

## *epff12*

### Editorial

Katalin Lanczi, co-director, *epff12*

Journey – the theme of the 12<sup>th</sup> European Psychoanalytic Film Festival – is a rich concept, yet it carries the risk of appearing to be a contemporary cliché. (*Stephen Wilson*) Still, the Organising Committee of *epff 12*, after much discussion, chose this theme because it was felt to be meaningful as a concept both in the world of film and in psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysts often conceptualise psychic change as the hallmark of progress in psychoanalytic work. The exploration of the internal – psychic – world is at the centre of the journey analyst and patient undertake together. It involves an enquiry into the way patients perceive their internal objects: representations of past relationships and experiences. For analysts, the journey through the countertransference, the ebb and flow of the sessions, the responses to the patient's transferences, provide a backdrop to the rich tapestry of emotional responses.

It is a journey that ends one day with the termination of the analysis but continues internally for both patient and analyst. If the analysis was felt to have been helpful, patients internalise their analysts and continue a dialogue with them, first actively and consciously and then, increasingly, unconsciously, throughout the patient's life. The analyst, in turn, learns from the relationship and this sustains future work and becomes part of the analyst's psychoanalytic identity. This indicates an ongoing journey, never linear, always powerful.

This process can be seen as having some shared characteristics with the viewer's process during and after watching a movie. The audience, while immersed in the film, share, each person in their own way, through their own emotional filters, the journeys of the characters as well as their visual, non-verbal reactions. After a movie, if it is a powerful one, we are often left with residues: thoughts, feelings, memories, reactions. It is not infrequently that we have taken in a character to the point of feeling identified with their movements and expressions for a little while after the end, and they may even subsequently enter our dreams.

In analysis the journey entails a process in which both partners must work through the losses involved in ending the analysis: the relationship will never be the same again, even if, as it happens at times, the patient returns for further exploration. The patient must give up fantasies akin to Oedipal and pre-Oedipal longings: the analyst will never become their parent, friend or lover. Both must give up their wish for perfection, for a fundamental change that would entail a rewriting of the patient's history, for 'cure'. Instead, limitations must be accepted, idealisation given up and mourned, reality faced.

The viewer's journey is not entirely dissimilar: it is an immersive process, but at the end of the film the connection with the characters changes; it is now located entirely in the viewer's mind. Sometimes there is a real sense of loss when a particularly powerful and moving film ends, though of course, unlike in analysis, the process can be repeated, reexperienced and reviewed and subsequent re-watching of the film might reveal new discoveries.

In film the journey is in time and space, and, uniquely among art forms, present, past and future can all be represented, visually as well as in dialogue, in a chronological but also entirely non-chronological and parallel ways. The unconscious of the characters – which, as Freud emphasised, is timeless – can be portrayed visually, without words. The audience will have many and varied responses as they process, through their own unconscious internal world, the experience of watching the movie.

During analysis the patient finds, in the analyst, an object with a variety of characteristics but ultimately (and hopefully, though not always) a helpful other who will assist their journey/development. This will unblock defences that are counter to life and movement. The internal drama of the characters in a film is equally compelling. Trauma and its unsymbolised residues, developmental blocks, unresolved Oedipal conflicts, the bread and butter of analytic work are all central to our films this year as are developmental journeys where protagonists are seeking to find others who could assist them, while struggling with internal and external blocks on the way. The creative process is itself a journey and filmmakers face many challenges on the way. (*Fenella Woolgar*)

Interestingly, our European consultants, who submit films for consideration from their own country, sent us this year several road movies which were at time felt to be disturbingly concrete. A surprising number of dead bodies were being transported in vehicles to one location or another. Was this a fallout from the pandemic, which was still very present during our last festival, and which must haunt us for years to come? Or is it to do with the increasingly volatile nature of our world, the ever-present danger and ever more complex nature of conflicts, terrorism, wars, environmental catastrophe: death and more death? Is it a sign of a culture unable to mourn losses? Loss is never far away in our personal journeys and in our films, and eventually we chose 11 films we felt were particularly authentic contributions to the exploration of the theme.

