Crazy Love
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Levy: **Francis Levy**
Nersessian: **Edward Nersessian**
Gabbard: **Glen Gabbard**
Harris: **Adrienne Harris**
Klores: **Dan Klores**
Marcus: **Eric R. Marcus**
Merkin: **Daphne Merkin**
Miller: **Michael Miller**

Nersessian: Daphne Merkin is former film critic for *The New Yorker*, where she wrote book reviews as well as essays on subjects such as Freud, depression and sex, and Marilyn Monroe. She's currently a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine* and also has a regular column in *Elle* called "Provocateur." She has contributed to a bewildering number of anthologies. Her latest piece, called *Penises I Have Known* from a forthcoming anthology called *Bad Girls*, has been excerpted in the June issue of *Playboy*. She's the author of the novel *Enchantment* and *Dreaming of Hitler*, a collection of essays.

Dr. Eric Marcus is a supervising and training analyst and he's the incoming Director of the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research. He's interested in modern ego psychology approaches to interdisciplinary work, and has a special interest in symbolic alterations of reality in dreams, in art, in culture and in psychosis. His most recent book is *Psychosis and Near Psychosis: Ego Function, Symbol Structure, Treatment*.

Dr. Glen Gabbard is Brown Foundation Chair of Psychoanalysis and Professor of Psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. He's also training and supervising analyst at the Houston Galveston Psychoanalytic Institute. From 2001 to 2007 he was joint editor-in-chief of *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis.* He has authored or edited 21 books, including *Love and Hate in the Analytic Setting, Psychiatry and the Cinema, Psychoanalysis and Film* and *The Psychology of the Sopranos.* He's the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2000 Mary Sigourney Award for Outstanding Contribution to Psychoanalysis. He was recently featured in *The New Yorker*'s "Talk of the Town," discussing depictions of psychiatry in film.

Adrienne Harris is on the faculty and supervises at the New York University Post-doctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. She's on the editorial boards of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* and is the co-editor, with Lewis Aron, of *The Legacy of Sandor Ferenczi*.

I know Dan Klores, but I don't have—I got a list but it didn't have you on it.

Miller: I may have to do my own marketing. I'm Michael Vincent Miller. On one piece of paper that was passed out it said that I'm a Clinical Psychologist in private practice in Cambridge

and the author of a book called *Intimate Terrorism*. However, the announcement I've got to make is that for about 30 years I was a Clinical Psychologist in private practice in Cambridge, but for the last four I've been here in New York. That's the marketing piece. And here I'm a Psychoanalyst and a Marriage and Family Therapist.

Nersessian: Well thank you. Dan Klores is the director and producer of this movie and is a public relations specialist. He has appeared as a commentator on numerous television programs, including *Today, Good Morning America,* and *Entertainment Tonight.* He produced Paul Simon's Broadway musical *The Capeman* and served as executive producer of the film *City by the Sea*. In addition to *Crazy Love*, he has directed *The Boys of 2nd Street Park*, *Ring of Fire: The Emilie Griffith Story*, and *Viva Baseball!* Daphne Merkin will moderate tonight's roundtable.

Merkin: I just wanted to say a few words. One is that we're going to go in alphabetical order. Everybody has been told to keep their remarks relatively brief, and if it goes very long I have been instructed—the person who instructed me will remain anonymous—that I should put up a finger to acknowledge that the time is up.

I just wanted to put in a word or two. Having seen the movie, I think about six weeks ago, or two months ago, for the first time, how much it touched me. It also made me laugh, possibly a bit less than other people. I admired it as a work of filmmaking. I attended a panel that Glen Gabbard hosted. It was at the Waldorf at that endless conference on *Capturing the Sopranos*.

Gabbard: *Capturing the Friedmans*.

Merkin: *Capturing the Friedmans*. And I was struck that the psychoanalytic profession is as ill at ease with ambiguity as the lay population, so I am making an actually probably futile plea that we avoid clinical categories tonight as much as possible. I'm sure they will come up. I think the tendency of a movie like this—whether one is analyzed, unanalyzed, aware of self, unaware—is to simply project wildly. So I already disagreed with one response to the movie, which is that it was about a psychopath and a very interesting woman. To me she seemed like a feisty, what they used to call dame, with an eye on the good life, mainly.

Also, just as a final word, the movie has been getting—I sound like your publicist—has gotten a very interesting and good review. Mostly good reviews. I read, to my dismay, a small item in *New York Magazine*. I think it was called "Crazy Love on the Couch," and I wanted to quote from it. I left the page at home, and actually asked my 17½ year old daughter to read to me from the diagnostic categories that were given to the characters in the movie, which made them seem all the more—I wouldn't say absurd—but un-illuminating. So there's a Dr. Steven Fayer from Mt. Sinai Medical Center who went to the screening, and he diagnosed Burt Pugach: "He may well have had what we call a bipolar type II disorder, with what we call personality disturbance as well." Someone else's deeply illuminating diagnosis—I don't know who this is—"Linda has," this should come as a big surprise, "a narcissistic personality disorder with borderline features and inadequate personality." All I'm saying is, in an effort to make the movie less a clinical case history, we could avoid such categories. I'm first going to call on Glen Gabbard.

Gabbard: Okay, thanks, Daphne, and thanks to Ed and Francis and Matthew for inviting me. Glad to be here. Is the title of this film misleading? This is one of the things I pondered as I watched it. Is it about love? Is it about obsession? A disconcerting pattern of internal object relations? Insecure attachment? There's another possibility. Some of you may have read recently in *The New York Review of Books* an interesting essay by Ian Buruma on two books about Lenny Riefenstahl, which he entitled, "Fascinating Narcissism." Now, are we watching two opportunistic hustlers who are out for themselves? I know that Daphne doesn't like it when I talk about narcissism. I once described *8½* as an exercise in narcissistic self-indulgence and she didn't appreciate that. But rather than diagnosing the characters, what I'm saying is we're watching something that's fascinating to us, that's drawing us in. Let's face it. None of us really know what love is. Here are a few definitions that have been tossed around: the most slippery word in the human language; a grave mental disease; the crocodile in the river of desire; the only fire for which there is no insurance; the triumph of imagination over intelligence. But my all-time favorite is James Thurber's: love is what you've been through with someone. This might be relevant to what we saw tonight.

