Dreyer’s female characters as the conflict between their supernatural powers and the puritanical, human (read masculine, rational) laws constricting them. “Thus, as the natural source of all bliss, the Dreyer heroine is adored; as the temptress who sins and causes to sin against the man-made laws of puritanism, she is made to suffer; and in either case, she unconsciously wields a power that is inbred, incalculable, purely supernatural” (*Cinema of Carl Dreyer* 31).¹³ Milne’s reading brushes on the way that melodrama too can tend to mythologize the personal, something Elsaesser would argue makes it a potent carrier of ideologies. Bodil Marie Thomsen’s reading of gender issues in Dreyer and von Trier’s work takes an equally elusive tack, typical of the way in which Dreyer’s reputation as a serious art-house auteur often shields him from feminist critique in a way von Trier’s reputation hasn’t. Thomsen reads Dreyer’s images of suffering female characters as actually embodying the antithesis of melodrama. In contrast to melodramatic suffering, which she argues is implicitly objectifying and sexist, Dreyer’s images contain a liberating potential. Thomsen then associates this potential with the sacrificial heroine-victims of Lars von Trier’s Golden Heart Trilogy [*Breaking the Waves* (1996), *Idioterne/The Idiots* (1998), and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000)] to defend von Trier’s work as a continuation of Dreyer’s work. Relating von Trier’s work to the *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928) defends it from the accusation of being melodramatic (and thus sexist). Trier’s female protagonists, Thomsen writes, have been unfairly accused of “bear[ing] the burden both of passion and sacrifice, [following] the representation of women in outmoded melodramatic *weepies*, where the women actor’s sacrifices are only rewarded by the female spectator’s tears, and not within the fiction frame” (43). Thomsen in effect argues that Trier instead continues Dreyer’s non-melodramatic, non-sexist project of creating haptic imagery and also creates images of

¹³ Milne’s appeal to a Manichean melodramatic rhetoric in which the world resembles a post-sacred moral occult is remarkably melodramatic. The passage in its entirety reads, “In this inner world, the mystic powers of both good and evil are very real, and although Dreyer’s work is ostensibly dedicated to acceptance of the Christian faith, its undertow is altogether darker and more impenetrable, oddly akin in spirit to man’s primitive worship of the moon goddess, revered as the repository of infinite desire but reviled for the inconstancy of her favours. Thus, as the natural source of all bliss, the Dreyer heroine is adored; as the temptress who sins and causes to sin against the man-made laws of puritanism, she is made to suffer; and in either case, she unconsciously wields a power that is inbred, incalculable, purely supernatural. Call it what you will—witchcraft, vampirism, or simply the nature of love—Dreyer’s heroines all live or die by this power, from old Dame Margaret in *The Parson’s Widow*, who simply arranges to die one day in order that two young lovers may be happy, down to Anne in *Day of Wrath*, Inger in *Ordet*, and of course Gertrud, that arch-vampire of them all, relentlessly pursuing her hopeless quest for perfect love in *Gertrud*, and somehow at last achieving the impossible in the solitude of her memories. Her choice of epitaph is *Amor Omnia*, Love is All, and it would serve as well for any one of Dreyer’s heroines, each of whom models for a detail—self-sacrifice in *The Parson’s Widow*, fidelity in *Master of the House*, suffering in *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, ethereal grace in *Vampyr*, passion in *Day of Wrath*, joy in *Ordet*, purity in *Gertrud*—in the great mystic portrait of womanhood offered by his *oeuvre*” (31).

flesh that transcend “the exclusion of (female) bodies from the written, dry *logos* of history” through their connection to spirit (53). Thomsen writes,

In Dreyer’s films the passion of the heroines is almost always situated within their bodies, but the filmic style does not deliver the body as a visual representation of ideas, one of the melodramatic genre’s most common traits. Instead the body and the face become flesh, concrete and real through the preference for extreme close-ups of skin and facial expressions. (44)

Thomsen’s understanding of melodrama can be difficult to parse at times, but seems to entail that melodrama’s superficial embodiments objectify women in a way that high art (haptic imagery) does not. Consequently, Dreyer’s images of suffering, because they are not melodramatic, resist critique.

James Schamus takes up similar questions of gender in his analysis of conflicting semiotic orders in Dreyer’s work and the (im)possibility of overcoming these orders. (Both Schamus and Thomsen draw upon Lacanian designations that gender these systems: the image being feminine and word being male.) In *Carl Theodor Dreyer’s Gertrud: The Moving Word*, Schamus describes the strong female protagonists in Dreyer’s *oeuvre* as suffering from a violent and persistent lack of access to semiotic orders of signification. Schamus reads a tentative, provisional (if painful) resistance to this in the access of these female protagonists to the Real, via the image.

One unfortunate consequence of the fact that Dreyer’s *oeuvre* hasn’t been read as melodramatic is that it has largely avoided the critique that feminists have raised against the mode’s use of aesthetic, idealized depictions of female suffering. One notable exception is Emma Bell, who critiques Dreyer’s figures of female suffering (albeit circuitously) by associating them with von Trier’s “Dreyer-inspired” experiments with melodrama. In reference to Trier’s controversial “miracle” film *Breaking the Waves* (1996), featuring Bess (a protagonist arguably as innocent and carnal as Inger, and more overtly self-sacrificing), Bell writes,

The film is inspired by De Sade’s *Justine* (1791) as much as by the films of Sirk, Bergman and especially Dreyer’s *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928), *Ordet/The Word* (1954) and *Gertrud* (1964). Bess, Gertrud, St. Joan, and Justine are fantasies of the idealistic purity and goodness that might reside in womanly passions, and their forbearance of suffering is all the more horrifying given their compulsion to martyr themselves for an ideal. At stake is the madness of woman’s morally transcendent complicity with the retribution that such goodness might provoke. (208)¹⁴

This entirely justified critique revives discussions central to a vital wave of feminist melodrama scholarship in the 1970s. Feminist film scholars faced the sometimes-tricky

¹⁴ Bell rejects the way in which feminists like Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous have attempted to redeem the figure of the martyr/hysteric/mystic as evidence of a radically anti-patriarchal approach to feminism. “Compelling though these ideas are, is it not the case that they are recuperated by and reinforce patriarchy precisely because they collaborate to conceal the political and the social forces that shape and put such archetypes to work? By conforming to the myth that the feminine speaks and acts as the body itself, consolatory images of woman’s ‘mad’ and numinous essence reinforce patriarchal notions of femininity as wholly somatic and affect-driven, as the Other of masculine Reason. Femininity and madness are re-established as irrational, bodily, silent, and of Nature, by way of pathologies intrinsic to them. In this way, Bess becomes synonymous with the supposed general condition of femininity and its passions” (208-209).

task of critiquing the sexism underlying depictions of female suffering in the woman's film (as a product of Hollywood's inherently patriarchal and exploitive capitalist structures), while also reclaiming "the woman's film" as a legitimate (if-neglected) object of cultural and artistic expression. Christine Gledhill notes the prominent role that feminist criticism plays in melodrama scholarship in her volume, *Home is Where the Heart Is* from 1987, where she writes:

The significance of feminist analysis of melodrama is not simply that it brings a 'woman's area' into critical view, but that it poses wider questions about gender and culture. At stake are the categories used to demarcate art from entertainment, the serious from the trivial, the tragic and the realist from the melodramatic – demarcations which determine how the relationship between ideology, popular culture and pleasure is conceptualised. (2)

Dreyer's attraction to women's suffering in particular might indicate that he was nothing more than a man of his time, shuffling predictably amid sexist representations of women—the kind in which women are most beautiful (and aesthetically useful) when they are either suffering or dead.¹⁵ But it might tell us that he viewed women's suffering as particularly interesting; or perhaps as unfortunately more common and therefore worth drawing aesthetic attention to; or simply as one of many legitimate manifestations of the universal experience of suffering. Ultimately, Dreyer's figures of female suffering produce an attraction-repulsion to melodrama that Williams situates with feminist critics of melodrama in the mid-eighties, a discussion sparked by the threat scholars saw in the female spectator's (enslaving) over-identification with victims. Like Dreyer's own ambiguity toward the melodramatic mode, the great analytical care that these critics undertook in disavowing melodrama betrayed an undeniable draw toward it.

