



A WORD THAT HAS THE POWER
TO CHANGE ONE'S LIFE.

by Julie Ault

Alejandro Cersarco, *Everness*, 2008, film installation.

Five chapters infinitely looped.

A monologue on the meaning of tragedy.

An excerpted song from Brazil's Tropicalista movement.

A version of the final scene of James Joyce's 'The Dead.'

An excerpt of a requiem from the Spanish civil war.

A breakfast scene.

Filmed in Montevideo in Spanish with English subtitles.

Black-and-white film transferred to DVD, twelve minutes.

Everness. This culmination of Cersarco's sensibility, methods, and concentrations tills the ground from which a multitude of thorny issues concerned with tragedy and fate, the spirit of romantic passion, and the intricate confines of the couple economy spring forth.

SCENE ONE. A young unshaven man with longish dark hair wears an open-collared white shirt, a dark cardigan, and dress slacks. Legs crossed, he sits on an upholstered armchair with bookshelves to his left. He seems self-possessed, probably a writer or perhaps a scholar. He speaks about the allure of tragedy as a literary device. His manner of address oscillates between looking at the camera with thoughtful certainty and gazing off in search of precise phrasing. He gestures with his left hand for emphasis or caresses the chair continuously. Whether he is answering questions posed by an invisible interlocutor, or reciting a script, is ambiguous.

What he is saying is that it's literature that produces readers. That the great texts change the ways in which we read.

That would be the first issue. Then there's an element that's more intrinsic to literature itself, which is how to possibly define tragedy.

I define tragedy as the arrival of an enigmatic and supernatural message that the hero fails to fully and timely comprehend....

... there is, on the one hand, a hermetic phrase, written in a language that is both familiar and supernatural, and on the other, a problem deciphering that phrase....

Yes, it seems to me that there is a very interesting issue there ... in those discourses that arrive and that are personal warnings, enigmas, coded messages....

These would be, right, a series of fairly attractive issues for a writer.

That is, the terrifying presence of a hermetic and true word... a word that has the power to change one's life.

Subtle staging and direction credibly render the situation and the character. The grain of the film and soft black-

and-white tones translate the event into a seductively visual atmosphere. The engaging actor with down turned eyes is well cast as a pensive romantic protagonist. His emotive face radiates sincerity and muted melancholia, which might, at any moment, transfigure into passion.

The scene sets the ground for a confrontation with fate, and establishes the film's interlacing methods. Cesarco's penchant for language and narrative enigma result in inventive scripting, including his use of 'everness,' the title of a poem by Jorge Luis Borges, his 'monólogo tragedia' quoted here, and his rendition of the Joyce story extract in scene three. Cesarco has effectively anchored the character's ruminations in an abstract sense of personal and communal history.

SCENE TWO. A close up view of a record playing, rotating clockwise in synch with the stacked metal strips of the turntable base, some of which turn likewise while others move counterclockwise. The spinning actions mesmerize, as does the woman's voice—that of Brazilian vocalist Gal Costa singing 'Maria Bethânia.' (Maria Bethânia is another popular Brazilian singer. Her brother Ceatano Veloso wrote this song in 1971 while he was living in exile from Brazil's dictatorship.) The recording is of a live performance; the song is rewritten by Costa's voice, which along with the tightly cropped shot creates an impression of intimacy. The brief segment is quixotic and nostalgic.

*Maria Bethânia,
Please send me a letter
I wish to know things
Are getting better, better,
Better, Beta, Beta, Bethânia
Please send me a letter . . .*

SCENE THREE. A young woman with short dark hair wearing a light-colored sweater and a skirt sits with her legs crossed on a dark-colored couch. She gazes distractedly toward the partially veiled windows nearby, through which sunshine and gently moving trees are visible. She seems somewhat anxious and takes deep breaths; she is silent. Occasionally she steals a glance toward her companion—the man interested in tragedy. Arms crossed, he slouches next to her on the couch, appearing despondent, and saying nothing. Together they enact an intimate estrangement. Perhaps a difficult conversation has just ended. His inner voice narrates the scene, accompanied by italicized subtitles, which suggest retelling.

How poor a part I've played in your life.

*It's almost as though I am not your husband; and
we've never lived together as man and wife . . .*

*To me your face is still beautiful, but it is no longer
the one for which Michael Fury, your first love,
braved death . . .*

Why am I feeling this riot of emotion? What stirred it up? The ride in the cab? You not responding when I kissed your hand? My aunt's party? My own foolish speech? The wine, the dancing, the music? My poor aunt Julia. That baggard look upon her face while she was singing . . .

