

IS INTELLIGENCE NECESSARY ?

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

Noncommercial reproduction permitted

Not really, this strikingly outré 1995 film says. After seeing it last night, I said to the man at the urinal next to mine, "Gump thinks one's life is both a destiny and a blowing in the wind. Not bad, eh?" He: "Something to think about, really." Since he then left & I didn't get to lay the Whole Truth on him, I'm laying it on you.

1 One of the angles for viewing this refreshingly mature movie is as a rosary of hilarious **anomalies**. Right off the reel we're told that this philosopher with the binocular vision to see life as both directive & random has a 75 IQ, which is below the abstractive range: his brain is forever going klunk with literalism, as much as Hagar the Horrible's halfwit sidekick's. As a child, he's so crippled he has to wear full leg-braces; yet when attacked by boys on bikes, he's so scared he runs his braces off & outruns the bikers--becomes the greatest football runner--later, runs for 3½ years straight! He can do only the most menial work, yet comes to own a fleet of twelve shrimpboats. He was so dim a bulb he couldn't've gotten into high school, but he was graduated from college....

2 Anomaly is (through Lat.) Gk. for "not-same," uneven, misfitting, deviant; & it has several dimensions in the film: (1) Life does indeed strike philosophers, of both academy and street, as a mix of determinate & open, order & chaos, reason & luck, fate & freedom, the mutual mysteries of good & evil, providence & the demonic, grace & indifference; (2) intentions & consequences often don't fit (a fact parodied in the consistency with which the consequences of Forrest's desires, though he's incapable of planning [which requires more power of abstraction than he has], finally always far overproduce: his small coin always hits the jackpot); (3) solidly grounded in life's grimmest experiences, including war & unrequited love, the film resoundingly deviates from the dooms the world teaches us to expect: the film is joyfully deviant from Hollywood; (4) To the cynic's "No good deed goes unpunished," with high whimsey "Gump" changes the last word to "unrewarded" (sardonic sanguinity?).

3 The thing's a **philosophical** triumph. What's that? It's something--a film, an article, a book, a play, a sermon, a radio/television program--that sets folks to saying, with my urinal friend, "Something to think about, really." Since Americans are now, by my calculating, moving 45% too fast, to get any of them to think is a high achievement. And to do it with rollicking entertainment in an escapist medium? That's genius! Folks are guarded against sermons from expected pulpits, but not....

4 The thing's unashamedly **moral** without being moralistic. But aren't the people self-protected against sneak attacks by Righteousness? Not any longer: they're now too worried about the ethical **void** increasingly obvious to the citizenry in education, government, sports, business, even religion (eg, a bishop suicides when the wandering of his genitals is about to be exposed). Tonight Billy Graham is slated to preach to 1 billion human beings, about the same number as earth has Christians or Muslims: spiritual & moral hunger, now, is not just American.

5 For the novel behind the film, Winston Groom intertwined several sure-hit **themes**: the idiot savant (as in Dustin Hoffman's brother Raymond - "Rain Man," an i.s. in math: F.G. is a motor i.s., able to [1] run, & [2] assemble a rifle, faster than anyone else); the virtuous local "idiot"; innocents abroad; the improbable marriage; the wounded healer; the failed success; love conquers all; loyalty wins over betrayal; virtue triumphs over hate; the "charmed" (angel-protected) life (as, in Tobit, Tobias' guardian angel--though F.G.'s angel-guide through narrow squeaks into broad, sunny plains is never plain). The mix has made the film ca.1/3rd million \$ & 13 Oscar nominations. To make it, the producer had to have courage (for the film's cross-grain to Hollywood), but wisdom more, & cleverness (the theme-weaving) even more than wisdom.

