

Medea in the shadows and without eyes by Robustelli

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Medea (1969) is one of the few films that Pier Paolo Pasolini has made commissioned by a film director. "Commission" is of course to be understood in a broad sense: the proposal by Franco Rossellini to make a film from Euripides' tragedy for the film debut of Maria Callas was accepted by Pasolini because, after Oedipus Rex (1967), he was fascinated by the idea of reinventing another dramatic text of classical Greece, that would inspire images, visions to reify into bodies and landscapes with absolute 'dreamlike' freedom. A freedom that the director Rossellini would grant him without too many restrictions (for his company he had conducted the year before Theorem and realized even the Decameron in 1970-71, in which Rossellini will take over the majority production PEA). The director's proposal also conformed to the desire that the director had to be inspired by Euripides for his own film and to have Callas, whom he had already thought of for the role of Jocasta in Oedipus Rex (1967).

Actually the project of the film Medea with Callas lingered on the horizon to Rossellini for some time and had to be initially directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer. But the great Danish director died in March 1968 and it was then that Rossellini probably thought of Pasolini, perhaps because Dreyer was one of the most beloved filmmakers by the poet-director.

During an interview, the author of Theorem defined the project of Medea as a film about the origins of agriculture. Pasolini meant that the Euripides tragedy - ie the drama of a barbarian witch who comes from an archaic civilization and that fails to integrate into the universe of the rational Corinth, because she was also betrayed and abandoned by the man who seduced her, the 'Argonaut Jason - offered him the opportunity to stage a series of propitiatory ancient rituals of the fertility of the land, inspired by the anthropological studies of Mircea Eliade and other scholars. In particular, also by anthropological studies derive a sequence of the first part of the film, set in Colchis, where Medea and the royal court witness the ritual of a human sacrifice: it is an important sequence because it evokes a vivid dimension and at the same time ghostly religious acts and so enigmatic of a barbaric, remote and lunar society, that Pasolini opposed to pragmatic rationality of the Argonauts, who burst to violate the ancient world.

In Goreme, Turkey, Pasolini found a landscape that for the sharp shapes of the hills and the design of the caves dug into the rock, lent itself to become a mythological and dreamlike Colchis. But another element of inspiration became central to the film: the presence of Callas, her barbaric face, the vulnerable and aggressive light of her gaze. In the soprano Pasolini perceives the embodiment of a sorceress with dark powers, belonging to an obscure and irrational world, and that of a defeated and humiliated mother, who did not retreat in the face of no horror in order to implement his revenge: to suppress their sons to wound to the heart her faithless husband. Pasolini transforms Callas into Medea also thanks to the wonderful costumes by Piero Tosi and Gabriella Pescucci, to the solemn and disturbing shapes of those tragic tissues, to the enigmatic heaviness of the golden jewelry standing out on the dark canvas. Not by chance when he prepares his deadly enchantment against Glauce, Medea wears those burial clothes and the gift of a robe is the secret weapon to suppress the girl, who, in the eyes of Medea, has usurped her rightful place in Jason's bed. The iconographic power of environments, objects and faces determines the visionary breath of a film that does not rebuild a world of the past but it creates a concrete and tangible imaginary past.

More than forty years later, it is precisely the Medea iconographic power to have inspired an artist today, Giovanni Robustelli, born five years after the death of Pasolini, who conceived an entire series of paintings and drawings, after having already spent some works in Art exhibition for Kamarina (Archaeological Park, Dubrovnik, 2014).

As the writer-director had invented a new form from the text of Euripides, as well Robustelli created a figurative cycle inspired by the images and especially the iconography of Pasolini's Medea. The compositions by Robustelli, in fact, do not refer to shots of Pasolini's films but are all self-paintings of an original expressive world, visions that the artist has performed with mixed techniques, moving from "poverty of the ballpoint pen tip thin, the bic of everyday use, to oil painting.

In the exhibition, occur variations of the image of Medea, awoken after the first night of love with Jason, inspired by the sequence in which the woman contemplates with dreamy sweetness the sleeping man's body, who seducing her, has torn from her culture, her family and her land. In the movie, Medea observes Jason with the excitement of a woman who discovered the men's carnality. In the Robustelli's imagination that

sweetness also thickens a maternal feeling and Medea seems the Madonna during the grief over the Dead Christ, that becomes an image on which he almost embeds another, an archetype of the maternal piety. But of course it is also and above all the image of a lover who keeps the beloved body in the silence, the solitude of an awakening that belongs only to her. An awakening that Robustelli dips in the blue night, while the yellow dawn is spreading far on the right. In another painting, he lets the colors of Jason's body invading the figure of the witch, with the ever dipped in dark shades face.

In a drawing, Robustelli closes off the two bodies in the tiny and accurate sign of Indian ink, showing only the woman's chest, who dominates the abandoned lover's body into sleep. In another painting is more recognizable the physiognomy of Callas reminiscent of a vampire in the voracity of the embrace with which she envelops Jason, now no more body. The face of the soprano is also the figure of a beautiful watercolor that depicts her in the fetal sleep posture: a sleep dominated by the image of the sun that shines like a tiny pearl in the distance of the wide open sky outside the window. A sleep that has nothing peaceful or pacifying, as the purplish red that surrounds the figure of Medea alludes imminent bloodshed.

In other works the figure of the woman becomes one with the dazzling light of the sun god, a material sun, indistinct, ever that penetrates and possesses the woman's body. In another work Medea becomes a kind of totem, a mother without eyes, whose figure is essentially defined by the design of heavy jewelry that hangs like ornaments of an altar. In the face corroded by a light that burns the eyes and part of her features, Robustelli seems to suggest the sorceress's hypnotic trance who becomes possessed, a figure of impenetrable and unknowable hate. As in the painting in which he shows her with completely fictional features, sitting on a ritual throne, with a hand holding the Golden Fleece.

Beautiful and menacing is the drawing in which Medea has instead eyes devoured by the dark hood and if a hand is doubled, the other disappears behind the open painting as the wings of a nocturnal bird of prey or a bat: an image of death, where the jewelry design stands still and that looks like the map of a maze, a rebus. The same jewels in a painting become pure form of colors and lights, a flow of unstoppable energy, but also a possible image of chaos, of decay. In another painting, Medea has lost all human features and the design of the jewelry merges into a dreamlike distortion which seems to evoke the lunar size of Colchis.

But Robustelli was also inspired by the aura of mysterious places, especially the Medea's home, marginalized under the walls of Corinth in a no space where green, yellow, and blue triumph. A tower that rises like a yellow monolithic and a suspended mass, it seems, on the physical and existential discomfort of a steep slope of the land. Furthermore works on the barbarian army of knights Colchis are very nice, which Robustelli imagines as profile, at a distance, in an oil painting and a pen drawing. The rider and the horse, whose head, which is glimpsed through the garments, and seems a skull, give off the mystery of ghostly apparitions, suggesting to revise the film as the conflict between the dead humanity of the inhabitants of Colchis, intended for be defeated and extinct, and the Western civilization of the Argonauts invaders, ie us.