His fresh revelation of her first love—Michael Fury—brings forth an onslaught of thoughts. He covers her hand with his for several moments, while imagining himself mourning the inevitable death of his Aunt Julia.

(Is the protagonist his own oracle, destined to miscomprehend or close his eyes to the message?)

He walks to the window and looks out, his somber agitation contradicting the sunny serenity outside. Seen through the glass with reflections of swaying trees around him, his face expresses internal torment. He looks down at the street scene of aged buildings and cars, buses, and pedestrians passing by; his mind's eye transfixed on a swiftly expanding existential crisis. Loss of innocence. Ruptured identities. Self-deception. Mounting age. Collective fate. Consciousness of loss engulfs him.

Yes, the newspapers are right. Rain is general all over the country. Falling on every part of the dark central plain, and the treeless hills, softly upon the city and farther east softly falling into the dark, mutinous, shallow waves. . . .

*Better to pass boldly into that other world in the full glory of some passion than to fade and wither dismally with age.
How long have you locked away in your heart the image of your lover's eyes when he told you that he did not wish to live? . . .*

I've never felt that way myself towards any woman, but I know that such a feeling must be love.

To think of all those who ever were, back to the start of time, and me, transient as they, flickering out as well into their gray world.

Change of perspective. From a wider view we see the room with the couch where they were sitting just before. The room is empty. The panorama reveals that the armchair and bookcases from scene one and the record player from scene two are all elements of one domestic space, their living room. His thoughts continue to narrate.

Like everything around me, this solid world, which they reared and lived in, is dwindling and dissolving. . .

SCENE FOUR. A record is playing a Spanish civil war song performed by a male chorus. The shot is from slightly further away and higher above than that of the previous musical interval. This song also elicits nostalgia and passion—not for word from a beloved, but for the solidarity

of the collective bonded in struggle, by political ideals. (Like a fanatical lover, such a group will risk life itself in pursuit of their imagined Eden.)

*Death does not matter,
Life is too short;
If a slave I shall be
I'd rather fall.*

*Young blood being shed
With torrents of passion,
Your seed is pure and strong,
Bread of blood and pain.*

*The sun has set, the song has ceased,
Sentry, alert, keep guard
For liberty and a better world
Sentry, alert, keep guard*

SCENE FIVE. A room with a door. Morning light shining through its translucent glass panes. A freestanding coat rack. An overhead lamp. A table for two against a wall. Two chairs perpendicularly arranged. Low shelves along the opposite wall. The table is set: plates, cups, silverware, napkins, coffee, and a bowl of fruit, bread and butter. She. He. Time has passed. (A day, a month, a year?) They wear casual clothing. He butters and passes her bread; she smiles faintly. The only sound comes from the use of dishes and utensils. They do not speak.

The familiarity and nuance of such an occurrence makes this situation ripe for projecting onto. Let us assume it is the morning after. (*Or every morning after.*) The quintessential domestic scene: the couple eating in silence amid the palpable aftermath of disclosure. (*Disclosure rarely feels good beyond a sense of immediate relief.*) The formerly classified is now in the open. Her undissolved feeling for Michael Fury is 'on the table.' Rupture. Psychic exposure. Private tensions between imagined love, remembered love, and present love—active for her, projected by him. A turning point? Change of heart? We all know how delicate love and intimacy are, how emotional intensity illuminates vulnerability, how precious trust is and how easily it is lost.

... Consider triangulation: adultery's aesthetic trademark. Like some vast earth sculpture, rearranging the most fundamental geometry of organized social life—the couple form—from dyad to triad, revamping the contours and infrastructure of modern intimacy itself. (Laura Kipnis, *Against Love*, page 116)

It isn't so much their relationship on the line as his worldview at stake.

(Oh, that sinking feeling of waking up the morning after taking in bad news—of betrayal, disgrace, or a loved one's death. It takes a few seconds to orient consciousness, and then, bam—the shattering force of revelation. Heartsick,

grief, despair. In time, inevitably, we settle down. Acceptance and resolve set in, but the undercurrent is devastating.)

She pours his coffee. Routine gestures. Speechless intimacy. Uneasy harmony. Anxious affection. Domesticity. Comfort. Pact. Habit. No rocking boat here. They have minimal contact, negligible engagement. Safe. Muted.

