



josé duarte

*'I don't know how to begin 'cause the story is
so old'* Norah Jones

1. *New York by Night I*

'How do you say goodbye to someone you can't imagine living without?' asks Elizabeth (Norah Jones) in voice-over before leaving the café in New York, run by Jeremy (Jude Law), to start her journey from east to west, throughout the American landscape. This is the basic plot of *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), the first full-length film in English directed by Wong Kar-wai, also known for his other films like *Chungking Express* (1994), *In the Mood for Love* (2000) or *2046* (2004).

My Blueberry Nights is the story of a girl who goes soul-searching after discovering her boyfriend has left her for another woman. As the movie opens we are presented with an image of trains running back and forth, like the lives of the protagonists, particularly Elizabeth who will be going on a road trip to find herself. While she is trying to recover from the ended affair the café becomes a safe haven where Jeremy and her end up developing a bond that revolves around their mutual understanding

*The Comfort of Strangers: Sobre My
Blueberry Nights (2007)
de Wong Kar-wai*

*'I don't know how to begin 'cause the
story is so old'* Norah Jones

1. *Nova Iorque à Noite I*

'Como dizemos adeus a uma pessoa sem a qual não conseguimos viver?' é a questão que Elizabeth (Norah Jones) coloca em voz-off, antes de deixar o café de Jeremy (Jude Law) em Nova Iorque, partindo de Este para Oeste numa viagem através da paisagem americana. Esta é a narrativa principal de *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), a primeira longa em Inglês do realizador Wong Kar-wai, conhecido por filmes como *Chungking Express* (1994), *In the Mood for Love* (2000) ou *2046* (2004).

My Blueberry Nights é a história de Elizabeth, uma rapariga que parte numa viagem de auto-descoberta, após saber que o seu namorado está com outra mulher. A ideia de viagem é apresentada logo no início em que a câmara foca comboios de um lado para o outro, como as vidas dos protagonistas, especialmente a de Eliza-

of their dreams, their lost opportunities, their loneliness and, of course, food. The film is also a tale of urban isolation, a 'nocturnal broken poem of love' (Totaro, 2008) where people are trying to find each other. Likewise, it is about chance, the importance of the transience of life, memory, time and making choices as Jeremy explains about a bowl of keys he saves:

~ Most of the time, the keys stay in the jar.
~ Well why do you keep them?

~ You should just throw them out.

~ No. No, I couldn't do that.

~ Why not?

~ If I threw these keys away then those doors will be closed forever and that shouldn't be up to me to decide.

Should it? [...]

~ Everything has a reason. It's like these pies and cakes. At the end of every night the cheesecake and the apple pie are always completely gone.

~ The peach cobbler and the chocolate mousse cake are nearly finished, but there's always a whole blueberry pie left untouched.

~ So what's wrong with the blueberry pie?

~ There's nothing's wrong with the

blueberry pie, it's just people make other choices. You can't blame the blueberry pie, it's just no one wants it.

~ I want a piece.

(*My Blueberry Nights*, 2007)

beth que irá partir numa viagem para se reencontrar.

Enquanto ela recupera do fim da relação amorosa o café serve-lhe de refúgio onde estabelece com Jeremy uma complicidade baseada nos seus sonhos, nas oportunidades perdidas, na solidão e, claro, em comida.

O filme é uma narrativa sobre o isolamento urbano, "um poema nocturno de amor desfeito" (Totaro, 2008), onde as pessoas tentam encontrar-se umas às outras. Também é sobre o acaso, a importância da transitoriedade da vida, a memória, o tempo e as escolhas que fazemos, tal como Jeremy refere acerca da taça cheia de chaves que ele guarda:

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~ If I threw these keys away then those doors will be closed forever and that shouldn't be up to me to decide. Should it? [...]

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These keys, as well as the blueberry pie, represent a major metaphor in the film for the choices and opportunities in life. Jeremy is included in that metaphor, since he also keeps his keys in the bowl, a symbol of a past he had with Katya (Cat Power), a Russian girl. Before Elizabeth's departure we see a hand, probably her own, opening the door of the café and then, after hesitating, closes it, deciding to take the 'longest way to cross the street' (*My Blueberry Nights*, 2007). Throughout Elizabeth's journey Wong Kar-wai chooses to use different colors for distinctive environments in order to represent the places she visits, as Gary Bettinson suggests:

Each plot phase in My Blueberry Nights is assigned a dominant colour scheme – deep blues and greens in New York; hot reds and oranges in Memphis; golds and tans in Nevada and Vegas. (Bettinson, 2010: 17)

Notice how, for instance, the café in New York is filmed in a way very similar to Edward Hopper's paintings *Automat* (1927) or *Nighthawks* (1942), emphasizing urban alienation, depicting an almost anonymous city.

