

All About My Mother

An Essay on Film and Psychoanalysis

John McClean

Some films more than others lend themselves to psychoanalytical enquiry. Not only does this enhance our appreciation and enjoyment of the film, but it can also be a means of illustrating and of deepening our understanding of psychoanalytic ideas. Such films have a similarity to dreams. When Freud realised that dreams are meaningful, he opened a window onto psychic reality, and showed how very different is our unconscious mental life from our conscious adult thinking. We now understand that dreaming is a vital psychic activity, generating meaning, by being part of the effort to elaborate and represent experiences that are felt to be of deep significance to the dreamer. As such we can approach the film as we would a dream, thinking of the latent metaphoric meanings embodied, and wondering what the characters represent in the psychic reality of the film.

One such film is Pedro Almodovar's movie *All About My Mother* (1999). Almodovar dedicated this work to "Betty Davis, Gena Rowlands, Romy Schneider... to all actresses who have played actresses, to all women who act, to men who act and become women, to all the people who want to be mothers, to my mother". The film tells the story of a young man wanting to explore the circumstances of his birth, to know the father he has never met, and in so doing to come to know more about the nature of his mother. It is a richly textured film, full of references to movies and theatre and theatre life, and the many interacting allusions illustrate the themes of

the dedication. The film is of interest to the psychoanalyst because I believe it portrays processes described as projective identification, particularly in the form of intrusive identification. This refers to the process whereby one part or the whole of the person's personality is experienced in phantasy as entering into another personality, producing a variety of effects on both personalities. I want to use this film to discuss these processes and in particular, to examine the influence on identity formation.

In a film we may discern a structural configuration which recurs in different forms throughout. I am indebted to a colleague Richard O'Neill-Dean for suggesting the term cinetheme for such a recurrent motif. This is by analogy with the term mytheme, used by mythologists to refer to a similar configuration in myths. For example, we might think of the motif of emerging from water. Moses is lifted from the bullrushes, Jesus emerges from the river after baptism by John. In a film, this motif may be as obvious as the hero stepping from a boat onto the shores of the new found land, or as fleeting as his face emerging from being splashed in a basin of water. In *All About My Mother* I want to highlight the cinetheme of the transplant, of an organ or body part of one person being placed in the body of another. This recurs in many manifest forms, and I will argue that the process of intrusive identification is the latent theme which provides coherence to the cluster. In the particular forms taken throughout the film, the underlying phantasy is that the child enters into the identity of the mother and becomes the mother by taking over that identity. This reverses the difference between child and adult, and the child in phantasy appropriates the capabilities and prerogatives of adulthood, but while still a child. This is the essential point.

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER:THE FILM

Themes and Cinethemes

The story concerns Esteban, an eighteen year old young man, and his mother, Manuela. He is an only child who has lived with his mother, never having known his father. He is writing about himself and his mother and soon makes known that he wants to ask her about his father. It is clear this is a very difficult and painful matter for her to discuss, but his mother agrees that she will tell him at last. She shows him a photograph of herself as a young woman but the photograph is ripped in half and we come to realise that the missing half is where the father once was.

Other themes are introduced very quickly in these early moments of the film. The film itself begins in a hospital where Manuela is a nursing sister who arranges organ transplantation, usually from young people who have died, thus introducing us to the central cinetheme. Mother and son sit down together to a meal and they watch the movie *All About Eve*. This movie portrays a particular form of transplantation. Betty Davis plays a famous actress and Anne Baxter plays a young woman called Eve, from nowhere in particular, who is a fan. Eve offers her services to the famous actress, initially in very menial ways, but bit by bit becomes more and more important. Through continued contact with the famous actress she begins to learn her lines and can even substitute for her on occasion. The end result is that the newcomer takes over completely the roles and life, and indeed identity of the famous actress who crumbles in the process. This rather sinister movie portrays something in the nature of a parasitic relationship where the parasite takes over the host and

completely replaces the host, using up all the host's substances and all the host's identity.

The newcomer manages to come between the famous actress and her husband and breaks the marriage. It is worthy of note that the one person who begins to see through her is a man, a hard-bitten journalist who seems to know just what she is up to. The role of the father, throughout this film, is another interlocking theme.

