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İYİLEŞ(TİR)ME: PATCH ADAMS, YARALI ŞİFACI

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HEALTH AND HEALING IN *PATCH ADAMS*:

*PATCH ADAMS, THE WOUNDED HEALER*<sup>1</sup>

*PATCH ADAMS FİLMİNDE SAĞLIK VE İYİLEŞ(TİR)ME:*

*PATCH ADAMS, YARALI ŞİFACI*

Doç. Dr. Fatma KALPAKLI

**Abstract:** Inspired by a true story, *Patch Adams* (1998) tells the life of a suicidal man (a man with manic depressive disorder, or to use a much more contemporary term, a man with bipolar man), who makes his mind up to study medicine after his experience of a short stay in a mental hospital. During his stay there, (Hunter) Patch Adams (acted by Robbie Williams) comes to understand that physical healing cannot be obtained without having spiritual healing initially and having a strong urge to help ill people and to speed their healing process up with regard to their mental and physical health, Patch Adams decides to establish the *Gesundheit* Institute as another option to contemporary hospitals. Dr. Adams expresses that in the hospitals only symptoms of the diseases are treated, but the main causes of the diseases and the emotional state of the patients are not taken into consideration and are mostly disregarded. Putting together his first hand experiences of being an in-patient in a mental hospital and then being a medical doctor, he tries to bring alternative treatments (based on caring and sharing) at the *Gesundheit* Institute in the application of medical practice and in due course, he makes a positive impact by touching the lives of many people not only in his close circles, but all around the world as the story of Patch Adams is made into a movie (from the book *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter*) and his ideas and principles with regard to health and healing spread and reach at millions of people through media. Hence, in this study, journey of Adams' healing process as well as his healing methods in the field of medicine will be analyzed with regard to the flow of the events

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shown in *Patch Adams*. Moreover, the power of movies to raise awareness about health issues in our global world will be examined.

**Key Words:** *Patch Adams* (1998), Health and Healing, American Health-Care system, the *Gesundheit* Institute, Alternative Treatments, Medicine, Manic Depression/Bipolar Disorder.

**Öz:** Gerçek bir yaşam hikâyesinden esinlenerek beyaz perdeye uyarlanan *Patch Adams* (1998) filmi intihar eğilimi olan ve kısa bir süre akıl hastanesinde kaldıktan sonra tıp eğitimi almaya karar veren Patch Adams adlı kişinin (Patch Adams manik depresif ya da daha güncel ismiyle bipolar hastasıdır) yaşam hikâyesini konu almaktadır. Akıl hastanesinde kaldığı süre içerisinde (filmde Robbie Williams tarafından canlandırılan) Hunter Patch Adams öncelikle ruhsal iyileşme sağlanmadan bedensel iyileşmenin mümkün olamayacağını anlar ve hayatı boyunca içinde hasta insanlara yardım etmek için güçlü bir istek duyduğundan ve onların ruhsal ve bedensel sağlıklarına kavuşmalarını hızlandırabilmek için günümüz hastanelerine alternatif olarak Sağlık Enstitüsünü kurmaya karar verir. Dr. Adams hastanelerde hastalıkların sadece belirtilerinin tedavi edildiğini, ancak esas sebeplerinin ve hastaların ruhsal durumlarının dikkate alınmayarak genellikle gözardı edildiğini ifade etmektedir. Bir hasta olarak akıl hastanesinde kalma sürecinde edindiği tecrübelerini ve daha sonra da bir tıp doktoru olarak zaman içinde edindiği tecrübelerini birleştirerek Sağlık Enstitüsü'nde (ilgi ve paylaşıma dayalı) alternatif tıbbi tedavi yöntemleri geliştirmeye çalışmıştır. İlerleyen günlerde, Dr. Adams'ın çabaları sonuçsuz kalmaz ve o binlerce insanın hayatına dokunarak hayatları üzerinde olumlu bir etki yaratır (özellikle Sağlık: Sağlık ve Gülme Arasındaki İlişki adlı kitabının beyazperdeye uyarlanmasıyla onun sağlık ve iyileş(tir)me ile ilgili fikirleri basın aracılığıyla milyonlarca insana ulaşmıştır). Bu çalışmada, Adams'ın kendi iyileşme süreci ve onun hastalarını iyileştirme yöntemleri *Patch Adams* filmindeki olayların akışından örnekler verilerek incelenecektir. Ayrıca, her geçen gün daha da küreselleşen dünyamızda basının sağlık sorunları hakkında farkındalık oluşturmadaki rolü de irdelenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Patch Adams* (1998), Sağlık ve İyileş(tir)me, Amerikan Sağlık Sistemi, Sağlık Enstitüsü, Alternatif Tedaviler, Tıp Bilimi, Manik Depresyon/Bipolar Rahatsızlık.

## INTRODUCTION

*Patch Adams* is mainly the life story of a suicidal man, who desperately looks for a cure for his psychological problems<sup>2</sup> to the extent that he willingly goes and stays in the mental hospital for a while and eventually he decides to take the responsibility of treating himself and others into his own hands and studies medicine in the following years to be a healer.

<sup>2</sup> After changing many jobs and moving seven times a year, Adams wants to have some stability in his life and in order to so he wants to be healed.

Jackson tries to explain the relationship between sufferings, traumas and healers in his studies and in his article, he expresses that “while melancholic or depressive disorders have been rather common among healers, the evidence is clear that there has been quite a range of other forms of suffering or woundedness that have led to a person's being a wounded healer. Yet whatever the form of the personal suffering, there has been a transmutation of that experience into a sensitivity to the suffering of others, and that sensitivity has enhanced the capacity to be useful to others in a healing<sup>3</sup> role” (2001: 36). In the healing role, Patch Adams (Robbie Williams) emphasizes the inseparability of mental and physical health and he tries to know his patients and their problems to find out the causes of their diseases.

