

The Resistance of Friendship: Sigmund Freud, Laurence Rickels, and Sean Baker

La resistencia de la amistad: Sigmund Freud, Laurence Rickels y Sean Baker

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Abstract

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines three kinds of friendship: utility, pleasure, and virtue. The characters in the films of Sean Baker fit into none of these categories. Friendship is central to all of Baker's films, but it takes the non-Aristotelian form of "friends, no matter what," which I interpret as a description of the aporia of friendship, of an impossible friend, or a friend in the realm of fantasy. In other words, friends are only friends when they resist everything friends are supposed to do. Betrayal, lies, and complications sit at the heart of this new definition. One mechanism for this kind of friendship is *mourning*. Friends are only friends when friendship is mourned, or when it is part of a crypt, or a vault for losses that are too traumatic to confront fully, as set out in the work of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, and developed by Laurence Rickels. This reading of mourning puts a particular spin on fantasy, for if fantasy is generally assumed to be about wish-fulfillment, then when fantasy reaches into the crypt for inspiration, it is retooled into a vehicle for confronting what is too hard to face. This is the function of friendship in Baker's films: his friends are Judas figures going against their friends in order to keep their friendship alive. In *Tangerine* (2015), two transgender sex workers in West Hollywood develop their friendship around a fight over a man. In *Starlet* (2012), a young woman hides a secret from her elderly female friend, and this friendship is only saved when another actress betrays this secret. In these films, friendship is paradoxically formed by attempting to ruin friendship. Thought on fantasy and mourning will help in defining this type of non-Aristotelian friendship, as well as Freud's work on the "ambivalence of feeling" from his writing on the First World War.

Keywords: friendship, Sean Baker, Sigmund Freud, Laurence Rickels, crypt.



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Resumen

En la *Ética nicomáquea*, Aristóteles define tres tipos de amistad: utilidad, placer y virtud. Cabe señalar que, los personajes de las películas de Sean Baker no encajan en ninguna de estas categorías. La amistad es fundamental en todas las películas de Baker, pero adopta la forma no aristotélica de «amigos, pase lo que pase», que yo interpreto como una descripción de la aporía de la amistad, de un amigo imposible, o un amigo en el reino de la fantasía. En otras palabras, los amigos sólo son amigos cuando se resisten a todo lo que se supone que deben hacer los amigos. La traición, las mentiras y las complicaciones ocupan un lugar central en esta nueva definición. Uno de los mecanismos de este tipo de amistad es el duelo. Los amigos sólo son amigos cuando la amistad está de luto, o cuando forma parte de una cripta, o de un panteón para pérdidas demasiado traumáticas como para afrontarlas plenamente, tal y como se expone en la obra de Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, Nicolas Abraham y Mária Török, y desarrolla Laurence Rickels. Esta lectura del duelo da un giro particular a la fantasía, ya que si generalmente se asume que la fantasía consiste en cumplir deseos, cuando la fantasía busca inspiración en la cripta, se convierte en un vehículo para enfrentarse a lo que es demasiado difícil de afrontar. Esta es la función de la amistad en las películas de Baker: sus amigos son figuras de Judas que van en contra de sus amigos para mantener viva su amistad. En *Tangerine* (2015), dos trabajadoras sexuales transexuales de West Hollywood desarrollan su amistad en torno a una pelea por un hombre. En *Starlet* (2012), una joven oculta un secreto a su amiga mayor, y esta amistad solo se salva cuando otra actriz traiciona este secreto. En estas películas, la amistad se forma paradójicamente intentando arruinar la amistad. La reflexión sobre la fantasía y el duelo ayudará a definir este tipo de amistad no aristotélica, así como el trabajo de Freud sobre la “ambivalencia del sentimiento” a partir de sus escritos sobre la Primera Guerra Mundial.

Palabras clave: amistad, Sean Baker, Sigmund Freud, Laurence Rickels, cripta.

1. Introduction. Freud, Rickels, and the critique of fantasy

At the end of 1907, Freud delivered his paper, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” (1959) which focuses on the role of fantasy in psychoanalysis. This was the time of the rise of Freud’s international recognition, yet he was still holding his training sessions for other psychoanalysts not in a clinic or school, but on walks around his neighborhood. At this moment of standing on the precipice of world-wide fame, in front of an audience of 90, in the rooms of Viennese publisher Hugo Heller, Freud described how fantasies take childhood wishes out of the past and turn them into dreams of the future.

