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Every Little Thing

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Every Little Thing* (2024), directed by Sally Aitken.

Keywords

Hummingbirds, Nature, Conservation

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Author Notes

Dereck Daschke is a professor of Philosophy & Religion at Truman State University and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Particularly interested in the intersection among religion, psychology, and wellness, his academic work over more than two decades has analyzed the transformational breakdowns and creative buildups in the form of apocalypses, mysticism, new religious movements, psychedelics, the Bible, Bob Dylan, and, of course, film. He regularly teaches “Religion and Film” at Truman and has overseen a number of student research theses that have contributed to the conversation about just why it is that movies capture our meaning-making imaginations in the way they do.



Every Little Thing (2024), dir. Sally Aitken

Every Little Thing follows the uplifting work of Terry Maeser, who operates a hummingbird rescue and rehabilitation center out of her home in the hills overlooking Los Angeles. Director Sally Aitken spends most of the film following the incremental progress, and occasional sad demise, of a number of injured hummingbirds that L.A. denizens have brought to Terry to save. Terry gives them each names, and we chart their healing or mourn their loss over the course of the film: Cactus, Mikhail, Sugar Baby, The Sydney Twins, Larry Bird, Raisin, and Jimmy, just to name a few. But it's Terry and her unflagging energy, empathy, and determination to do whatever she can for these tiny creatures that is the centerpiece of the film. She exhibits an admirable blend of hard-nosed realism about the brutality of the natural world, repeatedly describing her work as preparing warriors for combat once they are released again into the wild, and reverent awe toward their magical, even spiritual qualities: their ability to beat their wings fifty times a second; to tumble and turn and rise and dive in ways no other bird can; to spot a flower to feed from a mile away. Happily, the film's cinematography is replete with ultra-high speed, high-definition footage of

these creatures, giving the audience a glimpse into just how exceptional their movements are, keeping their heads perfectly still as their bodies are suspended in mid-air, their wings maneuvering them ever so slightly here and there to eat or observe their surroundings. Having seen it for our own eyes, the viewer cannot help but agree with Terry when she states, “The hummingbird’s brilliance supersedes language.”

Besides the birds’ stories, of course, the other central narrative arc is Terry’s. We learn of her desperate, abusive childhood in rural Wisconsin; her self-discovery in college (assisted by what she alludes to as “certain chemicals”), her deep love of her deceased partner Frank, who appears to be decades older than she, but whom Terry describes as her “home” and being so close to her as to be “the same animal.” Terry even articulates the conclusion that any observant viewer will draw, that her empathy and need to help heal the brokenness and pain of these tiny, vulnerable beings is a direct result of having lived through and survived what she did growing up. Her connection to the birds gives her the ability to see beyond humans’ own limited speciesism, lamenting the way that humans have long dismissed the extraordinary talents that other members of the animal kingdom possess, ones that far surpass our own. *Every Little Thing* manages to show the universe contained in the “little things” that flit by our eyes, so small and so fast that we can barely register them and, in Terry’s work, offers a concrete illustration of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” If God’s eye is on the sparrow, as the old Gospel tune declares, then certainly it is also on these magical creatures and those with the capacity of care for them and others.