One of the things that we ought to consider together is what does love look like in this film? Remember when Burt first sees Linda and he says love at first sight? He didn't know her. He didn't know who she was. It reminds me of other cinematic artists who've looked at this, notably Luis Buñuel in *That Obscure Object of Desire*. Some of you may remember, Fernando Rey is obsessed with a young woman in that film and Buñuel mischievously casts two actresses in the part. So they alternate, and he said some people didn't know that he was substituting one actress for another, but the point of course was that the love object is not really seen, not really recognized. It's what the lover wants to make of the beloved, and this is very much what you see here. Freud would say the finding of an object is a re-finding. That's one way to look at this phenomenon of the peculiar way that Burt characterizes Linda, while most of us are sitting there thinking, "Now, what is it exactly about her?" But, as Daphne is suggesting, we analysts need to be wary of analyzing these characters. We don't know these people. We know a version of them in a film. They're a thousand points of light on a screen. Sure, it's a documentary. But it's still a film. Now I would like to submit that one of the phenomena that is so nicely done by Dan, the director, who's with us tonight, is that I think what unfolds is a film within a film. I think that the film within the film is the media circus that was the life of Burt and Linda. Their life is a cinematic narrative, at least as it unfolds in the film.

Merkin: A tabloid narrative.

Gabbard: Tabloid narrative, but it's also cinematic. Let me get to that. In fact, Jimmy Breslin said, you know, what could be more sensationalistic. But think about it. We have obsessive love, lye in the face, racism, hired thugs, out of control sex, a lawyer with seizures, a con artist who takes over the courtroom in his own defense. At one point I said, "My God, this is like *Forest Gump*." He knew Keefe Brasselle, and then he's at Attica during the riots, and then he gets William Kunstler of the Chicago Seven. What is this guy? He's in everything. I thought to myself after watching the film the other night that if somebody wrote their life and said here's a screenplay and handed it to a Hollywood producer, they'd look at it and say, "No, this is way over the top. " Nobody would believe it.

So we're looking at a kind of cinematic narrative, and clearly Burt and Linda love being in the limelight. Burt relished telling about his deceptions and his lies, etcetera. Now these days psychoanalytic film criticism must take into account the perspective of spectatorship. What is the audience doing in this film? What is the director doing to the audience, consciously or unconsciously? How do we experience this film? Christian Metz would be one of the major scholars who contributed to this perspective. Laura Mulvey is another one. The film is clearly making us complicit. We eat this stuff up. Dennis Harvey, in his review at Sundance, said once you hear the barest outline of the real life tragicomic opera it's hard not to want all the dirt. We want to know this stuff. Breslin is kind of saying the same thing. He said when he goes to a high-class dinner party everybody wants to know about Burt and Linda. I think what is happening to us is that we want to believe this love story. We want to believe the cinematic narrative. So we're horrified, like Andrea Peyser of *The New York Post*, when he cheats on Linda. How can this be? He was madly in love with her. But after a moment's reflection you think, "Well, of course this guy's going to do that." This is the repetition of compulsion. Of course he's going to do the same thing again. But we don't want to see Burt as a real life character. We want to see him as a figure in a cinematic Hollywood narrative where redemption is the theme. It's just like we watch Tony Soprano thinking maybe this bad man will change into a good man. We're rooting for Burt to become a good guy and actually sincerely love Linda. At the end of the film, we think this maybe has happened. We just hope that it's true.

One of the things we ought to keep in mind is that Burt was a filmmaker. He was producing films besides being an attorney, like the Keefe Brasselle film. We could talk about whether they're crazy or who's crazy or what's going on, but I think seeing it as a film, it says a lot about us, what we want to believe in what we hope is true. And just to end—Daphne's looking at her watch—I just want to end with—

Merkin: I was instructed.

Gabbard: I just want to end with one of my favorite playwright's quotations—George Bernard Shaw. He said, "Love doesn't make the world go round. It just makes the affected parties dizzy."

Merkin: I just wanted to say one thing to Glen's words. I very much agree that we watch a movie like this and root for the people. But I think we also watch a movie like this as we watch the Sopranos, to watch people go too far. In fact, what Carmella says to Tony Soprano—I don't know if everyone's such an ardent fan of the show—"You Sopranos, you go too far." It's an actual line in the thing.

I also just wanted to say something in reference to Glen's statement about the joy of watching the movie. Owen Gleiberman, who just reviewed it, gave it a rave and, to my mind, a very comprehending review in *Entertainment Weekly*. He ends by calling it a toxically fascinating true crime, true romance documentary, and saying that the director milks it for every tawdry twist it holds, yet the tale itself is so spectacularly perverse and the film stays so authentically close to the personalities involved that you don't feel dirty, you feel cleansed.
That's worth thinking about. Adrienne Harris?

Harris: I'm going to start with a piece of self-analysis. When Matthew emailed me to invite me and said Glen was going to be part of this discussion I was very eager to do it. I realized I was very eager to come and see this film and talk about it. And I had to figure out why. What interested me in this? I want to start by saying that I was 17 in 1958, and I remember this event as a news phenomenon, before they had married and before all the jail, but the moment when lye is thrown on her. And I tried to think about what did that mean to me as a 17-year-old. I think what it meant was, this is the danger of beauty, this is the danger of sexuality, this is the excitement of glamour, of men, of bad men—all the things that 17-year-olds are extremely interested in. And that first 20 minutes of the film sets this atmospheric picture and sound. The music is just fabulous in this film, I think, and you are right in that moment with all this strange glamour—the cars, and now you think the gasoline, it's all so atavistic. But in that conjuring up of their romance—I sort of clocked this—it's 20 minutes into the film before the detail comes that he's married. So there is this idyllic place of glamour, planes, nightclubs, and it stirs a lot of—

Klores: 15 ½, actually.

