

Recommended Movies

“**Shakespeare in Love**”. It seems we often look to the works of William Shakespeare as somehow being the most primary and recommendable patterns of theatre. I suppose this is why I found myself subconsciously looking for a mentor of sorts, a teacher, within this portrayal of the first ever performance of the play, “**Romeo and Juliet**”. Part of the challenge of this movie is that Shakespeare is a young man possessing all the usual struggles and challenges of artists everywhere. Yet like artists everywhere throughout time, sometimes, at just the right moment, everything comes together and the work that is created is far greater than the artist himself (or herself). This is what every true artist yearns for and could quite legitimately be described an an experience of the divine, a moment when the artist is also a sort of priest on behalf of humanity, inviting all of us to rise above our daily concerns for a moment and grasp a larger and more wonderful perspective than that which is most available within corporate offices and crowded streets.

My personal greatest challenge and inspiration within this movie is found within the repetitious acknowledgement that everything will have a good ending, which is always followed by the question, “how?” and the further answer, “I don’t know. It’s a mystery.”

I wonder sometimes whether I am too forgetful of the necessity and magic of divine mystery within my life, that elusive thing called faith which has never been adequately defined and perhaps can never be adequately defined, but which is not for that reason less essential to life.

If one were to plan the creation of a masterpiece such as “**Romeo and Juliet**”, I doubt very much that the stages and events of development would be so incongruous and disparate as the events of this movie, yet this too reminds us of Life’s resistance to being controlled, as it continues to unfold ever greater beauty and depth and meaning and potency. Somehow, the show must go on.

“**The Rescuers**”. I have seen this

movie many times and am still a long way from tiring of its music, words, progression, and emotional depth. Isolation and loneliness run neck to neck with compassion and righteous indignation from amusing and even hilarious beginnings to the pandemonious climax. My favorite quote occurs early within the movie, as a heartbroken orphan talks with an old cat, is encouraged to “have faith,” and responds by asking what faith is. Please pay very close attention to the cat’s answer. I would even encourage you to memorize it. In its simplicity, the cat’s answer is every bit as effective as anything written by any time-honored theologian. In the end, as with so many movies, it is the triumph of love that we celebrate--a triumph which can occur daily but will never occur at all if we are

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Sister Who’s Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant “information overload,” news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you.
---Sister Who

Pacing

Just when I am certain that there is no such thing as a higher order, a divine plan, or divine intervention of any kind, a peculiar synchronicity will often suddenly occur, providing new hope for a positive outcome to a situation which seemed otherwise hopeless. In contrast to this phenomenon, however, when I pray for such synchronicities to occur, they are usually conspicuously absent from my life’s experience. In the moments when I am blessed with the grace and maturity to step back and take a broader look at the unfolding of my own life, I often begin to see a pattern of pacing within the obstacles and discoveries that have determined when, at what speed, and in what direction I have “moved forward.”

Just last week, for example, a friend suggested I consider relocating to New Hampshire (something I am not considering seriously at this time, but it seemed wise to at least investigate). I discovered that my car (now with over 195,000 miles on its engine) would need about \$1500 of repairs in order to satisfy emissions standards there. In speaking with the finance company which allowed for a new transmission for my car about a year and a half ago, I was told that I would need to provide a paystub before any financing could be granted. Since I’ve been living off of residual graduate student loan funds for the last couple of months while working on a book manuscript, I telephoned several temporary employment agencies, inquiring about very short-term assignments which could produce the necessary paystub, to secure the financing, to fix the car, to make such a move even a possibility. A

combination of two agencies offered a total of four days’ work (though I proved to be far too efficient and finished the tasks in only three days instead). Upon entering one of the companies to which I was assigned, I noticed a job-posting which looked tailor-made for a friend of mine who’d recently been forced into early retirement by company budget cuts so I telephoned him immediately.

I don’t know whether he will be offered a position with that particular company or not, but it does seem interesting that in order for him to even hear of the available employment, I had to follow such a chain of events. Each step was both a problem to overcome as well as guidance toward the next link in the chain. I concede that following such progressions is nerve-wracking, but in retrospect I am also amazed at how perfectly such disparate events and elements relate to each other.

In any case, I continue to insist that “we all take turns being the one in need.” What makes this idea specifically difficult to integrate into daily life, are (among other things) the twin American myths that being in need is something bad which one should not confess to others and also that everyone should be able to magically “pull himself up by his own bootstraps.” I have yet to hear one single success story which is not dependent at some point or other (or multiple points) upon someone else’s benevolence. One may be willing to work, but if the employer is not willing to hire or the customer is not willing to buy, no income will result. A hundred years ago, perhaps, one could walk off into the wilderness, possessing skills of hunting and making full use of abundant animals such as deer and buffalo, and survive and

possibly even thrive. In our generation of private ownership of property, the requirement of hunting licenses and building permits, and the payment of taxes, such autonomous existence is generally not an option anymore.

My favorite metaphor for healthy community and civilization is that of an Amish barn-raising, in which everyone shows up and does what little he or she can. The result is that a durable and beneficial structure is created in record time. Interdependence is the fundamental understanding within such communities; the notion that we all provide for each others' needs so that others will assist us in providing for our own. It seems this understanding, a most basic principle of nearly every tribal society since the dawn of Time, has been mostly lost within our current industrial, economic, and technological age. The result is a humanity that is so extensively fractured, that each year presents us with an increasing list of books and movies questioning our most basic ability to survive.

