

Nature as Theater

By Susan O'Neil

To those of us who like to look at life as a theater, the prospects of good material are many times limited by the perspectives that we see on television and in movies. The dialogues seem to be somewhat incongruent with what we actually witness in real life. As a child, I used to think that there was an existence that was lived in another realm that was really like sit-coms.

But in the world of the one-dimensional screen, it seemed that there was something significant missing from the drama. Looking back at it now, I see that what was missing was the stage actor's relationship with the natural world. Nature was hardly ever mentioned or shown. And if it was mentioned, it was referred to as dirty outside and that there were dangerous elements that we had to be protected from, such as rain (messy and inconvenient), sun (blistering and suffocating) or snow (complete and utter catastrophe).

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and lived primarily with the "messy and inconvenient." Now that I am a Southerner, the climate can be an utterly vitriolic subject that much more resembles that sit-com reality. At first I found this humorous but now find it saddening. Our alienation from the elements and Nature has become a cycle that seems to spiral downwards and out of control, ending with Nature as the ultimate threat to our existence. It is like the elephant in the living room; the more we ignore it, the larger the problems become.

Must we live with Nature as a force to be battled against, or can we recapture the perspective of Nature as a source of natural bliss? That largely depends upon how we, as a culture, set our desires for transformation and our ability to use our long-term perspective in service to our imagination.

I like to imagine Earth as a Being with substance (the Earth itself), fluid (the lakes, rivers and oceans), and breath (wind, rain and atmosphere). It has helped me transform my relationship to Mother Nature from hostile threat to a loving embrace. No matter where we live and what the climate is, we can savor each breeze, each handful of soil, each leaf and each rain shower as a backdrop of moments that nurtures our lives.



Photo by Liz Holland

The movie world outside our doors is wondrously magical, endlessly varied, essential, and life giving. It's up to us to bring that luscious and sensuous relationship to life.

Susan O'Neil is a student of performance studies at UNC Chapel Hill and an environmental and Green Party activist. She is currently serving on the coordination committee of the Green Party and Citizens for Healthcare Freedom. She enjoys gardening, photography, metaphysics, critters, and being outside. Susan can be reached at susone@gmail.com.