Like Patch Adams does, Louise L. Hay believes that the physical illnesses mainly stem from mental and emotional conflicts. In her book entitled *Body Talks: Heal Your Body*, she explains it in the following words:

...the word metaphysical [may be explained as] ... go[ing] beyond the physical to the mental cause [which lies] behind it. [For instance], if you came to [see] me as a [customer] with a problem [such as intestinal obstruction] I would know you had some sort of belief in limitation and lack... [and thus you suffered from the scarcity consciousness] and therefore were mentally frightened to let go of anything out of fear of not being able to replace it. It could also mean [that] you were holding onto an old painful memory of the past and would not let [it] go [either]. You might have a fear of letting go of relationships that no longer nourish you, or a job that is [unsatisfactory], or some [belongings] that are now [not useable]. You might even be [a penny pincher]. Your [illness or the physical manifestation of problems] would give me many [signs about] your mental attitude [and your psychological problems or your long time repressed emotions]. (1998: 52)

However, Adams' the mental hospital experience reveals that even in the mental hospitals, the emotions are not seriously taken into consideration, instead they are very simply ignored; thus, his recognition of the problems in the health system puts him into the path of medical school. Therefore, his story is very reminiscent of Chiron, the wounded healer in Greek

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<sup>3</sup> Jackson further adds that

For a healer it could be [suggested] that it is [tremendously important] to come to live with what s/he is. The [importance] of exploring and coming to terms with what one is is particularly significant, and an aspect of this is becoming acquainted with one's liabilities [or responsibilities], as well as one's assets-with one's past and present wounds [or traumas] and sufferings, as well as one's strengths. Then the healer may turn those sufferings [and pains] to account as sources of knowledge [and wisdom], as bases for understanding, appreciating, and empathizing with the wounds and sufferings of others [who are in need of help]. As some [writers have claimed], an afflicted person's drive to [solve] his... own problems may well ameliorate or cure his... own illness. This effort has turned some sufferers toward being of use to others, toward finding meaning and meaningful activity in [the profession of ] healing. (2001: 36)

Parallel to this explanation, Patch Adams turns his sufferings into sources of knowledge and into bases for understanding, appreciating, and empathizing with the wounds and sufferings of other people and also inspires many others to do so in the movie.

mythology. It is told that once upon a time, Chiron, the demigod is injured by Hercules with his poisoned arrow. Interestingly enough, the wound never gets better and causes him an enormous pain. Being a demigod means being an immortal person at the same time, which makes things more complicated for Chiron. Eventually, he exchanges his life for the life of Prometheus and by becoming mortal, he gets rid of his pain and suffering. Thus, by helping others he helps himself as well. He uses his gifts in order to reduce others's sufferings. Therefore, the myth of Chiron<sup>4</sup> is the basis of the notion of the wounded healer (Gerada, 2015: "The Wounded Healer") and Patch Adams (Robbie Williams) is "the Chiron of the contemporary world"<sup>5</sup>. Gerada suggests that

[s]uffering is [an inseparable] part of the human experience [and life] and everyone [has] psychological, emotional, physical, and even spiritual traumas from [their] past. For many [would-be] doctors, as well as other health professionals, the nature of their wound might [affect] their choice to enter a caring and healing profession and also their choice of specialty. This choice provides the theatre for playing out the wounded, unresolved part of their past. [To exemplify], a doctor with an addicted [mother or father] might become an addiction [expert]; another [person] might become a paediatrician after the [loss] of a sibling or a psychiatrist after [having been exposed to the abuse of] a childhood caregiver. These unconscious motives can be a [powerful] driving force for compassion and commitment. [However], they may also be a portent for future problems if not understood and kept [under control]. [Moreover], a pattern might be established in which the doctor [has the risk of getting] overinvolved with patients, [and hence] [trespassing] professional [borders and eventually] developing burnout [syndrome], anxiety, or [a very severe] depression.

As in line with Gerada's explanations quoted above, Robbie Williams<sup>6</sup> in the character of Patch Adams becomes a doctor to heal the wounds of his immediate environment and himself both psychologically and physically.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, many plants are connected with Chiron's name. The four panaceas - Asclepion, Heracleon, Chironion and Centaurion - were believed to have been found by him. Chiron was the discoverer of the white Bryony, the Ampelos chironia of Pliny and the Bryonia alba, L., of botanists... as well. The Centaurea is supposed to have cured Chiron when Hercules' arrow pierced his foot, but taking the narratives of his death given above before, the wound [seemed to be] mortal and [therefore]... could not be healed. [Besides], [h]is name was [...] given to open ulcers that refuse to [get better]: "Old ulcers which are difficult to cicatrize are [named after Chiron and] called [as] Chironian, as if [making it necessary for] Chiron himself to heal [or cure] them." (Dawson, 1949: "Chiron the Centaur")

<sup>5</sup> The concept of "the wounded healer" needs to be explained here and "[t]he term refers to a person whose [own] personal experience of [a disease] ... or trauma has left [remaining] effects [and put its mark] on him - in the form of lessons learned that later served [and helped] him in ministering [and attending] to other sufferers [and patients], or in the form of symptoms or characteristics that usefully [affected] his therapeutic [and beneficial] endeavors [and efforts]" (Jackson, 2001: 1). Therefore, it may be connected with the wounded hero of trauma studies as well.

<sup>6</sup> Maureen Mylander, Adams' co-author in the book states that "[i]t seems only fitting that an actor of such unique comic and dramatic talents as Williams should be chosen to play Patch" ("*Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter*").