Both drawn to and repelled by the spectacle of virtuous and pathetic suffering, feminist critics were torn: we wanted to properly condemn the abjection of suffering womanhood, yet in the almost loving detail of our growing analyses of melodramatic subgenres—medical discourse, gothic melodrama, romance melodrama—it was clear that something more than condemnation was taking place. An opposition to female suffering was certainly an important goal of feminism, but in the process of distinguishing our 'properly' feminist distance from melodrama's emotions, we failed to confront the importance of pathos itself and the fact that a surprising power lay in identifying with victimhood. ("Revised" 47)

Dreyer's *oeuvre* contributes to discussions of gender mainly through its exploration of the power of pathos to attract as well as repel spectators of all genders, an important step, perhaps, in further blurring gendered demarcations between art and entertainment. Despite a general preference for female characters that do demonstrate some level of self-awareness, I still cannot *but* admire Inger.

¹⁵ See Bronfen.

Male melodrama?

To my mind, *The Word*'s most intriguing intervention in melodrama scholarship and discussions of gender is its unabashed use of male affect to explore *signifiante* in terms of the male body. As Dreyer mentioned in the article (above), he sought to create in Mikkel a character with whom male audience members could identify. Linda Williams has identified the melodramatic mode in male action figures, which the men of Borgensgaard clearly are not.¹⁶ For all of the surface of restrained emotion, the men in *The Word* suffer and cry readily, but not as the emasculated breadwinners and insensitive, aging patriarchs that Thomas Schatz described in identifying the "Male Weepie" as an important post WWII iteration of the "The Family Melodrama." Neither does *The Word* feature a clear male protagonist, which Schatz describes male melodrama as generally featuring. None of the sons of Borgensgaard suffers the emasculating effects of patriarchal structures that one sees in *Oedipally*-laden post-WWII Hollywood melodrama. The sons of Morten Borgen weep, but they are by no means the kind of tormented, inadequate son that James Dean will memorialize in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955).¹⁷ Seen pessimistically, Inger's glorious passivity positions her suffering as arguably working for the benefit of male desires, in line with Modleski's provocative argument that there is actually no such thing as a woman's film, for "Hollywood films are always dramas of and for the male" (19). In "Time and Desire in the Woman's Film" a feminist reading of Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) she writes:

Intuitively, of course, we ally melodrama with the feminine insofar as it is a genre quintessentially concerned with emotional expression. Women in melodrama almost always suffer the pains of love and even death (as in *Dark Victory*) while husbands, lovers, and children remain partly or totally unaware of their experience. Women carry the burden of feeling for everyone. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* simply takes this situation to its furthest extreme and shows that though women are hysterics with respect to male desire, men may be hysterics with respect to feminine 'emotion'; unable to experience it directly, they gain access to it only at second hand. (24)

In the case of *The Word*, however, men and children suffer the pains of love and death and carry the burden of feeling for everyone. As attested by their profuse tears and pronounced emotion, the men of Borgensgaard carry the burden of feeling for everyone. They also care for Johannes whose suffering and affected presence in the film (while trying to them at times) still instigates an elegant solidarity and caring among these hearty men. As long as Borgen draws breath, Johannes will have a home at Borgensgaard.

Female suffering in *The Word* informs a constellation of male victim-characters reminiscent of the stylistically conscious practitioners of Hollywood melodrama (Minnelli, Sirk, Ray and Cukor) that Elsaesser treats in "Tales of Sound and Fury." He writes, "One of the characteristic features of melodramas in general is that they concentrate on the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way they manage to present *all* the characters convincingly as victims."

¹⁶ For a discussion of melodrama and male action figures see, Williams "Revised" 59-62.

¹⁷ For a discussion of *Oedipally*-laden father-son relationships in post-WWII Hollywood melodrama see, Schatz 162.

(Elsaesser 86). Similarly, Dreyer grants no character in *The Word* a privileged point of view. Elsaesser argues that this diffusion of victimhood ultimately displaces questions of evil and responsibility onto the social or existential level and away from individualized psychology—a potentially suspect ideological project. Dreyer, as he did with *Vampyr*, uses a suffering female figure to shine a spotlight on the fissures, existential doubt, and crippling lack of faith in the male psyches in *The Word*. Dreyer raises the interesting question of whether the effusive tears shed by the men of Borgensgaard over Inger's death (making them victims in their own right) might ultimately trump the unease we might feel at Inger's objectification. Dreyer's constellation of suffering male victims in *The Word* quite literally revolves around the fantasy of reinstating the lost maternal, but to limit its lines of identification to this would be to underestimate its elegant and rare valuation of male suffering. As an art-house male melodrama, *The Word* expands the melodramatic mode in intriguing ways.

Johannes, innocence figured as male hysteria

Male bodies in *The Word* can also be used to convey a very direct, primary impulse of melodrama. Johannes, for instance, conveys a strong somatic presence in *The Word* as a male hysteric who “acts out” in ways commensurate melodrama's aesthetics of embodiment. Although several scenes of family discussion in *The Word* eventually clarify for the spectator that Johannes is not in his right mind, Dreyer also makes his mental state immediately apparent in Johannes's bodily posture and gesture. He walks with a slow gait, does not focus his gaze on those with whom he is conversing, speaks in a curiously drawn-out and high-pitched voice, has visions (of a man with a scythe) that no one else sees, and even swoons at the sight of Inger's dead body. Johannes has been affected by some powerful experience while away studying Kierkegaard (in Kai Munk's play-text, Johannes's state has a more explicitly traumatic cause at its root), and it is his inability to express this trauma that causes his body to “act out.” As Brooks writes,

Melodrama constantly reminds us of the psychoanalytic concept of ‘acting out’: the use of the body itself, its actions, gestures, its sites of irritation and excitation, to represent meanings that might otherwise be unavailable to representation because they are somehow under the bar of repression. Melodrama refuses repression or, rather, repeatedly strives towards moments where repression is broken through, to the physical and verbal staging of the essential: moments where repressed content returns as recognition, of the deepest relations of life, as in the celebrated *voix du sang* (‘You! my father!’), and of moral identities (‘So you are the author of all my wrongs!’). (“Body, Revolution” 19)

In conveying Johannes's hysteria, he revives a very direct, stock gestural system common in Nordisk melodrama: the “as if sleepwalking” (*søvngængerisk*), a stage direction commonly used to portray a strong emotional reaction or shock. (Reminiscent of the way in which characters in *Day of Wrath* peer into Anne's eyes to decipher her inner being, so Borgen too gazes into Johannes's eyes at Inger's funeral to see that he has returned to his previous self.)

Although Inger and Johannes manifest a presence of innocence in different ways, they perform parallel functions in the film, as primary melodramatic forces instigating psychological reactions, doubt, anger, and reconciliation in the constellation of male

characters around them. Johannes's illness allows his family to treat him with pity, as an almost childlike, innocent victim of unfortunate events. They do not hold him accountable for his actions nor for any of his outrageous statements. Similarly, Borgen, though shocked, will not hold young Maren accountable for wishing her mother to die so that she might be resurrected. Unlike Schrader's transcendent reading, in which Inger and Johannes (whom he calls John) are set up as representing Dreyer's dualism, I see the direct way in which Dreyer makes their experience manifest on their bodies as unifying the two characters rather than differentiating them. Schrader associates Johannes's experience with spiritual obsession (transcendence) and Inger's experience with corporeality, writing that both characters are "reborn," but in different ways (135-6). "The emphasis shifts from John's (sic) divinity back to Inger's corporeality... For a spiritually obsessed character like John this is the opposite of martyrdom and sainthood; like Inger, he has been recycled back to life. Dreyer uses the decisive action to reaffirm humanity; it does not disembodify the passion, it reembodies it" (136). In my reading, both characters function as different, yet parallel corporeal spectacles of a quite direct embodiment. For example, upon seeing Inger's "dead" body Johannes is overcome with emotion and falters in a swoon. His floundering, off-kilter swoon registers with a (substantially embodied) thwack as he stumbles toward the end board of her bed. Left unconscious by the sight, Johannes must be carried out into the other room. Typical of a hysteria cure scenario, the strong shock restores Johannes's sanity.

Johannes's character foreshadows even more pronounced examples of hysterical male embodiment that Dreyer will use in his "Jesus" screenplay. The scenes of spiritual and corporeal obsession allow Dreyer further opportunity to exteriorize interiority (mental illness). The first miracle that Jesus performs in a synagogue illustrates Dreyer's capacity for intertwining miracles and hysteria in the male body. I cite the scene at some length as an indication of Dreyer's enduring fascination with psychologizing corporeal spectacle.

