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Bérénice FF



France, 1983

director: Raúl Ruiz
production: Films du Dimanche, Festival d'Avignon
print: Maison de la Culture du Havre
scenario: Raúl Ruiz, based on the play by Jean Racine
cast: Anne Alvaro, Jean-Bernard Guillard, Jean Badin, Franck Oger, Claude Derrepes, Claris Dubois
camera: François Ede
music: Jorge Arriagada
running time: 105'

Film maker in Focus /
Raul Ruiz

Unusually lyrical Ruiz film about an impossible encounter, impossible harmony: a tragedy of closed doors. Based on the play by Racine.

Abandoning his project of filming the collected works of Racine on Super 8, Ruiz produced this remarkable piece of 'theatre on film' in collaboration with the Avignon Festival. On screen, the absolutely remarkable actors read the text, nothing but the text, and almost all the text of Bérénice. The light modernisation does not turn it into a pretext for a familiar Ruizian rebus. He opts for, simultaneously, great unity and great richness: every scene invents a new effect, a new way to play the scene, but the aesthetic of shadow and light gives it overall unity. Ruiz chose Bérénice precisely because it is the only Racine tragedy that doesn't end in slaughter. And yet the characters are presented as spectres, 'dead souls'. This beyond-the-grave ambience relates to an ambiguity some have detected in Racine: the possibility that the characters are already dead. If one takes play and film together, everything occurs as if the drama has already played out, and we are witness to its post-mortem re-presentation. Bérénice is about an impossible meeting, impossible harmony: a tragedy of closing doors. Ruiz's typical intellectualism is ghosted here by an unexpected lyricism; rarely has his work attained such heights of emotion. -Olivier Curchod