Because we would not tolerate anything else, each of these presents a possible way to rise above our differences, collaborate in a way that is not typical of daily life in America, and find our way to a happy conclusion to the particular book or movie. Something deep within our souls insists that there **MUST BE** a happy ending, that the "good guys" **MUST** somehow win. My contention is that any one of these could in fact become our true story, if we were only willing to act with the maturity and intelligence and benevolence demonstrated by the heroes and heroines.

I hear many people speaking of a desire for world peace these days, even if many of them also express disbelief that they will live long enough to see it. I insist that if we want to see such a thing occur (or if we want future generations to see such a thing occur), we must begin to live in support of such an ideal. World Peace is not brought closer to reality by rude driving practices during "rush-hour" traffic. World Peace is not brought closer to reality by

ignoring the needs and suffering of others. World Peace is not brought closer to reality by failing to address poverty and homelessness within our cities and towns and nations. Most especially, World Peace is not brought closer to reality by being careless about matters of justice and civil rights, turning a deaf ear to those who work hard and are not paid enough or given the necessary opportunities to adequately provide for themselves without sacrificing their own integrity.

The dark side of pacing is that small steps, which seem so insignificant in and of themselves, may lead as easily in a wrong direction as a right one. It has never escaped my attention that in the early 1930's, Adolf Hitler was just another stupid politician that many people in Germany chose to ignore. By the time the trajectory of his rise to power became obvious, it was too late to stop it. In a similar way but in a more positive direction, a single Romanian nun who arrived in India and began to simply show love to those who had been shown only everything else, was not recognized by the world until decades later, when Mother Theresa was invited to address the United Nations.

Please, let us replant the Tree of Life and Divine Love by each and every one of our seemingly insignificant actions today, dependably returning each and every day that follows, to pour a little more water and a little more sunlight upon the fragile sprout. Someday it could be the tree that towers over every other shadow, especially those which now seem to totally fill our field of vision.

**"THE PRESENT MOMENT
DOES NOT CONTAIN
ALL THAT I AM,
BUT HOW EASILY
AND HOW QUICKLY
AND HOW OFTEN
I FORGET THAT."
---Sister Who**

When Struggle is Not Only Necessary But Also Essential

I recall hearing a brief little story many years ago of two frogs who somehow fell into a butterchurn filled with warm fresh milk. For the purposes of this story, the assumption is that the person who had put the milk there was called away from some reason or other and failed to return until the following morning. I would also like to add my own little paraphrase of the characters, to illustrate a perspective with which I've been confronted a little too often lately.

So these two frogs fell into the butterchurn filled with warm fresh milk--let's call them Freddy and Franklin, for the sake of convenience. Franklin was a well-educated frog with a predominantly New Age belief system, heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism (though it might have been any of a dozen other belief systems also; no offense intended to anyone). According to Franklin, life is not about struggling but rather about being at peace with whatever one's circumstances happen to be and trusting that life will unfold as it should. His choice therefore was to close his eyes, go into a deep meditation while he waited for his intuition to suggest a remedy to his current predicament, and chant "om" repetitively. Certainly Franklin was welcome to make whatever choice he wished, but the end result was that he sank to the bottom of the churn and drowned. I suppose he went on to a happier place.

Freddy was also an intelligent well-educated frog but had never really settled on which belief system worked best for him. All he knew at the moment was that he was up to his eyeballs in milk and somehow needed to keep his nostrils high enough to breathe, even if the rest of him was totally submerged in this unhelpful (or so he thought) white substance. He paddled furiously, never ceasing to look for a toe-hold someplace but of course never finding one. Freddy's arms and legs ached. He became so very tired, but somehow he had to keep moving. He remembered reading someplace, "as long as there's life, there's hope" and chanted that over and over in his mind as the hours crept by. If the only constant in the universe is change, then he would just have to hold on until his environment changed,

providing new resources he didn't currently have available to him. There was no guarantee that he wouldn't wind up at the bottom of the churn with Franklin, but there was no reason to abandon himself to that outcome just yet.

The conclusion of the story is that the person mentioned briefly at the beginning of this story finally returned the next morning and discovered a churn full of butter with one very exhausted frog on top and one dead frog at the bottom.

As a poster I saw on an office wall said, "the race is not necessarily to the swift, but rather to the one who keeps on running."

Recommended Reading

One tired quiet evening, I pulled from my bookshelf a very old volume I discovered in a second-hand bookstore over eleven years ago, Emerson's Essays, to read Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance." Written a hundred and fifty years ago, I found his perspective as fresh and as timely as ever, addressing the current generation's struggles in its quest for self-fulfillment, legitimately described as blind and lacking in basic understanding of life itself. Yet if I reread the words of this essay a hundred times, I'm not sure I'll understand how to fully integrate its perspective with my own. This is exactly why I reread it, from time to time.

I turned the yellowed pages to the statement, "I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency"--two afflictions of society in every age, discouraging us from valuing original thought and new growth.

Yet I saw limitations within his perspective, even as I'm sure future generations will most likely see limitations within my own. Sigh. Somewhere in the myriad of personal choices will be the unfolding of each human life and the ultimate definition of liberty and personal freedom, the stage upon which each human soul has the opportunity to grow.