

*Finding Forrester (Gus Van Sant, 2000)*

I rented this movie because knowing the basic storyline – the development of a friendship between a writer, William Forrester, who didn't venture out of his room for 4 decades and a young basketball player with a gift – I thought I would get some ideas about the time for Forrester. I was wrong on that account. Nevertheless it was worthwhile for me to watch this movie.

The opening early morning montage of the Bronx established the basic atmosphere where the boy, Jamal came from. It was a mixture of half empty streets, half deprived people, houses in the state of halfway decay. This reflects the state of mind of Forrester. In contrast to this the next sequence starts with a close-up of a stack of classic books. The camera tilts up on the whole stack, then moves sideway to focus on Jamal's eye as he is lying on the bed. This was our establishing shot into Jamal's life.

"All the ~~world~~ basketball court is a stage," (sorry William.) The scene where Jamal enters the basketball court for the first time and exchanges greetings with all his friends seemed a bit too long at the time. Much later in the movie when he is already out of that circle and longs to re-enter it he is not welcome. That scene is just as long. But this way the director/editor managed to make a clear connection between the two occasions of the same location. As I see it the movie mostly wants to speak about friendship. The two court scenes are a good example of that. It also relates to Jamal's struggle whether he should follow his original game and try not to be outstanding (aka himself) so his environment and friends would accept him as one of their own. Or as his teacher said: "Basketball court is where he gets his acceptance." It was a bit unrealistic though that in the very last shot of the movie, he, the good guy, gets everything, even his old friend back. Still saying on the court I enjoyed the camerawork when in his new school the other colored player pushes him to the floor and we see the word shaking from that low and leaning angle.

I didn't take yet the college writing paper class, so I was anxious to hear the bits about writing itself. I got what I wished for in the form of 3 nuggets. Forrester wrote a lot of notes into Jamal's notebook when he left his backpack there. As he thumbs through the pages we get quick glimpses of a few sentences in red. But the one where the camera stops says: "Where are you taking me?" It refers to of course to whatever Jamal wrote on that page, but it is also a question that is easy to think that Forrester asks from Jamal in a more general or physical sense. Another advice I never followed, but one of these days I will give it a try: "Write your first draft from the heart and rewrite it with your head." Finally when I have problems starting to write a paper I will try to remember this: "The rhythm of typing may help to move from page 1 to 2". This accompanied Forrester's instructions to Jamal suggesting to start typing, copying an existing writing and then when his own words come let them flow.

The building where Forrester lives stands erect and lonely just as he does. The supporting buildings/people are gone from around. It is a direct visual metaphor between man and structure. Another quite direct connection is that he who imprisoned himself is watching and videotaping birds. Birds that are the symbol of freedoms as they fly anywhere they want to. Compared to this when Forrester drags out the first time from his home he gets an anxiety attack in the crowd. But that - and Jamal taking him to the empty baseball stadium - pushes him to open up really for the

very first time to his friend. A third similar connection is when Jamal takes the blanket and covers Forrester who dozed off in his armchair he takes a sneak peek of the writer's photo album. Both actions supposed to spread warm fuzzy feelings. And they do.

From the dozen films the director, Gus Van Sant directed I've only seen *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993) and *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) (with River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves) and I didn't see his most known picture *Good Will Hunting* (1997). But the first two is rather bizarre and twisted, maybe that's why I liked them. In comparison *Finding Forrester* was rather conventional. The story was quite predictable, the movie's structure and cinematography traditional. However I admired how well the selection of songs and music (mostly by k.d.Lang) got integrated into the film in the western/road movie *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. Similarly in *Finding Forrester* Bill Frisell's score, original compositions and arrangements made the experience richer. For example in one part of the movie within 2 minutes we slow down from an angry, fast rhythm to slow desperation then back to happy steady progress. Exactly the way the actions are forming on the screen at the same time. The most memorable music is though at the end and lasts till through the closing credits: a Hawaiian singer is singing a combined version of "Somewhere over the rainbow" with "What a wonderful life" in a capela style. It is a truly amazing performance.

Sean Connery not just acting in this movie but he is also one of the producers. I am quite sure that it was per his request that it is emphasized in the movie that his character is from Scotland to where he returns. His inferior archrival seems to be Professor Robert Crawford played by F. Murray Abraham. It is the same actor who played Salieri another second best person (and won an Oscar for it) in *Amadeus* (Milos Forman, 1984). Interestingly he also played a secondary role against Sean Connery in *The Name of the Rose* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1986). He is good at playing the sour, almost-made-it character.