

Review: *Love Me Tender*

by Muriel Del Don

With audacity and a reinvigorating dose of humour, Klaudia Reynicke's film paints the portrait of an anti-heroine wrestling with her fears



Barbara Giordano in *Love Me Tender*

Three years on from *The Nest*, Swiss-Peruvian director **Klaudia Reynicke** is returning to the Locarno Film Festival (competing in the Filmmakers of the Present section) with *Love Me Tender* [+], a film which defies categorisation and which tears through clichés about any kind of presumed, innate femininity with the merciless force of a tornado. This second feature film by Klaudia Reynicke zings on the tongue like a lemon popsicle, both refreshing and acidic, regressive and subversive in its seeming simplicity.

Seconda, the film's protagonist, suffers from agoraphobia and is unable to leave the house. Still living with her parents, her basic needs are met, but following the sudden death of her mother and her father's subsequent flight, Seconda is forced to take back control of her life. Out of necessity and perhaps desperation, our anti-heroine, clad in a blue jumpsuit, manages to leave the family home, but the challenges of life soon catch up with her. She must overcome her fears and break down the barriers separating her from the rest of the world. But, for Seconda, this by no means involves conforming and submitting to a society where being a woman equates to chasing after a sterile notion of perfection. On the contrary, Klaudia Reynicke shows her protagonist in all her (often banal) humanity: flossing her teeth while sitting on the toilet, picking her nose or greedily gulping down tomato passata straight from the carton. The director looks to show us the humanity hiding behind gender labels. It doesn't matter whether we're classified as men or women; at the end of the day we're all humans - imperfect and majestically complex.

Marked and underpinned by the omnipresence of the main actress (the powerful **Barbara Giordano**), *Love Me Tender* might be considered to be some kind of Ten-Commandments-guidebook for the perfect, modern-day anti-heroine: unpredictable, free and aware of her own obsessions, which she uses in her fight against conformism. Under Reynicke's gaze, Seconda's presumed fragility is transformed into uniqueness and into a weapon to be wielded against the patriarchy - the (self-) appointed supreme judge of a very particular form of "normality" which is, in many respects, suffocating. Seconda decides to accept herself in all her imperfect singularity and to take on the world, no longer as an outsider but as an Amazon encased in a blue jumpsuit. We don't know much about her past, but this doesn't detract from the protagonist's power. Seconda expresses herself more through her body than with words; it's a far more direct and archaic language, which doesn't stand for falsehoods. Unlikely moments of choreography, which see Seconda moving her body to the rhythm of pop music, insinuate their way into the story like waking dreams. Seconda's very real, human body and her spontaneous and, at times, naive dancing lend the narrative a reinvigorating dose of abstraction and oneirism. In Klaudia Reynicke's film, the real and the surreal tread an invisible tightrope without ever losing their balance.

Love Me Tender is also a film about madness, which is no longer seen as a prison from which to escape, but as a driver of rebellion against a society which would otherwise insist upon obedient docility. With its

powerful aesthetic (the photography of **Roberto Minervini**'s usual collaborator, **Diego Romero Suarez Llanos**, is stupendous) *Love Me Tender* urges us to take a good look inside ourselves and to face up to and accept our own (ab)normality. This, in itself, is already a huge achievement.

Love Me Tender is produced by Ticinese firm Amka Films and sold worldwide by Summerside International.

(Translated from Italian)

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