We are introduced to another theme quite quickly in the form of the famous play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Manuela, in her younger days, apparently played the part of Blanche, and mother and son together go to watch a performance of the play in which we are introduced to another major character of the film, the famous actress Huma Rojo. *A Streetcar Named Desire* concerns the arrival of Blanche, not quite from nowhere like Eve, but from the collapse of the family estate and the family fortune. She is dependent upon the kindness of strangers and asks to be taken in by her sister and brother-in-law. She slowly has a very disturbing and disruptive effect upon the couple, threatening to break them up, but this time the brother-in-law, the husband, sees through what she is doing and ejects her.

It is Esteban's birthday and for his present he wants to obtain the autograph of the famous actress after the performance. It is at this time that he says to his mother that he was wanting to ask her to tell him about his father for his birthday present. There then follows the shattering scene in which the young Esteban approaches the famous actress in the rain, knocking on the window of her car, asking for her autograph, but she disdainfully looks away, hardly even noticing him or giving any

thought as to what he might want. She is impenetrable to his questions, to his needs, to his wishes. She drives off, he follows and then he is killed by a passing car. We may see this as a metaphor for the impact of such heartless rejection by a kind of mother figure, leading to catastrophic collapse of the child, another background theme in the movie. But from this point onwards, like Alice down the rabbit hole, we are plunged into a dreamlike internal world of characters who are more like part objects than rounded individuals. We might think of what follows as the dream of Esteban, with the added tension that there is confusion between dreaming and carrying out the phantasy in a concrete manner. The whole boy Esteban is sacrificed and the distortions of his development are explored as the movie unfolds.

As a healthy young man his organs are now subject to transplant and in fact it is his heart which is taken and is used as a donor transplant to a middle-aged man who would otherwise die. Here we have another version of the transplant theme. One part of the young man, his heart, is taken by the mother in the form of the nursing sister, and is given to a father, in order to keep the man alive. This variation is not a parasite relationship, it is much more in the form of a life-giving relationship. It is at this point in the film that Manuela becomes the central figure and we begin on a journey with her, back to her origins and back into the details of her personal life.

Let us think further about the possible meanings of the boy's death. Considering it as metaphor or dream, his identity as a young man, perhaps as a male even, dies, but part of him lives on. The heart lives on, but it lives on with the purpose of animating the mother to really awaken her to his need to know about his father, and it lives on for the purpose of animating a father, bringing him to life for the young

man. The sacrifice however, is that all the rest of the young man's personality and development, at least for the time being, must die.

Another aspect of thinking about this material as if it were a dream is that it allows us to think of the different versions of this young man as they may occur in the course of the story, to which I will draw attention as we go along. Similarly, the mother, who consciously is portrayed as loving, might also take the form of a very vain, self-centred and impenetrable mother who has no awareness of the boy's needs. The different aspects of the mother occur in the course of the story, just as different aspects of a father can be seen in the men of the movie. Thinking of these as all characters in the internal world of a dreamer, can help us think about these different figures as aspects of self and of internal objects, and to think how they may influence the growth of identity and of personality.

Projective Identification

The processes described under the term projective identification all relate to formation and alterations of identity by primitive means, portrayed in phantasy as the splitting of the personality and projecting of parts of the self or internal objects into another person, leading to a variety of identifications. Three forms may be distinguished. In one, the evacuative form, parts of the self that are intolerable are projected and felt to belong to the other, leaving one's senses of identity completely free of the evacuated parts. In the intrusive form, a part of the self again goes over into the other, but this time one's sense of identity goes with the projection and identity takes the form of living in the other, and of being a part or even the whole of the other. Melanie Klein has discussed these processes in great detail in her paper

“On Identification” in which she uses the novel “If I Were You” (Klein 1955). In the communicative form, described by Bion as normal or realistic projective identification, the projection serves the function of being a primitive preverbal mode of making the other experience and know one’s overwhelming experiences, that cannot be mentally processed in oneself. In clinical manifestations, these processes are often experienced concretely in bodily terms, such as invasion, intrusion, claustrophobia, being robbed or impoverished, or of acquiring great riches, beauty or power.

