

Movie: *Mama* (2013)

Synopsis

Mama is a supernatural horror movie by Andrés Muschietti that is based on his 2008 Argentine short film *Mamá* about two feral children abandoned in a cabin in the woods who are fostered by a ghost that they affectionately call “Mama.” Victoria and Lilly are abandoned in Helvetia (the name of the cabin) by their father after his attempted murder-suicide is thwarted by the cabin’s supernatural resident. The film depicts the plight of the children upon being discovered, as their new family must battle Mama when it follows the children to their new home.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

With his film, Andrés Muschietti has inserted himself among attachment theorists such as Klein, Bowlby, Thomas and Chess. The D’Asange children were 1- and 3-years-old when they were abandoned. Upon being kidnapped by their father (and brought to Helvetia), the older Victoria drops her stuffed animal on the living room floor. The transitional object is a symbol of the girls’ vulnerability during the critical period of language development. Once discovered, Victoria assimilates to her new family much easier than Lilly, whose attachment to Mama is tested right up to the movie’s cliffhanging climax.

At Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, the first module – titled *Necromancy* – of our year-long resident Psychopathology course focuses on ghosts (wraiths) and demons. While the latter reinforce teaching points of chronic and persistent illnesses, ghost stories are told to review disorders that are episodic in nature such as Major Depressive Disorder.

“A ghost is an emotion bent out of shape...until it rights a wrong.”

Despite Dr. Dreyfuss (a psychiatrist) diagnosing Victoria with Dissociative Identity Disorder (misstated as Dissociative Personality Disorder), *Mama*’s true affliction is later revealed by Victoria, “It was a long time ago. A lady ran away from a hospital for sad people. She took her baby. They jumped into the water.” As such, *Mama* is a case study about Major Depressive Disorder, with Peripartum Onset (postpartum depression).

Key Words: Virginia, Mama, Helvetia, attachment theory, Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess, transitional object, Donald Winnicott, Dissociative Identity Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder with Peripartum Onset, postpartum depression

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