

Fragments of Love

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It had seemed like a dream with Susana and Rodrigo in it, a dream where a never-ending scene of longing and loss was recreated from one individual to another. A vision of bumblebees emitting sounds as “the dark radio” visualized by Alejandra Pizarnik, of cacophonous ruins and swans mourning, staring in the mirror.

We lived in a city called Évora (Portugal). Our place was comfortable. We were in a room saturated with idle kites. After a long night (the night is ovary for absence), we had wakened together for the ceremony of language. Still in bed we conversed about Manoel De Oliveira and Theo Angelopoulos as if drinking each other’s tears. The words were like sad dancers before an altar of pink marble. The existence appeared like a floating painting. A fraction of all the desires. Disquiet as Olga Orozco and Fernando Pessoa thought. Sentinels birds everywhere, belching after swallowing a shadow, a bullet.

Fragmentos de amor (Fragments of Love) is a film adaptation of the novel “Fragmentos de amor furtivo” (1998) by Héctor Abad Faciolince and directed by Fernando Vallejo, which portrays the relationship between Susana (a swimming teacher and sculptor who is about getting married) and Rodrigo (a piano tuner and in the past a well-known composer who is close to Susana’s boyfriend), characters whose natures/temperaments are seemingly opposite: she is loquacious and sensual while he is introverted and reluctant. However, they share “impressions of a shipwreck”, that watermarks love experiences left on their identities.



Although *Fragmentos de amor* deals with typical themes in relatively predictable ways, we aren't necessarily presented with mere reductionist discourses of desire, frustration, nostalgia, disintegration of the self, paranoia and obsessive jealousy. Its imaginative treatment of the above subjects is attractive. Its style isn't introspective or transcendent. Its tone isn't meditative. There's no dead time in it, the movie isn't prosaic either. It benefits from realistic and fictional devices which are used with a rare inventiveness and moderate dynamism.

I saw Susana and Rodrigo's doubles everywhere - compelling stories of our lives. Thought to myself: Mourners are we, as Mohammad Rasoulof knew, mourners walking by "the white meadows". I recited to you Henri-Frédéric Amiel's lines "Melancholy is at the bottom of everything, just as at the end of all rivers is the sea. Can it be otherwise in a world where nothing lasts, where all that we have loved or shall love must die? Is death, then, the secret of life? The gloom of an eternal mourning enwraps, more or less closely, every serious and thoughtful soul, as night enwraps the universe."

The film indulges in an exploration of perplexing emotions and sees love as a mechanism of subjective redemption in the face of the violence and triviality. That makes room for visual drama and justifies the structural axes of the narrative. Both "psychological devices" and "elements of magic realism" give form to that drama. Beyond the emblematic aspects of a romantic drama or unjustified plain eroticism which abounds in the commercial mainstream, the movie focuses on love as a manifestation of psychic life which is essentially fragmentary and turbulent. Susana and Rodrigo embrace the utopia of wholeness by trying to find "pieces missing from themselves". They try to recreate the lost world though what seemed like a therapeutic relationship.

You got up earlier than me. We were about to travel to Porto and had to pack our bags. Before packing, you started to shave and I looked at the fireplace where some calendars were burning. I said to you: dear, it seems to me that time wasted came back to us like an extravagant balloon, but the present is full of movements of mind, isolated pleasures and things more exemplary than lethargy. To which, you added: the men's mind is but a patch of flowers, nectar concentration tasted with every answer they struggle for. Everybody lives in the drift of the world. You and I are same, allegory of non-finite behind the sacrificed bodies.

It would be naive simplification to think that Rodrigo has been the only one hit by the fragmentation of the love (since he lost his previous girlfriend and it made him powerless and mournful, which was why Susana wanted to help him heal). As we delve into the lives of these characters and reflect on their exchanges, we realize that the two of them are dealing with their emotive dismemberments and have accumulated parts of an idealized anatomy (symbols of what they were or had) in order to make the sense of self



complete and stable. We can observe that there are two mechanisms to process the meaning of love here : the openness and closure to new flows. Susana was open to accept, if not search for more objects of love (she thought of love stories as if they were elements of a puzzle) while Rodrigo showed resistance to build new relationships since he was unable to trust other women and thought of completeness as impossible to achieve. She sought more fragments (illusory integration). He avoided being more fragmented (illusory self-preservation).