Patch Adams himself suffers from manic-depression, which is known today as bipolar disorder and as Gerada points out in the passage above almost everyone might be carrying with them some psychological and physical problems as well as spiritual traumas from [former times]. And celebrities are not an exception to this rule and some of them choose to become a voice for the people, who try to cope with mental health issues in their daily lives. For instance, the English actor and writer, Stephen Fry has also announced that he is struggling with bipolar disorder and he even turns this experience into a documentary. This documentary has reach out to millions of people under the title of *Stephen Fry: The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive* and in doing so, Fry tries to raise consciousness about the mental health issues and especially about manic depression or in more up-to-date terms bipolar disorder<sup>7</sup>. “[Fry as an actor] and writer has long been [honest and] open about his own [firsthand experience of and] struggles with bipolar disorder and has been prolific [and very creative] in raising [consciousness] around mental health [issues]” reports Paul Harper in *Metro*. In addition to Stephen Fry, some of the members of the British Royal Family, Kate Middleton and Prince William try to raise consciousness about the mental health issues by starting “the Heads Together Campaign” to “shatter the stigma” and shame on mental health (“the Heads Together Campaign”). In press-meetings, they state that “shame and silence” in relation to mental health problems should be overcome and replaced with “optimism and support”. Especially, unresolved mental health problems should be spoken out and everyone should be provided with right help and support since “every mind matters” in the society. They believe that the more people talk about mental health issues the more normal the topic gets and the prejudice and fear in reference to mental health problems will be eradicated eventually. Hence, the acceptance and embracement of mental health problems means the starting of healing process. What is more interesting is that as uttered by Kate and William, talking about the mental problems is actually the starter and part of the healing process (for further information see utube video “Harry, Kate and William Launch Mental Health Campaign”). With the help of the campaigns such as “the Heads Together Campaign” and with media coverage and support, mental health issues have become a part of the daily conversations in twenty first century.

Going back to Patch Adams’ own times, to 1970s, when he founded the *Gesundheit* Institute in 1971, unfortunately, the stigma around mental health illnesses seems to be more common and deeper. With the adaptation of the book *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter* (1992) into a movie and by naming it after Patch Adams, Universal Studios makes Adams’ contributions into the field of medicine and health care unforgettable.

As mentioned before, *Patch Adams* is rested on the true life story of a physician, who wants to establish a hospital, a health centre, where the main principle and norm will be “hu-

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<sup>7</sup> Bipolar disorder was used to refer to “manic depressive illness and manic depression”. Manic depression may be defined as “a mental disorder”, which might be “characterized by [extensive change of] mood[s] [or mood] swings from high (manic) to low (depressed)”. “Bipolar Disorder (Manic Depressive Illness or Manic Depression): What Is It?” Therefore, these two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this study.



manity and laughter<sup>8</sup>. It is adapted from the book *Gesundheit* by Hunter 'Patch' Adams and Maureen Mylander ("Chasing after the Truth behind Movies Based on True Stories"). Upon the adaptation of the book into a film, Adams' co-author Maureen Mylander expresses that

[t]housands of readers' [emotions have been aroused] by the story of Patch's life and work and his dream to [establish] a hospital that uses laughter as a form of medicine, love as its currency, and trust and acceptance as the very bricks of its foundation. We [...] hope that this film and the new exposure it gives to the story of *Gesundheit!* will prove the catalyst that finally brings to Patch and his friends the support, recognition and success they deserve. ("*Gesundheit: Good Health...*")

Linda Hutcheon in her book entitled *A Theory of Adaptation* explains that "[a]dapters are [...] attracted to their [occupation] for all kinds of [motives] [...]. Alternatively stated, the appeal of adaptation cannot simply be [elucidated] [...] by [financial benefit] [...]" (2006: 175). Film adaptations might be used to reach a wider number of people as it is illustrated in the case of *Patch Adams* and it is used to criticize the "deficiencies in [American] health care system" ("*Gesundheit: Good Health...*") and to establish "a unique and positive approach to health and healing" ("*Gesundheit: Good Health...*") and to implement humanitarian values<sup>9</sup> rather than capitalist ideals in the medical world.

The film<sup>10</sup> encompasses Patch Adams' time as a voluntary patient in a psychiatric ward or in a mental health institution; his motives in order to become a doctor, and the time period as a student in the faculty of medicine as well as his challenge of the "establishment" ("Essex, 1999: *Patch Adams*") of the *Gesundheit*<sup>11</sup> Institute. In the movie, we are informed that Patch Adams loses his father at the age of nine<sup>12</sup> and suffers from suicidal tendencies and he decides to take

<sup>8</sup> Like Chiron, Patch Adams becomes both a "protector and instructor of the children" (Dawson, 1949: 268) in his immediate circles.

<sup>9</sup> Hence, the "spirit" of the book (Hutcheon, 2006: 10) of *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter* is preserved during the process of its adaptation into the film, *Patch Adams*.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf expresses that "[i]t [is peculiar] indeed that illness has not taken its [deserved] place with love and battle and jealousy among the [major] themes of literature" (4) in *On Being Ill*. Similarly, the theme of illness has also been ignored in Cinema for many years, however, *Patch Adams* might be seen as a good attempt to compensate for it by raising consciousness about illnesses, health problems and healing through media in the contemporary world.

<sup>11</sup> Medical Definition of *Gesundheit*:

*Gesundheit*: Interjection used to [express the] wish [of] "good health," to someone, especially, who has sneezed. In this situation, *Gesundheit* is [nearly] equivalent to "God bless you."

[Originally, *Gesundheit* is a German word and in German, it] means "health" (and "sanity"). Wishing "good health" was once thought to [turn away] the illness that might [come after] a sneeze.

"God bless you" came into [similar] usage to prevent the escape of the soul from the body, which was [supposed] to occur with a sneeze. ([Hence],[s]oullessness was believed to [bring] ill health.)

Interestingly enough, Patch Adams tries to appeal to the souls and hearts of the patients in his treatments of the diseases. And his preference of the German word *gesundheit*, instead of health might show his prioritization of the soul over the body.

