The Film presents

Golshifteh Farahani

the patience stone

a film by Atiq Rahimi

Adapted from the Best-selling novel by Atiq Rahimi, winner of the Goncourt Prize in 2008
Somewhere, in Afghanistan or elsewhere, in a country torn apart by a war... A beautiful woman in her thirties watches over her husband in a decrepit room. He is reduced to the state of a vegetable because of a bullet in the neck, and not only is he abandoned by his companions of the Jihad, but also by his brothers. One day, the woman starts a solitary confession to her silent husband. She talks about her childhood, her suffering, her frustrations, her loneliness, her dreams, her desires... She touches him, kisses him, things she could never have done before, even though they have been married for the past 10 years. Therefore, this paralyzed man unconsciously becomes « syngué sabour », a magic stone which, according to Persian mythology, when placed in front of a person shields him from unhappiness, suffering, pains and miseries.

In this wait for her husband to come back to life, the woman struggles to survive and live. She finds refuge in her aunt's place, who is a prostitute, and the only relative who understands her. The woman seeks to free herself from suffering through the words she delivers audaciously to her husband. But after weeks looking after him, she will actually reveal herself in the relationship she starts with a young soldier...
When I asked Jean-Claude Carrièré to adapt my book Syngué sabour, he said: “What are you expecting from me?” “Betray me!” I answered.

It wasn’t said in provocation but with cinematographic vocation. Because what is exciting and challenging for a writer-director, is finding a way to exceed one’s own book to show and say in his film all the things he didn’t manage to write using words.

The book’s central idea is the myth of « Syngue Sabour », the patience stone, a stone on which you can shed your misfortunes, your complaints, your secrets until it’s so full it bursts. In this story, the stone is the husband, a warrior paralysed by a bullet in the neck. The woman, to bring him back to life, has to pray from morning till night for 99 days. But that prayer soon turns into a confession. She murmurs into his ear all the things she has kept locked inside her for so many years.

Like in my previous books, the characters evolve in extreme circumstances and in a single decor. But our adaptation primarily consists in moving away from this theatrical situation, by deconstructing the Romanesque narrative to arrive at a purely cinematographic dramaturgy. We thus changed the narrative point-of-view. By following the woman’s point-of-view, the camera permits itself to leave the bedroom, to follow the main character out of the house, in to the streets of Kabul, in to the heart of the war. The camera is mobile, light, wandering, like in Rossellini’s “Germany, year zero”, giving the impression of capturing situations on the spur of the moment. On the other hand, the interior scenes where sensuality, intimacy, dreams and phantasms, memories, regrets, remorse… prevail and haunt our heroine’s mind, the camera will harmonize itself to the rhythm of the characters emotions and very breaths. Supple, gracious, sensual, the camera slides through the bedroom, through the woman’s intimate world, like a confidante, an accomplice.

The contrast between the two worlds, outside/inside, social/intimate, war/love… will, in terms of lighting, be interpreted by contrasting images; the crude exteriors, and those, soft and veiled, of the interior where the woman is lit like a source of light and colour, as can be seen in the miniature Persian carpets.

The film is also structured by passages leading from the present to the past, making the narration non-linear. However, the woman’s memories are not depicted with systematic and arbitrary flash backs. It is always the elements and the situations from the present that introduce us in to the past. Like, for example, the combat scene between the combat quails that the heroine perceives in the streets of Kabul, not only does this scene reflect what the character lived during her childhood, but progressively transforms itself in to her own memory. Just like the wedding party in the whorehouse that reincarnates our main character’s wedding… rendering these flash backs more poetical than technical.

This is how characters in the book, that only exist through the memories and stories told by the woman, come to life. Like the aunt who is an initiating character in the life of our heroine, or her father, a breeder of combat quails.