



FILM: **THE MIDWIFE**

FDG RATING: 3.1 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Martin Proust: *Director*
Catherine Deneuve: *Actress, Beatrice*
Catherine Frot: *Actress, Claire*

DATE: September 17, 2017

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE MIDWIFE**

The French legendary screen actress, Catherine Deneuve is always captivating whether playing Martine who falls in love with an enamored gorilla in *The Brand New Testament*, or as the aging, needy, partying, free-spirited, Beatrice, in *The Midwife*. Catherine Frot's stellar performance as Claire, is on par with Deneuve, being the polar opposite as a dedicated, methodical, nurturing, compassionate, lonely, workaholic mid-wife. Much more interesting than the mediocre story line was watching these two exceptional French actresses flesh out the roles of their characters. (Frot starred as Florence Foster Jenkins in the French film *Marguerite*.)

Beatrice seeks out Claire after being diagnosed with brain cancer, although they have been estranged for more than 30 years, ever since Beatrice, a former mistress of Claire's deceased father, abandoned both her lover and his daughter, causing severe heartbreak. Beatrice, afraid of dying alone, wants to bond with Claire, even make amends, but still exudes her uninhibited reckless life style of smoking, drinking, gambling and extravagant dining. She tries to win over Claire by proffering gifts which Claire flatly refuses.

Claire still holds a grudge and initially wants nothing to do with Beatrice, but being the nurturing person she is, her attitude softens and the two eventually become close, each learning from the other how to live life a little differently. Their mother-daughter roles have reversed: the younger Claire taking care of the older, more childish Beatrice and at the same time, Claire tests the waters of living her life a little fuller.

What startled all of us as we watched the film, were the close-up shots of child births which must have been filmed in a birthing center because they were unbelievably real. "Enough births, already" said one of our resident film reviewers. But the scenes were important to show how much Claire cared for the mothers and new borns, plus, plugging the political message that the birthing clinics allowed warm, personal, dedicated care but were being forced to close in favor of large impersonal, technology-driven hospitals.

(Note: Provost says the film is partly a tribute to the midwife who saved his own life by donating blood to him soon after he was born.)

Many thought the film was a bit slow. One resident reviewer had expected more. Another had a problem with the basic story of a woman who was furiously ruining her life while dragging others into her particular style of self-immolation. Also, for this reviewer, Claire's transformation at the end didn't ring true.

Great cinematography of France but one participant reviewer commented that the story seemed like a French version of a Disney fairy tale and for someone who generally likes French films, this one missed the mark.

Excellent acting wasn't enough to pull this film above a mid-level score of 3.1 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best)



See you at the movies!

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[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer