**HELEN TAYLOR ROBINSON**

***The Capacity for Forgiveness in Cinema and Psychoanalysis, with reference to The Documentarian by Ivars Zviedris***

You have just seen Inta—the ostensible ‘subject’ of our film—in both her garish, flashing and also her gentler colours, as she gives her primitive ‘all’ to the intrusion into her life that a film of her necessitates. For, Ivars, the documentarian, apparently stumbles onto her outcast existence as she has constructed it --in the harsh but beautiful Latvian landscape—deep, deep snow, vicious mosquito bitten swamplands, serene sunsets and frozen waters, winds driving through the trees and grasses—its an implacable background at all times to the onscreen journey Ivars wants to make with his camera.

Its clear to us that Ivars, for his reasons as a documentarian, persists against **great odds**. What are his reasons? The film leaves us to ponder this.

Inta, his subject and her setting, also persists **against the odds.** Each has their own illusion of what is taking place between them. Her reasons are unclear also.

Both parties, we could say, as in any good film or artistic experience, are also to some extent out of their depth and control, in front of the camera, and allowing something greater to evolve.

We, and the camera, witness a titanic onscreen battle. The magic of omnipotent language (let alone all of that actual weaponry) are brandished by Inta, **not** Ivars, (except for his offending camera ofcourse)—and throughout this documentary landscape, it seems that things can barely resolve to any comfortable and harmonious happy ending….true to much of real life we might say.

This is no young prince rescuing an abandoned princess from her fairy tale tower………no gallant knight ‘bearding the dragon’ in his den and returning victorious.

Or is it? What is it?

The momentary flickers of interiority—Ivars on screen being called a German soldier with a hooked nose (the Germans, like so many other nations, have occupied Latvia) and having to manfully take this insult and rub at his nose—the camera steadily watching his bewildered but nevertheless un-retaliatory reaction—or, Inta on screen for once bending lovingly over her accordion playing a folk song with unexpected fluency—the camera again still and focused—or Inta and Ivars now like a husband and wife couple happily working to collect and chop wood together,(note how her hands move from holding his body, to holding the chair he stands on, to avoid direct intimacy with Ivars, and to stabilize the chair), or again Inta and Ivars indoors laughing over a celebratory candle light meal,-or Inta and Ivars -a kind of mother and son sharing the bleak knowledge the film will end and their time will be over together—is she sad or is she ‘acting’ sad—is Ivars sad or relieved, or is he playing a kind of son who must move on from home—the camera rightly leaves us with all this, in evocative uncertainty and irresolution.

Because of course such moments of **interiority** are disrupted again and again- unpredictably (as in the fearful opening sequences) by volatility and chaos—and though these images of interior calm-- and there are more-- are like those of that visionary landscape—some kind of brief respite reflecting inner stability—they are nevertheless set against that outer recurring and brutalized reality-- of driven snow, metal crowbars, literal assault, of both the man and his offending camera, threatened rape, witches’ curses, the hurling of acid, and also coy sexuality. And this cruel **exteriority**, both Nature’s and Man’s, painfully, and seemingly, predominantly, **prevails**.

All these fragments are skillfully edited (do not forget the mastery of illusion that the film is -it’s a deliberate screen illusion created between film maker and editor Inese Klava—(and, by the way, the DVD of this film shows many cut and unused scenes on which I cannot dwell here—but there are some very touching and wretchedly disturbing scenes of yet other kinds—I think particularly of the visit to the tramps’ home, where a Dickensian picture of hopeless and squalid degeneration is witnessed with compassion, or again, the ludicrous comedy of a young priest trying to offer prayers at a candle lit table, with the disruption of Inta’s off-screen incessant ranting, threatening to topple him at his task) ---all this material is available in order to make a documentarian’s vision of this strange year’s journey—and this strange hour and a half for the viewer.

To what end -we may ask?

Ivars clearly, by his title, which focuses on himself--wants to document the experience of a film maker and his camera—he is not just there for Inta—but he needs her as ‘the other’ in this setting, and she knows it, and challenges him on it constantly. Because in one sense she **is** being **‘used’** once again-- as she feels she always has been from her brief account of her life events, which may very likely be accounts adapted to fit her sense of immense persecution and abandonment. Inta has had it ‘very bad’-- she wants Ivars and everyone to know it, and to be recompensed for it somehow—with trips to the shops, briquettes for warmth, medicines, snow shoveling—yet at the same time shouting out her endless offensive and abusive refusal of all help or money. She is wholly impossible to penetrate—virtually impossible to comfort, please, support or pity. She has, in her onscreen persona, what we term clinically a ‘borderline personality’, sensitive to the smallest of insults and then, at such moments, unable to think— only **react**. Her interior is forbidding --like her shut green door—for the most part a ‘No Entry’ zone and even when open, yielding more trouble, along with occasional respite. Hers is “fright and flight” behaviour….a common response to the profound unknown which Ivars represents. And which this fearful landscape also depicts. Yet she is also cunning, curious, and intrigued. She won’t easily allow entry, but she wants to enter into something that might yield to **her**.