Harris: But you really set a scene, and I think that's what it meant, that's one of the things that actually must have caught me up as a 17-year-old. So flash forward close to half a century, and a lot of treatment, a lot of training, an immersion in feminism and all the things that happened to me, and then looking at this film, I have a slightly different, but not entirely different, take on it. Actually, I'm the person that Daphne didn't agree with, because I actually think that the authors I would conjure up to think about Linda are not psychoanalytic but literary, and they would be Edith Wharton and Dreiser. I think this was a working class girl of limited resources. Like lots of young women in the '50s, she had one, maybe two shots at a way out of her circumstance. And that moment when the cop in the elevator sees this 70-year-old and thinks that's who she's turning into—the women in the film, not the women who are caught up in Linda's celebrity. But I think Linda herself is actually mostly thinking, not loving. I actually think there's very little of love in what she's preoccupied with. I think of working class Edith Wharton, if that isn't a contradiction in terms.

I also think that the filmmaker does some really interesting things about when Linda's glasses are opaque and when we see her face. The whole question then, if you read it from a sort of feminist point of view: does the camera make the woman an object or a subject? Where is her subjectivity as she's sort of staring out through these glasses and you have these images of her as still as sighted person? So there's a whole question of her opacity as a face. And what it means for a blind woman to create an image of how she's seen that actually catches her in her traumatic moment with that sort of '70s look, with the wig. She's frozen. It's like her clothes carbon date the trauma and the experience. But this is a blind woman dressing in this way, so there's something to me very intriguing about the way the camera captures men and women in this film. But I would say—I don't know whether we can talk about this—I think the camera has a loving eye on Burt and a baleful eye on most of the women. Their celebrity, their preoccupation with celebrity—this sort Greek chorus—the women around Linda are kind of caught up and identified with her as this sort of glittery object that then is flawed and is blinding. But the camera's look on Burt—you know, he may have been very charming. I was staggered at the laughter. I saw this film on my own and then I came here halfway through the screening. I was sort of shocked

by the laughter. But I think it actually makes sense in some funny way that there's a kind of gauzy kind of look at Burt. For me the sort of deceptions and—I'm going to use the word—psychopathy crystallized around the Attica moment, where he has this Attica story of what happens to him, and none of it rings true. There's a piece of footage in which four people are carrying a stretcher and he's just said these guys, these Black Muslims, carried me out of Attica, and you think, "What?" But somehow the filmmaker has also built the illusion of this story, and so there's a way in which I think there's some pleasure, visual pleasure and other kinds of pleasure, in Burt's M.O.

The clinical people I did think of around Burt would be people like Christopher Bolas's writing about the evil self, or the Klinians talking about impenitent envy of the kind of person who feels that the person who inspires jealousy or envy is the provocateur and should be wiped out. At some point he says there's no point in my going to jail. There's a kind of complete absence of guilt. There's a funny sort of spin-doctoring throughout, and in a certain way the camera never comments on that. It doesn't comment on it in a way that allows one to contextualize. Where did this guy's money come from? You know slivers more about her social context. So I did end up feeling that what was fascinating in this story was the sort of way in which you could say this is a film about normative heterosexuality and the news is not good. Or you could say this is a film where gender is in a very interesting tension. I didn't think it was about love, actually. And I think the comment at the beginning about obsession is off. So, anyway, I'll stop with that.

Merkin: I had a question for Adrienne when she was talking. I was going to ask you, what did you think Linda was thinking about? You said she thought a lot. My main sense was she thought about getting out of her class. The movie is a lot about class.

Harris: Yes. But that's thinking. That's not an obsessional love.

Merkin: No, but I would just say I think there is some instinct for women to grant her greater complexity than she actually has and to demote Burt Pugach into simple—

Harris: Yes.

Merkin: I was discussing this with Glen. To call him a psychopath—one thought I had about him is that he seemed incapable of actually hurting a fly. I think he could only indulge in mediated violence, which isn't to excuse him. But I think his story is possibly more complicated than hers. That's just a point I want to make.

Harris: May I just say, the President hasn't hurt a fly directly, but that doesn't make him immune from the charge of violence. But I take your point. I wasn't meaning that she's a kind of intellectual heroine, but I'm meaning that I don't think she was in love, in that sort of obsessional way that Glen was quoting. I think this was a woman trying to improve her circumstances, and in that sense she's thinking, not intellectual.

Merkin: Right. She seemed to me fairly incapable of love. The obessionalism seemed more on his end to me, whether or not there's any correspondence to George Bush, which I hate to say I don't see at all. Dan?

Klores: Well first of all thank you for having me here, and thank you for doing this. As one of the few, or maybe the only, layman in the room, I should just talk a bit about what attracted me to making this film and to this story. I learned a lot from the time I got interested in it to the three years it took me to make the film. I was nine and a half when this happened, growing up in Brooklyn, and the papers were very important in the little apartment we had. The *New York Times* was maybe every third or fourth Sunday. And it struck me then. It was one of those stories that a nine-year-old boy—it struck me. There was crime, there was horror, and there was beauty. Even as a nine year old I can now remember, oh, I was attracted to this woman in some way. Then a few years ago I read a piece in the *New York Times* about this, so I said I remember that. That's a good story. It's about crime, it's about some form of romance. I never thought it was about love. Obviously you can't define that. It's about media. It's about the things—it's about a New York that I grew up in.

At first I thought, as uncomfortable as this is, that there's a part of Burt that I relate to, which may be a part of everyone. I kept on thinking, what could possibly make someone so obsessed with someone else? And how that related to pain and hurt. So I remember, because I think it's still with me, as it might be with most people, the time that you do get hurt, the first time. I can remember for a year or two thinking, "Will I ever not see her in some image, on the subway, in the street?" And, of course, he took it to a degree—that's why I like the line in the film when the secretary/lover says we all think about hurting people. But he did. Then I grew to a different place. A place of some type of—affection is the wrong word—of being alone. I think that easily relates to Linda, but in many senses also to Burt. When I began to interview Linda—they were the last people I interviewed after all my second-hand research, after getting the court records, the psychiatric records, the police records. I decided they have to be the last people that I interview, and I have to interview them separately, of course. I have to keep Burt out of the apartment, which was not easy at all. I mean I had Burt stay away eight hours, go somewhere. And it was like a cat at the door every hour and a half, that key would get in the door. You double lock it and tell him to go away.

