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Murphy's Romance an insidious film

Murphy's Romance
Columbia Pictures
Odeon

review by Dean Bennett

When looking at *Murphy's Romance* it's important to see it not for what it is but for what it represents. Taken by itself it is only a pithy romantic comedy, but in the larger context it is an example of the how the formula Hollywood film is insidious.

The film stars Sally Field as Emma Moriarty — a simple hardworking, down home, country girl, not well educated but people smart — which is more important. She is trying to make a new life for herself and her son in a small town somewhere in Arizona. Into her new life come: the town druggist Murphy Jones (James Garner) and her ex-husband Bobby Jack Moriarty (Brian Kerwin) and before film's end she must come to terms with her feelings for both of them.

Bobby Jack is scum and the film falls all over itself trying to show you just how slimy he is. He is from the city and reflects its values: lazy, self-indulgent, looking for a good time and the quick buck. He's all glitter, all style and no substance.

Murphy is as gentlemanly and honest as Bobby Jack is selfish and corrupt. He represents the values of the country: sincerity, amicability, and respect for people and for tradition.

It's interesting that in one scene Emma wins \$200 playing Bingo because on one level that's what *Murphy's Romance* is — a wish fulfillment a la *Lotto 649*. Our heroine, Emma, an everyday Joe just trying to get by. But she's besieged by faceless institutions — the bank won't give her a loan (they tell her it's because she's a single mother and therefore too great a risk) and when she has to go into the hospital for a few days she's soaked to the tune of \$3.00 an aspirin.

She's besieged on the other side by an ex-husband who comes back to leech off her, spending her bingo money on beer and



Sally Field and director Martin Ritt on location for *Murphy's Romance*.

good times. But do you think Emma fights back? No. She just keeps plugging away, minding her own business and — surprise,

surprise — everything works out in the end: Bobby Jack is forced to ride off into the sunset with the two bawling brats while

Murphy and his comfortable income fall in love with Emma.

Looking at *Murphy's Romance* from a Marxist perspective, you could say it's an example of how the ruling class — the wealthy, big business — keep the working man in his place. American films are for the most part myths of success. Films like this tell you that the way to spiritual and financial success is to be kind to everybody, work hard and not make waves. Anybody who's experienced the real world knows such is not the case.

It is through the subtle propaganda of shows like *Murphy's Romance* that big business keep the masses happy. These films assuage rather than agitate, telling you it will all work out in the end if you just mind your own business — telling you what you want to hear. They don't want the audience to think, because that might lead to a questioning of the existing social order.

In one way it is unfair to single out *Murphy's Romance* because it is only symptomatic of a greater malaise. It bothers me because it is such a blatant example of the formula. Emma's world is not a real world because the choices she must make — embodied in the two men — are too clean cut, too easy. Life is presented as the good path and the bad path. The former path leads to happiness and prosperity, the latter to decadence and poverty. It's maddening because it shows you how you can have your cake and eat it too, how the only choice you have to make to get ahead in the world one the easy black and white ones.

Murphy's Romance is cagey though because it couches itself as a "nice" movie. Coming out of the screening that's all I heard — "What a nice movie". It's as if because the film is bereft of rapid gunfire or teenage males losing their virginity we should be grateful it exists. Well it is a nice movie — full of nice people in a nice setting doing nice things but it is also quite manipulative and the statement it makes on life is utopian fantasy.

Totally bogus.

Film promises much but does not deliver

Down and Out in Beverly Hills
Famous Players Westmount

review by Suzanne Lundrigan

Dave Whiteman, hanger magnate, has made it to the top. He has a mansion in Beverly Hills; that magical land where even the janitors own condos in Hawaii and dogs have their own shrinks. Yet for all his wealth Dave is miserable.

He thinks his wife is boffing her guru. He's caught his son wearing a tutu and his daughter is dating a drug-smoking roadie. To top it all off, Dave feels guilty about all his money, a throw-back to this flower-power days.

Into Dave Whiteman's two-slugs-of-pepto-bismal-a-day, life come Gerry Atkins, Gerry is a street person, who in a fit of depression, tries to drown himself in Dave's pool.

Dave jumps in after him, saves him and in true bleeding-heart-liberal fashion invites Gerry to live with him for a while.

With a sensitivity and clarity of vision not seen since *Chances*, the gardener, dropped by in *Being There*, Gerry Atkins proceeds to straighten out all the Whiteman's problems.

Under Gerry's guiding hands, Mrs. Whiteman achieves her first orgasm in nine years. Having helped out in the boudoir, Gerry turns to Max Whiteman, the teenage son who is struggling with his sexual identity. Gerry helps Max come to terms with his androgyny. Why even the dog, Matisse, flourishes under Gerry's influence as he regains his appetite and no longer requires the services of his puppy-shrink.