The Journey

Let us see how some of these themes interweave as we follow Manuela on her journey back to Barcelona and back into herself and her early life. We find ourselves arriving in Barcelona accompanied by rollicking, heady, infectious music, introducing us to one mood that pervades the movie, somewhat manic in nature. She takes us to the streets among the prostitutes, presumably where she once was. There she meets Agrado, a prostitute who turns out to be a man, who has undergone numerous surgical procedures to look like a woman. Agrado is being beaten up and abused by a male client, and Manuela intervenes and rescues Agrado, hitting the man over the head with a rock in the process. Immediately Agrado is concerned about the man, not about herself. Here is one version of the heart transplant, of having the identity of being someone with masochistic abnegation of herself in total concern for the other.

Agrado is actually a very endearing character in the story. S/he provides much amusing commentary on the themes of imitation and authenticity in this business of

being a woman. Her name means agreeable and she tells us several times it is her life's task to be agreeable and make life pleasant for all she comes in contact with. She rails against the newcomers on the streets, the transvestites who merely dress as women, compared to herself who has gone to such effort to anatomically be a woman. Much later in the film, while filling in for the absence of the famous actress, she shows her audience, in detail, the anatomical changes she has brought about to be a woman: eyebrows, cheeks, breasts, bottom, everything, right down to the last dollar cost, and she explains ingenuously that what makes a person authentic is the achievement of becoming the dream of what one always wanted to be. Agrado attempts to establish a point by point correspondence between his body and a woman's body and thereby believes he can become a woman. This is a form of intrusive identification into an idealised image of woman. However as the movie progresses, Agrado becomes much more womanly and appears to be more at peace with herself. But all our categories of man and woman keep being jangled throughout the movie as we realise that this is nevertheless still a man.

Manuela, like Eve, goes to meet the famous actress who is playing the character of Blanche in *Streetcar Named Desire*, a play which we realise runs throughout much of the movie. The famous actress calls herself Huma Rojo. She explains that the name refers to her smoking which she took up in order to be like Betty Davis. At another point when Manuela is helping her, Huma says she is grateful because she has always relied upon the kindness of strangers, here echoing the famous lines of Blanche. Once again we find a mix up between being herself and being the character she is portraying. Huma, like Betty Davis, already exists in a relationship with her Eve, in the form of a young woman, Nina. Nina is her assistant and plays

the role of Stella in the ongoing play *Streetcar Named Desire*. Nina is addicted to drugs and Huma appears addicted to Nina and they have a sexual relationship together. The role of sexuality as a vehicle for carrying out and maintaining projective identification will be discussed later.

Manuela initially begins to take over Nina's role and becomes Huma's assistant, and even begins to play in *Streetcar*. However, this does not continue and she offers that position to Agrado. Huma and Agrado form a relationship and as the film progresses both appear to be increasingly happy with one another and both slowly transform and become womanly and attractive. But our expectations are jarred all the time, even at the very end. Manuela, the natural woman and mother, visits her friends Agrado and Huma and comments to Huma that she is looking very attractive with her new hair. Huma says 'Oh no, it's only a wig' and at one point Manuela makes a slight adjustment to Huma's earring. I think we are being reminded again and again that Huma, like Agrado, still is the imitation of the real thing, is still trying to be authentic but is not. Intrusive identification as a mode of being a person is characterised by this confusion between outer form and inner substance.

In yet another parallel plot, Manuela meets up with another young woman, Rosa, a dedicated young social worker who is assisting the street people, the prostitutes, drug addicts and AIDS victims. She is, in her own way, giving heart to these people. She has a rather self-centred mother who has never understood her. Her mother says that she felt Rosa to be an alien being even as a baby. I suggest that here we again touch something fundamental to the need to manufacture an identity: that is if the initial relation to the mother is so alienating, as illustrated earlier by Huma's cold

rejection of Esteban. Rosa, like Esteban, also has no father, but in this case because he is demented. He is more like a child being looked after by the mother. One of the most poignant scenes in the movie I think, is Rosa's meeting her father in the town square, when she is on the way to hospital. The father is walking the family dog, the dog instantly recognises Rosa but the father, who comes over, does not. It is noteworthy that this scene follows straight after the amusing scene by Agrado in which she explains the cost of all her surgical procedures, the cost and statistics that are to make her a woman. When Rosa's father greets her, he asks her how old she is and how high she is, questions he asks everybody. It is as if he can only recognise the statistics and not the person of his daughter. Here again is the theme of being recognised for oneself, which is central to this issue of becoming authentic, and of there being an authentic relationship between parent and child as the foundation of identity.

