

Robustelli's Medea from Pasolini

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Only those mythical is realistic and just who is realistic is mythical
Chiron to Jason in Medea, P.P. Pasolini, 1970, scene15.

It might seem obvious to link the Sicilian origin of Giovanni Robustelli to the interest that he cultivates for the Greek tragedy, remembering what importance Hellenic civilization has had in the history of the island; actually, if the subject of a critical reflection is the link between the artist, born in Vittoria, and Medea, this biographical data acquires a meaning far from trivial because the archaic passions that surge in the ancient myth - love, death, anger, revenge, regret - characterized (and in some respects still characterize) the story of his land. An attraction that can be defined empathic, in fact, led Robustelli to explore the story of Medea not only through the different versions of the Greek tradition, but also in the relatively more modern interpretations: those by Lodovico Dolce (the tragedy Medea, 1557), by Luigi Cherubini (the opera Medea, 1797), Corrado Alvaro (the tragedy Long night of Medea, published in 1950), and, in fact, as documented by the works on display in this neapolitan exhibition, Pier Paolo Pasolini, author of one of the first feature films dedicated to the Colchian sorceress Medea, made between 1969 and 1970.

The title originally planned by Pasolini for the film dedicated to this tragic figure from Greek mythology was Visions of Medea and this is *in primis* a point of connection between the series of works by Robustelli and the film of the writer-director. In fact, as the idea that gave rise to the film was not to narrate the myth through the events of the tragedy by Euripides - as is well known, the most famous representation of this myth, the main source of inspiration of Pasolini's films - but to translate into images the visions of Medea, so the intention of Giovanni Robustelli was not to illustrate the film slavishly, but to interpret visually certain moments and situations (Medea and the center, 2013; Medea and the golden Fleece, 2013. the dream of Medea, 2015 Medea and Jason, 2013 and 2015) or the main protagonists (Medea herself, her father Aeetes, her husband Jason, the centaur Chiron), following a completely original path. For this reason, inter alia, the period of conception and execution of works covers several years, from 2010 until today; the great and challenging work entitled The Dream Medea (long over five and a half meters high and three), it is the latest achievement in a long line of those inspired by the film and exhibited here in Naples.

The personal visionary character of the work by Robustelli, also supported by the large format that characterizes most of the works, returns the hallucinatory dimension that the film transmits through the visions of Medea: often, the characters depicted by the artist lose facial features of Pasolini's actors to become pure color, images that emerge from a thick, burning pictorial material that sometimes seems to overwhelm. It is as if the blinding light that characterizes much of the film, which symbolically opens and closes with a blood-red sun, had inflamed the chromatic mixture lying by the artist; a red sun that appears, in a dominant position, in water colors depicting the Centaur (2015). Not to mention the role that fire has largely in the film, especially in the final scenes that conclude ominously the affair. The chromatic-light intensity is, therefore, another ideal link between the painted work by Robustelli and that of Pasolini's film.

Moreover, Medea is the Helios' grandson, Aeetes' father, and it will be the Sun, to which in the film is often associated thanks to the wise assembly by Nino Baragli, to infuse the courage to take revenge; in a work in particular - an incision made with etching and aquatint, unusual in the series dedicated to Pasolini's films, all made up of paintings or drawings - Robustelli recalls the illustrious lineage of Medea by replacing the face of the barbaric princess with a radiant solar disk (Medea, 2011).

Another example of the interpretative freedom of Robustelli is provided by rare paintings depicting the places of the tragedy: Colchis and Corinth (both made in 2015). The first, which seems to highlight the close link between Medea and her homeland in the enactment of the woman's body from the landscape, is fully deviates from Colchis cave represented by Pasolini that he described in

the script with the colors of the " ochre and pink rocky points ". In the second the artist chooses to depict the fortress rather than the palace of Corinth - as is well known, the latter physically located by Pasolini in the Campo dei Miracoli in Pisa - but he reinvents chromatic characteristics, even inserting a water-filled moat.