But they were both very open. I'm not sure I credit myself. I think they were waiting. They were waiting. People had tried to do this film for many, many years, and it didn't get made. But they were waiting. I spent a lot of time with them off camera, so they were open. But with Linda, when she told me about the young man when Burt was away in prison that liked her, wanted to marry her, and then she had to reveal herself, that to me was the seminal moment where, at least from my perspective, it clarified her decision. That was what I'll do not to be alone. What do we do not to be alone? And it struck me then. I have three little boys and a wife, but it obviously wasn't always that way. I think that's the real reason that I wanted to make the film. In terms of love, I don't see it between them at all.

Merkin: Dan and I have had very lengthy lay analytic conversations about the film, and my interest always focuses on—I kept calling him by the wrong name. For a long time I called him Ron, which God knows what that says. Burt. I thought that your comment, which I had also seen in print, about it being one of the subtexts—what will you do to not be alone—is something that's forgotten when you talk about Linda. I even thought when Adrienne was talking about her, what choice did she have? As she portrays herself, she directly says she's damaged

merchandise, in her rich inflected accent. I'm showing my own class bias. But it never occurred to me watching the film, until someone else said to me two days ago, that one of her choices would have been to marry no one and stay alone in her cheese box of an apartment. I think we tend to find that a fate more horrendous, obviously more for women than for men, just as the whole ordeal of self-presentation is a bigger ordeal for women than men. So that was a comment that I found really interesting, that whole possibility.

Klores: I think for myself—and I know I transfer this to myself—that fear of being alone goes back to my childhood. I remember in the apartment building in the neighborhood there was always this lady. It doesn't matter what season it was, you're talking early '60s, late '50s, in the long coat and the white skin and the kerchief, and always alone. And sad. I remember asking my mother, what's wrong with that lady?

Merkin: Right. That's one of the strongest details in the film. It reminded me of *Madame Bovary*, when he glimpses the ankle—Emma Bovary's ankle—you suddenly understand why the women facilitate the marriage when there's a description by the police officer—I'm forgetting her name—of the supermarket with the—

Klores: Yeah. But in that she said her husband left her. Her husband left her. So as a little boy you say, "Oh boy, better not get there in any way. Better not do that or be that."

Merkin: Eric?

Marcus: A piece of self-analysis or revelation is pertinent as well. But before beginning I just want to make one comment and one disclaimer. The comment is this is an extraordinary piece of cinematography in my viewing. It is extraordinary because of the self-discipline that you used in letting them speak practically without interruption. It was the editing that told their story as they experienced it, and the words were revelatory. It wasn't scripted and it wasn't interfered with. That took great self-discipline. It also took thinking somewhere inside of you of the complex relationship between life and art. What is symbolically altered and symbolically alterable and what isn't, what is just there? It has a parsimonious beauty that was, for me, very admirable.

Klores: I wish you were reviewing it for the *Times.* They're kicking me tomorrow.

Marcus: If it's any consolation to you, I read the *Times* so that when they pan a movie I can go to it, and when they praise a movie I can avoid it.

Gabbard: Can I just interrupt? You know what Thoreau said—"I don't read the *Times,* I read the eternities."

Marcus: Now the revelation: I am here under false pretenses. I had no idea what the movie *Crazy Love* was when I agreed to do it. I was highly offended when I saw it, emotionally. I admired it, but was offended. I felt seduced and abandoned just by agreeing to be here.

Harris: How do you get through life?

Marcus: Well, movies are one way. And I also want to make one more disclaimer, which has already been made, and that is I'm not going to say anything about them as real people, nor me as a doctor. I've never met them. For me they are cinematography characters that we can discuss as characters, as Glen did so eloquently. We can discuss them as illustrations of general principles. That's what I want to get to. Because I think the general principle that I want to discuss is not them. They are who they are. Take it or leave it. I want to talk about us, which Glen said was a crucial aspect. Not just us in this room, but whether this film is going to make it or not. In part the marketplace isn't so accurate and doesn't really tell you much, but in part it does tell you something about the psychology of the mass, of the group. I think that for people like us all over it's going to make it, because it strikes a historical moment chord that is the symbolic alteration of reality in us, not in them. The symbolic alteration for us, we don't know. We have to try to grasp as we live—participant, observant—in the historical moment, which I think, by the way, you touched on. Whether or not the historical moment is one of self-serving sadomasochistic compliance with sociopathy—I wish I could express that in non-technical terms. But I will express it in the streets of New York from a taxi driver who, when I was riding yesterday and thinking about this, on the radio, on NPR, is the latest story about Hilary Clinton. So, of course, Bill comes up, and Monica Lewinsky. And he snaps the radio shut and says in a thick Russian American accident, leaning back to me, "Billy screw a bimbo. So what? Georgie Bush screw you every day. Every day!" I thought, well, okay, yes. That's right. There's an entire economic gigantic shift that's occurring, a mildly sociopathic, gigantic economic shift in which all the demographic and economic data are showing that the top 10% of the middle class is shoved up into the wealthy and all the rest is shoved down. The working man is disenfranchised. There's article after article about it while we scramble to stay afloat. The concept within America of changing one's class, of remaking one's self, of rising up to the better, of not being stuck in your circumstance, is our romantic ideal. It raises the issue at what price? It raises the issue of, what's wrong with being stuck in your circumstance? You just said that your wife and three kids are the happiest times of your life. And so ironically enough you have come to be stuck in your circumstance, only to find, perhaps, what you were looking for all along.

It's interesting that the culture is in a struggle about that. One of the reasons it's in a struggle about that is that the economics no longer support the middle class. I mean can you afford to send three kids to private school and live in Manhattan? I don't know. There is desperation within the culture that I think may only grow. And as it grows, depending on one's intellectual and educational level, you will either see evil superheroes destroy the world or you'll watch Burt and Linda try to cut a deal with themselves. It's very distressing to considerate it at that level, because if so it is the cultural stigmata of our times. Stigmata maybe isn't right. Indicia is a better word. It's the cultural indicia.

Merkin: What's the it?

Marcus: Films like this, which are trying deeply to tell us about an inner emotional experience we're having as a culture and as a society.

Klores: I wanted to ask you a question. You bring up, ironically, Hilary Clinton. I wonder if anyone sees any commonality between Hilary Clinton and Linda?

Merkin: None whatsoever.

