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	House of horror, Christensen, Benjamin, 1929
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	The haunted house, Christensen, Benjamin, 1928

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The hawk's nest, Christensen, Benjamin, 1928

Mockery, Christensen, Benjamin, 1927

Mikaël (Chained), Dreyer, Carl Theodor, 1924

The mysterious island, Christensen, Benjamin, 1929

The Devil's circus, Christensen, Benjamin, 1926

Die frau mit dem schlechten ruf (The woman of ill repute), Christensen, Benjamin, 1925

Seine frau, die unbekannte (His wife, the unknown), Christensen, Benjamin, 1923

Haevnens nat (Night of revenge), Christensen, Benjamin, 1916

BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN

AN INTERNATIONAL DANE

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BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN

AN INTERNATIONAL DANE

Published by **"The Danish Wave '99"** on the occasion of the exhibition
Benjamin Christensen: An International Dane
at The Museum of Modern Art September 9-26, 1999.

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Cover: *The Devil's Circus* (1926). Norma Shearer.

Frontispiece: Productionshot from *The Haunted House* (1928). Benjamin Christensen.

Back page: The cast and crew from *Seven Footsteps to Satan* (1929).

Back cover: *The Devil's Circus*. (1926) Left: Charles Emmett Mack.

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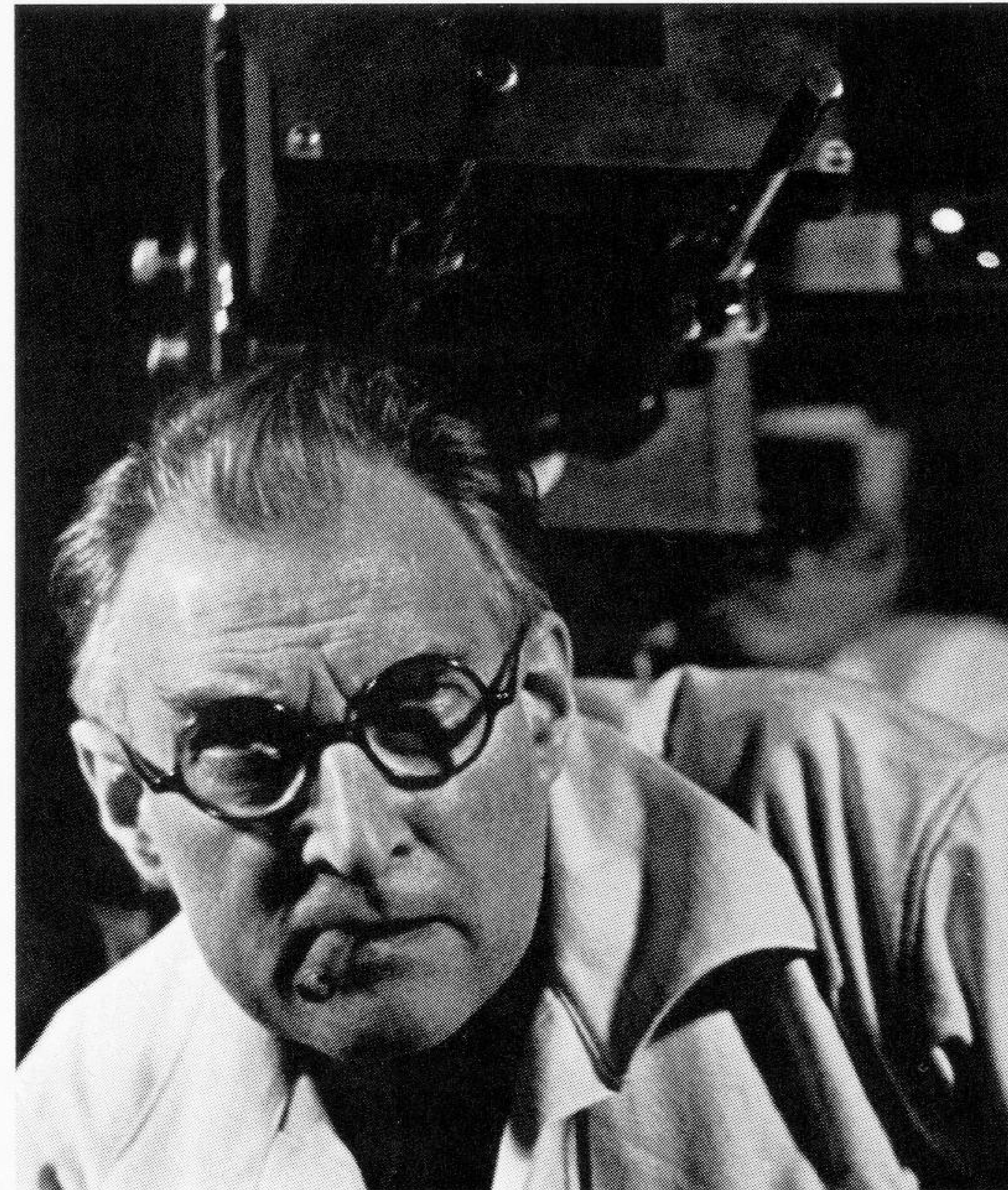
BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN

An International Dane



BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN DURING THE SHOOTING OF *CHILDREN OF DIVORCE*, (1939)

When 'The Danish Wave '99' was conceived by the Royal Danish Consulate in New York and discussed by a group of Danes and Americans involved with presenting culture in its many manifestations in the United States, we in the Department of Film and Video at The Museum of Modern Art saw the appropriate opportunity of finally exhibiting the extant work of a lesser known great Danish filmmaker.

Benjamin Christensen's (1879-1959) time has finally come: The Danish Film Institute/Archive has recently subtitled the director's Danish sound films in English; the filmmaker, whose work has never been shown in its entirety in the United States, now may enjoy the international research and validation accorded other directors with a sustained vision important to the development of film language (this booklet is the first English language critical overview dedicated to the director's work); and, quite fortuitously, the three Florida film students who made *The Blair Witch Project* -- the run-away critical and commercial hit of 1999, with prizes from Sundance to Cannes -- named their production company "Häxan" after Christensen's uniquely creative historical fantasy from 1922! Christensen's pioneering inventiveness and soaring ambitious imagination proves as inspiring at the end of the century as it was at its beginning.

Häxan was Christensen's last Scandinavian film of the silent era. It was made in Denmark for a Swedish production company (re-issued in the US in 1967 subtitled *Witchcraft through the Ages* with voice-over by William Burroughs) and was the most costly film of the silent era in the Nordic countries. Its three-year production time (1919-22) was inconceivable; this, together with the cost, execution and subject matter of the film, gave the director a rather problematic reputation at home – but he was ready and willing to travel.

In the silent era, when language was no barrier to reaching international audiences, Scandinavian actors, cinematographers, and directors were among the best and most sought after in the world of filmmaking. Christensen, who began as a director as early as 1913 with a most auspicious debut film, *The Mysterious X*, was one of the most creative and accomplished film artists of his time. A true individualist and artistic spirit whose contributions to the development of film language are still being assessed, he eventually made films in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and the United States. His early work is distinguished by a highly sophisticated play of light and shadow, an accomplished sense of narrative build-up and execution as well as superbly timed editing.

What is immediately apparent from all his films, however, is Christensen's command of the medium and the delight with which he tries out established techniques or genres and pushes their limits, and

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Seven Footprints to Satan (1929)

Häxan (1922) Else Vermehren.

the sheer artistry with which he chooses the cinematic means to express his ideas. A true auteur, Christensen wrote, directed, designed sets, and played major roles in most of his films – not to mention the creative inventions he performed during the often lengthy pre- and post-production periods and during shooting where he worked closely with the cast and crew on every detail.

The director returned to his native Denmark in the mid-1930s, and was later to make four films in the social realist tradition between 1939 and 1942 – at the time a tough proposition in a country whose film production was filled with light comedies and unengaged entertainment. These films are especially successful as character studies and made visible the director's love for the art of acting in the remarkable performances he elicits from his cast. Christensen himself is, of course, an outstanding actor in many of his own films, although his most arresting performance probably is as Claude Zoret ("the Master") in *Michael* (1924), directed by another "Great Dane," Carl Theodor Dreyer.

Even though Benjamin Christensen's career did not in the end, perhaps, succeed in envisioning his ambitious ideas and hopes for film as an art form (as expressed in some of his writings translated for this booklet), his surviving films exhibit nevertheless a strong manifestation of an accomplished visionary filmmaker whose work deserves to be a celebrated part of film history.

Jytte Jensen
Associate Curator
Department of Film and Video
The Museum of Modern Art

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The Mysterious X (1913) Left: Hermann Spiro; Right: Karen Caspersen.

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A GREAT DANE

At the Danish Film Institute's Cinematheque in central Copenhagen, the three cinemas have been baptized Carl, Asta and Benjamin – Dreyer, Nielsen and Christensen respectively – after three of the internationally best known Danish names in early cinema. Benjamin is not only the smallest of the three cinemas, but its namesake, Benjamin Christensen, is also the least known of the three. Nonetheless, whenever his early films are shown, they still are able to elicit great response.

Therefore I was very grateful when the Museum of Modern Art and Jytte Jensen took the initiative to make a presentation of Benjamin Christensen's films as their contribution to 'The Danish Wave '99' in New York. At last Benjamin Christensen's work would be presented in the United States where he made six films between 1926 and 1929 before returning to Denmark.

Now might be the right time for experiencing the films of Benjamin Christensen. There is a kind of brilliant inventiveness in his films. One senses the sheer joy in his experimentation with all the narrative, visual and technical possibilities this marvelous art form offers. It's no coincidence that his early films are melodramas of espionage and vendetta or deal with witchcraft through the ages and, that while in the United States, he made horror films and a hilarious dream comedy among others. He could use a popular genre to his own end just as he used expressive lighting, tour de force editing and masks and models that to this day remain an immensely popular part of filmmaking.

Benjamin Christensen, just as Carl Th. Dreyer, was a loner in Danish film. But unlike Dreyer, he began with the financial possibility of being his own person. And unlike Dreyer, he made his debut with a film so inventive in its mise-en-scene that we may call it one of the most amazing directorial debuts in the history of early cinema. *Det hemmelighedsfulde X* (1913) is a film with a remarkable visual style, using light and shadow to the fullest extent, dynamic editing with last minute rescues, dramatic cross cutting and a flexible camera. With this film he was at once considered one of the great experimentalists and a director with his own vision. A debut such as this is not easy to follow, but Benjamin Christensen did so with *Hævnens Nat* (1915) and *Häxan* (1922), each time raising the standard to higher and more ambitious goals, and also using unprecedented amounts of time and money for planning and shooting.

His Danish sound films are not as inventive and original as the early ones. To really appreciate them, one should be aware that Danish films after the silent era did not reach out for an international audience, but aimed only at the Danish market with light comedy material. But Benjamin Christensen thought otherwise and made a couple of films about burning social issues, thereby taking the first step toward what would be a new important trend in Danish films of the forties.

In his *Critical Dictionary*, Richard Roud concludes John Gillett's essay on Christensen by writing: "Christensen himself might well be called The Mysterious X. But anyone who has seen his three early films will never, I think, forget them". I think this is still true and I am quite sure that this booklet, newly written by young scholars, will help us understand this magnificent director with the mysterious career.

Dan Nissen
Danish Film Institute
Head of Department
Archive and Cinemateque

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IMAGES OF THE MASTER

Benjamin Christensen's Career in Denmark and Germany

BY CASPER TYBJERG

Is the cinema an art in its own right? This question was heatedly debated during the era of the silent film. From around 1910, a number of filmmakers strove to prove that their chosen medium was indeed a form of art, and that they themselves had the standing of true artists. One of the most determined in this regard was the immensely talented and ambitious Danish director Benjamin Christensen. Both in his films and in his writings, he emphasized the possibilities of film as a medium for artistic expression.

Benjamin Christensen was born in 1879 in the provincial town of Viborg. He was the youngest of 12 children, but came from a well-to-do family. He dropped out of medical school to train as an opera singer, and was quickly accepted at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen, where he studied both singing and drama. Among his fellow students were several actors who would become important figures in the Danish silent cinema, including the actress Clara Pontoppidan. He also met Asta Nielsen, who studied privately with one of his teachers, and would later become a silent screen star.

Christensen made his debut in 1902 and was soon cast as the Genie of the Lamp in *Aladdin* and then as Mazetto in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The "bull-roar" (1) of his bass-baritone voice was praised by reviewers, but a nervous illness soon deprived him of his singing voice. He turned to acting and became very popular at one of the leading provincial theaters. His nervousness continued to plague him, however, and he eventually was forced to give up the stage altogether.

He then turned to business. He became the Danish representative of a French champagne company, apparently a lucrative affair which he did not give up until long after he had become an internationally renowned filmmaker. Not coincidentally, many of his films contain champagne-drinking scenes.

Christensen had briefly considered working in films when he lost his voice, but he saw little opportunity for artistry in this new medium. It was only when he saw Asta Nielsen's performance in her 1910 breakthrough film *Afgrunden (The Abyss)* that he realized the tremendous potential of this new art form. Christensen, in fact, maintained that he completely by accident came to witness the shooting of the famous final scene of *The Abyss*, and right there and then decided to go into films (2).

That story really sounds too good to be true, but he did live directly across the street from where the scene was shot. Christensen did in fact become a film actor in early 1912. He appeared in several films, all of which have been lost. It seems certain, however, that Christensen was dissatisfied with the technical quality of these productions. His enthusiasm had been fired by Albert Capellani's *Les Miserables*, which was shown in Copenhagen in 1913. He decided to make a film on a similarly ambitious scale.

Shooting for *Det hemmelighedsfulde X* (usually referred to as *The Mysterious X* but distributed in the English-speaking world as *Sealed Orders*) commenced in August 1913, and was three months in production. This was quite exceptional, since

NOTES

1. Benjamin Christensen, "Hollywood og Damhussøen," interview by Toby, *Berlingske Aftenavis*, May 6, 1952.

2. Benjamin Christensen, interviews: *Vecko-Journalen* 4, no.6 (February 9, 1919); *Politiken*, March 9, 1941; *Ekstrabladet*, September 24, 1954.

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the norm for that time seems to have been a couple of weeks. Budget figures are difficult to establish reliably, but they seem to have been comparably ambitious, so that *The Mysterious X* resulted in costing three to four times as much as a typical production from a minor Danish film company.