In the darkness of a side-aisle is a man known to all the town. He is thought to be possessed of an evil spirit and his frequent fits of rage lend credence to that opinion. In fact, he suffers from a mental disease which shows itself in periodic bursts of hysteria. The following scene depicts the ambivalent mind which characterizes those afflicted. On the one hand, he is attracted by Jesus and wishes to be healed; on the other he is repelled and wants nothing to do with him. The religious excitement is only the incidental cause of his rage. (Dreyer, *Jesus* 67)

The man, though held by Jesus's preaching, becomes restless but cannot move because he cannot make his way to the door, for he is trapped by the large audience surrounding him. As his anxiety reaches fever pitch he leaps to his feet, his eyes (like Anne's, one might say) are "afame with excitement." Just as Johannes's possessed ranting will have a truth-telling quality to them, the man shouts foreboding words to Jesus about the fear that will lead to his crucifixion,

Let us alone. What have we to do with you—you Jesus of Nazareth? Are you come to destroy us? I know who you are." His outburst instigates a full hysterical fit. "He beats the air violently. Those sitting nearby draw away from him as he repeats again and again / *I know who you are* / He becomes incoherent and starts to scream. Seized with a cramp, he falls to the floor.

His lips covered with foam and his face distorted, he screams out time and again. Involuntarily, his arms are thrust back. His hands look stunted and his fingers are crooked like claws. (*Jesus* 67-8)

Eager to attract American funding, Dreyer wrote the *Jesus* script in English. His use of the word “involuntarily” above would have corresponded to the word *uvilkaarligt*, another favorite term at Nordisk in the silent era that sutured gesture with authentic emotive response. It served the same function in Nordisk scenarios that *søvngængerisk* often did, to indicate a pure, direct indication of interiority given by bodily response to situations of duress or strong emotion. Hysterical symptoms and the gestures of a melodramatic body both bypass voluntary cognition, becoming associated with a pure communication. Melodramatic gestures, as Brooks writes, “offer a set of visual messages, pure signs that cannot lie, the undissimulated speech of the body” (“Body, Revolution” 19). Dreyer’s imagination of the male hysteric sets in motion a series of questions about the way melodramatic suffering in the woman’s film (not to mention hysteria) has typically been associated with femininity. His interest in depicting vividly embodied psychological suffering, however, affirms his continued engagement with the mode of melodrama.

Innocent men, male victims at Nordisk

The cross-section of *Offer*-films I have considered for this project included a surprising number of male victims, suggesting that they were not uncommon in early Danish melodrama. Their victimization took many different forms. Along with the wayward, fallen young men rescued by their mothers from the clasp of demimondes that I mentioned above, men could be drugged and abducted into slavery as in *Shanghai’et* (Shanghaied, Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen, 1912, aka *Mænd som Ofre for Slavehandel*, [Men as Victims of the Slave Trade]). Male characters could also fall victim to psychological seduction. The arch-scientist skeptic, Dr. Leo Harding in *Viljeløs Kærlighed* (Unwilled Love, Hjalmar Davidsen 1916, distributed in Great Britain as *Hypnotist’s Victims*), being unfortunately predisposed psychically, falls victim to a malevolent hypnotist. The psychological predisposition to suffering in Dreyer’s work also instigates the action of his Nordisk scenario “Røvedderkop” ([Filmed as *The Spider’s Prey*] featuring the arch-criminal Valentine, whose varying eyes I mentioned in relation to Anne’s in *Day of Wrath*) and the suicide of his male victim, Charlie Falkenberg. The Nordisk program for the film presents Charlie in no uncertain terms as a naïve victim, “The Victim. Charlie Falkenberg,” (*Ofret. Charlie Falkenberg*) and then, “Her last victim is the young painter, Charlie Falkenberg, who is as naïve and daydreamy (*sværmerisk*) as a child.”¹⁸ [Dreyer’s scenario depicts Charlie as a sensitive painter whose weary expression indicates his melancholic disposition (7).] A production still showing the discovery of Charlie’s beautiful corpse slumped at his desk suggests Charlie was one of the many beautiful corpses reappearing throughout Dreyer’s *oeuvre*. He is still in a tuxedo; a desk lamp softly illuminates his young face. His brother holds Charlie’s hand (a hand still clenching the fateful revolver) to check his pulse and looks down upon him with pity and concern. In the background, servants look on; one wrings her hands. As with female *Offer*-films at the company, male victimhood resolved itself through a

¹⁸ “Hendes sidste Offer er den unge Kunstmaler, Charlie Falkenberg, der er naiv og sværmerisk som et Barn” (*Røvedderkoppen* program).

variety of different scenarios. Male victims could save themselves heroically, but were often aided by plucky young sidekicks, male as well as female. While the idealist scenario of a male character rescuing an incapacitated young maiden certainly existed at Nordisk, it was only one of many possible victim-sacrifice scenarios. This melodramatic tradition was expansive enough to include depictions of vulnerable and childlike male characters.

Johannes functions in this tradition as an innocent *Offer*-figure in *The Word* alongside Inger and Maren. Though Johannes's ambivalent mind (his study of Kierkegaard for instance) might seem to indicate that he is less of an innocent victim figure than Inger (whose childlike innocence is evoked every time Mikkel, her husband, calls her his girl [*pige*]), Dreyer reinforces Johannes's innocence by securing it narratively through his close relationship to his niece, Maren. As Bordwell notes, "Maren is established as a narrative force; the problematic Johannes is replaced by a much more conventional figure of unity: the pure, faithful child" (*Films of Dreyer* 148). While Maren, Johannes and Inger in one sense interact to form a composite family unit, much in keeping with melodrama's drive to reconstitute a nuclear family as a means of narrative resolution, at the same time, their "family" is constituted in the utter absence of any psychosexual family implications. The urge to primary melodrama that Dreyer repurposes in *The Word* taps into something that looks hyper-naïve and unrealistically innocent. In order not to exceed plausibility, innocence in Inger and Johannes needs to be mediated through Maren, an actual child.

Living images, dead bodies

Representing death and "dead" bodies in *The Word* brought interesting semiotic challenges for Dreyer as distilled moments of melodramatic *significance* with great dramatic potential. Dreyer expressed his interest in death as the limit of artistic representation as early as 1926 when he visited the set of Abel Gance's *Napoleon* and commented on the "dead" horses and the "dead" soldiers on set, referring to those who had actually been harmed in depicting harm.¹⁹ Representing "death" allowed Dreyer the opportunity to test the limits and potentials of theater and film as media. In 1939, he wrote a review of the Folketeatret's Capek's play entitled, *The Mother* (1938), directed by Betty Nansen, featuring a mother character who is visited by the spirits of her dead sons (an inverse victim constellation to that in *The Word*). The article reveals Dreyer's early musings about the limits of staging ethereal bodies, figures whom the other characters on stage are not supposed to see, but whom the audience (along with the mother) are to see as dead. Dreyer wrote critically of Nansen's too real, too material dead people, "Fru Nansen's dead were lacking the mark of unreality (*uvirkelighedspræget*), and consequently failed to produce that peculiar ambiance, that the playwright imagined as the background for the drama. Many of the play's scenes became embarrassing as opposed to producing release and liberation."²⁰ Nansen's dead, according to Dreyer, were living and only living (Dreyer laments that at one point during the performance he glimpsed one of the supposed apparitions wearing socks.) In this instance, the conflation

¹⁹ See Dreyer "Fransk Film."

²⁰ "Fru Nansens døde manglede uvirkelighedspræget, og derfor udeblev den særlige stemning, som af digteren er tænkt som baggrund for dramaet, og mange af skuespillets optrin blev pinefulde i stedet for at virke udløsende og befriende" (Dreyer, "To Skuespil" 62).

between character and phenomenological body could be detrimental: when an actor passed through a projected beam of light, it destroyed both possible effects: that these were real walking-dead, or that they were conversely the mother's psychic projections.

Dreyer's critical review prompted an equally critical response by Mogens Dam, titled "The stage-life of the dead" (*De dødes sceneliv*) instigating a peculiar discussion of the best way to represent dead people, an exchange that culminated in cinematic staging that evokes the projections of consciousness and "unreal reality" (*uvirkelige virkelighed*) he sought in both *The Word* and *Vampyr*.