Klores: None? In terms of their—

Marcus: In terms of the deal they're trying to cut.

Merkin: I don't agree. I just want to interrupt. I actually wanted to call this panel—and at Ed Nersessian's suggestion did not call it—*Conundrum of Sadomasochism: Who's Tormenting Whom?* I'll also add that I wrote a piece for the *Times*. It was about what I believe was the only panel I had seen—psychoanalytic panel—devoted only to sadism. It was up at Yale. And I wrote a piece about it saying it was missing the other half. I mean there aren't exclusively sadists and exclusively masochists. I see one similarity between Linda and Hilary in that they're both ball busting in their own ways. But all that depends on where your sympathies lie. I'm not quite sure where the whole economic—if I may say this, Eric, since psychoanalysts are implicated in the wish to go higher and higher in one's class.

Marcus: Hey, I'm not exempting myself from anything. I said I was seduced and abandoned. I'm right in it with you, guys. I didn't want to see this film. If I had free choice and knew what was in the film, I wouldn't even be here tonight. That's what I claim. And yet I'm here. Hey, I'm like all the rest of us. I'm trying to make a comment about what the rest of us all are feeling as a group, maybe, as indicated by our cultural expressions, through the receiver of the historical moment—him. If we pick Hilary, we already in a sense have, "Hey, don't look at her." Look at our selection of her and what it is she is expressing for us. If she cut a deal, hey, that's great. What deal are we cutting through her and within ourselves as represented by her?

Merkin: I was just going to open it to have the overlooked, but not overlookable, Michael Miller speak.

Miller: Well, yes, I seem to keep disappearing tonight. I'm going to make an effort to do something about that. Speaking of sadomasochism, just to take off from what you said, I think sadomasochism is a very special kind of deal that only secondarily is about pain. In fact, part of what I'm going to say will address that. But first a personal note. I too, like some others, alas, am old enough to remember when Burt and Linda appeared in the newspapers. I was a senior around that time, 1959, at Stanford University, and what was going on all around me was that virtually the whole graduating class at Stanford was rushing to turn, as quickly as possible, from an I, first person singular, into a we, first person plural. Whoever one was going steady with—or if you didn't have somebody you better grab somebody quickly—because right after getting your diploma, the next step was to get married. And the whole romantic, desperate episode of Burt and Linda seemed, in a very strange way, to fit into this ideology that was driving my classmates. Even me, I have to admit, because I did get engaged. But I have to tell you I didn't go through with it.

Merkin: You eventually went through with it to someone.

Miller: Yes, but that was ten years later. But I have had that experience. Anyway, what it makes me think about is the romantic ideology, the romantic myth that was driving us. I think that this fascinating film of yours, Dan, is a kind of epitaph by pushing to an extreme of that romantic myth. It makes me think of an earlier epitaph. Adrienne, you mentioned a couple of novelists, Wharton and Dreiser, who presented the image of the working class woman finding opportunities to move ahead—upward mobility. But there's a very important novel from around that period about a man who's not too far from Burt, and that's Jay Gatsby.

Merkin: Interesting.

Miller: In *The Great Gatsby,* another novel that's an epitaph on romantic love—I guess we'll keep having epitaphs on romantic love and it will continue to refuse to die. That's how it is. But Jay Gatsby, somewhat like Burt, created vast wealth as a showpiece in order to win a woman who he was obsessed with, in love with. Again, whatever it was, he was following the terms of an important romantic love myth, which also did have economic implications, and still does. His great wealth, we learn late in the novel, was based on criminal gain. Was he a sociopath? Well I don't think it's a very interesting category to apply particularly to Jay Gatsby or to Burt.
It seems to me that, as you were saying Glen, this film is about the creation of a myth, but it's a myth that we've created that in many ways we live by. It goes through variations, and we continue to live by it. I think it's important to have, about every seven years, an epitaph on romantic love, because in many ways it's dangerous. I do want to say something about—forgive me—the nature of love with respect to this. Don't forget that the first love is basically an equation with dependence. Is it love? Well, it's the first experience we have of something that we come to think of as love. And it's in an equation with dependence. That's human nature. Freud, I think in *Civilization and Its Discontents,* commented that the greatest tragedy of human nature is the incest taboo. Well, we seem to find some elaborate displacements for getting around the incest taboo.

Marcus: And some not so elaborate.

Miller: And some not even so elaborate, that's right. But I think a broader way of speaking of that is that that first equation of love and dependence is something that may be the noir, the mixed blessing. The tragedy of human nature is that we have I think the most prolonged dependence on adult caretakers of any species. And that affects us, and our notions about love, and our myths of love, forevermore. So, in a way, I think you might think of maturing as a kind of learning, inventing, discovering how to extract love from so much dependence, even though that task is never completed. The romantic myth in the forms that we see it in extremists, in Dan's film or in *The Great Gatsby*, doesn't help us much in that job. In fact, it makes the dependence begin to seem beautiful—beautiful anguish. I think sadomasochism is really about the mix of love, anxiety and power, and not about inflicting and enjoying pain, though that may be the medium of intensity that makes it have the excitement.

Merkin: I think we spoke briefly on the phone about an equation between male dependency and violence. I was struck and asked Dan tonight, because I missed it. I think I was spellbound by one particular detail in a spellbinding film, which is when Burt is describing his own childhood. I believe he uses the word doting, that his mother doted on him.

Klores: Yes.

Merkin: And then adds that she gave him nice—or not nice—incestuousbaths until he was 12 or 13. But I was so struck when I saw the movie the first time that he said she doted on him. So I was expecting it to be a sort of classic narcissistic, if I may use the N-word, tale of an overindulged—I mean people always said that about Ted Bundy, but they said many things. A lot of these killers seem to always emerge from no boundaries, excessive love. So I was expecting him to continue with his tale and we would discover that the mother doted on him, thought he was God's gift. But it was interesting to me that he confused—and possibly what made me also find him more sympathetic than some people do—that he confused rampant abuse: I believe the mother broke his—the neighbors complained. He was still at this point in his life referring to it as being doted on. You don't have to be in heavy therapy to have somehow realized this wasn't being doted on. And also, later in the movie he refers to the fact proudly that he doesn't cry. He didn't cry when they hit him in jail.

Klores: The cops beat him.

