



Cinematherapy.com *Film Index*
Cinema therapy movie articles

Why cinema therapy works
Guidelines for choosing films
Guidelines for watching films
Theory and guidelines for therapists
FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions
Experts talk about cinema therapy
Tell us your story

Training opportunities
Professional Directory
Cinema therapy groups
Articles by Birgit Wolz
Other articles and useful links
Cinema therapy bibliography

The Press Room
Contact info
Join a CT Forum (a listserv)
Subscribe to free CT Newsletter

Mining the Gold in
Movies for Healing and
Transformation

Under the
Tuscan Sun:
A Cinema
Alchemy Review
for
Psychotherapists

by Birgit Wolz, Ph.D.

Director: Audrey Wells
Producer: Tom
Sternberg, Audrey
Wells

Screenwriter: Audrey
Wells

Stars: Diane Lane, Raoul
Bova, Sandra Oh,
Lindsay Duncan, Dan
Bucatinisky, Vincent
Riotta

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Year of Release: 2003

Although *Under the Tuscan Sun* received mixed reviews from critics, with some calling it typical Hollywood escapism, it also won praise for its fairy tale

cinematherapy.com the Web

© 2002-2003 Birgit Wolz
Canyon, CA, USA
Site last updated 9-9-03

storyline, gorgeous scenery and sincere characters.

Diane Lane plays Frances Mayes, a San Francisco author and book critic who suffers intense emotional pain in the process of divorcing her husband. First he cheated on her. Then he played the legal system to get a big chunk of Frances' money. Lane's very convincing facial expressions and body language of despair pull the viewer right into Frances' internal emotional experience: we feel her hesitant anticipation when her newly pregnant lesbian best friend gives Frances a 10-day trip on a gay tour through Tuscany, we sense her joy and confusion around spontaneously buying a 300 year old house there, her fear and dread during a big thunderstorm and the many other challenges she confronts while remodeling her villa. Rebuilding the mansion corresponds symbolically with the process of reassembling the fragmented pieces of

Frances' soul.

As her inner healing progresses and Frances falls in love with an Italian man, she starts expressing a heart warming and extremely uplifting exuberance. Coming home after having sex for the first time in a long time she bounces up and down, pumps her fists in the air and shouts, "Yes! Yes! I still got it! I got it! I got it!"

The messages this story conveys are hopeful. Just as with the 1989 *Field of Dreams*, *Under the Tuscan Sun* says: "Don't give up," "If you build it they will come," "Relax and let go, when you cannot control an aspect of your life. Things will fall into place on their own." During the last two scenes of the film Francis receives a surprising reward for having learned these lessons. Her life becomes complete again.

A Client's Response:

Several times during my therapeutic

work with Jennifer, I suggested certain movies to her. Watching these films served her as inspiration and as a catalyst to bring awareness to previously unrecognized dimensions of her psyche. She loved the results and started watching many motion pictures "with different eyes." She watched them, wondering how the character development or the story might apply to her and her life. I was amazed when my client told me that she even began to choose movies in a new way. Sometimes Jennifer picked a film because she felt intuitively that it might inspire her to find a solution to a problem she was struggling with. After reading some reviews she felt drawn to the newly released *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

Preceding this, for quite a while Jennifer had been struggling with the question of whether to stay in her marriage. She and her husband tied the knot shortly

after high school. Now, 12 years later, she was not the same person any more. After one year of couples' therapy with another therapist they still fought very frequently and rarely ever had sex. Jennifer also became increasingly aware of a strong desire to have children. She felt nervous that her biological clock was ticking. Her husband was adamantly against having kids. When they first got married she had not considered this a problem. Now my client felt trapped. Although Jennifer deeply wished to be with a partner who shared her desire for a family before it was too late, she could not imagine starting over again on her own after having spent more than a third of her young life married to her husband. She understood that her fear of an uncertain future might cause her to stay in her marriage for the wrong reasons.

Because the movie plot shows a courageous woman rebuilding her life after a devastating loss,

Jennifer found it to have positive therapeutic effects. I believe it can have a similar effect on many viewers who don't yet see a "light at the end of the tunnel" in their life situation. The engrossing portrayal of the main character's emotional roller coaster and the rich use of symbolic images in the film contribute to this effect.

Jennifer understood the film's messages intuitively. Our subsequent explorations in session helped her integrate her newfound wisdom on a more conscious level. Hope began to arise. She gained a new perspective of faith in the future, even if that future involves starting over. Jennifer believed now that there can be a new beginning after a phase of grief. She felt more inner strength and freedom, less constricted by fear. This process helped her enter the next stage in therapy where she now started evaluating whether she wants to stay in her marriage

from this fearless new perspective. In our most recent session she decided to suggest to her husband a temporary separation in order to find more clarity about what is best for both of them.

Guidelines:

Guidelines for clients in life transition before they watch the movie:

- Focus on France's strength, courage, and determination to rebuild her life after experiencing much despair.
- Notice the "messages" she receives throughout the movie that help her cope.

Guidelines for questions after clients watched the movie:

- What touched you most?
- What resources inside and outside herself did Frances access to cope with her loss and to rebuild her life?
- How can you apply this to yourself and to your own inner and outer

resources?

[Text-only version](#)

[Easily printed version
w graphics](#)