

26<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## Glimpses

**“If you could see your whole life from start to finish,  
would you change things?”**

Eric Heiserrer, *Arrival* (2016) screenplay

*Arrival* is a 2016 science fiction movie which is based on a short story by Ted Chiang. The film focusses on a linguist who has been enlisted by the US Army to discover how to communicate with extraterrestrials who've arrived on earth, before tensions lead to all-out war. It was selected by the "American Film Institute" as one of the ten best movies of that year and received eight nominations at the 89<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards.

This came to mind when I was sitting on a train waiting to depart, when an incoming train arrived on the opposite platform. I *love* watching people in stations and airports, and the arrival of these passengers was no different. They weren't extraterrestrials or aliens. And there was no way I could ever see their lives from start to finish. But as people struggled with cases, met up with loved ones, gathered their possessions and headed off for the exit-gate, I had short, but fascinating, glimpses. In *Arrival*, the linguist, Dr Louise Banks, muses on what we see and know about each other. And, in truth, we only ever have glimpses. We don't see the whole of people's lives. Indeed, as Dr Banks hints, it's unlikely that any of us knows or understands the full panoply of our *own* lives from start to finish.

As I watched those passengers arrive at their platform, it struck me how much we *assume* we know about people, when all we usually have are glimpses – and all-too-fleeting glimpses at that. I could make up fantasies about the people on that platform. I could construct in my mind what I *thought* they were like. But I don't really *know* them at all. They have their story. They have a "whole life from start to finish". They have a richness of experience, influences, achievements, joys and sorrows. But what right do I have to think I know, when all I am privy to are mere glimpses from a carriage window?

Beware of thinking we know about people, when, in truth, we know very little. Beware of making assumptions, when all we are privy to are glimpses. Beware of extrapolating from what we *think* we know, to fantasies that may bear little relation to reality or truth.

### **A prayer for today**

*Me? Known completely? That takes a lifetime of learning, doesn't it?*