

Material. Timing. Delivery. And the beauty of random disregard.



Life is busy and such, mostly in ways good. But one must never disregard the wisdom of Miss ~~Latella~~ Rosannadana.

(Ed Note: Eagle-eyed reader Popopopovich correctly points out that it was in fact Rosanna Rosanadanna who made famous the "It's always something" catchphrase. The management apologizes for any inconvenience and begs forbearance of the litigious demons of the Gilda Radner Estate.<fn>Worse than Disney, I hear.</fn> The Writer has been put on a strict diet of gruel made from the ground up bones of our recently departed fact-checker. We regret the error.)

It's always something.

In the past two weeks...two biopsies to try and figure out why my aching Studebaker of a body continues to drop parts despite the mechanics' best efforts. The first: mostly negative (yay!) but inconclusive as to another one of those melodramatic 'C' word diagnoses. Results of the latest test due Friday. I expect good news, as most of my symptoms have disappeared untreated. Go figger.<fn>And I still cannot grip a guitar, and fk that shit, Rupert.</fn>

In the meantime, Awesome Daughter is expecting news about whether her first choice college welcomes her with open arms. Decision day is Friday. Well.

Yesterday, as she was asking for a favor, she demurred at pushing too hard, because (her words) “you’re dealing with that whole cancer thing.” I laughed so hard I thought I’d plotz. And of course, she won her request. Comedy is all about material, timing, and delivery. A-plus on all fronts.

This evening, we were all laughing about her remark.<fn>Graveyard whistling and disregard for solemnity being big around these parts.</fn> Son declared her horrible. I declared him my favorite, as one is always well-advised to encourage sycophancy from the underlings.

Then it struck me: a thought experiment!<fn>I’ve been reading the latest Daniel Dennett. My puzzlers are not nearly as profound, but I aver to the inspiration.</fn>

A family awaits two pieces of news of critical importance. Only one response can be positive. Do you, daughter, wish me to be cancer-free, or do you wish to be accepted to your dream school?

Zero hesitation from my (truly) loving and wonderful child:

College acceptance. Cancer is treatable.

A moment of WTF was that pause, and then we all fell down laughing.

Material was a tad off center, but the timing and delivery was pure Coltrane. Brava.

Also, too, in the realm of casual disregard...

The bloggy vineyard of i2b attracts a steady parade of eyeballs, but few of the humans bother to leave comments. This makes me very sad.<fn>Try to hear that phrase in the icy teutonic accent of Heidi Klum dismissing a Project Runway contestant for bad taste.</fn>

So, dear reader, your random disregard leads me to bask in the

warming glow of nothing but spambot generated comments intended to entice me to purchase sports jerseys, weight loss supplements, and penis enhancers.<fn>Aside from the jerseys, none of that stuff is for real. Believe me.</fn> But I've come to love some of these simplistic machine friends, as their comments serve to encourage continued blogularity.<fn>And to stimulate my tumescence for under the medically recommended four-hour maximum.</fn> To wit:

What i don't understood is in reality how you are not actually a lot more neatly-appreciated than you may be right now. You are so intelligent. You know therefore significantly in terms of this subject, made me in my view consider it from a lot of various angles. Its like men and women are not fascinated except it is something to accomplish with Girl gaga! Your individual stuffs excellent. At all times care for it up!

Damn right, registered user Tanya3756dc from Uzbekistan. And thanks for the shout out.

There are two kinds of these auto-messages. One is dry, written in impeccably poor language, and offering nothing but commercial enticement. But such feeble witterings are not sufficient for my dear Tanya3765dc. These comments find art in the strangest places.

You know therefore significantly in terms of this subject, made me in my view consider it from a lot of various angles. Its like men and women are not fascinated except it is something to accomplish with Girl gaga!

A shrewd judge of literary merit is my Tanya3765. Indeed, does not Girl Gaga make the world go 'round? Mais bien sur! Even Cole Porter knew that!

Your individual stuffs excellent. At all times care for it

up!

You bet your sweet Uzbekian bippy, Tanya. My individual stuffs excellent, as legions far and wide will attest.

But more critically, my beloved Tanya3765, despite her automated disposition and limited linguistic facility, has arrived at the existential core of Immune to Boredom:

At all times care for it up.

Amen, Sister Tanya3765. Amen.

And one last thing...