Merkin: But he cried when his mother hit him. I found that a fascinating part.

Audience: In addition to the economic need of Linda, I believe that she accepted him because he really did love her. It was a love there. It was an important aspect, and she knew that these other men, like Larry and the other one who first wanted to marry her—when she had this defect they turned away from her and he didn't, whatever the reason. It might have had something to do with—

Merkin: That he caused it.

Audience: I'm not a psychoanalyst, but it might have had to do with the mother. But he actually did love her to a certain degree, and I almost felt like it was written well. When they spoke, they spoke terrifically. The only time, in my feeling, that they didn't speak terrifically was at the end when they were speaking to each other. That seemed unreal. That was unreal. It might have been, which proved, in a sense, that as art it was far better than as reality. Art itself was superior to what actually happened in life.

Merkin: I have just a question. What do you mean by unreal? That they seemed like any bickering couple by the end?

Audience: It was superficial. It was shallow. Whereas when they were analyzing it individually, that was not. That was beautiful. That was art.

Klores: Which is why I was very reluctant, and purposefully had them together only and initially about the 1996 affair. That was on purpose.

Audience: Good for you.

Klores: And I think you raise a very good point. In that diner, they're performing. They're performing. But alone—

Gabbard: But, Dan, don't you think they're performing through much of this?

Klores: Yeah. I was just going to say, yeah. But it's a singular performance. You know, one of the things about Burt is he's very smart. What I learned is that he sizes people up quickly. One on one he will tell you what he thinks you want to hear. I think I'm right on that.

Gabbard: I think you are.

Miller: They're both pretty smart.

Merkin: Yes. One thing I was struck by was what their lives would have been if either of them expressed rage. I mentioned this to Glen: her eyebrows jumped up and down like jumping beans for much of the movie, over the sunglasses, and I kept thinking, that's where all her fury went, including a lot of her comments to him. Maybe the part of the movie that you didn't like was the punitiveness of her to him.

Audience: Where did he get his money?

Klores: He's a paralegal—

Merkin: But originally he wasn't a paralegal.

Klores: After his conviction they took his law license from him, so when he got out—he works as a paralegal to this day in the Queens courthouse. And there's a bunch of lawyers that keep on hiring him. He works long hours.

Merkin: Isn't he also paid, if I may ask this indelicately, for his involvement in your film. He must be paid.

Klores: Well, no, I had to purchase the life rights. But that's not a lot of money.

Merkin: No. I also don't think they live so spectacularly well. She wears dated furs from the '70s, as Adrienne said. Her wardrobe seems very locked.

Klores: They live in the same place they've always lived in. I'll tell you an interesting thing, especially for this crowd. They live in that one-bedroom apartment like a lot of us know of in Queens. And there's a large closet. In the beginning of the film, remember when I come to her and she lights up that smoke? She sits in that closet, and that's where she resides almost all the time. That closet is her refuge. It's a large closet, and everything is compartmentalized in terms of here's her voicemail, here's her underwear, here's her wigs.

In about 1994—I don't know if anyone saw it, she's got a real scar over here—she had heart surgery. So they said you can't smoke anymore. In this closet she smokes. It's part of their

routine, for lack of a better word. She smokes. She's not allowed to smoke. She says I have to smoke in the closet, otherwise Burt will know. Well of course Burt knows. But she continues smoking.

Harris: Something that Eric said that I thought was really interesting was how to read this film in terms of the cultural moment—the '70s and the '50s somehow, their interrelationship, this place of politics and race and ethnicity. It's a film about New York. I think that's a really interesting thing to think about—what's also being carried as a kind of cultural analysis in this? I really think that's very stimulating to think about.

Audience: I was thinking that it's fascinating that in this group one thing that hasn't been mentioned at all is the sort of early origins of each of their relationships and their early love objects. Clearly they have in common tremendous failure probably—paternal and maternal failure. It was interesting that that hasn't been mentioned at all.

Harris: It has been.

Klores: The doting mother.

Audience: Well, yeah, the mother beat him, but really early, like sort of pre-five. What do you know about their families? I know she was abandoned, the father left. She was sent to another household. But how much you did learn about their earliest lives with their parents?

Klores: I think that to me it was remarkably similar. They both grew up in homeswhere the mother was the dominant figure—unusual in the 50's. The father was an object of being put down. They basically felt abandoned. I think in Burt's life he would always talk to me about this feeling of being deserted. He romanticizes the father to this day. He didn't even attend his mother's funeral. The idea—and someone says it in the film—about Linda's father not being there, because even if he was a bum you kept him, which was more or less true in those days, especially in that economic sphere.

Harris: There's a little interchange where he says, "I had a dream that she left me," and she says, "I don't dream." And there's just this sort of place of emptiness.

Klores: Yes, and I manipulate her at the end. I admit to that from a filmmaking perspective, because I asked her, well, do you dream about Larry Schwartz? And she says, "I sometimes think of him." But I'm not sure. Well, actually I am sure. They could not have had any sense of a normal relationship with anyone—neither of them.

Merkin: She seems like a pragmatist in every fashion.

Harris: Yes.

Audience: What really bugs me, and has from the moment I heard about the eyes—the blinding—is, why that sort of act? I think of Desdemona—she gets killed. Medea kills her two children. He ought to have killed her through the hit man. I mean that's the way I would

envisage it in Greek drama. Shakespeare would have it done that way. So he chooses this particular act, which in a way is the most malicious, awful possible thing you can do—remove somebody's eyes.

Merkin: Did he expect to blind her? I thought he was maybe expecting to kill her.

Audience: Disfigure.

Klores: I'd like to ask a question, because some other analyst told me this at one point. They told me that they didn't think it was an accident that it was her eyes that he wanted to destroy. They related it to a term that—forgive me, I can't remember it—but they said something about when a little boy, three to five, feels abandoned—and abandoned could mean the mother loses him in the supermarket aisle for a few minutes—when the mama picks him up, the boy goes to scratch the mother's eyes. Now I don't know, I was told this by a colleague of yours. Essentially—why didn't you keep an eye on me?

Merkin: How very literal, Eric.

