

The Picnic

Synopsis: After his girlfriend's disappearance in a forest where dreams, memory and reality are intertwined, a man tries to reconnect with her by returning to the area and hopefully vanquishing his demons.

Characters:

- Dan
- Anna
- Jennifer
- George
- The Prostitute
- Fred

Plot:

Prologue

With blood all over his face, Dan runs frantically through the forest. He stops, removes an apple from his pocket and bites it. He then rejoins Anna at their picnic. All the blood is suddenly gone and Dan recounts his dream of someone drilling a hole into his nose.

Main plot

At the picnic near an apple tree, Anna apologizes to Dan for their fight the night before and promises she has always been faithful throughout their relationship. Dan seems to believe her and they briefly reconcile. It's clear Dan has an **inferiority complex** and Anna is his emotional **cathexis**, which Anna doesn't want to be since to her, it feels burdensome. They are suddenly interrupted by howls coming from distant wolves. Scared, they dash away through the forest but when Dan looks back, Anna has vanished.

Three months later, there are still no signs of Anna and Dan's father George comes into Dan's apartment to comfort him. He talks about his love for Anna and how everything was going well in their relationship. George seems to be puzzled by this and whilst contradicting Dan, the latter becomes irked by his presence. He then berates George for being uncaring and absent to his mother, Jennifer. For Dan, this is the reason Jennifer is allegedly adulterous. George is shocked to hear all this and denies Jennifer's infidelity. Dan has been distant lately towards his mother and George makes him promise to visit her.

The next day, Dan returns to the forest in search of any traces of Anna. He goes to the apple tree and when he takes a bite from one apple, he falls unconscious and finds himself transported to the day of his last picnic with Anna. However their conversation plays out differently with Anna **gaslighting** Dan and accusing him of adultery and being neglectful. The scene mirrors the fight they had the night before the fateful picnic and we **intercut** with that scene in Dan's apartment.

Dan returns to the present and is confused by his experience. He takes another bite from the apple but nothing happens. On picking another apple from the tree and eating it, he is sent back to the picnic where, again, his conversation with Anna plays out differently. This time, Anna reprimands Dan for refusing to have sex with her. Dan tries to explain his **Madonna–whore complex** whereby he confesses to really admiring Anna and being unable to disrespect her with carnal desire. He relates to **Schopenhauer**'s views that sexual desire is one of the main causes of human misery since it can lead to jealousy and only serves as temporary relief. As per **Sartre**'s views, Dan refuses to dehumanize Anna as an object of his desires, believing it would make their relationship less authentic and purely driven by sexual desire. The scene is **intercut** with another scene taking place a few months ago at a hotel room: Dan refuses to have sex and Anna sexually assaults him by going down on him despite his objections.

Back to the present, Dan is overwhelmed by these events. He tries to phone his mother but she fails to respond. He then phones George and relates his discovery whereby each new apple he eats seems to awaken memories he has apparently forgotten and makes him relive them. George then accuses Dan of having done something irrevocable the night before. Dan doesn't know what he's talking about but George threatens to punish him like he did when Dan was little but this time, he promises to give him his worst punishment yet. Perplexed and horrified, Dan hangs up.

Dan eats another apple and after being sent back to the picnic, he tries to alter events and tells Anna that she's about to disappear. He takes her hand and runs away with her, making sure she's by his side. But suddenly, they are surrounded by a pack of wolves and Dan wakes up back in the present and vomits what he's just eaten.

Whilst walking through the trees, he sees his father having sex with a woman who he assumes is his mother. This scene is **intercut** with a scene of a child Dan witnessing his parents having sex through a window. Back in the forest, the woman's face is blurred and when George finishes, the woman disappears and George metamorphoses into a doppelganger of Dan. The doppelganger explains he represents the **id, the repressed memories and the latent content** of his dreams.

The pack of wolves overlook them and Dan and the doppelganger walk away. The latter says that it is only through his help that Dan will vanquish the layers of **psychological censorship** covering the truth. He also claims that Dan has **condensed** all his troubles into that one picnic with Anna, which is why he keeps revisiting it. Being a proponent of free-will, Dan believes he can change the events he has been revisiting and even prevent them from happening because they feel like returning at a previous point in time. The doppelganger insists that because these events have already happened and are just memories sometimes entwined with dreams, he can neither change nor escape them. He asks if Dan knows he is in a memory whilst reliving them. Dan ponders on his question and retorts that he will use all his mental capabilities to become aware of that and change the events in his memory as per his current self's will.

They both go to the apple tree to eat an apple. Dan returns to the picnic but Anna transforms into another woman, a prostitute. The prostitute leaves and Dan's doppelganger, also present, urges him to follow her. Dan seems to realize what is about to ensue and thinks he can alter that by abandoning the prostitute. This scene is

intercut with Dan leaving his apartment after his fight with Anna. Whilst driving through the streets, he finds the prostitute and they drive to an alley where Dan refuses any sexual activities and just wants to talk to her. There, Dan **displaces** his guilt and anger towards the prostitute and strangles her to death.

Back in the forest, Dan stands terrorized on top of her dead body, having been unable to escape fate and the constraints of being in a memory. Dan's delusion intensifies and he refuses to believe these events are true and determined. The doppelganger believes Dan is repeating these past events in the forest as a form of **repetition compulsion** and tries to persuade him to accept reality. Suddenly, a wolf attacks the doppelganger and mauls him whilst Dan escapes.