One could group them in multiple ways; they are each unique. Interestingly, six of the eleven films were directed by women (*The Green Border, Scrapper, Je'vida, The Walk, Le Ravisement, Vasil*) and one by male and female codirectors (*Soundproof*). Some are debut films (*Soundproof, Scrapper, Le Ravisement, The Walk*) and this may contribute to the freshness of expression, the originality of the visual style and the presence of so many youthful protagonists. Not infrequently, the actors are strikingly accomplished amateurs matching the talents of experienced actors.

I thought it helpful to group the movies from a psychoanalytic perspective, though various different groupings and interpretations would be equally compelling. After all, the hero's journey is a classic theme, from Moses in the Torah, through the *Odyssey* to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, ....., all the way to *Harry Potter*! (*Pina Antinucci*) I thought it remarkable though that many of our films have no clear endings: we cannot be sure how the journey ends, what the outcome of it might be, so very much like it is in psychoanalysis – and in life.

Significantly, there are numerous adolescent characters in our films this year: could this be because adolescence is, par excellence, the most complex and fraught journey of our lives? It

is, after all, the journey from childhood to adulthood, the reworking of all the childhood developmental stages, most particularly Oedipal conflicts, a process of second individuation (Blos, P, 2017).

### **THE OUTSIDER**

Several films shown at *epff* 12 this year interrogate **the Journey of the Outsider**, the migrant, the Other, with all the obstacles, anxieties and potential achievements of such a journey. Parallels can be drawn here with the journey of a session where analyst and patient attempt to bridge their ‘otherness’ through unexpected movements and with varied results; an encounter as traumatic as it is thrilling. The outcome of the process, the integration of the immigrant’s experience, a process of ‘third individuation’ (Akhtar) much depends on the circumstances: is it the terrifying journey of the refugee or the less traumatic but undoubtedly daunting one of the émigré? In these films – as in every analysis – we are confronted with hopes, fears, idealisation, disillusionment and the dangers of the unknown.

**THE OPENING GALA FILM**, our Honorary President Agnieszka Holland’s new masterpiece, **The Green Border** (A. Holland, Poland, 2023), winner of the Jury prize in Venice last year, was conceived initially during the 2015 migration crisis. It probes and investigates our concept of what it is to be European, what our borders might represent (both internally and actually). How do we deal with a seemingly impossible dilemma: the conflict between a perhaps unrealistic demand for open borders and unlimited immigration on the one hand and the denial of the human rights of genuinely persecuted, frantic, terrified people forced to leave their war-torn, famine ridden home countries on the other. The film was banned by the then Polish authorities for describing the reality of exceptional, state sponsored brutality of both Polish and Belarussian border guards; Agnieszka Holland required bodyguards after the movie was released, due to threats to her life.

The Green Border has compelling echoes with her previous films about the Holodomor and the Shoah and with her early movie *Europa, Europa* (1990). To paraphrase Primo Levi: If this is Europe....(Levi, P. 1947)

Films in this group address journeys made voluntarily or as a matter of survival, from country to country, ultimately from one identity to a potential other identity. (Antinucci, A. 2024 and Lanczi, K. 2023)

**Vasil** (A.Prat, Bulgaria/Spain 2022), a Bulgarian man, an immigrant in Valencia is forced to live on his wits. He faces many acts of discrimination as well as kindness. His journey is not just the actual one from one country to another, but it also involves his changing perspective on the ‘otherness’ of the locals. The film urges us, the audience, to ponder about difference, but this would be a cliché if it weren’t for the way the film was shot. Through static images we often see only one member of a dialogue, as if we are being invited to identify with the invisible other’s perspective. The main characters are single, their loneliness tangible, their rivalry, warmth, rage illustrate complex internal journeys.