6 As a **morality tale**, F.G.'s righteous simplicity (innocence) touches on all the self-righteous, self-seeking complexity (knavery) of ordinary, everyday, hope-crushing America. Yes, another anomaly, viz. America's good heart v. Americans'

bad behavior. What's so appealing here is that the struggle between puritan & cavalier does not end (as the hymn, "Once to every man..." has it: "truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne") with the latter's victory over the former but the reverse (as the same hymn has it, "yet that scaffold sways the future, / and behind the dim unknown / standeth God..., / keeping watch above his own [including F.G.]). We human beings, & especially we Americans, want to believe what biblical religion entices us, pleads with us, to believe, viz. that the twin loves--the love of truth & the truth of love--will out & win out, though we realistically confront the fact on a bumper sticker we've all seen (& a fictional etiology for which the story gives): SHIT HAPPENS. The balancing bumper sticker (not appearing in the story) is from a gospel song written by a guy I knew in the early '30s, named Luther: JESUS NEVER FAILS. To believe only the 2nd sticker is Pollyannish; the 1st, cynical. But to believe both (as the Bible & the film do) is, well, let's call it *realistic idealism*.

7 This ethic of realistic idealism is biblical. Mother Mary's Magnificat (L.46-55) squarely faces the realities of overbearing pride, oppressive power, & economic maldistribution---but triumphs in praise to "the Mighty One who has done [& will do] great things." And the prayer her Son taught us to pray (11.2-4; Mt.6.9-13), while trusting "Father," looks into the teeth of the evil one, temptation, & our perpetual need of food & forgiveness/forgiving. F.G., a somewhat secular saint, is this ethic with hair & skin but without "intelligence," that aspect of our species which the Enlightenment ("modernity") adored, to the increasingly visible peril of soul, society, & earth.

8 "F.G." is more than a Swiftian satire (which it is) & a broad farce (which it's even more); it's a tear-bringing **tragicomedy** of purgative force, the tears arising from empathy & laughter. (We don't know whether the jury will "get" O.J.Simpson, but we can't get too angry at the injustices of "F.G." since we've heard that justice will have the last laugh.)

9 Let's have a look at the **institutions** "F.G." holds up for gentle/devastating spoof (yes, yet another anomaly):

(1) **Schools.** The elementary principal doesn't want to mainstream a kid with "only 75 IQ." (The story's main timeframe is '72-'82, the last the death of the female lead, Jenny, after whom Forrest names the whole dozen of his shrimp-boats.) (In our current stupid PC lingo, he'd be called "intellectually challenged" or even "other abled.") But when he proves to be a breathtakingly good footballer, high school & college welcome--& graduate!--him. F.G. is forever being called "stupid": the story says, in effect, Who was that you called stupid? Our schools, here & from other angles, fit the description of stupidity as doing the same thing over again & expecting a different result--stupid, because general intelligence is the ability to adapt/change by making use of learnings from experience. Forrest's IQ is too low to handle the abstractions necessary to such adaptation/change: must the same be said for America's educational institutions & personnel?

(2) **The military.** Here the film's as irreverent as "Alice's Restaurant" & as buffoonish as "MASH." But realistic: massive, senseless suffering, somewhat relieved by Gump's rescuing his buddies (for which he gets the Medal of Honor, whose pendant he gives to Jenny).

(1) **Commercial propaganda,** Mad Av. Forrest the Runner makes a mint as an uncomprehending shill for products. He decides to put some of the boodle in a fruit company which has as its logo an apple with a bite out of it, & makes another mint. Then he gives $\frac{1}{2}$ his total to the black widow of the black friend, his best friend, who was an Army buddy who died though Forrest rescued him.

(4) **Racism,** another kind of institution. Gump is too dumb (!) to be racist.

10 The embittered, war-crippled, legless veteran whom Gump befriends finally can say to him, "Thank you for saving my life." To which Gump responds, "I think he's made his peace with God." Earlier, that veteran had laughed when Gump said "I'm going to heaven."....He marries Jenny when she's dying of AIDS....Pervasive symbolism. A feather of "destiny" falls on his foot at film's beginning, & another at its end: what's blowing in the wind may not be other than our destiny.