I watched *Casablanca* for around the 75th time last night. I was really just going to watch for a minute, but one thing led to Sam and Ilsa and *Les Marseilles* and "Shocked, shocked I say!" and I was done for. And while I always choke up at the big moments and miss subtleties because goddammit the problems of two people don't amount to a hill of beans in this world and we'll always have Paris, and therefore I'm a helpless heap incapable of critical scrutiny...what I realized in watching this time was: there is not one wasted word, frame, musical note in this movie. Every cut, every aside, every casual glance at the side of the scene contributes to a deeper story.

Try to think of more than a few works of art that achieve this superb economy.

You think the great works of Dickens or Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy might not have benefited from a little judicious pruning? How about *Lawrence of Arabia*, or even Billy the Bard's plays? Oh, how they do go on!

Even my favorite book of ever, the infinite *Infinite Jest*...even that epic could probably have lost a word or 5000 and suffered nothing from the loss.<fn>Though I would not be the one to cut

even a punctuation mark from that one.</fn>

I bring this point to bear for two reasons.

One, *Casablanca* may just be a perfect piece of art. Consider it. The story is timeless. The material is poetry. The delivery and timing, utterly majestic.

Two: however perfect the movie may be as an example of aesthetic precision and efficiency, this blog post stakes out the opposite pole as an exemplar of free-floating random and discursive disregard.

Mea culpa. This shit don't write itself.

Here's looking at you, kid.



Sartre Got Nuttin on Me



A Monday has come and nearly gone, and the Writer remains chained in the dankness of his scribbler's warren, seized by the bitter darkness that attends the cold winds of hopelessness and despair.<fn>These are metaphors, you know.</fn> And yet, as the daylight wanes and the hoarfrost descends, there is no post. No hope. Only a bleak, suffocating sense of emptiness.

What harsh deity delivers this wrath upon my sensitive – yea, though ceaselessly questing – spirit? What miasma of gloom places its icy, bony fingers on my neck, reminding me of the impossibility of relief, the sheer and forbidding rock walls that bind my very soul?

Yes. It is The Bachelor/ette. On ABC.

My Women<fn>Implying no sense of ownership, naturally, but merely referencing our familial proximity.</fn> watch The Bachelor/ette. It is a time for chocolate, popcorn, and (well deserved) hyper-critical fashion commentary. The girls, they bond and giggle, they take a well-deserved break from the rigors of their jam-packed lives. They have earned their pleasure.

Alas, the presence of this program within 100 feet of my person is the televideo equivalent of a thin-needle aspiration removing my scant remaining testosterone directly from my bits and pieces. I quail, I quiver, I quest for another tremor word that begins with 'Q'. To no avail. There is no exit, no hope.

Because I am Immune to Boredom(TM), I do not fall asleep during the broadcast. Quite the contrary. Against all reason, I am consumed by the fabricated dramatics, the over-emphasized faux sexuality and faux bosoms. I confer moral judgments and establish favorites among those competing for their shot at true love, but only for those worthy emblems of strong womanliness deserving of my affections. The rest are targets of my withering scorn. Harlots!

Of course, my emotional investments are well-shrouded by snark, by sarcasm, by base commentary on the lack of basic intelligence exhibited by, well, everyone on the show. I am, I realize with a frisson of self-satisfaction, a laugh riot, the personification of comedy gold, mirth made flesh. Certainly my witticisms and piercing bon mots earn me the accolades of My Women<fn>Again, proximate, not property.</fn>, spurring them to cast roses at my feet and gently slip bon bons between my wise-acreing lips?

Alas, no. No prophet is extolled in his own land, and instead I face umbrage and exile. And now I will never know which animatronic inflatable will claim the heart of our hunky-yet-sensitive man beast who only wants to find true lasting love just like every good man before him has done – by sleeping in succession with 16 conventionally beautiful women with genuinely stunted mental capacity.

America. Freedom. And I, lonely man, am cast off the island.<fn>Different show, I know, but the meta-metaphor that connects one sliver of the...oh fuck it, you get the point.</fn>

As I Lay Sighing



For most of the past 8 years or so, I've embraced my introverted hermit instincts. I've always tended that direction, but once we decamped our lifelong hometown of Atlanta – leaving behind a crazy great network of family, friends, resources, institutions, &c. – I overindulged my love for solitude until it morphed into full blown seclusion.

