

TV or not TV sez Thrumbo

Movie review by Thrumbo Wattskiller
(for the Thorsby collective)

"You know what the problem is? Words. We've backed off from words. Milfred Campbell quoted from *Regressions: What Happened to the Great Tradition?*"

Milfred Campbell, Alice (our remedial English prof.) and I are here at the *Golden Lion* after the tap dance number Peter Sellers and Jerzy Kosinski did on our heads in *Being There*. Milf is visibly affected; he takes sparing sips from his bottle of Blue and stares vacantly at the *Golden Lion's* jumbo sized T.V. screen.

"The guy was obsessed," I say, trying to start a discussion of the movie.

"Who wasn't obsessed?" asks Alice.

"Who isn't obsessed," sez Milfred, "being here today means you gotta be obsessed." While he talks, Milfred never takes his eyes off the screen which is showing JR from *Dallas* talking up one of his creepy deals.

"Sellers. Or Chance (the guy Sellers plays). I mean him," I say, not wanting Milfred to turn this into a lecture on Campbell's philosophy of life.

"There's a problem here. I think we mean different things by 'obsessed.'" Alice, as usual, comes to the rescue.

"I think he was obsessed because he watched T.V. all the time," I say.

"What the hell does that mean?" sez Milfred, "I don't think watching T.V. all the time makes one obsessed. It makes one regular folk. Like mashed potatoes. Or Adidas."

JR is now trying to talk a girl into going to bed with him. He is taking his clothes off, while she sits at the side of the bed wanting to talk to him about why he doesn't talk to her anymore.

"He is an innocent," sez Alice, "Sellers plays the least obsessed character because all he knows comes from the tube. It's the other people who're obsessed because they think life and T.V. are different and try their damndest to prove it. But Chance can't see any difference. Life and T.V. are the same thing to him"

"Nobody's innocent," sez Milf. JR tells the girl to stop talking, grabs her by the arm and pulls her under the sheets.

"Funny how you think there's no such thing after you lose your own innocence," sez Alice, "the thing that you don't see is that to be innocent is not to be able to manipulate the world or people to your own ends. Everybody in the movie manipulates the world and each other except Chance. That's why he confuses everyone he meets."

"That's right. Nobody believes Chance can be less than what they all believe him to be," I sez.

"Alright. I'll agree that everyone who bumps into Chance refuses to take him literally. But because he is just a gardener and because all he knows comes from T.V., Chance understands the cliches of T.V. to have literal meaning for him. No one realizes that the things Chance speaks of are just words which refer to themselves. But that doesn't make him innocent. It makes him a victim pushed by forces he doesn't understand," argues Milfred. The girl tries to fight JR but because of his charm and cunning her resistance melts away.

"Look," sez Alice with a bit of impatience creeping into her voice, "Chance, once he's plucked from his garden and his T.V. sets is in a new world. Words are strange, new and wonderful things. That's why he impresses all the people who come near him. Because he uses words as if he just found out how to use them, he states the obvious to people who have seen words manipulated, cheapened and emptied of their original power. Chance liberates a woman like Eve because she knew love only through cliches and words. Similarly Ben admires Chance because of his directness."

Alice tries to find Milfred's eyes but they are lost in the fog of *Dallas*. She fixes them on mine, although I have no argument with her. But Alice is right. The seduction scene in *Being There* is one of the best I've ever seen; between a Peter Sellers glued to the T.V. set and a Shirley MacLaine (Eve) "finding" herself on the

bear rug there is a sad, absurd sort of sexiness which I've experienced only once (that was the time that Irma Lizotte, my old flame, taught me how to . . . well, there's no words for it . . . but it was without words, or touching, only looking).

"But the forces," says Milfred, cutting into what Alice's eyes have been saying, "the Force. What controls it all — the eye in the pyramid. Ben and the Masons.

That's the scheme of things. A dead Ben and his pallbearers scorn words, don't they? And Chance, as naive as he is, has been touched by the eye. Chance has been expelled from his Garden into the World. Chance is fallen — like the rest of us."

JR and the girl wake up in the morning. JR is dressing up to slay corporate monsters in the wild oil jungles. The girl has the morning after smile and is loving and kind while she scrambles him eggs. This morning she does not care about him not talking to her. But JR is in a hurry. He gulps the coffee she made and zips out the door while the girl, oblivious, smiles lovingly at the frying pan.

Milfred is scared; we all feel like Chance and he doesn't want to feel like him because he thinks he's learned to use words. Alice, who's felt this too many times before to really care about it, talks about the great acting that Sellers and MacLaine put into the movie.

"There's a lot of flesh and love in this movie that you don't find in Kosinski," she sez.

While Milfred watches JR lie, cheat and steal, Alice imagines what it would be like to live in the world of Chance, where every moment is new and separate from the one that preceded it, where words are new and fresh things, where we entrust ourselves to the forces which run the world while we try to find the angel Raphael.

Alice leans over to me at one point and whispers:

"We all used to be innocent like Chance. But then we discovered words. And lies." With that she gets up to leave. Milfred must be in a really bad state because he doesn't notice. "Tell Milfred," she says, disappearing into the darkness of the lounge.

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