Of course, sometimes the protagonists of the film stand out with clear definition on the chosen by the carrier (be it paper, cardboard, canvas), represented in the different techniques that he experiences: the centaur Chiron takes the marked features of Laurent Terzieff of the face, French actor chosen by Pasolini to interpret the being half man and half horse protector of Jason, in graphite drawing entitled, precisely, Centaur (2015); Medea herself presents fair and barbaric in the likeness of Maria Callas, memorable and celebrated interpreter of this great tragic figure of antiquity, in the two watercolors tentatively called Callas Medea (2013), in drawings Medea (2013), The Medea's dream (2015) and Medea and Jason (2015).

It could not remain excluded from the creative imagination of Robustelli what has become, thanks to the Pasolini film, the modern icon of Medea. Moreover, the writer revealed that he had made the script, contrary to what he used to do, just thinking of the famous opera singer: "I sometimes write the screenplay without knowing who will be the actor. In this case I knew it was Callas, so I always calibrated my script running at her. He relied heavily on the character creation ... Barbarism, sunk in, it comes out from her eyes, in the features, it does not manifest itself directly, indeed. She belongs to a farming world, greek, agrarian, and then she has refined herself to a bourgeois civilization. So in a sense I have tried to concentrate in her character the complex totality of Medea. It is not a coincidence that Robustelli gets the intense expressiveness of the eyes of Maria Callas, particularly important for several reasons in the character of Medea: "Always central from Euripides onwards, in his description," " mother's and sorceress' eyes together "who" see beyond reality (magic visions - foresight) and see the reality (of suffering - eyes fixed on Jason, the children ...) ". Also notice the black pupils that Robustelli draws under the imposing horse's legs appearing in the aforementioned large and very recent work The dream of Medea (2015).

As has been said, "we'd all like Jason, if there were not Medea and Pasolini. Namely the woman and the poet. If there was not that eye of Medea, harboured in the imagination of Pasolini, driven by force in our orbits by the director, which opens up so our eyes to different views. The 'Visions of Medea', precisely as he first called his film ". In the same way Giovanni Robustelli opens our eyes to a new expressive universe to unprecedented color vision of the myth revisited by Pasolini.

Sometimes, other elements take over in Robustelli drawings, those, in particular, capable of stimulating an affordable iconic translation: for example, the costumes "invented out of whole cloths reminiscent at times the magnitude of the reconstructions of the last Eisenstein" : look at the aforementioned painting Medea and the golden Fleece (2013), where the woman's face gradually loses definition, while the author's focus is all on apparel made of richly decorated luminescent necklaces or even canvas and graphite drawing dedicated to Medea's father (Aeetes, 2013; Aeetes, 2015), wrapped in the warrior estate, while preparing to lead the army in an attempt to recover the children (the same Medea and brother Apsyrt) and the fleece subtracted from them overnight.

But in addition to these aspects and formal references, it cannot escape as the music also constitutes a perfect link between the works by Robustelli and the film by Pasolini. Not so much because, simply, Callas was also famous interpreter of the work by Lodovico Dolce, as well as various opera versions of Euripides' tragedy, but especially the fact that, as the communicative power of the paintings is based on symphonies of color, often refined into expressive dissonances - a tradition that has seen increasingly shaking the music and painting relationship since the beginning of the twentieth century - so the film is for many part mute, only accompanied by a mysterious soundtrack that acts as an effective and engaging commentary music (as stated in the opening credits) to the scenes through ethnic Tibetan, Japanese, Iranian and Bulgarian songs selected by Pasolini in collaboration with Elsa Morante.

Finally, it is important to point out that the operation Robustelli carries on Pasolini's films, focuses the attention on the message. The director is able through Medea to fully express his relationship

with the myth and the archaic past "behind the myth, as Pasolini said in many interviews, hides the author's need to observe things and the reality and show them as such. " The ancient as a filter through which to read and to understand contemporary reality: "the myth, as it is reworked by Pasolini, contains a very large series, allowing you to identify the forces of a reality that destroys and destroys itself, as the ours" .

In short Robustelli, through the Medea by Pasolini, reminds us once again that inside the myth is hidden an inescapable reality.