[...] in order to achieve *the unreal silence that he [Capek] demanded* [Nansen should] have shrouded her dead in a calming, deadening half-darkness, such that these dead emerged as what they actually are: subconscious phenomena. It is as such that we should see them. Muffled, projected out into a gray darkness of eternity. We should see them as they were as when they lived—and yet different. Nearby and yet distant.²¹

Dreyer's bodies are real (psychic) projections. The presence and non-presence Dreyer desires evokes film's ontological predicament. Filmed bodies are by definition always already the absent, living-dead, shadows of real bodies. His critical response to the staging reveals his underlying pleasure in making bodies legible at an elemental, existential level. At the same time, interest Dreyer showed in depicting living and dead bodies (and all shades in between) could sometimes seem to exceed his humanist ambitions. His use of the body as signifier verged on becoming a fascinating end more than a means.

Though quite different films, *Vampyr* and *The Word* both demonstrate Dreyer's interest in film's capacity to depict shades of unreal reality, particularly with respect to bodies. *Vampyr*'s protagonist, Allan Gray (Julian West) has grown unable to distinguish between reality and unreality. (Not unlike Johannes, he is the victim of too much studying, this time about the occult rather than Kierkegaard.) *Vampyr* depicts the many shades of Allan Gray's fractured psyche cinematically, using superimposition to allow more and less real versions of Gray to separate from his body. In *Vampyr*—as he will also do in the final scene of *The Word*—Dreyer unleashes cinema's potential and pleasure for melodramatic *significance*. The audience must read whether Allan Gray is dreaming or awake, dead or alive, a vampire helper, some kind of hypnotized, sleepwalking victim, or even a corpse himself. On a thematic level, both *Vampyr* and *The Word* use suffering innocence to instigate an exploration of the male psyche. Shots of the mysteriously ailing, near-suicidal, vampire-victimized young woman in the film, Léone (Sibelle Schmitz) suffering in her bed will foreshadow key close-ups in *The Word*. Both Léone and Inger are depicted (whether dead or ailing) with the sheets pulled up to her neck, leaving only her face visible. Léone will also experience something of a resurrection scene (albeit on a much smaller scale). At the moment a stake is driven through the vampire's corpse, she sits up in bed, her soul suddenly restored.

²¹ "...hvis hun for at opnå *den af ham krævede uvirkelige stilhed* havde indhyllet sine døde i et dæmpende, sløvende halvmørke, således at disse døde var fremtrådt som de, de er: Underbevidsthedsfænomener. Som sådanne skal vi se dem. Dæmpede, projicerede ud i evighedens grå mørke. Vi skal se dem, som da de levede—og dog anderledes. Nærved og dog fjernt" (emphasis in the original) (Dreyer "Når de Døde Lever" 67).

Although *Vampyr* cannot easily be called melodramatic, it still demonstrates Dreyer's enduring fascination with the aesthetics of embodiment that he encountered in early Danish film melodrama. In many ways it enacts the revivification of key death and suffering situations from Nordisk melodrama, much like *The Word* would later do. Dreyer repurposes the overtly melodramatic spectacle of bound bodies, for instance, when Gisèle (Rena Mandel) is tied to the bedpost for Allan Gray to rescue her. Nordisk too exploited the semiotic pleasures of staging death. As with the ambiguous moments of victimization and sacrifice that I discussed in Chapter Two, Nordisk also incorporated death in its play-within-the-play. One early example of death made simultaneously theatrical and real can be found in August Blom's *The Vampire Dancer* (*Vampyrdanserinden*) from 1912, in which Oscar Borch (Robert Dinesen) falls in love with the diva with whom he performs her famous vampire dance. His love is unrequited, allowing him the extraordinary position of both being a victim of love and playing the vampire's victim on stage. Distraught, he consumes poison before going on stage, in effect committing suicide during the performance and accomplishing another radical blurring of phenomenological and semiotic bodies for dramatic effect. Audience and performer alike must read Borch's body—whether he is asleep, unconscious, dead—or as performing either of these states. It is not until Sylvia Lafont's (the vampire-diva's) third bow—the curtain has come up and down three times—that she realizes her fellow performer has *actually* died, accomplishing the thrilling coup-de-theatre with which *The Vampire Dancer* ends.

False death, real pathos

Dreyer too orchestrates the final third of *The Word* so as to accomplish a similarly magnificent—if inverse—coup-de-theatre to great pathetic effect. Instead of revealing the performing character as actually dead, *The Word* goes to great lengths to convince both the men of Borgensgaard and most importantly, the cinema audience that Inger is actually dead in order to subsequently reveal her as actually alive. Dreyer pulls off an elaborately orchestrated “false death,” one of the relatively conventional, immediately recognizable “effective situations” used in “classical” melodrama to elicit pathos.²² Actually, Dreyer effects a minor reversal in preparation for the final miracle. Inger has endured an immense ordeal giving birth—a fact attested to in a beautiful close-up of Inger sighing softly in pain, still lying on the birthing table. She has been crying. Borgen, sitting outside her door, prays resignedly to God that He will not send death to them. As the doctor emerges from the sickroom, wiping his hands, equilibrium is established. The worst seems to have passed. “She’s asleep now,” he declares, the first of a surprising number of statements documenting, testifying and reassuring all that Inger’s peaceful body is not dead, but *asleep*. After Borgen and Mikkel peer over her, Borgen reports “She’s sleeping like an angel” to those gathered in the parlor. Later, after Mikkel reports that Inger has in fact passed away in her sleep, Johannes refuses to believe her saying, “She’s not dead. She’s sleeping,” mimicking the language in several Biblical accounts of raising the dead. Following Mikkel back in the room to see for himself, Johannes will swoon at the sight. The film’s insistent references to sleep set up a fundamental desire for all (the audience too) to read Birgitte Federspil’s still body as being at rest. Her peaceful

²² For a discussion of “strikingly effective” situations such as false death and unaccomplished recognition in Sergei Balukhatyi’s *Poetics of Melodrama* (1926), see Gerould 127.

silence instills an immediate sensation of relief in an audience that has been subjected to her excruciating moans every time the door to her room opens. But Dreyer also uses these confirmations to lull the spectators before springing Inger's death upon them as a sudden, dramatic reversal.

Shortly after the doctor has again reassured Borgen that Inger is sleeping and then departed with the pastor (with Johannes perceiving the lights and sounds of his car as the return of Death), Mikkel steps out of the sickroom to relate that Inger has died after all. "Come see for yourself," he says to his shocked father and brother, instigating a new invitation for the reading of Inger's body. Showing Inger's death to the cinema audience would have released too much of the pathetic charge that Dreyer has carefully begun cultivating for film's final climactic paroxysm. Without allowing it to compete with the final resurrection scene, Dreyer allows her still body (now to be understood as dead, not sleeping) to create a pathetic response in her loved ones. The sorrow of her death is reflected in the figures above her. Borgen and Anders crouch over toward her in disbelief as Mikkel despairingly relates the moment of her death. Using indirect melodramatic technique—to report rather than show her moment of death—allows Dreyer to cultivate pathos for her body rather than dispel it through a too early climax. *Showing* such a phenomenally liminal moment will be left to the resurrection scene. Mikkel's account still betrays a heart-felt corporeality, even though Inger's body remains shrouded up to her neck. Mikkel felt her limbs tighten in his arms, saw her lips turn blue, and her eyes glaze over. The contrast between the sculptural beauty of Inger's face—shown again in one of the film's precious few close-ups—and the graphic "proof-telling" of her death betrays Dreyer's lingering dualism, as Schrader puts it. "It is as if Dreyer carefully sets the viewer up for the Transcendent, then reveals the immanent" (136). Dreyer's "failure" to commit fully to transcendent style, like Ozu or Bresson, (a "failure" that conveniently betrays a certain preference for melodramatic reversal and revelation) actually opens up space for the ambiguous causality of melodrama's worldview.

Dreyer too opens up space for the discussion of worldview quite literally in the curiously existential discussion between the doctor and the priest that provides a dramatic pause in the drama of Inger's death. The extended discussion between the man of science and the man of faith as they drink a (prematurely) celebratory cup of coffee sets up a world of dubious causality. With *The Word*, Dreyer couches melodrama's miraculous response to post-sacred epistemological crisis amid very explicit medical and religious discourses. In many ways the film presents a more explicit version of the crisis of legibility and causality that Dreyer began with in *Day of Wrath*. Both films include extraordinary exploits that threaten to undermine their veneer of (causal) realism. Johannes's "altered" mental state seemingly allows him to see God and death and predict that Inger will "die." In *Day of Wrath* this power is occult, in *The Word* it is equally mysterious, only more benevolent. The miracle of Inger's resurrection, as a supremely melodramatic moment, will threaten the logic of cause and effect without ever fully defying rational explanation. Neither medical science (personified by the despicably self-assured doctor), nor religion (represented by the equally rational priest) can fully reinstate a sacred cosmology. The doctor instills his faith in the miracles science has taught him and his abilities to practice them, while the priest's belief in God's powers is tempered by his belief that God no longer enacts miracles that would violate His equally divine laws of nature. The unknown "cause" of the resurrection miracle stumps both of them. Dreyer

turns to melodrama because “realism” doesn’t quite suffice when it comes to accounting for “real” miracles.