<sup>12</sup> In real life, Patch Adams loses his father when he is a high school student (for further information see *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter*).

treatment in a psychiatric ward willingly<sup>13</sup>. In relation to the causes of manic depression, there are many theories; some suggesting that it is genetically oriented, whereas others suggesting that it is psychologically-oriented such as the loss of a loved one especially for a child; “Sometimes a breakdown results from a particular stressful event (such as the death of a loved one, especially a parent), but many [inconsistent, fluctuating] shifts of mood [and] even complete [mental and psychological] breakdowns cannot be [grounded on] [...] an [external] or ‘psychological’ [reason]. [What is more],[t]he [scientific] evidence for genetic [or hereditary] transmission [of manic depression] is [extremely powerful]” (Caramagno, 1988: 12). In the movie, the audience is informed that Patch Adams suffers from mood swings and insomnia and he hopes that he would get a proper treatment to lead a stable and normal life. Moreover, we are informed that manic depressive<sup>14</sup> patients “[oscillate] between mania and depression, [despite the fact that] the speed, [time span and even] intensity of the mood swings [substantially differ] from [person to person] and from [occasion to occasion]” (Caramagno, 1988: 12). In other words, it is deduced that “[b]iology, not psychology, is the [ruling instrument] of predisposition. [Some events and experiences in life] can trigger, but [they can not bring mental illnesses or insanity]” (Wolpert, 1977: 584-86; Paykel, 1982: 146-61).

In his manic periods, Patch Adams could not sleep, yet these manic periods provide him with time and energy to observe other patients and serve for them. As Wolpert states during their manic periods, “[a]s if their imaginations have gone into overdrive, manics feel unable to [suppress] their racing thoughts...[and they] ... attempt to “read” [or to understand] the environment by imposing [a purpose and a neatly organized structure, or a sort of] order on a world that spins [more and more quickly] out of control (Wolpert, 1977: 65-68) and which gets more chaotic and hence makes life very difficult for them. Yet, luckily enough, Patch manages to channel this manic period into a productive period by focusing on other people’s needs (just like Chiron does in the mythological tale) in the psychiatric ward. A researcher explains that “[p]eople often feel invincible and [revitalised] when [they are] in a manic [period], but it’s [crucial to direct the excess of their] energy [or vitality properly]. [Instead of] going to a [ gambling house] to gamble or [being carried away with the tricks of the consumer culture and] doing unplanned shopping, [they should] use [their] energy [and their potential in order] to accomplish [goals or carry out tasks that they] didn’t have the drive for [previously]” (Orenstein, 2012: “Bipolar Disorder: Healthy Ways to Focus Your Energy”).

Being a conscious patient, Patch Adams uses his excessive energy to help his ward mates and we, the audience, are informed at some point in the movie that he has changed many jobs and has moved seven times a year and these ups and downs make him uncomfortable and

<sup>13</sup>Dramatic conflict is one of the most important driving forces in popular cinematic narratives, which is frequently due to the development of a character. Even if such narratives are intended to address a large number of audiences, horror films or other types of thrillers exploit inner conflicts within external events and surface plots, and a wide audience have always been interested in characters with psychological problems.” (Çıraklı and Yemez, 2019: 96)

<sup>14</sup> Bipolar disorder is defined as “a serious [mental illness], in which a person [goes through great variations] in [his] thinking, mood, and behavior. Besides, it should not be forgotten that “[b]ipolar disorder is on some occasions called manic-depressive illness or manic depression. (“What is Bipolar Disorder?)



therefore, he wants to be treated. Taking the symptoms of manic-depression into consideration, these events might have fallen into the manic phases due to the emergence of excessive energy and having developed some defence mechanisms, he channels this energy into serving for the other patients in the psychiatric ward.

Meanwhile, his skills of empathy improve more and more day by day. Besides, he has experienced how it is like to be in the shoes of other mental patients. To exemplify, in one scene, when his hallucinatory room mate in the psychiatric ward begins to see squirrels or enemies in the middle of night, he pretends to see them as well ("*Patch Adams*",13:29). Then, he begins to accompany his friend as if they were two boys playing a game together. Afterwards, he realizes that having sympathy and communication, his room mate feels much more better. In his book *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter*, Adams states that "[c]ommunication, both verbal and nonverbal, will be [their] way of life" and the movie remains loyal to his ideas and principles and reflects them very clearly as well.

In another scene, we see him discussing with an old man named Arthur in the the psychiatric ward, who questions the things beyond the appearances and who becomes the center of concern and attention for Patch Adams ("*Patch Adams*"; 11:17). Later on, it is illustrated that Arthur has a long term influence with his philosophical ideas on Patch Adams. One day, Patch Adams goes to Arthur's room and finds him studying on mathematical equations and realizes that the cup on his study desk is leaking and he fixes it by putting a sticker to the leaking part of the cup and this makes Arthur very happy ("*Patch Adams*"; 10:37). At this moment, Arthur has the experience of being cared and concerned about and feels good. And this urges him open his heart and mind to Patch Adams by raising his hand and asking "[h]ow many fingers do you see [when you look at my hand]?" and then, the conversation begins to flow in the following order:

Arthur Mendelson: "How many fingers do you see?"

Hunter Patch Adams: "Four."

Arthur Mendelson: "No no! Look beyond the fingers! Now tell me how many you see."

Arthur Mendelson: "You're focusing on the problem. If you focus on the problem, you can't see the solution. Never focus on the problem!"

Hunter Patch Adams: "Eight."

