

choice of the label 'a woman' for herself was a call for sisterhood amongst women, setting herself up as both exemplary and typical. In this clear allusion to female heroism in his depiction of a woman who moves from being the object of the narrative to its subject, and through an ending which brings together three generations of women in possible reconciliation, Palermi addresses a female audience. If we read beyond the ubiquitous stereotypes of innocent prostitutes, good and evil mothers, the message of this film for that audience is powerful: mothers can turn on daughters and vice versa, but female power and survival lie in the fierce defence of a female genealogy, a preservation that requires an active female heroine. The apparent corpse that opens the film must awake to become 'una donna'.

Danielle Hipkins

The Fall of the Rebel Angels

La caduta degli angeli ribelli

Studio:

Filmalpa/RAI Due

Director:

Marco Tullio Giordana

Producer:

Mario Gallo

Screenwriters:

Marco Tullio Giordana
Vincenzo Caretti
Mario Gallo

Cinematographer:

Giuseppe Pinori

Art Director:

Raffaele Balletti

Editor:

Sergio Nuti

Duration:

102 minutes

Genre:

Melodrama

Synopsis

The affluent Cecilia is married, with a young daughter, to a brilliant university professor. She learns that her father is fatally ill and, driving back to Milan from his lakeside home, stops by the side of the highway to weep. A handsome stranger notices her distress and they embrace passionately in her car. Returning to home, work and normality, she is pursued by the stranger and the affair continues. The intense Vittorio, it seems, is some sort of fugitive – a terrorist? Her father dies and Cecilia leaves for Naples with Vittorio, pleading that she needs time alone. In Naples the couple encounter a variety of colourful characters, but the interlude is interrupted by the reappearance of one of her lover's comrades, who Vittorio is obliged to kill. The couple flee to Palermo, where coincidentally Cecilia's husband is teaching at the university. Cecilia visits her husband (now aware of her affair) in his hotel, pleading for understanding, but he sends her back to Vittorio, instructing her to resolve the situation. Vittorio has been condemned to death by his organization, and in their squalid attic, with her lover's behaviour increasingly erratic and brutal, Cecilia is forced into a desperate gesture.

Critique

La caduta degli angeli ribelli was the second feature film by director Marco Tullio Giordana, best known for his work with the screenwriters Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli, including *I cento passi/The 100 Steps* (2000) and *La meglio gioventù/The Best of Youth* (2003). His first feature, the meta-cinematic and Godardian *Maledetti vi amerò/To Love the Damned* (1980), had been a critical hit; this second film was a critical disaster and seems barely to have had a cinema release after its bad reception at the Venice festival. Viewed now (with difficulty – it has never had a DVD release), it is spoiled less by the 'overblown, didactic dialogue' reviled by the *Variety* critic than by some clumsy dubbing of the non-Italian

Cast:

Clio Goldsmith
Vittorio Mezzogiorno
Alida Valli

Year:

1981

actors, especially of the heroine played by the French and exquisite Clio Goldsmith. What intrigues about the film is the fact that it refuses the male homosocial story archetypes, usually Oedipal or Cain and Abel tales, typically employed in the cinema to deal with Italian history. Giordana would have recourse to these more typical modes in the later films mentioned above, but in *La caduta degli angeli ribelli* he dares to generalize Italian political circumstances in a deliberately melodramatic key (the film alludes to Tristan and Isolde) and filters these circumstances through the eyes and desire of a woman, and an upper class woman at that. Even if critics remembered the example of Visconti's *Senso* (1954), they were unlikely to be sympathetic.

In doing terrorism in an erotic key the film was not, however, unique. It is one of a small group inspired by Bertolucci's *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris* (1972) that refracts the experience of 1970s terrorism in Italy through the motif of the *amour fou*, the love affair that consumes the lover. (The fate of Brando's Paul at the end of *Ultimo tango* gives a clue to that of the terrorist lover in *La caduta degli angeli ribelli*.) Giordana's film is usefully paired with the equally-little-seen *Kleinhoff Hotel* (Carlo Lizzani, 1977), in which the beautiful and rich young wife of an architect has a torrid fling with the terrorist in the hotel room next door (he too comes to a bad end). In both cases the affair with the brooding fugitive is a kind of carnal time-out from the mores of normal life and society. The physicality of the terrorist lover – who, paradoxically, given his devotion to political violence, is body rather than ideology – is contrasted to the rationality of the temporarily-abandoned husband, and Cecilia's husband is set up from the opening dialogue as the ultimate representative of the Moral Law: a philosopher of ethics. If the *amour fou* is a sign of Cecilia's crisis of boredom or grief, it is also a sign of the increasing desperation of Vittorio, the terrorist. The love affair offers him a last (if always already doomed) opportunity of exchanging armed struggle for the traditional imperative of heterosexual communion. However, the 'taken' aspect of the woman, and the cliché, familiar from 'adult' film and literature, of the erotic self-investigation undertaken during a sensual holiday from ordinary life, establishes at the outset that social and marital order will be restored. As such, this is a conservative, reassuring, even cathartic film. The lovers' transgression is associated with the transgression of social rules that is terrorism, and terrorism itself comes to be signified as a crime of passion: a season of mad and impossible desire that can only burn itself out. But the film retains its interest as a rare attempt to refract Italian historical experience through the prism of a female subjectivity.

Alan O'Leary