

Opinion

AS OBSERVED BY C. REED

MORE TRUE STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES OF DEMOCRACY

(NO, IT'S REALLY TRUE!)(REALLY!)



NEXT WEEK:

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF SUPERBUSH!

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT THE MASHED POTATOE

Lion's Eye / CHARLES REED

Of people and machines

By ADAM WOJCIECHOWICZ
Staff Writer

What misery — to sit in a massive echo chamber and faintly hear the doldrums of knowledge listlessly patrolling back and forth, infinitely distant from your current location: second row, third seat.

This scene is, of course, to be likened to a very average classroom, and the faint sounds to the voice of pedantic education. Pedantry is, perhaps, a lost art. An art the understanding of which is lost, we should rather say. It is a religion of acquisition, not of creation; the self is a vessel, nothing more, to be filled and emptied and replicated in reference to its content, so dubbed "knowledge." In light of the practice, Montaigne, the celebrated French essayist, wrote that "though we could become learned by other men's learning, a man can never be wise but by his own wisdom." And that statement is

nothing but the championing of ingenuity.

In fact, it brings to mind the words of physicist Albert Einstein, telling us that sometimes "the questions are more important than the answers." It's true enough, despite the paradox that one person's life seems to lend it. The contradiction: although to one person important questions may seem minor next to the immediately percussive answers we see in our lifetime, humanity on large-scale terms only ever sees greatness as a direct result of a question. And after all, Martin Luther didn't nail his parchment to the church doors because he had answers. He did it because he had questions — questions that couldn't really be answered. Once posed, those questions "are what time and mediocrity can resolve," said H. R. Trevor-Roper of Oxford.

But back to the point; Michel Eyquem Montaigne would have been a great fan of Charles

Dickens, had he not died 220 years before the birth of the latter gentleman. Montaigne delighted in Italian plays of the 16th century that would caricature the classically pedantic instructor, and he made the education of educators a highlight in his illustrious career. He would have adored Dickens' depiction of ultimate pedagogue Thomas Gradgrind, intellectually mauling average students in the aptly titled chapter of *Hard Times*: "Murdering the Innocents."

"Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else," says the student's instructor, as if to an assembly of accomplished scholars. With contempt in perfect accord with these sentiments of Dickens, says Montaigne: "... these pedants of ours ... they who most pretend to be useful to mankind ..." The word "pretend" is not an exact description there, but rather a mock upon the entire "higher mind" concept.

Any instructor with common sense would not make-believe their being beneficial, but simply would assume that it is so, for that is the role. "If only they knew," Montaigne seems to plea, to all people.

Before I become the recipient of less-than-congratulatory notes from faculty at our university, it is worth noting the differences between the college experience and that which comes prior. Dickens' antagonist is a teacher of children — mere grade schoolers. This harmless lot is an efficient solicitor of our sympathies, for as the audience grows up, the wrongness of the learning process become more and more a matter of degree; it is less unreasonable to teach a university in the manner of Gradgrind than it is do unto 10-year-olds. Accordingly, I am not out to indict our professors. I may take the liberty of a warning, though.

What I am trying to say is that anyone — but the educator in

particular — has an obligation to not let his or her life become a mechanized, simple doing what it does because it does not know better. Machines, despite what some may say, do not think, in the sense that thinking means having beliefs that can change on their own, creatively and autonomously. People need not operate by algorithms, trial and error style. When they are simplified so, then "they have learned to speak from others, not from themselves," in the words of Marcus Tullius Cicero. So don't explain things like a machine, because *that's what we have machines for*. If the sign of an intelligent man truly is the style with which he gives his speech, then we had better stop reading life's little teleprompter sometimes. And while you're at it, ask questions that no one else ever has — I guarantee you some unique answers.

Adam Wojciechowicz is a staff writer for the Lion's Eye.

Features

Movies can get you into the holiday spirit

By CHARLES REED
Staff Writer

Iconoclastic Christmas Classics: Die Hard and Die Hard 2

If Steven Spielberg were to remake The Book of Maccabees into a three-hour epic saga, a la Saving Private Ryan, we might have an action-packed holiday film as fine as Die Hard, but until that happens, we'll just have to wait.

This classic film takes place during the Christmas season, but setting alone does not make it the holiday classic that it is.

