

Clownen Jac

Hj. Bergman

June 28–July 1, 2019

A strange book indeed. A mixture of vintage Bergman set in an idyllic Swedish early 20th century setting, and an excursion to Los Angeles. It jars, but that might be the charm of the novel to many readers, although I am not one of them. We have on one hand Benbé the young man who learns about his relative Trabac who emigrated to the States and made it very big, in fact becoming the most celebrated clown. The purpose of the young man is very clear. He wants to have some of the fame and money of his successful relative rub off on himself.

Trabac is known by his artist nom Jac, and as such he is not only extremely successful but also very unhappy. In fact without his predisposition for unhappiness there would be no success, and without his success he would not be so miserable as he is now. The outward sign of his success is that he lives in a big mansion with a big staff and an extended entourage of hangers-on. One thinks of Graceland of Elvis or the similar mansions of more modern mega stars such as Michael Jackson, deified by their followers, and as a result lost in the unreality of their fame. It is a life of misery in which you are totally dependent on your managers who decide what you should do and what spin will be put on it.

But is it just media-hype? Fame being a chimera like formed in a desert, the projection of the desires of the desperate, as liable to dissolve as to endure. What makes Jac appeal to people is his fear. His real fear, which takes such appealing forms. Without this terror that he feels, and which the public must sense without really realizing it, Jac would be nothing. But when he acts it is for real, the ostensible emotions displayed are in fact real, or emanating from real emotions, so even if they are not exactly what they purport to be, they strike the public by their authenticity. Maybe the same thing is at work with modern mega stars, and if so, the imagination of Bergman is indeed prescient.

Yes the imagination of Bergman is duly appreciated and admired. I find it undisciplined, and hence at times somewhat enervating. It bubbles and bubbles but does not really move. His imagination very much adheres to the idea most people have of imagination. An unstoppable bubble of wild associations which sparkles as fireworks against dark sky. But when all is said and done, when all the works have fired themselves out, nothing really remains. The sky is as dark as it was initially. True imagination goes beyond unfettered associations.

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