Ivars’ exterior is gentle but dogged—he won’t give up. But as Inta says—(and its hard to remember this moment, but it happens, as they sit outside quietly at that mosquito ravaged table again after a lovely shot of steady falling rain beating on the table surface)--what is it he wants?—what is his film for- or about?—what is the main idea?

It’s an important question for us all perhaps. And it is edited IN.

Ivars is off-screen—Inta is full screen, eating cherries.

Ivars answers very quietly his film is a piece of art……in the widest sense, and…….. it’s also about their relationship….Inta adds ‘but you said it would be about forgiveness’—‘that too’- Ivars admits……………Inta declares it will be a bad film if its about their relationship which, she says, has deliberately engineered conflict— she asserts you cant make a film about such a relationship, and also about forgiveness—you will be disgraced--its like mixing salad with soup —you cant do it. Ivars quietly says each has ingredients in common……….and for once it’s a piece of serious and moving dialogue—it enters **us**-amidst the anarchy we have had to take in. And it presages ending.

For actually do we not need forgiveness for inordinate wrong-doing—whether it be personal, intergenerational, societal, or international? Do these two areas not have common ingredients? The causing of suffering leads, we hope, to understanding, redress --- forgiveness—they are intimately related.

Does Ivars get it, or indeed create a film that implicitly makes-- out of a most unlikely relationship--forgiveness its theme?

Do Ivars and also Inta learn to briefly trust, and to some extent forgive the wrong doings, the misunderstandings, the virulent clashes that each have differently been subject to –recorded permanently now on camera?

It’s a lot to ask, perhaps. But could this documentary have been made **without** this element somewhere—or would it have ceased from the start as the opening sequence threatens?

In an analytic experience, a journey over many years, not just one year, like this one, (though I should say Ivars and Inta have remained in touch off-screen, as is often the documentary way) both patient and analyst make any number of painful attacks, small hurts, deep humiliations, just or unjust, deliberate, or wholly unintended, on the inner worlds of each—it is built into the process of entering from outside that other green door called our externally functioning selves, into the darkly lit interior where things are not what they seemed and where violence, hurt, bewilderment, as well as relief and insight may occur. This is particularly true in a heightened way in work with highly disturbed adolescents or children, as well as with the more psychotic adult patient. Analytic experiences not unlike those with Inta and Ivars do take place. And they too cannot continue without some mutual understanding. For both parties suffer, and each can only try to gradually learn from it. Each has to try to trust finally, and forgive finally, that ‘documentary’ (that record of all the internal illusory world they have generated together) that each has made, and will always carry inside them in some form. And of course we know that forgiveness is a necessary part of all human activity—it is not limited to the sphere under consideration here.

We also know that it does not always happen that forgiveness is recognized as present, or indeed recognized as necessary. Often when it is most in order- it fails us. (Think of the unforgiving Shylock……….at the culmination of Portia’s speech on mercy--two figures-- equally at extreme odds- and finally punishment, with a modicum of forgiveness, is meted out to the unyielding Shylock.) (Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice.)

When mutual forgiveness is there—the fragments of the analytic relationship, or indeed those of the documentary journey may cohere, to some extent, into a loving and accepting whole. Donald Winnicott calls this “The Capacity for Concern”; Melanie Klein calls it “The Depressive Position”. It is an achievement analytically to attain this stage of internal functioning. And when the self doesn’t reach that stage, matters remain in an un-integrated, unresolved and painful state, leaving both parties affected long term. The interior self damages the exterior self. It is not a small matter to be unable to understand, and then forgive, to allow the common ground of that ‘salad’ and that ‘soup’ to be found.

Perhaps it’s a big question to raise —and not necessarily to be answered here and now--forgiveness as an element of both the documentary and the analytic journey, but I respectfully raise it, because I think the film, to its credit, quietly raises it also.

I leave you now to make your own approaches to our film.

Thank you.

**HELEN TAYLOR ROBINSON ©**