Throughout the film, the Christmas motif of red and green is ever present in the form of blood and money, perhaps as a symbol of the toil and greed that is put into the modern celebration of Christ's birth.

Die Hard contains enough shoot-em-up gore to satisfy every member of the family, as Bruce Willis' character sacrifices all (exemplified by his barefoot trial through broken glass) in order to take down the terrorists and return peace and harmony to his family in time for Christmas.

Christ himself would have been proud to know that his message has lived this long, and is continuing to spread through the peaceful medium of cinema. Yippy-kai-yeh-lujah, mo-fo.

The sequel to Die Hard, the ingeniously titled Die Hard 2, also takes place during the holiday season, but it must be looked at as government propaganda, conspicuously aligned with the extradition of General Manuel Noriega from Panama.

This silly little ode to blood strays from the original's intent by attempting to parley a message of colonial imperialism into

an already successful formula of Yule-tide gore, and in the process it fails to capture the Christmas message that is so well presented by its predecessor.

In essence, it is a dud grenade.

Gremlins

Only Spielberg could blaze this trail. Not only was he the first to bring miscegenation to a 1940's Bugs Bunny cartoon and good old-fashioned Hollywood gore, but he also found the long-sought manner of combining the previously limited field of campy Christmas films (Rudolph flies, Frosty the Snowman ...) and those from the horror genre (Alien, Frankenstein ...).

Like whomever it was that did Die Hard, Spielberg also used the red-green juxtaposition. However, he used the demon's skin rather than the color of money to emphasize his motif (though a lesson of greed is implied in this festive little morality tale).

Why this film is a Christmas classic:

- Easily marketable, foot-high, evil-yet-cuddly villains.
- The luscious Phoebe Cates.
- A good-hearted parent suffocates in the chimney while masquerading as Santa Claus.
- Animals mutate after eating fast food. At last, an element of truth from Hollywood!

Why this movie sucked:

- If Spielberg was going to culturally stereotype the ancient Chinese Gremlin vendor, why not go all the way? If the old man had come in during the finale and busted out some Shaolin Kung Fu magic on Stripe and his green gang, this film's

simple genius would have been complete.

This year's Christmas movie: "How The Grinch Sold Christmas"

I went to this film knowing it would be bad

'Cause that's the approach when only bad movies are had.

I was pleasantly, pleasantly, pleasantly pleased

When Howard said, "Grinch's mind is diseased."

And I began thinking that this thing could be great,

And what better allusion than having Lecter narrate?

The child director took a deep dark foray

Into our villain's brain and its matter so gray.

With beatings and whippings, and all heart's torment,

Our hero climbed up a high mountain to vent.

The old and bald Opie would have his audience believe

It was a long lack of lovin' that sent our Grinch to grieve.

Maybe he was right, but that's not what Seuss was about:

Cliched Who-llywood endings and producers with clout ...

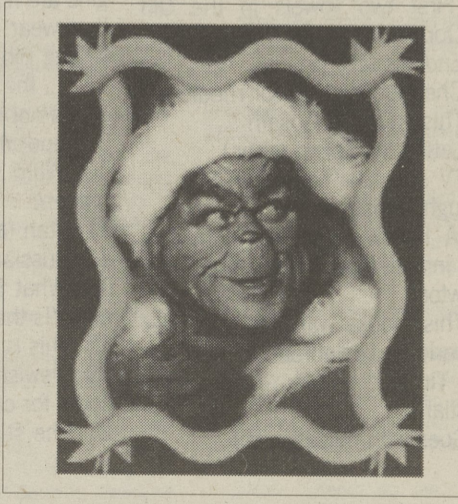
Hypocrisy, commercials, endorsements throughout ...

It finally hit me that the Grinch had sold out.

With five minutes remaining, that warm feeling was ruined,

And I couldn't help wonder: were he alive, would Dr. Seuss be suing?

As I walked from the theater, I glanced



Jim Carrey's Grinch.

at my skin — it was ever so pale. But that's the reaction when one realizes that tradition is for sale.

I actually thought that this was Jim Carrey's best comic performance to date, which would naturally make it his best performance. With many of his lines improvised, he only played with one butt joke, and is that really too much for the modern kiddy flic? It fit.

Also, his introduction of the word "bitchin'" into Grinch lore was to be expected. Out with the old, in with the new, right?

It just makes the inevitable remaking of "It's a Wonderful Life" that much easier to take.

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