Arthur Mendelson: "See what no one else sees. See what everyone chooses not to see... out of fear, conformity or laziness. See the whole world a new each day!". ("*Patch Adams*"; 11:17)

Then, Arthur tries to share his view of life with Patch Adams and he advises him to "see things beyond the appearances [which are not perceived by everyone]" ("*Patch Adams*"; 11:17) and Arthur appreciates Patch Adams' seeing the clever man hidden behind the bitter old crazy man known as Arthur Mendelson. And if we analyze this scene in terms of mental health issues, we can also say that it questions who is sane or insane and according to whom or what? As it happens in the movie, Patch sees four fingers from one angle and eight from another an-

gle. So the perceptions may differentiate as in line with the circumstances and the mood of the person or people. Thus, everything is very relative in life like some people perceive Arthur as a mad person, whereas some others like Patch perceives him as a genius. In this scene, inevitably, the question of “what if people who do not conform to the society or to the rules are labelled as insane or mad” arises. And if only the power holders and the ones, who have authority in their hands decide who is sane or insane, then what happens if these decision-makers themselves are not sane? Who will decide who is sane or not and according to what or whom? Briefly, the finger scene has many layers of meanings and the choice is left to the audience to dig it more or not. In relation to the “Finger Scene” and *Patch Adams* in general, a commentator states that

*Patch Adams* is a [film] about questioning the [widespread] soulless, institutional approach to[wards the] medical care. [It suggests] [t]reating people as people [not as lab rats], using compassion and humor [in order] to heal them. In other words, [it asks the question of] what do you see when you see people? That’s the driving question of daily life [that people should keep in mind]. And the answer, the awareness plan with which you experience the world, is what informs your creative abilities. Patch, unlike the other patients in the mental institution, doesn’t see a bitter man, he sees a brilliant one. This interaction changes the entire dynamic of the relationship [between Arthur and Patch]. Arthur is beside himself. As a man with a hardened heart, he’s not used to this type of kindness. But Patch wins him over. And from that moment on, their relationship blossoms. Arthur even lets Patch use his acreage to construct the *Gesundheit* Institute. Yet another reason to treat people with compassion. [Life is full of surprises and] [y]ou never know who has millions of dollars and tons of land. (“How Many Fingers Do You See ? ~ *Patch Adams*”)

As an irony of history, Arthur turns out to be a millionaire as stated above and donates some of his land to Patch for the establishment of the *Gesundheit* Institute, when Patch is searching for a land to build the *Gesundheit* Institute on.

Unfortunately, Patch Adams himself could not get enough attention and care from his psychiatrist and the treatment he is looking for his illness (that is manic depression or in other words, bipolar disorder). The main features of his illness may be explained as follows:

Bipolar disorders are [identified by looking at repeated] episodes of elevated mood and depression, which are [followed] by [alternations] in [one’s deeds or] activit[ies] or [one’s level of] energy. [These disorders are connected] with characteristic cognitive, physical, and behavioural symptoms... [To be more precise], the term mania is used when elevated mood is [alarming] and sustained or [connected] with psychotic symptoms, [which might be] leading to marked disturbance of behaviour and function... [Though], traditionally [perceived] as opposite poles, manic and depressive symptoms [frequently co-exist, developing] “mixed” states... [Bipolar disorder] is a result of [cooperating genetic or hereditary] and environmental [influences or] factors... [such as having been exposed to] physical or sexual [exploitation] in childhood [days]... (Anderson and *et al.*, 2013: 28)

Contrary to his expectations in his first days in the psychiatric ward, he sees that including the doctors, nobody listens to the patients and the lack of concern for the needs of the patients is a common and widespread problem in mental hospitals. Hence, he decides to leave the psychiatric ward in order to study medicine and to help people as he believes that the doctor's "responses may [throw light on] the hidden nature of the behaviour of a patient" (Caramagno, 1988: 17) if they are given enough time and care. Under normal circumstances, in a mental hospital, psychotherapies are [main] adjuncts in [diminishing] stress, treating depression and improving the patients' [activities] (see Anderson and *et al.*, 2013: 29). Luckily enough, many patients have good [results] and can [have a fulfilling life] (see Anderson and *et al.*, 2013: 32) after their treatments. However, Patch Adams and his ward mates do not have access to these facilities and he decides to take the issue into his own hands by getting medical education so that he can grasp the ways of how human mind and body and how it works.

As a medical student, Patch Adams tries different ways to treat his patients. He gives priority to the emotions and he tries to appeal to the hearts of his patients first. Afterwards, he focuses on their physical problems. Inevitably, his humanitarian approach is considered as irrational and emotional and therefore, not welcomed in his immediate environment in the Faculty of Medicine, especially by the Dean of the Faculty.

For example, in one scene, Patch Adams makes use of "Hello Experiment", and "Laughing Treatment" (*Patch Adams*"; 21:26, 45:43) and he observes that saying Hello to the patients and making them laugh contribute to raise their spirits up and boost their immune systems. However, his extraordinary methods make the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine uncomfortable and warns him to follow the rules of the Faculty and to fit into the system. The Dean seems to be very concerned about the construction of hierarchies between medical students and professionals and patients and is a believer in the absolute power of the physicians as it is reflected through his posture and body language and the discourse he uses throughout the movie (*Patch Adams*). The Dean might have been used as an instrumental character in order to show the power and authority of the physicians in American society. Here, we think it might be beneficial to refer to Foucault's ideas about discourse and power and discursive practices in medicine. For Foucault, "[d]iscourse is not just a way of speaking or writing, but the whole [of the mental attitude] and ideology which [encompasses] the thinking of all members of a given [community]" (Barry, 176). In the movie, having seen "the trust that so many Americans place in their physicians" (Skinner, 2020: 22), it becomes very obvious to the audience that "physicians have a privileged<sup>15</sup> place and have a considerable amount of power<sup>16</sup> in the [American

<sup>15</sup> As a result of "the rising status physicians.... patients' wishes and needs often be secondary to the experts' goals and interests" (Achenbaum, 1985: 344) in American medical system. However, Patch Adams observes that when the patients' wishes and needs are taken into consideration, the recognition of the patients as individuals and as human beings rather than being objects to analyze quickens their healing process. Accordingly, Adams prepares a spaghetti bath for an old lady and wears a red clown nose for the children in the geriatric ward in the movie. In doing so, he rejects the general assumption in American medical culture, which sees the patient "as a project to be worked on" (see Byron, 2003: 78).

