



THE WINDMILLS OF YOUR MIND

by María Gainza

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,—
How long ago I may not know:
But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turn'd so,
Some veil did fall,—I knew it all of yore.
Has this been thus before?

And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our love restore
In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more?

Sudden Light, Dante Gabriel Rossetti

A man in his thirties sits in an armchair and speaks to camera. He analytically and resolutely presents a theory about Tragedy. His attire—white shirt, open cardigan and gray slacks—indicates that he is probably a literary critic or a professor, someone who is well versed in his field. His thick bangs remain intact to one side. His open gaze allows him the ample vision his profession requires. While he ponders his ideas, his hand slowly yet impatiently caresses the armchair. He seems secretly irritated. Like an etymologist with pins, he attempts to capture an elusive definition but something continuously escapes him: his reasoning turns over the same thing like circles within circles.

Cut to a rotating vinyl record. From this spinning record, the needle plays a Brazilian song from the Tropicalism movement. Someone, an affected voice, the voice of an exile, awaits a clue from a letter that does not arrive, she says: '*Maria Bethânia*, please send me a letter.'

Cut to a living room. A woman gripping firmly to her very being sits in front of a window with voile curtains. When the frame opens the camera reveals that by her side is the intellectual that minutes ago exposed the ranges of Tragedy and who now seems lost amongst the windmills of his mind, a prisoner of his own personal hell, engulfed by his own object of study. Something amongst them has broken, something has been revealed, but we will not know what. In voice-over we hear Gabriel Conroy's epiphanic monologue from James Joyce's story 'The Dead.'

Cut to a vinyl record with a little rotating white dove. A Republican song from the Spanish Civil War sounds heavy and lugubriously and, like a Greek chorus, warns the protagonist: 'The sun has set. The music has ceased.'

Cut to an interior room. Sitting at the breakfast table, the man prepares a slice of toast for the woman. The daily routine has reestablished itself, the passions have been appeased. His bangs, however, now fall continuously over his eyes, the foot of a coat hanger barely blocks the door, and on the table a bowl of fruit condenses the intrinsic ambiguity of a still life: an offering that is at the same time a retention. On that impenetrable white table the fruit seems artificial; the imitation suggests, more than ever, a simulacra of reality.

Up close, *Everness* is a clinical analysis of the secret understandings and antipathies that lay hidden beneath our language and that, more than any other external event, produce within us joys or sorrows. Populated by foreign voices, by far away discourses that seem to drown any attempts at a voice of one's own, the film becomes a prison. It is a small cell made up of words that close in on the protagonist.

However, as soon as a reading of the work begins to take shape, another one begins to crumble. Because there is something unattainable in *Everness*. Something that promotes interpretation equally as much as it resists it. And it

is precisely in this confusion where this film produces its best effect; a rich ambivalence that as the story develops adheres to every object, every image, every space.

A doubt extends over the scenes like an evening fog: the man being interviewed seems to speak to a void, the woman never clarifies her relationship with the man, the place where the action occurs, a gray and depersonalized space, could be anywhere, and what exactly has taken place will never be made explicit. But this seems to indicate that *Everness* tells the story of something irrevocable and fatal, something that never happened but that will never stop happening. And it is this uncertainty, this slippery sensation, that evokes the mental mirages of the stories of Adolfo Bioy Casares. *Everness* shares with *The Invention of Morel* an obsession with immortality, and with *The Dream of Heroes* the vain attempt to reshape Destiny, to recover the lost revelation.

From afar, *Everness* is also a broken allegory of the magnificence and puerility of the human condition. It is a quotidian tragedy. There is a hero and a message to be deciphered. It is a domestic structure for a furious work.

The first prerequisite in believing that the fall of our protagonist is genuinely tragic is to convince ourselves that this is an admirable man, a man that matters. A way to achieve this would be to show him doing something noteworthy,

as Fitzgerald did with Dick Diver in *Tender is the Night*. Here, however, it seems that greatness was achieved before the film began. The first scene already establishes him as a superior being, one of those studious types capable of deciphering the world contained in a grain of rice. Like the intellectual that he is, he pontificates his superiority, he glides, not tying himself down to the ground. He is what Barthes calls a ‘helicopter:’ someone that unhinges from the real and remains in the air, in the same place, turning in circles. He has trained himself to think he cannot be wrong. Meanwhile, he starts to foretell the gaping dualisms of a mind replete with incongruities.

Immersed in a relationship, this man, this thinking machine, intensely contemplates the meaning of his life. The sudden revelation of a truth, that step that goes from innocence to knowledge, where certitudes collapse—has begun. But his apartment is not in Dublin; the snow of Joyce’s original text is, in this case, rain that curiously cannot be seen through the window nor heard beating against the sidewalk; and the hand the man searches for is that of a young woman, who tediously looks out the window towards a world that is less tense, like Percy, the cat shaped like a Chinese jar in the marvelous portrait of conjugal decadence by David Hockney. These displacements insinuate that the epiphany will never be fully manifested.

The woman inspires tenderness in him, but above all else, he feels dominance over her. This quality does not make

him a very likable hero. He is an example of a man whose internal life struggles to adjust to that of the outside world. It is an oppressive scene. It suggests that even in the most harmonious of couples there is a double life: a life together, which is what can be observed in any home next door, and underneath this, a different one, an intense one, the real life that prints its shadow on faces and gives character to voices. Relations are the tragic necessity of human life, and each ego spends half of the time yearning for them, and the other half trying to escape them.

Everness is a tragedy intertwined with pleasure, to a luxurious pleasure in one’s own suffering, in self-provoking pain. In this sense, the hero is selfish and self-centered. The images he creates are false. However, and in spite of being sentimental, his love is not weak. It is powerful and firmly planted in his mind. Even still, this tremendous spirit seems tied to an infantile emotional state. He does not know himself and knows his object of love even less. His greatness goes hand in hand with his puerility.

The hero’s descent is underlined by the final attempt to resume his previous routines. But he shall pay, not with his life as in classic tragedies, but with an emotional and intellectual paralysis that begins to encircle him. It so happens that there is a visible immobility, or rather, a constant circling motion—the records, the thoughts, the narration—which may well be another form of not moving

forward. This is how *Everness* insinuates a purgatory of the mind, of madness even.

Like King Lear, the protagonist sets up an interlude in which he positions himself as the central character. From this place he casts expressions of love and resignation towards his tormented heart. He is childlike, foolish, but very human. Profoundly comic and profoundly pathetic. It is a tragedy that needs only an infinitesimal movement for it to reveal a range of comedy. Sometimes an artist can achieve a transitional effect between tears and laughter. Chekhov does this, especially in his plays. Comedy and tragedy both relay ideas of incompatibility and mixing them results in new incongruities.

It may appear strange to search for elements of comedy in a film of such a dense and somber atmosphere, whose reading of human destiny is so blatantly tragic. In spite of this, *Everness* is at times humorous. It is not trivial but solemnly absurd: all the topics of love are here, exposed without irony, as if the characters consciously walk along the border of parody knowing that on the other side an abyss of seriousness awaits. A way of acknowledging that human beings deserve our full admiration and compassion and that, as Joseph Conrad says, 'He is not insensible who pays them the undemonstrative tribute of a sigh which is not a sob, and of a smile which is not a grin.'

María Gainza, *The Windmills of Your Mind*, and Julie Ault, *A word that has the power to change one's life* were commissioned on the occasion of *Everness* being 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, still from a black and white 16mm film transferred to dvd

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