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ECK 281 -- Response Paper 1

October 5, 2021

In Between: Life, Death, and Purgatory as Divides in Urban and Rural Life

The true apex of the plotline in the film “Amador” begins almost 40 minutes in, as hard-working, recently pregnant, distressed Marcela strolls into Amador’s plainly colored, drab room, peering over her shoulder at him with a level of suggested intrigue that provokes worry. Her eyes widen, jaw drops ever so slightly, and chest heaves in a cluster of emotions: panic, fear, sadness, frustration, and presumably love seem to fill her body as a puzzle piece is shown resting comfortably in the now dead man’s paradoxically erected hand. Amador’s mouth is seen to be wide open and his head is resting suitably on his pillow in the same frame that Marcela stays gazing at him. Marcela’s expressions can be clearly read as the daunting overwhelm of death transforms her preexisting challenging life into an almost hellish state. Amador’s reflection in the mirror, however, remains blurry and ambiguous — indicative of some state of being between life and death.

This signifies their transition into a shared experience in a purgatorial ontological space; the crucifix-resembling puzzle piece lightly clasped together by the weak, lifeless fingers of Amador instigates a furthered cycle in the unsightly imagery, soul-wrenching mental anguish, and perverted reality made true by purgatory — proving the Catholic-centric, religious imagery omnipresent in this new chapter of not life, not death, but the cramped vessel in between.

Cut immediately to a pale, perspiring Marcela stomping ferociously along deserted land after deserting the man for whom she vowed to care, but the only sounds to be heard are of her heavy, shallow breathing and rapid, troubled footsteps intermixed with an overwhelming,

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anxiety-provoking freight train. We can almost see her head spinning through frantic cinematography with questions of ethical matters, of repentance to the God she deifies, but also a somewhat eviler plan forming and invoking a true dissociation. She nags at her throat with desperation to quench her thirst and feel some new sense of comfort, as the camera closes in solely on her tearful face which seems to dart around the screen in a frantic manner. It is this scene that aptly portrays the desperation built into her urban immigrant life of pervasive economic anxiety to risk-taking and desperate upheaval that becomes a necessity; she becomes more absolutely 'stuck' than ever before, just as one feels in this purgatory-like space where one can only suffer waiting for their oft-called 'sweet release' of life or death.

Roughly four minutes later, another dramatic cut shows us the same frame of Amador's mysterious, logic-defying hand as before as some form of magic maintains its soft but structurally-sound position, proving bizarre, mystical forces at work. Marcela's facial expressions now feel heavy with notes of guilt, sympathy, and depression, as she sets the scene that will remain stagnant: with a light, angelic-like touch she switches the TV on, illuminating the room as if someone would be soaking in its entertainment, respectfully drapes Amador's sheets over his deceased body, though she refuses to outwardly accept his death, and gingerly takes the puzzle piece which lies as the bridge between her lively fingers and his fingers which lack all life. She views the outside world by studying Yolanda's phone number, aggressively written, and standard portrait picture and begins meditating on the puzzle piece, feeling entirely disconnected from this outward reality. Everything outside in this urban life understandably continues while time and space become irrelevant inside Amador's apartment and inside

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Marcela's nightmare from which she feels she cannot awaken. The apartment is likened to a rural space with its contents immune to the evolving, busy lifestyle of the 'city' and due to its newfound isolating identity.

We begin to understand the monotony of this purgatory as the timeline repeats itself. Within about seven minutes in the film, Marcela seems forced to return for the third time to this heavenish-hellish place where she is forced to see death but is salvaged by pay: truly a sign of corrosive capitalistic trends seeping into her non-life. Though the unspoken, and thus bizarre vacuum of death fills the apartment, the objects in the room stay the same, and Marcela paradoxically livens the room seemingly in an effort to counteract the tone of death. All this does, however, is further an in-between: a purgatory environment for the two of them. Vivacious flowers surround Amador but are paired with synthetic scented spray, i.e. a fake sense of life, in an attempt to fill the lungs of these two beings wedged between Amador's literal experience of the afterlife and Marcela's more metaphorical situation of the same. When Yolanda calls, the sonorous ringing of the phone robs all the energy in the apartment, turning Marcela pale and clammy seemingly without her volition. Their conversation is chock-full of excruciating pain exuding from Marcela's forced lies, the crucifix puzzle piece presumably taunting her conscience. Almost as if Amador, himself, is alive and behind the camera in his room, he sees Marcela's facial expressions become rigid and tight, emotion exploding from her body as she stumbles, leaning on the counter as if she is completely drained and defeated. Amador, his death, and her dire need for money pigeonholes Marcela into a new life lacking any illusion of freedom. These scenes exemplify rather deeply the interconnectedness of a personal feeling of

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living within purgatory and the life of Marcela, the epitome of a low socioeconomic immigrant forced into an unrecognizable and unwanted purgatory. This is compared to life, such as presented by Yolanda, fruitful and opportunistic to some degree, and even the sweet release of death presented by Amador.

Consistent in these repetitive scenes and the rest of the film is the powerful comparison of the poverty-ridden urban life depleting one's sense of self in a purgatory-like state with the privilege of an urban-middle-class, fulfilled life and even more subtly with that of the comfortable, familiar rural life. The almost romantic ubiquitousness and simplicity shown of death as an alternative to a living hell highlight the atrocious, inhumane state in which Marcela dwells.

(Post-Writing Disclaimer: I decided to undertake this niche view of this film due to the fact that the scenes themselves do not depict an outward, obvious image of the analysis I above described, but rather I did so because it posed a challenge — I believe that this theme of purgatory in addition to generally the greater significance of life and death among this geographical, economic, social, and political divide we discuss are ideas that beautifully illustrate this ongoing conflict. Essentially, I understand that my piece may not in its entirety reflect the prompt/examples provided, but I hope and wish for it to be understood as a strong stance for a crucial metaphor to this course and thus represented above the way it should be for this assignment.)