

Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Wim Wenders' *Everything will be Fine*

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Abstract: *The viewer is drenched in what it feels like to have a stalker know where you live, your habits, your family and friends. This story is ultimately an antidote to that sort of stalker anguish. Instead of the anguished blood-satisfaction of revenge, the filmmaker shows how heartfelt and fearless reconciliation bring forgiveness and healing in place of revenge. It would have been justice for Christopher to kill Tomas for killing his brother, but Christianity as a religion tells us to forgive and reconcile in place of revenge, and therein lies the redemption and healing in life which becomes greater than revenge. As Tomas walks out with him, they look at each other a long time. At last, Tomas embraces Christopher, who hesitates then hugs him back. Both are finally smiling as they go their separate ways. Derrida's injunction to forgive the unforgivable and move into a Derridean third space of thinking the impossible forgiveness of sins and holding one accountable to the death penalty for transgressions committed is an extension of his meditations on hospitality and forgiveness, extending Christian charity, forgiveness and hospitality as a move that exceeds the law and exceeds the thinking of the possible.*

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This 2015 film by German director Wim Wenders, set in a Canada where each character speaks with a different accent, tells over a dozen years the story of a young man, writer Tomas (James Franco), who driving home stops just in time to avoid hitting a child who sleds into the road. He brings the wordless boy, Christopher (Jack Fulton), up to the house, where his mother Kate (Charlotte Gainsbourg) asks what happened to his little brother. The younger child, under the car, died.

Over time Tomas recovers, and writes more novels. Occasionally he and Kate make contact. His relationship with Sara (Rachel McAdams) falls apart, and eventually he marries Ann (Marie-Josée Croze), a woman from his publisher's office, adopting her daughter, who's about the same age as Christopher. When the boy is sixteen (played by Robert Naylor), he writes to Tomas, by now a successful writer. After a confrontational phone call with Kate, Tomas agrees to talk to the young man, who's having trouble in school. Filmed in Montréal, Québec, Canada, the film opens during the frozen winter that surrounds a young writer Tomas Edan (James Franco) living in a tiny cabin attempting to come up with ideas for his third novel. He is at odds with his girlfriend Sara (Rachel McAdams) and while driving aimlessly after a quarrel her, he accidentally

runs over and kills a child. The one child he sees is basically unharmed and he walks the child Christopher (Jack Fulton) home to his mother Kate (Charlotte Gainsbourg) who, while happy to see Christopher, runs to the scene of the accident to find her other son is under Tomas' car, dead. The accident and its aftermath deeply traumatizes Tomas. Over the next 12 years, he struggles to make sense of what happened and continue on with life, becoming a very successful writer who marries Ann (Marie-Josée Croze), but when he looks in the mirror, he sees a murderer. Christopher (Robert Naylor) confronts Tomas about the accident years later and we are privy to see how even at that stage in Tomas' life the incident has bored into his soul.

Tomas' life is permanently changed, however, when an auto accident on a snowy road causes the death of a young boy and leaves the boy's brother Christopher (Jack Fulton and Philippe Vanasse-Paquet as a twelve-year-old) emotionally scarred and unable to give and receive love. suppressing outward expressions of grief, neither Tomas, Christopher, nor Kate (Charlotte Gainsbourg), Chris' mother, are able to achieve any release, especially Tomas who carries his unexpressed guilt around with him wherever he goes, like a chain around his neck.

Though Kate, an accomplished illustrator, is forgiving, telling him repeatedly that the accident was not his fault, he internalizes his guilt and makes a half-hearted suicide attempt much to the consternation of his overbearing father (Patrick Bauchau). Franco delivers a sensitive performance as

the conflicted author who is able to channel his suppressed emotions into his writing which become stronger and lead to long-awaited public recognition.

As Tomas' career blossoms, he marries Ann (Marie-Josée Croze), a woman with a young daughter, allowing him to become a father for the first time. As told in a series of flash-forwards, Tomas develops a close friendship with Kate but his relationships with Sara and Christopher (Thomas Naylor as an adolescent) build towards a series of confrontations in which long held resentments explode.

Christopher accuses him of profiting from the accident - writing better, using the experience as material for his novels, faring better than Kate who still struggles to make ends meet. And he picks out a character in one of the novels and asserts that it is himself. Tomas, trying to maintain distance, explains that experience and imagination work together for a writer in ways not easily teased apart; he will not accept blame for the way their lives have turned out. When Tomas leaves after their conversation, the youth pursues him across an open space, then tells him to wait and fumbles in his backpack. We, and Tomas, are tensed for a weapon to come out of the pack - but instead, it's a stack of Tomas's books Christopher wants him to autograph. The moment could have gone another way - a bloody outcome all-too-familiar to the modern film-goer. These days, distant camera-shots of interiors through windows give us the sense of spying and stalking: impending violence.

In the final scene, the night Tomas wins a writing award, Christopher, by now a

college student, breaks into his house and urinates on his bed. When Tomas and his family get home, Ann notices the smell. Police come and investigate, but they turn up nothing. Ann and their daughter leave for a hotel, unwilling to stay where they feel violated and unsafe. As he darkens the house preparing for bed, Tomas notices a figure on his lawn. He opens the door wide, turns on his kitchen lights, sets out a soda and a bottle of beer, and sits. Christopher comes in, gets himself a beer, and they spend the night in conversation we don't hear. In the morning the young man is ready to leave. As Tomas walks out with him, they look at each other a long time. At last, Tomas embraces Christopher, who hesitates then hugs him back. Both are finally smiling as they go their separate ways. It is the impossibility of Christ's incarnation and forgiveness of sins that makes the law possible as Christ came to fulfil the law rather than to defeat it. Derrida's injunction to forgive the unforgivable and move into a Derridean third space of thinking the impossible forgiveness of sins and holding one accountable to the death penalty for transgressions committed is an extension of his meditations on hospitality and forgiveness, extending Christian charity, forgiveness and hospitality as a move that exceeds the law and exceeds the thinking of the possible but it is precisely this impossibility of grace, mercy, Christian charity and forgiveness which makes the law possible just as the exception is necessary to thinking the rule. Derrida thus makes a compelling case for thinking the impossible forgiveness and mercy as the exception that makes possible the rule of the law and the upholding of the legal necessity of the death penalty

Both abolitionist and anti-abolitionist views thus make claims to truth on the basis of

interpretation of divine law, and yet what both views fail to account for is the Christian passion which does not hold a sinner accountable to his crime with the passion of Christ in which Christ cancels our debt by bearing our sin and forgiving our sin. Hence both laws uphold a need to hold a person accountable to his actions and the necessity of punishment and retribution while the Christian paradox is precisely a cancellation of debt, a relieving of accountability for one's actions, a forgiving of the unforgivable.

This is the paradox of Christian charity, it gives and takes the place of sin and wrongdoing, in response to wrongdoing, one is told to turn one's cheek, in response to one's enemies, one is told to forgive, in response to debts accumulated and owed, one is called to cancel one's debt and forgive, it is a giving in place of receiving, taking the place of he who has sinned and replacing indebtedness with forgiveness and cancellation of debt. While this may seem impossible to worldly eyes, Derrida precisely views Christianity as an impossible religion.

The viewer is drenched in what it feels like to have a stalker know where you live, your habits, your family and friends. This story is ultimately an antidote to that sort of creepiness. Instead of the anguished blood-satisfaction of revenge, the filmmaker shows how heartfelt and fearless reconciliation bring forgiveness and healing in place of revenge. It would have been justice for Christopher to kill Tomas for killing his brother, but Christianity as a religion tells us

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