

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

“Aspects of Danish Cinema”.

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

Screening on the 22nd of February 2018

A Second chance (2015) by Susanne Bier

Susanne Bier is a very important director who has been closely connected with the Dogma 95 movement, but who took a different direction in her later career, directing a line of movies that were well received by the audience with several awards, but also received negative reviews.

In 2011, Susanne Bier won an Oscar for best foreign movie with “Hævnen”, that was promoted in Greece with the title “Ισως αύριο” (“Maybe tomorrow”) and translated in English to “In a better world”. We watched this movie last year at the Institute on the 7th of March 2017 and we had the chance to discover the diversity, complexity of issues as well as the moral and philosophical dimension of the scenario written by Anders Thomas Jensen.

In tonight’s movie from 2015, the scenario is once again written by Anders Thomas Jensen. The “double” meaning is dominant all through the movie – the second chance, the second truth and the second version. Similarly, the dipole characters* are part of this game of contradiction and reversals, involving the audience emotionally and mentally through sentiment and moral dilemma – what is wrong and what is right? What is fair and what is unfair? Who is the strong and who is weak?

*Andreas is an uncompromising representative of the legal system with a perfect family life and Simon, also a police officer, but addicted to alcohol after his separation from his wife. Anne is the perfect wife and Sanne the bad mother.

After the quite shocking first scenes where Bier captures the realism and straightforwardness (characteristic for the dogma 95 movement) of the cruel world of drugs and violence where many young people in the downgraded areas in Western capitals live, the audience is introduced to a modern tragedy. The solution to this tragedy does not come “από μηχανής θεό” (deus ex machina), but from the decisions and the behaviour of the involved persons when they find the strength to accept their mistakes and to face and overcome the difficulties. Bier-Jensen focus on human characters in the moment of their lives where they face the challenge of pain (Athanasatou, screening on the 7th of March 2017).

The main character of this movie, Andreas (played by Nikolaj Coster Waldau), is a police officer who persecutes “evil”, has a perfect family, an ideal wife Anne (played by Marie Bonnerie) and lives in a beautiful house near the ocean. The perfect world of Andreas is destroyed with the sudden death of his little son Alexander.

It is important to stress the significance of the surroundings in which the supposedly idyllic family life of Andreas and Anne takes place, a lifestyle that finally proves to be very fragile and misleading. There is a very clear cinematic connection to Ibsen's "Doll house" in its disapproval of convention, hypocrisy and lack of emotion and in the mental distance between family members (the main issue in Thomas Vinterberg's movie "The celebration").

During the film, the protagonist Andreas seems to lose his sense of justice and moral. He decides to kidnap Sophus, the little baby son of drug addict Tristan (played by Nikolaj Lie Kaas) and Sanne (played by Lykke May Andersen), convinced that the baby would be miserable if growing up with its unworthy parents. The truth is that he does this, in order to fill out the emptiness after the loss of his own son, by placing the dead body in the flat of Tristan and Sanne. After the suicide of Anne, when Tristan and Sanne are accused of the disappearance of their son, Andreas participates together with Simon in the interrogation of the "uncaring" parents while keeping the secret to himself about the replacement of the babies. The two weak characters of the story, Sanne and Simon, who find themselves in a dark world of drug and alcohol addiction, finally retrieve their moral strength and this is crucial for the development of the story.

After the shocking revelation that mental ill Anne is responsible for the death of her own son, Andreas finally comes to terms with the loss and decides to return the baby to its biological mother.

Another interesting thing worth mentioning, is the moral and philosophical perspective of the many issues put forward in the movie (motherhood, parental responsibility, state intervention and legal rights, gendered violence, moral and legal dimensions), all presented in the genre of melodrama. It is a known fact, that several of Bier's movies have been criticised for their melodrama. Nevertheless, as Peter Brook stresses in his emblematic work: "The melodramatic imagination" (1976): *melodramatic imagination is endorsed in the moral thinking of a society affirming to consolidate a moral ranking in a post-sacred period* (Ref. G. Paschalidis in Patsalidis, Nikolopoulou, 2001)

It is obvious that by choosing Nicolaj Waldau Coster in the protagonist role, the director aims at reaching out to a wider audience. The actor is acclaimed and recognised for his worldwide success in the series, Game of Thrones and his role in this movie is considered one of his best performances.

There is a feeling of relief in the audience, at the end of the movie, in the scene of the supermarket with Andreas and Sanne both making a new start in their lives, that can be interpreted as a form of "modern catharsis".

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