The virtues of solitude are plentiful. Man, what a great period for guitar practice and learning to write, reading all the books I can eat, engaging with myself in the best Walden Pondish tradition. Know thyself, mofo, and all that entails. But I began to feel that I was becoming invisible. Solitude is all well and good, but seclusion is a terrible platform for actual *doing*. It also gets kind of lonely in the cave.

My Apocalypse Summer was the zenith<fn>Or nadir.</fn> of my retreat into seclusion. (Aside from the immediate family, about the only people I saw and spoke to for several months were medical professionals.) As I lay sighing, a terrible thought occurred to me: I had all but written myself out of the story over the space of several years. I began to wonder whether anyone would show up at my funeral or if my family would toss handfuls of dirt on my box and wonder why I had no friends to see me off. This thought did not arise out of any kind of self-pity.<fn>By some weird trick, the Episode had exactly the opposite effect. Go figure.</fn> It was just frightfully obvious; I have lived in my new hometown for over 6 years, and I could count the number of people I've had meaningful conversations with up to that time on slightly less

than all my toes. I envisioned myself slipping under the water and leaving barely a ripple. That, I thought, was a sad statement about a life (or at least the most recent part of it) ill spent.

None of this has to do with any burning urge to leave some kind of enormous legacy, some sort of Birdman-esque megalomania. I may still paint my masterpiece, but I don't think everything's gonna be different on that far away someday. Anyway, I have all the legacy any one person could want in my two kids.<fn>I refrain from braggadocio right now, but ask me about them sometime when you are ready to hear me rave at length.</fn>

Still, one considers the prospect of his funeral unattended with some sobriety. My best eulogy would be a group of people agreeing sincerely that, hey, all in all, this guy was good to the people around him and made a positive difference in his time on the planet. I'm not worried about historical legacies, but I would really prefer that when I slip under for the last time, the ripples are noticed by *someone*. Hermits are not notable ripple makers.

As I recovered and contemplated this dilemma<fn>In my solitude, naturally.</fn>, I began to marvel at how many people reached out to share their own Apocalypse stories with me – people who just wanted to tell their own version of here's-this-fucked-up-thing-that-happened, usually with a little trepidation, but brimming with a hopefulness that somebody else will *get it*, will know what it feels like to have the world turn upside down on you. And to be honest, many of these stories made me think, damn, I'm not sure I could have endured that ride, knowing that of course, the ride is the same for each of us in spite of the almost inconceivable variety of Apocalypses we each endure: that the specificity is only surface, that the real connection arises from our shared fragility and from the immense randomness of it all, with every bit of the absolution and terror and opportunity that

the fickleness of nature confers.

Once I regained my legs and my wits, I decided to toss the script and rewrite my final act. I've had some excellent assistance in this, from family and good friends who refused to let me completely disappear into the hermit cave, and it appears that, now and at last(!), the gears are starting to catch. I've enjoyed several conversations with longtime, very close pals about the Apocalypse and the accompanying cloud of whateverthehell. Great stuff, down to the bone stuff, the kind of connections and honesty that makes life hard and beautiful and challenging and utterly worth the price of admission and ongoing participation. The right kind of encouragement-slash-asskicking I needed, it is impossible to overstate the gold-and-jewels level of wealth these people gifted me.

I've also managed to re-connect with a number of once-close pals that I had allowed to drift away, or that I had drifted away from/closed off/shut out/convincing myself that the moment had passed. I'm also meeting and connecting with some really dynamic and creative and interesting people, new friends who are getting my motor running in a scary and exciting and powerful sort of overdrive. Possibility in abundance!

But even more than all this luxe bounty, two more or less random exchanges landed in the middle of my pond of ponderous pondering with a hearty splash. And the ripples keep on rippling. Amazingly enough, the ripples started with me.

First: I was having a Facebook exchange about music with someone I knew during my college radio days. I was station manager then, and she was a young and eager station volunteer. We were never close friends or anything, but now with FB we're getting to know each other a bit, and we were talking about music and such, when out of the blue comes this:

You were my mentor though. Did I ever say how grateful I am to you? I am.

Well knock me down with a feather. The idea that I had ever been a mentor to anyone is sort of bewildering, especially when it is someone that I probably met with a dozen times or so over 30 years ago. She went on to describe several specific events that made a difference and stuck with her. For 30-plus frigging years.

