Desdé Allá (From Afar,) Leone d’Oro at the 72nd Venice Film Festival, 2015

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The Leone d’Oro for the best film at the 72nd Venice Film Festival was awarded to Desdé Allá (From Afar). The debut of the forty-four Venezuelan director Lorenzo Vigas confirms that the South American cinema is today able to offer innovative high level works. The director, who was very touched, pointed out that, among the many problems of his country, a deeply homophobic culture is rooted, and this movie brings it to light. Hopefully this award will help to develop further awareness and openness to change, thanks to the great power of images.

The onset of Vigas is surprising, a courageous and original debut, with extraordinary actors' performances. With style and rhythm the film delves into "mine" fields, on which it is difficult not to explode. We are in the territory of the Father, of his inadequacy, his violence, in a whole masculine universe – flesh, sweat and blood - where the Mother is the great absentee. This film can look disturbing, hard to swallow, unconventional, but indeed it is able to speak directly to the unconscious and thus the viewer can reject it or be profoundly involved in. It tells the story of an "impossible adoption," involving Armando (Alfredo Castro) and Elder (newcomer Luis Silva), both sorely traumatized.

Armando is a middle-aged, harmless looking, owner of a dental lab, luring desperate young boys and paying them handsomely to bring them to his house and watch them "from afar." From afar he also spies on an old man, the father, by whom you can imagine he was abused physically and mentally throughout his childhood.

Elder is a hoodlum with an intense and scared look, who works in a garage. His father is in jail, a man who could kill "just because he felt like it”.

Their meeting-and-crashing will change the existence of both. In an escalation of tension, made up of comings and goings, of understanding and rejection gestures, the film

develops the story of an "impossible adoption". Armando cannot bear an intimate proximity while Elder is too hungry for a paternal love which he confuses with sex and he can kill in the hope of getting it.

In counterpoint there is the Armando’s sister of Armando who achieves the adoption of a newborn, somehow managing to leave behind a past that her brother cannot forget. But it is only a glimpse of life in a world that remains without compassion for the leading characters.

Violence and trauma, incompatible with the tenderness and the chance to enter into authentic relationship with the other, are never overly exposed in the movie, but you can see clearly the dreadful consequences, physical and psychological, in the protagonists. The chaotic city of Caracas - where the two main characters lost and find themselves - as a setting alternates to the orderly and silent house of Armando. The quietness and control of the latter are opposed to the impulsivity and inability of Elder to defend himself.

The director, working by "removing", is able to be essential and without complacency, excesses and rhetoric, in dealing with issues that images can touch and convey to the viewer before and better than words. Those will come later: to the word from the image.

A movie that has divided critics and audiences, maybe because it does nothing to "entertain" the viewer but is instead masterfully thought-provoking.

And cinema, according to the great master Godard (1995) "is made to think the unthinkable." Vigas has hit the mark.