As Donato Totaro (2008) notes, the camera presents the café as an abstract place, impersonal and saturated with colors, bleeding neon lights, hot color temperature, capturing the characters in blurred areas and fragmentary images as seen on the CCTV camera that Jeremy continuously tries to fix.

Wong Kar-wai uses this visual complexity to

blueberry pie, it's just people make other choices. You can't blame the blueberry pie, it's just no one wants it.
~ I want a piece.

As chaves, tal como a tarte, representam uma importante metáfora para as escolhas e oportunidades na vida. Jeremy também se inclui na metáfora, uma vez que é ele que guarda as chaves, símbolo de um passado inacabado com Katya (Cat Power), uma rapariga Russa.

Antes da partida de Elizabeth vemos uma mão, provavelmente a dela, a abrir a porta do café e depois, hesitando, voltar a fechá-la, com a decisão de que "irá tomar o caminho mais longo para atravessar a estrada".

Ao longo da viagem de Elizabeth, Wong Kar-wai usa cores diferentes para cada ambiente, de forma a representar os lugares que ela vai habitando, tal como refere Bettinson:

Each plot phase in My Blueberry Nights is assigned a dominant colour scheme – deep blues and greens in New York; hot reds and oranges in Memphis; golds and tans in Nevada and Vegas.
(Bettinson, 2010: 17)

Repare-se como, por exemplo, o café em Nova Iorque está filmado de forma a lembrar os quadros *Automat* (1927) ou *Nighthawks* (1942) de Edward Hopper, chamando assim uma maior atenção sobre o aspecto da alienação urbana, pintando uma cidade praticamente anónima.

illustrate a particular expressive force that is not seen in the characters (Teo, 2005). As a master of time, like Dennis Lim refers to him, he enjoys playing with visual clarity and obscurity, showing solitary bodies floating and lingering in an abstract place. Elizabeth on her solitary journey will encounter new places and new characters, further enhancing this aspect.

Oddly enough, *My Blueberry Nights* is a road movie (an example of Wong Kar-wai working with a traditional American genre), where the road is nearly inexistent, mostly displaying interiors and a closed dark atmosphere, like in Memphis, the first place where we see Elizabeth listening to others while trying to deal with her own problems.

2. Memphis: Day and Night

'Try just a little bit of tenderness/ that's all you got to do' Otis Redding

In Memphis,¹ Lizzie (she changes her name) becomes the servant and not the one who is served, by day she works in a café and by night bartends. Here, she does not have time to think about what happened in her life, which makes it much easier for her to move ahead. Meanwhile, Lizzie writes postcards to Jeremy while he tries to contact her by phone but unsuccessfully. Miscommunication between two people will reoccur in this part of the film when Wong Kar-wai tells the sad story of Arnie (David Strahaim) and Sue Lynne (Rachel Weisz), a couple who has separated.

Tal como Donato Totaro (2008) nota a câmara apresenta-nos o café como um local abstracto, impessoal e saturado de cores, as luzes néon sangrando, a temperatura de cor quente, capturando as personagens em áreas desfocadas e imagens fragmentadas, como se pode observar na câmara de segurança que Jeremy continua a arranjar insistentemente.

Wong Kar-wai usa esta complexidade visual para mostrar uma força particularmente expressiva que não pode ser encontrada nas personagens (Teo, 2005). Enquanto mestre do tempo, como refere Dennis Lim, Kar-wai gosta de jogar com a clareza e obscuridade visual, onde nos revela corpos solitários a flutuar num espaço abstracto. Exemplo disso serão os locais e as personagens que Elizabeth irá conhecer na sua solitária viagem.

Curiosamente, *My Blueberry Nights* é um road movie (um exemplo de Wong Kar-wai a trabalhar com um género tradicionalmente Americano) onde a estrada é praticamente inexistente, pois é um filme de interiores com um ambiente fechado e obscuro, como em Memphis, o primeiro lugar onde vemos Elizabeth a ouvir os outros, enquanto tenta lidar com os seus próprios problemas.

2. Memphis: Dia e Noite

Just try a little bit of tenderness/ that's all you got to do Otis Redding

Em Memphis,¹ Lizzie (ela muda o seu nome) torna-se a pessoa que serve e não a que é servida, uma vez que trabalha de dia num café, e de noite num bar. Nesta cidade ela não tem tempo para pensar nos

¹ This section is also a tribute to Tennessee Williams. In fact, throughout the film, Wong Kar-wai makes several references to icons of the American culture, from music to literature and film. Williams is just an example, but we could also refer to Robert Frank or Jack Kerouac. In *My Blueberry Nights* Wong Kar-wai presents us with a 'slice' of Americana.

