



ARTS & LITERATURE AND NATURE

I recall being told “it’s all psychiatry, you can’t escape it”, after reflecting on a novel with a supervisor of a residency rotation, now some years ago. But seeing psychiatry in everything and everywhere seemed to me to violate the pervasive mental health professional dictate to maintain strong work-life boundaries. In contrast, art and literature and nature may allow us to see from different angles and through new lenses, to foster wider perspectives, and to contextualize psychiatry and so maintain healthy boundaries. In this new section, “Arts & Literature and Nature” (ALAN), we invite readers to offer short reviews and reflections on art and literature, for example books and movies, and aspects of nature; reflections that widen and contextualize the psychiatric experience. (Section lead, Peter Braunberger)

We are now soliciting submissions from readers for the new ALAN section. They should not be more than 200 words in length. Submissions should be submitted to Vicki at vsimmons@shaw.ca with the subject heading “ALAN submission”. A subcommittee of the Journal will review all submissions. We look forward to your contributions.

To start, here are three movie recommendations to consider.

“Hunt for the Wildepeople”

Peter Braunberger recommends the “Hunt for the Wildepeople” (2016), starring Julian Dennison, Sam Neill and Rima Te Wiata, and directed by Taika Waititi. Ricky (Dennison), a foster child with gangster pretensions, finds himself in a last chance rural New Zealand foster home. When tragedy strikes, Ricky and Uncle Hec (Neil) are on the run in a tale of wilderness survival and growth. Major and minor character flaws are exposed with humour, and covered with kindness. More than a few awkward transitions are managed with wit and a rich soundtrack. This is a fast-paced comedy with many pointed truths that leave you wiser and kinder.

“System Crasher”

John McLennan recommends the movie “System Crasher” or “Systemsprenger”. This 2019 German film, directed by Nora Fingscheidt, presents a period in the life of a nine-year-old girl with severe psychopathology. The film captures the difficulty of finding a stable placement for this child whose mother is not able to take her back into a challenging home environment and her severe behaviours have derailed multiple out-of-home placements. The film captures the attempts by various mental health providers to try and intervene to help this child within the limits of real-world services. The movie avoids simplistic presentations of mental health difficulties, stereotypical players, and contrived fixes. One suspects that the story was informed by people who have worked with complex children in the service system as many of the scenarios will strike the clinician as realistic conundrums. The acting is exceptional. It may not feel like a break from your clinical work as it is strikingly realistic.

“Short Term 12”

J.D. Haltigan recommends the 2013 movie “Short Term 12” directed by Destin Daniel Cretton which presents the story of Grace Howard who is a clinical supervisor at a residential group home for troubled children. The film juxtaposes the struggles of youth in the group home with some light humor from Grace and her peers, while also exploring the struggles of Grace herself. The movie portrays the various forms of mental health concerns that arise from different forms of trauma in a child’s life and sensibly highlights Grace’s motivation for taking up clinical work as well as its implications for her ability to effectively provide clinical oversight. “Short Term 12” is a layered project that highlights the intricacies and nuance of residential life and management while offering a deeper reflection on the developmental course of psychopathology in the context of abuse, neglect, homelessness and other social/environmental factors.

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