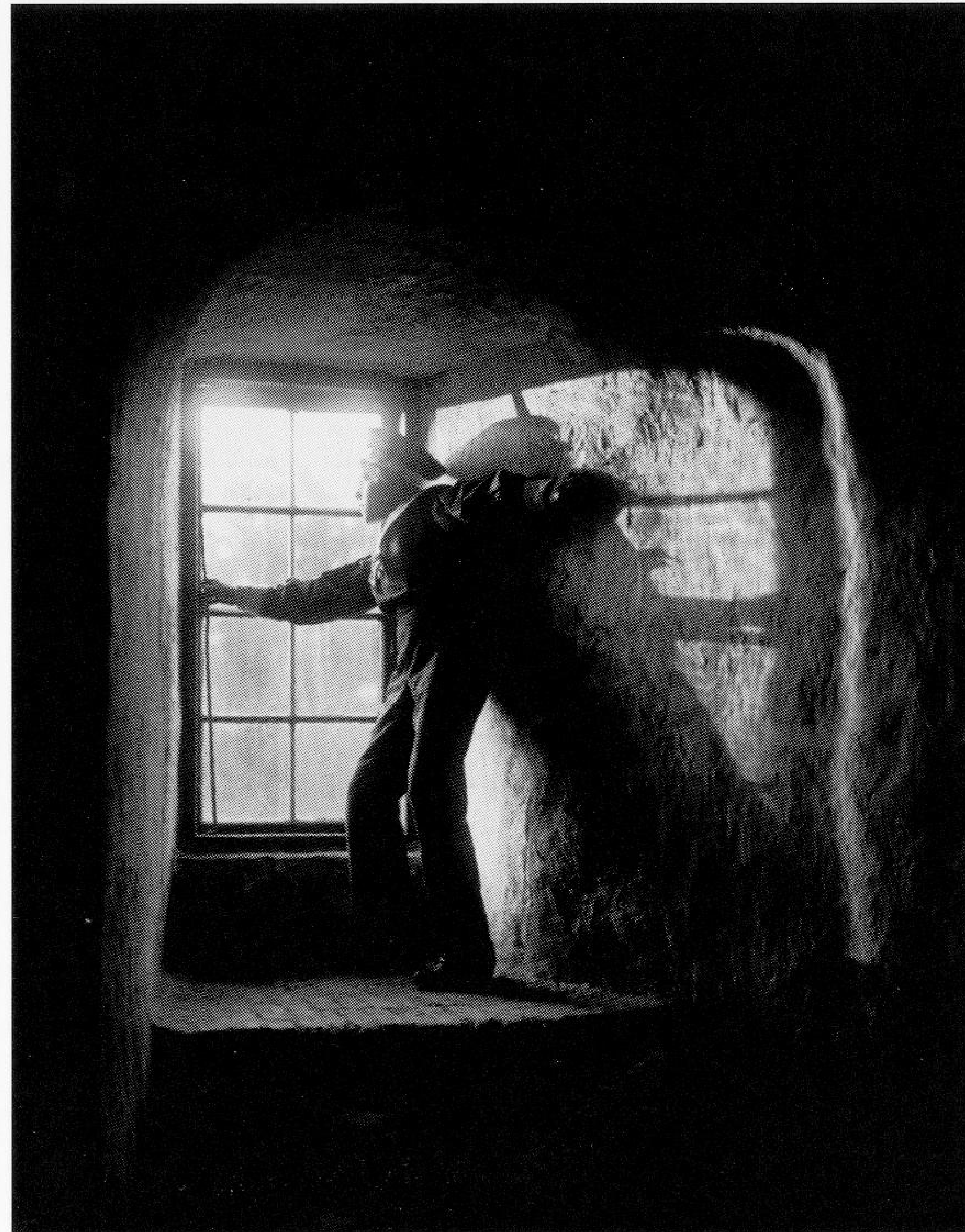
The care Christensen lavished on his film was evident. *The Mysterious X* was a great success, not only in Denmark, but also abroad. In fact, it was released in the United States several weeks before the Danish premiere in March 1914. It received critical acclaim in the American trade papers, where European films were generally given dismissive reviews because they were considered too stagy. In *The Moving Picture World*, W. Stephen Bush wrote:

This feature is nothing less than a revelation in dramatic motion pictures. It sets a new and hitherto but hoped for standard of quality. It emphasizes as no other film production the absolute superiority of the screen over the stage and opens up a vista of coming triumphs. ... An extraordinary boldness of invention joined with a mastery of detail that approaches genius help to make this feature rise above all which has been filmed before (3).

3. *Moving Picture World*, March 1914: 1654; cited in Ron Mottram, *The Danish Cinema before Dreyer* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1988), 112.

4. An example of Christensen's careful staging is discussed in detail in Ben Brewster & Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and Early Feature Film* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 197-200.

The hero of the story is a young navy lieutenant, van Hauen (played by Christensen himself). His beautiful wife (Karen Caspersen) is coveted by the sinister Count Spinelli (Hermann Spiro), who happens also to be a spy for a foreign power. War is declared, and van Hauen is entrusted with a set of secret, sealed orders. The wife fends off Spinelli's advances, but the latter gets an opportunity to break the seal and read the orders. Van Hauen discovers Spinelli in his living room and assumes that his wife has deceived him. Spinelli disappears. Due to the discovery of the broken seal, van Hauen is suspected of treason. He cannot defend himself before the court martial because he wants to spare his wife's honor, and he is sentenced to death. In a dream, his wife realizes how everything fits together. Only a race across the battlefield saves van Hauen from the firing squad...



The Mysterious X (1913) Otto Reinwald

What was truly remarkable about *The Mysterious X*, however, was not its action-packed story, but its extraordinary command of cinematic language. The quality and assurance of both editing and camerawork measure up to the very best films of the period, and individual scenes are staged with great skill (4). A famous example of Christensen's ability as a filmmaker was first pointed out in a Danish premiere review. The spy Spinelli has dispatched a carrier pigeon from his secret base, the cellar beneath an old windmill, but he is trapped when a gust of wind blows open a door, which knocks the trapdoor to the cellar shut and blocks it. Spinelli

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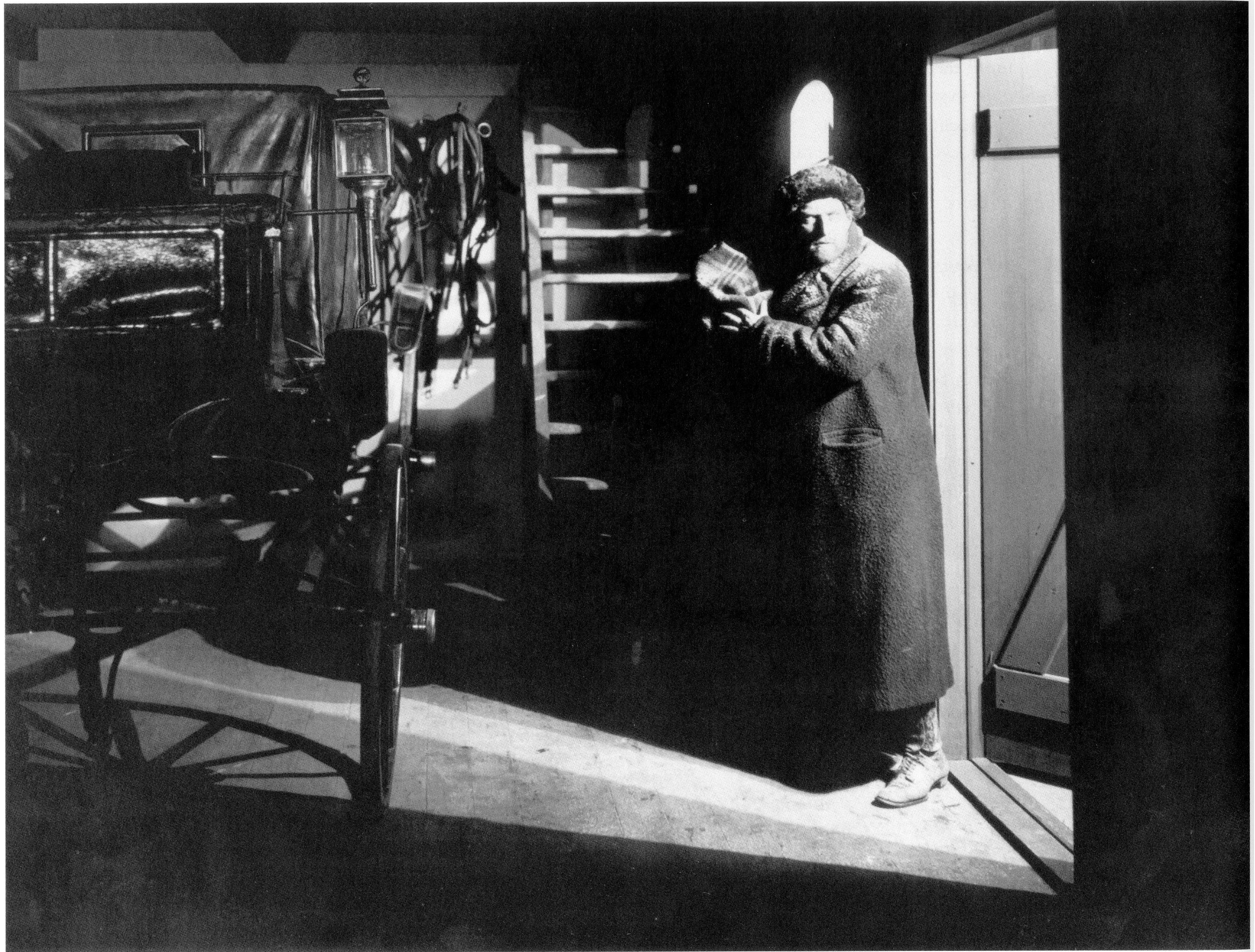

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tries in vain to push open the trap door; we first see him struggling down in the cellar, lit only by a few rays of light filtering through the floorboards. Then we cut to a shot of the trap door seen from above, lifting a little as Spinelli pushes from below; the camera then pans to the door, tilts up along the doorframe, and reveals that the upper hinge has a cross-pin that prevents any attempt to push the door off the hinges. No escape is possible.

The wings of the windmill represent the "mysterious X" of the title, and the significance of the windmill is stressed in an early scene, where Spinelli meets a pair of accomplices. The windmill on the hilltop is shown in an extraordinary image, shot directly against the light, so that it appears in sharply edged silhouette. The shot was done at sunset, and the cinematographer Emil Dinesen supposedly balked at the idea. It would turn out completely black, he said. But this was just what Christensen wanted. This silhouette shot is only one of many that uses single-source lighting to create dramatic shadow effects; others have strong lights emanating from the side into dark rooms, creating an intricate interplay of light and shadow. Some scenes have characters turning lights on or off, necessitating complex lighting changes.

Christensen's next film, *Hævnens Nat* (literally "Night of Vengeance"; the English title, though, was *Blind Justice*), is equally dazzling technically and even more assured in its direction. Christensen was not content to rest on his laurels, but continued to strive for the highest quality. Shooting and post-production lasted eight months, and except for August Blom's *Atlantis* from 1913, it was the most expensive film made in Denmark up to that time. Christensen again plays the lead himself, and the reviewers were united in their praise of his performance as Strong John (Strong Henry in the Danish version), a man wrongfully jailed for many years who, though fearsome-looking, nevertheless remains a decent man. *Les Miserables*, which so impressed Christensen in Capellani's film version, was almost certainly an inspiration.

NIGHT OF REVENGE (1915)
BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN.

On a snowy, wintry night, Strong John, an escaped convict, sneaks into a wealthy home, seeking refuge from the cold. He carries with him his infant child. Eva, a young woman (Karen Caspersen), tries to help him, but she is discovered and John is captured. He thinks Eva has betrayed him and vows vengeance. Eva marries and adopts John's infant son. Fourteen years later, John is released from prison, but can find no trace of his child. A prison buddy talks him into helping out with a burglary, where John discovers Eva's address. Spurred on by his desire for vengeance, he lures her husband into a trap, overpowers him, and hurries off for the great house where Eva is left defenseless. With the help of the boy, the husband manages to alert the police, and at the very last moment, John is brought down by their bullets. Mortally wounded, he is reunited with his son and dies peacefully.

Christensen's crescendo of suspense is masterful. In one sequence early in the film, John stalks Eva through the darkened house. She is listening at her door, believing him to be just outside, when the camera tracks back, through a glass door leading to the outside, and suddenly a hulking, silhouetted figure charges threateningly into the frame: Strong John!

When the shooting of *Hævnens Nat* began in the fall of 1915, Christensen changed the name of his production company from Dansk Biograf Kompagni to Benjamin Christensen Film. Christensen thought of himself as an artist and his film was his work, something which emerges strikingly from the very first scene of the film. It shows Christensen, as himself, standing with a scale model of the house where much of the action takes place and explaining the plot to Karen Caspersen, the leading lady, while the camera is deftly moved about. This foregrounding of Christensen's role as filmmaker is also apparent from the promotional materials for the film. One

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advertisement consists of three pictures of Christensen: two in his make-up for the role of Strong John as both a young and an old man, and the third as himself, the artist.
Below is the text:

Written by BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN
Directed by BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN
In the leading role BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN

The front page of the program booklet is completely given over to the third photo of Christensen's face, the one where he is clearly not wearing the make-up for his part, and displays the daunting stare of Christensen the master filmmaker.

Christensen elaborated on his views about the role of the filmmaker in a number of articles and interviews, beginning in 1919. He insisted that the artistic film should be the product of a single vision, so directors should always write their own screenplays. Although in the years of the silent cinema such views were quite widely shared among his fellow filmmakers, Christensen formulated them with clarity and consistency and might be said to have anticipated the *auteur* theory. In an interview from 1919, published in a Swedish film magazine under the title "The Child Learning to Walk: A New Stage in the Evolution of the Cinema," Christensen said:

A silent scene can express more than a thousand words. But if these thousand words already exist, a thousand good, wise words, and if one must express them in images, one will be made painfully aware that the words are infinitely superior to the pictures. And the joy over the images vanishes, because one feels one is about to commit sacrilege. On the other hand, one may often get to see images made only and solely as images, so full of life, so mighty, so moving, that one feels them superior to words, even infinitely superior.

