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Epiphanies in Jerzy Kosinski's "Being There"

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ANNOTATION

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse epiphanies in the novel *Being There* by Jerzy Kosinski and to describe this work in the literary and cultural context of the second half of the 20th century.

This work is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter covers the historical and cultural context of the post-war United States and defines the most significant events that took place at this time and impacted society. Second chapter focuses on Jerzy Kosinski's writing with the emphasis on postmodernism. The last chapter focuses on the novel *Being There*, examines the behaviour of the main protagonist and compares the differences between the written and film versions.

KEYWORDS

Jerzy Kosinski, epiphanies, post-war era, counterculture, postmodernism

NÁZEV

Epifanie v románu J. Kosińského “Byl jsem při tom”

ANOTACE

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat epifanii v románu Jerzy Kosinského “Byl jsem při tom” a popsat tuto práci v literárním a kulturním kontextu druhé poloviny 20. století. Tato práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních kapitol. První kapitola pojednává o historickém a kulturním kontextu poválečných Spojených států a definuje nejvýznamnější události, které se v této době odehrály a ovlivnily společnost. Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje na psaní Jerzyho Kosinského s důrazem na postmodernismus. Poslední kapitola se zaměřuje na román *Being There*, zkoumá chování hlavního protagonisty a porovnává rozdíly mezi psanou a filmovou verzí.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Jerzy Kosinski, epifanie, poválečná éra, kontrakultura, postmodernismus

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	8
1. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT	10
1.1. POST-WAR UNITED STATES.....	10
1.2. COUNTERCULTURE OF THE 1960s AND 1970s	13
1.3. THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE 1960s.....	17
1.4. OIL CRISIS.....	18
2. POSTMODERNISM IN JERZY KOSINSKI'S WORK	19
2.1. LITERARY CONTEXT	20
2.2. PLAGIARISM OR POSTMODERNISM?	20
3. BEING THERE	21
3.1. INTERPRETATION OF CHANCE'S BEHAVIOUR	24
3.2. EIPHANIES IN THE NOVEL	29
3.3. FILM ADAPTATION	30
3.4. DIFFERENT DENOUEMENT IN THE FILM AND THE BOOK.....	32
CONCLUSION	34
RESUMÉ	36
4. BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

Introduction

Jerzy Kosinski is a Polish literary author publishing in the second half of the 20th century, best known for his works describing the situation in Europe during the Second World War. His Jewish origins, due to which he had to hide from the Nazis during World War II significantly influenced his writing. After emigrating to the United States in the 1950s, he first subsisted on odd jobs to make money for living in a new country, but later began lecturing at universities. His books quickly became hits in the United States and he enjoyed the popularity. He lived a relatively controversial life, during which he experienced moments of glory but also failure. He published during the second half of the 20th century, which was an era of great technological and social development. Kosinski criticized some of these new technologies and ideas and projected them into his works. This bachelor thesis focuses on defining the most important events that took place during this period in the United States and its impact on society. The theoretical part of this thesis describes the development of the United States from the end of World War II to the end of the 20th century. The first chapter discusses the economic situation of the United States after the end of the fighting in Europe and the Pacific, the subsequent help to countries affected by this conflict and the state of the economy in the first years since the end of the war. This chapter further describes the situation that led to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and how society changed during this era. Attention is also paid to the issue of racial inequality, which began to escalate in the United States in the mid-20th century. It presents the major legislative changes and the most fundamental events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement. The theoretical part of this work further describes the entry of the United States into the Vietnam War and the wave of anti-war movements that were established as a result of this situation. The influence of the media on this conflict is also briefly described in this chapter. It also briefly describes the changes in literature and art that have taken place at this time, as well as new movements fighting for gay equality and multicultural rights. The following chapter deals with the most significant countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s, which fundamentally influenced the development of society in the United States. In connection with the war in Vietnam, the Hippie movement and its anti-war attitudes are briefly characterized. The Women's Right Movement is also described, which marked great progress in the perception of women as equal to men, especially in the 1960s, after

