

MIRRORS FOR PRINCES

Introduction by the filmmaker

A young man is carried naked to a shiny desk in the middle of a mirror room. He is the Postman, barely 17, and he's dead, declares the son, carrying him into the room. In the mirror room there are people, some behind cameras, and his father, who was just trying to write him a letter of instructions on leading the life that's ahead of him. The son lays the naked body of the Postman on the shiny desk and shaves his pubic hair.

Circumcision, Fra' Filippo Lippi, ca. 1460AD



I made this scene as a homage to Jewish circumcision rituals, in which I replaced the newborn with a young postman, the agent of communication. It comes at about the middle of the film, as the knot that ties the broken loop that is "Mirrors for Princes". A father, a son, and mainly two rooms: a family living room and a mirror room, which switches also into a toilet / bathroom. I started working on the film from this basic idea.

A mirror room which is a fantasy room and simultaneously a film set, that turns out to be a toilet, where the son would piss or jerk off, bored, idle. As a fantasy room – it is a space where the fathers' memories are projected, literally, on

Circumcision, Unknown photographer



a wall that contains a locked door. Memories which are epic in nature, but poorly executed: he and his son playing all the characters in an arty adaptation to the biblical story of Joseph: the dreamer boy who was sold to Egypt by his own brothers, where he would become "more powerful than Pharaoh himself".

Both father and son were the dreamer boy, though in different times. Both, later, would not fully execute the promise to become the lords of the land, assuring a next generation (the future) that will also try and fail. Identity is the opposite of freedom. And therefore any parallels between this film and my own life are omitted from this text. It's better this way – one's own experience in service of the narrative and not vice versa.

The mother is dead. Her images are spread around the house. At some point, projected on the mirror room wall, she will sing a song of love to the father and the son. Her images and her song are the songs of Hayedeh, the late Persian singer (1942-90), who fled the country after the revolution, in order to avoid execution by the degenerate men who stopped the Iranian female singing. She went to L.A and stayed there until her death. The song she sings is from her time there. Her sadness is flavored with exile.

The father is an immigrant from a non-existent land. He speaks on the phone in gibberish with his sister abroad. The immigrant father always speaks an unintelligible language to his sister, not only in this film, but all over the world, throughout all history. By moving away, one takes into consideration that parts of his past will become more incomprehensible to future generations. The promise in staying put is the promise of repetition. The tension between cyclic and linear times have been expressed since ancient times – Parmenides, Heraclitus, the “great year”, the cyclic rituals of religions. We try to forget that all life is always in motion, because that would signify the passage of time which is our aging and our consequent death. Then come fences, and the talk of ancestry, of roots and homes; Identity, the opposite of freedom. Of course - the other, the unknown, will almost certainly push us aside from our imaginary road that leads us towards silence. It feels sometimes, that we could have already reached it, if it wasn't for those knocking on our fortress' gates. But silence should have never been our destination.

In the film I combined three Joseph characters from Antiquity times: First, the biblical one (The dreamer boy, sold by his brothers, achieves greatness in Egypt, shares his fortune with his brothers), which also appears in the Koran. Second,

the father of Jesus – who himself leaves for Egypt, but it is his son that delivers the promise for greatness – again with compassion towards those who betrayed him. Unlike the biblical Joseph, he shows his compassion not by sharing power but by sharing weakness. The third is Josephus Flavius, a historical figure – a rebel who in the summer of year 67 betrayed his comrades, Jews revolting against the Roman Empire. He joined the oppressive power, but some would argue that with his betrayal, by telling their stories in his histories, he gave them eternity.

Combined I wanted to tell the story of those who ran away. So many wonderful fruits have come to man by running away. Acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami once stated that “trees that are moved do not bear fruit”, referring to his fellow filmmakers who went to exile after the revolution in Iran, when they ran away from the degenerate men who took control of the country. By saying that, he not only hurt those specific persons, but he also showed contempt to the fundamentals on which humanity is based. By leaving a place, indeed, it’s harder to make naturalistic films – The space in the head doesn’t always match the place you are at. But a man is a not tree. And as Naturalism is a lie, presenting itself as a truth, I'd rather tell a truth that presents itself as a lie.

My story of Joseph, of any Joseph, is nothing more than another variation on stories told before. In an ancient Sumerian text from 2500BC, “An Elegy to Nannaya”, a message is sent to tell a son, who went far away, that his father is dying. Of course, the son is devoted to his journey and ignores the message. Then a new message comes, that the father is dead. The son is in great agony, and he mourns his father’s death by performing a musical song.

What seems at a first glance a betrayal, might turn out to be devotion to a greater cause. And it is this “faulty” behavior that keeps the loop running, amateurly tied with a knot. The broken world is the world that keeps spinning. The perfect one is icy and dead.

(Lior Shamriz, 3.2011)

*The term „**Mirrors for Princes**“ refers to a genre – in the loose sense of the word – of political writing, best known in textbooks which directly instruct kings or lesser rulers on certain aspects of rule and behavior. “The Instructions of Šuruppak” from ca. 2500BC Sumer (Mesopotamia), the earliest known example, belongs to the earliest literary tablets known.*

With Horst-Günter Marx, Imri Kahn, Hayedeh

Written and Directed by Lior Shamriz

Camera: David Schmitt

Production Designer: Ole Kloss

Soundtrack: Valentin Silvestrov, Hayedeh, Georges Moustaki et al.

Sound Designer: Assaf Gidron

2011. 63 minutes.

Shot on HD in location and studio in Germany.



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