



Prejudices&Prejudices

I'm happy to be a son of my time. I thank my lucky star for being born around the half of the last century: thus I could eagerly absorb the whole nineteenth-century French and Russian literature. But I have also been able to follow – from its very beginning – the whole extraordinary human adventure of the informatics, and a significant portion of it, equally full of charm (at least for me): namely, the adventure of cinema. I am, in fact, a film expert, a cinema-goer; one who owns about six hundred original DVD's of the most beautiful films of the history of cinema: from *Umberto D* and *Bicycle Thieves* (among my favourites), to Kubrick's complete works, and Ridley Scott, up to our days with *Schindler's list* and the trilogy of *Matrix*, although above all there is Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*. I've also 'discovered' a little magical box called Mediabox (see www.arkimed.net): it has the size of a pack of cigarettes, but it allows you to storage *en route* your 70–75 favourite movie films and to watch them later on, connecting the box directly to a TV set, without needing any computer.

So I'm happy to be a son of this age, despite the already unbearable pollution, cancer, terrorism, corruption in the politics, and everything.

During the last weeks two films, that I have watched again and again several times, have inspired me reflections. They are ideally linked by the same subject: *prejudice*. It is something that should make reflect us astrologers, although not in the obvious way that you may predictably think.

The first film is **Philadelphia**, released in 1993 ("Angela, we're standing in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, the birthplace



of freedom, where our founding Fathers authored the Declaration of Independence. And I don't remember that glorious document saying 'All straight men are created equal'. I could have sworn it says: 'All men are created equal'") starring Tom Hanks (as Andrew Beckett) and Denzel Washington (as lawyer Joe Miller). This is the plot summary. Andrew Beckett is a smart lawyer, an excellent young lawyer who becomes an associate of the most prestigious law firm in Philadelphia; he's entrusted with the most important cases, and he punctually wins them thanks to his own extraordinary talent and to his boundless passion for the law. But Andrew Beckett is gay and he has contracted AIDS. So when the conformist senior members of the law firm get to know it, they create an *ad hoc* incident: he seemingly mislays a weighty appeal and is fired.

After Andrew is fired, in an attempt to sue his former law firm he turns to several colleague lawyers, but he draws a blank because defeating one of the greatest institutions of the whole state of Massachusetts would be an enormous enterprise.

Eventually Andrew finds a colleague willing to help him: Joe Miller, a young and brilliant lawyer – and a black man. The starting point of their action is an important sentence: “The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability against qualified workers, even if disabled, provided that they can fulfil the duties required by their position. Although the Act does not specifically refer to individuals who have contracted HIV and AIDS, later judgments sentenced that AIDS is a disability according to the law. In fact, not only AIDS causes physical restriction, but it also implies prejudice provoking a sort of social death prior to, and accelerating, physical death. This is the essence of discrimination: to foment judgments on a group with alleged distinguishing feature”. Beware: this passage of the film is important for us astrologers.

The end of the story is not so important. I find it interesting to underline other two passages of this movie film. Lawyer Joe Miller asks a witness: “Mister Collins, Are you a homo? Are you a queer? Are you a faggot? Are you a fruit? Are you *gay*, sir?”. The court is astonished while Joe goes on: “Yes, Your Honour, because – with your permission – that's what we have to talk about. In fact this is not a suite against AIDS: it concerns our repugnance and our hatred for homosexuality. In this court everybody's wondering who makes se with whom and how...”. Judge replies: “Mister Miller, let me



remind you that for this court any difference in race, religion, sexual habits and anything else – does not make any importance”. “Yes, Your Honour, but – with the permission of the Court – we do not live in this court”.

The story of **The Human Stain** (2003, directed by Oscar award winner Robert Benton and inspired by Philip Roth’s novel of the same name) is similar, under certain points of views, to the main subject of *Philadelphia*. Even more: we can certainly say that in this film the ‘prejudices&prejudices’ are reflected *ad infinitum*, just like in a huge mirror room’.

To make a long story short, a young black man (Coleman Silk, played by Anthony Hopkins) whose complexion is very pale for a weird freak of nature, looks like a Caucasian and lives like a white man. He’s an assimilated Jew from New Jersey becoming the first Jew professor of history and classical literature at Athena College, Athena being a small town in the area. Under Silk’s direction, Athena College becomes one of the most prestigious colleges of the United States. One day professor Silk insults two students who were absent from his class and whom he had never seen before, calling them ‘spooks’ – suggesting they were ghosts without considering that *spooks* is also an old-fashioned epithet for blacks. This is enough to have the colleagues turn against Silk and support the African-American students. Ironically Silk, being himself a Jew and a black man, is forced to resign for an inadvertent act of racism – of prejudice.

