The Flying Fickle Finger of Fate



The hand of Fate has bony fingers. Cold, too. When it pokes, The Flying Fickle Finger of Fate will not be ignored. Attention must be paid. Nobody puts Fate in the corner, try though we may.

Fate's touch is a harbinger, a moment of reckoning. It could represent an awakening to an essential truth about ourselves. The presence of true love. A recognition of one's duty and obligation to someone/thing else. A growing awareness of our minuscule place in the larger order of things. A glimpse of life's abundant potential or a reminder of fragile mortality. Messages derived from the random associations generated by the gnarly digit's touch drive inspiration and striving. Its touch can serve as a welcome reminder of our vitality, no matter the shiver down the spine.

But comes that moment when the bony digit lays its frosty touch on your shoulder yet again, and all you can say is, "Fk, dude, could you just give it a rest?"

Alas, no, as the FFFoF has no intention, no agency, no recognition of any of us as an anything. It is random and impersonal, and any meaning we may derive is our own doing. There is no task from which it could rest. The Finger, c'est moi, c'est tu, c'est notre. We can no more ignore it than we can ignore ourselves.

Still, I am compelled to exclaim: "Fk, dude, give it a rest

already.”

My Favorite World #15



Spring has arrived. Nuff said. My Favorite World.

Such a Lovely Word



Everyone has a set of favorite words. Even if you’ve never thought about it, you have a go-to collection that would represent pretty nicely in a wordcloud illustration. Even with kids and teens (allowing for some obvious weighting towards utterances such as the *quotative like* and *whatevs*<fn>Like totaly, like, whatevs.</fn>), there are just certain words that work, that ring, that roll off the tongue and end up becoming as much a part/reflection of your public identity as your choice of clothing, car, music, &c.

And so we observe our friends with their own style: some who regularly use *quite* as a modifier; others who would die rather than say *utilize* rather than *use* (or vice versa); and even some with a let-us-say *narrow* linguistic palate v. those who seem to have eaten a dictionary and *logorrheacally* spew synonyms and obscure references<fn>Geez, don't you hate that?!</fn>.

Which brings us somewhat discursively to one of my long-time faves: *discursive*. I've always taken this to describe a style of speech or writing that trips along more or less aimlessly from point to point, an amble, rather than a march, toward some destination at which we shall inevitably arrive, albeit with some mild surprise/disappointment at the banality of it all.<fn>Kind of like that sentence.</fn> A great example is the classic *shaggy dog story*, of which, say, *The Big Lebowski* is the classic exemplar.<fn>From Wikipedia: "In its original sense, a shaggy dog story is an extremely long-winded anecdote characterized by extensive narration of typically irrelevant incidents and terminated by an anticlimax or a pointless punchline." Loyal readers of the i2b blog likely experienced a *frisson* of recognition just now.</fn>

But I began to doubt my understanding of *discursive, so* I opened the dictionary with no little worry that I had been mis-using this word all these years. And lo and behold, what I found was this:

> *1. passing aimlessly from one subject to another; digressive, rambling*

So far, so good. But then…

> *2. proceeding by reasoning or argument rather than intuition.*

Well then. What we have here is a word that means both itself and its opposite, and vice versa. My excessive fondness for

the word has been validated; it's even better than I thought.

In honesty…most of the time my thoughts rattle around like a BB in a bucket, like a carrot in a bathtub, like a… Well, there I go again. Your Narrator often finds himself bouncing from pillar to post, often with a vague destination in mind, sometimes not, but always confident that the destination will be worth the journey.<fn>How we get there is where we're going?</fn> So off I lurch, dictionary recently eaten.

And admittedly, I happen to love writers who begin in one place, proceed to the next logical checkpoint, and then veer off into pasta-knows-what twisty turns and digressions that lead one to think that either the narrator or the reader/listener has lost touch with reality, only to arrive at a conclusion that elicits a "holy shit, where did that come from?" reaction alongside a recognition that there was really no other possible destination, all things considered, though we never could have guessed at the outset.<fn>Let's consider this a codicil and corrolary to one of the ruling precepts of the blog, that being: resolved endings suck.</fn> Consider the explorations of Waterloo and the Paris sewers in *Les Miserables.*<fn>The novel, not the musical. I can't even bring myself to watch it.</fn> Consider James Burke's fantastic excursions in the TV series *Connections*; the flights of fancy in Proust and Wallace and Barthelme for example, and, again, *Lebowski*. All of the things that appear to be random and discursive turn out to be…well, given definition #2, they actually end up being *discursive* in both senses of the word. Random? Maybe not quite so much as it first appeared.

