

FIL 1001, SPRING 2003 TERM
Introduction to Understanding Film
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Silent Running
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The movie, *Silent Running*, opens with beautiful close-ups of wild life, and for a moment, the viewers could get the impression that they are in paradise, only to discover that they're on a space ship full of environmental domes that grow forests.

The first time the viewers get the sense that there might be trouble in paradise is when one of the crew members mentions that, "they plan to re-foliate the Earth," and someone else ironically comments, "Again?" It gradually becomes obvious to the viewers that, over the centuries, technological advances led to major changes in tastes, life styles and customs, and that people no longer appreciate real food, fresh air, and nature, instead eating synthetic food, breathing artificial air, and living in shielded and unnatural settings.

In this lost world, the main character, Lowell, seems to be the only one who realizes how precious life and nature are, and he hopes that one day, the people on Earth will re-learn how to appreciate them. His harsh words towards his colleagues, best explain his feelings and the situations:

You don't see the difference? The difference is that I grew it! That's what the difference is. And I picked it! And I fix it! And it has a taste, and it has some color. And it has a smell. And it comes back to a time when there were flowers all over the Earth. And there were valleys. And there were plains of tall green grass that you could lie down in, that

you could to sleep in. And there were blue skies, and there was fresh air, and there were things growing all over the place, not just in some domed enclosures blasted some millions of miles out in the space.

...[On Earth] there's no more of my friends, there's no more beauty, and there's no more of imagination. And you know why? There is only one reason why: the same attitude; no one cares! [A child] will never be able to see the simple wonder of a leaf in her hand, because there's not going to be any trees. You think about that! (Lowell, *Silent Running*)

The irrationality of the decision to destroy all forest domes becomes clear when the viewers are presented with camera shots of the innocent wild life living in the forests. It becomes obvious that the main theme of the movie is about the importance of ecological preservation and conservation efforts, as well as the ecological danger that our world could face, if we don't learn how to conserve what we have today. Lowell's efforts to prevent the destroying of the forests become the focus of the movie, and the viewers hope that he will succeed saving them. There's a humorous yet sad moment when the drones try to plant a tree. After they dig a hole, they put back the dirt, and then throw the little tree on the ground—"pitiful" says Lowell, considering that these are the same drones who know how to repair a ship or even perform surgery.

In the end, the only way that Lowell knows how to save the forest is to release the dome into the space, hoping that, just like a message in a bottle lost in the ocean, one day the forest will be found and saved. The ideas expressed in the movie are very important—man and nature depend

on each other, and technologies do more damage than good if left in the wrong hands—considering that today, conservation efforts that were started years ago have begun to show some results—for example, the replenishing of the ozone layers.

Although the ideas expressed in the movie are extreme, they point out that if we don't contribute to conservation efforts, and if we don't learn how to appreciate the beauty of nature, we too can fall onto the same wrong path of no return. It would be very lonely in an empty universe without the simple but irreplaceable magic of trees, the symbol of life.

Works Cited

Silent Running, dir. Douglas Trumbull. Michael Gruskoff Productions and Universal Pictures, 1972.