And this is what must be made clear to everyone, that the word and the picture are two separate art forms which have different ways of speaking to us. And therefore we must have two different kinds of writers: of words and of pictures! Let us soon have writers of the moving picture, artists of the film who work directly for the film and stage their films themselves (5).

Similarly, in a 1920 interview, he said:

We must get to the point where the film director and the film writer are no longer separate concepts, but are merged into a single whole which we must find a name for. In my language I shall call him an IMAGE-MAKER (6).

During the same period, Christensen wrote several essays describing these ideas, two of which are included in full elsewhere in this booklet. The one entitled "The Future of Film" was published in the Danish newspaper *Nationaltidende* in November 1921, and it provoked several responses. Carl Gandrup, a novelist and prolific screenwriter, objected to Christensen's urging that the cinema should aim for the original and not rely on famous novels and plays for material, because it did that *before* the literary films appeared, relying on "original ideas – preferably sensational!" These sensations included:

...bursting water-pipes, earthquakes inside cathedrals, derailed express trains, crushed elevator boys, cobras crawling along telegraph wires, and aeroplanes crashing into unsuspecting allotment gardens!

These motifs provided the artistic ballast and spark for the independent and originality-conscious film fiction which until recently ravaged all five continents with its stupidity, its

5. "Barnet som lär sig att gå. Et nytt skede i filmens utveckling. En intervju med Benjamin Christensen." *Filmrevyn* [1919? Undated clipping, Benjamin Christensen Collection, Danish Film Institute Archive].

6. Benjamin Christensen, interview, *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 5, 1920.

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lack of taste, its utter wretchedness (7).

On New Year's Day 1922, another newspaper, *Politiken*, printed an essay by the fledgling director Carl Theodor Dreyer, where he distanced himself from some of Christensen's ideas. It was called "New Ideas About the Film," and it has since been published in English (8). Dreyer claimed that Christensen was "definitely wrong" to view the director as an independent artist: "... the task of the film is and will remain the same as that of the theater: *to interpret other people's thoughts*, and the director's task is to submit to the writer whose cause he is serving." Film should, in Dreyer's view, go "to the source of all art representing the human being: to *the poets*." The film wants the literary writer, he continues, to remain "exactly the way he is, with all his individual peculiarities of style and form." One may think it slightly odd that Dreyer, one of the most individual of film-makers, should make such claims, but one should recall that Dreyer always preferred working from pre-existing literary material, especially plays. All his films were adaptations except *Leaves from Satan's Book*, which was a story written directly for the screen by the playwright Edgard Høyer.

Christensen, on the other hand, stressed that he worked with original material, conceived specifically for the cinema. At the time Dreyer's essay was published, Christensen had just completed his most ambitious project yet: *Häxan* (*Witch*) or *Witchcraft through the Ages*. In February 1919, he had been hired by Svenska Biografteatern, shortly thereafter renamed Svensk Filmindustri (SF hereafter) after a merger. SF was the dominant Swedish production company, riding on a wave of success, thanks to a string of brilliant films made by the company's star directors, Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller. Under the enlightened leadership of Charles Magnusson, artistically ambitious directors were allowed unusual freedom to realize their visions, a policy that also attracted Dreyer to the company, and where he made his marvellous *Prästänkan* ("The Parson's Widow") in 1920.

Christensen told an interviewer that it was this promise of full artistic freedom that led him to sign on with SF (9). He did have some reservations about SF's overall production policy; many of the company's films were adaptations of famous, best-selling literary works, led by the novels of the Nobel laureate Selma Lagerlöf. Christensen, as we have seen, preferred original works. In an open letter (included as an appendix) to Sophus Madsen, the Danish distributor of SF's films, Christensen repeats this point, even though this letter, published in a Danish film trade paper, was intended to promote Christensen's forthcoming, SF-financed superproduction.

In the letter to Madsen, Christensen speaks of using the cinema to disseminate knowledge. Before settling on the theme of witchcraft, Christensen had pondered different ways of using the cinema in the service of science. As an example, he mentioned trying to film the ectoplasmic materializations of spiritualist mediums; he also contacted the famous Austrian physician and venereal specialist, Eugen Steinach, to make a film about his work (such a film, called simply *Der Steinach-Film*, was in fact made in Germany in 1922). These unrealized projects testify to Christensen's interest in the occult and in sexual matters, and in *Häxan* the two are strikingly brought together.

Only after two years of research and preparations did shooting begin in February or March 1921, and continued until October. While the film was financed by SF, a Swedish company, it was shot entirely in Denmark, with a Danish crew and a largely Danish cast. Christensen again worked at his old studio, located in a residential area north of Copenhagen. Christensen had sold the studio in 1917 to another company. It was now again for sale, and

7. Carl Gandrup, "Stene for Brød!" *Nationaltidende*, December 18, 1921.

8. Carl Th. Dreyer, "New Ideas About the Film: Benjamin Christensen and His Ideas," in Donald Skoller, ed. and trans., *Dreyer in Double Reflection* (NYC: Dutton, 1973), 30-35.

9. *Filmen* 7, no. 9 (February 15, 1919): 107.

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Christensen talked Magnusson into buying it for him and having it refitted with the most modern equipment. He worked at his own pace, often at night, and scandalous rumors circulated about what went on when the studio doors were closed. *Häxan* was not released until the fall of 1922, but it was eagerly anticipated, as it was clear that it would be a completely original film.

This is how Christensen himself described the film to an interviewer:

> *I have sought* **not** *to present a schematic rendering of the witch trials in a dramatic form, which would have meant taking one witch trial as an example and then constructing a "plot" around it – so, not according to the usual way of making films. My film has no continuous story, no "plot" – it could perhaps best be classified as a cultural history lecture in moving pictures. The goal has not only been to describe the witch trials simply as external events but through cultural history to throw light on the psychological causes of these witch trials by demonstrating their connections with certain abnormalities of the human psyche, abnormalities which have existed throughout history and still exist in our midst (10).*

10. "Benjamin Christensens film: en studie över häxprocesserna," *Filmjournalen* no. 21-22 (December 25, 1921): 737.

11. The most detailed is "Halvandet Minut, der kostede 100,000 Kr.," *Ekstrabladet*, November 7, 1922.

It is an essay in cultural history, cast in cinematic form. It begins as a sort of slide-show, presenting old woodcuts and other still pictures of witches. But soon the film makes the world of witchcraft hysteria come vigorously alive before our eyes: we see broomstick rides, witches' sabbaths, and astonishingly realistic demons. An old crone is accused of witchcraft and tortured; she gives up the names of a number of others. A young woman awakens a powerful sexual desire in a young monk; soon, she finds herself before the witchcraft tribunal as well. In the stifling atmosphere of a convent, the nuns drive themselves to a crazed, blasphemous frenzy. A comparative episode takes place in the present day. It links the belief in witches with nervous illnesses like kleptomania and nocturnal visions of strange, virile men. The film concludes with a celebration of progress, but the very last image shows the witches burning at the stake.

Christensen's explanation of the witchcraft phenomenon is that it was a product of hysteria, of hallucinations being mistaken for fact. Such explanations were advanced by a number of leading psychiatrists and medical men, many of whom had taken an interest in the paranormal. Christensen wrote a bibliography for *Häxan* (which was handed out to spectators at the first-run theaters). It indicates that the theories of Jean-Martin Charcot and his followers were particularly important for him.

However, the idea that the belief in witches and demons was simply a delusion is somewhat undercut by the extraordinary vividness with which Christensen makes the supernatural come to life. The effects work in the film was revolutionary. The most elaborate special-effects sequence in the film shows a great flock of witches riding their broomsticks through the night sky. Christensen described the making of this sequence in several interviews when the film was first shown (11). One cannot rule out the possibility that he exaggerated some of the figures for promotional purposes, but even so, the achievement remains extraordinary. For the landscape zipping past below them, Christensen first tried shooting footage from a speeding train, but with unsatisfactory results. Instead, a huge model was constructed, with some 250 model houses, each around two meters high. The entire model was mounted on a giant carousel, turned by twenty men, which was then filmed from the edge. The flying witches, of which there were seventy-five, were filmed separately. They were stationary, and the illusion of movement was created by having a camera track past them while their

HÄXAN (1922)

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clothing was whipped about with an airplane engine. All these individual shots were then combined using an experimental optical printer designed by Christensen's cameraman and chief photographic technician, Johan Ankerstjerne.

As important as Ankerstjerne's technical wizardry was, it is the commanding presence of Christensen that makes itself felt throughout the film. It begins with a close-up of the great director glaring menacingly at the camera, followed by an intertitle: "BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN produced this film, wrote its screenplay, and directed it, in the years 1919-1921." Christensen refers to himself as "I" in the intertitles throughout the film. At one point, there is a sequence of some length where various instruments of torture are displayed to the camera. An intertitle states:

One of my young actresses insisted on trying the thumbscrew, so we shot the following pictures.

We see the face of the young woman from the side against a bare background, her hands held out in front of her. Another hand reaches into the picture and operates the thumbscrew. The young lady giggles, but suddenly she flinches and cries out in pain. Another intertitle:

I shall draw a veil over the terrible confessions I extracted from the young lady in less than a minute.

Furthermore, Christensen cast himself as Satan, a masterpiece of make-up, with pustule-covered skin and a long tongue flickering in outrageously diabolical glee.

The numerous sets and the spectacular effects work did not come cheap, and with the purchase and refitting of the studio added in, Christensen's uncompromising approach drove up the cost of *Häxan* to unprecedented heights. At a cost of between one-and-a-half and two million crowns, it was the most expensive Scandinavian film of the entire silent period. Worse yet, SF had great problems releasing the film, as it was an almost continuous series of daring and provocative scenes, displaying acts of blasphemy, torture, cannibalism, and sex with demons. *Häxan* was apparently quite successful in Denmark and Sweden, even if some critics were very hostile. Elsewhere, it ran into tremendous censorship problems, severely curtailing its earning potential and resulting in considerable losses for SF. At the same time, SF was hit hard by declining admissions and merciless Hollywood competition, resulting in an economic catastrophe for the company.

Christensen was left with a reputation for extravagance that was difficult for him to shake. In 1925, at a time when he had been away from the country for quite a while, a review of *Fra Piazza del Popolo*, a new Danish big-budget literary adaptation, praised its director A. W. Sandberg for not being "a spendthrift like Benjamin Christensen (12)." Christensen had then been working in Germany for a couple of years. The German censors had subjected *Häxan* to massive cutting, leaving "only the torso (13)" of the original film. Erich Pommer, the top producer at UFA, the dominant German film corporation, arranged a private screening of the full version for various members of the German intelligentsia, mostly artists and scholars. Impressed with what he saw, Pommer invited Christensen to come to Germany and work for him. Working for Pommer, however, Christensen did not have the free rein for his abilities he had formerly enjoyed. Christensen later explained in an interview:

*After **Häxan**, I [was] out in the cold for two years. When I finally got a chance at UFA, I was obliged to completely tear off the label that had been stuck on to me: that of "literary experimentalist (14)."*

12. "Piazza del Popolo-Portrætter," *Politiken*, June 21, 1925, sec. "Politikens Magasin."

13. Claus Ib Olsen, "Benjamin Christensen: Hans film og hans rolle i dansk filmproduktion 1912-1922" (unpublished master's thesis, University of Copenhagen, 1974), 138.

14. Tage Heft, "Klip af en Livsfilm,"

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HÄXAN. (1922)
BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN
("THE DEVIL")

He therefore started making "completely commercial films," beginning with *Seine Frau, die Unbekannte*.

The film tells the story of a young artist, Wilbur Crawford (played by Willy Fritsch), who has lost his sight in the war. He tells his mother of a thrilling and unforgettable experience he had some years before: At a carnival, he met a beautiful and mysterious woman, pursued by unknown enemies, who begged him for shelter. Chivalrously, he invited her to his house, and despite a strong attraction felt by both, he slept on the couch. In the morning, a grim-faced fellow arrived and the woman left with him, leaving only a scrawled note of thanks and a ring.

When Wilbur's doting mother realizes how important this memory is to her son, she decides to track down the mystery woman. Eventually, she discovers that the woman was a criminal being sought by the police on the night they met at the carnival. Nevertheless, having obtained her address, the mother goes to see her and invites her to dinner. When she fails to appear, the mother asks for advice from Eva (played by Lil Dagover), a young widow who works for the Red Cross and who helped the mother during her search.

When Eva arrives at the house, however, the eager Wilbur mistakes her for the mystery woman. Not wanting to disappoint him, she pretends to be her. She and Wilbur start seeing a lot of each other, and when the mystery woman finally decides to appear and all is revealed, Wilbur sticks to Eva, who joyously accepts his offer of marriage.

An American doctor operates on Wilbur and miraculously restores his sight. He returns to see his wife and child for the very first time. Unfortunately, he storms up to another woman when he disembarks from the boat. Eva is furious at this and moves in with a friend, taking along the baby and all pictures of herself. Wilbur tracks her down, but when she refuses to let him see her, he snatches the

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Politiken (Copenhagen), March 26, 1939.

15. Unidentified Copenhagen newspaper, n.d.

16. "Benjamin Christensen-Premièren i Gaar," unidentified Copenhagen newspaper, Dec. 28, 1923.

17. The book has recently been reprinted: Grant Allen: *The Woman who Did*, edited by Sarah Wintle (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1995).

18. Benjamin Christensen, letter to Ove Brusendorff, March 25, 1939; quoted in John Ernst: *Benjamin Christensen* (Copenhagen: Danish Film Museum, 1967), 22.

SEINE FRAU, DIE UNBEKANNTE (1923) LIL DAGOVER AND WILLY FRITSCH

baby and returns home.

Eva and Wilbur's mother then cook up a bizarre scheme. Since Wilbur obviously cannot tend the infant himself, a nurse is needed. The mother hires Eva, who [again] assumes a false identity. The rest of the film is devoted to intrigue: will Wilbur prefer the attractive nurse or the unseen wife? Strangely, Eva would much rather have Wilbur fall in love with the nurse than stay faithful to the wife.