¹ Esta secção do filme é uma homenagem a Tennessee Williams. De facto, ao longo do filme, Wong Kar-wai faz várias referências a ícones da cultura Americana, desde música e literatura ao filme. Williams é apenas um exemplo, como poderiam ser os nomes de Robert Frank ou Jack Kerouac. Em *My Blueberry Nights* Wong Kar-wai mostra-nos uma parte da Americana.

Arnie, a police officer by day, drinks himself to stupor every night, in order to ease the pain of knowing that his wife is with another man. He keeps a tab that he will never pay because, one night, he lashes out at his wife, after beating her boyfriend, and ends up being in a fatal car accident.

After Arnie's death, Sue Lynne takes his place at the bar, drinking herself to oblivion. When Lizzie takes her home that night, Sue Lynne wonders: 'How will people remember Arnie?', recalling how she met him and how she still loved him. Curiously enough, Arnie died in the same place where Sue Lynne and him met for the very first time.

After paying Arnie's tab, she asks Lizzy to post the tab back up at the bar, functioning as a memorial and, therefore, a way of remembering him, as Donato Totaro comments:

As Sue Lynne wonders, "How will people remember Arnie?" The bar he frequented has a memorial in the bar's storefront which the camera reveals briefly in one of its many lateral movements. Elizabeth also wonders as she writes in a letter to Jeremy, how will you remember me, as the woman who ate blueberry pies or the jilted lover? Hence memory remains an important element to Wong Kar-wai. Elizabeth learns that people do have the ability to change or perform minor acts of redemption.

(Totaro, 2008: 1)

Even though Sue Lynne 'closed the door' on Arnie it seems like all that was needed was

seus próprios problemas, o que a ajuda a seguir em frente. Entretanto, Lizzie escreve postais a Jeremy que a tenta contactar via telefone, mas não consegue, um exemplo da não comunicação entre as personagens. Uma temática recorrente no filme e na triste história, que Kar-wai e Sue Lynne (Rachel Weisz), um casal separado.

Arnie, um polícia de dia, bebe até cair durante a noite, na tentativa de eliminar a dor de saber que a sua mulher está com outro homem. Ele tem uma conta aberta que nunca irá pagar, pois uma noite, após ter batido no namorado de Sue Lynn, irrita-se com ela, e acaba por ter um acidente fatal.

Após a morte de Arnie, Sue Lynne toma o seu lugar no bar bebendo até cair. Quando Lizzie a acompanha a casa Sue Lynne pergunta: "How will people remember Arnie?", lembrando como se conheceram e como ela ainda o amava. Curiosamente, Arnie morre no mesmo lugar onde ele e Sue Lynne se conheceram pela primeira vez.

Após pagar a conta de Arnie, Sue Lynne pede a Lizzie que mantenha os papéis da conta no bar. Estes irão funcionar enquanto memorial do seu ex-marido e, por isso mesmo, uma forma de o lembrar, tal como Donato Totaro comenta:

Wong Kar-wai however, continues to care about Arnie even when dead. As Sue Lynne wonders, "How will people remember Arnie?" The bar he frequented has a memorial in the bar's storefront which the camera reveals briefly in one of its many

a 'bit of tenderness', as Otis Redding² sings in the soundtrack. Right from the beginning the oranges and reds involving the character's faces predict a tragedy. Nevertheless, Sue Lynne seems to redeem herself by wanting to preserve Arnie's memory.

The road, or better yet, the places alongside the road, seem to offer a time and space to explore Lizzie's tensions and problems, as she considers each of the character's lives, preserving their memory in her postcards, impending their disappearance forever in time, as Wong Kar-wai does with the film, capturing their stories on screen.

3. *Las Vegas: Night and Day*

'Thrust people, but always cut the cards'

Leslie

Elizabeth, now Beth, continues her westward journey, as she finds another job as a waitress in a casino, in order to save up for a car to complete her journey. In Las Vegas, Beth meets Leslie (Natalie Portman), a poker player who has lost all her money and who convinces Beth to lend her the cash she needs to play again, with the promise of returning the money, plus a third of the winnings or, if she loses, the car she owns. After having lost, Leslie hands the car over to Beth with the condition that she gives her a ride.