A few weeks after that, I was on Facebook again chatting with a woman I knew years ago from the Atlanta band scene. She was an active friend, someone I ran into and hung out with fairly often. But I'd never considered myself a significant factor in her world at all. And again, out of the blue:

oh you got me started...that's what i mean. I owe my entire career to you. early to mid 90s you helped me blag my way through a sad, soulless job into a technical writing job that i figured out by the seat of my pants and then i ended up managing teams of writers, graphic designers, and online help developers and have been an expert project manager (not so overnight) ever since.

Holy shit. I mean seriously. Ho. Lee. Shit. I had no idea.

These sudden and random splashes left me wondering how many other times I had done something with/for/to people that had left such generous, warm remembrances of me. Made me feel all George Bailey and such, wonderful life-wise. Ain't I swell?

And then the flip side hit me. If I've stumbled through life unaware of the positive impacts I've had on others, how many equivalent dark side episodes have there been? I aver that I can be a prickly prick, and that I am not always<fn>OK, rarely.</fn> an exemplar of patience and kindness. How many times have I pissed on somebody's shoes through carelessness, or even worse, through intentional disregard? How many people remember me as well as these two fine people, but for all the wrong reasons?

It is to shudder.

A Facebook pal posted this earlier today, a quote from Chicago choreographer Nana Shineflug:

Since I am growing older, I am concerned with death and my desire to pass through this final act of my life with as much consciousness and understanding as possible.

I'm not too concerned about death. There were several times during the Apocalypse when I sensed that I could choose to just let go and go, I had no illusions that my surviving was a matter of choice. I was damned lucky. and there were moments when that seemed a pretty reasonable path. I've been close enough to death that it does not worry me much. Though I'm in no hurry, believe you me.

But that second part of the quote, the bit about "pass through this final act of my life with as much consciousness and understanding" as I can muster: that's the tickler.

Several people have asked whether the Apocalypse left me with any sense of majestic religious enlightenment or epiphinal awakening, and the answer is: not so much. No bright light or hallway lined with dead ancestors. No scent of brimstone or flames licking at my sinful heels. It's actually much simpler than that. I saw that my final act could last 40 years or 40 days or 40 minutes. This is true of everyone, sure, but it's probably easier to not examine that too closely. How it plays out depends on randomness and chance, sure; but there are at least a few ways that I can influence the remaining scenes.

I'm left with this: every encounter I have with another human being. And maybe this extends to all living things, but sweet suffering Mary, I'm overwhelmed enough as it is. Mosquitos and ticks can still go to the devil. carries the potential to leave a mark. How I behave towards the people

I meet every day can have implications beyond my limited imaginings. I may save someone from a dead-end job or share something that changes their lives. Or I might step on tender feelings, derail an earnest ideal, crush a dream in its infancy. I might speak and act with kindness towards someone who feels invisible, like a cashier at the take-out joint or the person cleaning the office you work in. Or I might be careless and act like an ass.

The choice is mine. I can think of no more awe-inspiring responsibility than that. I'm not much for divinity and concepts of sacred supreme beings and such, but I am beginning to feel that this goal is something that makes the idea of sacrament a practical reality. If we can maintain the awareness that our surface specificity obscures the shared randomness/loneliness/yearning, if we can find it in ourselves to hold that do unto others suggestion in a way that helps us remember each other through our real connection – ah, but that's hard stuff, and so and so did this and that and she's a bitch and he's an asshole and and and. I know too well my deep flaws to pretend that I can practice this 24/7, but it does set an aspirational standard for the final act, however long it may last.

It might just add up to something.

I realize that this all lands pretty squarely in the realm of the thuddingly obvious. But I'm not only stubborn; I'm slow, too. So allow me to play catch-up for a while.

To the people I've wronged, as if any would be here interested in my feeble bloggy witterings in the first place, my deeply felt apologies to each of you. If any of you feel the need to get in touch and let me know what a right bastard I am, have at it. Really. Unburden if that's what you need. I can take it, and I certainly have earned it.

To the people who have benefited from knowing me...keep it under your hat. Seriously. Otherwise, I might get a big head and think I can ease up on making the most of whatever time I have left.

But it would be pretty great if you turned up for the funeral so J and the kids don't have to stand alone.

Immune to Failure? Not so much...

Another week, faithful readers. Once again I enter the arena to wrestle an idea to ground, and once again I find myself with a foot on my chest. Mea culpa. Maxima maxima.