In the end, everything is of course happily resolved, but as the summary reveals, the plot of *Seine Frau, die Unbekannte* is complicated. To present this complication, lots of intertitles were required – over 200 of them. Furthermore, the film suffers from a certain unevenness of tone. For the first twenty minutes or so, it appears to be a melodrama – the tone is quite sombre – but after Wilbur's eyesight is restored, drawing-room farce takes over. Nevertheless, there is much to admire in the film. It is lit with great skill by the cinematographer Frederik Fuglsang, who was one of several Danish cameramen who came to work in Germany in the years after 1913. Danish cinematographers were renowned at the time for the exceptional quality of their work. There are, furthermore, many touches that reveal Christensen's hand.

Besides the obligatory champagne-drinking scene, there are some shots towards the end which display the intricate light-and-shadow interplay of which Christensen was so fond. We see a wide corridor at night, lit only by the moonlight which slants in through a row of tall windows on one side, the shadows of the window bars falling in criss-cross patterns across the floor and the characters moving about in the hallway. The film is lit throughout in key lighting, bringing out faces and details. This may be somewhat unconventional for comedy, but it gives the film a feel of elegance and stylishness. Both the look of the film and its doubled mistaken-identity story are distinctly fairy-tale-like. Even the publicity photographs stress the oriental elements of the décor, so that the film despite its modern trappings becomes suffused with the heady atmosphere of the Arabian Nights.

Seine Frau, die Unbekannte opened in Berlin on October 19th, 1923, and in Copenhagen two months later. In general, it seems to have been a success with both reviewers and audiences. A notice in a Danish newspaper after the Copenhagen premiere states that the film "for a long time has played to full houses at two of Berlin's largest picture-theatres (15)."

A Danish reviewer complains that

> *... Benjamin Christensen has succumbed, as he did in* ***Häxan****, to the temptation of placing his greatest efforts on a series of situations which somewhat embarrassingly panders to the unsavoury* (16).

This is partly true, insofar as the scenes that work best are the scenes of erotic interplay between the characters. As another reviewer notes, these scenes are played out through silent acting alone, without recourse to intertitles. Some of this is apparent in the carnival sequence at the beginning of the film, but a much more effective bit occurs later, when Eva is seized with jealousy when she, hiding behind her fake identity, can do nothing when her husband brings an attractive model to his studio and shuts the door: Eva imagines various wicked goings-on between the two, and Christensen shows us her imaginings with considerable relish. The final scene, in which the question of identity is resolved at last, also benefits from being left largely to the skill of the actors.

Christensen directed one more film for UFA, *Die Frau mit dem schlechten Ruf* (*The Woman of Ill Repute*). It was based on a novel by a British chronicler of contemporary mores and theosophist mystic, Grant Allen. Published in 1894, *The Woman Who Did* was a mildly scandalous contri-

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bution to the debate about Free Love, and concerns a woman who deliberately decides to have a baby outside of marriage (17). Christensen later scoffed at this "young ladies' story (18)" and claimed that the film was sunk by an overdose of internationalism: The stars were Russian Alexandra Sorina, American Lionel Barrymore, German Gustav Frölich and Englishman Henry Vybart. The film has been lost, and we will never know if it was as bad as Christensen later made it out to be. It was released with little fanfare on December 12, 1925, and it must be said that the reviews were quite cool, if not altogether dismissive.

Between the making of *Seine Frau, die Unbekannte* and *Die Frau mit dem schlechten Ruf*, however, Christensen won tremendous acclaim as an actor in Carl Theodor Dreyer's film *Michael*. Based on a turn-of-the-century novel by the Danish author Herman Bang, it tells the story of an aging artist, known as "The Master," and his young protégé and adopted son, Michael. Michael abuses the love and trust of the older man, who dies alone and heartbroken. When Dreyer asked Christensen to play "The Master," he accepted, but Erich Pommer had misgivings about the idea. Two directors working on one film? That would court disaster.

Sparks did fly between the two Danish filmmakers. Dreyer told an interviewer during the shooting: "Well, Benjamin Christensen and I, we sometimes get into a row, and then the rough edge of the tongue really gets used. But we have agreed that we won't use words like idiot ... because the others understand them (19)." In the end, mutual respect, professionalism, and artistic instinct won out, and many years later Dreyer still felt *Michael* to be one of his most successfully realized films. He had a substantial budget to work with – *Michael* was a prestige production, the sets were lavishly outfitted, and there was time enough for Dreyer to attend carefully to the performances of his actors.

By his own account, Dreyer, in adapting Bang's novel, shifted the emphasis of the tale, making the Master, rather than Michael, the main character. Thus it was to Christensen that Dreyer gave the prolonged, intense close-up which forms the climax in many of his films. Ebbe Neergaard writes:

> *In full understanding with his actors, Dreyer in film after film peels off the existing layers of the human face to bare the innermost parts. One actor after another exposes a naked talent which he (or especially she) had hidden* (20).

Michael opened in Berlin on September 26th, 1924, and in Copenhagen two months later. Even though the film is a psychological drama, not a grand spectacle, it was promoted as one of the year's best films. Reviewers greeted it as an artistic triumph, not least because of Christensen's performance. *B.Z. am Mittag's* reviewer wrote that in films it was very difficult to portray great artists believably:

> *But Benjamin Christensen – whom we now, after his outstanding achievements in* ***Häxan*** *and* ***Seine Frau, die Unbekannte****, also get to know as a wonderfully gifted performer, working with the most simple means in rare concentration – is completely convincing. He unites nobility with gravity, external calm with the most profound expressions of the soul; his death scene belongs among the very few great masterpieces of the art of film acting* (21).

One Danish film magazine suggested that the way *Michael* brought attention to Christensen's name was a vindication after the unjust attacks to which *Häxan* had been subjected.

19. Julia Koppel, "Herman Bang-Filmen Mikaël," *Politiken*, December 1923.

20. *Ebbe Neergaards Bog om Dreyer* (Copenhagen: Dansk Videnskabs Forlag), 106.

21. B.Z. am Mittag, September 27, 1924.

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Now, film posters everywhere would carry the legend:

Benjamin Christensen as "The Master"

And, the article went on, "the word Master has a double significance – all the critics have agreed that Mr. Benjamin Christensen plays the role of 'the Master' with true mastery...(22)"

After *Michael* was released, an interviewer asked Dreyer how he had chosen the actors for the film. Dreyer said that he preferred trained stage actors: "Only actors can give artistic expression to states of the soul." But he wanted people who fit the parts: "I construct the piece around the *personal* traits of the actors. I choose people who to the greatest possible extent have the same personality as the characters ... they have to portray." (23)

This makes it tempting to speculate about how much of Christensen himself is in the character of the Master. Certainly, there is something eerily prescient about having Christensen play an artist whose best work is behind him and who dies a bitter man. Christensen would never again have the resources or the artistic freedom to realize his visions that he had enjoyed for his first three films. Yet even so, and despite his career bringing him many disappointments after leaving Germany for Hollywood in 1925, he still had fascinating work ahead of him.

22. "Danske Filminstruktører i Udlandet," *Film Magasinet* no. 73 (1924): 7-8.

23. "*Michaël* paa Film," interview with Dreyer, *Hver 8. Dag*, November 6, 1924: 13-14; original emphasis.

MICHAEL (1924)
BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN
"THE MASTER"

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Productionshot from *The Hawk's Nest* (1928) Sol Polito (cinematographer), Wid Gunning (producer), Benjamin Christensen (director)

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BENJAMIN CHRISTENSEN IN HOLLYWOOD

BY ARNE LUNDE

NOTES

1. See Graham Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922-1931* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1985)

2. John Ernst, *Benjamin Christensen* (Danish Film Museum: Copenhagen, 1967), 25.

3) See Hans. J. Wollstein, *Strangers in Hollywood: The History of Scandinavian Actors in American Films from 1910 to World War II* (Scarecrow Press: Metuchen, N.J., 1994) and Hans Pensel, *Seastrom and Stiller in Hollywood* (Vintage: New York, 1969).

4. "Benjamin Christensen er vendt Hjem fra Amerika." *Filmen* (Copenhagen), January 1, 1917: Volume 5, Number. 6.

5. After his film career ended in 1942, Christensen experimented with writing semi-autobiographical fiction, incorporating Osborne and the Sing-Sing visit into two of the stories in his short-story collection, *Hollywood-Skæbner*. (Det Schønbergske Forlag: Copenhagen, 1945).

6. *Filmen*, January 1, 1917.

7. Letter from Christensen to Ove Brusendorff dated March 25, 1939. Danish Film Institute (DFI) Collections, Copenhagen.

Beginning in the early 1920s, Hollywood began seriously courting and importing European filmmakers, particularly from Germany and Scandinavia (1). While Benjamin Christensen was working for Decla-Ufa in Germany in 1924, Louis B. Mayer of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer previewed a print of *Häxan*. "Is that man crazy or a genius?" Mayer allegedly asked Victor Sjöström (the great Swedish director whom the studio had signed in 1923 and renamed "Seastrom") (2). Presumably on Sjöström's recommendation, Mayer offered Christensen a contract at MGM, and the Danish-born director accepted. When Christensen arrived in Culver City in February 1925, he joined a growing colony of Scandinavian film artists that had been immigrating to Los Angeles since the 1910s. Other Nordic emigres during the silent period eventually included Swedish director Mauritz Stiller and his protege Greta Garbo, Swedish stars Anna Q. Nilsson, Lars Hanson and Einar Hanson, and Norwegian actress Greta Nissen. Among the most prominent Danes were actors Jean Hersholt, Karl Dane, and Anders Randolph, director Svend Gade, and set and costume designer Max Ree. (3)

Christensen had first visited the U.S. in 1916 to promote and sell the American rights to *Night of Revenge* (retitled *Blind Justice* in the U.S.). In a subsequent interview, he described his astonishment at watching the film together with 3500 spectators, while a fifty-piece orchestra played at the Strand Theater in New York City (4). The earlier American success of *The Mysterious X*, released in the U.S. in 1914 as *Sealed Orders*, had already built up an eager interest in Christensen's work, having prompted Vitagraph to send him a contract offer in Denmark which he had turned down. During Christensen's 1916 visit, the filmmaker also screened *Blind Justice* for an appreciative audience of convicts at Sing-Sing prison at the invitation of progressive-reformist warden Thomas Mott Osborne (5). Christensen sold *Blind Justice* to Vitagraph, which released 40 copies of the film throughout the U.S. The studio again offered the Danish director a significant position within the company, but Christensen again declined, opting to return to Europe and ultimately to make *Häxan* for Charles Magnusson and Svensk Filmindustri. Before leaving the U.S., however, Christensen claimed to have studied American films and production closely, observing that "in America, directors take film seriously and are themselves taken seriously" (6).

THE DEVIL'S CIRCUS (1926)

When Christensen finally accepted an offer to work in the United States nine years later, his creative independence at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer turned out to be less than he might have hoped. According to Christensen, on his very first day at MGM he sold the studio a scenario entitled "The Light Eternal" for the equivalent of 30,000 Danish crowns. During the following eight months, however, twenty MGM screenwriters were set loose on the screenplay (7). Although his contract gave him sole credit for story and direction,

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Christensen later claimed that he barely recognized his original story after the continuity "improvements" by studio staff-writers, but that as a foreigner and recent émigré he felt compelled to concede to the studio's own sense of American tastes (8). According to MGM associate studio executive Harry Rapf, however, during the eight months of script work on *The Devil's Circus*, Christensen "has been seeing American pictures, studying American audiences, analyzing American tastes, until today he has a better conception of those things than some domestic directors" (9).

The plot of *The Devil's Circus*, which opens in an unspecified European (though implicitly German) city in 1913, involves Mary (Norma Shearer), a poor, friendless girl befriended by Carl (Charles Emmett Mack), a petty criminal just out of prison. Carl at first attempts to seduce the inexperienced Mary, but is disarmed by her vulnerability and innocence. The two fall in love, but after Mary finds work at the Circus Bomparino, Carl is arrested for burglary. Sent back to prison, he promises Mary to reform thereafter. Meanwhile, Hugo (John Miljan), the circus lion-tamer, is obsessed by Mary, and assaults and rapes her one night in her wagon. Intense jealousy compels Yonna (Carmel Myers), Hugo's mistress, to tamper with the ropes during Mary's vertiginous trapeze act, causing the aerialist to plummet to the ground into a cage full of lions. The Great War intervenes, and after serving in the trenches, Carl becomes a shoe cobbler. He accidentally discovers Mary again, now a destitute and disabled street vendor selling string puppets. Intending to kill Hugo, Carl relents when he discovers that Hugo is a blinded war casualty and that Yonna has become a prostitute after prison. The film ends on Christmas Eve, with Carl reunited with Mary, who miraculously begins to walk again.

In launching Christensen's American career, MGM may have hoped to repeat the success of the studio's first great critical and popular hit from 1924, Victor Sjöström's *He Who Gets Slapped* (which also featured Shearer in a supporting role). That film's symbolic Fate figure (recurring extradiagetic shots of a mocking circus clown spinning a globe) is echoed by the grinning devil figure in *The Devil's Circus* who serves as the narrative's master puppeteer. As the opening title reads: "When the devil pulls the strings, all the world must dance." Christensen's original story conception for "The Light Eternal" was very likely influenced by the classic 1911 Danish film version of Herman Bang's novella, *The Four Devils*. This erotic melodrama of love, betrayal and death among trapeze artists in a circus milieu was remade several times (not least by F.W. Murnau for Fox in Hollywood in 1928, a film now considered lost).

Contemporary reviews of *The Devil's Circus* in March 1926 tended to dismiss the film's old-fashioned, hyperbolically melodramatic story but generally praised the stylistic touches and sustained emotional conviction which Christensen brought to the material, as well as hailing the star-making central performance of Norma Shearer as Mary. "It's foreign and it's different" wrote *Variety's* critic, and Mordaunt Hall of *The New York Times* claimed that the film "displays a marked ability for introducing little human touches which do away with the necessity for many subtitles" (10). Regardless of how many MGM screenwriters and supervisors may have contributed to Christensen's script, the final product reveals perhaps the director's most tightly constructed and "classical" surviving film in Hollywood. MGM advertised the film as "the first production in America of the European Film Genius, Benjamin Christianson," and judged solely in terms of his prestige within the industry, *The Devil's Circus* turned out to be the high point of Christensen's American career (11).

8. Letter from Christensen to Ib Monty dated March 21, 1955. DFI Collections, Copenhagen.

9. "Rapf Sees Era of Improvement," *Motion Picture News* (New York), November 28, 1925.

