

Reference

Stenstad, G. (2006). *Transformations: Thinking After Heidegger*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Nicola Slade

When Nietzsche Wept

Directed by Pinchas Perry (2007) based on the novel by Irvin Yalom
DVD - First Look Studios

Here are two, related, pieces of usually truthful but not always accurate everyday wisdom:

1. Psychotherapists are failed novelists.
2. If you have loved a particular book, you will be disappointed by its translation into a film.

What links these two statements together for me at this moment in time is Irvin Yalom. Or, more accurately, a conversation on writing novels that I had with him a couple of years ago. Yalom is an obvious exception to the first piece of 'everyday wisdom' noted above. As if you needed reminding, he is both a highly successful psychotherapist and novelist. He is also almost certainly the most well-known living existential therapist - even if he, himself, does not believe that a form of therapy called existential therapy is possible. And, perhaps, not even desirable.

It was during our conversation that he alerted me to the fact that his first novel, *When Nietzsche Wept*, had just been turned into a film. What did he think of it, I asked. The gist of his reply was: 'They did the best they could, given the limits of the budget and the actors.'

Ben Cross plays Josef Breuer, Kathryn Winnick plays Lou Salome, Michal Yannai plays Bertha (Anna O). And Jamie Elman plays the young Sigmund Freud. Uhm.

I was intrigued enough to purchase the DVD. I had read *When Nietzsche Wept* when it was published in the UK in 1990 and, though I can't say I'd 'loved' it, I'd thoroughly enjoyed it, not least because as a work of 'historical fiction' it played by the rules of the game by ensuring that dates and events coincided with what 'actual' history, or at least could have occurred within its boundaries. I also thought that the characters of Nietzsche, Lou Andreas-Salome and Josef Breuer were exceedingly well-developed and three-dimensional. Freud, I wasn't so sure about, but then his role in the drama was somewhat peripheral.

Like the novel, the film's basic plot is this: Lou Andreas-Salome, Nietzsche's platonic lover, is deeply concerned about his mental state. She meets with Josef Breuer in order to convince Breuer to take on Nietzsche as a patient. Breuer reluctantly agrees, but the 'talking cure' goes nowhere

until Breuer hits upon the brilliant idea that the way to treat Nietzsche is by getting Nietzsche to 'treat' Breuer as his patient.

As a novel, it works wonderfully - especially for those readers who are therapeutically informed. Yalom keeps his eye on the story proper, but still finds interesting ways to raise interesting questions about the whole enterprise of therapy. As a film, many of these 'asides' are minimised, if not entirely eliminated. Instead, it 'sexes up' the story and the various romantic relationships contained within it. It also emphasises a number of 'symbolic' fantasy passages that are, frankly, somewhat hokey.

Thinking about, and re-viewing, the film for this review, I was struck by the thought that Nietzsche has very rarely been portrayed on the screen. In fact, the only other portrayal of him that I could think of was in an obscure Italian film, *Beyond Good And Evil*, directed by Liliana Cavani in 1977 which I chanced upon in the early days of VHS video rental shops and which has since all but disappeared from view and consciousness. Actually, the actor, Armand Assante, who plays Nietzsche in *When Nietzsche Wept* does a reasonable job of it. He plays down the histrionics and doesn't keep playing with his bushy moustache just to 'emote' what a great thinker he is, as I recall was the case with the actor playing Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

So.... I know that there are a great many people - including members of this Society - who loved reading *When Nietzsche Wept*. Are they likely, as Point 2 above proposes, to be disappointed by its film version? Almost certainly, yes. But perhaps not *quite so* disappointed as they might fear. I think that Yalom's own summation is pretty accurate.

As I see it, what's best about the film, in the end, is that it reminds you of how much you enjoyed the book and that a second (or whatever number) reading might be a better option.

Ernesto Spinelli

The Case for Working with Your Hands: or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good

Matthew Crawford. (2010). London: Penguin.

This is an easy book to misunderstand, from its wacky three part title, to its folksy language. It also talks about elements of US culture that mean little to a UK audience, like 'shop-craft'. Shop-craft is explained in a special preface for UK readers as, '*training i n t h i n g s l i k e w o o d w o r k i n g, a u t o m o b i l e r e p a i r, a n d m e t a l f a b r i c a t i o n...t h a t w a s o n c e a s t a n d a r d p a r t o f t h e s c h o o l c u r r i c u l u m b u t i s l e s s s o n o w*'. It is declining in UK education too, as are the possibilities for genuine physics, chemistry and biology experiments. And sports. There is a lot of detail of motorcycle mechanics which has led it to be compared to Robert Pirsig's unique (1974) book and