<sup>16</sup> Sociologists and medical anthropologists try to answer some questions such as "why medical resources have been more inequitably distributed in the United States than in any other advanced capitalist

medical] system. And in the eyes of the patients, their medical knowledge, [their power] and decisions are not questioned much" (Skinner, 2020: 22). If we have a look at the construction of power in the field of medicine or

(i)n the case of medicine, power is [encompassed] and comes with the [daily] rational-scientific practices [connected] with the work of [physicians in the health centres or hospitals including clinics], which Foucault (1973) [phrased] the 'clinical gaze'. Such [daily] practices [add and aid] to the (social) construction and reproduction of what has been [labelled as] the 'biomedical discourse'. [From] Foucault's [perspective], the [connection] between power and knowledge is an inevitable and [inseparable] one. [Having perceived it, Foucault] in fact uses the single term 'power/knowledge': any extension of power involves [a growth] in knowledge. Specific [structures] of power [necessitate] [exceptionally] specific [constructions] of knowledge. In this [regard], [institutional organizations] such as medicine (also the law and organized religions) [have] power not through overt coercion but through the moral authority over [sick people] associated with being able to [explicate personal] problems (such as [a sickness]) and then [come up with] solutions (i.e. treatment) [and remedies] for [the ones, who are in need of them]. ("Concepts of Health, Wellbeing and Illness, and the Aetiology of Illness").

However, its application in daily life might bring some problems such as abuse of power<sup>17</sup> in the medical profession and by reflecting these problems and the failures in American

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society?" and come to the conclusion that physicians prevented "the emergence of a national health insurance system" and shaped the type of Medical insurance in USA:

... once physicians had succeeded in reducing the supply of practitioners and in enhancing their legitimacy, they became the dominant force in shaping the American medical system. They were then able to use their "dominance" and "authority" in order to gain control over hospitals, which they used for their own practice, to prevent the emergence of a national health insurance system, and to shape the type of medical insurance which did emerge. In short, the medical profession, like most professions, succeeded in restricting the effectiveness of a competitive market (Hollingsworth, 1983: 326).

<sup>17</sup> "[Generally], the doctor has [assumed] a position of power within the [process] consultation: s/he alone [has] the medical [information] and authority [needed] to diagnose. [Over the last decade], there have also been [alterations with regard to] access to power/knowledge in consultations as a [consequence] of the [improved] empowerment of patients. Traditionally, [doctors are defined] as [employing] a process of silencing and [forcefully driving the sick person] to speak [or to articulate] (an internal procedure referred to by Foucault as 'rarefaction of the speaking subject'), which institutionalises the discourse, and minimises and [directs probabilities] for the sharing of knowledge. [Physicians have been blamed for cutting patient narratives down quickly, and consequently] potentially [leaving out] important information, or failing to adequately [investigate] health beliefs and explanatory models of [disease]" (Bristowe and *et al.*, 2014: 553). In relation to this, Adams in *Gesundheit: Good Health* underlines the importance of communication with the patients in order to find the real cause of the diseases and problems and says that communication will be their way of life in the process of healing the patients since communication and the intimacy brought with it has "the healing power" (for further information see *Gesundheit: Good Health*). Luckily enough, "more recent models of communication in [the education of medicine], which encourage the parallel exploration of the patient's illness experience alongside that of the disease, in conjunction with the rise in alternative sources of truth and knowledge (such as [Web-based medical] patient info), have

medical culture, the movie becomes a critique of American medical culture and system, which promotes the well being of the doctors rather than the well being and healing of the patients.

*Patch Adams* criticizes American medical culture/system in a humorous way as it is also shown in Patch Adams' reply to the Dean. Upon Dean's warning and implicit threats, instead of getting angry, Patch Adams with all his optimism and sincerity suggests laughing to the Dean to be happy. He says,

"Remember laughing? Laughter enhances the blood flow to the body's extremities and improves cardiovascular function. Laughter releases endorphins and other natural mood elevating and pain-killing chemicals, improves the transfer of oxygen and nutrients to internal organs.

Laughter boosts the immune system and helps the body fight off disease, cancer cells as well as viral, bacterial and other infections. Being happy is the best cure of all diseases!" (*Patch Adams*"; 45:43).

Yet, his extraordinary manners and treatments make him "an outcast<sup>18</sup>" in the eye of the Dean and Patch Adams cannot conform to the system at the Faculty of Medicine.

In relation to the idolization of the doctors in American medical culture, Adams states in his book *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter* that "[d]octors supposedly knew all the answers, ordered others around, often rudely. This kind of thinking-the doctor as a [superman or as a] hero who saves the patient-is [harmful and] destructive [for the reason that] it instills the belief, in students and everybody else, that the doctor has all the answers [for all the problems]. [That mentality or that kind of attitude left] [...] no room for humility and mistakes. What pressure this put on [the shoulders of the] students of medicine!"

Therefore, as it is shown in the movie, it becomes obvious that he needs to establish a place, where he can freely apply his methods of treatment based on love and caring and where he can feel at home and where he should not worry about bureaucracy and rules.

The movie itself starts with Patch Adams's sentence that "all of life is coming home, how far home can be?" (*Patch Adams*"; 1:08). This sentence reveals that from the very beginning, he is in search of a place, where he feels at home and to where he fits in. He needs to have the sense of belonging to somewhere and eventually he establishes the *Gesundheit* Institute, where he and patients can be, who they are and where they can act without pretence. As uttered by Patch Adams himself in the movie, "it will be the first Fun Hospital" and he declares to his friends that "[they] will heal suffer and pain with humour" (*Patch Adams*"; 1:07:04) and "[there] love [will be] the ultimate goal" (*Patch Adams*; 1:07:30). With these ideals and principles in his mind and heart, Patch establishes the *Gesundheit* Institute and calls it their "new home" (*Patch Adams*"; 1:12:08), where people without Health Insurance can be treated free of any

begun to draw the authority to diagnose [and to evaluate], and access to power/knowledge, out from the [doctor's] exclusive grasp" (Bristowe and *et al.*, 2014: 553).