The quintessential paroxysm of pathos

All of this prepares for *The Word*’s climactic sequence. Lasting about seventeen minutes, it is a melodramatic paroxysm of pathos par excellence that culminates in Inger’s resurrection. Linda Williams identifies “paroxysm of pathos” as one of two main iterations of climax in the basic vernacular of American moving pictures (the other being action). Paroxysm of pathos refers to a sequence constructed to achieve a sustained escalation of dramatic anticipation and emotion (punctuated by moments of expressive, minor release) that allows the moral good of the victim-hero (for whom sympathy has been generated throughout the film) to be revealed to great affect.

Dreyer sets the stage for Inger’s resurrection against a chorus of mourners, instilling the sequence with a baseline of palpable loss and sorrow. Opening with a slow tracking shot backward, we see Inger’s beautiful corpse lying in its coffin as Anders lights the remaining candles on the left, and Borgen stands transfixed to the right. The room is glowingly empty. Anders wipes a tear as he sits down. Midway through this shot, as the two men sit to either side of her, their backs to the camera, we hear the singing of the mourners gathered in the room next door, “Joyful, joyful is the soul that’s at rest.” The sound of these voices, singing about the ceasing of songbirds, provides the bridge to the next shot of a tableau of mourners gathered together in the parlor in small clusters drinking coffee. Mikkel steps in to greet one of them and steps out again through the door as the camera continues to weave through the thick chorus of mourners on its slow, meandering track, back and forth through the crowd. Almost lingering on the door to the sickroom, the camera makes visible the parlor clock that remains deathly still, and comes to rest on the door behind which Inger died. Several of the mourners weep openly. Karen wipes away a tear as she delivers coffee. Another woman covers her face, weeping, unable to sing. The shot makes evident a collective loss. In the following shot, back in the room with Inger’s coffin and corpse, the camera has changed positions, and we see Borgen and Anders from Inger’s POV (only the foot of the coffin is visible), again allowing a clear view of Mikkel entering and crossing right in front of the clock, which has been stopped. Mikkel is visibly upset and paces slowly, back and forth, unsettled between his brother and his father who sit to either side of the coffin. Unable to express his despair he speaks circuitously about the arrival of the pastor. Importantly, he asks whether putting the lid on his wife’s coffin should wait until after the guests have finished their coffee. After a cut to the funeral carriage arriving outside, which Mikkel has paused to hear, he begins “hurrying” to put the lid on his wife’s coffin.

With this Dreyer injects pathos with a vague hint of action, the other pole of American melodrama that Williams identifies. Action, in contrast to the woman’s film or family melodrama, specializes in eliciting pathos and empathy by channeling pathos into “the more virile and action-centered variants of rescue, chase, and fight (as in the western and all of the action genres),” but the two are rarely found in pure isolation (“Revised” 58). Williams argues that American film melodrama often uses pathos and action in various combinations by intercutting shots of suffering with the action undertaken to rescue the sufferer. As I have discussed in previous chapters, early Danish film melodrama shifted these terms a bit, tending to alternate (and intertwine) pathos and

spectacle (or pathos and [dramatic] irony), rather than pathos and action. Still, Dreyer injects his paroxysm of pathos with something that, if not *action per se*, nevertheless approximates a “rescue logic” to create suspense and multiply the opportunities for escalating pathos. Inger must be resurrected before the lid of her coffin is fastened and it is too late.

When Mikkel threatens to put the lid on Inger’s coffin, he does so out of despair, eager to dispense both with the pain of seeing her lying there dead and the tomfoolery of a religion to which he does not adhere. But underlying Mikkel’s torment is his knowledge that to do so is to leave Inger’s body to rot. *The Word* has narratively pre-staged both “rotting” and “resurrection” as the two alternative outcomes for Inger’s body. *The Word*’s thick, foreshadowing talk of miracles and resurrection all through it has set up the anticipation of a miraculous resurrection. Johannes, in his state of possession, has predicted it and declared himself capable of it. Mikkel, on the other hand, vividly establishes the alternative to this resurrection. Earlier in the film, Mikkel laments the meaninglessness of everything and encapsulates his separation from everything he loved and worshipped in the image of her body rotting. Each of these contributes to the generation of anticipation and climactic emotional release in the ultimate sight of Inger and Anders once again united in carnal embrace.

The threat of Inger’s burial is repeatedly introduced and then barely postponed, delayed, and prolonged in this sequence. The mourners must finish their coffee. Then the priest and the doctor arrive to be greeted by Borgen. The priest must say a few words. Then Peder the tailor arrives to reconcile with Borgen, and Anne and Anders are reunited. Each new delay is accomplished with long, deliberate, delaying camera movements. Dreyer, for instance, does not cut to the door as the pastor arrives with the doctor. Instead, the camera follows him slowly as he walks across the distance of the room. Just when everyone has more or less reconciled themselves to the inevitability of Inger’s death (both body and soul), when farewells have finally been said, then, in the nick of time, Johannes magically resurfaces after having disappeared out into the moors for several days. He initially founders and appears to fail. Then, when it appears that even he too has lost the faith in his ability to resurrect Inger, Maren steps in to “save” her mother. Maren’s urging, “Hurry Uncle!” encapsulates Dreyer’s version of this just-in-time temporality. Johannes’s “saving” of his sister-in-law—uttered in his response to the pastor’s accusation that he is insane, “Is it insane to want to save?” (*Er det sindssyg at ville frælse?*) captures a lovely ambiguity. *Frælse* can mean save, in the sense of religious redemption, but it can also convey rescuing in the sense of melodrama’s spectacle of just-in-time. As much as saving Inger’s soul, Johannes has saved her body from being interred.

Turning back time

Several explanations have been offered up for *The Word*’s use of exceedingly long takes. Dreyer at one point writes that he sought to put the audience into a state of suggestion or hypnosis so that spectators might fully believe in the resurrection miracle at the end. The film’s temporality has been analyzed as part of its art-house estrangement, the medium seeking to announce itself as film. As Bordwell writes, “The primary function of these long takes, I suggest, is to foreground *the shot itself* as a component of cinematic perception” (*Films of Dreyer* 151). Melodramatically, *The Word*’s slow pace contributes

to its overall strategy for delaying climactic resolution in order to elicit and release the most potent expression of emotion possible. Dreyer's funeral-resurrection lends itself well to Linda Williams's assertion that "[the] teasing delay of the forward march of time has not been sufficiently appreciated as key to the melodramatic effect" ("Revised" 74). On one hand, *The Word* exemplifies Franco Moretti's theory of hopeless tears in his essay "Kindergarten," which Williams takes as a point of departure. Moretti explores crying in situations in which something is experienced as lost and impossible to be regained. "This is what the protagonist's death is for: to show that time is *irreversible*. And this irreversibility is perceived that much more clearly if there are no doubts about the different direction one would like to impose on the course of events" (Moretti 162). The film's temporality has put this "different direction"—Inger's resurrection—quite palpably on the table, along with the repeated deferral of the knowledge that it is already too late. Dreyer signals the importance of "too late" quite overtly, by positioning the clock (stopped at Inger's death) directly opposite her coffin. Funerals provide the quintessential topos for the release of tears. Moretti notes that people cry particularly at funerals, for example, because it is then that one "knows" finally and forever, that it is too late. Mikkel's final, effusive burst into tears illustrates Moretti's assertion that, "Tears are always the product of *powerlessness*. They presume two mutually opposed facts: that it is clear how the present state of things should be changed – and that this change is impossible" (162). Mikkel's heart-wrenching tears, their temporality further punctuated by Borgen's remark ("Finally, he's crying!") mark precisely the release of these two mutually opposed facts. Moretti writes that tears mark the release of tension between two mutually opposed points of view (*agnition*). Desire in Moretti's scenario is shown to be futile. Letting go of desire and conceding reality produce sadness, but also a sense of release.