the movement was supported by the President. In this chapter, attention is also paid to the Free Speech Movement, which was a student movement supporting the equalization of the African American population and a change in the functioning of education system and students' perceptions. The following chapter describes a central topic for this thesis, and that is the role of the media in the United States in the 1960s. It describes the rise of this phenomenon and its impact on society as well as the the possible threat of this technological invention. It briefly describes the oil crisis that weakened the United States economy in the 1970s and led to negotiations on the production of this liquid and its importance to the developing world. In the next chapter, this thesis deals with postmodernism in the work of Jerzy Kosinski, defines the basic elements of this movement and their influence on Kosinski's writing. Following chapter is devoted to the issue of plagiarism in the work of Jerzy Kosinski, which marked a turning point in the perception of his work. The similarities between his work and the work of foreign authors that led to his accusation are described in more detail. The analytic part of this bachelor thesis deals with the novel *Being There*. Based on the historical context discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, the book is set in the broader context of the United States in the 1970s. As the title of this bachelor thesis suggests, this analysis deals with epiphanies. The main character of this novel, Chance Gardener, is described in the following chapter. The chapter analysing the character of Chance in terms of his behaviour and character is based on critical receptions of authors such as Mary Lazar or Gareth Griffiths. The chapter on the epiphany defines the turning points that the main protagonist experiences throughout the story and also contains a subjective opinion on the perception of the epiphany in this novel. The final chapter deals with a film adaptation filmed by Hal Ashby in the late 1970s. This film adaptation is probably the main reason why Jerzy's novel *Being There* is still famous today. The film and book versions are compared with the emphasis on the main differences that distinguish the two works. The aim of this thesis is to provide a historical and cultural context of the decade in which the work was published and at the same time to describe and demonstrate the essential elements emerging in the work *Being There*. This bachelor thesis also aims to approach the term epiphany and list the key moments in which this element occurs in the story.

1. Historical and Cultural context

To fully understand a literary work written at a particular time, it is necessary to define the most important events that affected society. In Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, there are several allusions to events that took place in the United States of America in the second half of the 20th century. This chapter discusses the important changes that the United States was going through at this time. It describes the economic situation after the end of World War II and also the tense relations between the United States and the Soviet Union after the end of this war. To understand Jerzy's work, it is important to discuss the issues related to racial inequality, subcultures, the influence of the media on society, and also the economic crisis that occurred in the United States in the last decades of the 20th century.

1.1. Post-war United States

After the end of World War II, which ended victoriously for the Allies led by the United States, it was necessary to begin to solve problems that arose outside the battlefield. The war ruined millions of lives, but it also affected the economic situation, especially in Europe. The total war meant the suspension of all industry and the concentration of production only on products intended for the military. This situation therefore had to be rectified after the end of the fighting in Europe and the Pacific. The United States, as the winner of the war, found itself in a situation where the government was to restore the economy not only in the United States, but also in countries where Allied troops were fighting. Unlike European industrial cities demolished or completely razed to the ground by German and Allied air raids, the United States had a major advantage as its territory was never directly affected by the war. In other words, except for the attack on Pearl Harbour, there was no direct fighting. The resumption of operations of the factories therefore entailed only the readjustment of production plans. However, the desperate economic situation in Europe and Japan had to be resolved, and so General G. C. Marshall came up with a program called the European Recovery Program. With this program, the United States has promised to help rebuild the economy in war-torn states. The government provided an incredible amount of money for this program, which, however, guaranteed the United States the future affection of those states. Western Europe immediately accepted the program, while Stalin-controlled Eastern Europe refused it.