<sup>18</sup> Adams in his book, *Gesundheit* explains that he had "a clash with an assistant dean" during his university education and says that his actions were seen as a "threat" by his school. Comparatively speaking, the adapters remain loyal to Patch Adams' book while making it into a film.



charge. In relation to this, we can take the whole movie as a severe critique of the American health care system due to the fact that millions of USA people have no access to the medical treatment because of lacking financial resources. And this fact is ignored by the millions of others, who have access to the health care facilities. However, Dr. Adams feels himself responsible of the gap between haves and have nots and of what can be done to help the ones in need.

He emphasizes that “death just like birth is a natural part of our lives” throughout the movie and expresses that “[d]eath is not the enemy... Indifference is!” (“*Patch Adams*”; 1:42:40). He utters many times that “we are all dying, we should improve the quality of life, not just delaying it” (“*Patch Adams*”; 49:54, 1:43:04). Having observed the importance of connecting with people and the importance of empathy, he does some attempts to attract the attention<sup>19</sup> of strangers around him and confirms that “people act as a kind of mirror and respond to you in the way you treat them” (see also Ford’s *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers*, 2013: 125, 214). Eventually both sides feel better as a result of communicating one another. Thus, the emotions and psychological features of people can not be ignored during the treatments and doctors should not be indifferent to this very influential denominator. And as told by Dr. Adams in the movie many times “[t]he purpose [or the main goal] of a doctor or any human in general should not be to simply delay [to postpone] the death of the patient, but to [improve] the person’s quality of life, [the quality of every second as long as s/he breathes]” (“*Patch Adams*”; 1:43:04). Dr. Adams helps not only his patients, but also his friends. To exemplify, Carin is one of his friends, whom he tries to help to overcome her psychological problems.

Carin, with whom Patch falls in love at the Faculty of Medicine, has trust issues and one day she reveals the dark events buried in her childhood to Patch Adams and she confesses that men are always attracted to her and she is molested in her childhood. As a result of the molestation, she develops some defence mechanisms such as becoming a lesbian and avoiding men as well as trusting no one. With patience and love, Patch manages to gain her confidence. Afterwards, he persuades her that there are good people as well as bad people in the world. But unfortunately, her newly regained trust in people result in her death at the hands of a psychopast. She is killed by one of her patients during a home visit. This event makes Patch feeling very sad and guilt-ridden and in the next scene, we see him walking on the edge of a cliff and thinking about committing suicide again. He might be devastated with a sense of guilt and he might think that he should be punished. Moreover, he might have felt that he does not deserve to live any longer. Researchers bring the explanation given below for the mixed feelings and suicidal tendencies of the manic depressives in the following words, which might be applied to Patch Adams’ case in the scene mentioned above:

Often, as if to make sense of their [great] despair, depressive [people] accuse themselves of terrible sins or [they might] claim responsibility for family tragedies [and their friends’ tragedies], real or [even] imagined [ones]. Sometimes they [might] hear voices making these charges for them and thus become further convinced that they are losing their minds. If, in the manic phase, the subjective world

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<sup>19</sup>Interestingly, he names it as “Hello Experiment” (*Patch Adams*).



dominates the objective [world], the depressive stage reverses these positions, rendering self powerless, [desperate, valueless, and unfruitful], without even the [inclination] to question its interpretation of a world emptied of meaning. Depressive [people] see their work as [unimportant] and [worthless] and themselves as [non-achievers]... If there is [confirmation] to the contrary, they dismiss or misinterpret it [in order] to fit their despondent mood. Since depression interferes with memory and the brain's ability to [focus] and [to judge], [the work of the patient is generally negatively influenced and it seems to be] making matters [even] worse. Suicide seems [very appealing or even very] attractive [since the mind has already started to have been undergoing] a [sort] of death, [which might be defined as the] [...] death of the soul. (Wolpert, 1977: 86-88)

In this scene, Patch Adams talks with God and asks for a sign and the sign he is longing for comes in the shape of "a butterfly" (*Patch Adams*"; 1:32:42). It stops on his bag and then on his left side, just above his heart and he understands that Carin becomes the butterfly she has always wanted to be. Before "the butterfly scene" (*Patch Adams*";1:34:14), we see that Carin always wear accessories like earrings, necklaces in the shape of butterflies. In addition to these, there was also a big paper butterfly in her window at the *Gesundheit* Institute. Butterfly symbol might have been used in the movie to express Carin's "transformation" (Güner, 2018: 346) and also her "short life" (Güner, 2018: 347). She transforms from the isolated, cold girl into the caring and loving person; this is also implied in the name of Carin, which brings "caring" into our minds, and which is one of the prominent themes in *Patch Adams*. Seeing the butterfly, Patch Adams finds consolation and remembers Carin's words: "When I was a girl I would look out my bedroom window at the caterpillars; I envied them so much. No matter what they were before, no matter what happened to them, they could just hide away and turn into these beautiful creatures that could fly away completely untouched" (*Patch Adams*"; 1:17:10).

He realizes that eventually she has become what she has always wanted to be and she must be well and happy, wherever she is now. Having perceived what has happened to her (having seen beyond appearances as Arthur has suggested him to do so earlier), he gives up committing suicide and chooses to continuing his life, which also means that he manages to cope with his suicidal tendency<sup>20</sup>, which is enlivened by guilt and "a temporary neurohormonal imbalance" (Caramagno, 1988: 18). Thus, he manages to preserve his well being at the end.

The scene, when he is on the edge of cliff, mentioned above gives to the audience a privileged view into Patch Adams' mind and into the minds of millions of people, who try to cope with manic depression or bipolar disorder in their lives, all over the world. Fortunately, Patch Adams chooses life over death and not an ordinary life, but a happy and meaningful life.

In relation to well being and happiness, Dr. Adams in the movie and in his books suggests that the most radical act a person can commit is to be happy and consequently, he dedicates his life to make people happy. From time to time, his extraordinary manners and ways of

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<sup>20</sup> In real life, he wants to commit suicide after hearing his uncle's suicide and after his girl friend's break up with him when he is in college (for further information see, *Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter*,) but in the movie slight changes are made while describing his suicidal tendencies.

treatment put him into trouble and he faces the risk of not being able to practise his job as a General Practitioner. To be able to continue help people and serve as a healer, Patch filed a grievance with the state medical board and he participated in the hearing of that board.