Are your Narrator's discursions actually random, or do they instead conform to some deeper pattern of rational argument that could not be clearly revealed through a more formal A+B=*x* sort of explication? Consider who you/we are asking? What kind of rigorously logical answer can you possibly expect from someone who just danced you through 650 words to get to the question in the first place?

And furthermore: What in perfectly fresh hell is a picture of Satan's Dick doing at the top of this ramble?

Think about it people. This is a post about discursion, which is exemplified by the shaggy dog story, which is in turn exemplified by *The Big Lebowski*, which is itself all about bowling. And discursion. And some other stuff, too, but do we have to spell it out?

Wheels within wheels, my friends. Wheels within wheels.

My Favorite World #14



The regular visitor to My Favorite World has probably noticed that I love movies. Here we go again.

A couple of weeks ago, the family was having a celebratory dinner and we spontaneously decided to go see a movie. This never happens. We all have so many schedule issues, but this night, we tossed it all aside.

We dashed to the theater with son using his hand-held intertubes google machine to find something worth seeing. The listings were grim. Would I endure the never-going-to-go-away Matthew McConaughey trying to sell me a Lincoln from the depths of space? How about another animated romp with soulful animals sporting overlarge eyes? Perhaps a celebration of someone who hides in trees and shoots people in the back?

Things were not looking good.

Then he mentioned one that I had heard of, vaguely, and since it was the only one that fit our timing, we gave it a spin. And wow.

Two Days, One Night turned out to be one of those little films that really stick with you. Made by the Dardenne brothers<fn>Think a Belgian-flavored Coen Brothers partnership</fn>, in French with subtitles, this is the story of Sandra (Marion Cotillard). Recovering from illness and all set to return to her job, Sandra gets word that her co-workers have voted her out so they could each receive a thousand-Euro bonus. Dogs eat dogs.

But she convinces the boss to hold another election to give her the weekend to convince her co-workers to change their vote. That's the setup, and the rest of the movie shows Sandra going from one co-worker to the next, making her case. Occasionally groveling, always a bundle of nerves barely contained by her Xanax, the reactions she elicits run the gamut. From people who felt such shame at their greed to people who wanted her to *understand* just how important that money is for her family and wouldn't she just see it their way, to actual outbursts of violence that she would dare 'stir the shit'.

In lesser hands, this setup could devolve into simplistic characters playing out obvious cliches. In Hollywood, there would have to be gun play or a big speech about shared humanity and triumph of the spirit or some such bushwah. But here, every character has a human dimension.<fn>Even the dickhead supervisor and boss who thought it was a swell idea to pit these people against one another in the first place. Fucking motherfuckers.</fn> You see that everyone is struggling; that even good people who know right from wrong can succumb to the pressures of not having enough money to make ends meet; that the conflict within the working class –

conflict often deliberately instigated by the Galtian superheroes – creates degrees of rightness/wrongness that makes moral judgement nearly impossible, because you know how much it costs to send your kids to school/take care of medical expenses/&c.<fn>Again, with the exception of the dickhead bosses. Fk those guys. I recognized them as though I had known them personally.</fn>

And in Hollywood, you can bet there would be at least *some* makeup. Cotillard, one of Europe's most financially and artistically successful actors, is a beauty, a fashion model, and spokesperson for a variety of glamour products. But here, she is washed out, an aging woman of former beauty who has endured too much to trouble with her appearance.



Too tired to care

A mother of two, married to an underemployed man who also happens to be filled with love and devotion, Sandra is at the end of her rope. She looks tired and beaten. The question at the core – will she persuade enough people to give up their bonus to save her job – seems at once impossible to achieve while we believe "of course she can, it's the movies!".

And Cotillard is just stunningly perfect in the role. (She was nominated for the Best Actress Oscar for the role.) Of course we're rooting for her, and of course we see there is no way in hell she can possibly succeed. We know that she is fragile, and in many ways barely even alive to her world anymore. And yet…

So, no spoilers. This movie held us in the palm of its hand for 95 minutes. Along the way, we meet some truly good people, some people who wish they were good but aren’t quite, and a couple of people you wish would slip and fall down some steep stairs. It’s kind of like life that way.

Two Days, One Night. Just the kind of unexpected surprise that makes this My Favorite World. Go. Watch. Thank me later.