Another problem that needed to be solved for the proper functioning of the economy was the return of war veterans from European and Japanese battlefields. Due to the huge number of men who had to enlist into the army, the country was facing labour shortages. It was therefore necessary to ensure that these soldiers were taken care of so that they could start working as soon as possible. Also, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill, was established to educate and care for war veterans, who were offered various benefits in the education sector. Many veterans not only from World War II, but later also from the Vietnam and Korean War, took advantage of this program and decided to study at a college or other education program.¹

Although the Soviet Union was an ally of the United States during the war, the end of the war also meant the end of this agreement. As described in *Writing the Nation*, both of these victorious powers longed for the position of global leader. The communist regime united the states of Eastern Europe into so-called states of the Eastern bloc, which were under the rule of the Soviet Union. Communist ideology forbade private ownership, and so all trade, services and business were owned by the state. While the civilian population was still recovering from the horrors of war, the leadership of both powers realized the need for the constant development of the war industry. The Cold War era began, during which the United States and the Soviet Union sought to advance in the development of new weapons and technologies, especially a whole new threat to the world – the atomic bomb. Although this type of explosive was used by the United States as early as 1945, when two bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima to end the World War II in the Pacific, the best scientists in both countries sought to improve technology and accumulate as much nuclear energy as possible. During this period, a huge number of secret agents were also sent from both countries to monitor technological developments in the enemy country. Fortunately, the Cold War did not escalate into open conflict, and none of these weapons were used with intent to attack, as such a situation would have a far-reaching consequence for the entire planet.²

However, the United States was not only facing the threat of a nuclear attack, the issue of racial inequality has also begun to graduate. This situation led to the Civil Rights Movement, a movement particularly active in the 1950s and 1960s, which fought for

¹ J. Peter Matilla, "G.I. BILL BENEFITS AND ENROLLMENTS: HOW DID VIETNAM VETERANS FARE?" *Social Science Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (December 1978): 536–538.

² Amy Berke, Robert R. Bleil, Jordan Cofer, and Doug Davies, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present* (Dahlongega: University of North Georgia Press, 2015), 720.

equality between blacks and whites and whose main goal was to end the Jim Crow law, which promoted racial segregation. The main supporter and leader of this movement was Baptist Minister Martin Luther King, Jr. As described in the work of Jacob U. Gordon, one of the major events that started this movement was the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This affair, which lasted from 1955 to 1956 and was initiated by Rosa Parks when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on the bus, led to the Federal Court banning racial segregation on public transportation in 1957. One of the most famous events of this movement was March on Washington. During this protest, King delivered his legendary “I have a dream” speech, in which he spoke of the desire for racial equality. Following the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson became President, signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned racial segregation in public accommodation and discrimination in employment, and subsequently, in 1965, a law that prohibited racial discrimination in voting. After the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King Jr. three years later, the movement lost two of its main leaders. These events led to the riots that resulted in the Fair Housing Act, the last law passed during the civil rights era, which guaranteed an end to housing segregation regardless of race, gender, religion or national origin.³

At that time, the Vietnam War, which had been joined by the United States in 1964, had been raging in Vietnam for 10 years. The United States wanted to prevent the spread of communism in pro-American South Vietnam, which was fighting against Northern, communist Vietnam, supported by the Eastern Bloc states. This war was highly condemned by the American public, who was still recovering from World War II. The participation of United States troops in the fighting in Vietnam provoked a wave of protests and anti-war movements. The wave of resistance to the war intensified even more under the influence of the media, especially television. Footage of the bloody fighting in Vietnam was broadcasted daily on television screens, allowing the civilians to witness the horrors of the war. The American public’s opposition to the war grew even more after information emerged about crimes committed by the US military against the Vietnamese civilian population. My Lai Massacre is considered to be the biggest crime during which American soldiers raped, tortured and murdered more than 500 unarmed children, women

³ Jacob U. Gordon, “Black Males in the Civil Rights Movement” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 569 (May 2000): 43–55.

and old men living in the village of My Lai.⁴ The United States finally withdrew its army from Vietnam in 1973. President Johnson was heavily criticized for participating in this conflict, lost the confidence of the public and did not run for a second term. The end of this conflict led to a situation similar to 1945, when it was necessary to take care of exhausted, wounded and terrified soldiers returning from the war.

