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.

Such An Ugly Word



Special Message From the Mgmt.

The Mgmt wishes to inform you that The Writer is “away on assignment” this week, and will therefore be unable to serve you, loyal blog visitor, this week.

Enquiring minds (even inquiring ones) express wonderment: away on assignment? What can that mean? It’s simple: the Mgmt, as per the terms of its contract with The Writer, has the right to hire The Writer’s services out to interested bidders with a willingness to pay. In our benevolence, we are always willing to share.

This week, The Writer is asked to unlimber his mighty pen to make the world a better place for actuaries specializing in claims predictions for the pest control industry. The pest control industry pays handsomely, well more than this blog could ever earn for its long-suffering investors and Mgmt team.

This research-heavy project requires The Writer to inhale,

absorb, and otherwise ingest the bio-agents and neurotoxins prevalent in modern pest control practices, the better to understand the motor- and neurological-malfunctions that can occur under certain circumstances<fn>Conditions so statistically rare as to be barely worth the mention, and in no way does this constitute any admission or assumption of responsibility or culpability, moral or otherwise, &c.</fn>. The Mgmt and the Pest Control Industry's representative decided that this was necessary to enhance the veritas and gravitas of the assigned writings; the hazardous nature of the work also means that the Mgmt can upcharge for this engagement, further enhancing the investor/Mgmt team revenue stream. It is, as the wags like to say, a classic *win-win* scenario.

Alas and as always, though, The Writer is turning a simple sub-letting of human capital into some sort of issue of quote-fairness-unquote. Further complicating the situation, accusations of disregard for the mental and physical well-being of The Writer, along with charges of *street-level pimpery*<fn>Such an ugly word, along with *indentured servitude* and *slave-wage*. The Writer's sharp tongue will, in the end, bring him grief, just as his mother warned lo so many years ago.</fn> have brought progress to a near-standstill. The Writer, despite the clear contractual agreement under which he toils – and all the while luxuriating in his Mgmt-provided abode and sustaining himself on Mgmt-provided victuals and comforts – nevertheless considers himself worthy of surplus-remuneration for this assignment. In case the loyal reader has not surmised by now, it always seems to be about The Writer. The Mgmt, however, regards such selfishness as unseemly and will not tolerate such a breach of the socio-economic stratification that benefits us all.

The Mgmt views this uprising as born of naked greed coupled with an unhealthy contempt for established property rights and contract and labor law. As such, we have implemented a lockout

and begun a talent search for a new ~~scab~~ replacement writer eager to find her Big Break. No pay, people, but really…just think of the exposure!