

Ingrid E. HOLMBERG

A Dream of Medea: Euripides' *Medea* in Dassin's *A Dream of Passion*

Most classicists are familiar with the renditions on film of Greek tragedies which represent the tragedies by adhering strictly to the ordering of the text and by attempting accurate and judicious translation; perhaps these productions even incorporate some innovative cinematic techniques to enliven the ancient text for a modern audience. As classicists, we may be less familiar on a professional, scholarly level with films which employ the resources of antiquity creatively to interrogate questions whose problematics the modern world shares with the ancient. We as classicists also appear to be reserved about engaging with the few films which seek, whether seriously or not, to build these bridges. There have been some efforts in this direction: Solomon's *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, while still a valuable resource, is little more than an identificatory catalogue; the best known resource in book-length is Winkler's collection *Classics and Cinema*, joined recently by Wyke's book on Rome, *Projecting the Past*; there is a smattering of articles throughout diverse journals. My aim in this paper is to add to the work in this field by examining Dassin's *A Dream of Passion* and how the feminine is constructed based upon the director's [mis]interpretation of Euripides' *Medea*.

A Dream of Passion interweaves a theatrical production of *Medea* in Athens with the lead actress's efforts to understand and to portray more successfully the protagonist through a relationship with the imprisoned American Brenda, "the Medea of Glyfada". As her epithet implies, Brenda has murdered her children because of her husband's affair with another woman, a native Greek. As the lead actress Maia increasingly identifies with Brenda/Medea, the theatrical rehearsals gradually become more intense, more visually representative of the supposed production of *Medea* in 5th century Athens, and move outside to the theatre at Delphi. The rehearsals are also being filmed internally by the BBC, increasing the early emphasis in the film on the constructedness of theatrical drama and the distanced quality of the production. Not only Maia's ability to render Euripides' Medea dramatically and even shockingly on stage, but also her own self-knowledge and acceptance of her femininity are intimately linked to her access to Brenda's passionate emotional state.

The focus of my examination is how this film manipulates the Euripidean character of Medea, already established in Euripides' play as "the other", into a figure essentializing the feminine. Especially in the last scenes of the film, the female as passionate, elemental, mystical/religious, ultimately murderous and the actress's own co-option into this ideology become highly positively charged. Maia's newly recognized passion is an achievement of "femininity" and truthful acting. I will also make some further comments on the socio-cultural implications of the uses, both positive and negative, to which knowledge of ancient classical texts can be applied in a modern cinematic context.