

Very good, Patricia. Very good.

I panicked one day several weeks ago when Comcast informed me that Turner Classic Movies was no longer available; that I would have to switch to another more costly package to retrieve it. After some repressed profanity I bought the other package and am relieved to see those old movies again – many of which I saw as a boy when they first came out in the 1930's. Indeed, I was born as the silent films gave way to talkies and I have been talking ever since.

A week or so ago TCM aired the 1940's film *The Bells of St. Mary's*. It starred Bing Crosby as Fr. O'Malley, pastor of an inner city parish (featured in a prior film called *Going My Way*); and Ingrid Bergman as Sister Mary Benedict, principal of the parish's elementary school. The crisis that carries the story is the construction of a huge office building that will crowd whatever property the decrepit school occupies. How to overcome that?

But within this story is another about a single mother's daughter "Patsy" Gallagher (played by Joan Carroll), bordering on delinquent unless the school takes her in and turns her in the right direction. And so it happens. And the high point that indicates she has a future is her recitation of a composition she writes.

As I watched I moved forward on my couch. I had seen this film when it came out in 1945; I was seventeen years old. I had no recall of this recitation scene; went over my head without the least notice. But now I was moved. Indeed, I wondered how so "philosophical" an utterance could turn up in what was a fairly light production. It was about the six senses. But here's the text, as scripted by Leo McCarey:

I choose for my subject: The six senses.

To see, to hear, to taste, to smell, to feel . . . to be. The most important is the last. The sixth sense is to be able . . . to enjoy the five senses properly. To be. That's what really matters. We see others, hear others, know others with our five senses. But how do we know ourselves? Through common sense. Common sense is . . . to differentiate between the senses' reports or to reduce these reports to the unity of a common perception.

What great words: To be. Other words grow out of them. I am, you are, he is, we are, they are. That takes in everybody.

As Shakespeare said, "To thine own self be true. And it shall follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."

And he was so right, Sister. He was just talking about the sixth sense. To put it in my own words: "To be or not to be, that is the question."

When Patricia finished, the priest and nun were no longer in the room. It was just Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman, silent with astonishment, shaken out of their roles, being just themselves.

Geoff Wood