

Arts & Entertainment

My interview with Wallace Shawn

By Chuck Jagoda

Films are full of action, outdoor car chases and colorful spectacle. They have otherworldly special effects and very little dialogue. Right? Wrong.

Playwright Wallace Shawn visited UNL screenwriting and theater classes Friday, as part of Sheldon Film Theatre's Film/Video Showcase, to explain how his film got away with breaking all those rules. "My Dinner with Andre" sold more tickets than any other Sheldon film in 1982, it has been shown at the New York and Telluride film festivals and has a small but loyal following in this country and abroad.

"My Dinner with Andre" is unusual because it is simply a conversation between two friends over dinner. The friends are Andre Gregory, a New York avant garde theater director (whose company, The Manhattan Project, developed "Alice Through the Looking Glass," which was produced last year at UNL) and Shawn, who has written plays for Gregory and Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare

Festival. They discuss Gregory's unusual adventures, theatrical experiments, improvisations in a Polish forest with 40 strangers, being buried alive, trips to India and Tibet, Shawn's attachment to his electric blanket, his belief in Zen, New York snobbery, the state of modern theater, Nazi influences in everyday life, metaphysics and ethics.

A more traditional approach to filmmaking would have called for taking the camera on location and filming the activities Gregory describes. Instead, audiences are presented with what is apparently an improvised conversation.

During Shawn's visit to UNL, he discussed various aspects of his film with students and faculty.

Q: I don't understand the structure of the film. I've seen it twice and it draws you in. I'm amazed that it works. Can you explain the structure of it?

Shawn: Well, a lot of it is a mystery to me. I didn't understand why it was so interesting. One thing that is attractive about it is that the script is based on tape-

recorded conversations. We would just meet and talk — about anything in the world — for hours at a time. We finally had this big bunch of tapes and they were transcribed and then I wrote a script that was based on the tapes.

There's a point in the film where Andre and I have this confusion over the words faun and fawn. It's one of those wonderful things that happens in life but you don't ever see it in a play or a movie. And all the way through we are talking and making the sort of verbal mistakes and confusions that only come off the tape recorder.

The script has a kind of — well, sex appeal — for lack of a better word. There's something interesting about hearing these odd things. Of course you don't realize that as you're watching it. But I think part of the appeal of it is that an enormous amount of the dialogue is stuff that people really do say but never gets into a movie.

Q: Why did you choose to make your character in the film such a jerk? Why couldn't he have been more normal?

Shawn: Maybe we could have gotten away with doing it a little differently. But my feeling was that we had to exaggerate enormously the contrast between us to make a conflict that would dramatically interesting. I think it might have just been too flat — because Andre and I are really very much alike.

I had no high hopes at all for this project. In fact, for months I thought it would not come to anything because it was so boring. I really didn't see anything in it. Here are these two people who basically understand each other's point of view — we would never show irritation. There was no indication that we had different points of view. He had done certain things I hadn't done. And then I had this idea: I'm going to say that we haven't met each other for years, that I'm afraid that he's nuts. I'll use the story about his crying on the street and put it at the very beginning, and I will just play the skeptic to the hilt — the man representing the bourgeois view of life.

True love

By Billy Shaffer

From the first moment I saw her across the bar, I was in love. Her hair . . . a shade like none other I'd ever seen — a shade between purple iris in winter and faded carpet stains. Her form . . . unmistakable in its extremes, undeniable in its origins. She was at least 6-2, although only 113 pounds, with the preponderance of that weight in her copious breasts,

puzzle, this human package of contradictions, this anomaly of genetic explanation, tormented me as no other question ever had. I was in love. For no damn good reason, I was in love. Love at first sight yet.

I approached, apprehensive at the thought of what I hoped would be the first of our many deep conversations. She immediately put me at ease.

"S'cuse, me ma'am, but may I ask your name?" I asked.

"Huh?" she quickly replied.



Her face . . . round, yet puckish; sweetly simple yet aged with character in the cute little acne scars around the problem areas of her "combination skin." Her ears were not particularly out of the ordinary, outside from the fact that she had them pierced on the top rather than the lobe, and in their size (5+, lending themselves to her cute little habit of cocking her head at the slightest sound, much like a parrot or a good hunting dog. The secret of this

I melted. A beautiful goddess with a Chinese name, to boot!

"Well, Huh, I was admiring your remarkable personality from across the bar and I was wondering if you perhaps would like to engage in a meaningful conversation and then maybe go to my place and play 'Hide-The-Salami?'" I inquired, my confidence definitely gaining.

"Sure," she said.

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Nielsen falls in Donahue's trap

By Pat Clark

Last week: Spinoff, the plucky revolutionary with the heart of gold, informed the hospitalized Robert Nielsen that Antenna, leader of the Video Nostra, had planned to kill him. Nielsen, a victim of drugged food, was recovering well, despite the haphazard ministrations of Dr. Donahue and the staff at Saint Dinista Hospital and Video Game Arcade.

An orderly in a hospital-white labcoat with a carefully embroidered CBS logo on the left breast carried Nielsen's tray into the room for his evening meal. "Well, here it is, Mr., uh, Smith," the orderly said in the too-loud voice of a man trying to be overheard. He winked at Nielsen. "Tonight's dee-licious dinner of strawberry Jell-O and fresh garden vegetables is the perfect meal for a man with a stomach on the mend."

Nielsen winced at the thought of consuming food items known to contain nutrition. The orderly winked again. Guy's got a nervous disorder, Nielsen thought. The orderly set the covered dinner on the tray in front of Nielsen, lifted the lid and revealed a still-sizzling Swanson's Hungry Man Salisbury Steak TV dinner.

"Don't worry Nielsen," said the orderly, in a much quieter voice than that in which he had spoken before. "I'm here to take care of you."

Nielsen nearly buried his face in the highbrow hamburger wallowing in the greasy aluminum pond before him. He

looked at the orderly, who winked yet again. After another minute, Nielsen thought he recognized the face.

"Brewster?" said Nielsen between bites of his dinner.

"Shhh!" shhed the orderly with an exaggerated wag of his finger. "The name's Sanders. Carl Sanders — right, Smith?"

"Oooh, sure," said Nielsen, pleased with himself for being in on this elementary bit of subterfuge. He hadn't felt so clever since he solved the murder on an "Ellery Queen" show several years ago.

"OK then, let's get down to business," Brewster-Sanders said. "I realize how much you would like to go home, but we can't take you back there just yet. Whoever kidnapped you in the first place is probably still looking for you, and they may well return to your home in hopes of finding you there."

Nielsen wondered just how much Brewster knew about the kidnapping and the events that had come to follow it. He especially wondered if Brewster knew about Spinoff.

As if on cue, Spinoff wandered into the room. "I was just talking to the admitting nurse," she said, a look of concern on her face. "She said some flak from CBS was here to get you . . . tooo . . . hoo boy." Her voice lost steam as she noticed the Swiss-embroidered CBS logo patch on the orderly's coat. "Excuse me, I think I have the wrong room," she said unconvincingly.

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