Rosa becomes pregnant to one of her clients, a prostitute by the name of Lola. It is around this issue that we discover the identity of Esteban's missing father. Lola, like Agrado, is a prostitute and is a man who has undergone surgery to look like a woman and we learn that Lola, in fact, was Manuela's husband and is Esteban's father. In a poignant but amusing scene Manuela reveals this to Rosa, after Rosa has told her she is pregnant. Manuela explains that when their son was born Lola, whose name was then Esteban, went to Paris for work, promising to return. When he did, he had breasts. Rosa, listening to this, nods in a worldly wise way, as if to say, Well it is hard to find good men these days. Esteban the father, now Lola, was intensely envious of his wife. He wanted to possess all the attributes of the woman, to be the one wearing the bikini and being admired by all the men. Manuela, like

Stella in Streetcar, takes her baby and goes to Madrid and cuts out all pictures and all reference to Esteban /Lola, until the present.

I think that Rosa can be seen as representing a female version of eighteen year old Esteban, our initial hero and voyager. And this time, the heart takes the form of a baby. Rosa has contracted AIDS from Lola and subsequently dies, just like young Esteban. Her baby however is taken by Manuela, who names him Esteban and who eventually takes him to show Lola. We can see in this a girl's phantasy of being the father's partner, of having the baby to make herself a woman and make him the man. But we might also wonder what the effect might be if this was a boy's phantasy, of becoming the father's partner, of giving him a baby / heart to make him a father. What does it make the boy? Perhaps this is the threat to the boy's masculine identity and the origins of the confusion with being the mother, which can lead to seeking surgical change in order to fulfil the dream of being female.

At last we meet Lola. The occasion is the funeral of Rosa who has died giving birth to her baby boy. Like eighteen year old Esteban, Rosa dies, or perhaps we might think is sacrificed as a whole person to become a split off part object, a new baby or a heart, to be taken over by the mother and brought to the father, to Lola. Lola, the father, is gorgeously dressed as a woman, but she is dying of AIDS, and I experience a sense of shock and sadness, mixed with repulsion, as we see her coming down the steps to meet Manuela. Manuela says to him that he is not a person, he is an epidemic, something we will come back to in a moment. The overpowering effect on me is to see Lola as a put-together identity, the result of an effort to look beautiful and harmonious, but in fact producing a kind of collage of

female elements overlying the male. There is no attempt to portray him as attractive or winning like Agrado for example, but rather disintegrating. When Manuela subsequently meets Lola in the restaurant and brings to him evidence of his sons, I experience a tremendous jangling of emotions and categories in the process. He learns that he has an eighteen year old son who has died, he meets his new baby son and he says Come to Daddy. Here is the heart transplant that is to bring him alive as a father at last. But the excruciating confusion of the scene is that he is dying and that his efforts to be the mother himself have resulted in this collage of a gorgeous, beautiful looking woman that we feel has no substance. Esteban III, the baby, contracted HIV antibodies from Rosa, ultimately from Lola, but the baby has miraculously reversed the infection and is now free. I think we are meant to believe that the epidemic is finally cured, that the baby transplant has worked his magic and the past will not be repeated. But is this really so? After all, Esteban III will never know his father and will grow up with Manuela, perhaps in the same way as Esteban II. That is to say, there may be a repetition of living in this phantasy of being the heart transplant saviour.

In the film *All about Eve*, this ending is more explicit. We see Eve luxuriating in the role and identity of the famous actress, in fine clothes and in the wonderful apartment, when a knock comes at the door. Standing there is a young student, a fan of Eve, who asks innocently if she can be of any assistance. Equally innocently Eve says Yes. But we all know that the whole process is about to start again. I feel this sinister note is hinted at in the ending of *All About my Mother*, along with the more predominant theme of the film as being very heart warming. The transformation that we see in Agrado, Huma to some extent, and Manuela, does

seem to be about giving heart and emotional substance to women and mothers, as distinct from being caught up in a narcissistic identity.

