

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

“Aspects of Danish Cinema”.

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**Screening on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2018**

**Babette’s Feast (1987) by Gabriel Axel**

In the last film screening of this year’s programme, we have chosen to show the award winning movie that brought Danish cinema to the heights of International acclaim in 1987 and achieved huge popularity among the audience, “Babettes Gæstebud” (in English “Babette’s Feast”).

The movie was directed by Danish movie-veteran Gabriel Axel, based on the novel by Danish author Karen Blixen. “The ultimate Cinematic Feast in history”, the media wrote when the movie won the Oscar in 1988 as best foreign movie – the first Danish movie ever to achieve such recognition (at the time).

Let us take a closer look at this charming fairy tale with its very significant cinematic finesse. A realistic and at the same time illusive portrayal of a Danish fishing village in Jutland in 1870, narrated with flash back (by actress Ghita Nørby). The story is about the relation between three women, set in the frame of a small and poor Protestant community. The actors have been chosen mainly from the cast of Carl Dreyer’s movies.

Filippa (actress Bodil Kjør – a great star in the eighties both in theatre and on the big screen) and Matina (actress Birgit Federspiel), playing the beautiful daughters of the community pastor, dedicated to their fathers work. They live unmarried together after the death of their father, doing charity work and helping people in need. When young, they both met love in their life. Martina when she met the young Swedish General, Lorens Löwenhielm, who finally decided to withdraw, trespassing his feelings for her, in order to focus on his career. Filippa declined the love of a famous French musician Achille Papin (played by actor Jean-Philippos Lafont), when terminating her music lessons with him.

One evening the monotony of the sister’s lives is “intruded” by a thunderstorm and the sudden arrival of Babette (French actress Stéphane Audran) who is a refugee from France. Babette has lost her husband and son at the 1870 bloodshed in Paris and she begs the sisters to take her in as a maid, even without paying her any money. The sister accept.

As years pass, life goes on in the small village and the values of love and solidarity seem to fade out among the members of the community. This is in total contrast to the life of the three women that is characterized by politeness, respect and mutual appreciation. Babette manages to win the respect of the whole village with her dynamic, cleverness and capability (she is also an excellent cook). Ten years have passed when Babette receives the news from France about her winning

10.000 francs at the lottery. She is now free to leave the small village and to start a new life with her own money in France.

Before that, Babette expresses the desire to make a “French dinner” on the founding pastor's hundredth birthday. Babette will chose the menu for the invited guests. One could say that the whole movie leads us to the preparations of this big event that liberates the senses and the emotions. During the beautiful dinner in which also the audience takes part, due to the outstanding directing by Gabriel Axel and operator Henning Christensen, we taste Babette's eclectic red wines and the French specialities. The members of the small community enjoy their dinner silently. They have reconciled not only with each other, but also with themselves. We learn that Babette used to be a chef at the famous French restaurant Café Anglais and that she has spent her entire winnings at the meal with no intentions to return to France.

Like in every fairy tale, the movie is characterised by elements of symbolism, allegory and truth. The discreet and fine criticism of Protestant moral that prohibits pleasure and oppresses emotions coexist with the glorification of generosity, altruistic love and solidarity – values of the early Christian communities. Romanticism coincides with deconstruction and realism with the dream. We could actually say that the Ghost of Dreyer meets French finesse.

The whole movie transmits beauty and spiritual revival, penetrates aesthetics and emotions and suggests reconciliation while stressing the importance of simplicity and sincere human communication by honouring female strength and intuition.

The balance between serious and tranquil, drama and humour and supernatural and contemporary is for me the greatest assets of the story by Karen Blixen, beautifully narrated by Gabriel Axel.

Awarded with an Oscar in 1988 as best Foreign Movie

Awarded best movie at the British Academy BAFTA

Awarded by the Ecumenical Commission in Cannes

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