Dan eats another apple and is sent to the picnic where Anna is seemingly pregnant and about to give birth. Dan helps her deliver a strange bloody organic orb. Dan opens it and finds a letter marred with blood from a detective with photos of Anna copulating with another man. Again, the pack of wolves gaze at him. The scene is **intercut** with a scene at Dan's apartment where he burns the images **in denial**. Anna arrives shortly later and reveals that her pregnancy tests came out negative, after she has been experiencing **false pregnancy** symptoms. Despite receiving these images, he embraces Anna and reiterates his love for her.

Back to the forest, Dan finds Anna naked with Fred (the man in the pictures). He overhears them talking about him. She recounts her **cognitive dissonance** wherein she knows cheating goes against her values but she keeps doing it. She **rationalizes** it by blaming Dan for being neglectful. She laughs at how during her false pregnancy, Dan didn't even realize he couldn't have been the father since they didn't have sex during the timeframe she would have been impregnated. She suspects Dan has always known about her unfaithfulness but has denied it even to himself, repressed his doubts and ultimately, through **reaction formation**, became even more romantically attached to Anna. She is annoyed by Dan's affections and clinginess but refuses to leave him out of guilt. She also knows that deep inside, she feels validated and empowered by his unrequited love for her.

She shares **Schopenhauer's** views that love is the source of endless striving and unfulfillment, as it is driven by the insatiable nature of human desires. True happiness can only be attained by transcending these desires and attachments, rather than indulging in them, something which Anna cannot do which consequently leads her to infidelity. She mentions **Sartre's** views of authenticity and freedom as to why she's unfaithful, namely to counter "bad faith" and stay true to her desires. She believes that **Schopenhauer's** will-to-life, which posits that sexual desire is a powerful force that drives individuals to procreate, leads to a cycle of suffering made up of jealousy, conflict and unfulfilled desires.

All of a sudden, Fred hears a noise and upon seeing Dan behind some bushes, he picks up a drilling machine and chases him. Dan runs away but falls and hits his head, falling unconscious. Dan wakes up next to his mother, Jennifer (revealed to be a doppelganger of Anna), tending to his injuries. Dan apologizes for being distant after beginning his relationship with Anna but blames Jennifer for being cold and overprotective as the reasons why he behaved as such. He says that he wanted to supersede her lack of affection with Anna's.

He blames Jennifer for never returning the love he had for her and for always providing more attention to his father when he was a child. He also **projects** his frustrations on Jennifer and blames her for cheating on his father, something he has no proof she did. He used to view his mother as an idealized version of himself and interprets her potential infidelity as a flaw within himself. Offended, Jennifer leaves.

Suddenly George arrives with a drilling machine, screaming that he will punish Dan for something he did. He pins him down but Dan strikes George with a rock and runs away. He then encounters his doppelganger again, who has been severely mutilated. Dan screams that he wanted to ignore and forget everything he has been revisiting so far in the forest. The doppelganger reveals that after being attacked, he is now dead and the surviving Dan will soon automatically assume his identity as the unconscious impulses/desires and repressed self of himself. The doppelganger then urges Dan to eat two other apples and find the truth about what happened to Jennifer and Anna respectively. Dan claims nothing happened to his mother and choosing ignorance over reality, Dan goes to the apple tree and burns it down.

However one single apple survived the fire, having fallen from the tree. Dan picks it up and battles himself over whether to eat it or not. He chooses to keep it in his pocket but is again attacked by George, who proceeds to drill a hole into Dan's nose. Blood seems to simultaneously exude from Dan's genitals. George then dashes away and Dan bolts in the opposite direction.

After some time, he stops, removes the apple from his pocket and bites it. He then rejoins Anna at their picnic. However, the blood is suddenly gone and Dan recounts what he interprets as a dream of someone drilling a hole into his nose. Anna then transforms into Jennifer, much to Dan's bewilderment. Jennifer asks if he was happy with his relationship with Anna. Dan finally caves in and expresses his resentment for Anna and interprets her disappearance as **wish-fulfillment**. Suddenly, Dan becomes terrorized as he remembers what is about to unfold. To prevent it from happening, he leaves and begs Jennifer not to follow him.

The above scene is **intercut** with a scene in his parents' house which Dan visited the night before coming to the forest to search for Anna. He relates to **Nietzsche's** views that his love for Anna was in fact an unconscious desire to possess and control her. When he failed to do so, he repressed all his impulses and jealousy deep inside his unconscious. He became more submissive and turned a blind eye to her infidelity. This cathartic moment is countered by a surge of guilt and self-loathing, wherein he blames himself for Anna's infidelity. He also condemns Jennifer's treatment of him when he was a child as the catalyst to his persistent loneliness and overcompensating clinginess. He experiences a moment of psychosis and sees Jennifer as Anna. Burning with rage, he rapes Jennifer and keeps doing so even after he realizes he is raping his own mother.

Back at the forest, Jennifer cries in pain and revulsion at what her son has just done to her. Dan is right next to her, despite having walked away. He says he no longer cares about what really happened to Anna and shares his denial that what has been happening in the forest is not reality, blatantly ignoring the events' connection to his memories. He then mentions he still has one thing left to do before choosing to put all of this behind him through memory suppression. He walks away and later, he stands over the agonizing George in his parents' house, with a drilling machine in his hand, having just drilled a hole into his father's nose.

Epilogue

At the forest, the pack of wolves devours what seems to be human meat before howling into the distance.

The End