The Epidemic

Let us consider Manuela's description of Lola as an epidemic. It suggests that he is an infection, a life-threatening presence, a presence that is very widespread which can affect a great many people. The image of the HIV that he spreads around and which is miraculously cured by baby Esteban is an aspect of his epidemic presence. But what does this epidemic represent in the internal world?

We may remember that Sophocles' drama *Oedipus Rex* begins in Thebes with the citizens greatly concerned about plagues and epidemics, just as Hamlet reflects that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark. In Sophocles' play the search for the source of the trouble leads back to discovering that Oedipus the king has married his mother and has killed his father, albeit unknowingly. I suggest that *All About My Mother* shows us a similar kind of confusion that has devastating psychological effects upon development.

In the current era of post-modern thinking, it is somewhat unfashionable to think in terms of universals, and the psychoanalytic theory of the Oedipus complex as a universal in psychological development has come under much criticism. However, I think it contains an essential truth. I suggest that there are three categories of universals that we need to take account of in thinking about human development: biological, cultural and intra-psychic. It is a universal that all humans are born either

male or female anatomically and physiologically and that it takes male and female to make a new person. It is equally a biological universal that humans are born extremely immature. We take time to develop, we need to be dependant, and thus there is a real difference between the child and the adult.

It is a universal that all human beings live in a culture and every culture has its own way of dealing with the difference between male and female, between child and parent, between mother and father. The post-modern insights are correct in alerting us to the great variety of cultural forms that these universals can take, and that we can be quite unconscious of our own cultural relativities and consider them norms or givens that require no further enquiry or explanation. The Oedipal situation in development embodies these universals. Boy-child and girl-child stand in relation to mother and father and these differences need to be integrated one way or another.

The third kind of universal points to the intra-psychic aspect of this. Psychoanalysis insists that every human being has an internal world where these universals, biological and cultural, are processed and elaborated in phantasy. Every culture shows its own form of imaginative elaboration of human experience.

All About My Mother takes us into a world of great mix-up between male and female. Sometimes highly amusing, sometimes disturbing of our accepted categories of what it is to be male and female, but sometimes I think, painfully and sadly. However, I think there is another form of confusion which is even more destructive in development and which underlies the confusion between being male and female, and this is expressed at the heart of the movie.

All About Eve is a particularly clear example of the fundamental phantasy which I think underlies the film and which I introduced earlier in the paper. The child enters into the identity of the mother and becomes the mother by taking over that identity. This reverses the difference between child and adult, and the child in phantasy appropriates the capabilities and prerogatives of adulthood, but while still a child. Real growth is through slowly learning about oneself and the world through one's own experiences, and this has not taken place. It means living in the illusion of being grown up while still a child. The character of Oedipus in the story looks like the king but in fact he is a child married to his mother, having eliminated his father. The motif of infection represents the power of this state of mind to cast a spell over the child, captured by the heady grandiosity that brings about a loss of reality sense. The somewhat manic tone that is present in parts of the movie is an expression of this, and we can find ourselves caught up in the humour and optimism and "heart warming" but omnipotent nature of the mood.

The motives for doing this can be varied. *All About Eve* shows a rather sinister motive, something akin to robbery and appropriation. Lola's desire to be the woman, to be the mother, and his envy of the real woman, Manuela, would indicate something of the same motive. However, the other motive portrayed in the film is the wish to be the heart, or the saviour/baby. This too can involve the phantasy of the child being the parent as I think we can see in Rosa. But the aim, which I feel is the heart-warming thread that runs throughout the whole film, is to be the heart who will make the mother and the father come together again, be restored in their parental places and in their love of their child. The epidemic, the disaster that runs through the film, reflects the catastrophe for development if this is carried out by the child by

means of projective identification. Authentic development is sacrificed and false identity and development are the result.