10. *Variety*, 31 March 1926; *New York Times*, March 31, 1926.

11. MGM advertisement materials for *The Devil's Circus*. DFI Collections, Copenhagen.

The Devil's Circus (1926). Norma Shearer

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THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (1926-1929)

A good deal of mystery itself surrounds the director's ill-fated next project, *The Mysterious Island*. Christensen was allegedly scheduled to make a film starring Mae Murray when Maurice Tourneur was suddenly fired from *The Mysterious Island* because of artistic differences with Louis B. Mayer (12). Specifically, Tourneur refused to tolerate a producer being constantly present on the set and supervising the production (13). *The Mysterious Island* was an expensive MGM "super-special" (very loosely based on the Jules Verne novel) in which the studio had already invested a considerable amount of money even before Christensen was assigned overnight to the production in mid-July 1926 (14). Apparently directing the film during the day and struggling to rework the script at night, Christensen persuaded MGM to temporarily halt production at least twice, in order to work out story concerns (15). The final blow to Christensen's involvement with the unlucky project was a hurricane in the Bahamas, where the film's second-unit equipment and underwater sets were destroyed, forcing an indefinite shutdown. *The Mysterious Island* was ultimately completed by Lucien Hubbard in 1929. Substantially recast (except for Lionel Barrymore) and reshot in two-color Technicolor, this hybrid silent-sound film was released with an awkward blending of recorded dialogue, intertitles, muffled sound effects, and a music track. Although it is difficult to determine how much if any of Christensen's mise-en-scene or script additions remain in Hubbard's final film (especially considering the extensive casting substitutions), one torture scene of the young heroine suggests the macabre imagination of the director of *Häxan*. Silhouetted lighting in a submarine-interior shot also shows traces of a key Christensen stylistic signature (16). And, as Graham Petrie has noted, the film's Russian ambiance, which includes an uprising of characters in Cossack costumes at the beginning, bears some resemblance to parts of *Mockery*, Christensen's next film (17).

MOCKERY (1927)

With *Mockery*, Christensen's third and final project at MGM, the studio appears to have given Christensen a freer creative hand than on *The Devil's Circus*. The film was released in August 1927 as a "Benjamin Christensen Production." Just as Victor Sjöström had been renamed "Seastrom" for American consumption, MGM initially had converted Christensen's name to "Christianson" in all marketing and publicity during his first two years in Culver City. But with *Mockery* his name reverted back to its original Danish spelling, and the director apparently was also able to develop his own original screenplay with less studio interference than previously.

The film's story, originally titled *Terror*, takes place during the Russian Revolution. The slow-witted serf, Sergei (Lon Chaney), encounters in the woods the Countess Tatiana (Barbara Bedford), disguised as a peasant. Sergei agrees to pose as Tatiana's husband and guide her through enemy territory to the Imperial headquarters at Kurovsky. Captured by Bolshevik soldiers, Sergei is whipped and tortured but refuses to reveal Tatiana's true identity. The two are saved by a band of White Russian cavalry soldiers and its captain, Dimitri (Ricardo Cortez). As a reward, Sergei is made a servant in the household of the war-profiteering Gaidaroffs (Mack Swain and Emily Fitzroy). Meanwhile, Tatiana and Dimitri begin to fall in love. Feeling betrayed by Tatiana's class-conscious indifference toward him and inflamed by liquor and the Bolshevik propaganda of fellow servant Ivan (Charles Puffy), Sergei becomes a revolutionary and attempts to rape Tatiana during a peasant uprising. When Dimitri and his soldiers return just in time to squash the revolt, Tatiana saves Sergei's

12. "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Shifts Directors on Verne Story:" *Exhibitors Herald* (Chicago), August 7, 1926.

13. Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (Secker & Warburg: London, 1968), 418-420.

14. *The Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1926.

15. *Hollywood Citizen*, September 2 1926; *Hollywood Filmograph*, October 9, 1926; and Arnold Hending's profile on Christensen ("Fra Los Angeles til Rødovre" in *Mandens Blad* (Copenhagen) August 1944, 30-31.

16. Christensen's cast included Conrad Nagel and Sally O'Neill as the two young leads, roles played by Lloyd Hughes and Jan Daly in the final version.

17. Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies*, 160.

MOCKERY (1927)
LON CHANEY

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life by claiming that he alone protected her. In stunned gratitude, Sergei soon sacrifices his own life defending Tatiana from assailants during another brief uprising.

Christensen claimed that his purpose was to make for Americans a picture that was "different." "Explicitly," a *Los Angeles Times* article stated, "he wanted to put on the screen a characterization of the European peasant type, that which has been bred out of years of service to the soil and to his masters, the aristocrats" (18). In its publicity material on *Mockery* to exhibitors and the press, MGM promoted Christensen as "one of the world's greatest authorities on the psychological effect of light and shade in the drama," and announced that "many strange effects were worked out on the screen for the first time....the play was made by a blending of American and European methods" (19). While *Mockery's* Slavic beauty-and-the-beast tale did exhibit Christensen's legendary chiaroscuro lighting at moments, the film mostly received mixed to negative reviews. *Variety* wrote: "But for the costumes the revolution might have been set in South America. There is nothing except the titles to tell that Russia is the locale," a critique partly justified by Ricardo Cortez's Latin screen persona within the film, as well as the scarcely disguised Southern California exterior scenes (20).

Mockery was primarily, however, a vehicle for one of MGM's most important stars, Lon Chaney -- "The Man of a Thousand Faces." While fellow Metro directors Tod Browning and Victor Sjöström both had earlier successfully exploited the Chaney star persona and its key narrative requirements (betrayal, masochism, revenge, madness, and death), Christensen's original script toned down that proven formula. Even though Chaney's customarily powerful and subtle mime work as the peasant Sergei earned him excellent reviews from a few critics, *Mockery* disappointed the star's fans. MGM's subsequent willingness to release Christensen from his contract may have been partly the result of the film's weak reception, not to mention the director's limited production over the previous three years. It is also quite likely that MGM had vetoed a number of Christensen's scenario ideas over that period as unmarketable. As Christensen reminisced in a 1953 letter, "Over in the U.S.A. during the silent-film period, every time one proposed to the studio powers a film subject of some worth, one invariably received the answer: 'Do you think the American farmer would like a picture of that kind?'" (21).

THE FIRST NATIONAL PERIOD

On March 10, 1928, *The Los Angeles Record* reported that "Ben Christensen" had signed with First National Pictures for one picture, and that this "leading Danish director," together with producer Wid Gunning, hoped to make a series of productions for the studio (22). Christensen and Gunning had first become close friends in New York in 1916, during Christensen's visit to sell the American rights to *Blind Justice (Night of Revenge)*. Gunning was a film critic and promoter at the time, and the two men shared a great common interest in the art of the silent film (23). They continued to keep in contact after Christensen's return to Europe, and twelve years after their initial meeting, Gunning was instrumental in helping Christensen break his MGM contract and move to First National in Burbank. There the producer-director team established their own production unit, assembling a technical crew that included future legendary cinematographer Sol Polito (24).

In this speediest, most-productive filmmaking phase of his career, Christensen proceeded to make four films for First National Pictures during 1928 and early 1929 – a Chinatown underworld film and three "comedy-mysteries." While *The Hawk's Nest, The Haunted House*, and *House of Horror* all

18. "Strives to Be Different." *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1927.

19. "Fantastic Lights and Shadows in Mockery." MGM "Press Material" eight-page publicity newspaper for *Mockery*, DFI Collections, Copenhagen.

20. *Variety*, August 24, 1927.

21. Letter to Erik Nørgaard, dated April 9, 1953. DFI Collections, Copenhagen.

22. "Ben Christensen to Remain at First National with Producer." *The Los Angeles Record*, March 10, 1928.

23. "Benjamin Christensen, den danske Operasanger, der blev Filminstruktør i Hollywood." *Aftenbladet* (Copenhagen), October 21, 1928.

24. Sol Polito was cinematographer on an array of major Warner Bros. films of the thirties and forties.

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remain lost films, *Seven Footprints to Satan* surfaced again in the 1960s (25). Judging from the evidence of that surviving film, and from contemporary reviews and articles regarding the lost features, Christensen appears to have thrived creatively at First National. His gifts for eroticized fantasy and horror, crime and the occult, sudden narrative twists, surrealist comic irony, and mobile, expressionist camerawork (in close collaboration with Polito) were all given much freer imaginative reign than at MGM. Despite working at a less prestigious studio, and on comparatively low-budget feature-programmers within "sensation" genres, Christensen arguably regained a good deal of the improvisational freedom and creative sovereignty as director-writer that he had enjoyed in Scandinavia.

At First National, Christensen also tried to counter his Hollywood reputation from the MGM period as a dour, painstakingly slow, and unproductive European director. References in the trade press to "Ben" Christensen suggest an attempt by the director to reinvent himself as an energetic and efficient American-style craftsman. Admiring his impressive speed and economy as a director during this period, *Variety* wrote: "Ben Christensen, FN director has established a record in two consecutive pictures (*The Haunted House* and *Seven Footprints to Satan*) in that every camera set-up is represented in the completed picture... Christensen since in the U.S. has been handicapped by a more or less prevailing sentiment that a sense of humor combined with a bump of economy could not be found in a foreign director. At M-G-M for three years he directed two pictures and a prologue. At FN he is making four a year" (26).

THE HAWK'S NEST (1928)

In 1939, Christensen recalled his initial First National features, *The Hawk's Nest* and *The Haunted House*, as his two best films in America (27). Based on a story by Gunning, *The Hawk's Nest* is set in an urban Chinatown underworld where two nightclub owners, John Finchley, aka "The Hawk" (Milton Sills), and Dan Daugherty (Montagu Love), are business rivals. When The Hawk's best friend is framed for murder and sentenced to the electric chair, the disfigured war-veteran undergoes plastic surgery and poses as a different person in order to terrorize the real killer, Daugherty, into confessing.

Milton Sills was one of First National's biggest stars, and *The Hawk's Nest* also featured his real-life wife, Doris Kenyon. Reviews from June 1928 tended to comment on the film's unique camera angles and vivid lighting effects, as well as the story's succession of thrills, fights, gunplay, corruption, gangsters, torture, cabaret girls, and mysterious Chinese characters appearing and disappearing constantly through secret subterranean passageways and trap doors (28). *The Los Angeles Record* wrote: "The direction of Benjamin Christensen is worthy of considerable comment due to the fact that he assumed a particular mysterious style in handling his characters. Odd angles are much in evidence, and for the first time, it seems that Sills is listening to a director who has ideas" (29).

THE HAUNTED HOUSE (1928)

The success of German-émigré Paul Leni's *The Cat and the Canary* in 1927 spawned a number of imitations in the "haunted house" subgenre. Recounting *The Haunted House*, Christensen later wrote: "With this film, which earned a great deal of money and cost very little, I entered into a genre... the "mystery-comedy", where the effect depended upon alternately getting the public to shudder and to laugh, in other words, an 'Art Farce.' Following the film's success, I was engaged to make two more films of the same kind" (30).

25. In 1928, First National was taken over and absorbed by Warner Bros., which retained the name on some of its product until the mid-thirties. *The Hawk's Nest* was made before the acquisition, but the subsequent three features were made under Warner Brothers ownership and released under the First National logo.

26. *Variety*, December 12, 1928.

27. Letter to Brusendorff.

28. Given that *The Hawk's Nest* is lost, it is not clear how comparatively enlightened or racist the film's "Orientalist" subtext might have been. In fairness to Christensen, however, the Chinese characters in the film, against conventions of the period, turn out to be allies of The Hawk in exposing the real killer. The director himself cultivated a life-long interest in Chinese antiques and art, and his collection was prominently displayed throughout his Copenhagen apartment until the end of his life.

29. *The Los Angeles Record*, May 12, 1928.

30. Letter to Brusendorff.

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Adapted by Christensen from a 1924 mystery-farce play by Owen Davis, *The Haunted House* involves an eccentric millionaire who tests his four avaricious heirs to find out which one of them is trying to poison him. Given sealed letters by their dying uncle warning them against going to his seacoast mansion where half a million dollars is hidden, the heirs of course take the bait, and encounter a madhouse full of bizarre situations and characters (including a demented doctor, beautiful sleepwalker, strange caretaker, and mysterious nurse). In the end, the would-be murderer is unmasked.

Made in the midst of the talkie revolution in Hollywood, *The Haunted House* was released by First National in both silent and sound versions. The latter had no recorded dialogue but did include synchronized music and sound effects (clanking chains, moans, screams, gunshots, wind squalls, banging doors, etc.). Contemporary reviews tended to rate the film as slightly superior to similar mystery-comedies of the time, and singled out the audience-pleasing comic performances of Chester Conklin and Flora Finch. As with *The Hawk's Nest*, Christensen and Polito's low-angled, expressionist camera-work also received near-unanimous praise. "Indeed a great deal of "The Haunted House" is quite beautiful in its macabre lighting and scenic effects," wrote *The New York Sun* (31). As so often in Christensen's American career, critics again suggested that his pictorial gift and stylistic touches transcended the plot mechanics and formulas of a too-familiar genre.

SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN (1929)

Although allegedly based on A. (Abraham) Merritt's popular, 1928 pulp novel of the same name, *Seven Footprints to Satan* was entirely rewritten by Christensen, working again under the pseudonym of Richard Bee (32). The film's plot involves a wealthy dilettante and would-be explorer, Jim Kirkham (Creighton Hale) who is planning a three-year trip to the jungles of Africa. After his Uncle Joe (De Witt Jennings) fails to convince him to abandon this foolish venture, Jim and his girlfriend Eve Martin (Thelma Todd) are mysteriously kidnapped and taken to the fantasy-nightmare mansion of a black-hooded cult-leader known only as Satan. The surreal proceedings they encounter there include demonology, whippings, shootings, a gorilla, a dwarf, trapdoors, clutching hands, sliding panels, and tongue-in-cheek suggestions of nudity and orgies. In a twist ending, the whole ordeal turns out to have been an elaborate hoax designed by Uncle Joe to make Jim come to his senses.

