

## HOPE

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*‘Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.’*

Desmond Tutu

*This is an adaptation of a paper that was presented to the Applied Section of the British Psychoanalytical Society (BPAS) in March 22 and was then published in the Society’s Bulletin several months later.*

### **Why hope?**

The last two years seem to have unleashed a veritable Pandora’s Box of disasters upon us: the fragmentation of Brexit, Covid, the mounting evidence of climate catastrophe and now, of course, the war in Ukraine. So why, at the height of the pandemic, during the long period of lockdown, did the Committee choose ‘Hope’ as a theme? Was it a desperate hope that we might be in a better position by the autumn of 2022? That we might just be able to be back in the cinema? Was it also a wish to engage in something hopeful, through art and creativity, to sustain our collective resilience in those dark times? Furthermore, as this festival, epff 11, is the first to be organised by the current committee with the new directorship of Katalin Lanczi and myself, with a new honorary president, Agnieszka Holland, I wonder if our choice was the expression of our desire to work together, to create something that both honoured the culture established over twenty years by the previous director, Andrea Sabbadini, of promoting a dialogue between the worlds of film and psychoanalysis, and at the same time to offer something new. We were not alone in choosing ‘Hope’ as co-incidentally it was the theme of this year’s Anglo-German Colloquium in June that several members of the committee enjoyed attending.

### Hope in European culture

European culture can be said, somewhat narrowly perhaps, to have emerged from the classical societies of Ancient Greece. According to Hesiod, Pandora, the first woman, who bears in some respects a striking resemblance to Eve, was given a jar that held all the so called ‘gifts’ from the gods which were, in fact, the various plagues and miseries of humanity that flew out whenever she opened it. All that remained at the bottom was Hope.



The Judaeo-Christian culture which followed has much to say about hope of which I will only mention a few points that seem particularly relevant. Stephen Wilson, philosopher and priest, in his paper: ‘Why Hope Matters: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives’, published on this website, refers to ‘The Birth of Hope,’ by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who argues that Judaism is essentially a hopeful theology, as opposed to the tragic Hellenistic culture exemplified here by Pandora. Stephen goes on to show how this hopeful tradition continues into the New Testament. Notably he quotes from [Romans 8:24-25](#) (Revised Standard Version):

‘Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.’ He also draws very usefully on Thomas Aquinas who contended that ‘hope is born from the desire for something good that is “difficult but

possible to attain.” Aquinas’ definition firmly situates hope within the perspective of the reality principle.

### **Hope and Psychoanalysis.**

I am going to offer a very few thoughts here about hope from a psychoanalytical perspective, concentrating upon the concepts that seem most pertinent to the films that we have selected many of which do not appear inherently hopeful!

Hope and its vicissitudes for example: hopelessness, fear, despair, false hope, do not, I think, constitute a discrete psychoanalytic concept: there is no entry for ‘hope’ in Laplanche and Pontalis’ definitive text. Instead, I would suggest, they are key ingredients in many, if not all, major psychoanalytic concepts.

Those that came most often to my mind in considering the films we have seen centre upon the capacity to mourn, omnipotent or manic hope, the generation or loss of meaning and the crucial role of the good internal object in maintaining resilience against the odds.

### **Mourning and its failures: melancholia and mania**

It is in Freud’s (1917) seminal distinction between mourning and melancholia as different responses to loss that the possibility of hope can be found. He movingly describes mourning as the lengthy and enormously painful experience of relinquishing every tie to the lost object; every memory, every association must be worked through so that the mourner can finally return to life and reattach with hope to a new object. Despair lies in the refusal to mourn, in which the subject refuses to give up the object, hopelessly identified with it in a melancholia that offers no chance of finding a new object. Elsewhere, in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud describes the bleakness of melancholia as ‘a pure culture of the death instinct.’

Miss Havisham from Dickens’ ‘*Great Expectations*’ comes to mind, dramatised in David Lean’s 1944 film. She denies the reality of the loss, of her jilting on her wedding day; for her, life and time are suspended forever as she waits in expectation for the wedding breakfast that will never take place, for the husband who will never come.



But how does melancholia come to an end? Freud struggles to understand the economic situation but notes the manic triumph and the way in which the ego proclaims itself free of the object that is lost.

Melanie Klein added to our understanding of mourning by noting that the loss of the loved person revives the anxieties of the early depressive position such that the mourner feels that all their internal good objects have been destroyed and have to be reinstated. Any loss in the external world, therefore, revives past losses and menaces the integrity of the internal world (1940). The importance of the good internal object, established in the depressive position, cannot be emphasised enough in the maintenance of resilience, supporting and nourishing the individual throughout life and sustaining them through difficult times.

Klein also develops Freud's thinking on mania, contending that the manic defences consist in a denial of psychic reality with an omnipotent and contemptuous denigration of the importance of the objects that are lost and of the ego's dependence upon them. It seems to me

that this is where a more pathological, omnipotent vicissitude of hope can be seen, as in the case of Miss Havisham.

Anna Potamianou(1992) has also identified a more problematic manifestation of hope in borderline states that functions as a character armour that supports the subject's narcissistic self sufficiency, denying reality and sustaining masochism and suffering (Steiner 1993.) For these patients the present is ever subordinate to the future which is supported by omnipotent hope based on the denial of reality.

For his part, Winnicott wrote about the vital importance of primary creativity in the generation of a meaningful experience of being alive. Themes of hope and hopelessness can be found throughout his work. His (1969) concept of the object that becomes real and separate through surviving the baby's destruction is fundamentally hopeful. He sees signs of hope in the antisocial act and in the psychosomatic symptom. However, he is also concerned with what happens when the environmental provision fails and the baby is traumatised, forced in extremis to mount primitive defences against unthinkable agonies. Herein lies madness and despair. How to hope then that there is any benevolence in the world or that it is possible to be dependent on another?

### **Hope and the generation of meaning**

Margot Waddell's recent paper, "'All the light we cannot see": Psychoanalytic and poetic reflections on the nature of hope,' (Waddell 2019) is a wonderful way to conclude this brief reflection upon hope, the paper's title echoing the unseen nature of hope described in the New Testament. In her beautifully written paper, Waddell, as in much of her writings, turns to literature, to the poets, to help us see what is 'beyond words.' She draws on Bion's work on the importance of the search for meaning, on the metabolism of the infant's raw experience into meaningful emotional experience transformed by maternal reverie, and links this to the work of analysis. Who, either analyst or analysand, approaches the analytic endeavour without some degree of hope? Waddell considers that the patients she describes in the paper all came to treatment with the hope of being held in mind by another.

Waddell also refers extensively to Segal and these words from her 1952 paper: 'A psychoanalytic approach to aesthetics' seem particularly pertinent to many of the films chosen.

Segal writes:

‘It is when the world within us is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments, and we ourselves in helpless despair—it is then that we must create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, recreate life.’

In *Burnt Norton*, TS Eliot writes: ‘Humankind cannot bear too much reality.’ I would suggest, however, that the thread that runs through this reflection upon hope, from Aquinas to Waddell, via Freud, Klein and Winnicott, is that it is in the capacity to bear some reality, both internal and external, that hope can be found.

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