The Fundamental Anxieties

I think the film draws our attention to some of the psychological background that might give rise to this mode of identity formation and development, specifically that this process arises out of life and death anxieties. There is throughout the film the theme of the famous actress, the narcissistic mother, the one so caught up in her own life and image of herself that she is closed and impervious to the needs of the child. Huma in the car is unreachable by young Esteban. Desperate efforts are required to get through to such a mother, such as the sacrifice of everything about oneself in the interests of being the heart that can animate real responsiveness. Rosa manages to get through to the famous actress Huma in that cheeky amusing way that results in Huma finding her heart at last. Rosa's mother is another version of the same figure, a mother who simply does not understand her daughter, who in fact experienced her from her earliest days as an alien creature. It is Rosa's mother who cannot bear to pick up baby Esteban for fear that a scratch may infect her with the baby's infected blood. This is a shocking and painful image of contact between mother and baby.

By way of extreme contrast near the end of the movie, echoing the beginning of the movie and the violent death of Esteban on the road, Huma acts in a segment of the play *Homage to Lorca* in which the mother contemplates the body of her son, murdered in the Spanish Civil War. Huma quotes:

..it is so awful to see your son's blood on the ground. A stream that flows for a minute yet cost us years. When I found my son, he was lying in the middle of the street. I soaked my hands in his blood and licked them. Because it was mine. Animals lick their young don't they? I am not disgusted by my son.

We then see her kneading bread with the assistance of the male director, a new and vivid image of parents making a baby and sharing grief. The making of a play or movie can have the same function of making meaning. Huma looks up and says Don't you notice my cold? As if to say Am I still infected, aren't you disgusted? No,he says,it's fine. I think the life blood and heart of this movie is about the love between parents that makes a child who is loved, and that this love is naturally very visceral. When this is missing and replaced by disgust and fear, desperate means such as intrusive identification, concretely experienced, may be the only way for the child to survive. Mother and child become one blood, one flesh, one body so that separation and loss are obliterated.

DISCUSSION

I want to focus my discussion on the way sexuality becomes recruited in these processes of identifications and identity formation.

Identity and Sexuality

Mervin Glasser has written numerous articles on the relationship between sexuality and identification and on one occasion proposed that far from being a weak or unruly aspect of ourselves, sexuality is the most powerful and willing of servants, always ready to aid in attempts to find satisfaction and peace.(Glasser 1993)

“Sexuality is, to choose an appropriate metaphor, his ever-willing genie, able to expand from the confines of a small phial to become an enormous giant, all powerful, capable of conquering time and space, executing miracles, all in the service of bringing about the fulfilment of his master’s deepest wishes.”

In understanding the relationship between sexuality and identity therefore, this would suggest we place emphasis on the detailed internal structure of the individual, his object relationships and the kind of identifications that he has made, and to see sexuality as a kind of genie that animates each individual’s personal structure. We can see this in the way the theme of being a heart, or a saviour baby, can express itself in various forms of sexual relationships.

Almodovar’s film illustrates the role of intrusive identification in the formation of a particular form of identity, including sexual identity. Susan Coates and her colleagues have discussed this process in their work in Gender Identity Disorder in boys (Coates 1991). They make reference to the case of a boy whose cross-gender behaviour “ involved an attempt to regain a psychological connection with an inaccessible mother.He enacted a self-fusion fantasy by imitating her....he confused ‘having mommy’ with ‘being mommy’” This same phantasy was expressed by another little boy who decided girls were lucky, they were always with the mother.

Here is the concretely experienced phantasy that being like the mother is the same as being the mother, and therefore there is no separateness or differentness.

