

I am often asked if there are ways to speed up the process of psychotherapy (counseling) and make it more likely to succeed. Reading books about psychotherapy can sometimes provide assistance but I and many other psychiatrists/psychotherapists often recommend certain films (the following are among my favorites for this purpose) that illustrate specific themes, life stage issues, and relationship conflicts in evocative, emotionally charged ways. It obviously helps if the movie contains an interesting plot, good, realistic dialogue, and believable acting. There are obviously multiple other themes in these films but these themes resonate most strongly with me. Some of these films could be placed in more than one of the following categories. Some of these movies have violent elements (designated by V) or sexual elements (designated by S) so that you can choose accordingly. The following films I recommend in the following categories:

The presence of evil in the universe:

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS-(1991)-(VV)-There actually can be important insights learned from evil people like Dr. Hannibal Lector, especially about the frightening truths around all of us. There truly is evil in the universe and sometimes it is very close to us or even (gasp) within us. Behind the fear is the wish and behind the wish is the fear. The dialogue between Agent Starling and Dr. Hannibal Lector is like psychotherapy in many ways, including the provision of some painful, personal interpretations/insights (as well as less personal ones) and the beginning of the development of a relationship between them. Starling actually uses insights from Dr. Hannibal Lector in real world ways, something that we sometimes wish our patients would do.

DR. STRANGELOVE-(1964)-Peter Sellers plays multiple roles in a creative partnership with Stanley Kubrick the director in a brilliant satire that makes the evil, foolish, crazy, careless destruction of the world seem hysterically funny. George C. Scott also shows his comedic side.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE-(1971)-(VV,SS)-Another film satire by Stanley Kubrick the director who creates an all too believable world of evil ultra-violence where women are cheerfully degraded, devalued, attacked, and humiliated (like in our actual, current, real world). Free will as a concept is 'worked over'.

PSYCHO-(1960)-(VV)-An Alfred Hitchcock film about frightening, deadly exposures to evil and some explanations as to why and how the evil came about.

THE DEER HUNTER-(1978)-(VV)-It is not usually hard to find the evil in war. The scenes between Robert De Niro and Meryl Streep are incredibly moving, however.

APOCALYPSE NOW-(1979)—(VV)-Another war movie that convincingly reveals evil, with an effective voiceover and performance by Martin Sheen, as well as riveting performances by Marlon Brando and Robert Duvall.

Dangerous asymmetrical romantic relationships:

SUNSET BOULEVARD-Excessive, extreme fantasy life can crowd out reality to a dangerous extent, especially in an asymmetrical romantic relationship where one partner loves far more than the other partner, endangering both partners. A more modern movie than its original date of filming (1950) aided by a convincing voiceover and performance from William Holden.

DOUBLE INDEMNITY-Another more modern movie (film noir) than it would seem based on its original date of filming (1944), again aided by a convincing voiceover and performance this time from Fred MacMurray with another asymmetrical romantic relationship that leads to disaster for both partners. Barbara Stanwyck seems a long way from her later role in Big Valley and Fred MacMurray seems even further from his later role in My Three Sons.

LOLITA-(1962)-A cautionary story of what happens when you desire someone that you really can never sustainably have and in the process reject people you could have realistically had (if you could only have convinced yourself somehow to actually desire them.) Peter Sellers plays multiple roles in a creative partnership with Stanley Kubrick the director, something he also repeated in the later DR. STRANGELOVE. This is also another example of an asymmetrical romantic relationships where one partner loves far more than the other partner, endangering both partners. James Mason, Peter Sellers, and Shelley Winters are perfect in their respective roles.

DARLING—(1965)-Julie Christie (winning the best actress Oscar for her role here) fails in a series of unsustainable, asymmetrical, romantic relationships and never overcomes her own negative contributions to the failed relationships.

DR. ZHIVAGO-(1965)-Another Julie Christie film where she fails in unsustainable, asymmetrical, romantic relationships.

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE-(1973)-Director Ingmar Bergman's movie about a couple's marriage ending in divorce with both then remarrying. The divorced couple come together again by having an affair but with a new understanding of each other this time, but both are now betraying their new spouses.

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF-(1966)-Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton as an unhappily married couple that metaphorically takes another couple hostage and subjects them to witnessing savage, vicious, verbal/emotional abuse.

CLEOPATRA-(1963)-Another romantic spectacle between Elizabeth Taylor (as Cleopatra) and Richard Burton (as Mark Antony) but perhaps outshined by Rex Harrison as Julius Caesar. Evocative dialogue and Hollywood spectacle.

OBSESSION-Obscure, old (1949) British film about a psychiatrist (Robert Newton) in an unhappy, asymmetrical, romantic relationship with his wife who becomes obsessed with making an example of his wife's latest lover. Although symbols are important to all of us, we must be careful to not make them more important than the rest of our life.

NOTORIOUS -Another Alfred Hitchcock film where Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman alternate being the more 'one-down' romantic partner before finally achieving a more equal partnership. There is some wonderful dialogue between them highlighting their respective/alternating insecurities and jealousy.

The hidden world behind things:

REAR WINDOW-Another Alfred Hitchcock film, this time where Jimmy Stewart has a broken leg and, accordingly, has plenty of idle time to observe his neighbor and begins to piece together his theory about the neighbor's murder of his wife. He initially has trouble convincing those

around him (who actually have real lives at that time) of his theory. Raymond Burr (of Perry Mason fame) ably plays the murderous neighbor.

