

## Mother Mary

Or: Back to nature! After all, it was there where everything began.

Bogomolje, a small village in the south of the Croatian island Hvar, was named after a mantis (called bogomolka in the Croatian language) which, skilfully using its slim porthorax, hides behind plants in a manner of a perfectionist. If hiding behind grass it protects itself with green colour, if behind a dry pine needle it protects itself with light brown, if behind a flower it uses a colour similar to its blossom. Holding its forelegs in an upraised position as if in prayer it can go on motionlessly simulating its surroundings for ever. However, a mantis puts on its act of a saint only until it grabs for its prey. This double mimicry – of lifelessness and literal saintness – is performed immediately after the act of fecundation when it eats the male.

There was an exceptional abundance of mosquitoes at Bogomolje this rainy summer. My intensive relationship with them, when there was no way to stop their continuous zzzzzzz-s, reminded me that I had made a mistake whenever I said that a mosquito bit me. I should have said that a female mosquito bit me. The blood is actually sucked by the female which needs it for its eggs – that is, its offspring. The fact that a female mosquito has developed an utterly sophisticated system – first it injects in our blood an anaesthetic to numb our perception in order to immediately after inject a serum against blood coagulation which enables it to peacefully suck an amount of blood three or four times of its weigh – is rather unimportant for man, despite the fact that this miniature perfectionism of a vampire coincides with a perfectionist structure of motherhood as a privileged state. In nature let alone in culture, the latter has developed a complete operational system subordinated to the only imperative of preserving a generation, kind, species .. and consequently the world ...: motherhood.

In other words: To understand culture as the mimicry of nature, we can begin with the positive science and natural laws fathered by Darwin. Determined by culture, which helped by economy, ideology and religion subordinated the basic laws of nature to itself, we forget the basic elements and so to speak automatically eliminate the roots of our origin.

Continuing this text, I intend to mildly decode the forms mankind invented or agreed upon, from the position of power or from the position of defending

the symbols of nature, with the intention of preserving itself. That is, with the intention that a queen bee – mother preserves the status of a reproduction machine as unawaresly and interminably as possible. I will focus on the mimic procedures in the other, perhaps symbolic language, invented by mankind merely for a woman to preserve her status of the object, indispensable in the development process, which profits in certain privileges as well as loses certain things due to these privileges. She can suck blood, but consequently she has to zzzz..., work and take care of the eggs all the time.

The structured social survival was established through a womb. The history of civilisation witnesses that through time everything possible has been done to give it the status of a protected object. It is common knowledge that those women who made teas for preventing or terminating pregnancies were proclaimed witches by the Middle Ages, that men couples are denied adopting children, that the most sophisticated structure – Christian religion – severely punished Eve (and skilfully silenced the probably with heathenishness connected Lilith). Eve reached for the knowledge belonging only to him – God, and consequently assumed the role of an eternal victim or sinner who is to repent for the sins – not only by giving birth in suffering, but also by concealing her desire for knowledge. She could not have endured the reproduction imperative without concealing her desire, as well as the Bible could not remain the supreme image of the most accomplished form of imagination.

The notion of the structured social management most closely to the Christian religion – communism, which has sworn by Work and never by God (Work being the other path leading to God or, as mentioned before, to the system of preserving the laws of nature), in fact defended equality, but identically with Christianity impugned equivalence. It equalled man and woman, but only in the sense of the production process, giving the womb a double burden. Truly the socialism, its milder form, provided kindergartens and schools, dragged women away from kitchens and send them to work. But in the final consequence, it burdened a woman with a double share of the Work worship cult. Not only did she give birth suffering, she also worked suffering. Speaking for the benefit of both ideologies: she was given a double award for a double sacrifice. If the Church had refused to pardon her, she was pardoned by Tito – as, for example, Pepca Kardelj who found herself in a terrible dilemma whether to have or not a child during the revolution, in the time when special people were asked to make special kinds of sublimations. Her spouse, Edvard Kardelj, did not know how to advise her, so Pepca went to Tito and asked for his opinion. And Tito said, she could have it. And with his permission, Pepca gave birth to a child.

The answer the question why Mary with Jesus in her lap was given a crown is given by the history of the arts, but is really explained by the history of the Church. In 1954, Pope Pious XII officially declared Mary the Queen, and in 1964 the Queen of the Church. Following the analogy of the mimicry practised by a mantis or a salamander which developed an imaginary construction simulating something which they are not (a rock,

grass, a pine needle), leads us to Mary who by title developed an imaginary construction simulating that which she in fact was not – she did not conceive a child immaculately, she was not a virgin before nor after Jesus, she did not go to heaven, etc. But her imaginary construction, particularly concretised by the fine arts and literature, was entirely subordinated to the goal of the greatest possible identification of a mortal with the image of a queen, mother, virgin and an inaccessible lover.