Freud is first interested in how writers get their ideas. He suggests looking for the roots of adult creativity in the play of children, since “we can never give anything up; we only

exchange one thing for another” (Freud, 1959, p. 145). In adulthood, play is exchanged for fantasizing and daydreaming, and it is in the daydream that a particular temporality becomes apparent.

Daydreams are not removed from reality. They are not unalterable archetypes floating around in the unconscious. Rather, daydreams are time-bound, reflecting changes in the daydreamer’s life. Thus, daydreams bear a “date-mark” (*Zeitmarke*) (Freud, 1959, p. 147), which stamps them with whatever happens to be important at the time the fantasy is fantasized. This opens up a discussion of the temporality of daydreams, which, like Freud’s endopsychic structure of the id, ego, and superego, is threefold: first, the present daydream is triggered by some current impression; then, this reaches back to a previous event in which a similar wish was fulfilled in the past (such as in childhood); and, finally, the daydreamer now imagines a future situation in which this same childhood wish is once again fulfilled.

Freud gives a rather straight-forward example to illustrate this daydream temporality. An orphan boy, on his way to a job interview, daydreams that he will not only be successful in his job but will eventually marry the boss’s daughter and take over the business. With this daydream, the boy has regained what he supposedly only had as a young child: a happy home and protective parents. “Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them,” Freud says (1959, p. 148), meaning that a fulfilled wish in the past becomes the hopeful fulfillment of a daydream in the future. Therefore, as Marcia Westkott (1977) argues, this idea of fantasy implies that it “not only opposes real conditions, but also reflects them” (p. 2), meaning that fantasy both escapes from and is formulated by one’s current context.

For Freud, daydreams involve the past because they project an old, fulfilled wish out into the future. But when daydreams arise from the crypt, a different structure is involved. Initially developed by psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, the crypt is not a sanctuary for pleasant wishes fulfilled, but rather a vault for losses that are too traumatic to confront fully (1986, pp. lv-lvi). Thus, when the daydreamer reaches back and pulls something out of the crypt to insert into their daydream, a different set of coordinates arises, a set of coordinates which is similar to Joan Scott’s concept of *fantasy echo*, in which “Retrospective identifications, after all, are imagined repetitions *and* repetitions of imagined resemblances. The echo is a fantasy, the fantasy an echo; the two are inextricably intertwined” (Scott 2001, p. 287). Thus, rather than being about wish-fulfillment, the daydream is now retooled into a process for confronting often forgotten traumatic loss or, in other words, into a process for mourning. Thus, with the crypt, as Laurence Rickels (2020a) puts it in the first volume of his *Critique of Fantasy*, the temporality of the daydream gets turned into “the two times you get and the one time you forget” (p. 57).

An example of the crypt from pop culture can be found in the movie *Jurassic World* (2015), the fourth installment of the *Jurassic Park* franchise. In the earlier films, attempts to create a theme park featuring genetically engineered dinosaurs are thwarted by the animals escaping

their confines and causing havoc. Yet in the 2015 movie, which is set 22 years after the original, a fully functioning dino-theme park is in place, and the issues that plagued the first films have seemingly been overcome. Yet the original wish of a functioning theme park has actually not come true, which is seen in a moment of the film that features a crypt.

Two brothers enter an out-of-bounds area and discover the ruins of the original park. They use the debris they find there to construct a Jeep and return to the main resort. Yet this scene is not one of wish-fulfillment in the sense that the 2015 park fulfills the wishes that business tycoon John Hammond had for opening a park in the original films. Instead, it functions as a crypt in that it is a storehouse for the trauma, death, and loss from the first films that have never been properly dealt with, hence the new park is not a complete success, but is ravaged by the same havoc as the original, as “The secret raptor provenance is the hot spot of betrayal and allegiance in the heroic saga waged among the creatures” (Rickels, 2020a, p. 25).

