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Endless Poetry

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Endless Poetry

Abstract

This is a film review of *Endless Poetry* (2017), directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky.

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It can be easy to overlook how important a role autobiography plays in the films of Alejandro Jodorowsky, as even his more surreal works like *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain* are centered on his own spiritual journey (he in fact wanted to play the lead in *El Topo* because he wanted to make El Topo's spiritual journey into his own). However, with the release of *Endless Poetry*, its predecessor *The Dance of Reality* and his recently translated autobiographical novel *Where the Bird Sings Best* (which focuses on Jodorowsky's ancestors and ends with the author's own birth), it is starting to become clear just how much Jodorowsky's own life has been the driving force behind his art.

Endless Poetry (Poesia Sin Fin) is the second part of a planned five part series of films chronicling Jodorowsky's own life, though with considerable artistic liberties. While it is by far his most restrained work, *Endless Poetry* is still replete with Jodorowsky's penchant for surreal imagery, including his usual parade of dwarves and amputees as well as homages to the circus and enough symbolic imagery to fill a book. One of the few downfalls of *Endless Poetry* and *The Dance of Reality* is that the symbolism is often so specific to Jodorowsky's own past as to be impenetrable without the director's commentary. Take the role of his mother for example, played by Pamela Flores, who sings all of her lines because, as Jodorowsky informed us in an interview some years ago, his real mother had always dreamed of being an opera singer and this was his way of making her dream come true. Without this information, having just one character sing all of her lines can come off only as a pretentious indulgence on the director's part (which perhaps it still is anyway).

However, these frustrations are at worst only a minor distraction from what is otherwise a breathless exploration of the birth of an artist and the deep spiritual desire to create. Where *The Dance of Reality* focused on Jodorowsky's childhood, *Endless Poetry* focuses on him first as a

teenager (Jeremias Herskovits) and then as a young man (Alejandro's own son Adan Jodorowsky) in Santiago, Chile, following his momentous decision to abandon his father's wishes for him to become a doctor and pursue poetry instead. His father Jaime (played by another of Jodorowsky's sons, Brontis) is a stern and unloving man who clings to archaic notions of masculinity ("men do not touch each other," he tells his son at one point), who thinks poetry will turn his son into a "faggot." After being forced to lie about his career plans at a family gathering, Alejandro, in a fit of rage, chops down a beloved tree in the backyard and storms out, disowning his family. However, one of his cousins, impressed by Alejandro's rebellion, takes him to an artist colony in the city where he is assured he will be accepted.

He indeed finds a home amongst the myriad artists there, which includes a ballerina who is always in costume and walks everywhere *en pointe*, a "polypainter" who paints several canvases at once by attacking them with brush, bucket and body, and a luchador who inexplicably always carries a Japanese woman on his shoulders (dedicated fans of Jodorowsky's work will no doubt see a parallel to the famous image from *El Topo* of a man with no arms carrying a man with no legs on his back). Here Jodorowsky abandons himself to art and, in search of a muse, meets the bombastic poetess Stella (played, significantly, by the same actress who plays Jodorowsky's mother), who becomes his first love and inspiration for his work. Later he meets another aspiring poet, Enrique Lihn (Leandro Taub) and one of the film's most memorable sequences involves the two poets' determination to walk across the entirety of Santiago in a straight line, which requires them to walk over vehicles, through houses and onto private property.

Endless Poetry is infused with such inspiring moments and is less a structured narrative than an exploration of the creative spirit, and for Jodorowsky the creative spirit is truly a spiritual

act. Religion and spirituality have always played a significant role in Jodorowsky's work and here too Jodorowsky's unconventional spirituality is on display, including his deep belief in tarot and his blasphemous treatment of more conventional religion. The film's spirituality can perhaps best be summed up in the film's most memorable line: after Alejandro abandoned his family and abandoned himself to poetry, he declares to his newfound artist friends, "I have sold my devil to the soul!"

Alejandro himself appears throughout the film to offer guidance and advice to the young representation of himself, including a scene at the end in which Jodorowsky takes the chance to speak to his dead father one last time. Jodorowsky, now eighty-eight years old, still makes films with a passion and vitality few artists of any age can match. In the documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune*, about his failed attempt to adapt Frank Herbert's novel in the late seventies, Jodorowsky boldly declares his intention to live to a hundred and fifty. I wish him all those years and not just that he sees his autobiographical quintet to completion but that they do not prove to be the end of Jodorowsky's own biography as well.