There are many unfinished story lines: the widower architect's, who offers hospitality, albeit ambivalently, the complexity of his relationship with his daughter, the welcoming American expat's backstory, the disorientation all the characters feel in each other's company. We are invited to enter this puzzle and thus identify with Vasil's bewilderment. We don't know why exactly Vasil is in Valencia either and so we also experience the perplexity of those who befriend him. The audience is left with numerous questions: Is the ending hopeful? Is it possible for Vasil, deeply rooted in his culture and language, to find a home and yet retain his connections with Bulgaria? Is his talent in chess a route into a more fulfilled life? (*Svetlozar Vassilev*)

From a different angle, **The Walk** (T Kotevska, North Macedonia 2023) by the auteur of *Honeyland*, (*epff11*), is as unusual as it is challenging. The film was premiered at the New York documentary festival, and it features a variety of refugees, among them adults from Syria and Palestine, and a nine-year-old Syrian refugee in Turkey. The main hero is Amal – the name means *hope* but also *pure* and even *hard work* and, tellingly, it is gender neutral and has both Arabic and Hebrew origins. Amal is a large puppet who makes the journey from Turkey through Europe with two puppeteers, themselves refugees. But rather than simply documenting this, Kotevska interrogates the problematic of migration via dreams and fantasies, as well as through showing us the profound hostility the project evokes in some of the 'Christian' countries Amal encounters on the way. This journey, full of loss and despair, nevertheless offers some hope through the changing relationships of the refugees and their delightful creativity. It also connects, interestingly, with the theme – hope – of our previous festival, (*epff11*); it was shot during the pandemic and, like at that festival, masks serve as reminders of the recent pandemic. Memory, trauma, and hopeful journeys of 'working through' feature centrally here.

**Compartment 6** (J Kuosmanen, Finland 2021), the winner of the 2022 Cannes festival, might be described as a Finn's journeys in Russia. Its protagonists speak 'languages' initially incomprehensible to the other, despite the young Finnish woman, Laura being fluent in Russian. Their mutual projections create fear and contempt: Lyoha perceives Laura as easy prey and she in turn sees him as an uncouth and predatory Russian. The journey to the remote North-West corner of this vast country shows some of the Russian 'reality' – poverty, alcoholism, rough attitudes to women, hopelessness – but it also offers us a glimpse of warmth, care and genuine concern between some of the characters. The viewers' expectations are turned on their head more than once. 'Old hat' train movie meets international love affair between two deeply troubled people who travel to pursue their dreams and gradually come to terms with their otherness, perhaps even finding solace in it. Questions of sexuality and differing cultural norms further highlight the struggle to make sense of Otherness and the psychic journey required to process it.

## **FROM RAGE TO REPARATION**

A different group of movies could be conceptualised as journeys **from rage, violence and criminality to forgiveness and redemption and, perhaps, reparation**

**Soundproof** (M Rogerson, M Hayman UK 2023) is the gripping and challenging story of a single mother, her criminal boyfriend, her teenage children, rape and murder. It offers us an insight into lives in the underbelly of London, a touch and go escape via a road trip to the Kentish coast, and into an essentially psychopathic world that the young protagonists try to escape. The redemptive power of a new relationship with an equally damaged but creative new lover, Tom, offers hope for the young mother, while an alternative relationship with a substitute father for the son, Dylan is juxtaposed with the journey of the inevitably more suspicious and terrified daughter, Izzy. Tom, the mysterious stranger, tells his own traumatic story bit by bit and we observe his gradual thawing, his longing for contact, for family, for love. Mutual projections give way to a more realistic appreciation of each other, not unlike in the psychoanalytic process. Fear and loyalty play equal parts, but trauma is central to the lives of all the characters. Nothing is straightforward though, and we are kept in suspense to the very end – and beyond.