It might be suggested that the scene, in which Patch explicitly expresses his situation within the health system and his feelings on health and healing, (*"Patch Adams"*; 1:39:43-1:49:02) is very remarkable in relation to the forgotten values of humanity. He declares that "[he wants] to be a doctor with all [his] heart" and doctors are not the *übermensch*, but they are the ones, who "help and serve others" (*"Patch Adams"*; 1:41:22). Adams criticizes the American medical system in his book by saying most of the doctors in his Faculty "were aloof, arrogant [patronizing] and devoid of any vision of a humane health care system. The emphasis was on the [sick person] as a passive [receiver] of wisdom, which demigods [that is doctors passed on] from a temple of technology. Patient advocacy and consumerism were unheard of" (*Gesundheit: Good Health...*) in the 1970s in USA. His honesty and sincerity impress everyone present at the board. Thus, the board approves his humanitarian approach in the field of medicine at the end and he gets the right to practise as a General Practitioner.

In the movie, the more Dr. Adams improves his curing and caring skills, the more he is referred as Patch instead of Hunter, his real name. And if we have a look at the literal meaning of "Patch" in the dictionary, it is given as "a piece of material used to cover or protect a wound, an injured part" ("patch") and therefore, it has symbolic meanings in the movie and he really deserves to be named Patch Adams; he earns his name within time as we also witness watching the movie and see that the spirit of curing or healing is embedded in his nickname as well.

### Conclusion

Thus, Dr. Patch Adams learns the dynamics of healing very well and shows us that "the most important factors in healing are not [advanced computerised technological miracle workers], but [the very] ordinary [aspects of daily life] such as love, compassion [or tenderness], [fellowship], and hope" (Adams, *House Calls*). Similarly, a recent study in UK has revealed that old people, who socialize more and who enjoy friendships tend to get ill less. Relying on this study, doctors begin prescribing going out for the elderly people and advises to them to socialize more. This situation further makes a positive impact on the healing process of the elderly as well as on the national budget spent on the health care facilities (for further information see Cohut's "What are the Health Benefits of Being Social?"). In other words, "[b]eing happy is the best cure of all diseases!" (*"Patch Adams"*) as uttered by Hunter Patch Adams himself.

Interestingly enough, Patch Adams finds happiness in voluntarily giving voice to his illness and in helping others as well. In doing so, he forgets his own pains and sufferings just like Chiron does in the mythological tale. Though, "denial of being ill" and "rejection of help" is a common problem (Anderson and *et al.*, 2013: 27) amongst the manic depressive patients, Patch Adams does just the opposite; he welcomes and embraces his illness as it is. He also has a strong concern about the other people in his community and he eventually founds the *Gesund-*

heit Institute in order to provide poor people with effective psychological and physical treatments without charging<sup>21</sup> them money. The more he sees happy people around him, the more happy and content he gets in life.

In conclusion, under the light of all the information and examples given from the movie so far, it can be suggested that Patch Adams might be seen as a modern day Chiron and continues to be an inspiration for many people all over the world to heal themselves and one another through compassion and love.

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<sup>21</sup> For him, "healing is not a business transaction", and love and "intimacy have the power of healing" and accordingly, "reestablishing love of self and others" is "the most potent therapy of all" (*Gesundheit: Good Health Is a Laughing Matter*).

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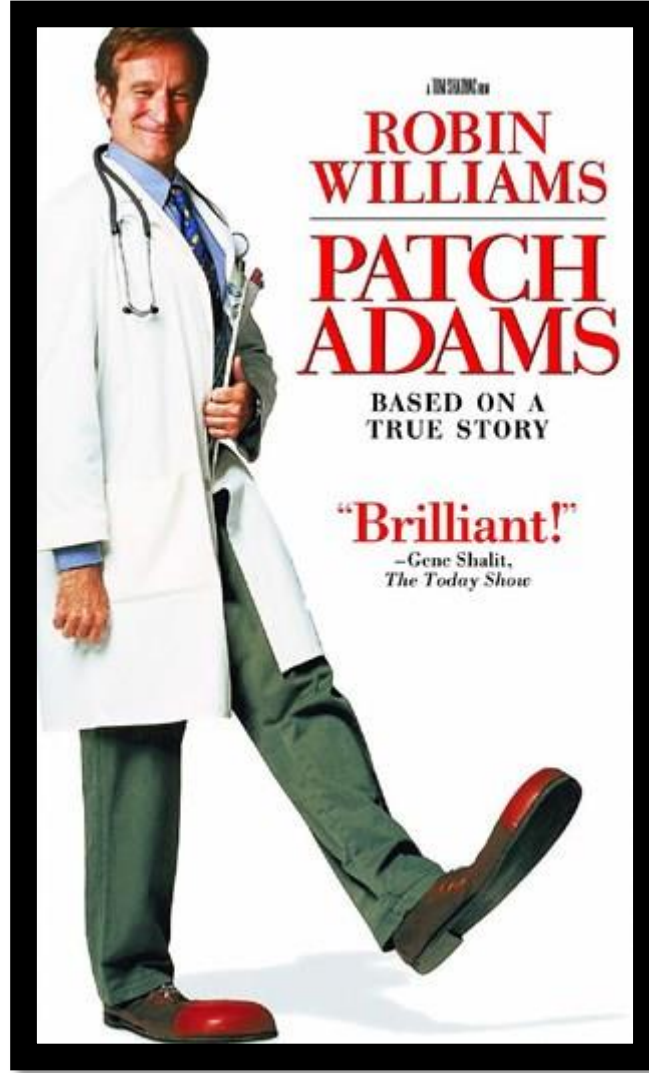
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*Patch Adams-Movie Poster*

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