Culture began to develop. Literature of this period expressed disagreement with the development of American society. The literary works criticized mainly racial inequality, but also the war conflicts in which the United States participated. As stated in *Writing the Nation*, the Beat movement can be considered the most significant symbol of American post-war culture. The authors of this movement began to use new, modern elements and techniques in their writing in order to change the traditional literary format and to get closer to modern styles from the fields of music, fine arts and everyday life. In their works, these authors put emphasis on uniqueness, individuality and description of real life in the post-war United States. The term postmodernism began to appear in the literature, extending the experimental techniques developed by modernists in the first half of the 20th century. Feminist movements demanding economic and social equality with men were supported by literary authors and became one of the main symbols of American society in the 1960s and 1970s. Movements for multicultural and gay rights also began to emerge in the last decades of the 20th century.⁵

The post-war period marked an economic, technological and cultural boom for the United States. For society, this period meant important changes in racial, gender and cultural stereotypes. New literary and artistic trends and ideas were discovered during this era.

1.2. Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s

As already mentioned, the second half of the 20th century marked a period of cultural and social changes. These changes were most perceived by the young generation, who rejected the set norms and standards occurring in society. The result was the introduction and adoption of new trends and movements. The young generation differed from their parents in their views on society, which led to the creation of movements that brought together people with the same ideas. These groups subsequently became active in politics

⁴ Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (June 2007): 154–162.

⁵ Berke et al., *Writing the Nation*, 719–722

and organized various forms of protests during which clashes with the police often occurred. This chapter describes the most prominent countercultures of this period.

The Hippie movement

The Hippie is one of the most significant movements of the second half of the 20th century. One of the main ideas promoted by Hippies was the opposition to the United States' participation in the Vietnam War, which, due to its mediatization, provoked a negative attitude on American society towards the conflict and government. One of the hippies' most famous slogans was "Make love, not war." Members of this movement promoted a peaceful lifestyle, for which they were sometimes nicknamed "flower kids." This movement had a transnational impact, with young people from around the world professing Hippies and spreading the idea. They were characterized by a specific style of fashion, popular were colourful clothes, for women especially dresses and for men tie-dyed shirts, jeans and sandals. These clothes often came from second-hand stores, as Hippies also cared about the environment. Men often grew long hair and beards, accessories such as beads and glasses were also popular. Many Hippies have also switched to a vegetarian diet. They lived together in rural communities, where they practised open sexual relationships and experimented with drugs, especially marijuana and LSD. As Micah L. Issitt states in his book *Hippies: a guide to an American subculture*, in 1966 a political/social outreach group called The Diggers was formed, which called for a revolution and wanted to create a society where food and other products would be provided free of charge. Two years later, the Yippies movement, an offshoot of the Hippies that was influenced by the new left and became involved in politics, emerged. However, none of these offshoots succeeded, as members of the Hippies focused their attention on drugs and experimentation with their bodies and minds rather than the idea of a social revolution. Probably the most famous event of the Hippies era, which brought together many members of this anti-war movement, was the Woodstock music festival in 1969. This movement and its strong anti-war stance contributed to the United States withdrawing its troops from Vietnam. After this event, the largest wave of the movement

declined, although a significant number of members continued to live in Hippie communities.⁶

Women's rights movement

The aim of the women's rights movement was to equalize women and men. It demanded a change in the stereotype placing a woman only in the role of housekeeper, mother and wife. As described in *Political Women: The Women's Movement, Political Institutions, the Battle for Women's Suffrage and the ERA* by Alana Jeydel, the movement called for equal job offers and pay regardless of gender, equal conditions in education, the possibility for women to enter politics or the right to abortion. The period from 1960 to 1985 marked the third wave of women's rights movement. The first wave took place in the years 1848 to 1889 and the second in the period from 1890 to 1928. An important figure of the third wave was the newly elected President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, who recognized the important role of women and in 1961 founded the President's Commission on the Status of Women, which supported women who then began to gather and discuss issues related to gender inequality. This commission is considered the starting point of the third wave of the women's rights movement. On the basis of this commission, mini-commissions were created in all 50 American states. These mini-commissions focused on analysis of individual laws relating to gender discrimination and then presented the results of these analyses to the governments. Thanks to this system, the process of amending these laws has been greatly facilitated. Although the movement failed to obtain a sufficient number of states to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, they succeeded in enforcing a number of legislative changes concerning gender and gaining the support of Congress.⁷

Free Speech Movement

The Free Speech Movement was inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, which demanded equality between white Americans and African Americans. This movement

⁶ Micah L. Issitt, *Hippies: a guide to an American subculture* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), 1–12.

