

To swim in milk – *The Golden Gate*

Movie Chronicles

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There are destinations you become obsessed with, that give you nightmares and to which you would swim even at the risk of drowning. There are journeys you must take, because otherwise you would never feel complete. There are seas which divide two worlds, two histories, two continents. The same iniquities, however, pollute both shores. Winners on one shore will be winners on the other shore as well; losers will be losers here and on the other side as well. **The Golden Door** tells us precisely about these journeys that take you to *the other side*, but which actually take you nowhere.

The Golden Door re-enacts the experience of emigration from the point of view of the Italian emigrants who, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, left Europe in great numbers, spellbound by the promise of the American dream. In **The Golden Door**, just like in fairytales, heroes leave the old, known world to venture into the new, unknown world, reminiscent of the most pure and childlike fantasies. A risk with no guarantee of success and a bet which Crialese's immigrants take upon themselves, mesmerized by the potential gain.

Salvatore and his family leave for America from a deserted village in Sicily. They come from a bloodline that has been working the same land for entire generations, being one with nature and surrounded by spiritual beings. The dry monotony of their ordinary life is interrupted by fables about the New World, where money grows on trees and carrots are gigantic. In order to leave for America, Salvatore and his family are forced to sell absolutely everything they own: the land, the house and the animals. In order to become citizens of the New World, they must die a little and be born again while letting go of the outdated customs and superstitions of their native lands. They must have strong bodies, healthy minds, learn how to obey and pledge

loyalty to the adoptive motherland if they ever want to pass through the Golden Gate. Just like in fairytales they undergo all the tests with the help of a mysterious character, the British woman whom they meet on board of the ship that will take them to the United States. At the end of the four-week metamorphosis, the final test awaits our heroes.

The quarantine time on Ellis Island is one of the most horrid re-enactments of historical events that I should live to see. No, it's not about any carnage, but instead, about a more refined stage of human cruelty. On Ellis Island people are measured: physically, intellectually and spiritually. On Ellis Island, the bed of Proustes decides who stays and who goes. In the New World there's no room for the deaf-mutes, for the elderly or the mentally challenged. Somehow, even single women are out of the running, unless there's an American man who, keen to turn them into serious housewives, is waiting for them on the other side. To the contrary, they could always turn into scarlet women, couldn't they?

On Ellis Island people are numbered like animals. Disinfected like animals. Trained like animals. Sorted like animals. They would probably reach the values of the American land only if and after they pass through Ellis Island. Because here, instead of trees with money, the immigrants will find shrubs with thorns that severely graze human dignity. Here is where the fairy tale takes an unpleasant turn, where everything is not in its right place, where tests don't bring the hero the much dreamt magic land and where families don't live happily ever after.

The story is as deeply connected to the history of Italian immigrants as its style is lyrically enriched, however, without leaving traces of sentimentalism or emotional discourse. From surrealistic visions (see the scene where Salvatore swims in the milk river) to vapid realities, Crialesse depicts images of a magical realism that visually stimulates the viewer. Without alienating himself from the reality of the experience he re-enacts, Crialesse doesn't eschew from using contrasts and he artfully juggles with the story's equilibrium. He never lets his characters slip into any extremes. He keeps them alive, warm and half the distance between heroes and antiheroes. He believes in their ambitions, but at the same time he regards them with cynicism. In one second he caresses their faces with his camera lens whereas in the very next one, he slaps them.

There are destinations you become obsessed with and sometimes, after you swam to them, you drown. There are journeys you must take so you'd feel complete, but what should you do if at the end of it all you just feel hollower than ever?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DD9xNvlnEk&feature=player_embedded

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