**A Chiara** (J Carpignano, Italy 2021) is a coming-of-age drama about a teenage girl's discovery of her father's links with the Calabrian mafia. Chiara (Clara, meaning *bright, luminous*) moves from idealisation and adoration to disillusionment. We see the film unfold from her adolescent perspective, her changing moods, brooding uncertainty and fury. When she is offered an escape route by social services, the state's representative – education, a new home with a Northern upper middle-class family, a new identity – it is undoubtedly at a terrible cost: the loss of everything she had known, the family she had loved, the father she had respected. All of her earlier life must be given up if she is to turn her traumatic discovery into a reparative journey.

The quintessentially Italian journey from South to North is illustrated by changes of education, culture, even skin colour as Chiara traverses this complex country. There is an additional, fascinating feature in this film: the Calabrian Roma, playing themselves: another troubled, crime ridden, poor community. The father, or rather his absence as representative of the Law (Freud, S., 1913) appears to have little choice but criminality if he is to provide for his family – an appalling predicament. (*Fabio Vighi*)

Our film from Serbia, **The Load** (O. Glavonić, Serbia 2018), shown in Cannes and the winner of the 2018 Zagreb Film Festival, takes us back to 1999, the war in Kosovo. It features Vlada, a Serbian truck driver. He is hired to transport his cargo from Kosovo back to Belgrade, to earn money his family needs for survival. He claims not to know – and not to want to know, turning a blind eye – what is in the truck. We discover slowly but unsurprisingly that he is being used to hide massacres thereby colluding with the destruction of the evidence of Serbian atrocities. At the same time, we come to understand, through his attempts to share this with his son Ivan, his own history of multi-generational trauma and the harrowing recent history of Serbia itself: his own father's and grandfather's struggle to survive in another war, WW2, in which Serbia suffered huge losses while resisting Nazi occupation.

Ivan represents the next generation. He wants the life of an ordinary youngster, as does the hitchhiker, Paja, whom Vlada had picked up earlier: preoccupied with girls, pop music and the forming of a band. (*Vladimir Jovic*)

Perhaps we, the viewers, are called upon in these three movies to understand the complexity of the criminality of the fathers and stepfather and the tacit acceptance of it by women who

struggle ‘to protect’ their children from facing this. The perverted Oedipal situation then confronts the children with an additional layer of a profound dilemma.

All three films interrogate the struggle of the protagonists in seemingly impossible situations and that of the next generation who must come to terms with the truth but move on and away from their parents’ desperate choices and hopefully build better lives.

### **FROM LOSS TO MOURNING**

Our third group of films explores **the internal journey from loss to mourning**. In each of these films Oedipal themes predominate but here the focus is perhaps on the next generation; separation must be achieved to form a safer base for a more secure identity and mourning is central to this process. (*Anne Patterson*)

**Here We Are** (N Bergmann, Israel/Italy 2020), a portrait of a relationship between a father and his autistic son, directed by one of the creators of the original *In Treatment* series, focuses on the painful internal journeys of Aharon and his son Uri. Their relationship is so exclusive – as if they are the Oedipal couple – that Uri’s mother remains on the margins, though as the film progresses, we come to see her and the dynamics of the parental couple in a more complex way. As father and son travel through the country to escape the inevitable, the repetitive nature of the physical journey comes to represent the stasis of their respective internal journeys: their symbiosis now prevents development. The son must separate by accepting a place in a community for young autistic people. It is through this separation and through mourning his childhood that Uri is able to move on from regressed, childish dependence on his loving but lonely and anguished father. Screenwriter Dana Idisis has, apparently, drawn on her personal experience, which explains the haunting accuracy of the portrayal of Uri’s predicament.

Aharon, in turn, faces his own need for maintaining a lack of internal movement, his own painful dependence on his son and the sacrifices he has had to make while bringing him up. References to Chaplin’s silent movies may indicate that there is much in the autistic state that is beyond words.