The contract was like an emotional spell cast over the relationship at the beginning to exempt her from contingency, to pre-empt the inevitable uncertainties of evolving time. (Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation*, page 7)

There we are, hoping that the flimsy social safety nets we've committed ourselves to — monogamy, domesticity, maturity — resolve our anxieties; that 'security' or 'commitment' (or children, or real estate) are functional salves, even if the fetid quantities of apprehension pooled just beneath the floorboards bode a different story. (Kipnis, page 57f)

Is this simply a typical morning spent protecting one another's solitude, or are they both beset with confusion, resignation, and fear? Too many emotions tumbling around to put into words. Immersed in couple grammar, the aesthetics of their relationship demonstrate the complications.

(Words so often fall short when a relationship falters. A friend once cautioned: 'Forget the directness imagined of language, it isn't so much helpful as just another avenue for misconstruances. Discussions alone can't be expected to negotiate the tumultuous sides of those depths.')

History. Love's graveyard. Our gothic pasts. He invents betrayal in her affective prehistory. (The other has magical powers with the capacity to seduce, envelop, and steal. In your mind, he is omnipotent, not you.)

The proprietary sentiment he held dear: deflated. The fiction of fidelity: no longer supportable. Onlyness, primacy, foreverness: fictive.

I know what he's thinking. *I can never compete with history ... with the impassioned Michael Fury... her final vision of him, frozen in forever, haunting. My love is banal in comparison. Our marriage is earthly, requited, daily.*

(And isn't Michael Fury's absolute yearning the type of love we hunger for, which is permanently unattainable once youth and innocence are shed? *Ah, to be dominated by desire.*)

A strange virus seems to have invaded your normally high-functioning immune system, penetrating your defenses, leaving you vulnerable, trembly, strangely flushed. It seems you've contracted a life-threatening case of desire. (The life it threatens is the

one you've been leading, which now seems painfully lacking in a vital ingredient—a lack whose portrait now haunts every waking thought.) (Kipnis, page 7)

Dispirited by the prospect of their parting, Michael Fury made a truly secure relationship—with death. Is this the message that affects our protagonist so? Is this his first realization that desire, love, and death are so intricately connected? And what about matrimony he wonders—the ultimate amulet empowered with the capacity to save their love from dissolution and him from the abyss. His mind's eye surveys utopia vanishing in the distance.

... Contracts, indeed all agreements and connections, are always vulnerable to ... the unconscious and the unknowable future. People can never know in any situation exactly what they are agreeing to because the agreement includes at the very least the unconscious history and desire of the participants and, in that bizarre phrase, whatever the future holds... (Phillips, page 6f)

Remote from one another, they concentrate on drinking their coffees.

The narrative structure of *Everness* suggests time passing, however beginning and ending are debatable given that the film's segments continually loop.

Nevertheless, the breakfast scene conveys finality. This is how life will be: day in day out, coupledness on endless repeat, in all its ambivalent resignation, inhibitions and prohibitions in tow, at times draining and uninspired, but orderly.

This is how life will be: day in day out, coupledness on endless repeat, in all its enrichment and depth, marked by the pleasure and beauty of private routines and familiar rhythm, a harbor for autonomy and togetherness, a sustained and fortifying expression of faith.

Let's begin with the fact that falling in love, in the current intimacy regime, doesn't mean committing to another person, it means committing to certain emotional bargains and trade-offs also, some of which prove more workable than others. It's generally understood that falling in love means committing to commitment... if we weren't so emotionally yoked to the social forms we've inherited that trying to envision different ways of having a love life seems intellectually impossible and even absurd, who knows what other options might present themselves? (Kipnis, page 56)

What kind of love affair is a person having with time, and what kind of object is it for them? Is it, for example, something that

needs filling or something that tends to be killed? What makes us feel there is plenty of it or that it is running out? If we spend so much time planning to use it, what is the risk of leaving things to chance? Entrusting oneself to a person is quite different from entrusting oneself to time. (Phillips, page 8)

Phillips's question warrants repeating, 'If we spend so much time planning to use it, (*Till death do us part?*) what is the risk of leaving things to chance?'

SCENE ONE.

What he is saying is that it's literature that produces readers. That the great texts change the ways in which we read.

That would be the first issue. Then there's an element that's more intrinsic to literature itself, which is how to possibly define tragedy.

Julie Ault, *A word that has the power to change one's life*,
and María Gainza, *The Windmills of Your Mind* were
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exhibited in:

Alejandro Cesarco
Two Films
Murray Guy, New York

Alejandro Cesarco
Three Works
Tanya Leighton, Berlin

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COVER Alejandro Cesarco, *Everness*, 2008,
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