Audience: That's an interesting observation. I don't have any particular interpretation about why the eyes. But I wonder—there's a Yiddish expression *beshert*. This match was made in heaven, as it were. But the eyes are also part of this heavenly, shall we say, arrangement, because it seems to me that ultimately this enables him to be redeemed over time, because you can actually live your entire life with blindness. Obviously it depends on the other party, the forgiving party, being around to do that. What I just find absolutely intriguing is that these two then come together almost like assortative mating. So there's the person who has to be redeemed and there's the other person who has to redeem, and I get the impression that they're doing a damn good job of it.

Marcus: I think that's buying in to the kind of mythology that we're talking about. I don't see any redemption there, unless I read it in and force it, because that's what I want to see in sort of cinematic mythology. Do you really think that he was redeemed?

Audience: As I was saying, this was bugging me all night, and so I'm just gravitating towards the idea that there may be a good, authentic redemption scenario here. One has to test out, I don't know in what ways, but maybe it's a difference of opinion.

Miller: But again, reality is the least interesting part of it.

Audience: I have a trivial question. Are you going to keep a friendship or a relationship with these people?

Audience: They're moving in.

Klores: No. I don't think so. When we got back from Sundance, and Burt and Linda came to Sundance for the world premier, which was fascinating—

Merkin: You also brought them to an opening here last week.

Klores: Right, but that was the first time that an audience met them. No one knew what the reaction would be. And in the culture that we have the audience applauded. Who knows? The degree of comfortability—who knows?

Gabbard: My worst fear was you'd bring them tonight.

Marcus: I called Matthew to find out, because that was my ticket out of here.

Merkin: I'm glad Eric has such high morals. Dan had brought up the idea of brining them, and I said I thought it would either be exhibit A or Jerry Springerish. But they seem to lend themselves very readily.

Klores: They have an enormous appetite, yeah. But what happened after Sundance—you read in the paper that we sold the film. So he calls me up about a week later and said do I want to keep a relationship with them. And all of the sudden there's a dramatic change in tone and language and he threatened me. He wants more money.

Marcus: Oh.

Klores: It was very uncomfortable. But I knew enough to stay calm and—

Merkin: Don't leave out the detail. You hired security for your children. He didn't stay that calm.

Klores: He told me two things that stuck with me: "I'm the last guy in the world you want to make paranoid." Not a great thing to hear. And then, "There's a lot of things I could do to you."

Marcus: Oh, my goodness.

Merkin: Dan, it adds to the story.

Klores: Well, you know, I notified my kids' school and they had extra security there. And that was taken care of in two days. He then reverted: "I love you, I love you, I love you, no problem." So I don't plan to have them over the house.

Audience: I was struck, Mr. Klores, by your comment that you thought that she too would have no chance of a normal relationship. Maybe I have a bias as a woman, but I saw her more as a pragmatist, as you said Ms. Merkin, and a survivor. I know she was complicit in some way, but I see her more acted upon. I wonder if you could talk about that. I wonder if he hadn't attacked her if she could've had—why do you think she couldn't have had a normal relationship? Also, I don't think there's love between them, but there is some power in their working relationship. I mean, obviously it works for them and they've done it now for 28 years and there's something in that.

Klores: I think her fear of intimacy is so profound. I have questions throughout this process if they've ever even had intercourse with each other. So that's one of the reasons. Let alone how she was trained to fear men.

Miller: Well look, I'd like to just respond to that and to the previous comment about the violence, and go back to male dependence for a moment. For one thing, a great many successful marriages are based on fear of intimacy. And they cook along very well. This may indeed be one. There's a way in which I'd like to emphasize the ordinariness of this marriage. There's this wonderful comment about a bizarre love that led to a happy marriage. Well, that's just about par for the course with a little bit of exaggeration, from my experience. Male dependence, I think, is something that is not emphasized enough. I was once giving a lecture in Cologne, Germany and I said it's been very hard for me to accept this, but I do a great deal of couples and marital therapy, and I have concluded that males are by far the more dependent sex. And a woman leapt up from the audience and said, "How did you know that?" somewhat indignantly, which made me feel that perhaps women have known this all along but they keep it a secret because men don't like to open themselves to any charge of dependence. In fact, we have an individualistic self-reliant ethic in this country and in the West in which men say, "I don't need anybody."

Merkin: Well that way he went against that ethos.

Miller: Well it's interesting, because the romantic love and the individualism, these two basic ethics of ours, kind of contradict each other. The thing about male dependence is that when men suffer from powerful dependence they haven't separated it from love, and we could go into a whole analysis and understanding of what that's about. We don't have to. When love is so bound up with dependence, it's not simply obsession or anything like that. It's a form of attachment that has to do with being seen—and Burt is very explicit about it. He says, "Sex is important to me. It makes me feel self-esteem." When you're about to lose that, when a man is about to lose that, it's easy for him to say, as Burt does, "If I can't have you, I'll see to it that nobody does." It leads pretty readily into violence. I think it's that kind of violence. I don't think it's about the eyes. It's about disfiguring her in a way that she will no longer be a beautiful, tempting object to somebody else. I think that's really what it's about.

Merkin: One thing I had a problem with when he said is that it was hard for me to put the character of Burt together with any concept of self-esteem. I actually thought that had been something he learned.

Miller: It sounded learned.

Merkin: It sounded like this is in his prison therapy. Someone said, "You need to have more self-esteem, and then you won't be blinding women again." But it didn't seem real to me.

Miller: I've found in couples therapy when men leave a marriage, they almost always have another woman in the wings. When women leave a marriage it's much less frequently the case. They often leave because they say, "Enough is enough. I'm fed up and I'm out of here." And I think women have a greater capacity for living alone than men do. That's my observation.

Marcus: The epidemiological data supports you.

Miller: Good.

Marcus: Widowers die at a more rapid rate.

Merkin: They also remarry more rapidly.

Marcus: Yes, they do. And if they don't they—

Audience: And widows blossom.

Marcus: I want to comment on the ordinariness that Michael just talked about. You know, Dan had the courage to say that he could somehow relate to Burt. There was some kind of feeling of resonance or empathy that you could relate to when you first were getting familiar with the whole situation. I think that what will make or break this film is partly whether the audience can think of some kind of ordinariness here, and some kind of identification. Arthur Miller once said that people don't go to the theater unless they see themselves on the stage. I think you've got to see something in Burt or Linda that you can relate to to really have an audience for this film. It's easy for us to distance ourselves, but that's a defensive posture, I think, when somehow we're relating to them and pulling for them.

