

He Is Afraid
by Joan O'Dwyer © 2021

The time: Late spring, 1982

The place: The Loma Theater in San Diego

Characters: Two nine-year-old girls and a voice-over professor (although one of the other two can perform professor part with a change in voice/tone)

Who, what, why: Two nine-year-old girls talk in a long movie line.

He is afraid. He is alone. He is three million light years from home.

- A "It's so hot."
B "S'not hot. Snot."
A "Snot, snot snot!"

They titter immoderately.

- A "This is going to be some scary movie."
B "Some gnarly movie."
A "Some scary e. t. extratreesal."
B "What's that?"
A "Extra trees Al!"
B "No way."
A "Yah, a guy named Al. He comes from a planet far away—"
B "With lotsa extra trees—"

They giggle.

- A "And he comes to earth—"
B "With lotsa trees—"
A "To stick us with them."
B "Yah."
A "So he can take over the world with his trees. Stick. Stick. Stick us with em."
B "Until...until..."
A "Until we're all dead!"

B "Yah? ... Where's your mommy?"
A "Parking the car."
B "You sure?"
A "Sure."
B "The extra tree person didn't get her?"
A "No. Here she comes, see?"
B "Look. I think I don't want to see this movie."
A "It's OK. It's FOR children."
B "Yah?"
A "Lookit all these kids standing in line. Would their mommies bring them if it was not OK?"
B "Um...I guess not."
A "Sure. It's going to be gnarly."
B "Yah, gnarly. Hold my hand."
A "We'll hold hands."
B "All through the movie. All the time."
A "ALL the time. Unless we have to go to the...you know..."
B "Ladies. Sure."

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**Excerpt from Professor Tumbley's lecture on the literary significance
of
*E. T. the Extra-Terrestrial***

As an undergraduate I had a writing teacher who said there are only two plots. You are astounded, no doubt. You've heard other theories: that there have been only twelve, ten, maybe five plots since recorded time. But no, she said two: a stranger comes to town or someone leaves home to embark on a journey. Think about it, just for movies. Star Wars, Die Hard, Babel, Borat, Harry Potter, Evan Almighty, Pride and Prejudice. This theory isn't perfect, but it is true a surprising percentage of the time. And that's because strangers are fascinating, and so is traveling to find one's self.

A corollary to that is the mythic quality of E. T. – a hero's journey. It follows pretty neatly, albeit not perfectly, the mythic literary structure postulated by Joseph Campbell in "The Hero With a Thousand Faces." E. T. travels to a strange land and is befriended by Eliot, his siblings and friends, who, although young and inexperienced, fight for E. T. and get him

homeward bound, while battling myriad evil grown-up forces, including – horrors! – the government and military.

Screenplay writing classes stress that in modern American movies all plot elements and all major characters must be introduced in the first ten minutes. E. T. isn't seen in the first ten minutes, except in shadow, but he's heard, sighing and stepping on twigs on his way to a safe haven after his spacemates have reluctantly abandoned him on earth. You also hear and see menacing shadow people looking for him: the element of danger, the antagonists. Shortly thereafter you meet Eliot and his family: the spunky single mother, the rebellious teenaged brother (always a fine plot element) and the naïve younger sister. You sense that, somehow, these people will meet E. T. and help him either stay on earth and fit in or to go home. You don't know how. All this happens in the first ten minutes. Use your watch next time you rent it – or any other modern American movie.

It's also a coming of age story for the boy Eliot, and to a lesser extent, for E. T.

It's a story of acceptance of people and things different from one's self and one's beliefs.

It's a story about friendship.

It has been interpreted to be a Jesus or savior story.

It's about the triumph of good over evil, of belief over the impossible, of working together to solve the most difficult of problems.

We may feel manipulated afterwards. We might want to see it again to determine why – oh, why! – do we cry? Why do we surge with triumph at the end? Then why do we want to see it once again to experience that sadness and redemption anew?

So what if it's manipulative. It's a story. It's not real, even though it stirs up real emotions. That's what stories do.

It's a love story. We love it.

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A That was some scary movie!
B Some gnarly movie! Why was your mom crying?
A You were, too!
B Wasn't! I had to go to the ladies!
A Because you were crying.
B ...Yeah. You, too?
A Yeah. I like it.
B A lot. I like it a lot.
A I like it better. Want to see if your mom can bring us next weekend?
B Sure. Why do you like it?
A I don't know.
B Yeah. The only thing is, where was Al, the extra trees guy?
A Dunno.
B Let's look for him next week.
A Yeah.