Since *Seven Footprints to Satan* is to date the only surviving Christensen film from First National, modern spectators have been able to appreciate the virtuoso lighting effects, camerawork, and cutting of the director during this phase of his career. In three dazzling transition shots, for example, the camera appears to quickly ascend (via an elevator-crane) from one scene up to the set directly overhead, when in fact the effect was achieved ingeniously and inexpensively in the lab through the use of nearly seamless, vertical optical wipes. Christensen's experiments with sound also continued during this production. A contemporary fan magazine described how Christensen used sound effects, even while making the silent version, in order to create a psychological mood on the set and affect the performances of his actors. These aural devices would include "shrieks, groans, moans and howls; the screeching of metal on metal; chattering as of teeth; sirens screaming; bells of all sorts ringing; pistols fired off stage," with Christensen reportedly emerging after a night's work with his voice nearly gone (33).

Seven Footprints to Satan has decided visual and thematic parallels to Christensen's European silent masterwork, *Häxan*. Ib Monty has suggested that the American film be

31. The *New York Sun*, December 17, 1928).

32. "Modest Director," *Variety* (October 24, 1928, p. 15). Allegedly wanting to avoid the repetition of his name on the credits, Christensen took no credit for adaptation and continuity on *The Haunted House*, *Seven Footprints to Satan*, or *House of Horror*, but instead invented the pseudonym Richard Bee. According to burial records at Søndermark Cementary in Copenhagen, Christensen's full christian name was Richard Benjamin Christensen. Thus for his screenwriter pseudonym at First National he used his given first name and middle initial.

33. *Hollywood* (Hollywood, Ca.), December 15, 1928, 25

SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN (1929)
THELMA TODD

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seen as a joke, ridiculing superstition and including much irony in its "descriptions of the banal and naive dreams of horror and eroticism" (34). The film might also be read as a parody of its Sax Rohmer-style source novel. Whatever Christensen's intentions, *Seven Footprints to Satan* still contains a great deal of thrill-ride fun and sly perverse pleasure. As *Variety* noted in its review: "One scene depicts scores of men and women in evening clothes, lying on the floor. This is unquestionably one of the hottest exhibitions of iniquity done in a long while...No picture for kids" (35). (The film's premise and dinner-banquet hoax ending also bear striking similarities to the 1997 David Fincher film *The Game*, starring Michael Douglas).

HOUSE OF HORROR (1929)

House of Horror was the last of the four films Christensen shot under his First National contract (36). In making his fourth film in quick succession, the director appears to have begun to repeat himself creatively within the confines of the "mystery-comedy" genre. A retread of *The Haunted House*, the plot of *House of Horror* involves an old bachelor from Ohio interested in spiritualism (Chester Conklin, once again), and his skeptical spinster sister (Louise Fazenda). Convinced that they may be heirs to a family fortune, they travel to the mysterious house of their ill Uncle Abner in New York. The pair's comic efforts to escape being murdered by a killer who wants the inheritance for himself, comprise the main story. The other characters include a mystery man (William V. Mong), two reporters (Thelma Todd and James Ford), and a gang of jewel thieves, all in pursuit of diamonds. Christensen also included the requisite trap doors, trick wall openings, and sliding pictures he had used to good effect in the previous two pictures.

According to *Variety, House of Horror* contained only "1% dialogue," a scene during the first few minutes between Conklin, Fazenda and Mong (37). Although it is probably impossible to authenticate, Christensen claims to have improvised and introduced one of the first (if not *the* first) microphone booms in Hollywood during the making of the film. Challenging the stubborn belief of the studio's audio technicians that the multiple microphones on the set could not be moved, Christensen had a single microphone placed at the end of a long, sturdy fishing pole made of bamboo. Poised above the heads of his actors and outside of camera range, the pole could then be manipulated to follow the actors' movements according to Christensen's instructions. The details of Christensen's Hollywood reminiscences could vary a great deal over the years. Christensen's anecdotes about his movable-microphone invention included one version in which his studio quickly transformed the basic prototype into a standardized metal apparatus, and another version, in which every studio in town had bought itself a bamboo pole within a week (38).

INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION AND FAILURE

After fulfilling his contract at First National, Christensen returned to Europe for a year (39). His return was in part necessitated by his government-licensed, half-ownership in the Park Theater in Copenhagen (opened in October 1926). Criticized in the Danish Parliament and press because he had allegedly never set foot in his own 1500-seat movie theater yet was still earning considerable income from its profits, Christensen defended himself in person. Ultimately, however, he was forced to relinquish his ownership share (40).

When Christensen returned to Hollywood in 1930, he found the film industry greatly changed by both the complete consolidation of the sound-film and the economic impact of the Depression. Most of the Scandinavian colony, including

34. Ib Monty "Seven Footprints to Satan," *Filmnotes*, May 1968. Danish Film Museum, Copenhagen.

35. *Variety*, April 17, 1929.

36. Letter to Brusendorff.

37. *Variety*, June 19, 1929.

38. Letter to Brusendorff, see also Ernst, 29.

39. Letter to Brusendorff.

40. Ernst, 30.

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Victor Sjöström, had already retreated back to Europe, eclipsed by the importation of New York theater directors, writers, and stars. Despite these obstacles, Christensen and Wid Gunning attempted to start their own independent production company. Unfortunately, the company never succeeded in producing a single film. Among their projects was a plan to film Nis Petersen's Danish novel *Sandalmagernes Gade (Street of the Sandalmakers)*, which was set in ancient Rome. In a 1932 interview in his Santa Monica home with the Danish newspaper *B.T.*, Christensen outlined his ambitious vision for the film (including a Roman festival with masses of slaves and legionnaires), stressing the necessity of producing it on an epic Hollywood scale for an international market (41). With bravado, Christensen later claimed that his startup film studio with Gunning would certainly have succeeded, since contracts with theaters throughout the U.S. had already been signed. Catastrophically, however, the new Roosevelt administration's "Filmcode" (part of the National Industrial Recovery Act) privileged the large, established studios over independent producers and distributors, suddenly making their business venture untenable (42). Christensen returned to Denmark permanently in 1935, eventually making a brief career comeback as the director of four films for the Nordisk Films studio in Copenhagen between 1939 and 1942.

41. *B.T.*, March 21, 1932.

42. Letter to Brusendorff; see also Ernst, 30.

Benjamin Christensen's Hollywood career was marked by a combination of successes and setbacks. The fact that three of the six films he completed in America are lost, and that the surviving three have only belatedly and miraculously resurfaced, has greatly contributed to a general mystery surrounding his Hollywood period. The standard film-history accounts (that mention Christensen during these years at all) have tended to construct him as a victim of the Hollywood system, a European genius-eccentric unable to adapt to the impersonal, formulaic demands of film-factory mass production (and who retreated back to Scandinavia with the coming of sound). His experience at MGM might reinforce that thesis, if not refuted by the First National phase, where Ben Christensen managed to reinvent his industry persona and succeed within a studio system on largely his own artistic terms, despite limited budgets and tight shooting schedules. His quest for independence outside that system in the early thirties was in retrospect mistimed and quixotic. It seems quite likely that Christensen, had he chosen to, could have successfully integrated himself back into the Hollywood system in 1930 as a contract director at Warner Brothers, for example, given his consistent commercial and critical success at First National. Christensen's failure in Hollywood during the early sound period had less do with his foreignness than with his ambitious dreams for the kind of creative and economic control he had increasingly secured for himself in Denmark between 1913 and 1921, but then lost with the financial debacle of *Häxan*. That Christensen ultimately failed to realize those revived dreams in California should not obscure his actual accomplishments at MGM and First National between 1926 and 1929.

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THE DANISH SOUND FEATURES AT NORDISK

BY ARNE LUNDE

After the bitter failure to successfully start up his own independent studio in Hollywood in the early 1930s, Christensen surreptitiously moved back to Denmark in 1935. He lived reclusively in an apartment in the Frederiksberg district of Copenhagen for over a year before the Danish press even learned of his whereabouts (1). Gradually, however, Christensen began to plan his comeback as a European filmmaker, rigorously searching for the ideal literary property with which to launch his directorial return. After securing the rights to a 1936 Danish novel entitled *Children of Divorce (Skilsmissens Børn)* by Alba Schwartz, Christensen worked for a year adapting it into a screenplay. He presented the finished manuscript to Carl Bauder, the head of Nordisk Films Kompagni, who approved it for production in February 1939 (2).

Thus, after a ten-year hiatus from filmmaking (which had ended with *House of Horror* at First National in 1929), Christensen returned to his Danish-cinema roots, a quarter of a century after his initial breakthrough with *The Mysterious X*. Christensen proceeded to direct one film per year for Nordisk over the next four years. The first three were contemporary "social-debate" films, each of which progressively re-established him (then in his sixties) as a major Danish filmmaker, social provocateur, and gifted director of both veteran and younger actors.

His 1939 comeback film, *Children of Divorce*, became an immediate critical and popular success, praised by several of Copenhagen's critics as the best Danish sound film made to that date (3). The film portrays contemporary Danish teenagers and the moral irresponsibility and self-absorption of their single parents.

The framing story of *Children of Divorce* opens in Manhattan, where (in a long flashback) a young Danish woman, Vibeke Dreyer (Grethe Holmer) confesses her sexual victimization as a 15-year-old in Copenhagen. Christensen cast the veteran Danish actor Johannes Meyer (the husband in Carl Dreyer's 1925 *The Master of the House*) as Vibeke's father, the well-intentioned but philandering and self-deceiving artist, Professor Dreyer. As a father and daughter whose close emotional relationship hints at repressed, incestuous desire, Meyer and newcomer Holmer create the film's most transcendent moments. Christensen, a former actor himself and back in a Danish studio for the first time since *Häxan*, could not resist appearing in a disguised cameo as a bearded, cigar-wielding ship's captain who barks in English at Holmer: "Get the hell out of here! Hurry up!"

Christensen's second film for Nordisk, *The Child* (*Barnet*, 1940), tackles the theme of illegal abortion. Faced with an unexpected pregnancy, a young secretary, Ilse (Lis Smed) and her law-student boyfriend, Pontus (Mogens Wieth) struggle with the tortuous decision of either having the baby or seeking a back alley abortion. Adapted from the Leck Fischer play, the film's mise-en-scene never quite escapes the story's theatrical origins, despite Christensen's periodic tracking shots and a sunlit, exterior sequence of the Nordic summer. The divisive politics within the Pontus' family clan serve as a

NOTES

1. *Berlingske Aftenavis* (Copenhagen), June 30 1936, and 1 July 1936.

2. *Politiken* and *Berlingske Tidende* (Copenhagen), February 15, 1939.

3. *Ibid.* August 12, 1939.

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE (1939)
BJØRN SPIRO
AND GRETHE HOLMER

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„Skilsmissens Børn" – A/s Nordisk Films Kompagni, København.

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metaphor for conflicted Danish social attitudes toward abortion in 1940. Well-received by critics and the public alike, *The Child* further strengthened Christensen's reputation as an important filmmaker willing to take on serious and previously taboo subjects.

The last in Christensen's trilogy of socially engaged films at Nordisk, *Come Home With Me* (*Gaa med mig hjem*, 1941), is arguably both the wittiest and most moving of the three, resembling at moments a Danish fusion of Frank Capra (*You Can't Take it With You*) and Eugene O'Neill. Danish theater legend Bodil Ipsen portrays Helene Hanøe, a successful, altruistic attorney who can't help but invite home people in crisis for guidance and a second chance. Johannes Meyer (again serving as Christensen's gifted, alcoholic and self-destructive screen alter ego in their second actor-director collaboration) plays Ipsen's ex-husband, Valdemar Nielsen, a charming, roguish dreamer of a salesman on a long, slow descent toward drunkenness, poverty, fraud, and perhaps even prison. Christensen never had two more talented lead performers in a single film than here, and Ipsen and Meyer's scenes together, as John Ernst has suggested, manifest the most deeply human and fully realized characters found in any Christensen film (4). Revealingly perhaps, this was the only screenplay among the director's films in which he had no creative hand.

Christensen's last film *The Lady with the Light Gloves* (*Damen med de lyse Handsker*, 1942) was a misfired experimental return to the WWI-era, espionage intrigue and expressionist visuals of *The Mysterious X* thirty years earlier. The film's promising opening reel is full of rapid-fire effects (tracking shots, flashbacks and voiceovers, irises and keyhole masks, and enormous phantom wall-shadows) but thereafter the film reverts to a static, plodding, and nearly incomprehensible tale about spies in a foreign hotel during the First World War. Despite Nordisk's repeated misgivings, the 63-year-old Christensen used the leverage he had earned from the three previous successes to devote a year to this intensely personal project, which he intended in all seriousness. *The Lady with the Light Gloves*, however, was met with disbelief and derisive laughter at its Copenhagen gala premiere. Released in Nazi-occupied Denmark at a time when the outcome of the Second World War was far from decided, the film and its creator appeared hopelessly naive, antiquated, and out of touch (5). This critical fiasco abruptly ended Christensen's filmmaking career, although the film itself continued to draw younger wartime audiences for its unintentional "camp" value.

In a final attempt to recover from the disaster, Christensen tried two years later to court studio financing for his adaptation of Tove Ditlevsen's debut novel, *A Child Was Hurt* (*Man gjorde et Barn fortræd*), but neither Nordisk nor the Danish studio Palladium could be persuaded to back him (6). At about the same time, he received a state-licensed pension to manage the 504-seat Rio Bio cinema in the suburban Rødovre district of Copenhagen. Christensen ran the cinema for the next fifteen years until his death on April 1, 1959, half a year short of his eightieth birthday. According to his wishes, he was buried in an unmarked grave in the Søndermark Cemetery in Copenhagen.

4. John Ernst, *Benjamin Christensen* (Danish Film Museum: Copenhagen, 1967), 38-39.

5. *Politiken* and *Berlingske Tidende* (Copenhagen) August 4, 1942.

6. "Har aldrig haft Storhedsvanvid," *Ekstrabladet* (Copenhagen) April 28, 1944.

The Child (1940)
Lis Smed; Helga Frier.

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CHRISTENSEN ON FILM AS ART

Three newspaper essays.

THE FUTURE OF FILM

(*Nationaltidende*, November 15, 1921)

Director Benjamin Christensen, our most important connoisseur and creator of films, explains to us what the art of the future can expect from film and what film can expect of art.

As I stand fairly alone among film people in my opinions concerning the art of film, I accept with gratitude the editor's invitation to put forth my opinions for the readers of the *National Times*.