Merkin: I didn't see the *Times* review, but I saw one denunciatory review—in *Rotten Tomatoes,* I believe it was called—in which the reviewer said who can be interested in this pathetic, sordid—I've wasted my time. Maybe you didn't see this review?

Marcus: I think that looks at the wrong identificatory figure. I think the film will make it, because we see ourselves in Linda. And that's a very powerful and effectively disguised—

Klores: First, you need to define "make it." I made the film I wanted to make, and I'm under no illusion. I think you're right, most of the audience will relate to some part of Linda and feel more comfortable relating to that. Whether it makes it—what's the definition of making it? I'm not going to make much money, if at all. Will it get great criticism? Mostly it is. Not from the *Times* tomorrow, but mostly it is. And will people talk about it?

Gabbard: But look how we're talking about it.

Klores: Yeah. But we've done a lot of screenings all over. It's obviously not the typical movie goer's film.

Gabbard: But it's a successful film. It's really stimulated a lot in us.

Klores: Yeah.

Miller: The figure of Burt will scare a lot of men to death. They'll deny that they identify with Burt.

Klores: Absolutely. 100% right.

Nersessian: Dan, I wanted to ask you a question. There's something familiar about this general story of a man who damages a women in order to then imprison her. Have you checked any of the historical antecedents of this kind of behaviors?

Klores: Of similar types of behavior?

Nersessian: Yeah, where the man specifically sets up to do something to the woman so nobody else can have her and then he goes and—

Klores: No, I have not, I'm sorry to say. Historically, though, even the act—and some people here may remember—even the act of throwing lye and blinding had been done a number of times before in the mid to late '50s. So I was very aware of that, but no I didn't do that.

Nersessian: It may be because for the first 14 years of my life I grew up in Iran, and that story sounds familiar to me of men doing that to women.

Klores: Yes. On that end, you're right. There are cultures where that happened.

Merkin: Ritual circumcision has some of those features, actually.

Miller: I thought you were going to say genital mutilation in women.

Merkin: Yes, I was.

Audience: I was delighted to see that you were involved with *The Capeman,* which is another exploration of what must have been a sort of boyhood nightmare for a lot of people of your generation, and it's also strongly connected. The music also sort of evokes that time. This seems to be something you return to again and again, and you've already alluded to it a little bit, but I guess one of the identifications the audience here might find is with that little boy in the '50s looking at the tabloids. I could almost see a poster for the movie with like *Invasion of the 50 foot Woman*.

Klores: Yeah. *The Capeman* was my friend Paul Simon's idea, and we were discussing this the other day because of this idea of whether the movie make it—*The Capeman*, of course, was a colossal failure, even though it was a beautiful, beautiful musical. Paul said, "I never thought that people didn't want to see that." It never occurred to me because in his mind that's what he was interested in when he was a little boy—Salvador Agron, who happened to murder people. He was attracted to the visual image. He was sort of a James Dean, Sal Mineo type of guy. Cool. It never occurred to him people are not going to come to Broadway to see a play about two Puerto Ricans that kill a white kid, and they're singing songs. It didn't occur to me either.

Merkin: I was thinking that there are parallels within it as a documentary—although I think it's actually more ambiguously and thus more artistically handled—to *Capturing the Freidmans*,

which I never knew if it did well outside of New York. Or *Grizzly Man.* Those kind of movies that draw upon very disturbing—

Klores: *Capturing the Friedmans* was a great critical success. And it did well for a doc. It did well.

Merkin: The all important "for a doc." I mean documentaries don't usually do that well.

Klores: Right.

Audience: Your story ends—it's a lot bleaker ultimately, and there is an attempt—

Klores: Well *The Capeman* is about this idea of redemption. I never saw my film as being about redemption, or forgiveness. It never entered into my thinking.

Merkin: No, but how do you marry someone you don't forgive? I kept wondering that about her.

Klores: Well as you're talking tonight, I think there is this—

Audience: You marry someone you don't forgive if it doesn't matter. If that's less important than—

Klores: But also that's her triumph.

Audience: He does take care of her.

Klores: He does take care of her. Well, to a certain extent. He provides a haven, a safety net. Probably not a surprise to people here, it's not the definition of how we take care of a partner. If you look, the paintings in the living room are all crooked, because often when she walks she has to hold the wall. He never straightens out a painting. She fixes the light bulbs.

Merkin: But she wants to, according to what I read. She has her own assertiveness.

Klores: She has to. So, yeah, he provides this home. They get meals on wheels.

Audience: Who dresses her? Who buys her clothes?

Harris: She doesn't have such great clothes.

Merkin: She has fabulous clothes.

Harris: No they're not, they're ancient.

Klores: She dresses herself.

Harris: They all look like they're in mothballs, her clothes.

Audience: She doesn't have her own money.

Klores: That's a very good point. She doesn't have her own money. When I sent them the check for the rights, I often wondered where that money is going.

Audience: Dan, I just wanted to say that I came from that era too. I remember it very clearly, and looking at the pictures of Linda, the whole way you did it, I saw myself there. I could remember the poses, the hair, the clothes, the sheets, the whole thing. It was captured so beautifully. I think when the lye was thrown in her face she stopped. We talked about whether she was ever going to grow and Adrienne talked about movements that have shaped us. She died with that lye.

Harris: She says that at the beginning: "I'm dead already."

Klores: She says that. That's very good. You're 100% right.

Audience: And she remains dead.

Klores: But that to me is, "So why Burt?" Because there's a part of her that—in her mind, Burt sees her as she was.

Audience: Exactly. They're able to stay there. They can stay in the past.

Merkin: Doesn't she take her glasses off?

Klores: She takes her glasses off around Burt. I asked her to take her glasses off.

Audience: What did she say?

Klores: What she said—I'll never forget what she said. She said exactly this—this is on camera, it was the last question I asked her: "I won't take them off, even for you. I have a glass eye and one eye is sutured together. I have to look like a freak. I look like a freak." That's exactly what she said.

Merkin: I think we're done.