

BIOSONG FREESTYLE (November 16, 2022) Madam Flow

'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'
(The more things change, the more they stay the same)

The two closest friends of my mind are Madam Flow and Mr Thought. Madam Flow is so supportive and helpful to me that I call her 'the Princess of my mind.' But she is shy and unobtrusive, so her qualities are subtle and easily missed. Mr Thought can't quite understand them, but he respects her – he does have some drawbacks, as I've said, but he's not stupid.

Madam Flow doesn't seem to mind that she is misunderstood. We know intuitively that the only constant is change; the details of my life keep changing, but I am still the same person. Our minds often wrestle with our experience of time, wanting to speed it up to get to somewhere sooner, or stop it so we can look at something more closely. Even our faithful Laws of Motion have, as their starting point, a state of rest (non-movement). That is very appropriate for machines, that need to be put into motion, but for living things in which movement is the natural state and nothing ever stops, it isn't ideal.

Mr Thought would quite like to divide this flow of time and space into bits, but he is not entirely left-brain, so he realises that can't be done. Flow is irreducible – not made up of any parts. Zeno's Paradox tells us that, if we did divide time and space into bits, Achilles could never catch the tortoise that he has given a head start because he first has to cover half the distance he is behind and then half that distance again, and so on, forever. By the same logic I cannot, theoretically, ever get out my front door. So Madam Flow is content.

You can see that a river remains roughly the same over time, but you know you can't step into the same water twice because that is always flowing. The river needs the movement to remain what it is – as we do, too. Change is a natural, constant, quality of life. When we see each small change as exceptional, we may find it threatening, taking us out of our 'comfort zone.' But if things didn't change, something important would not be able to remain the same – namely, us. So the attitude that is most helpful is to respect and trust in the flow.

When I let myself be with Madam Flow, I can be more accepting of everything that happens in my life, and also enjoy the wonder about what might happen next. That means I am trusting in forces other than whatever I have set up by myself (which may well be helpful, but that's not certain). Madam Flow is always alerting me to new opportunities whereby I can participate in the change that is happening, rather than ignoring or resisting it. She is often my source of inspiration and excitement about what might happen next. As long as I have wonder in my life, I will always have hope.

As we come to know more, we realise how little we know. That humility helps us to enjoy and trust the uncertainty instead of trying to control all those changes we cannot control. Life is not just about me – I am alive, and so is everything else. We live in a participatory world in which we always have the opportunity to join and shape the flow.

The essence of that flow is hard to represent in words – though good poetry gets us closer to feeling it. Music has a better chance of capturing its spirit. So Life Sings.