En route, in a *Thelma and Louise* (1991) reference, on Highway 50, the loneliest road in America, Leslie discovers that her father has passed away, but she believes it is a plot to lure

lateral movements. Elizabeth also wonders as she writes in a letter to Jeremy, how will you remember me, as the woman who ate blueberry pies or the jilted lover? Hence memory remains an important element to Wong Kar-Wai.

Elizabeth learns that people do have the ability to change or perform minor acts of redemption.

(Totaro, 2008: 1)

Apesar de Sue Lynne ter "fechado a porta" a Arnie, tudo o que era necessário era a "bit of tenderness", como refere Otis Redding² na banda sonora. Embora o uso de vermelhos e laranjas que envolvem a cara das personagens anunciasse tragédia, Sue Lynne parece atingir, de alguma forma, a redenção ao querer preservar a memória de Arnie.

A estrada, ou melhor, os lugares ao longo da estrada, parecem oferecer um lugar e um tempo para explorar as tensões e problemas de Lizzie, à medida que ela reflecte sobre a vida das personagens, mantendo a memória delas viva ao escrever os postais, impedindo o seu desaparecimento para sempre no tempo, da mesma forma que Wong Kar-wai o faz ao registar as suas histórias na tela.

3. *Las Vegas: Night and Day*

'Thrust people, but always cut the cards'
Leslie

Elizabeth, agora com o nome Beth, continua a sua viagem em direcção a

² The film's original soundtrack is made up of songs by American musicians. It can be seen as one great pop song, where all the songs play a vital role. As Emily Yueh-yu Yeh and Lake Wang Wu (2007) observe, music is, in fact, a major concern for Wong Kar-wai, because it allows him to create a space where different geographies, cultures and histories are intertwined.

² As músicas usadas neste filme são de autores americanos. Todo o filme pode ser visto como uma grande canção pop, pois a música aqui tem um papel muito importante. Tal como Emily Yueh-yu Yeh e Lake Wang Wu (2007) observam, a música é uma das grandes preocupações de Kar-wai, uma vez que o permite criar um espaço onde as diferentes geografias, histórias e culturas se interligam.

her home. However, upon learning the truth, Leslie confesses that she had really won the card game and helps Beth buy a car to return to New York.

Leslie is yet another lonely character in the film who is always on the move, afraid of confronting her father (although we get the feeling that he really loved her) and it is only after his death, that she manages to face reality. A common feature between all the characters is that they do not share any meaningful communication with anyone, as Donato Totaro observes:

The loneliness that all the substantial characters feel in My Blueberry Nights is represented in the fact that none of the characters have any meaningful communication with anyone. Jeremy talks on the phone with people, but never with people in his café, any more than 'good night'. Arnie is drunk most of the time and only has meaningful talk with Elizabeth; and Leslie talks the usual male posturing talk during the poker games, but only engages in human discourse with Elizabeth. Even when she gets to her father he is dead and hence she cannot do anything more than cry. (Totaro, 2008: 1)

It apparently seems like Elizabeth is the one who binds all the other characters, also experiencing loss, which means she understands how they feel. It is in fact this comfort shared between and from these strangers that allows Elizabeth to discover herself and, in the end, the acceptance that life must go on.

Oeste, onde irá trabalhar como empregada de um casino. Ela está a poupar dinheiro para um carro, de forma a poder completar a sua viagem. Em Las Vegas, Beth conhece Leslie (Natalie Portman), uma jogadora de póquer que perde todo o seu dinheiro e que consegue Beth a emprestar-lhe mais. Caso ela ganhe paga-lhe de volta e ainda lhe dá um terço de tudo o que ganhar. Se perder, Beth fica com o seu carro. Ela acaba por perder e dá o seu carro a Beth, na condição de que esta lhe dê boleia.

Enquanto viajam de carro, numa referência a *Thelma and Louise* (1991), pela auto-estrada 50, a estrada mais solitária na América, Leslie descobre que o seu pai está morto, mas pensa que é mais um truque dele para que ela volte a casa. Contudo, após descobrir a verdade Leslie acaba por confessar ter ganho o jogo e ajuda Beth a comprar um carro para voltar a Nova Iorque.

Leslie é mais uma figura solitária, sempre em movimento, com receio de enfrentar o pai (embora tenhamos a sensação de que ele gostava dela) e, só após a sua morte, consegue enfrentar a realidade.

Uma característica comum a todas as personagens é a de que elas não conseguem comunicar de forma substancial com outros, tal como Donato Totaro aponta:

'The loneliness that all the substantial characters feel in My Blueberry Nights is represented in the fact that none of the characters have any meaningful communication with anyone. Jeremy talks on the phone with people, but never with people in his café,

4. *New York by Night II*

'How do you say goodbye to someone you can't imagine living without?' Elizabeth never said goodbye, she just walked away, but eventually returned. The film ends where it begins, with Elizabeth returning to New York. Now that Jeremy has thrown away all the keys, representing the complete dissolution of the past, and resolves his unfinished relationship with Katya, he can move forward.