The image of the Virgin of Mercy depicted with Pierre della Francesca's cloak or as beautiful Mary of Ptuj's gora is that of a ruler taking care not only of her son but the entire humankind. Allegedly the Virgin of Mercy was noticed by (at that point still both) eyes of Fritz Lang who lived in Ljutomer as a soldier. The image was motioned in *Metropolis* which presents Mary not as a queen but as a virgin protecting the exploited who were pushed into the underground by the capitalism of the heavenly.

Meta (Majda Potokar) in Igor Pretnar's *Samorastniki* (*Wild Seedlings*), 1963, is also a lady of mercy – she shields her bastards who are more each year despite the interdiction and forbidden love. Contrary to the Mary of Ptuj's gora who stands before God, but similarly to Lang's Mary, Meta stands before the conscience of society. The latter prevents her to marry a son of a landowner, because she is a crofter. Consequently she is punished by the community – not in the name of the Cross which denounces bastards, but in the name of the estate which denounces crofters. In the name of the Cross, Meta suffers. The latter is unintentionally emphasised through the movie's cinematic language: each punishment is literary implemented and shown through a Christian symbol. Her naked sinful body is whipped, she is pushed to isolation and mocked – but nevertheless, Meta remains a queen, full of life, a heroic and ethical woman who refuses dirty money offered to her by saying to her bastards: Do not let them walk all over you!

In the middle of the 13th century, the Virgin, an ideal unit assumed to heaven immaculate, is humanised. She is given the role of a modest, simple and poor humble mother, a reminder to which is Pierre della Francesca's Birth with a mother on her knees beside her child. Her motherly humbleness evokes women masochism which is reflected, according to common knowledge, in her pleasure.

The role of a Cankarian mother is characterised by narcissism and given identity by pleasure derived from suffering. All her complaints, failures and discomforts call for confirmation of her sacrifice. What sacrifice? What does Cankar's mother wish? To be noticed by her son. To be thanked for her sacrifice. What did she sacrifice? The departed husband or son? Her husband, naturally. The object of her love was her son. Cankar's mother claims to be acknowledged a virgin. The Virgin Mary remained a virgin even after she gave birth to Jesus. The Church decided so. Cankar's father became a drunkard. Vojko Duletič's *Na klancu* (*On Hilltop*), 1971, appropriately articulates their first and violent night spent together, when mother sees her son and not her husband as the groom.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's father was also a drunkard, he gambled his property and took an opposite political position to his son's. He was a soldier, faithful

to the great tendencies of the Italian empire and somewhere in the African captivity he had lived to witness its fall. P. P. Pasollini was an intellectual, communist, masochist and homosexual. The only woman who he lovingly respected and worshipped was his mother. When he fled from Friulian Casarsa to Rome, his mother accompanied him. A teacher who married a soldier. She tolerated him, but did not respect let alone love him. She loved Pier Paolo. At every trial, there was about twenty of them, every persecution, and even at every glass of anisette thrown at the screen during the showings, her reactions were the first to come to his mind. Even though she knew about his relations with boys, he never slept with them in the apartment he had shared with her. He would go to suburbs and deserted rural areas. And every morning she would make a cup of coffee for him – not for coffee, for milk she searched early in the morning, knowing that Furlanian habits please him. She would then pour the milk in an earthenware pot which she bought in Rome and then intentionally made it look old so that it reminded him of the pot he used to drink from during the happy times in Friuli. P. P. Pasollini knew all about it and his guilt grew bigger by every sip he made. His guilt grew bigger and in the end he found the way out himself. His death, after all, remains a secret.

The Church understood that motherhood should be awarded and upgraded for the sake of continuation of mankind and reproduction. A mother was awarded by being excepted from the sin – and, further, excepted from death. Mary was sent to heaven. All the rest of the mothers who call for identification with Mary and everything she stands for will not be able to follow her – but will choose between a sacrifice similar to hers and everything she does not stand for leading straight to hell. Everything leading to hell also leads to the destruction of the order which in nature carries out "perforation", the latter defining exactly the measure of pleasure and the measure of the image which went hand in hand with the image of the world, as defined by the social order.

#### P. S.

The following is an interpretation of the basic women characters in Slovene motion pictures. These are selected basic prototypes:

- the melodramatic type of Ančka (Mira Stupica) in Bojan Stupica's *Jara gospoda* (*Pretence High Society*), 1953. This is a character of a suffering victim, the only person who does not fall in the category of the pretence bourgeois class. Not only she is caught in a circle without being able to influence it, but she also finds herself in the role of a suffering victim in an out-of-wedlock relationship; Pavle (Stane Sever) first disavows her as a woman, a mother and as a mistress, and when he as a judge meets her many years later he accuses her of being a whore.
- As numerous other mothers in Slovene films, Lucija (Alenka Vipotnik) in France Kosmač's *Lucija*, 1965, has the role of both a double sinner and a double victim. Her first sin is her daughter about to be married. The

