

Programme of Danish Film Screenings at the Danish Institute at Athens 2019

“Aspects of Danish Cinema”.

By Ioanna Athanassatou/Film Historic at the Greek Open University & the University of Athens

Screening on the 28th of March 2019

Winter Brothers (2018) by Hlynur Palmason

Tonight’s award winning film, “Winter Brothers” by Hlynur Palmason from 2018, is part of the third season Tribute: “Aspects of Danish Cinema”, organized by the Danish Institute in cooperation with the Danish Embassy.

The movie is considered a treatise in the subjects of alienation, survival, truths about masculinity, lovelessness and isolation (“a lack of love story”, as it is referred to in the film trailer). The movie has a unique cinematic style with its distinctive visual approach and impressive frames, inviting the audience into a supernatural setting of a limestone quarry, somewhere in the eastern part of Denmark. This is where two very different brothers live and work in order to survive. One of them, Johan (played by Simon Sears) is beautiful, loving and carefree. The other one, Emil (played by Elliot Crosset Hove) is ugly and excluded from the working community but with a desperate urge for love and passion. The person that Emil is hopelessly in love with is Anna (played by Victoria Carmen Sonne), who seems to be the only female in this corrosively masculine environment. Everyone accepts Emil only because he provides them with his noxious home-brewed whisky, which he makes using chemicals stolen from the plant, until the grave illness of one of his co-workers. Then the community takes its opportunity to ostracize him even further. The only one showing affection is his older brother Johan.

Based on the tradition of the Trilogy of alienation by the great Michelangelo Antonioni, the film setting (empty, deserted industrial surroundings) has been chosen as a connotation to alienation, estrangement and deduction of emotions.

Palmason seeks for the sensory dilemma of his audience with the conditions of his characters within the framework of “Moderns Cinematic extremism” (Horeck, Kendall 2013).

The director presents the complex and yet brilliant psychosis of the protagonist to the audience. In an interview, at the 58th Cinematic Festival of Thessaloniki in 2017, when the movie was projected for the first time, Mr Palmason expressed the following:

“The essential part of my work as a director is the *direct transmission of the actual incident to the audience* and not a dull analysis that might conceal substantial elements through a flow of pictures....of the main character. It is his perception of reality and his experience that is the main theme of the movie. His psychic balance has a lasting intensity. As if he is in a constant state of agitation, like a volcano ready to explode....in a warlike state of mind (as shown in the scenes of his imagination with the lieutenant having the face of the Leader of the Company and the soldiers)....

The landscape around him and the submission of his surroundings emphasise the experience of this unique world” (www.myfilmgr/v2/site/map/festivals/thessaloniki/filmfestival/322-580-festival-Kinimatographou-thessalonikis) (Interview with Yiannis Raouzaio, retrieval on 27 March 2019).

And indeed the nightmarish darkness of the quarry arches, lit only by helmet flashlights, bleached white by a settling of lime dust and snow that seems to pervade every human cell. The inhumane routine of the workers is endurable only thanks to Emil’s homemade illegal whisky. Nevertheless, when one of the workers is poisoned severely, Emil becomes the black sheep of the Community. The revelation that Johan has been sleeping with Anna creates an extreme intensity that finally turns into an inevitable and violent outburst.

Palmason is a visual artist and his style of narration does not conform to traditional cinematic and dramaturgical style. It rather adapts to the trend of paradox as established in *Weird Cinema*. According to several International critics, Palmeson`s cinematic poetry compares to the early works of George Lanthimos and David Lynch. Elsewhere, Pálmason’s background in photography comes through in some striking tableaux and portrait shots (though Maria Von Hausswolff’s cinematography is exceptional throughout). Her camera astoundingly captures the hostile and unworldly setting, reflecting the mental and emotional world of not only the protagonist but of the entire Community to the audience. The sound contributes to the outstanding result in a unique way with the creativity of composer, Toke Brorson Odin and sound engineer, Lars Halvorsen.

The movie was awarded for its original aesthetics at the Locarno Festival in 2017 as the best European movie, for best director, photography and male role by Elliot Croset Hove. It also won the Bodil Award in 2018 in Denmark for best movie. Furthermore, it was awarded at the 58th Thessaloniki Film Festival with the presence of the Director. Nevertheless, the movie was never shown in Greek movie Theatres. It is therefore important that today’s screening - within the Tribute to Danish movies – makes it possible for a wider audience in Greece to get to know this powerful new movie.

Sources, bibliography:

Tanya Horeck, Tina Kendall, *The New Extremism in Cinema from France to Europe*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2013.

www.myfilmgr/v2/site/map/festivals/thessaloniki/filmfestival/322-580-festival-Kinimatographou-thessalonikis

<https://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/winter-brothers-review-1202513383/>

Official site: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5323760/>