But Mikkel's tears of "hopelessness" are not the film's final melodramatic climax, instead it further delays the paroxysm of pathos with which the film ends. The miracle of Inger's resurrection will, of course, occur *just in time*. Like Anders, Mikkel and Borgen leaning over Inger's "dead" body in her bed, the cinema audience too stares intently at her body in eager anticipation of the slightest tremor of life. As Inger's hands stir, they confirm cinema's miraculous capacity to make dead bodies living again. Cinematic "proof" trumps both science and religion. Steve Neale theorizes that melodrama's tears result not only from sadness and loss, but from happy, "just-in-time" endings as well. The coincidence or chance recognitions that bring lovers together just before they lose one another forever, produces tears of joy. Dreyer's decision to raise a woman from the dead—reuniting her with her lover—affords a magnificent example of producing tears not only in the spectator, but also in the embracing couple. The resurrection is extremely cinematic. As Williams writes, cinema realizes the melodramatic effect of delay more powerfully than either stage or literary melodrama: "It needs to be linked with melodrama's larger impulse to reverse time, to return to the time of origins and the space of innocence that can be musically felt in terms of patterns of anticipation and return" ("Revised" 74). In returning Inger to life, Dreyer pushes melodramatic return and temporality to the limits of realistic conventions. Time begins again as the clock is restarted.

This moment of fantasy and glorious melodramatic temporality registers also in Bordwell's formalist reading as a moment in which art cinema and Hollywood norms of

continuity editing merge. Bordwell reads the miracle as a more or less conventional Hollywood resolution. Referring to Inger's resurrection miracle, he writes:

From a narrative standpoint, the miracle unifies the film, canceling the problems raised by Johannes as a narrative force. We need to notice, though, that this final scene also accomplishes an important *representational* unification. Whereas theatricalization and sparseness have foregrounded spatio-temporal form as such, the resurrection of Inger reintegrates space and time, *realigns* them with structures of causality. Here, cinematic form returns to a stable articulation of narrative form and helps motivate the miracle. (emphasis in the original) (*Films of Dreyer* 167)

Perhaps most miraculous in the final scene of *The Word* is its miraculous unification of art-house modernism and "classical" Hollywood, through melodrama.

On one hand, the miracle sequence is the embodiment of melodrama's capacity for false consciousness. "Melodrama is by definition the retrieval of an absolute innocence and good in which most thinking people do not put much faith" (Williams "Revised" 61).²³ Dreyer's choice to make the kind of film in which the innocent faith of a child conquers all of the "thinking people" (for even the ones who claim to be religious prove to be more thinkers and skeptics than believers) in one sense proves Williams's point that "we go to movies not to think, but to be moved" ("Revised" 61). *The Word* demonstrates how art-house melodrama can reinvest a post-sacred world with the miraculous. Cheating death's supposedly inevitable temporality, *The Word* actually brings to life the fantasy of reunification with pre-fall maternal plenitude. Melodrama's insistence on such presence (in for example the hyper-presence of a star's persona) can challenge cinema's inherent absences. Christine Gledhill writes, "This poignant 'presence in absence' lies at the heart of the desires stimulated by stardom. But it is a genuine paradox in which presence can be understood not as simple mystification but as an assertion by the melodramatic imagination in the face of absence" ("Signs" 219). Similarly, *The Word* makes manifest Dreyer's innocent faith in the cinema's potential to overcome absence. Asserting a joyful melodramatic reunification, he allows himself a sweet concession to melodrama's most voluptuary pleasures. The miracle sets up a potentially transcendent moment in which Dreyer delivers the fantastically immanent, the corporeal. Mikkel's "But I loved her body too!" uttered over Inger's dead body gushes forth in the sight of her carnal, ravenous kiss, a kiss extended and exquisitely marred by an incidental strand of saliva left on her husband's cheek. Inger is very much flesh and blood. Dreyer leaves something powerfully un-idealized in Inger's passionate, voracious embrace of life.

²³ Williams refers to this in relation to *Schindler's List*, which illustrates Hollywood melodrama's potentially insidious capacity to rewrite history.

CONCLUSION

Dreyer's *oeuvre* poses intriguing challenges for those who read his work exclusively as high art cinema. His interest in quotidian or domestic subject matter and his inclusion of audience-grabbing spectacles like witch burnings and scenes of torture can be difficult to accommodate in either formalist or metaphysical readings. Likewise, any popular-culture reading of Dreyer's work must necessarily contend with its more ascetic moments. Stylistic eccentricities such as slow, stylized dialogue and camera movements or percussive close-ups have estranged some popular audiences. Dreyer's films draw attention to film as a representational system in a way that demonstrates a dissatisfaction with realism's illusions of a coherent, imagined world. This dissatisfaction can be subtle, as in *The Word*, or relatively overt, as in *Jeanne d'Arc*. In this dissertation I have argued that melodrama's "third-way," as a fundamentally humanist endeavor equally dissatisfied with realism's unquestioned illusions and with modernism's drive to reveal representational systems as irreparably futile, offers a valuable interpretive framework in which to situate the eccentricities of Dreyer's work. Christine Gledhill describes melodrama's approach in her article "Signs of Melodrama" in the following way:

If realism presumes the adequacy of given linguistic and cultural codes for understanding and representing reality, and modernism embraces the infinite regress of meaning in the self-reflexive play of the signifier, melodrama's rootedness in the real world, its urgent ideological mission to motivate ordinary lives, leads it into an opposing stance. Faced with the decentered self, the evasiveness of language, melodrama answers with excessive personalization, excessive expression. (218)

Although I do not insist on linking melodrama's expressive response specifically with excess (either personalization or expression), melodrama's third-way accommodates Dreyer's hope of earnestly communicating something about the human predicament to his audiences without forcing him to relinquish his innovative experimentation with cinematic form. Gledhill's discussion of personalization also highlights another critical link between Dreyer's *oeuvre* and the melodramatic mode, his use of the human body. Consistent with the melodramatic mode, Dreyer conveys existential issues and larger social or cosmological conflicts by focusing intently on human relationships, social structures like the family, and individual human experience. Gledhill's work is typical of the proliferation of melodrama scholarship in recent decades that has drastically expanded the melodramatic field. As I discussed in Chapter One, this body of scholarship allows Dreyer's work to be seen from a variety of new melodramatic perspectives. Melodrama scholarship on D.W. Griffith, whom Dreyer admired, has shown being a consummate melodramatist and being a determined innovator of cinematic form to be completely compatible. Likewise, melodrama scholarship has also shown highly conscientious stylists like Henry James and Douglas Sirk to be capable practitioners of melodrama. This scholarship has helped blur distinctions between modernism's understood status as high art and melodrama's stigma as low art. This blurring allows Dreyer's work to be read as shedding light on intersections between (modernist) art-house cinema and melodrama.

In this dissertation I have drawn attention to Danish early film melodrama as a particularly important influence on Dreyer's work. I argue that the tradition of melodrama with which Dreyer worked at Nordisk exerted a more sustained and creative impact on his later work than has yet been considered. The general stigma associated with melodrama has not only occluded important thematic and stylistic continuities in Dreyer's work, but has allowed Nordisk's vibrant, early iteration of Danish silent film melodrama to remain relatively unexplored. Nordisk's Golden Age of melodrama combined situations of proto-modernist reflectivity with influences from Scandinavia's strong tradition of Naturalist/Realist Theater to create a surprisingly rich "third way" for Dreyer to exploit. The company's extensive use of play-within-a-play situations and other artistic frameworks embedded in the diegetic world imbued its melodrama with potential self-reflexivity and media awareness. The playful interactions between film and the other arts in Nordisk melodrama provided precedents for Dreyer's later attempts, for instance, to reproduce the "presence" of live theater in his films. Nordisk also provided Dreyer with a non-Manichean melodramatic worldview, which could incorporate a surprising degree of epistemological uncertainty. Nordisk melodrama also displayed interest in psychological complexity by often depicting or alluding to psychological dividedness and complexity. Such psychology has mistakenly been linked in Dreyer's later work with his having abandoned melodrama. Nordisk's explorations of human subjectivity, consciousness, psychology, and volition could take spectacular forms, but its core concerns remained intact and reimagined in Dreyer's *oeuvre*.