⁷ Alana Jeydel, *Political Women: The Women's Movement, Political Institutions, the Battle for Women's Suffrage and the ERA* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 1–3, 143, 153, 182–183.

demanding freedom of speech originated on the university campus and gained thousands of supporters. In his work *Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left*, Bret Eynon describes the origins of this movement. It was based on an event that took place in 1964 at the University of California, during which Jack Weinberg, a university student who was distributing information about the Congress of Racial Equality to other students, was arrested. At that time, it was prohibited to hold events related to student political groups on the campus. When the police wanted to leave with the arrested student, several hundred students staged a spontaneous protest against the arrest as they sat around the police car so that the police could not leave. This event, which lasted thirty hours, sparked great media interest and launched a campaign focusing on the role of universities and students in American society. The initial purpose of the movement, which aimed to help black people, thus extended to include issues related to universities' attitudes towards students. During this four-month campaign, many negotiations took place and students organized rallies to inform about the development of the situation and planned future steps, gaining more and more members to the movement. The movement received the most attention on December 2, when six thousand students came to a rally at Sproul Plaza. After the program at Plaza ended, over a thousand people decided to take over Sproul Hall. After several hours, during which the students held information meetings, studied and watched films, the police were sent to the building. Although the people in the building were non-violent, the police intervened harshly and arrested many people. This event had a major impact on the movement, as it met with support after the information about the arrests appeared in the media. In protest against the presence of armed forces on the university campus, the students declared a strike, which resulted in personnel changes in the university's management. The newly elected management negotiated with the students and subsequently complied with their requests. This event marked the victorious end of this movement. The success of the Free Speech Movement not only meant student victory, but also became a great inspiration for future movements in the United States and around the world.⁸

⁸ Bret Eynon, "Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left," *The Oral History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 39–41, 54, 56, 64–69.

1.3. The role of media in the 1960s

As already mentioned, the post-war United States experienced growth and progress in all sectors, and the media was no exception. Printed newspapers were beginning to be neglected and newer forms of obtaining information, especially radio and television, were gaining prominence. Radio, invented as early as 1896, was very popular and used by majority of the American population since the early 20th century. Its popularity grew during the Second World War, when radio was used to inform about the situation in Europe and the Pacific, for propaganda and to maintain the good morale of the population. However, one of the greatest technological invention of the 20th century was television. Although inventors and scientists had been working on the possibility of transmitting radio waves to moving images since the late 19th century, the first demonstration of television broadcasting did not take place in the United States until 1927. During the World War II, the development of this device was slowed down as factories focused on the production of material for the military. Television began to be re-produced in the 1950s, and by the 1960s the majority of the population could purchase this device. It has become an essential device in the living room of every American family. Television was used mainly for entertainment and as a source of information from around the world. In 1965, television began to provide a direct portrayal of the heavy fighting in Vietnam. Broadcasting from the war zone became so frequent and realistic that Marshall McLuhan stated “Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America—not the battlefields of Vietnam.”⁹ Many people were shocked by the footage, since it was the first time they had seen the reality of the war. The Vietnam War was the first fully mediatized war conflict of the 20th century. Over time, however, television ceased to be regarded a useful device by some people and began to be considered a threat to society as people became addicted to watching the screen. As written in *Writing the Nation*:

The media of the book, radio, and film have been joined by the new media of the television and computer screen, giving Americans since 1945 an overwhelming variety of often contradictory ways to know themselves, their

⁹ Marshall McLuhan, “Vietnam War,” in *Oxford Essential Quotations*, ed. Susan Ratcliffe (Oxford University Press, 2016)

fellow citizens, and their world. With so many media in which to see, know, and communicate with one another, Americans in the final decades of the twentieth century developed a growing sense of the “textuality” of experience, the recognition that their lives are increasingly lived through signs and images seen on life’s many screens, that videos and computer simulations have become an indispensable part of, and perhaps have even taken the place of, their reality.¹⁰

The reality of American society addicted on television became a subject of many criticisms. Television was still evolving at an incredible pace. Constant technological improvements and the growing range of broadcasted programs have created television in the form in which it is known today.