- sin is intensified by her social status: she is a girl, beautiful, good, hard-working, desired and honest, yet unworthy of the wealthy master's son. (Using the meaning of the word housekeeper in a sexist way is not comparable with that of the word master: a housekeeper keeps a house whereas a master owns property). And Lucija dies giving birth to a child.
- Women partisans have sublimed motherhood. Majda Potokar in France Štiglic's *Ne joči Peter*, (*Don't You Cry, Peter*), 1964, comes to be a commander unburdened with the differences between the sexes. First she appears to Rozman and Sotlar as an ordinary, vulnerable, frightened woman, to be later on revealed as a superwoman: as a commander.
  - The emancipation rooted in the partisan films continues in the Slovene movie with the highest rating. Meri (Milada Kaležič) in Bevec's *To so gadi* (*Those Rascals*), 1977, is supposedly the crown of the women emancipation in Slovene movies. Her trademark being: "No way, bro." She trains for a male profession, she cannot iron, she cannot cook and she is cheerful. Meri corresponds to a man's job description: she becomes a bus driver and a man is forced to recognise her role. However, the movie is a comedy.
  - An approximation to *femme fatale* in Slovene movies remains Metka Gabrijelčič. Far from a woman destroyer in *Ne čakaj na maj* and *Vesna* (*Don't Wait for May* and *Vesna*), she is a cheerful girl who can laugh and who never suffers or is the cause of suffering.
  - The Slovene version of *femme fatale* is an image of a woman who, with her smallness, narrow-mindedness and by not paying any attention to his wishes, destroys a man. In Igor Pretnar's *Idealist*, 1976, the obsession of Kačur's – idealist's wife originates in her inability to become great, noticed, loved and much more than just an ordinary motherly listener to his troubles. Consequently, she spreads evil.
  - The *femme fatale* of the revolution is the emancipated Kristina in Živojin Pavlovič's *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni* (*Be Seeing You in the Next War*), 1980. She dances an ideologically orthodox dance. Her real object of love being the great idea of communism, her femininity is suppressed by the revolution. A woman apostle.
  - And a woman angel. In Pretnar's *Pet minut raja* (*Five Minutes of Eden*) she has the role of a saviour angel who falls from the sky between two concentration camp prisoners and gives a fatal cut to reality.
  - The prevailing image of a woman in Slovene movies is that of a cheated, rejected, unaccomplished, to the big him subordinated and only by him given purpose servant who pays for being naive. One of them, a liar in Igor Pretnar's *Lažnivka* (*Liar*), 1965, is not only an object of men's deception but of trading as well. Discovering this, she feels ashamed and flees into an imaginary world to hide the deception from herself as well as from the others.
  - In Igor Pretnar's *Na valovih Mure* (*On the Mura Waves*), 1955, Katica cannot stand the deception. She falls in love and becomes pregnant. Naci (Bert Sotlar) took her – "take her" is a typical syntagma used by the Slovene literature and is usually followed by "for one night". "Just

one more time," says Naci, "tomorrow I will be good". But at dawn Katica is dead.

- Karolina also cannot take the deception. This vigorous, but by the end an exhausted woman robbed of her illusions, has to pay for one sin only: for her ardent desire for love. She is not concretised as a mother nor as a mistress let alone wife. Matjaž Klopčič's *Vdovstvo Karoline Žašler* (*The Widowhood of Karolina Žašler*), 1976.
- If a woman in a Slovene movie is determined to succeed, she is faced with troubles as in Boštjan Hladnik's *Ples v dežju* (*Dancing in the Rain*).
- If she succeeds in her profession, she is miserable in love. As a successful architect building prisons in Franci Slak's *Eva*, 1987, Eva is herself in emotional captivity.
- If a woman in a Slovene movie succeeds, as for example Blanka Kolak in *Ljubezni Blanke Kolak* (*The Loves of Blanka Kolak*), 1987, she survives all the deceptions of socialism, her husband and lover – and stays alone. Is her professional success also a conciliation with her emotional dependence? Doubtfully. Blanka's photographs exhibited on a show are merely collection of her life fortunes and misfortunes, that is her men.

Never has a Slovene movie saw a woman director behind the camera. Several tried but gave it up. They became videographers. The women behind the electronic camera took over the field of "video fitting". Successful in what they do, despite the fact that nobody understands, watches or uses them. Their alibi is the art. Otherwise, their stories are fragile and artificial. To the endlessly manipulated picture they add lyrical elements based on impressions or rarely comprehensible stories. With a drop of intellectualism and a scent of worldly trends. Similarly to that developed abroad, the Slovene video art also tends to border on worshipping and rarely includes critical evaluations. If it was chosen by women to become their ghetto, it could be also a form of racism. After all, they are the only one to enter the outside world noticed.

Translated by Mihaela Zupančič