

Medea and the laceration of Care

As Nietzsche clarifies in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Attic tragedy is already a domestication of myth, of the forces that feed its sacredness and irreducibility to history. According to Nietzsche, however, it is possible to identify Euripides as the most conscious creator of the separation between myth and tragic art because it is in his theatre that tragedy would become a spectacle destined to appease the anguish of everyday life for a few hours. In short, paradoxical as it may seem, tragedy would represent a particular form of entertainment. In other words, in the theatre, love affairs, betrayals, incest, murders, friendships, and double-crosses, would be nothing more than the exaggerated staging of events that are, in reality, ordinary.

And yet, one gets the impression that in Euripides' *Medea*, the woman from Colchis rebels against this tragic fate of the tragedy, which drags her towards the drama, towards a situation in which the audience can project their anguish. She probably rebels thanks to the lucidity of her violence that makes her, the granddaughter of the Sun, a barbarian refractory to any logos of power. An excess persists in her that is difficult to tame and even to name: her passion and desires consign her to an incalculable experience, the loss of a part of herself. In *Medea*, the tragic could survive because this woman, a stranger everywhere, even in her own home, resists any tragic commiseration of her fate. By dismissing the legitimacy of any narrative in the face of horror, of the implacable, she materialises the unrepresentable that the tragic itself expresses.

But who is Medea? Perhaps Medea does embody, as Pasolini imagined through the prehistoric face of Maria Callas, a testimony to an archaic and frightening form of life that survives its own disappearance, a life form that at any instant, like a spectre, can re-emerge in the civilised universe of *nomos*. Or, on the contrary, can we let her emerge from this dialectical tension? Might not Medea then become the feminine name, before anything else, of a rejection of any inflexible hendiadys?

Medea is the one who uses men to free herself from her father's law. She inaugurates her favourite activity - destroying family ties - by killing her brother Apsirto. Although she is overwhelmed by her passion for Jason, there is one aspect that should not be underestimated here: Jason is also the one who can help her leave her father's house. Medea is mother, sister, murderer, subversive figure, lucid and passionate queen of Colchis, exiled, lover, infanticide, vagabond, foreigner, wife, unpunished (in fact, there are no ‘penal’ consequences for her criminal actions); a powerful and extreme woman capable of devastating the tyranny of Corinth.

Her passions transcend all inclinations of human finitude: being of divine descent, she appears indifferent to the blows of fate. She possesses almost magical arts and knows the human soul, especially its weakness. That is why Medea seems to materialise the terror of every male (not only Greek): she disregards her father's and husband's orders; she kills her brother and sons; she relentlessly defies male authority, tenaciously deserting the role of the victim. And yet, she is also much more: she lets us see how far a victim can go when she refuses her destiny; what gestures can be conceived by those who embody a radical difference and do not stop evoking and repeating the power of difference. Medea, after all, is much more than a tragic figure: her rage leads her to make precise gestures, recognising the meanness of

those around her, and wisely administering her charisma. In this excess when dealing with the tragic, there is also the echo of the venerable and divine dimension that Medea had before Euripides; as if the tragic line, dominant in the reception of this myth, served precisely to darken Medea's obscure and titanic greatness. On the other hand, the despair and shame she feels at having let herself go with a cowardly hero like Jason make her pitiless with herself. It is well known that only with Euripides does the mythical story of the woman from Colchis take its most terrible turn: the murder of her sons Mermeros and Phereas by Medea. A shocking and unequivocal gesture, but one that actually preserves and releases a myriad of contradictory tensions that, probably, among ancient authors, only Euripides is able to manage without nailing the figure of Medea to the terrible character of the murderous mother. For instance, Seneca's Medea is unable to decipher the tangle of symptoms of an apparently 'reasonless' violence that condemns the woman to become merely the exemplification of the monstrous.

If, on the one hand, from the very first lines of Euripides' tragedy, the love for children is strongly questioned, Medea finally seems to kill them off because she lets the most frightening logic of the mother's symbolic order surface: care as an extreme form of possession, care as an overabundance of love and attachment (probably more than anyone else, Corrado Alvaro in 1949, in his formidable *The Long Night of Medea*, casts his hand on infanticide as a system of protection, not without some sympathy). As she says, she kills them so that no one will be able to take her away from her boys.

Unwittingly sent by their mother to assassinate their father's betrothed Glauce (King Creon's daughter), they would certainly be punished with death. Thus, the mother should directly deal with the crime. But perhaps things are not so simple: Medea probably acts because she does not tolerate that her children are their father's exclusive property.

Medea is, therefore, a very intelligent woman and thinks very well but she thinks *differently*: she tears apart all custom and economy of utility and lets her desire resist even when the object of desire becomes detestable. The pure exposition of her own life without any guarantee as a decision of the political, is the atrocious infamy to which Medea rebels to. Her extreme gesture materialises the impossible exclusion by the *polis* of the unknown, of the other, without provoking an excess of that intestine violence capable of revoking its force. Medea strikes the body of her children to write with the blood of innocence, with the death of the beings she loves the most, her extraneousness to Jason's political *logos*.

Medea rises up against the decision that seals the time of unhappiness, that is, she does not allow herself to be segregated in the *oikos*, she does not identify herself quietly with her political misfortune. To find a remedy for the injustice from a position of exclusion, an unjust power causes injustice: Medea annihilates the power and excludes herself because she understands that there is no other destiny for her but to become a suppliant vagrant.

Medea does not allow herself to be assimilated, not even as a prisoner! She refuses to do what they ask of her; she refuses to become the woman men want her to be. As a nomad, she inhabits a condition of permanent leave and throws herself with all her might against an image of woman as guardian of the *oikos* and committed to bearing any insult in the name of her children first and foremost.

Medea destroys everything: her father's house, her bond with her brother, the power of Corinth and the law of men. But she does even more: she even destroys her tragedy. In fact, in every moment of her story, she rejects the role of victim and, from time to time, she employs and abandons both the *logos*, the simple destructive passion, and the complicity and sympathy she can arouse. Medea does not allow anyone to identify with her. One can feel compassion, even a certain admiration for Medea, but no feminism can ever take her name (Lina Prosa writes that: 'there is a void of relationship' with her). Her

thousand faces deny that her name can become the index of an alliance; her solitude is also the ending of permanent taking leave of anyone who approaches her. On the other hand, her wild and, at the same time, divine gaze reveals the misery of everyone. Furthermore, she dares a form of revolutionary greatness: she reminds us that, for any revolt worthy of the name, there is always a hefty bill to pay, a terrible wound to bear, and a loss of the self to be reckoned with. By killing her children, Medea loses herself as a mother; she decapitates a part of herself: to continue to become something other than what men want her to be: a grieving woman.

Medea's escapes, her incessant wandering, Colchis-Iolcus-Corinth-Athens prevent us from pitying her. Above all, that wandering signals the constant desire of Medea to evade capture. It is not the wounded woman who acts; it is the ancient goddess who rises against the forms of the logos that evaluates, calculates, commands; the nomad hostile to the sedentary logic of power; the woman against patriarchy; the warrior against the 'wasteland'. Medea/Medelha is a conceptual figure that would have appealed to Frantz Fanon because it transfers violence to a collective level; to the agora. Hers is not simply domestic violence but, rather, it appears as an absolute act: a terrible and indecipherable one.

If destitute violence existed, could it have the ambiguous and delirious appearance of Medea? A vehemence, therefore, called upon to desert and abandon even the very force that unleashes it.