Although *Jurassic World* is usually considered a work of science fiction, this scene of the crypt is read as a moment where fantasy creeps in. The genres of science fiction and fantasy are not diametrically opposed to each other, as thinkers such as China Miéville (2009) and John Reider (2010; Willems, 2017, p. 9) have pointed out, although in the case of *Jurassic World* the border crossing of the two genres is unique: it becomes a strategy for mourning.

One key essay for policing the borders of fantasy is J.R.R. Tolkien’s “On Fairy-Stories,” composed during the writing of *Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) (Tolkien, 2008). Although Tolkien spends most of his essay arguing for what a work of fantasy is not, stating that he “will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done” (Tolkien, 2008, p. 32), although he does ban or “rule out of order” the genre’s inclusion of any kind of dreaming (2008, p. 35), he does eventually describe the genre as covering great “depths of space and time” (2008, p. 35), and describes how it is “founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it” (2008, p. 65). Yet in the midst of this border patrol, science fiction slips back into the discussion. Tolkien argues that the Eloi and Morlocks of H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) exist in an “abyss of time so deep as to work an enchantment upon them” (2008, p. 34), meaning that even though time travel takes place through the technology of science fiction, these creatures are figures of fantasy because they are non-dreamed and reach back far into time.

Rickels (2020a) makes use of this slip in Tolkien’s essay to argue that in science fiction film, fantasy can make an appearance in a very specific way: in the form of the crypt. Fantasy commonly interrupts science fiction in the special effects that nearly define the genre. Special effects are read as the crypt of science fiction, as the escape hatch for what we do not understand: “*Critique of Fantasy* follows the rebound of wish fantasy between literary description of the ununderstood and its cinematic counterpart (for example, visual and special effects)” (Rickels, 2022a, p. 22). With special effects, science fiction “can go into reverse and



sustain within its ruins the allegorical legibility of deregulated fantasy” (p. 30). This crossing of the streams of fantasy and science fiction then opens “a forum for addressing novel forms of grief” (p. 33) because one genre functions as the crypt for the unresolved loss of the other.

One example that adds to the function of the crypt, while bringing us back to Freud, is *The Mystery of Picasso*, Henri-Georges Clouzot’s 1956 documentary in which the artist creates his work on glass plates so that the camera can go “behind” the canvas to show the man at work. What makes this film science-fictional is Picasso’s encounter with the technology of the production, including the whole set-up of the camera and glass plate, Clouzot counting down the remaining feet of film stock and pressuring Picasso to finish his painting in time, and the director at one point running the film in reverse “to redo or undo the painting process we just witnessed” (Rickels, 2020b, p. 49). These inclusions of special effects within the film function as sites of fantasy, where unconscious wish fulfillment can take place.

In the words of Rickels (2020b, p. 47), we find that:

Pablo Picasso made no bones about the wish that he brought to his encounters with technical media, first photography, then film. It was to see conserved the successive changes going into a work, which are lost upon completion of the process. The mediatic prospect of simultaneity of visualization or remembrance was the place Freud marked in his book of analogues for unconscious thought.

Yet the technology in the Picasso film has a slightly different function than how fantasy has been developed so far. Rather than acting merely as a crypt, these “special effects” also take on the role of Freud’s mystic writing pad, since, as Rickels says, “Each station of the film is demarcated in the manner of the mystic writing pad lifting away one image from the screen to clear it for the next image in progress” (p. 49). Freud’s 1925 note on the “Mystic Writing-Pad” (Freud, 1961) is based on a re-usable writing device, a wax slab covered with transparent sheets so that one can write something and then lift the sheet and the writing supposedly “disappears.” However, the device is imperfect and traces of writing remain, prompting Freud to take it as “a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind” (Freud, 1961, p. 232). The glass plate in the Picasso film has a similar role. The artist works and re-works his pictures over and over, for example staring with a rooster and then ending up with a human face, although with a rooster partially visible underneath. This represents a different approach to fantasy since it focuses on fantasy’s simultaneity, overlap, and doubledness, as seen in the multiple versions of a drawing all appearing together at once.

