Letter about The Green Mile

10 February 2000

Just saw *The Green Mile*. My wife and I would have never seen it had it not been for some friends who recommended it. We said, "OK, let's see it. We can't have an intelligent conversation without actually seeing it." Well, the film confirmed our worst expectations. It is without doubt one of the most disgustingly self-satisfied and stupid movies we have seen (though better, in our opinion, than Amistad). We had refrained from reading your review of it so as not to taint our perceptions. As it is, I just read it this morning and, though it was one of your most brutal pans, you were too, too kind!

Of course, my recollection of your review is a little fuzzy now and I can't remember if you emphasized the subject of its racism, but I think it is one of the most pernicious aspects of the film: a non-intentional product of self-satisfied, politically correct liberalism. First, in yet another film, the main story or theme is how kind, benevolent white people are deeply affected by the suffering of a black person. The black man's story—his suffering—is not the main story in *The Green Mile*; it's a manipulative tool for "examining" white liberals' guilt and the resulting ennobling experience. Furthermore, the black man in this film has been so emptied of all human contradictions, is so blatantly good, kind and wise in a sort of noble savage way, that he ceases to be human and becomes instead a bloodless abstraction, denying the desires of members of oppressed minorities to be treated precisely as human beings with all their human flaws, foibles, and weaknesses—and beauty. Besides, there is something intrinsically disgusting in portraying a black man as a servile simpleton, particularly as there's no indication whatever that the man has suffered brain damage.

Aside from the more sociological aspects of the film, it is a shamelessly manipulative Hollywood concoction which relentlessly tries to wring tears every time it can. If my memory serves me well, every character has a turn crying copious tears, many times in close-ups. This is bathos, not pathos. As such, from the emotional point of view, it is as forced, synthetic a movie as I have seen in many a moon. (You have already covered its unreality from a social point of view.)

It was rather amazing for me to see that the eight o'clock showing of the film, after its being in release for quite a few months, was sold out. What is it that draws us Americans to this sentimental drivel in droves?

RR

6 February 2000

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