Over the course of some twenty years, we have watched film grow from the penny arcade shows to a daily factor in the lives of many people. In schools the projection of films has for a long time played an important part in education; many important scientific institutions have their own film archives, which are enhanced daily and already play a role in their research; and finally, the great public around the world sits down every evening to be entertained by films in movie theaters.

These films projected in theaters are the kind of moving pictures that I have had the most to do with, and it is about them that I would like to say something in what follows.

Artistically seen, I still consider these films exhibited in theaters of doubtful value, if one takes the matter seriously. For they can more accurately be considered an echo of the literature from which filmmakers everywhere take as their primary task the retelling of the old, well-worn stories from successful novels and drama, and in more recent times, successful serials from various newspapers.

While many filmmakers and even the public feel somewhat satisfied with this state of affairs, I for my part believe that we ought to think of this as only a transitional stage. It is not living life for an art form to serve merely as an echo of something else.

One needs to think of theater used exclusively to perform dramatized novels, short stories, operas and serials.

Would such theater be seriously regarded by any knowledgeable person as good theater, just simply by having management display the [sold-out] red light every evening?

I wouldn't want to be misunderstood and would add, therefore, that naturally I am not blind to the fact that retelling a story in film can now and then create pioneer work, in the sense that interest in a good book can be aroused. And I must say, I would of course rather see a film built on the narrative from a brilliant novel than one constructed on a bad, original film script.

But as long as the novel's written words say more to me than the film's representation [of them], I cannot see any artistic achievement in the film.

Naturally, one should never act on principle alone, but in general I believe we ought to keep in mind that it is time for this story retelling and parroting in moving pictures to come to an end. There has been too much talk for much too long that film is in its infancy. An infant prodigy of twenty five years is no longer an infant, and I believe that it would serve film artists well indeed if they soon began to show that films can stand on their own. More to the point: we who are responsible for making films should make every effort as quickly as possible to give the literature of the novel and the theater a decisive kick in the pants out the door.

But then what?

First and foremost, we must try to clarify what film is capable of, what is its special character and capability.

These fleeting shadowy images are in reality still a mystery, even though they have rolled across the screen already for a quarter of a century.

The most fundamental questions have yet to be answered.

Intermittently among the images on the screen, we suddenly see written words, words that are either a direct communication to the audience concerning a link in the film's narrative or the representation of a sentence spoken by one of the film's characters to another.

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It's still undecided whether these words are necessary or if the film is making a mistake by mixing them into the flow of images.

We previously introduced these written intertitles so that the public could delve deeper into the story than the pictures themselves would allow.

But perhaps in doing so we sinned against one or another of the laws of film that we still do not know for sure.

It is possible that we should take the exact opposite direction and that to a completely different degree than before we will become absorbed in the technique of the expressed words, their form and placement in relation to the images themselves.

The films of the future hold many other technical problems of similar importance that are waiting to be taken on.

And then there is the larger question of the genesis of film.

As it stands now, dramatic film 'tailors' sit in large production factories, gathered in so-called Scenario Departments, and weave literature's masterpieces into scenes of the film.

The film script which in this way comes into being with the help of many is further elaborated upon by the person who directs the picture. The old expression of too many cooks spoiling the broth is confirmed once again, in that the film more often than not with this mode of production becomes impersonal. One film looks very much like another.

Like every other artist, film artists must display in the future their own personality in their works.

When we leave the theater, we should know the person who has spoken to us from the screen.

And that, perhaps, will happen only when filmmakers have something to say that they are quite capable of expressing from their hearts in a language unlike all the others, a language of images, without the help of those 'tailors'.

Filmmakers have yet to show the world something new from the screen, something bold, something for which they have taken the responsibility.

For this reason, we have not yet witnessed film's first martyr. And no filmmaker is starving because his ideas are twenty years ahead of the times, so that no financier dare finance him.

Film can hardly yet be called an art form.

Nor does the word industry, on the other hand, any longer cover the world of filmmaking.

When bourgeois people believe that it is an unenviable or half-baked way of life to make films, they are wrong.

The meaning that the Danish language gave to the words "film" and "to make film" – something similar to swindle, flirt, arcade-like, or humbug – was funny for a time because it was appropriate. This is no longer the case.

The modern filmmaker works his twelve-, fourteen-hour days.

He loves his work and believes that the day will come when his work will bear fruit.

Benjamin Christensen

ADVERTISEMENT

(Kinobladet, 9:17, August, 1921)

"Dear Director Madsen!"

You ask me if I couldn't report something to you about the films that I work on at A/B Svensk Filmsindustri, since your customers would like to be informed, so far as that is possible.

As a matter of principle I avoid previews that are otherwise common practice in both the film and theater worlds. I do this partly because I find them tasteless and partly because I feel that the public would see a work with much fresher and receptive eyes, if it had not been talked about in advance through a shower of indiscretion by the press.

And in the situation I find myself presently, it is perhaps especially reasonable to keep one's mouth shut and let the work speak for itself.

These are the facts concerning me and my films:

When I had completed the sale of my two last films, *Det hemmelighedsfulde X* and *Hævnens Nat* – this is now four years ago – it began to become fashionable by film directors the world over to use excerpts from established and successful novels and theatrical pieces for film scripts.

This practice has never pleased me. I believe that film art in this way runs the risk of being fixed as something second-hand, something second class.

Don't misunderstand me!

In my opinion some of the best films the world has seen to date have been made in this manner.

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Even though I myself work for a Swedish company for the moment, certainly no one would take exception to my saying here that I believe it is the Swedes themselves who have produced some of the most beautiful story retelling in pictures we have ever seen.

But it is precisely this practice of retelling stories that I am against in principle.

They may only be a transitional stage to the original films that one day will become the rule, while the retelling of old successful novels declines into becoming the exception, just as it is now for spoken drama.

The dramatization of "Den gamle Præst" ["The Old Priest"] is – rightfully so – a great success on the stage of our Royal Theater.

But God only knows what would become of the Royal Theater if management on this basis allowed itself in the future to attach great importance only to "dramatized novels".

After this short preface, I have no difficulty in giving you, Mr. Director, an impression of what I want to accomplish by my films.

I want to take up the task that most of my colleagues around the world prefer to neglect.

I want to seek a way forward to original films.

And my Swedish financiers in their unparalleled understanding have given me free rein under my own moral responsibility. The task I have taken on is by no means easy.

For I don't only seek to create original films, but also through my current work I want to become clear, to reach conclusions, about whether film as an art form doesn't demand from us a much larger field of activity than we have thus far used.

Does a film need to be entertaining exclusively?

Should we try to engage other artists than just writers?

Isn't film the best way for mankind to broaden knowledge among the masses?

Shouldn't it be possible for us to find for film's characteristically popular, clear and reliable form other subjects than purely entertaining ones?

Shouldn't it be possible for film to approach a problem in another way than through the social drama?

Doesn't film have precisely in this area a tremendous advantage over the theater?

Shouldn't it be possible just at some point to wrench the film away from its slave relations with the spoken drama that exists for the time being?

I feel that it ought to be attempted, and I believe that the day will dawn when this man or those men will show us that everything we have up to now considered as films were not films at all, but just the echo of melodies we recognized from somewhere else.

Until these brilliant film people do come forth, I think that the most beautiful and valuable task that we others can undertake is to clear the way and find the tools that these new men will one day use.

It is these kinds of things with which I experiment in my own humble way, and I am completely aware that I am plunging into difficulties and efforts that far exceed the powers and abilities of a single man.

But it is better to stumble on the way to a great and unknown goal than to storm forward with bravura on well-worn paths.

My films require innumerable performers – but very few extras.

I'm not looking for any external earth shattering impact.

But I would like to know at this time whether a film is able to hold the public's interest without mass effects, without sentimentality, without unified narration, without suspense, without heroes and heroines – in short, without all those things on which a good film is otherwise constructed.

My films consist of a series of small episodes that – as part of a mosaic – give expression to an idea.

Should they fail and misfire, I trust that another will take up similar tasks. For what I want is, in one way or another, a pact with the future, and in that I cannot give up hope.

Yours faithfully,
Benjamin Christensen

Seven Footprints to Satan (1929)
Left: Creighton Hale;
Right: Thelma Todd

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FILM, THEN AND NOW...

by the film director
Benjamin Christensen
(*Berlingske Tidende*, November 26, 1940)

Young actors ask me now and then what difference there is in making films today as opposed to thirty years ago when I first began.

I always give them a straight answer: the job of filmmaking is exactly as enjoyable today as it was before, and also as difficult. Only the nature of the enjoyment and the difficulties encountered have changed character over the years.

I first got involved in film in 1912. Already at that time the mass production of moving pictures was in full swing the world over – not the least here in Denmark. Most film directors made between 8 and 12 films per year.

Supported by actors and cinematographers with a certain studio experience, they succeeded in getting through the work quickly, made much money and were probably deeply satisfied with the situation. In the laboratories, where each film was developed and copied, a certain daily routine had likewise taken shape with respect to what was the accepted level of technical achievement at that time. Life was very good. A Danish company yielded 60 percent proceeds for its shareholders. But then came the setback -- in 1913.

At the same time I took on the project of managing a small studio that had come to a standstill 6 months after its start-up due to the fact that the world market had by now become saturated. In other words, it was my destiny to enter production at the same time as difficulties arose from fierce competition.

From 1913 on, a film had to tower above others in one way or another to become successful.

And the people who stood first in line in terms of these successes were no longer the routine directors, but the ones who dared to do something new.

To be a film director in the years 1913-1916 meant to be inventive in both artistic and technical matters. And that could only happen if one was lucky enough to have complete freedom.

To belong to the large routine production studios was from then on a handicap for a director since the way the studios were run suddenly had become old-fashioned. Instead of encouraging directors to attempt new conquests, the routine factories were constantly hindering them, blocking the way for new kinds of experiments.

Basically, this was understandable, for when a filmmaker had made loads of money by serving as a shelter for the banal for so many years, what was he to do now that his old methods had gone by the wayside?

Three to four weeks were at that time the norm, I believe, for the production of a film. And then it is not so strange that this director was considered a bit crazy, when I was presumptuous enough to spend all of three months on my very first film?

As I think back on those happy pioneer days, I often smile with the thought that even my own collaborators now and then shook their heads in despair over me.

I had a cinematographer back then, a man very capable and skilled in all areas within his domain. But this same man also always wanted first and foremost to be one hundred percent certain of a successful outcome of anything that was attempted.

When I positioned him in a field after sunset one day and asked him to aim the lens directly to the west and start shooting, he declared in short that this was a pure and simple waste of raw film stock. There wouldn't be anything on the screen. The man was right, of course, seen from the traditional perspective – every hope of capturing any nuance in the landscape was excluded.

He didn't see the new and beautiful and extremely dramatic in the entire pitch-black silhouette that I was after, the silhouette of two horsemen riding against the hill crest by night, up to an old mill whose sharp silhouette appeared like a cut-out in black paper.

Would anyone believe me today, if I said that in 1913 one could create a sensation with something so simple and straightforward as letting the charming little Karen Caspersen turn on the ceiling light in her living room, when she – during the course of the film – came home from visiting the city?

It sounds unbelievable but it is nonetheless true. For before then, when a person entered any room in a film, the lights were always on. It had been discovered that a lit table lamp with a pretty shade could serve as a nice lighting effect for an evening image. But all the same, the idea that one's living room at home could be pitch dark when one entered it from the outside. No

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– this was unthinkable!

One explanation may be that we didn't own terribly many electric lamps at that time which would be available to us during a shoot. The sun was still the most important light source. That is why the first film studios always were constructed of glass and built at first-floor level.

To accomplish this new lighting effect, I had to buy a lot of black cloth so that I could cover the entire exterior of the studio: roof, walls, ends – everything.

Then I would ask twelve men to mount the glass roof and then drill them on the strange proficiency of dumping all the black cloth to the ground simultaneously, after I had given them the signal to do so with a shot from a revolver.

This required time and patience, but a miracle occurred on the screen: When Miss Karen turned on the electric switch in the living room set decoration – oh what wonder! – light appeared in the room.

Such was filmmaking back then. Everything that today seems more or less obvious, and which almost no one considers interesting any longer, was so difficult at that time that it held our collected attention in making the film.

The traditions of film back then were also much too tied to theatrical traditions, but the dramatic contribution of the images of animals and the natural elements was still something with which you could surprise the world.

Thus it created a sensation when in my first film I would populate an old sinister cellar with living rats, and that I would allow a haphazard wind in one dramatic moment to blow open a door, and intervene in the action.

I had learned the year before from "De fire Djævle" ["The Four Devils"] that dead things are often able to create greater responses than living ones. Who could sit through this thrilling film without being affected by the empty trapeze – more than anything else in the film – swinging back and forth over the circus arena, since the one who should have caught the trapeze, had fallen.

If I had to mention other things that significantly marked the difference between film then and now, I would say perhaps that it would have to be the contempt that many people harbored for film twenty or thirty years ago.

Today, scholars from the National Museum gladly help film people in their efforts to create the right atmosphere for a scene, if the action is to be played out in bygone days.

But even as late as 1921, when I was making *"Heksen" [Häxan]*, public opinion held on strongly to the idea that film was mere frivolity, and only under the promise of secrecy was I able to get a little help here or there from the scholars *behind the scenes*. If a skilled practicing doctor, a humble, highly educated man, hadn't helped me in tracking down the best sources for the Middle Ages and Renaissance, I might have given up on the work altogether.

When one looks – as a collected overview – back on film's beginnings and earlier years, the main distinction between one's work then and now as a director has to be that at that time everything was concerned with the technical. It was simply necessary for it to be that way, while now, since you are surrounded by skilled experts in all the technical fields at every major studio, you can concentrate on the artistic. Film's technical possibilities have been laid out long ago; image making runs in the blood to the degree that one no longer sees any great problems with it.

The crux of the matter lies now in completely different areas.

Now one musters all that he can of human knowledge, talent, and life experience – for the single endeavor of making the scene truthful.

We have become familiar through the silent film with the mimetic and plastic effects the actors can provide us. Now we attempt to explore the secrets of the spoken word. In this respect, there are still many problems to solve for directors of sound film.

Why – for example – doesn't the microphone allow us the use of beautiful, fragile words but instead only the small, gray words of everyday?

