

Our day had already begun, but it was still dark and cold; it was winter. The cars spluttered their way to work and in people's kitchens some bluish lights were still on. When we reached the bus stop, the day still wasn't fully awake, and neither were we, it was as if last night's dreams were still stuck to our eyelids. We didn't feel like talking. All we could do was light up a cigarette to make the bus come quicker.

Izibene's eyelids looked heavy as if they were weighed down by her dreams or a lack of sleep. She coiled up in the seat beside me like a hedgehog and fell straight asleep. Before she did, though, her lips drew an affectionate smile—or at least that's what it looked like to me as I watched her—reflected in a window turned into a mirror by the darkness of the morning. I was sitting up straight as a ramrod, like some dictator's statue, when I was overcome by sleep. And in my dreams, the bus never stopped, and I had a hedgehog by my side, and I was afraid of nothing.

Of course the bus did stop, and we slotted some coins into the coffee machine at college to wake ourselves up. The dream had to be different from there on: determination, work, faith. I didn't do much. I read; I sought political asylum in the library, looking for the right to feel like I belonged somewhere. Izibene set about building a world. She wanted to build an inhabitable world in oil or ink, and we know now she was going about it the right way.

If she wanted to build an inhabitable world, it must have been because she found it impossible to inhabit reality. It must have been because she found it impossible to keep quiet in a country governed by custom, impossible to give in, in a society shaped by hiding the truth and pretending. For good or (especially) for ill, Izibene was committed to telling the truth; in other words, to make art that could be painful.

But, how can you tell the truth when the words lack content?

All you need is some ink and a few blank sheets of paper. All you need are some tubes of oil and a blank canvas. That and a lot of bravery. It's never easy to make up your mind to fight your own ghosts.

We called it the painting corner; it seemed excessive to call it a home, but the fact is that that was

where we lived; it was there that we felt most alive. As you walked in, you'd be greeted to that shelter, fenced in by canvases, by a penetrating smell of turpentine. And by the cassette player that was always on. Our choice of music depended on the weather. And depending on the music, our mood would change. Depending on the mood, sometimes I dared to dab at some canvases. That happened very seldom. Izibene always worked.

But that was later, after Izibene got back. The poet Nazim Hikmet said that people change when they change places, and Izibene changed in The Hague in the Netherlands. I'm not talking about the way she did her hair or the way she dressed; I'm not talking

FICTION IS AN HABITABLE WORLD

**Xabier
Gantzarain**

about learning, getting to know new people and places, having new experiences—all that stuff which is so much in vogue right now. No. One changes when one is forced to stand facing oneself, and Izibene met her own ghosts; in The Hague she saw the pillars of her existence sinking in the mud. It was there that she began drawing non-stop; it was there that she first set out on her path—though she didn't know then where it would lead. She didn't know then that those drawings would take on a life of their own; that they would eventually become the animated film *Hezurbeltzak*.

The drawings she did in The Hague became her little obsession; in them she saw the road she had to take. And with her drawings in her hand, she took over the animation room. Some people spent hours there when they should have been studying; Izibene devoted every spare minute she had to the studio, with some ink and a few blank sheets of paper as the only things she had to grab onto. Not even she could tell you how much time she has invested in making *Hezurbeltzak*. In any case, I wouldn't like the number of hours spent on a piece of work to be thought of as a criterion for judging it. Dedication does not necessarily mean the work is going to be good.

Even though I had already seen the entire animation process, I was still amazed when I saw the film. To be honest, I'm still surprised every time I see it because I always discover something new.

I always thinks it's funny when journalists, always so keen on abbreviating things, talk about it as being highly sexually charged. The phrase means absolutely nothing. Sex is pleasure, but it is also exclusion, humiliation, non-communication, isolation; it is even the dictatorship of imposed models. Sex awakens the beast within us. Sex can be sweet, but it can be unpleasant, too. Sex is love, but

it is also a relationship of power. So, when you talk about the film being «highly sexually charged», you really should be a bit more precise, even if it's just out of respect for the artist and the spectator.

The first character to enter the spectator's eyes throws out signs, unintelligible signs that might seem like letters of a strange tongue, mad bees drawing the code of the impossibility of communicating around our heads.

That is the beginning of *Hezurbeltzak*. And that's precisely what the word «hezurbeltzak» means: a «hezurbeltza» is someone who, whatever they do, will always be different, someone who is excluded from the outset because they belong to a different group than others, someone stigmatised by have been born in a group they did not choose; someone condemned to carry original sin on his or her back. And we are all «hezurbeltzak» insofar as we have been excluded for some cause that is beyond reason.

And, moreover, it seems impossible to challenge this. The female characters in the film, for example, have no arms: they have no power. They can have determination, mood and intention; they can love or desire, but they can't make. They can't make anything. All they can do is wait. I don't know where the journalists are looking if they can't see a critique of a society in which power is entirely male in the film.

I don't know how they can fail to say that the film shows that Walt Disney (and everything he stands for) is screwing us from behind, and that he then replaces our own heads with his, immersing us in a terrible schizophrenia.

Maybe that's not the journalists' job. Maybe they'll say it won a few prizes and that it's been screened at many festivals.

And then they'll be surprised when they see the characters making signs that are impossible to understand.