As soon as she gets to know this piece of news, his wife Iris dies of a stroke. Silk resolves to write a book on this vicissitude; but in the meanwhile he falls in love with Faunia Farley (Nicole Kidman as we have never seen her before: so charming, beautiful and sexy). Faunia is only 34 years old, while professor Silk is over 65; nonetheless their affair is a special story anyway. She is a victim of prejudice too: she belonged to a very rich family and, when she was a child, she used to be harassed by her stepfather. When Faunia reported that to her mother, the latter did not believe her. Thus Faunia left home at the age of 14, and her life came down and down in the world. She married a Vietnam veteran, who used to beat her. Meanwhile she was having an extra-conjugal sexual affair, an accident happened and two of her kids died in the fire spread in the very house where she was too. Since that day she wondered around



the world, carrying only two little amphorae with her sons' ashes and tons of prejudice on her shoulders.

Coleman and Faunia are two dropouts; probably because of their common withdrawal from society, they intertwine their lives in an apparently implausible love affair; but their love is strong, tense, although chemically supported by a physical expression.

Prejudice is a silent wind blowing across the story: the prejudice of the people of the little place where they live, who cannot accept that an aged Jew may 'have fun' with a gorgeous young lady who makes the cleaning in the schools and milks cows for little money. Prejudice is also the attitude of professor Silk's lawyer: instead of defending Silk from the anonymous letters and the menaces of Faunia Farley's (Nicole Kidman) former husband, the lawyer warns Silk about having the HIV-test made to Faunia, and do they use condom, for perhaps she is only willing to have a son to legitimate... Prejudice is the girl's attitude towards the whole world; prejudice is the attitude of Silk's father, who used to be a waiter and who expected that his sons would study exclusively at Harvard; prejudice is in Silk's first fiancée, who used to love him crazy, but left him as soon as she realized that he was 'coloured'; there is prejudice in Harvard, against black students (it's the post-war period); prejudice is Faunia's behaviour, when she thinks that her companion must not see her in the morning, when she is not presentable; even the crows show prejudice against a crow grown in captivity, whose caw sounds strange and guttural; and there's prejudice in Silk against himself too: while trying to become free, he ends up by becoming a slave of his own secret. There's prejudice also in what happens to Faunia's former husband: he kills them but they don't believe him (inquirers show prejudice about his alleged lack of mental lucidity).

"Prejudices&Prejudices": a sea of prejudice crossing every single frame of this precious film ideally bridged with *Philadelphia*.

Prejudice is also the attitude of the overwhelming majority of our opponents, who claim to be able to judge astrology without having studied it. We might agree on everything the main characters of these two films make and say, but on one definition I must disagree with the Supreme Court of the United States of America: "This is the essence of discrimination: to make judgments on a group with alleged distinguishing feature".

In fact, I am convinced that every human being was born in a precise



moment and place; this way, he/she takes the peculiarities of that moment and that place. Everybody knows, for example, that Naples has usually a wonderful climate compared to the rest of Italy. Nonetheless, those who live in the higher part of the town (Vomero) breath a much chillier air than those who live in the same area as me (Mergellina). In Mergellina, behind the street where I live (via Giordano Bruno) always blows a stiff breeze that may annoy you, even in May or June. On the contrary, in our street temperature is definitely milder and the air is stiller. At our place, the northern side (where you can find the studio where I work) is the warmest portion of the whole flat, while on the opposite side (where my daughter Luna's room) is the chillier. But inside Luna's room, there is a warmer corner compared to the rest of the room...

To make a long story short, what I believe is that beyond prejudice there is demagoguery; the latter being no less harmful than the former feeling, so widely described in the aforementioned films. Demagoguery would deny that, say, the inhabitants of Castellammare di Stabia show peculiarities quite different from the people of Vico Equense: being about 8 kms the distance between the two places.

Judging by the same standard, one would deny that Irishmen or Californians have their own peculiarities; and that – for example – thanks to their own peculiarities, Ethiopians are among the best marathon runners of the world.

So I believe that you can also talk about the differences among us human beings without ending up with the paradox of theorizing that we all are perfectly equal at birth, otherwise you run the risk of being accused of prejudice against the 'alleged distinguishing feature of a group'.

