

*Programme of Danish Film Screenings at the Danish Institute at Athens 2018*

“Aspects of Danish Cinema”.

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**Screening on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2018**

**Silent heart (2014) by Bille August**

In film screening programme of the last 2 years, we have had the chance to see 1 line of Danish movies from Carl Dreyer, Lars von Trier, Susanne Bier and Thomas Vinterberg.

Today we have chosen to screen “Silent heart” - in Danish “Stille hjerte” and in Greek “Αθόρυβη καρδιά” (2014) by Bille August, the fourth movie this year. Bille August is considered the total opposite to Lars Von Trier and Vinterberg with a great international reputation.

The filmography of Bille August includes two movies that both were awarded with the Golden Palms in Cannes: “Pelle the Conqueror” (1988) and “The best intentions” (1992). In these movies, including today’s, the director is closer to the cinematic perception of Swedish director Ingmar Bergman (Valoukos 2003, page 630), avoiding formalistic searching, but focusing on the mental state of his heroes. When August directed the movie in 2014, he was inspired by the Scandinavian drama of Ibsen and Strindberg, but also by the philosophic/religious meditation of Søren Kierkegaard. “Silent heart” touches upon the very complex and emotional issue of euthanasia. It was awarded at International festivals and was admitted at the European Art House.

The movie is about the family gathering of three generations, coming together for the weekend in order to say their last goodbye to Esther (Ghita Nørby) – mother and grandmother – who is sick from the incurable disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. Esther has decided to make an end to her life that weekend, in agreement with her doctor/husband (played by Morten Grundwald). The audience follows a “room-drama”(the whole movie takes place in the summerhouse of the family) where the protagonist daughters, Heidi (played by Paprika Steen) and Sanne (played by Danica Curcic), involve themselves in a line of interior actions and conflicts, peaking when the end is near, and all the hidden resistances and secrets are revealed.

The plot of this psychologic and dramatic movie is developed in an excellent way with unpredictable subversions. August presents the contrasts between the very emotional and fragile Sanne, and the rational and controlling Heidi, the carefree and bohemian boyfriend of Sanne (played by Pilou Asbæk) who’s lively spirit is a great contrast to the dark, suicidal atmosphere of the summerhouse of the family. The neurotic “normality” of the characters is very characteristic – except for Sanne who represents the diversity of the family, in a setting where everything seems to be normal and nothing tragic is about to happen. The director urges the audience to search for the emotional truth of the characters. The scene with the dying grandmother advising her teenage grandchild about romantic matters is of essential importance.

Through the female relations (between the two sisters and Esther with her daughters), Bille August presents the “theatrical stage” of the drama in a low profile way, focusing mainly on the facial expressions. The philosophical question remains: Has Esther made the right decision to make an end to her life. \*\*

At the end of the drama, the true and diverse character of Sanne shines through – her sensitive and powerful attitude in contrast to the inflexible rationalism of a life attitude, in which a life is worth living ONLY when it is perfect and productive. The meaning of subjective responsibility originates from the Protestant belief - that we only take responsibility when we have knowledge. August, similar to Bergman, uses cinema as a tool of philosophical meditation.

When *Silent Heart* was shown for the first time at the festival of San Sebastian in Spain, the audience applauded upright for twenty minutes after the end of the movie (Nicolas Stig Nielsen). It might be, that the movie encourages us to accept cinema not only as a visionary experience, but also as an art form allowing the deeper aspects of realism

\*\* Euthanasia is in opposition to the part of Hippocratic Oath:” I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked”.

### **Sources, Bibliography**

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Stathis Valoukos, *History of Cinema*, Αιγόκερως ed., Athens, 2003

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s and is known for “always creating within borders” and thereby overturning cinematic stereotypes. Together with Lars Von Trier, he was the co-founder of the Dogma 95 movement (a radical cinematic avant garde movement).

Vinterberg was awarded already with his very first short films “Last Round” and “The boy” when graduating from the Danish Film School in 1993. It made a great impact, when Vinterberg, along with other initiators of the Dogma movement, went to Paris in 1995 and presented a new kind of cinema that was unconventional and free from the limitations of classic cinema (20 aesthetics? the presentation of “naked truth” through an ultimate realistic dramaturgy with natural lighting, handheld camera - a rejection of the melodramatic and beautified form. The plausibility of the story is emphasized by the power of the script as well the performing of the actors.

The movie “The celebration” (in Danish “Festen”) from 1998 was the first movie from the Dogma movement and it was awarded with the Golden Palm at the Cannes festival, The European Fassbinder Award as well as the Oscar for best foreign movie (Roussos 2016). After this, Vinterberg, together with other directors, distanced himself from the Dogma movement as he believed, that “it had become just another cliché”.

After “The celebration” came a line of remarkable movies such as “It`s all about love” (2003), “Submarino” (2010) – official representative from Denmark at the Berlin Film festival and awarded as Nordic Council Film, “The hunt” (2012), Oscar nominated as best Foreign movie and last “The Commune” (2016).

In today’s movie “Submarino”, Thomas Vinterberg “returns in a spectacular form”, as Le Marsall underlines in Screen Daily, basing his movie on the novel by Danish writer Jonas Bengtsston. “I like the direct language in the book”, the director says. “The rigid truth of the written word reminds me of my first steps in cinema. I immediately felt that the subject matter was essential. In some way, the characters are people trying to keep their heads beyond water. The movie is about people that do not manage to do that. The title “Submarino” refers to the torture method of violently keeping the head under water”.

Tobias Lindholm has written the scenario and it is beautifully carried out by the actors Jakob Cedergren, Peter Plaugborg, Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Morten Rose and the young Gustav Fischer Kjærulf with the support of leading photographer Charlotte Bruss Christensen. The result is a daring heart breaking drama that touches not only the emotions but also the consciousness of the audience.

Thomas Vinterberg: “I wanted to tell the story of people helping each other, even under difficult conditions in bleak environments. The characters in “Submarino” have reached the bottom. They belong to a ruthless part of society where survival comes first. In spite of the sad story, the experience of the filming was very enriching and satisfying. All through the shootings, we felt that we did something right”.

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