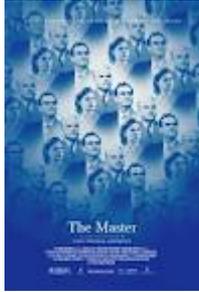


THE MASTER

By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



The Master is thought-provoking on many levels. At the core is the interaction between different versions of the self. Joaquin Phoenix is Freddy, a palpably intense war veteran who drifts along on a river of drunken impulsivity until he meets Lancaster Dodd, played with grandiosely menacing charm and ego by Phillip Seymour Hoffman. Lancaster immediately sees in Freddy a chance to control and manipulate someone using his quasi-hypnotic techniques to lure the drifter into his complex world of intricate relationships.

Looking at it from an existentially psychodynamic perspective, Freddy is pure id, acting on impulse without thought to consequence. Lancaster is the continually wounded ego, struggling with his own internal conflicts, needing endless reassurance to survive. All the while, lurking in the background is the super-ego personified in the character of Mrs. Lancaster Dodd, portrayed with deft control by Amy Adams. These characters take no prisoners. Each strikes out with deadly force when attacked, hitting the raw nerves with precision.

This isn't a plot-driven film, it is a character-driven piece determined to upset the psychological balance just enough to get your attention. *The Master* makes only one real point: We are all subject to being slave to something or to someone. Whether it is alcohol, power, control or the desire to be worshipped, we are vulnerable to losing ourselves in the process. That is the fate we are destined to live out regardless of how much we try to break free. Something or someone will always have a grip on us – literally and figuratively.

The Master makes no explanation or excuse for it. The tension between all the characters and the masterful performances by Phoenix, Hoffman and Adams make *The Master* interesting to watch on a purely experiential level. Don't try to analyze or understand it. Sometimes a film is just a series of scenes meant to challenge how we see ourselves – and sometimes it is not a pretty picture.

I give *The Master* four couches for the quality of the performances.

