

The movie is about a special form of creative nostalgia

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Abstract

Midnight in Paris” by Woody Allen is a movie that deals with the concept of remembrance of the past. I have used a some conceptual ideas proposed by the late analyst Pier Mario Masciangelo. In his work Masciangelo elucidated in a very creative manner the function of nostalgia as an important aspect of psychic functioning. The film moves from the past to the present to the future as a way to find, reshape and elaborate early objects in our mind in order to find a creative solution.

Key-words: movie, nostalgia, creative, art

“Art and humanities research begins with a the desire to understand the human condition. For centuries, literature has provided the source material for reflection on what it means to be human. While literature continues to enlighten us, for some time film has provided a visual alternative. Film not only offer a narrative similar to literature, It also provided an audio-visual feast for the senses, and in the quick –fix, fast –paced. Technicolor whirl of the twenty –first century, it is the feast which best mirrors our experience of modern life . When we sit down to watch a film, the sensual experience – sight and sound –is familiar, but the cerebral one, the story itself, can take us anywhere. In this sense, film is both an old friend and a new adventure. It is also through film that we have a unique means of preserving the historical past, as well as looking forward, toward an uncertain future.”

(Masoud Yazdani, Director, Intellect Publishing)

Woody Allen’s “Midnight in Paris“ is a delightful movie that takes place in the city of light. The movie begins with a spectacular view of Paris that has a magical quality. Like a tourist accordion postcard the views are breathtaking accompanied by the romantic music of Sidney Becker.

The story is about a successful screen writer Gil (Owen Wilson) who is visiting Paris with his girlfriend Inez (Rachel Mc Adams) and his future in-laws. Inez is from a rich conservative family and interested in shopping, eating in the chic restaurants. Hoping to marry and settled down in Los Angeles. In contrast Gil is a dreamer, a bright easy-going

man wanting to be a writer. He is struggling to finish his first novel about the owner of a nostalgic shop. He is neurotically torn between his present career and his dream to become a writer. During this vacation there is an increasing tension between them regarding their future and priorities in life. Their conflicts are intensified by the meeting of Inez's ex-college professor and his girlfriend. He is narcissistic, a sort of intellectual, whose expertise in French culture, its wine and the latest Parisian trends are bookish and ostentatious. He becomes their official guide and Gil begins to feel estranged in his relationship with Inez.

One night, Gil, bored by the tourist routines, the night parties and shopping, starts to wander into the city neighborhoods. At midnight, he is lost at Rue Montagne St. Genevieve. Out of the blue, a vintage car pulls up, and Gil is invited to a party hosted by Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda. The invitation has an uncanny feeling. Gil is possessed by this night experience. Every midnight in the same street corner he is invited to different events. He meets Picasso, Hemingway, Dali, Matisse, Man Ray, Bunuel, Gertrude Stein, and her entourage.

In these encounters he speaks to his literary idols, and is startled when Hemingway asks about his novel and elated when Gertrude Stein likes his work.

These encounters, real or imaginary, help Gil to re-evaluate his life. In a casual manner he tells Inez about his night adventures and his aspirations. She is worried and thinks that he is a lunatic. Inez, in her concrete way, is unable to dream with him.

Gil realizes that his dream is to stay in Paris. He falls in love with another woman who works in an antique shop and who shares his romantic ideals and love for Cole Porter. The movie is a travelogue about the past, present and future and their effect on the choices and desires of the protagonists.

I liked the movie: the fantastic world of Paris of the twenties, the literary characters and painters. Woody Allen is at his best in creating a back and forth between the present and the past between reality and fantasy, regression and progression. The movie is reminiscent of Fellini's film *Amarcord*, a return to a nostalgic past. The cameos of the painters and writers are magnificent. Picasso's obsession with his mistress and Hemingway's maniacal quality about writing are a delight. The acting, especially that of Owen Wilson is first class. The cinematography and the camera work are exceptional. This is a great movie in the best Woody Allen tradition.

I felt that there was a dream like quality in this film. The film critic Kent Jones in "Film Comment" captures the dreamer aspect of the movie. He thinks that "Life is a dream" and lyrically adds: "Dreams giving way to realities that fan and spiral into new dreams, spells cast and lifted, belief dismantled, expectations realigned" p. (31).

Jones's descriptions echo Freud's dream interpretation, Ogden's concept of interrupted dreams and Laplanche's desire of the other in the formation of the dream. Indeed the movie is like a dream in which the past, early fantasies and ideals are activated in a dream. However, the concept of a dream does not convey the depth of the movie.

As I watched, I was intrigued by the concept of nostalgia. Gil's writing focused on the owner of a nostalgia shop, the forays into the past were nostalgic. All the protagonists in the film suffered from nostalgia. But what is nostalgia? The word connotes a longing for loss, a certain kind of longing which has a different qualitative aspect from mourning and melancholia.