Another way to understand the overlapping process of the writing pad is through English psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott’s idea of the transitional object, which was first published in 1951 (Winnicott, 2017). Transitional objects are a part of child development and are situated between a child’s instinctual play, say with their own fists and fingers (by putting them into

their mouths), and their play with objects which are seen as separate from themselves, as “not-me” objects, such as dolls. As Winnicott says, transitional objects, lying between these two, have some of the properties of both:

By this definition an infant’s babbling and the way in which an older child goes over a repertory of songs and tunes while preparing for sleep come within the intermediate area as transitional phenomena, along with the use made of objects that are not part of the infant’s body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality. (Winnicott, 2017, pp. 266-267)

Here we can see how transitional objects relate to the writing pad and the daydream: all involve overlap, or a not letting go, which can then be repurposed into a site for confronting loss.

In 1949 a teenaged Susan Sontag visited Thomas Mann in Los Angeles. Just sixteen at the time (although she had graduated from high school a year earlier), Sontag had thought *The Magic Mountain* one of the great works of art, yet when she finally met the author she was filled with shame at Mann’s facileness. While this example might be taken as Sontag daydreaming about what Mann would be like based on a wish she had had when she was younger, Rickels’ reading of the scene does not stop there: he intersperses this event with a totally different text, an analysis of the way the Gidget novels and films upend their expected beach-blanket banality with references to the likes of Marcus Aurelius, Keats, Shelley, and Vittorio de Sica. These two examples are mixed together to such a degree that we end up with passages such as the following, which represents the multilayers of the writing pad, or the transitional object that will not let one side let go of the other:

The Sontag who graduated from North Hollywood High School at age fifteen might be characterized, like the subtitle to *Gidget*, as the little girl with big ideas. Little, however, in the sense of young: Sontag was the tallest girl in her class. Just as Kathy Kohner a.k.a. Franzie Hofer a.k.a. Gidget was mediated as somewhat laughable, though charmingly so, through the midlife criticism of her father Frederick Kohner, who, as the author of the 1957 coming-of-age book, mimicked and ventriloquated her, so teen Susan, as recalled by Sontag from the other shore of fulfillment of the wish to be an important intellectual author, is a touch ridiculous for the purity of her aspiration to become the big-ideas version of herself. (Rickels, 2021, p. 124)

This passage in Rickels is a key point in connecting the daydream, crypt, and transitional object with friendship. All of these concepts are about the work done in order not to let go. The text about Sontag is not just mixed with that about Gidget, but rather when one appears it does not displace the other; in fact, it demands that the other stay. Therefore, rather than becoming about replacement or subsumption, Rickels stylistically creates a text as transitional object, having properties of both one text and another. This is also a model for a specific kind of friendship. Not friendship as utility of virtue, but friendship as demand. Friendship as not letting go. At the same time, in order to foreground this aspect of friendship, friendship

will need to be made as hard as possible. Thus, true friendship is when friendship is kept, long past the time it should have been discarded. This idea of friends, no matter what, is an important aspect of the films of Sean Baker, and looking at his work, along with the thought of Freud, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, and others, will help define the way this specific type of friendship works.

2. Friends, no matter what

The traditional starting point in the Western canon for thinking about friendship are the three types Aristotle defines in Book 8 of *the Nichomachean Ethics*. The first two are based in self-interest. Friendships based on both utility and pleasure are concerned with what the friendship can do for oneself, rather than any kind of mutual benefit; thus, “Those who love for utility or pleasure, then, are fond of a friend because of what is good or pleasant for themselves, not insofar as the beloved is who he is, but insofar as he is useful or pleasant” (Aristotle, 1999, p. 121). Such friendships are easily dissolved, once the characteristics which have aroused self-interest have disappeared. The third kind of friendship, which for Aristotle is the highest form, is based on virtue. The virtuous feature of this kind of friendship is that both friends are good themselves, and they wish good for the other’s sake, not just their own: “those who wish goods to their friend for the friend’s own sake are friends most of all; for they have this attitude because of the friend himself, not coincidentally” (1999, p. 122). All types of friendship are necessary for holding the *polis* together, says Aristotle, but only the third reaches the highest form of *philia*, or fraternity, among people (1999, p. 130). This has led A.D.M. Walker, for example, to argue that it is only this third form of friendship that is actually a true form of friendship for Aristotle, since the other two forms involve “qualifications” (1979, p. 195), while Dean Cocking (2014) has taken a path that lies closer to the discussion that follows, insisting that it is the “shared activity of ideal friendship” that is key, meaning virtue is generated in the way that two friends “regard one another and contribute toward one another” (p. 85), which elevates this form of friendship above others.