As always, Jeremy waits for Elizabeth inside the café with a slice of blueberry pie and ice cream. The two lonely characters, adrift in fragmentary space, converge to each other in the final scene. Elizabeth is asleep, she has cream on her lips and Jeremy slowly leans his head towards her, kissing her from the other side of the counter.

'The scene, known as 'the kiss',³ does not conclude the film. Now that the past is gone, Elizabeth is able to move on with her life. The 'story', as Norah Jones puts it, is actually very old, because it is a story of emotional pain and recovery, a story of love and self-discovery. Wong Kar-wai films the past and the present in the same instant, showing us 'slices' of several lives from Memphis, Nevada and New York, in a cross-country road movie, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and back again, in order to present the possibilities of destiny and the transience of life.

He preserves the memory of all these characters that inhabit *My Blueberry Nights* universe leaving some doors open, while others are closed: Sue Lynne leaves town, Leslie

any more than 'good night'. Arnie is drunk most of the time and only has meaningful talk with Elizabeth; and Leslie talks the usual male posturing talk during the poker games, but only engages in human discourse with Elizabeth. Even when she gets to her father he is dead and hence she cannot do anything more than cry. (Totaro, 2008: 1)

Elizabeth parece ser aquela que une todas estas figuras. Também ela experimentou a dor da perda, o que a ajuda a compreender melhor os outros. É, de facto, este conforto entre e daqueles que são estranhos uns aos outros que permite a Elizabeth compreender-se melhor e, no fim, aceitar que a vida continua.

4. *Nova Iorque à Noite II*

'Como dizemos adeus a uma pessoa sem a qual não conseguimos viver?' Elizabeth não disse adeus, ela só se afastou, mas, eventualmente, regressou. O filme começa onde acaba. Elizabeth retorna a Nova Iorque.

Agora que Jeremy atirou as chaves fora, metáfora para a dissolução do passado, e resolveu a situação com Katya, ele pode seguir em frente. Jeremy está no café, um pedaço de tarte de mirtilo com gelado a aguardar constantemente a chegada de Elizabeth. As duas personagens solitárias, à deriva no espaço fragmentário, cobrem uma para a outra na cena final. Ela está a dormir, tem gelado nos lábios, Jeremy inclina vagarosamente a cabeça na sua direcção, beijando-a do outro lado do balcão.

³ This scene already happened right at the beginning of the film although we cannot see the actual kiss because Jeremy's face covers it up, thus leaving a certain doubt to the viewer.

³ Esta cena já aconteceu logo ao início do filme, embora não seja possível ver Jeremy a beijar Elizabeth, uma vez que a cabeça dele cobre por completo a cara dela, deixando assim o espectador em dúvida.

drives away in the car that her father left her and Elizabeth (now using her real name once again) recovers her true unique self and becomes more determined.

Elizabeth took the longest path to get here, but all was worth it as she comments at the end of the film: 'It took me nearly a year to get here. It wasn't hard to cross that street after all. It all depends who's waiting for you on the other side', just as you open another door.

A cena, conhecida com o nome de "O beijo",³ não conclui o filme. Agora que o passado não atormenta o presente, Elizabeth pode seguir com a sua vida. A "história", tal como Norah Jones refere, é, de facto, muito antiga, porque é uma história de dor emocional e de como se recupera dela, uma história de amor e auto-descoberta.

Wong Kar-wai filma o passado e o presente num mesmo instante, mostrando-nos partes de vidas situadas em Memphis, Nevada ou Nova Iorque num *road movie* que atravessa o país, desde o Atlântico ao Pacífico e vice-versa, de forma a mostrar-nos as possibilidades da vida e a sua transitoriedade.

Ele preserva a memória de todas aquelas personagens que habitam o universo de *My Blueberry Nights* deixando algumas portas abertas e outras fechadas: Sue Lynne deixa a cidade, Leslie faz-se à estrada no carro que o pai lhe deixou e, Elizabeth, agora de novo com o seu nome original, recupera o seu eu verdadeiro e único, tornando-se mais determinada na vida.

Elizabeth tomou o caminho mais longo para chegar até aqui, mas valeu a pena, tal como ela comenta no fim do filme:

"It took me nearly a year to get here. It wasn't hard to cross that street after all. It all depends who's waiting for you on the other side", tal como quando se abre outra porta.

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