

Letters in response to “Terrence Malick’s *The Tree of Life*: A world of confusion”

25 June 2011

To David Walsh:

It’s hard to argue with your take on *The Tree of Life* really.

One can see where you’re coming from, and I had a feeling you might interpret certain aspects of it as pessimistic. I honestly think it’s a wonderful review, and as always with your writings, even when one disagrees on a visceral level, one can completely see your point, as you are so thorough and clear in your analysis.

Just briefly in a kind of “quasi-defence” of Terrence Malick, if you like...

His own brother committed suicide, I believe, in Madrid in the 1960s.

Obviously, I think you’d agree, *The Tree of Life* is a very personal film, and of course that’s neither here nor there in many ways, and why should the audience care either way whether it is personal or not in relation to what they are watching? But I’m raising this point in relation to our not being told why or how the brother died in the film, a point you raise rightly.

In my opinion, Malick chooses wisely and interestingly to not engage in a “psychological drama” about the effects of “death in the family.”

We see that time and time again done so blandly and sentimentally. So, okay, instead he chooses a rather grandiose and epic approach, the whole “meaning of life” thing, “big bang,” whatever you want to call it. And here is where I saw the “objectivity” in the film ...

Just as Brecht wants us to step back and pass critical judgement on what we are watching, I felt Malick was doing the same with all the lava and rocks erupting, and dinosaurs and all that jazz. For me this was more philosophical than pessimistic. For me, he was saying, “My brother wasn’t the first and sure as hell won’t be the last, so what are you going to do?! That’s just the way it goes!”

And rather than be full of doom (I’m paraphrasing one of your sentences badly there, sorry!), it felt to me like he was approaching the “big questions” and “what’s it all about?” in quite a detached and, in the case of the dinosaur scene, tongue-in-cheek manner. And I felt he was also asking the audience, “what do you think?” I know that’s a very easy way out, but it’s hard to accomplish.

Ha! But there you go, there are my thoughts.

All the best for now,

Robert F

New York City, USA

20 June 2011

David Walsh did not admire *Badlands* or *Days of Heaven*, but sees fit to provide a detailed “plot summary” of Terrence Malick’s latest film, *The Tree of Life*. Walsh lacks any aesthetic qualification for the task of trying to spoil the artistic work of his betters. He knows nothing yet presumes to pass judgment on a work he does not understand. He’s a born critic. He’s pathetic, but that’s not reason enough to publish him.

James M

21 June 2011

Thanks for a fascinating review.

Oscar

Australia

21 June 2011

I wish to thank you for your ever-brilliant essays.

Sincerely,

Robert L

San Francisco, California, USA

21 June 2011



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