Following this first meditation on psychological realism, I got up and began to choose the dress I would wear. You were checking your email. Silence between us was a little garland. Once I took shower, you made some aromatic tea and while drinking it, we walked to the door attracted by the voice of one of our neighbors (a woman called Dominique who was 76 years and who apart from having been the well-known owner of a flower shop, used to write poetry and design furniture). We had heard Dominique's voice once or twice before, but on that day she was singing something we found touching (it was a poem about the loss she was writing to her closest friend, who had undergone a surgical amputation of his legs). As we listened to her trembling voice, you said to me " the world is full of migratory birds, but we stay mute after bathing in waters deeper than those we see by desires". To which I replied "The tongue is oldest, darkest womb we have never really reached. It is not our home nor is it an island where we go away from our wars with nonbeing".

In the film, the element of grace dictates narration. It also shapes the primary method of healing for the characters to recover from their own losses. At first, it seems to be Susana who plays the role of therapist. Like Sherezada from "Las Mil y una noches" (1000 Arabian Nights)] Susana tells Rodrigo stories of her romanticized past night after night in order to cure him. However, the situation is paradoxical since Susana thinks that she will inspire Rodrigo by her hyperbolic stimulus and help him catapult his desire, but the two of them have known subjective fragmentation and end up facing prolonged mourning.

Susana has never loved entirely, but secretly collected, like a veritable philatelist, "stamps" of love. In fact, the story begins with the scene where Susana is making a face-mask of Rodrigo which is completed by the end of the film. The masks Susana makes of her lovers symbolize fragments of a big loving for "self" – a love that is left incomplete as shadows of a lost totality - a pillar of magic realism. If we reflect on every chapter Susana narrates for Rodrigo, we readily see the deepening of his feelings for her, becoming possessive to the point of embracing her as the missing piece.

Since we kept talking about that elegy by Dominique, we lost the track of time and all of a sudden we realized we lost our train to Porto (we had been planned that trip for too long in order to get our book finished there while spending some time at ship-like libraries people used to cross the city). Pain and pleasure eat into our systems as ghosts of desire, so do dreams - fat worms-

You decided you would go by car. The autumn was a reward, like an old coin. You began to talk about Vincent Van Gogh and I replied to you with commotion and longing. I realized that a butterfly, as exuberant as silence, was sipping my tea (fragrant pool of death).



Susana and Rodrigo had been reconstructing “past existences”, conserving their dead selves deep inside. However, Archetypal Love is elusive and we all live and die by those we love (fragments). The acts of imaginal total possession dramatically compound eros with thanatos (theory/myth). In making and preserving the masks of her lovers, Susana tries to cure herself by keeping them ambiguously alive and dead.

Before leaving for Porto, We stared at some pictures of ourselves and uttered in unison “Crying is a trap, it is a concrete cage. We keep spinning around moments of inertia.” Then, you quoted Henry Wadsworth Longfellow “our lives are incomplete, but in the dark unknown, perfect their circles seem”. I thought of Pizarnik when she wrote about strangulation of stars.

