

PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED

SCIENCE, FICTION OR MEMORY?

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Hollywood has made another movie about marriage and divorce, only this time with a *Back To The Future* twist. If we look beneath the surface, however, we see that there are many levels of approaching this rather charming film, *Peggy Sue Got Married*- I would like to suggest that it is a psychoanalytic journey - a kind of commercial, so to speak, of an individual psychoanalysis. The movie is no *Spellbound*, it is, nevertheless, an interesting approach to the famous talking cure treatment. All the essential ingredients are there, that is, Peggy Sues present pain over her imminent divorce, her capacity to emotionally and verbally remember her past, and her honesty in doing so. As for an analyst, Director Frank Coppola has playfully made us, the audience, the listening ear. There's even a couch, at least the suggestion of one in the last scene, that is, Peggy's hospital bed where she has apparently been in coma for the past few days.

The plot is rather straightforward, compelling in a charming way, led on by the audience's nostalgic yearnings. Peggy Sue who is about to get a divorce from her estranged, unfaithful and immature husband goes to a twenty-fifth high school reunion. While there, she meets old friends, sees her drunken husband enter the room and is called to the stage to receive an honor.

On stage she collapses. With that event we are back to Peggy Sue's eighteenth birthday - the closing days of her high school. As with any good analysis, Peggy Sue not only relives the experiences with emotional intensity, she does so with all the awareness she has gained over the past twenty five years. Struggling not to repeat what she knows will be a painful life experience, she is led, nevertheless, to the same place that she was at in her original last days at Middletown U.S.A. High! During the film Peggy Sue experiences some touching moments with her family, has a one night affair with a budding writer fellow student and a positively heartwarming encounter with her maternal grandparents. These are two people who have lived long enough to learn, without cynicism, that almost anything can happen in life.

Why call this a movie about psychoanalysis? Not merely, I believe, because of the emotional recreation of the past - good literature does that. Not because the painful symptoms of divorce (anger/anxiety) have been lessened by the film's end - sensitive counseling and basic honesty between the couple can accomplish that. But because the particular honesty the film portrays is the honesty to remember a past experience which I suspect Peggy Sue had repressed, namely, her one night affair with her fellow student. She had this while, ostensibly, trying to change her fate by getting away from her future husband, although then steady boyfriend. Analysis is the treatment that enables one

to remember the lost, the forgotten, the repressed parts of one's life. In this regard it is important to note, yet admittedly difficult to understand, that repressed fantasy can be just as important as repressed factual event. The lifting of repression is more important in understanding what psychoanalysis is all about than particular theories of childhood, or sexuality, or even the role of the sexes - all of these are constantly open to new studies and theories. Emotionally remembering this sexual experience is, I believe, the major factor in Peggy Sue's capacity to come to mature terms with her husband. I do not mean by this a shared permissiveness; rather, the movie enacts the heroine's remembering her own humanity, - she achieves compassion, finding other peoples' humanity, follows.

No longer righteous Peggy Sue did not have to be injured by her husbands infidelity, she could then be sensible. At the end of the film she invites her estranged husband to Sunday dinner at "his house with his children." Anger and anxiety has given way to understanding.

I am reminded here of Eric Erikson's enigmatic insight that freedom comes when we are able to will the inevitable which has happened to us. Unfortunately it takes more than one sitting at the cinema to come to understand and accept such awareness - one of the reasons that analysis takes such time.