CONTEMPORARY POSITIONING FOR READ A FILM

BJARNE O. HENRIKSEN

AUTHOR PROFILE

“Large entertainment machinery enclosing a small human truth.”

A cinematic storyteller

Bjarne O. Henriksen is a cinematic storyteller whose work combines the humanist ensemble storytelling of James McBride, the accessible crime-and-character pleasure of Richard Osman, and the genre intelligence of writers such as Kaliane Bradley, with a distinctly Scandinavian appetite for deadpan comedy, eccentricity and emotional understatement.

Across fifteen Read-a-Film prose stories, Henriksen moves freely between historical adventure, crime, romantic comedy, fantasy, satire, war stories and black comedy. What makes the work recognizably his is not genre but a particular dramatic instinct: ordinary, damaged, eccentric or underestimated people are thrown into increasingly extraordinary circumstances, where comedy and danger are allowed to exist side by side until something unexpectedly human emerges underneath.

His stories frequently begin with people whom the world has already decided it understands: a criminal, a prostitute, an institutionalized old man, a failing lawyer, an emotionally awkward teenager, a kitchen boy, a frightened child. The institutions surrounding them - courts, governments, schools, armies, churches, psychiatric systems, bureaucracies and families - tend to prefer simple definitions. Henriksen does not.

Again and again, his stories ask what happens when a human being turns out to be larger than the label placed upon him or her.

A professional foundation in screen storytelling

The Read-a-Film slate is not the work of an emerging writer approaching screen storytelling from the outside. It grows out of a long professional career in Danish film and television. Henriksen created Gøngehøvdingen, one of Denmark's highest-rated action series with 2.25 million viewers and international sales, and the top-rated sitcom Bill & Daphne, which outperformed M.A.S.H. and Cosby in Denmark.

His debut screenplay Eddie Holm's Second Life won a Silver Nymph Award at Monte Carlo and was noted by Variety for travelling "lightheartedly beyond Denmark." The work led to a two-year story-development invitation from Erik Balling at Nordisk Film. Henriksen later wrote the original story and screenplay for the box-office hit Ørnens Øje (Eye of the Eagle), nominated for the Golden Bear in Berlin, while Herforth & Jensen won a European Script Fund Award and was praised as "technically accomplished," "punchy and exciting," and "a welcome change" from other Danish submissions.

His additional work includes serving as a called-in staff writer on the 24-episode DR Christmas adventure The Secret Tunnel, produced by Saks Film; being hired by Northern Lights to write the film adaptation of Bernard Pinkerton's Big Case; and teaching film scriptwriting for a year at the TV- and Film School at Snoghøj Højskole. Most of his screenplays received script support from the Danish Film Institute, and he participated in international workshops and EBU seminars.

Across his career, Henriksen has produced more than DKK 100 million worth of content. The European Film Academy invited him to join with the words:

> "***We would be very proud to count you among our members, and feel that your contribution would help the Academy to protect and strengthen European cinema as well as its artistic and commercial values.***"

Professional experience carried into prose

That professional history matters to the Read-a-Film concept. The prose is not trying to imitate cinema from a distance; it is built by a writer accustomed to thinking in dramatic architecture, visual behavior, production logic, audience rhythm and adaptation.

Contemporary creative kinship

That connects his work to contemporary novels such as James McBride's The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store, where humor, community and institutional cruelty coexist without cancelling one another; to Richard Osman's crime fiction, where elaborate plotting remains inseparable from affection for eccentric human beings; and to Kaliane Bradley's The Ministry of Time, which uses high-concept storytelling, romance, bureaucracy and comedy to investigate identity rather than merely deliver genre mechanics.

Henriksen's natural language, however, is intensely visual. He thinks in scenes, cuts, sound, behavior, reversals, props and physical comedy. A seemingly ridiculous object may enter a story as a joke and return much later carrying its emotional meaning: a twenty-five-øre coin that once stopped a child from killing himself; a robin connecting two separated boys; a magical date that disappears when a frightened child no longer needs it; a box of immortality-giving apples turned into a soccer ball; an absurd environmental gadget that becomes the key to an international criminal conspiracy.