Yet the main characters of Baker’s film *Tangerine* (2015) are not great friends because they regard each other and contribute toward one another; rather, it is the opposite. In fact, these characters fall into none of Aristotle’s types of friendship, and yet they are great friends. Sin-Dee Rella (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez) and Alexandra (Mya Taylor) are transgender sex workers in West Hollywood. Sin-Dee has just been released from a short stint in prison and is chasing down her boyfriend Chester (James Ransone) to find out whether he has slept around with anyone while she was gone. Alexandra tries to help her out, but gets exasperated with Sin-Dee’s “drama,” and her attention becomes more focused on handing out flyers for her performance that evening.

Thus defined, the friendship between Sin-Dee and Alexandra lies outside Aristotle’s categories. They do not get any particular personal utility from their friendship (Type 1), they are actually stringently divided on the need for finding Chester, with Alexandra eventually



giving up on it. Regarding Type 2, a friendship based on pleasure, although both women work in the sex industry as prostitutes, neither gets any self-interested pleasure from the other, and there is no sexual tension between them at any time in the film.

In the last type of Aristotle's friendship, two virtuous friends improve each other's goodness in the bond of fraternity. "Happiness or good living," as Nancy Sherman argues, "is thus ascribable to me, not as an isolated individual, but as a self extended, so to speak, by friends" (1993, p. 94). The interesting point about this type is that Sin-Dee and Alexandra both do and do not fit into it. There is much work in the film done to show that they are not virtuous: for example, Sin-Dee kidnaps Chester's lover, and near the end of the film Alexandra admits to sleeping with Chester while Sin-Dee was in jail. Yet at the same time the women work together to make each other better, as witnessed in the final scene of the movie where Sin-Dee washes her wig from some urine that was thrown on her by some young hooligans. While waiting for the wash cycle to finish, Alexandra lends Sin-Dee her own wig, thus illustrating how "The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself" (Aristotle, 1999, p. 150). In other words, Alexandra and Sin-Dee are both not virtuous in relation to each other and see each other as another of themselves. This combination is what is meant above when it is said that the characters both do and do not fit into Aristotle's notion of friendship. Yet when looking at Baker's films in general, this type of friendship appears repeatedly, indicating that both non-virtue and seeing another as one's self are not opposed, but essentially connected.

In order to define how this combination of virtue and non-virtue works, Freud's reading of the "ambivalence of feeling" from his 1915 essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," written a few months after the beginning of World War I, is essential.

Freud begins by describing the disillusionment felt due to how "We refused to believe" that war would break out (Freud, 1957, p. 278). The cause of this disillusionment is twofold: a disbelief both in "the low morality shown externally by states" and in "the brutality shown by individuals" (1957, 280). The question then becomes, how is it that individuals become brutal, or in the words of Aristotle, non-virtuous? In other words, if the thesis of hereditary virtue is not to be considered, then a developmental thesis must be entertained, in which evil tendencies are eradicated "under the influence of education and a civilized environment," and then later re-emerge (1957, p. 281) (in the case of war, for example).

Yet here is where Freud disagrees with both theories of how individuals become unvirtuous and develops a concept of his own. For Freud (1957) there is no such thing as eradicating evil, since "the deepest essence of human nature consists of instinctual impulses which are of an elementary nature, which are similar in all men and which aim at the satisfaction of certain primary needs. These impulses are neither good nor bad" (p. 281). In addition, when these impulses appear in the world they often get turned into pairs of opposites, in what Freud terms an "ambivalence of feeling" (1957, p. 281), meaning that love and hate exist in the

same person for the same object, and thus take on the characteristics of the writing pad or transitional object as described above, in which one (or more) characteristic(s) does not “let the other go.”