Heinz Liechtenstein(1961) discusses this link more extensively in his paper. He proposes that non-procreative sexuality in humans is used to acquire a primary identity. He also states that “psychoanalytic evidence makes it probable that the maintenance of identity in man has priority over any other principle determining human behaviour, not only the reality principle but the pleasure principle”. He proposes a detailed thesis that each of us develops an identity theme established in the very early relationship between mother and infant, and that this identity theme expresses itself in various forms in later life. He uses the analogy that this early relationship is in the nature of an organ within the body, in that the infant is not a separate being but exists rather the way an organ does within the overall body of a mother’s psyche. He even suggests that this mode of relating is universal throughout life in the sense that we are social and group animals, we all have to some degree this mode of dependence on others, in the way an organ is dependant on the overall body. Be that as it may, the example he gives to illustrate his thesis, is that of a young woman whose identity theme is that she is the essence of her mother, it is she who keeps her mother alive and gives the mother’s life meaning. The clinical material suggests that this may also be her mother’s view of the child too. In other words, that this identity theme is established by projective identification from the mother. This theme then expressed itself in all the girl’s relationships. Her love relationships with another woman, expressed sexually as well, is in the form of each being the essence if the other, extremely possessive and requiring a very exacting form of at-one-ment. When this broke down, there developed a state of

psychological catastrophe and the girl then moved into sexual relationships with men of a very punishing, masochistic kind.

I think we can see something of what Liechtenstein is talking about in the material of the movie. Eve takes over the essence of a famous actress and becomes that actress in order to have an identity of her own. The identity theme of the transplant, an organ within the body, is exactly as Liechtenstein describes. In the boy's development this may lead to severe confusion of identity, and fuel efforts to make himself the mother, in whatever way possible. In the girl, the same theme may express itself in an overriding devotion to being a saviour. But in each case, severe confusion between being a child and being the adult results. The phantasy of being the heart inside the mother who gives heart and life to others, creates a severe distortion of one's own growing identity.

The Role of the Father

One of the striking and painful aspects of the film is the absence of the father who is a strong and loving presence in the growing child's life and in the mother's. The father is either torn away, turned into a woman, dementing, more like a child, but never present as a separate and distinct individual. This is a complex matter, fraught with the risks of universalising what in fact are different versions of what it is to be a father or a male in any given culture. The tendency of psychoanalytic theory to talk about the father and the mother as if these are universals, can create confusion between actual figures in the external world, with what are in fact internal objects. Psychoanalytic insight helps us think of these as internal figures and to focus on

their their function and what they represent, rather than seeing them as gendered givens..We may recognise for example “the mother of bodily oneness” portrayed so viscerally in the movie. When we think of the need for separateness and the growth of reality sense, we may think of “the mother of separateness”, or “the father as third and carrier of the reality of separateness and difference”. The Oedipal triangle captures differences that every individual must find a way to deal with, just as every culture must. Britton (1989) for example has described the structural importance of the internal triangle, with the internal parental couple seeing the child as a child, thus presenting the reality of the difference between the generations. What I suggest is the rather sinister ending to this movie, contrary to the thrilling omnipotent illusion of having fixed the epidemic at last, is epitomised by the fact that there is still no father present in young Esteban’s life. There still is the risk of the mother and baby existing within the phantasy of the baby being the heart transplant, that gives mother and by extension, father, meaning to their lives. As the movie shows, living in that phantasy can take the form of being anatomically indistinguishable from a woman, which is the phantasy of the child being indistinguishable from the mother while still a child. One vital function a father can perform is as the third person who intrudes upon the phantasy and by his very separateness, helps mother and child emerge from it. The reality that is thus introduced includes the fact that the mother and father have a sexual relationship which is different from the child’s immature sexuality and which the child cannot compete with. Mother and father are the ones who look after the child’s development, not the other way around. And a father is different from a mother, anatomically as well as in personality. All these realities can be swept away under the infectious spell of the phantasies portrayed in the movie, with devastating effect on development.

References

BRITTON R (1989) The Missing Link: parental sexuality in the Oedipus complex. in
"The Oedipus Complex Today" Karnac Books

COATES S. FRIEDMAN R.C. WOLFE S. (1991) The Etiology of Boyhood Gender
Identity Disorder: a model for integrating temperament, development and
psychodynamics. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 1(4):481-523

GLASSER M. (1993) "The weak spot" - some observations on male sexuality. In
"The Gender Conundrum" New Library of Psychoanalysis No 18

KLEIN M.(1955) On Identification. In "Envy and Gratitude and Other Works.

LICHTENSTEIN H.(1961) Identity and Sexuality: A Study of their Interrelationship in
Man *J. Am. Psychoanalytic Assoc.* 9: 179-260