

## The Sun Ariseth and the Sun Goeth Down

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The jolt caused by loss often absorbs the desire to uproot the familiar and persistent from the limbo of loss whose uniqueness is threatened by the routine of “there is no new thing under the sun.” One then endeavors to envelope the absolute void in a drift which is larger than words, to drive the shock within and beyond the ability to contain, digest, mediate, to reduce comprehension to a pursuable flicker which an inexplicable urge nonetheless strives to leave unobtainable.

Ben Hagari’s film INVERT, which I wish to regard as the sweetish face of horror and the stupor of loss, generates a binary structure, antithetical to the aforesaid abounding absence. It is a film which decisively formulates being and absence, the illuminated and the dark, the chattering and the silent, as if sorrow had a method, and mourning – a structure.

The reversal in the film is elastically stretched over the existent, leaving little leeway to chance and nuance. It is the result of mathematical optical control which gives rise to the prosaic as a hermetic master plan, and to sentiment as a product of a carefully worked out undertaking.

The inverted world, in which every reality is a trace of fiction, establishes a universe of optical illusion, perceptual suspicion, and mental disorientation. The shadow glitters in its radiance, dullness gleams, light smolders in the darkness.

Since the procedure by which the visible is created is a central image in the film, constant movement is built-up on the axis of relativity and relation to the origin. The house’s stoic tranquility is the antipode of the optical whirlpool and excessive perceptual activity underlying the

uncontrollable need to decipher the origin while succumbing to its visible inversion.

A position of constant distance is thus created, laying out rigid coordinates of illusion and alienation, a concurrent settling and exile in the realms of experience, orientation, and comprehension. It is also an efficient means to increase, gradually, the yearning for a world where order is reinstated.

The plot is simple and clear. The film’s protagonist (the artist himself) teaches a caged parrot (who remains silent, in defiance of the anticipated imitative chatter) how to say words, which are uttered backwards. With the simple plot in the background, form – being the film’s definitive, sweeping element, to begin with – stands out.

The formalism scorches the content, the thematics, the ability to establish meanings and interpretations; it may well serve as a plausible surface for the instruction of silence. As a juggling formal spectacle, the film is suspect, if only momentarily, of a desperate attempt to ward off conventional talk, the well-honed device of exegesis as a motivation and a surplus byproduct of the artwork. INVERT, with the monumental labor involved in it and the gap between the speaker and the caged addressee, is the reflection of privacy, of non-communicative singularity.

Via script decisions, primarily aesthetic ones, the film hinders all identification aids; it sterilizes the protagonist’s presence as a subject, and the plot as a realm of a scream, of first person speech, of a desperate last attempt to ask: “Where are you?”.

The sweeping formalism suspends the emotional effect. The character in the film is deprived of the virtues of a self-portrait, i.e. the singularity and the

speaker’s position charged with “selfness.” He is transformed into an archetypical figure of a “man,” into a painted hollow gaze, into a marionette-like existence which paradoxically transforms the I into a representation of I, and the self, present in its own person right before the camera – into a distant, metaphorical echo of selfhood.

This is the price of alienation established by the makeup, the saccharine – sweet design, the theatricality, the drawn pupils (animating a living character), the intonation and the repetition, the sense of excess labor substituting for an illusion of a concrete space, the radicalization of objecthood substituting for the atmosphere of a place that has accumulated a duration of life.

The sterilization of the emotional and sentimental effect in the film is a significant element, to my mind, and a pivotal surface on which to anchor the utter reversal. After viewing, the work is revealed as the impervious face of a great emotion.

Within this inverse universe, two palindromic Hebrew words survive the distortion of the linguistic norm, and do not yield to the authority of reversal: sun (*shemesh*, שמש) and mom (*ima*, אמא).

According to the same backward logic, everything missing from the film exists in it as a grand entity, and everything present in it marks the infinite depth of the absence – a tautology of sorrow, a pedagogy of loss, a proof of stupefaction.

The film’s protagonist observes the painting of a woman hung on the wall, and utters the Hebrew word for mom (*ima*) twice. In order to present and teach the word nail or peg (*masmer – remsam*, in reverse), he stretches his hand out to the painting and takes it off the wall. It is hard to describe the

intensity of cessation, the primordial depths of absence generated by this filmic moment. All the joy of creation and glamor of the virtuoso work in which the film is imbued implode into the artist’s attempt to teach silence (the mute parrot) how to mumble the word mom for him like an echo. This is where the film’s inversion of meaning occurs – all the humor, the rhetoric of grace, and the saccharine sweet colorfulness blacken: the didactic procedure of language instruction teaches that which cannot be taught – a mother’s absence.

If one surrenders to the reversal mechanism, not only as the work’s procedure, but also as an indication of the rules of the universe of the film as a whole, then the film’s beginning is found at its end. Thus, the dedication “To my mother, Shula Hagari” concluding the film in the margins, ought to be regarded as a prelude, a motto, as initial information into which the entire film is channeled and in whose arms it rests. Within that command to flip and turn, the mother’s presence, both as a word (*ima*) and in the specific naming and ascription (*imi*, my mother), fuses the biographical into the universal, enabling one to construe the entire film as an elegy for the mother’s death. The protagonist gets out of bed, draws the curtain, and realizes that the sun had risen, or – in the film’s dialect – that the world has gone dark.