

**ALL DESIRE
WANTS
ETERNITY**

All Desire Wants Eternity

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It's nearing the end of summer, the busiest summer I can remember having, one in which I've been gone more than I've been at home, with one deadline after another. It's not that it hasn't been good, but I'd originally thought I'd stay in one place, work at a relaxed pace on my novel, go swimming, take walks, sit outside to read.

I can't help but take stock. The year began with my mother entering hospice, and me taking care of her in a remote part of the Catskill mountains in New York. Since that time, I've been going over the experience in my mind, going over her death, her dying. It's a strange combination, to have lost someone you love, to be grieving, and busy at the same time. Maybe I've said yes to everything on purpose, to not be too alone with what happened.

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The other night, while my husband Amar was in the kitchen making dinner, I watched a film. I watched it with openness, and then absorption. The hills outside my bedroom window faded, the lights from the surrounding houses dimming in my consciousness. On screen, the walking, the crunching of the snow underfoot, the music that begins ominously, but becomes beautiful as the singing comes in, the howling of the wind, and the snow swirling around in the air became more vivid than my own surroundings.

Annik Leroy's *In der Dämmerstunde – Berlin* (1980) is not just a passage to or through that city; it is a passage through the mind and through history. We are out in the elements, and then we are thinking. It is snowing heavily, and then the snow is gone. A child shrieks, sounding a little violent. They calm and then we hear the same shriek again. Because the film was made in 1979-80, the child is probably about the same age as me. There is a heaviness, a foreboding sense of time. It is the past coming through to that very particular present.

The next day I watched the film again. It was daytime and I was alone. I waited for the music to enter the film. And the sound of the crunching snow. I didn't know if the melancholy I felt when I watched *In der Dämmerstunde – Berlin* was mine or Leroy's, or if they were mixing.

I kept watching the movie. I watched it in the evening, the morning, in the heat of the afternoon. I took my laptop outside to the shaded courtyard. Again, I waited for the sounds I liked: the child, the music, the singing, the train, the howling of the wind, the voiceover in French. The voice lulled me. I waited for the direct gaze of the filmmaker. Annik Leroy looks at the camera longer than I thought she would. In the darkness of a café, it is only the smoke from her cigarette that moves.

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On another morning, I watched another film. Amar was behind our house on the hillside, which he is terracing, where he is planting fruit trees, tending to the sage and succulents that grow there, and the huge prickly pear cacti that have taken over right where our property meets our neighbor's. Because of the marine layer that morning, the hill was enveloped in fog, but the sun was just starting to break through. I went into the night of Jeanne Liotta's *Observando el cielo* (2007), the many nights of that film, which course across the screen. Its dark, heavenly skies, its jagged, broken movements, the tapping of some "insect" (for that's what the film's score sometimes sounds like to me). How strange the world is, the universe, yet so many of us live normally, or feel that we should. Watching *Observando el cielo*, it feels like a border has been broken

and all is streaming—the spirits of the sky, the cosmos, it is all streaming into us, emptying into our houses. We are not living normally after all.

I began to watch this film repeatedly too. One afternoon, tired from having stayed up late the night before, I fell asleep on the couch while watching it, but could hear the soundtrack as I drifted off. In my half-conscious state, I saw shapes—tall, thin, hard mountains—formed through sound. I heard a crunching that wasn't unlike the crunching of snow.

When I woke up, I thought of Jorge Luis Borges' "Delia Elena San Marco," that very short, deceptively simple story about death, the soul, and saying farewell: "From the sidewalk on the other side of the street I turned and looked back; you had turned, and you waved good-bye. A river of vehicles and people ran between us; it was five o'clock on no particular afternoon. How was I to know that that river was the sad Acheron, which no one may cross twice?" I was thinking of my mother, of course, of all the farewells we said to each other, and then the final one, there in that harsh winter in the Catskills. Reality has always hit me hardest upon waking because that is when I remember, acutely, what the reality is, when I remember that someone has gone, or that something has been lost or is changing.

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I watched each film once more. I wrote down in my notebook: "*In der Dämmerstunde – Berlin* is a kind of leave-taking too, not unlike Borges' story, while *Observando el cielo* is a barrier broken, a joining. For me, this is where the two films meet, in that 'river' of time."

I was sad, but finally I was having the kind of summer I'd imagined, in which I relaxed into something. I relaxed into two films.