In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida (2020) expounds on Freud’s concept of ambivalence to describe how non-virtue is essential for friendship. This is because, following Derrida’s reading of the structure of the aporia, true friendship demands possibility for the end of friendship, in this case, in the destruction of the friend:

there is no friend without this possibility of killing which establishes a non-natural community. Not only could I enter into a relationship of friendship only with a mortal, but I could love in friendship only a mortal at least exposed to so-called violent death – that is, exposed to being killed, possibly by myself. [...] To love in love or friendship would always mean: I can kill you, you can kill me, we can kill ourselves. (Derrida, 2020, p. 122)

Derrida ties this demand to Freud’s concept of ambivalence from the World War I essay (2020, p. 122) to the way that friendship can challenge how ideas of fraternity permeate both justice and democracy. For Derrida, *philia* opens a way to see how the structures of family and filiation, of brothers and not sisters, informs the construction of territory, nation state and representation. However, Derrida does not want to delineate an alternative to fraternity, or an anti-fraternity; rather, he wants to keep the word in order “to designate a fraternity beyond fraternity, a fraternity without fraternity” which is “the name of a ‘law beyond law.’” This is what the opening sentence of *The Politics of Friendship* means: “Oh my friends, there is no friend” (2020, p. 1). He is retaining the idea of friendship while making it new. In other words, it is not about creating a new kind of friendship, but of making friendship inclusive of elements which are usually seen as its negation.

The law that Sin-Dee and Alexandra forge in *Tangerine* is a similar kind of friendship-beyond-friendship. They do have a friendship, it is not an alternative to friendship, but it is beyond the law that Aristotle defines for it. The mechanism for this beyond to take place is the *no matter what*. Everything needs to go wrong for friendship to happen. Alexandra and Sin-Dee become better friends because of their hardships, not despite them. It is only when all the bridges have been burned that an intimate friendship is possible. They need to lie and cheat in order for their friendship to grow.

In other words, this reading of Aristotelian friendship can be formulated as friendship-as-long-as. As long as you are virtuous. As long as you give me pleasure. As long as you are useful. Friendship in *Tangerine* is what takes place after all these conditions have stopped being met. It forms a fundamental resistance to these conditions in the first place.

Basing this reading in Derrida’s discussion of Freud is not accidental. The term “resistance” is key for one of Derrida’s most extended readings of Freud and Lacan: *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, from 1996 (Derrida, 1998). Here the resistance to analysis within psychoanalysis, as found

in dreams which resist the interpretive forces of the analyst, is not opposed to meaning but instead is a locus of meaning itself: “Resistance must be interpreted; it has as much meaning as what it opposes; it is just as charged with meaning and thus just as interpretable as that which it disguises or displaces: in truth, it has *the same meaning*, but dialectically or polemically adverse, if one can say that” (Derrida, 1998, p. 13). The resistance to friendship in *Tangerine* has as much meaning as the forms of friendship it opposes. In order to develop what this resistance does mean, another film of Baker’s can be considered, his 2012 feature *Starlet*.

3. Conclusion. My good friend Judas

In Baker’s *Starlet* (2012), friendship again takes the form of resistance. A best friend is a person who makes someone engage in the “no matter what,” despite however hard they are trying to ignore it. This means that a best friend is ready to go to any length to get their friend to face facts, even to risk losing the friend they are trying to help. Such a friend is essential. A real true friend.

As a kind of guiding thought, we can say that the true friend holds the position of the figure of Judas, for Jesus would not have been able to fulfill his role as a savior if he had not died on the cross. Judas was the only one who loved Jesus enough to sacrifice his own life so that Jesus could fulfill his. As Slavoj Žižek puts it in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*: “Is Judas not therefore the ultimate hero of the New Testament, the one who was ready to lose his soul and accept eternal damnation so that the divine plan could be accomplished?” (2003, p. 16). This view reflects the portrayal of the traitor in the second-century gnostic Gospels of Judas, in which he is singled out by Jesus for being the only disciple with the strength to be a “perfect human” (Kasser, Meyer, & Wurst, 2006, p. 22).

The Judas figure in *Starlet* is Melissa (Stella Maeve), a coke and Oxycontin-addicted porn actress who is too high to perform her scenes but still storms the production offices of her employer demanding to be paid anyway. Her roommate Jane (Dree Hemingway) is an actress for the same company, Renegade. Jane finds \$10,000 in rolled-up \$100 bills in a thermos she bought at a garage sale. She attempts to return the money to the original owner Sadie (Besedka Johnson’s first and last acting role, as she was discovered for the film at the age of 85 and died shortly after), a woman so ornery that she does not give Jane time to explain the situation with the thermos. This sets off Jane’s curiosity and she goes to great extremes to work her way into Sadie’s life, following her to the grocery store and sitting next to her during her weekly Bingo game.