Dreyer's use of theatrical source material in his films is well known, but I have argued that performance is a vital category for both Nordisk and Dreyer. Performance provided an outlet for Dreyer's later experiments in cinematic "authenticity," for instance. Although Dreyer (along with his critics) used the notion of authenticity to try to differentiate his work after Nordisk from the melodrama that he made at the company, as I have shown in Chapter Three, Dreyer's unrelenting quest for authenticity and realism in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* has precedents in spectacle and performance in Nordisk melodrama. Dreyer's elaborate on-set experiment with the conflation of acting and being and his stripping away of the inauthentic (done to great dramatic effect) are both mechanisms at work in Nordisk melodrama. Although both later critics and Dreyer himself have equated Nordisk melodrama with histrionic inauthenticity, such assessments oversimplify Nordisk's practices of coding and juxtaposing inauthenticity (whether in the form of disguises worn by actors, or the use of spectacular theater performance) against diegetic layers coded as more "real." The real and the feigned remain intimately interdependent and subject to spectacular conflation in this tradition of Danish melodrama. Dreyer remained interested in moments in which being and representing were conflated on the performing body. At the same time that Dreyer reproduced such moments of performance, his distrust of what he perceived to be Nordisk's spurious aspects prompted him to push these techniques to their (ethical) limits. Dreyer's exploration of the limits to which the bodies of his actors could be subjected brings to light intersections between melodrama and avant-garde performance art practices as both shared an interest in reading performing bodies. Compensating for a perceived lack of seriousness in Nordisk melodrama, Dreyer galvanizes interactions between performing bodies and the diegetic performance space (as for example representations of the

theatrical performance and its spectators) to assert film's potential for such vital interactions.

As an auteur director of art-house modernist cinema with decisive roots in a strong tradition of popular culture melodrama, Dreyer's *oeuvre* provides an intriguing opportunity to explore the connections between two seemingly disparate traditions and broaden our understanding of each. What initially looks like formal estrangement for the sake of formalist experimentation can be recuperated as an interest in producing pathos. Dreyer's percussive use of the close-up in *Jeanne d'Arc* shocked and moved spectators as it also drew attention to his formal experimentation with film as a medium. Dreyer's participation in these two seemingly incompatible modes further unsettles the claims that melodrama exists exclusively to produce identification in its spectators, while also showing art-house cinema to be potentially more invested in affect than is usually admitted.

In Chapter Four I showed the ambiguous worldview and unreliable systems of causality depicted in *Day of Wrath* (ambiguity upon which the film's reputation as art-house cinema rests) to be comprehensible in melodramatic terms. The epistemological ambiguity of Anne's occult powers and the lack of narrative closure at the end of the film need not preclude seeing it as an iteration of the melodramatic mode in the expanded understanding of the phenomenon. Similarly, the psychological complexity that Anne's character demonstrates is not incompatible either with this tradition of melodrama. *Day of Wrath* allows Dreyer to continue exploring issues of interiority, surface, and volition that he encountered in *Nordisk*, while obviously adding his own masterful inflections to the tradition. Anne's inherited powers and her plight reflect early Danish film melodrama's preference for depicting the world in terms of restrictions placed upon individual will rather than through clear moral or causal categories.

Reading *The Word* as art-house melodrama also broadens the melodramatic mode in interesting ways. It reminds us that emotion should be considered as an important artistic ambition not at all incompatible with the artistic experimentation of art-house cinema. The film stands as a compelling example of both melodramatic suffering embodied in both male and female characters. Although Dreyer's film exploits fairly traditional, idealized representations of maternal suffering (the film's status as art-house cinema has shielded these representations from legitimate feminist critique), *The Word* also opens up the possibility for an art-house melodrama to focus on male tears, hysteria, tormented psyches, and affect. The film broadens the conception of male-melodrama and the male-weepie as the legitimate domain of art-house cinema. Reading *The Word* as art-house melodrama again allows for understanding formal experimentation as part of an affective rather than a primarily formalist project. The film's prolonged temporality, accomplished through extensive use of long takes, creates a subdued environment of suspense and an elaborately extended paroxysm of pathos in the film's long culminating resurrection sequence. Again, what might be read as formal experimentation for the sake of formal experimentation can be recuperated as part of melodramatic affect and corporeal *signifiante*. *The Word* affords another example of Dreyer's continued fascination with melodrama's semiotics of the bodily surface and interiority. Not entirely unlike *Jeanne d'Arc*'s depiction of bodies experiencing duress (tears, torture, immolation), the insistent corporeality in *The Word* betrays Dreyer's fascination with depicting gradations of consciousness, pain, emotion, and death. *Nordisk*'s spectacular

depictions of dead bodies, and seduced, swooned, or hypnotized protagonists afforded Dreyer ample opportunity to begin cultivating this fascination. Although formalist readings have difficulty accommodating Dreyer's fascinations with the body (something a melodramatic intervention helps account for), his use of the melodramatic body also pushed melodramatic *significance* to its representational limits. In other words, Dreyer's interest in the limits of what can be depicted on the body at times looked like a modernist project intent on revealing the body itself as a medium for creating meaning.

Seeing Dreyer's *oeuvre* as the art-house extension of early Danish film melodrama adds interesting contributions to the melodramatic field. It raises questions about the trajectory of melodramatic development that Brooks outlines in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, in which the use of overt, direct melodrama (primary) gradually gives way to more indirect, secondary melodrama or melodrama of consciousness. Dreyer's *oeuvre* (following Nordisk) shows primary and secondary melodrama continually intertwining in various configurations throughout. Dreyer's long career thus offers another way of modeling melodramatic development as episodic and in conversation with earlier forms of melodrama. Unlike Sirk and James, Dreyer never wholeheartedly embraced melodrama as such. His engagement with melodrama demonstrates an interesting attraction and repulsion to the mode. Dreyer's complex relationship to the mode can contribute to current understandings of melodrama as encouraging contemplation as well as identification in its spectators. The way in which Dreyer's innovation of cinematic form often entailed rather conservative subject matter and narrative form allows a good opportunity to explore melodrama's development. Dreyer's *oeuvre* contributes to melodrama's paradoxical historiography—the mode's constant ability to adapt to new conventions of realism while also yearning backward toward timeless, prelapsarian archetypes. Dreyer's mixed engagement with melodrama offers another model for theorizing a melodramatic auteur working within melodrama's expressivity as well as against its constraints.

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APPENDIX A

CARL TH. DREYER FILMOGRAPHY INCLUDING SCENARIOS (REALIZED AND UNREALIZED)

Based on the Danish Film Institute's Dreyer Filmography available on-line through:
Carl Th. Dreyer—Liv og Værk (Carl Th. Dreyer -- The Man and His Work)
<<http://www.carlthdreyer.dk/Filmene.aspx>>

EARLY SCENARIOS (REALIZED AND UNREALIZED)

1912

Bryggerens Datter (Dagmar [GB]), (Rasmus Ottesen, DK, 1912)

Dreyer's scenario: no longer extant.

Dødsridtet (The Leap to Death [GB]), (Rasmus Ottesen, DK, 1912)

Dreyer's scenario: no longer extant.

1913

Balloneksplosionen (The Hidden Message [GB]), (Kay van der Aa Kühle, DK, 1913)

Dreyer's scenario: no longer extant.

Chatollets Hemmelighed (The Secret of the Bureau [GB]), (Hjalmar Davidsen, DK, 1913) Dreyer's scenario: "Chatollets Hemmelighed" NORDISK 164b.

"Döden Forener" (Death Unites)

Dreyer's scenario sent to the Swedish Film Institute ca. 1913.

Elskovs Opfindsomhed (Love's Ingenuity, Sofus Wolder, DK, 1913)

Dreyer's scenario: "Hans og Grethe" NORDISK 1062

Krigskorrespondenter (War Correspondents [GB]), (Vilhelm Glückstadt, DK, 1913)

Dreyer's scenario: no longer extant.

1915

Juvelerernes Skræk (The Skeleton Hand [GB]), (Alexander Christian, DK, 1915)

Dreyer's scenario: "Skelethaanden" NORDISK 1335.

Ned med Vaabnene! (Lay Down Your Arms! [GB/US]), (Holger-Madsen, DK, 1915)

Dreyer's scenario: "Ned med Vaabnene" NORDISK 1163a.

1916

Den Hvide Djævel (The Devil's Protégé [GB]), (Holger-Madsen, DK, 1916)

Dreyer's scenario: "Esther" NORDISK 1352a.

Den Skønne Evelyn (Evelyn the Beautiful [GB]), (A.W. Sandberg, DK, 1916)

Dreyer's scenario: "Den Skønne Evelyn" NORDISK 1371b.

En Forbryders Liv og Levned (A Criminal's Diary [GB]), (Alexander Christian, DK, 1916) Dreyer's scenario: "En Forbryders Memoirer" NORDISK 1366b.