The struggle we are fighting today within the arena of sound film is against the devilish conspiracy of the photographic objective lens and the sound detecting microphone. They seem to have plotted together against everything that is not common, bright as day or matter-of-fact in spoken and expressive language.

Why is it that what seemingly emanates so beautifully from the gifted actor's voice in the theater, that which we conceive as warm and touchingly poetical, so often comes across as affected, gibberish or unnatural when we attempt to transfer it to the sound film?

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HÄXAN (1922) KAREN WINTHER

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Why does it seem that the microphone can only deal with the most simple and trivial matters?

Will we ever be able to transfer to sound film a little of that secretive witchcraft, which those half-darkened theater spaces seem to add to an artist's work?

As it is now, the lyrical words, the poetical phrases, a deliberately chosen turn of a sentence appear in the transfer to sound film in the same way as does our furniture, when we move it from its place in the room. It looks nice there, until the movers drag it down and place it on the pavement in the early morning's mercilessly matter-of-fact light. It seems at that moment to transform into old junk.

And here is another problem that arose when we went from the silent to the sound film:

Why is another worthy quality denied sound film? A quality which belonged to the silent film to such a high degree, i. e. the ability to set the spectator's fantasy in motion in such a way as to get him to add to the creation of the work himself, to go further than what he sees on the screen?

Why does the very first crack of the microphone immediately bring us back down to earth, so that we, while the film is still rolling, behave as indifferent spectators?

How much we would like to deny what we all know, that while the sound film has freed us from the silent film's often irritating approximation in expression, it has at the same time slain something in the dream, the lyricism, that, in the more fortunate moments, radiate from the silent film.

I cannot conclude this article without saying a few words about the film script, which we have always lacked and always have longed for within Danish film. What I mean here is the original film script, written by a Danish author directly for film. If we direct something terribly, we Danish film directors deserve of course an honest and outright beating in the press and contempt from the public. But it seems to me a bit comical that Danish film directors so often get a thrashing because Danish authors lack the ability to write for film.

From time to time I have tried to encourage younger Danish authors to write for film, but just try to lure them, the smart alecks! They resort to offering us their books and dramatic pieces that do not lend themselves to filmmaking. Then we can allow ourselves to chew the cud over these artifacts, which again protects the writer against having to stand up and take the criticism when it comes time for that.

We Danish directors have no burning desire to write scripts ourselves. On the contrary, we are forced to do so because the authors in this country have deserted us.

We are not looking for old novels and plays in Danish film, especially since almost no Danish novel or Danish drama lends itself to film.
What we desire, of course, is original film scripts, written by real screenwriters and formulated according to the special demands of film.

The genre itself is next to unimportant, for we have nothing, and with open arms we'll take anything offered to us, provided it is talented and that it is a film.

We need comedies, farces, crime stories, human tragedies, social dramas -- it doesn't matter what.

And we need them badly!

It is meaningless that Danish writers say to us that they do not know the special techniques of film.

Who taught them to write novels and plays? Didn't they learn the technique by reading the novels and plays of others?

And why can't they get it into their heads that one learns the film script's technique in the movie theater and only there?

I would claim that there is no other place where you *can* learn it.

And who is to say anyway, that the film writers of the future will be trudging around in the film techniques of the past? Each talented person will find his own technique, naturally.

We are working under – in Denmark, as in other places – a misunderstanding, when it comes to the misery of film scripts being blamed on the producer. I know a number of producers in many countries and can assure you that in most cases they are far better than they are reputed to be.

Producers today throughout the world are too intelligent to be ignorant of the fact that without a good film script there will be no successful film.

For this reason they are willing to pay, but what they purchase must be good and it must be complete.

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FILMOGRAPHY

SKÆBNEBÆLTET
1911, released 1912. Produced by Dansk Biograf Kompagni. Written and Directed (?) by Sven Rindom. With Benjamin Christensen, Carl Rosenbaum, Karen Sandberg.

LILLE KLAUS OG STORE KLAUS
1913. Produced by A/S Dania Biofilm Kompagni. Directed by Elith Reumert. Written by Peter Nansen based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy-tale. With Benjamin Christensen, Henrik Malberg, Robert Storm-Petersen.

DET HEMMELIGHEDSFULDE X
(The Mysterious X/Sealed Orders).
1913, released 1914. Produced by Dansk Biograf Kompagni. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. Cinematography by Dinesen. With Benjamin Christensen, Karen Sandberg (Caspersen), Otto Reinwald, Fritz Lamprecht, Amanda Lund, Hermann Spiro, Bjørn Spiro.

MANDEN UDEN ANSIGT
1915. Produced by Dansk Biograf Kompani. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. With Nikolaj Neiiendam. (Never completed).

HÆVNENS NAT
(Night of Revenge/Blind Justice)
1915, released 1916. Produced by Dansk Biograf Kompagni/ Benjamin Christensen Film. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. Cinematography by Johan Ankerstjerne . With Benjamin Christensen, Karen Sandberg (Caspersen), Peter Fjelstrup, Charles Wilken, Ulla Johansen, Jon Iversen, Aage Schmidt, Mathilde Nielsen, Karl Gottschalcksen, Grete Brandes, Elith Pio, Fritz Lamprecht, Osvald Helmuth, Otto Reinwald, Jørgen Lund, W. Jordan.

HÄXAN
(Witch)
1919-21, released 1922. Produced by Svenska Biografteatern. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. Cinematography by Johan Ankerstjerne. Set Design by Richard Louw. With Benjamin Christensen, Elizabeth Christensen, Astrid Holm, Karen Winther, Maren Pedersen, Ella la Cour, Emmy Schønfeldt, Kate Fabian, Oscar Stribolt, Clara Pontoppidan, Else Vermehren, Alice O'Fredericks, Johs. Andersen, Elith Pio, Aage Hertel, Ib Schønberg, Henry Seemann, Frederik Christensen, Knud Rassow, Ellen Rassow, Holst Jørgensen, Poul Reumert, H.C. Nielsen, Tora Teje, Albrecht Schmidt.

SEINE FRAU, DIE UNBEKANNTE
(His Wife, the Unknown)
1923. Produced by Decla-Bioscop. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Cinematography by Frederik Fuglsang. With Willy Fritsch, Lil Dagover.

MICHAEL
(Mikaël/Chained/Heart's Desire/The Invert)
1924. Produced by Decla-Bioscop under UFA by Erich Pommer. Directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer. Written by Dreyer and Thea von Harbou based on Herman Bang's novel 'Mikaël'. Cinematography by Karl Freund (interiors); Rudolf Maté (exteriors). Sets by Hugo Häring. With Benjamin Christensen, Walter Slezak, Nora Gregor, Grete Mosheim, Robert Garrison, Karl Freund.

DIE FRAU MIT DEM SCHLECHTEN RUF
(The Woman of Ill Repute)
1924, released 1925. Produced by UFA Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by Christensen based on Grant Allen's 1894 novel "The Woman Who Did". With Alexandra Sorina, Lionel Barrymore, Gustav Frölich, Henry Vibart.

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THE DEVIL'S CIRCUS
1926. Produced by MGM. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. With Norma Shearer, Charles Emmett Mack, Carmel Myers, Claire McDowell, John Miljan, Joyce Coad, Karl Dane.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND
1926-1929. Produced by MGM. Based on the novel by Jules Verne. Benjamin Christensen took over direction after Maurice Tourneur; film completed by Lucien Hubbard. With Lionel Barrymore.

MOCKERY
1927. Produced by MGM. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. Edited by John W. English. With Lon Chaney, Ricardo Cortez, Barbara Bedford, Mack Swain, Emily Fitzroy, Charles Puffy, Kai Schmidt.

THE HAWK'S NEST
1928. Produced at First National Pictures by Richard A. Rowland. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by James O'Donohoe based on a story by Wid Gunning. Cinematography by Sol Polito. Edited by Frank Ware. With Milton Sills, Doris Kenyon, Montagu Love, Mitchell Lewis, Stuart Holmes, Sojin, Torben Meyer.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE
1928. Produced by First National Pictures. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by Richard Bee (pseudonym for B.C.) and Lajos Biro based on a play by Owen Davis. Cinematography by Sol Polito. Edited by Frank Ware. With Chester Conklin, Thelma Todd, Montagu Love, Eve Southern, Flora Finch, Larry Kent, Edmund Breese, Barbara Bedford, William V. Mong.

SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN
1929. Produced by First National Pictures. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by Richard Bee (pseudonym for B.C.) based on the novel by A. Merritt. Cinematography by Sol Polito. Edited by Frank Ware. With Thelma Todd, Creighton Hale, Sheldon Lewis, De Witt Jennings, Sujin, William V. Mong and Angelo Rossitto.

HOUSE OF HORROR
1929. Produced by First National Pictures. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. Cinematography by Ernest Haller and Sol Polito. Edited by Frank Ware. With Chester Conklin, Louise Fazenda, Thelma Todd, James Ford, William V. Mong.

SKILSMISSENS BØRN
(Children of Divorce)
1939. Produced by Nordisk Film Kompagni. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by Christensen based on a novel by Alba Schwartz. Cinematography by Valdemar Christensen. Music by Erik Fiehn. With Johannes Meyer, Grethe Holmer, Svend Fridberg, Ellen Malberg, Mathilde Nielsen, Sonja Steincke.

BARNET
(The Child)
1940. Produced by Nordisk Film Kompagni. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by Christensen, Leck Fischer, and Fleming Lynge, based on Fischer's play. Cinematography by Valdemar Christensen. Music by Erik Fiehn. With Lis Smed, Mogens Wieth, Agis Winding, Gunnar Lauring, Beatrice Bonnesen, Bjarne Forchhammer, Helga Frier, Inger Lassen, Charles Tharnæs.

GAA MED MIG HJEM
(Come Home with Me)
1941. Produced by Nordisk Film Kompagni. Directed by Benjamin Christensen. Written by Leck Fischer. Cinematography by Valdemar Christensen. Music by Erik Fiehn. With Bodil Ipsen, Johannes Meyer, Grethe Holmer, Mogens Wieth, Peter Malberg, Karen Lykkehus, Tudlik Johansen, Eigil Reimers, Lise Thomsen.

DAMEN MED DE LYSE HANDSKER
(The Lady with the Light Gloves)
1942. Produced by Nordisk Film Kompagni. Directed and Written by Benjamin Christensen. Cinematography by Valdemar Christensen. Music by Erik Fiehn. With Lily Weiding, Hans-Henrik Krause, Tavs Neiiendam, Paul Rohde, Karl Jørgensen, Grete Gravesen, Jessie Lauring.

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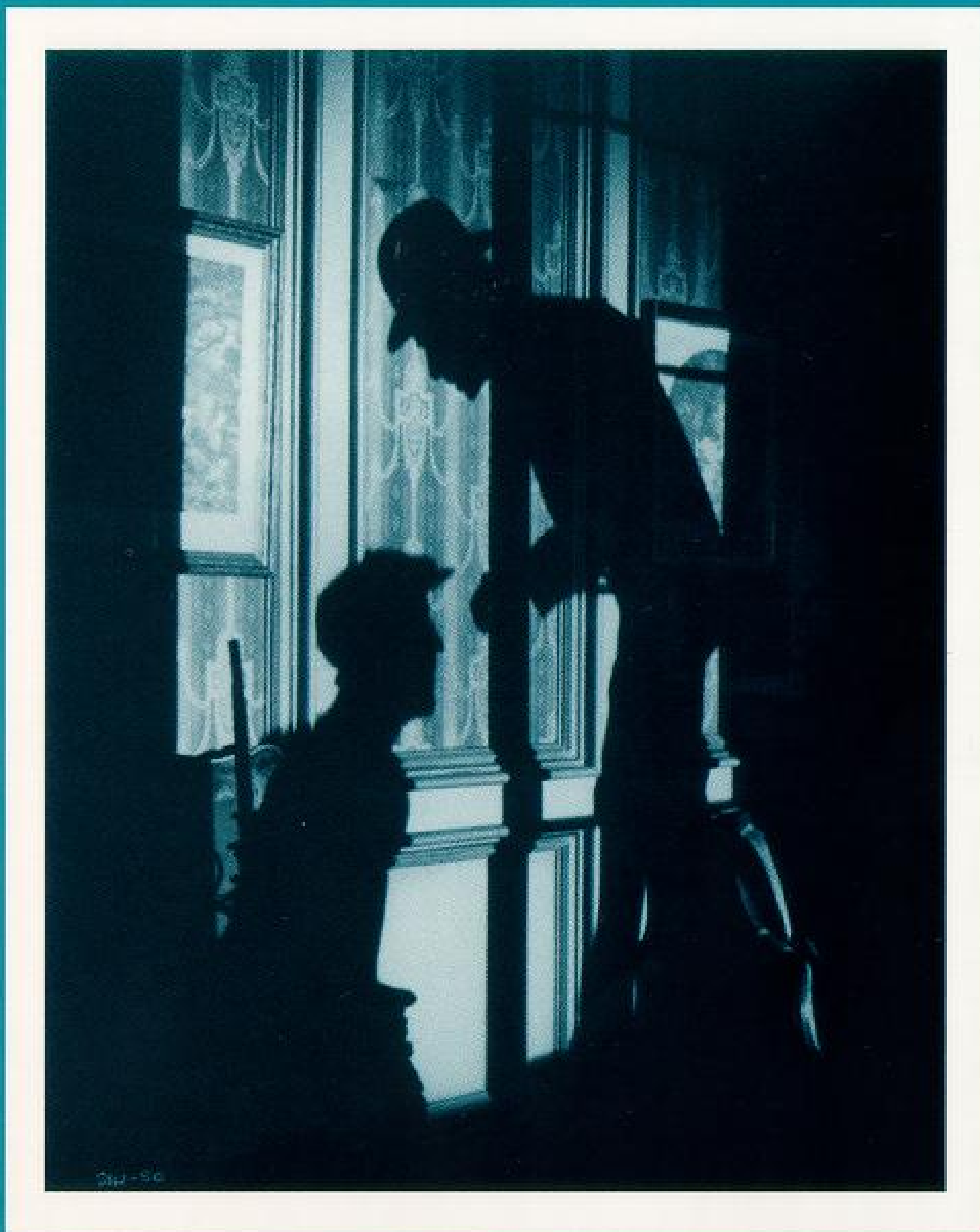

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