Sadie does not understand young Jane’s need to be friends. Jane decides to say nothing about the money, and nothing about her career as a porn actress. And when Jane spends the remaining thermos money on two first-class tickets for them both to Paris, a trip Sadie has dreamed of all her life, Sadie’s suspicions are aroused even more. This is a friendship in need of an intervention.

Enter Judas. When Melissa discovers Jane's money hidden in a pink go-go boot, she steals some of it to get her new Mustang out of hock. When she is too high to perform for the camera, she demands money anyway. When Jane gets picked to represent Renegade at a porn trade show, Melissa shows up demanding to give autographs too. And when she learns about the first-class tickets to Paris, Melissa gets so angry that she storms over to Sadie's house and tells her about the money, saying that Jane only pretended to be her friend because she had ripped her off.

Here, what exactly is Melissa betraying? She is betraying the features of Melissa and Jane's friendship in order to get at it the "truth" of their relationship. It takes a real friend to strip away the specific qualities of the friendship in order to be faithful to what friendship is truly about. In other words, the only way to betray friendship is to remain true to what friendship is really about. This is what Žižek means in *Organs Without Bodies* when he first says that "The true betrayal is an ethico-theoretical act of the highest fidelity: one has to betray the letter of Kant to remain faithful to (and repeat) the 'spirit' of his thought," which is then brought to its radical conclusion that "one can only truly betray an author by way of repeating him, by way of remaining faithful to the core of his thought" (2004, p. 13). Thus, in order to be friends, friends must pass through the "no matter what." In this way friends take on the operation of fantasy, or the crypt, in which they are storehouses of the aspects of friendship that are hard to face, as well as the transitional object, since they are always friendships in resistance rather than perfectly formed objects to be admired.

In *Starlet*, it is expected that after Melissa's betrayal, Sadie and Jane's friendship would end. But the opposite is the case. Melissa thus bears a similarity to Judas because both sacrifice themselves in order to ensure the friendship of others. Nobody likes Melissa for her stunt, not Jane, not Sadie. Jane moves out of the house she shares with Melissa, and Sadie says nothing to Melissa about the revelation. But without Melissa's anger, the friendship between Jane and Sadie would have been less intimate.

After Melissa's revelation, Sadie decides to share her greatest secret with Jane. On their way to the airport together, Sadie asks Jane to stop at the cemetery one more time to visit the grave of her husband. However, Sadie asks Jane to take flowers to the grave this time. When Jane does, she sees that Sadie actually had a young daughter who also died, something she had never shared with her before. Sadie only makes this move after learning about the one thing Jane is too scared to let Sadie know about: where the money came from. The only reason that this new intimacy comes about is because of Melissa. However, Melissa is not a "positive" figure. She is jealous, a liar and "no good." It is as if she needs to be such a bad person in order to have the strength to destroy her friendship with Jane (which she does) by telling Sadie the truth about the money. In other words, similar to Žižek's formulation above, Melissa uses Jane in order to betray Jane, using Jane's specific actions against herself, in order to remain true to the friendship she claims she shares with Sadie.

At the beginning of this essay such forms of friendship were claimed to be anti-Aristotelian, which we can now see is only partially the case. While the friendships in Baker's films do not fit easily into the three classic forms of friendship, one specific friendship that the philosopher mentions, that with Plato, takes on a similar form; for when Aristotle says "I am a friend of Plato, but I am an even greater friend of truth," what is happening here is a "religious' betrayal, betrayal out of love – I respect you for your universal features, but I love you for an X beyond these features, and the only way to discern this X is betrayal. I betray you, and then, when you are down, destroyed by my betrayal, we exchange glances – if you understand my act of betrayal, and only if you do, you are a true hero" (Žižek, 2003, pp. 18-19). The friends in Baker's films are all heroes, yet in a very specific manner. Thus, when Baker says in an interview that the main themes of *Tangerine* are "friendship and infidelity" (Crank, 2015), his words could be slightly reworked as "friendship and fidelity," meaning fidelity to friendship itself, rather than to any particular and relative characteristic of it.

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