Guldets Gift (The Temptation of Mrs. Chestney [GB]), (Holger-Madsen, DK, 1916) Dreyer's scenario: "Lerhjertet" NORDISK 1405.

Pavillonens Hemmelighed (The Mystery of the Crown Jewels [GB]), (Karl Mantzius, DK, 1916) Dreyer's scenario: "Guldkuglen" NORDISK 1200.

Penge (Money [GB]), (Karl Mantzius, DK, 1916) Dreyer's scenario: "Penge" NORDISK 1236b.

Rovedderkoppen (The Spider's Prey [GB]), (August Blom, DK, 1916) Dreyer's scenario: "Den Røde Enke" (The Red Widow) NORDISK 1350.

1917

Den Mystiske Selskabsdame (The Mysterious Companion [GB]), (August Blom, DK, 1917) Dreyer's scenario: "Legationens Gidsel" NORDISK 1488a.

Fange Nr. 113 (Convict No. 113 [GB]), (Holger-Madsen, DK, 1917) Dreyer's scenario: "Fange No. 113" NORDISK 1551.

Glædens Dag (Misjudgement [GB]), (Alexander Christian, DK, 1917) Dreyer's scenario: "Miskendt" NORDISK 1595a.

Hans Rigtige Kone (Which is Which? [GB]), (Holger-Madsen, DK, 1917) Dreyer's scenario: "Hans Rigtige Kone" NORDISK 1591.

Herregaards-Mysteriet (The Hands [GB]), (Alexander Christian, DK, 1917) Dreyer's scenario: "Hænderne" NORDISK 1557.

Hotel Paradis (Hotel "Paradise" [GB]), (Robert Dinesen, DK, 1917) Dreyer's scenario: "Hotel Paradis" NORDISK 1621.

1918

Lydia (The Music-hall Star [GB]), (Holger-Madsen, DK, 1918) Dreyer's scenario: "Lydia" NORDISK 1479c.

1919

Gillekop (August Blom, DK, 1919) Dreyer's scenario: "Gillekop" NORDISK 1509c.

Grevindens Ære (Lace [GB]), (August Blom, DK, 1919) Dreyer's scenario: "Kniplinger" NORDISK 1732b.

FILMS DIRECTED

Præsidenten (*The President* [GB]), (Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1919)

Blade af Satans Bog (*Leaves from Satan's Book* [GB]), (Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1921)

Prästänkan (*The Parson's Widow* [GB]), (Carl Th. Dreyer, SE, 1921)

Die Gezeichneten (*Love one Another* [GB]), (Carl Th. Dreyer, DE, 1922)

Der var engang (*Once Upon a Time* [GB]), (Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1922)

Michael (Carl Th. Dreyer, DE, 1924)

Du skal ære din Hustru (*Master of the House*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1925)

Glomdalsbruden (*The Bride of Glomdal*, Carl Th. Dreyer, NO, 1926)

La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Carl Th. Dreyer, FR, 1928)

Vampyr (Carl Th. Dreyer, FR/DE, 1932)

Mødrehjælpen (*Good Mothers*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1942)

Vredens Dag (*Day of Wrath*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1943)

Två människor (*Two People*, Carl Th. Dreyer, SE, 1945)

Vandet paa Landet (*Water from the Land*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1946)

Landsbykirken (*The Danish Village Church*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1947)

Kampen mod Kræften (*The Fight Against Cancer*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1947)

De nåede færgen (*They Caught the Ferry*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1948)

Thorvaldsen (Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1949)

Storstrømsbroen (*The Storstrøm Bridge*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1950)

Et slot i et slot (*A Castle Within a Castle*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1954)

Ordet (*The Word*, Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1955)

Gertrud (Carl Th. Dreyer, DK, 1964)

APPENDIX B

NORDISK *OFFER* (VICTIM/SACRIFICE) FILMS AND SCENARIOS

Scenarios are listed below in chronological order. The title in quotes is the working title written on the scenario. NORDISK followed by a number indicates the catalogue number corresponding to each film and scenario designated by the Nordisk Films Kompagni Collection housed at the Danish Film Institute. Most of the programs for these films are digitalized and available on-line through the Danish National Filmography.

Paul Wangs Skæbne (Paul Wang's Destiny, alternative title: *Storbyens Offer/The Victim of the Big City*, Viggo Larsen, 1909), NORDISK 492. No extant scenario.

Massøsens Offer (The Masseuse's Victim/Sacrifice, Alfred Lind, 1910)
No extant scenario.

Krigens Ofre (The War's Victims/Sacrifices, unknown)
No extant scenario.

"Offeret" (The Victim), NORDISK 843c.
Filmed as: *Mormonens Offer (A Victim of the Mormons)*, August Blom, 1911)

"Shanghai'et" (Shanghaied), NORDISK 920b,c.
Filmed as: *Shanghai'et* (alternative title: *Mænd som Ofre for Slavehandel/Men as Victims of the Slave Trade*, Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen, 1912)

Barfodsdanserindens Offer (The Victim/Sacrifice of the Barefoot Dancer, unknown, 1912) No extant scenario.

Lægens Offer (The Doctor's Victim/Sacrifice, unknown, year unknown), NORDISK 541.
No extant scenario.

Strejken paa den Gamle Fabrik (The Strike at the Old Factory, alternative distribution title in Great Britain: *The Sacrifice*, Robert Dinesen, 1913), NORDISK 987. No extant scenario.

"Prinsesse Elena" (Princess Elena), NORDISK 1073.
Filmed as: *Prinsesse Elena* (Holger-Madsen, 1913, alternative distribution title in Germany: *Opfer einer hohen Frau* [The Sacrifice of a Noblewoman])

"Privatdetektivens Offer" (The Private Detective's Victim/Sacrifice), NORDISK 1045.
Filmed as: *Privatdetektivens Offer* (Sofus Wolder, 1913)

- “Moderen” (The Mother), NORDISK 1079.
 Filmed as: *Moderen* (The Mother, alternative distribution title in Great Britain: *A Mother's Sacrifice*, Robert Dinesen, 1914)
- “Kærlighedens Offer” (Love’s Sacrifice), NORDISK 1129.
 Filmed as: *Et Kærlighedsoffer* (A Victim/Sacrifice of Love, *I Will Repay*, Robert Dinesen, 1914)
- “En Skæbne” (A Destiny), NORDISK 1249b.
 Filmed as: *En Skæbne* (alternative title: *Den Hvide Slavehandels Sidste Offer/The White Slave-Trade’s Last Victim*, Robert Dinesen, 1915)
- “Søster Ceclies Offer” (Sister Cecilie’s Sacrifice), NORDISK 1389.
 Filmed as: *Hvor Sorgerne Glemmes* (Where Sorrows are Forgotten, Holger-Madsen, 1916)
- “Børsen” (The Stock Exchange), NORDISK 1312d.
 Filmed as: *Børsens Offer* (The Victim of the Stock Exchange, Alexander Christian, 1916)
- “De To Verdener” (The Two Worlds), NORDISK 1334c.
 Filmed as: *Kornspekulantens Forbrydelse* (The Speculative Grain Trader’s Crime, alternative title: *Kornspekulantens Offer/The Victim of The Speculative Grain Trader*, Robert Dinesen, 1916)
- “En Fremmed Vilje” (A Strange Will), NORDISK 1385b.
 Filmed as: *Viljeløs Kærlighed* (Unwilled Love, Hjalmar Davidsen, 1916, alternative distribution title in Great Britain: *Hypnotist’s Victims*)
- “En Kvindes Offer” (A Woman’s Sacrifice), NORDISK 1395b.
 Filmed as: *Selskabsdamen* (The Society Woman, Martinius Nielsen, 1916)
- “Stakkels Meta” (Poor Meta), NORDISK 1409b.
 Filmed as: *Stakkels Meta* (alternative distribution title in Great Britain: *Cora’s Sacrifice*, Martinius Nielsen, 1916)
- “I Kamp med Skæbnen” (Battling with Destiny), NORDISK 1460.
 Filmed as: *Livets Genvordigheder* (Life’s Hardships, Alexander Christian, 1916, alternative distribution title in Great Britain: *The Bowl of Sacrifice*)
- “Offer for sin egen Hævn” (Victim of One’s Own Revenge), NORDISK 1481b.
 Filmed as: *Mand mod Mand* (Man Against Man, Alexander Christian, 1917)
- “Acostatetes første Offer” (Acosta’s First Victim/Sacrifice), NORDISK 1367a.
 Filmed as: *Krigens Fjende* (War’s Enemy, Holger-Madsen, 1917)