AMERICAN BEAUTY-(1999)- (V,S)—Describes the hidden world behind things (like psychotherapy itself), themes of true/sustainable vs fake/temporary psychological change, reparations/vengeance, and of course who or what really is the American Beauty. I love the scene towards the end of the film alternating between color and black and white where the Kevin Spacey character in a voiceover talks about some of his favorite memories in his life in a flashback after his murder.

BLOWUP-(1966)-Just like in psychotherapy a small clue is 'blown up' into something monumental (similar to the theme in AMERICAN BEAUTY which also describes the hidden world behind things.) The park scenes with the actor David Hemmings (who plays the leading man) searching for clues with the wind blowing through the trees are incredibly evocative to me. Google the actor David Hemmings and see pictures of him at the end of his life and then contrast them with what he looks like in this movie.

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY/SMILEY'S PEOPLE-(original versions as two BBC ~1979 mini-series)-Alex Guinness digs into the hidden world of spies, demonstrating incredible subtlety, insight, and persistence.

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED-(PBS Masterpiece Theater 1982 mini-series)-Jeremy Irons' best role ever in my opinion. There is so much hidden behind the beautiful, sublime, aching melancholy.

Self-actualizing (being all that you can be):

THE GRADUATE-(1967)-A young man, coming of age and growing into himself, finally takes charge of his life after initially, passively, allowing an older woman (Mrs. Robinson) to control him romantically or at least sexually. He eventually figures out who he really loves and wants and assertively pursues her instead, correcting an earlier mistake, and redeeming himself and his new partner in the process.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD-(also 1967)-A companion film to THE GRADUATE, this time with a young woman coming of age and growing into herself, taking charge of her life economically and romantically in a very modern way, initially making mistakes about her romantic relationships especially in creating a series of asymmetrical romantic relationships where one partner loves far more than the other partner, endangering both partners. Bathsheba (Julie Christie) eventually gets it right, correcting earlier mistakes, and redeems herself and her partner. There are two, additional, wonderfully evocative scenes for me, one where Sergeant York (Terrence Stamp), dressed in his military uniform and pretending to ride a horse with his sword brandished, romantically demonstrates different military sword cuts. The other very evocative scene for me is where they are all sitting around the table and Gabriel plays the flute and Bathsheba sings.

THE HUSTLER-(1961)-A young Paul Newman plays a pool hustler who initially fails to beat Minnesota Fats (played ably by Jackie Gleason) but perseveres after insightful assistance from a very believable George C. Scott and finally rises to the occasion.

TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH-(1949)-Gregory Peck (as General Frank Savage) takes command of a demoralized squadron that has lost its belief in itself and restores it, but at a very high personal cost to himself. He is caught in an irreconcilable conflict between winning the war no matter what the cost to his men and his increasingly strong affection and concern for his men and eventually, temporarily, decompensates psychologically as a result. He earlier had shamed one of his men, Ben Gately, who was nonetheless then inspired by Savage's real compassion and concern for him, and in the end Gately finally redeems himself and the squadron. (Kids, don't try this 'shaming stuff' at home.)

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD-(1962)-A Gregory Peck companion film to TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH with Gregory Peck now as a strong father (leader) rather than general (leader), but still caring deeply about his children (subordinates) but also trying to teach and actually model positive values as in TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH. The ugly, vicious, destructive effects of racism are also demonstrated along with contrasting identification with vs. jealous 'scapegoating' of racial minorities by other 'under-dogs'.

VERTIGO—(1958)-Another Alfred Hitchcock film, this time exploring self-actualization (being all that you can be or finally fixing a problem that you could not fix before) vs. pursuing romantic love (when the two lovers reconnect) as well as the fantasy of being given a second chance to totally change one's life (or not).

PATTON-(1970)-Even narcissists sometimes strive to be the best they can be. George C. Scott is magnificent as Patton.

THE HOSPITAL-(1971)-Another George C. Scott film, a satire of the modern healthcare industry, where initially George C. Scott plays a cynical, defeated, bitter hospital administrator who is finally, partially inspired by Diana Rigg to not give up and run away and, instead, to do the best he can in very difficult circumstances.

Out of sight is not out of mind:

MARNIE-(1964)-An Alfred Hitchcock film that explores the effects of childhood sexual and emotional abuse on a woman's adult life and her relationship with men, the dangers of repressing (making unconscious) the abuse, and the healing power of love. Sean Connery's acting is wonderfully reassuring, exemplifying a strong male figure who can still be loving and psychologically supportive.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY-(original version of 1945)-In some ways a companion piece to MARNIE about the destructive effects of unprocessed, repressed (unconscious) issues, even if they are seemingly hidden out of plain sight. "If you bring forth what is within you then what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you then what you do not bring forth will destroy you." This statement is actually from the Gospel of Thomas, a gnostic text not in the Bible, but with a psychological rather than religious emphasis herein. Pay special attention to the character played by George Sanders with all his pithy, wise-ass (but often wise) comments. You can also see younger versions of Donna Reed and Angela Lansbury here.

BEING JOHN MALKOVICH-Different people secretly enter/visit/inhabit JOHN MALKOVICH's mind in a fascinating and engrossing study of identity vs fusion.

No redeeming psychological themes whatsoever:

THIS IS SPINAL TAP-(1984)-If you don't laugh during this movie then you must have died without noticing it.