**Je’vida** (K Gauriloff, Finland 2023) is a woman who cannot speak of her trauma. Her mother tongue is Skolt Sami, a dialect of Sami, a Finno-Ugric language spoken by only about 300 people now. What happened to the child Je’vida or Iida, as she comes to be called in the Finnish world in which she must survive? What is it she is mute about, even in her mother tongue? Shot in black and white, with memories, past and present, fantasy and reality interspersed, through the eyes of the next generation – her niece, Sanna, daughter of her estranged, assimilated sister – we begin to understand the multigenerational trauma and the choices Je’vida had to make to fit in with the outside world. Russian Orthodox, and speaking a minority language, the community has been oppressed by the Lutheran Finnish majority. Secrets and lies in the community are perhaps inevitable: it is a claustrophobic environment. Survival is at a cost: loss of identity, of links, of generational connection, even of language. And where is her father? Who was he? We only meet her beloved but possessive grandfather who represents the past as he insists on maintaining old customs. There may be an irresolvable conflict here between the need to hold onto an ethnic identity and the wish to grow, to become part of the surrounding culture, much as it might at times have been cruel, superior, racist. Mourning, then, is pivotal and must be faced and in this sense the focal figure

is Sanna, a modern, mostly Finnish speaking woman and an artist. We come to understand what had happened to her family and her people and, as aunt and her niece begin to work through their mourning, they begin to reconnect with their culture. (*Riita Valijarvi*)

**Le Ravissement** /Rapture (I Kaltenbäck, France 2023), another debut film offers us further exploration of how unmourned losses block development. Although there are actual journeys here too – Lydia’s journey from the Marseille, Milo’s from Serbia and their attempt to escape to the Normandy coast – the film mostly portrays the internal journey of its heroine, a successful midwife who steals her friend’s baby, out of envy and following the betrayal by her partner. It is as if she cannot mourn the loss of the relationship, but more fundamentally her original loss. This leads her into a dead end and a perverse ‘solution’. Initially wanting to help her exhausted friend who struggles with post-natal depression, she increasingly feels attached to the baby she treats as if her own. There is no way back from the lie because of the loss this would entail: the loss of her relationship with Milo, of her friendship with Salome and of the baby, all of which would confront her with the tragic loss of her early life, the background of her profound loneliness. She refuses to answer Milo’s question: ‘where are you from?’, perhaps because she does not, symbolically, know. Can she escape her melancholia and mourn her mounting losses? Can she start again? Will Milo’s love for her prove to be redemptive?

**OUR CLOSING GALA FILM, Scrapper** (C. Regan, UK 2023) is also replete with loss: a missing father and a dead mother. Teenage Georgie’s omnipotent attempts to manage without parents through lying is portrayed with warmth but without sentimentality. Redemption comes, perhaps, with the arrival of the father, who returns after a stint in Spain, an attempt to escape poverty and fatherhood. As he could not face his responsibilities and the psychic journey this would entail, he had travelled, in a concrete way, to another country, which may represent an acting out of his denial. Father and daughter travel together internally in their impoverished London neighbourhood. Georgie struggles with mourning her mother: she connects with her mother in the special room she has built, creatively, to remain in touch with her and with her internal mother, but next we understand that she has not changed anything in the house she had shared with her mother and thus cannot mourn her fully. There are several internal journeys here: the father’s wish for reparation, the daughter’s journey from rage to forgiveness, the fights and reconciliations between her friends appropriately confused and fractious given their age. No easy ending here – just some hope for the *possibility* of reestablishing a relationship with her errant father and thus progressing in her mourning of her mother. (*David Simpson*)

It is with the greatest pleasure and much expectation that Anne Patterson and I, as co-directors of the festival recommend, on behalf of the Organising Committee, all our films to our audience.

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**FOOTNOTE:**

Some of our panellists have written a paper about the film they will be discussing. Their names are listed after each film in brackets and in italics but not listed in the references.