This ability to make plot carry emotion is central to his writing.

Large entertainment machinery, small human truth

Where much contemporary prestige storytelling reduces plot in order to create room for character, Henriksen often does the reverse. He increases plot.

The conspiracy grows. The chase becomes more impossible. The protagonists cross borders. Someone is kidnapped. Someone escapes through a sewer. A prison train changes direction. Jesus walks across Copenhagen Harbor. Three zoo primates join the Danish Resistance. An abused child grows into an international smuggling king. A mythology-obsessed teenager finds himself responsible for saving Odin.

And yet the larger the story becomes, the more likely it is eventually to collapse back into something small and recognizably human: a father and daughter, two friends, a lost brother, an old man's dignity, a frightened girl wanting someone to love her, a boy learning that he does not need certainty before he can live.

That combination places Henriksen close to a contemporary screen tradition represented by films such as Richard Linklater's Hit Man, Josh Margolin's Thelma, and Wes Anderson's The Phoenician Scheme - stories in which genre machinery, eccentricity and comic escalation ultimately reveal questions of identity, family, autonomy or love.

There is also a kinship with limited series such as Dying for Sex, which demonstrates the same refusal to treat comedy, sexuality, mortality and emotional seriousness as mutually exclusive registers.

Comedy as dramatic machinery

Henriksen's comedy operates in much the same way. The jokes are rarely decorations applied to a serious story. They arise from the dramatic machinery itself.

A failed smuggling operation becomes a fake film shoot. A boy terrified of alcohol is kidnapped by an alcoholic girl. A returning Jesus Christ becomes first a police problem, then a political problem, then a media problem and finally, after ascending in front of television cameras, apparently a meteorological problem.

Authoritarian soldiers are defeated by monkeys, machinery and manure. An eighty-three-year-old fugitive crosses Denmark on a green moped while dreaming of becoming a cloakroom attendant.

The absurdity escalates logically. Henriksen trusts the audience to laugh without concluding that the pain beneath the laughter has disappeared.

He is irreverent without being cynical.

People larger than their labels

His characters may behave badly. They may lie, steal, cheat, drink, fight, misunderstand one another and make disastrous decisions. Some are criminals. Some may even be dangerous. But the stories rarely reduce them to their worst act.

Instead, Henriksen is interested in the uncomfortable distance between what a person does, what that person believes about himself, what society says he is, and who he may actually become.

For all their violence, sexuality, satire and comic disorder, the stories are therefore surprisingly humanist. Again and again they return to friendship, loyalty, dignity, parents and children, forgiveness, emotional courage and the possibility of remaining beside another person when leaving would be considerably easier.

Where the work sits in 2026

The contemporary comparisons explain where the work sits today. James McBride reflects its humanism and belief in communities of flawed people. Richard Osman reflects its pleasure in plotting, crime, eccentric characters and accessibility. Kaliane Bradley reflects its willingness to use genre and high-concept premises as vehicles for human questions.

On screen, Hit Man, Thelma, The Phoenician Scheme and Dying for Sex belong to the same current movement toward stories that reject the old assumption that serious subjects require solemn treatment.

Behind those contemporary relatives lies an older creative lineage - Erik Balling's affection for ordinary eccentrics, Billy Wilder's irreverent humanism, Preston Sturges's escalating comic machinery and the Coen brothers' ability to let menace and absurdity inhabit the same frame.

But Henriksen's particular combination is his own: large entertainment machinery enclosing a small human truth.

A Bjarne O. Henriksen story may contain kings, gods, gangsters, conspiracies, assassins, smugglers, miracles, wars or international manhunts. Eventually, however, the spectacle tends to reveal the same conviction: human beings are more complicated than their files, their reputations, their failures or the roles the world has assigned them - and sometimes the thing that saves them is simply another person refusing to walk away.