Though reminiscent of Peter Sellers' *Being There*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* achieves neither the biting social commentary or comic hilarity which graced that film.

Director, Paul Mazursky, has incorporated both the elements of social commentary and comedy but he does so without achieving the balance necessary to the happy coexistence of these two elements.

In short the comedy serves only to under-

cut commentary, thereby rendering it impotent and ineffective.

For example in the scenes between Gerry and Max, Gerry tells Max that orange lipstick looks better. Later when Max approaches Gerry with his problem Gerry listens sympathetically and suggests that Max speak frankly with his parents. Bridges are being built, or so

the audience thinks. However, just as Max leaves, Gerry yells out, "I still think you look better in orange." The moment is marred, irreparably.

Bette Midler as Mrs. Whiteman, gives the strongest performance. She is superb as the dipsy Beverly Hills wife. She comes complete with aerobics classes and gurus. Richard

Dreyfuss' talents are buried in his part. Nick Nolte as Gerry, has his moments. He is particularly strong early in the film as the homeless vagabond.

This is a film of many promises, unfortunately it does not deliver. A lot of potential fell by the wayside.

Film not quite *The Best of Times*

The Best of Times
Universal
Odeon

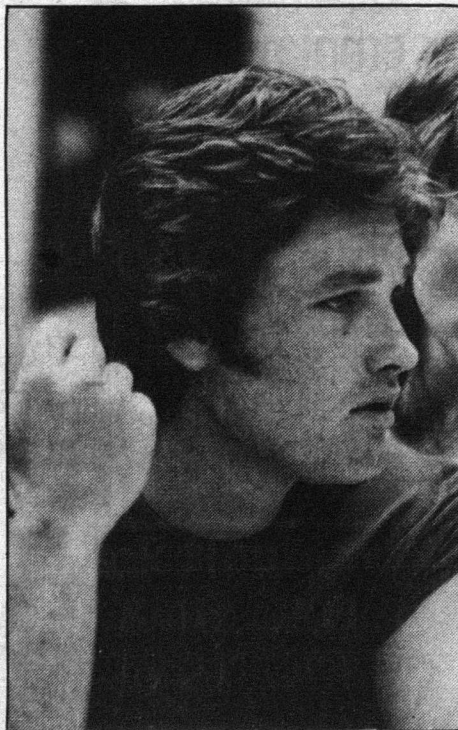
review by Regina Behnk

The Best of Times offers little humour and provokes even less thought. The story is set in the imaginary town of Taft, California. Taft is not a town of much success, save for a booming oil business.

Every year Taft competes against the Bakersfield football team. Taft habitually loses these games with embarrassing scores like 82-0. But in 1972 Taft came very close to defeating Bakersfield. Unfortunately, Jack Dundee (Robin Williams) botched the game by fumbling a crucial catch.

The movie opens fourteen years later. Jack is a mediocre banker employed by his father-in-law who ironically is an avid and financial supporter of the Bakersfield football team. Jack's dilemma is that he simply cannot cope with his past. His father-in-law frequently reminds him of his blunder in that memorable game of '72. Jack spends a great deal of his work day in a back room to his office where he can replay the black and white film of that renowned game which has marred his life.

Reno Hightower (Kurt Russell) is the team mate who threw that indolent and crucial pass in '72. Surprisingly, Jack and Reno are



Kurt Russell.

still best friends. Though the proprietor of an insolvent garage, Reno is a well respected citizen of Taft because of that famous pass.

He is married to the homecoming queen of '72 Gigi (Pamela Reed) and is content with his life as a "Van Specialist". This realm of happiness shatters when Gigi suddenly decides to leave to pursue a singing career.

In the meantime, Jack has decided to change history so that he can then attempt to purge himself of his guilt. He rallies the town to replay the game of '72. Reno is reluctant to participate in this scheme because he was the hero of that infamous game, and he change history so that he can then attempt to

Initially the town mocks Jack's proposal for an encore of the '72 game. Jack takes action. Dressing in the opposing team mascot he creates havoc in the town. The town is enraged and accepts the challenge to replay the game of '72.

From here the viewer can expect a victory for Taft regardless of how strong the Bakersfield team is. There are no surprises in this film, even the marital conflicts resolve themselves without much effort.

There are a few zany moments like when Taft's team of middle aged and overweight men attempt to follow an aerobics program. But the scene only draws a few chuckles. The major flaw with this film is the treatment of the theme. A young man errors and his entire life is stagnant until he can relive that embarrassing moment differently. In real life we learn from our mistakes and become stronger people for it.