The word nostalgia derives from the Greek words nostos (return) and algos (pain) and was coined by Johannes Hofer in 1688 in his medical dissertation "Nostalgia". The word described the homesickness of Swiss soldiers who worked in other countries.

In my exploration of the concept of nostalgia I was surprised that the word did not appear in the index of Freud's Standard Edition nor in Laplanche and Pontalis's "The Language of Psychoanalysis". It appears only once in Freud's Concordance Work. I wondered why Freud avoided writing on nostalgia but alluded to it in other ways?

Luckily, perhaps nostalgically, I found many sources in the Italian psychoanalytic literature. The late Pier Mario Masciangelo, a classic analyst, and a Freud scholar, wrote a series of exceptional papers on the topic. Like Loewald, he was an original thinker who transformed and revitalized Freud. His writings were based on a tight articulation of Freud's metapsychology focusing on the psychic apparatus.

My effort in this review is to elucidate Masciangelo's work which is infused by a Freud who is romantic, enigmatic and imaginative. I will start with a phrase of Freud's that is at the heart of Masciangelo's thinking. Freud (1929) in "Civilization and its Discontents" wrote: "Writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person; and the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease". (p. 91).

The theme of absence appears again in Freud's saying "Love is Nostalgia" and "Nostalgia for the mother". Masciangelo linked nostalgia to the first relationship, which is to the mother – the mother's body. It is the loss of the mother and the feelings associated with this sensory experience - this ideal affective state - that will stimulate the search for other love objects.

These memories, nostalgic in nature, are present in the deep strata of the unconscious and fuel the phantasmagoric search for other objects. It is the absence of the object that brings about creativity and symbolization. Thus nostalgia is an affective representation that stimulates a desire by substitutions in helping to find- rediscover, constructed – reconstructed, the loss of the object. It is a force that engages the libidinal desire.

The search is to find the reflection of the lost object. Concurrent with finding the lost object, one also discovers an illusory aspect of oneself and an appreciation of the other as separate.

The dense paragraph above reflects a reading of Freud that is classic in nature. Evoking Freud's concept of desire one can fully appreciate the link between object loss and nostalgia. In "Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908) Freud wrote: "Mental work is linked to some current impressions, some provoking occasion in the present which has

been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes . From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represent a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day –dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from memory. Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them. (p. 148).

The last sentence for me sums up Gil's neurotic dilemma. We could speculate that Gil's night encounters were a way to elaborate a space for creativity. The meetings and parties were like dream states – psychoanalytic sessions which needed psychic elaboration. Gil was able to integrate the past, present and future - a transformative creative movement - finding an aspect of himself and becoming able to see the other as a separate entity.

Thus nostalgia is the *Zwischenreich*, a zone of creative potentiality where the unsatisfied desire for the lost object and the fantasy that satisfies it co-exist, creating a space - a psychic dimension - that constitutes a structuralizing third. Nostalgia in this conceptualization is an important aspect of psychic life and creativity. The opposite, in which the *Zwischenreich* cannot be elaborated is the core of the severe pathology of borderline states, where there is no potential for psychic elaboration. The representation of the mother is not present. There is only a mother who is in the outside world.

I suggest that Masciangelo's ideas give us a reading of the movie that is rather original. He uses a sophisticated view of the psychic apparatus – in line with Freud's metapsychological assumptions - to add the role of internal and external objects in psychic elaboration. I envision the personages in the movie as representatives of Gil's internal world theatre, as Fairbairn described it. I see the personages as an aspect of Gil's ideals, inhibitions, and love. I wonder if Hemingway and Stein's interest in Gil's work promoted a change in Gil's own subjectivity, activating a search for a love object which was more satisfying and lovable.

To conclude I think that Nostalgia is a hyper cathexis of memory in which the past, present and future can work dialectically. Without nostalgia there could be no historical – creative Subject.

As Freud suggested “Writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person”. I propose that the absence in a movie stimulates our imagination and conflicts - internal and external - giving us the possibility of dreaming our emotions.

The movie “Paris Midnight” helped me to elaborate the concept of nostalgia. I was fortunate to find in my library two books on nostalgia. The first book titled *Nostalgia* is a collection of essays on literature, philosophy and medicine. The second book is a tribute to Pier Mario Masciangelo by a group of analysts who worked with him. I have

summarized broadly some of their comments. The paper of Dr Alessandra De Marchi “The realm in Between” is a clear and original articulation of the concept of Zwischenreich . Also I did articulate in “absence” an essay by the French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy on Freud on the concept of Trieb , which is fundamental in psychoanalysis. The paper of Nancy appears in the last number of the “European Journal of Psychoanalysis” in English.

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