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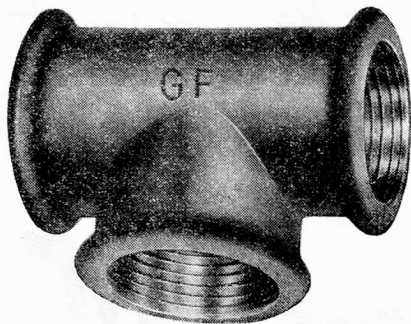
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"SO CLOSE TO LIFE"

"So Close to Life" is one of the most human and least intellectually complex films Ingmar Bergman has produced so far. At the same time it is closely related to his other masterpiece, "Wild Strawberries". The latter was a film about old age, about a lifetime of experience, guilt and expiation. "So Close to Life" deals with birth, with the agonies and ecstasies of life's beginnings.

In "Wild Strawberries" the vast accumulation of eighty years' experience could not be depicted realistically; it had to be condensed into a series of brief, symbolic sequences. "So Close to Life", on the other hand, is in Bergman's most realistic style, in keeping with its subject matter.

The entire action of the film takes place in a maternity hospital, and deals with the fate of three women, who are sharing the same room. One of them is brought there in an ambulance, in imminent danger of a miscarriage: a weak, sensitive woman, who is all too conscious of her inability to sustain the most important of human relationships. The second woman, a strong, generous character, seems to be made for motherhood, and is impatiently awaiting the birth of her child. The third is a mere girl, estranged from her parents, who is carrying an unwanted, illegitimate baby. But life is a mystery, greater than individual characters or attitudes, greater than our man-made distinctions and moralities; it makes its own choice of what is to be born and what is to die. Yet its verdicts, cruel though they may be, are not final, and those whom it has forced to accept a tragic loss will have another chance . . .

The subject of the film seems to have tapped a vein of warm human concern in Bergman. Gone is the curiously "frozen" emotional quality that has often been noticed in his films. The magnificent craftsmanship, the unerring eye for the significant detail, are still there, but this time Bergman confronts his subject in a new attitude, compounded of awe and humility.

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