

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **Tore** (in Bergman's *Virgin Spring*)          angry

**Overview** *Virgin Spring* (released 1960) is a revenge drama, into which Bergman introduces themes that are common features of his work: presentation and critique of religious values; deep personal suffering; the meaningfulness of violence. We are in the brooding mediaeval world of *The Seventh Seal*, with its dark heavy natural background, and its susceptibility to visions—either pagan, as in the bridgekeeper's seeing of the unseen, or Christian. (At that time the two religious forces are posed in struggle throughout the pagan north.) We are prepared for outbursts of passion and anger as dark as the landscape.

**Character** Tore is a prosperous, god-fearing town dweller, who lives in comfort with his wife and daughter, and with the family servant, Ingeri. He is a proud and reserved man, his thoughts often on god and duty, and his particular soul mate is his young daughter, with whom he shares his fancy and imagination. One spring day he makes the fatal mistake of sending his daughter, on horse and with the servant, to take candles to the church. He is soon to be ripped apart, by the news of what happened that day, that his daughter is raped and killed by two no-good goatherds. When these same goatherds unknowingly come to Tore's manor for shelter, a few nights later, Tore learns who they are and stabs them to death with exceptional brutality. Not much later, having discovered the body of his own murdered daughter, he vows to God that he will build Him a noble church, on the spot where his daughter died. He will in that way show his repentance for his terrible anger.

**Parallels** Sigrid Undset's three volume *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920-22) is a potent evocation of imagined life in Norway in the 13th century, and touches many of the same themes as Bergman's *Virgin Spring*: the conflict between paganism and Christianity; the violence latent in daily life; the intensity of passion and hatred. For an unbearable depiction of rape and humiliation in film—parallel to the scene of Karin's rape—one might turn back to *Deliverance*, by James Dickey, released as a film in 1972. The rape of Bobby, a porcine businessman, by a backwoods hillbilly, is as distressing as that of Karin. It makes us watch in terror.

### **Illustrative moments**

**Pride** Tore is mock severe with his young daughter, as he and his wife see the girl (and the servant) off on horse through the woods, to deliver candles to the Pastor. He threatens her with mock punishments if she strays from the path, or is late, and the two of them, father and daughter, exchange fanciful tales of knights and ladies in courtly times. His bony face, with its sharply pointed beard, creases around an impish smile when he is around his daughter, and she responds adoringly. We can see that, in the life of hard work, constant piety, and rough conditions, that make up Tore's existence, this young girl is the one outlet for Tore's emotions.

**Fury** Not long after the murder of Tore's daughter, the goatherds, driven by hunger and cold, mistakenly stop at Tore's manor. He offers them shelter, after they have first revealed who they are, by trying to sell Tore and his wife the beautiful clothes which they stole from his daughter, after killing her. At this point Tore knows who the guys are, but he holds his fury, like a truly vengeful person, even while the goatherds are eating supper together with the family. After dinner Tore's wife locks the hall door so that the herders can not get out. Tore is building fury inside himself, and with every moment of film time we feel him about to enter the door into the killing field loft.

**Unrestrained** Bergman indulges often in brutal violence, and is never more visual and tangible than in *Virgin Spring*. Tore the two goatherds with a rare violence, the first with a ritual-

handled dagger, the second by an up close choking that has—in the history of responses to this film—equalled the daughter’s rape for audience protests, and moralists’ despair. Especially in the scene of choking, the camera lens brings the audience close up to the neck of the expiring rapist, and then backs off slowly, letting us see the sense of satisfaction on Tore’s face. Finally Tore gives himself the unrestrained pleasure of smashing the youngest goatherd, who was not part of the rape, and who has gained some sympathy from us, against the wall, leaving him a dead inert heap.

**Repentance** After these killings, and after recovering the body of his daughter, with the help of the servant Ingeri, Tore –with his back to the camera, and his arms outstretched to God—promises to God that he will construct, for him, a large church out of stone and mortar—most regional churches were wooden—and that he will make it with his own hands. This promise comes as Tore begins to be flooded with a sense of the enormity of the killings he has just committed, and the far more painful murder of his daughter. He is reaching out to whatever source of peace he can believe in. His anger, understandably, has been too much for him, and he realizes the fatal consequences of acting without control.

### **Discussion questions**

Ingeri, the servant of the family, calls on Odin, the pagan pre-Christian god, to help her. What is the role of paganism in this film? How does the pagan-Christian conflict play out in the story?

When young Karin’s body is found, it is lifted from the ground, and a stream springs up from under it. Is this to be interpreted as a miracle? Broadly speaking, what is Bergman’s attitude toward Christianity in this film?

What kind of sympathy does Tore’s wife feel for the youngest of the three goatherds, who was not part of the rape, and who tried to bury Karin? Why does she feel this sympathy?