“... ”

cuatro números ríen en volteretas desabridas

Muere uno

Nace uno

Y el tiempo estranguló mi estrella

Sones de nenúfares ardientes

Desconectan mis futuras sombras

Un vaho desconcertante rellena

Mi soleado rincón

“... ”

Were Susana’s sexual intercoursés banal transfigurations of love, strangulations of love? We asked ourselves. Pizarnik’s voice made us tremble again with her poem “Yo soy”

“mis alas?

dos pétalos podridos

mi razón?

copítas de vino agrio

mi vida?

vacío bien pensado

mi cuerpo?

un tajo en la silla



*mi vaivén?
un gong infantil*

*mi rostro?
un cero disimulado*

*mis ojos?
ah! trozos de infinito”*



Interestingly, love is not presented in the film as a mere oneiric construct, but as an orgasmic residue of the dynamic tension between regimes of pleasure and reality. Every time we symbolically kill a lover, we encode the virtual motion of such constructs (objects/subjects of desire). Such a code has two sides - an ideal of completeness and an incomplete realization of desire. Susana sees her lovers as vehicles for learning and she is made of those fragments of life/experience whose permanence she intends to capture through museumification of their coded identities, of which the masks are perfect metaphors.

While making the mask and after curing it, Susana tried to make Rodrigo feel that he was its ideal of totality, but by entering the sanctuary-room where she preserved her dead ones Susana actually suggests that he was out of her life. He tried to travel in order to escape himself, but while being on the road to the airport, he realized that fragments were alive inside him and cried silently. Susana was looking at the mask with painfully contemplative gesture when the news of loss arrived. She kissed Rodrigo's mask while sobbing.

Then, I saw us in the car, you were driving and had new glasses. It began to rain softly and I kissed you on your right hand. On the way to Porto, we saw that another butterfly was traveling with us. I was like drawing on the windows of the car. You was wearing a scarf I knitted for you on the occasion of your birthday. I started to say: dear, the soul betrays itself, after hibernating years, oozes like any ill organ. Lips are tired nurses.

In a way, we were Susana and Rodrigo's doubles too. Doubles as would think Antonin Artaud would think. Bees exploring decision points. We kept meditating on love that it depends on drifts and



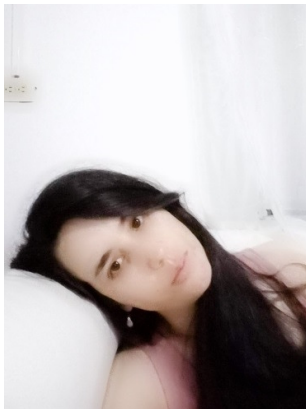
trajectories of self . Love is a circular evasion, an iceberg disintegrating. Pure erosion. Flow of small objects (hollows of sentiment). "A mirage but permanent" to borrow from John Ashbery.

Flowers' lax completeness reminded us of syllables lost in the being.. We said in unison: we mistake the total movement of the existent for the action of soul. You stopped driving and held my hand to say: men are always blind before sea, they keep looking for some definitions, looking for their lives. Their vessels are poor. Then, I told you: We are dreaming dear, we are drawing back to back. Uncertainty makes us wake up together to fragile, partial things, so let us form a cage for us living in need of the world. I kissed you tenderly on your cheek.

It continues to seem like a dream. Clayey soil everywhere, yet statues, toys that break. Flies around the pie. We reached Porto. We were in our hotel. I found myself exhausted. You had to go out to pick up dinner. But when you called me over phone to ask me what did I prefer to eat, I was unable to speak with you. I had lost my voice. You came back to our hotel in a rush. Fish eating into my eyes. The sensation was tolerable as the image of a river with its new flows...like an interrupted song...a clock suspended...

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Cristina Sánchez López is a bilingual poet from Colombia. Her maiden poetry book (with Aryanil Mukherjee) *Conversation about Withering* was released during the Covid-19 pandemic (Moria, USA 2020). Her poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines, namely *La Jiribilla*, *Diario Gráfico de Xalapa* (Veracruz, Mexico), *Urcunina* literary magazines (Colombia), *Los Escribas* (Mexico), *The MUD Proposal*, *Kabisammelan* (India) and *Kaurab* (Kolkata, India). Anthology appearances include *A Mar Abierto* (To Open Sea, SEPIA Ediciones, Mexico, 2014) and latin american poetry anthology *Esta ternura y estas manos libres* (This tenderness and these free hands, Editorial Touchstone, Colombia, 2015).

