

## Film Review

Review of *Lou Andreas-Salomé, The Audacity to be Free (2016)*. Directed by Cordula Kablitz-Post. USA: Cinema Libre Studio.

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*“The question of knowing if psychoanalysis can promise a new love, beyond the symptoms of love life that are addressed to it, has been there from the start...[F]rom the beginning, Freud postulated that the bonds of the passions of love, incomprehensible as they are, escape neither rationality nor logic.”*  
-Colette Soler, *Lacan: the Unconscious Reinvented (2014)*

The tug of war between love and logic in the discipline of psychoanalysis is nearly as old as the Freudian field itself; and is still heard today in the utterances of our analysands. “I love him, but I know he’s no good for me”. “*Then why did you go back to him?*” “...good question”. This question of love and its logics are at the heart of writer and director Cordula Kablitz-Post’s 2016 film *Lou Andreas-Salome: The Audacity to be Free*.

The German language film begins when a young scholar, Ernst Pfeiffer (Matthias Lier), seeks out an interview with the ailing and embittered psychoanalyst Lou Andreas-Salome (Nicole Heesters); now suffering from a variety of regrets and ailments at seventy-two. It is ambiguous as to whether Pfeiffer is seeking to write a biography of Andreas-Salome during the waxing days of National Socialism in Germany-or is making a demand for analysis. Andreas-Salome, despite her own prolific writing, and contributions to analytic theory that impressed even Freud, is less known today for her own writing, and more for being the muse of tortured men. Kablitz-Post does a commendable job in showing there is far more to the “who” of Lou Andreas-Salome, and that she was exceptional in her time and ours.

Pfeiffer’s demand is met by a series of vignettes of Andreas-Salome’s past; recalling the riddle of the Sphinx, we see “Lou” at all stages of life from childhood on (played by Helene Piske at age six, Liv Lisa Fries at age sixteen, and Katharina Lorenz from twenty-one to age fifty). The stories of her love, and loves with figures such as Paul Ree (Phillip Hauf), Friedrich Nietzsche (Alexander Scheer, with a truly excellent mustache that is either an impressive prop or a feat of personal grooming), and Rainer Maria-Rilke (Julius Feldmeier) are worth telling, and worth viewing for the watcher of this film. But she reluctantly gives them, haltingly, and with some censorship in spite of herself, for what Pfeiffer believes is a story that must be told. In Seminar XX, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* Jacques Lacan writes “After a while, a light bulb flashed on in the heads of certain commentators-it dawns on them that, if they are obliged to work so hard, maybe there’s a reason for it...”.

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The reason “for it”, is discovered in Salome’s analysis with Dr. Sigmund Freud (Harald Schrott); “it” being the scene of trauma that affected so much of Andreas-Salome’s life, from childhood onward. To give this scene away, the result of the hard work of Lou Andreas-Salome’s analysis with Freud would be to give away the lynchpin on which the whole film turns, and would be far more satisfying for the viewer to see themselves. However, I will say that the scene of Salome in analysis render the analytic situation far better than I have seen it in many films. I believe those who know nothing of psychoanalysis, as well as those who are more acquainted with it may find themselves more curious about the process.

The scene looks small and extremely uncomfortable. Cramped. Freud sits close to the back of the couch, his ear tuned to the frequency of his analysands words. Andreas-Salome herself lies upon Freud’s divan with a pensive look, and seems as though she cannot quite get comfortable. Many more films which choose to feature psychoanalysis should take a page from this-psychoanalysis is not always a pleasant chat, or a home for neurotic ramblings, straight out of *Annie Hall*. One potentially could get a surprisingly accurate view of the analytic situation that is not often depicted in American film and television: that of the quiet and patient work of psychoanalysis.

Amid flashbacks, such as this scene of analysis, most of the film takes place in the “present day” of Nazi Germany, in which the Freudian school of thought was consigned to flames; Freud, a godless Jew, was burned in effigy after his flight to England. To return back to the beginning of the film, Salome, by the admission of her erstwhile housekeeper, Mariechen (Katharina Schuttler) has retired, and is no longer taking patients. Yet, despite the dangers associated with being a psychoanalyst, with practicing psychoanalysis (“the Jewish science”) in a hostile regime; Andreas-Salome accepts Pfister’s demand for her to recount her exceptional life. Thus begins Andreas-Salome becoming the analyst of her own case. In the process of this recounting, Pfister’s symptoms, such as issues with his work, or his wife, are spoken of. Andreas-Salome provides the occasional interpretation; but more importantly, she follows an injunction put to her in childhood by her father to “become who you are”.

Who is Lou Andreas-Salome? A writer, a feminist, a revolutionary, a woman driven in equal measure by logic and love-but at her core Andreas-Salome is a psychoanalyst. And it is as a psychoanalyst she acts of her own case, and Pfister’s during a time of crisis. In *Lou Andreas-Salome: The Audacity to be Free*, we can see that the analyst must still act in a way that transmits psychoanalysis, no matter the material conditions of the world they live in. Overall, the viewer is left with the impression that Andreas-Salome was a woman far ahead of her time; and that, despite the limitations society (and her lovers) attempted to impose upon her-she is in many ways ahead of our time as well. Kablit-Post has written and directed an excellent film; if I have one qualm it is that it ends too abruptly. But, this too may be grist for the mill and may inspire the viewer to explore more of Andreas-Salome’s early and overlooked work as one of the true pioneers of psychoanalysis.