1.4. Oil crisis

The growing economy in the United States meant more factories where oil was processed and needed for operation. Vehicle production was booming, almost every American family owned at least one car. New forms of transport became popular, especially airplane travel. The roads were crowded with cars and motorcycles, and hundreds of planes took off from airports every day. An incredible amount of fuel was needed to keep all these engines running. Modern American society, which accounted for a significant portion of the world’s oil consumption, would no longer be able to function without this liquid, so there was an increasing emphasis on oil extraction. The situation changed dramatically in the 1970s. There has been a huge rise in the price of oil, which has resulted in a crisis. However, this price increase was preceded by several events. As described in *Reasons of State: Oil Politics and the Capacities of American Government*, October 1973 was the month in which the oil crisis began in the United States. It was a result of an embargo on oil shipments imposed on the United States and a few other countries by Arab members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The reason for imposing an embargo on these countries was their support for Israel, which was at war with Egypt and Syria at the time. Although the shortage of oil was not so overwhelming, its price has nearly quadrupled in the United States.¹¹ The situation in the United States in the first days of the crisis is described by Jack Davies in his work *OIL SHOCKED: A MICROHISTORY OF THE FIRST DAYS OF THE ENERGY CRISIS, OCTOBER 16-27*,

¹⁰ Berke et al., *Writing the Nation*, 722.

¹¹ G. John Ikenberry, “The Oil Shocks and State Responses,” in *Reasons of State: Oil Politics and the Capacities of American Government* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 3.

1973, although the media reported on the crisis, they did not attach much importance to it at first, as the United States did not want to show any form of dependence on Arab countries. It was not until the following days that the embargo began to be discussed in the press as a possible threat for the United States economy. Although the American population was not prepared for such a crisis, it overcame the situation and this experience helped the United States to be better prepared for future years, during which similar crises occurred several times.¹²

2. Postmodernism in Jerzy Kosinski's work

Jerzy Kosinski is one of the most prominent authors of the 20th century. After emigrating from Poland to the United States in 1957, he began publishing his first literary works. First, under the pseudonym Joseph Novak, he published the anti-communist works *The Future Is Ours*, *Comrade: Conversations with the Russians* and *No Third Path*, which was warmly received by American propaganda due to the raging Cold War. After becoming known to the public, Kosinski published novel *The Painted Bird*, which describes the life of gypsy boy wanderings through the villages of Central and Eastern Europe during the Second World War. The raw and realistic depiction of the sexual and physical violence experienced by the main character of the novel shocked the public and even more increased Kosinski's popularity. This novel became Jerzy's most successful work and won recognition from many authors and among the public. After this work, he published several other books, the most famous of which are *Steps*, *Being There*, *The Devil Tree*, *Cockpit*, *Blind Date*, *Passion Play* and *Pinball*. All his works contain several similar elements. The main one is the depiction of the main character of his books, where he portrays this character in the role of an individual who stands out from the line, who cannot and does not want to be accepted into society. The character does not want to give up his individuality and often fights against collectivism. Another element that appears in his works is the theme of sexuality and sexual violence, which seems to reflect Jerzy's personal interest in this theme. Kosinski's writing style defines several key elements, especially experimenting with language, or time inconsistency, meaning that the plot does not have a single timeline, but intersects multiple timelines. In his works, he also deals with the question of truth and reality and different perspectives of how to perceive it. His

¹² Jack Davies, "OIL SHOCKED: A MICROHISTORY OF THE FIRST DAYS OF THE ENERGY CRISIS, OCTOBER 16–27, 1973," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 1 (July 2014), 57–68.

work contains an autobiographical element, which were later questioned by critics, as will be explained later in this chapter. All these elements define Jerzy Kosinski as a postmodern writer.

2.1. Literary context

Postmodernism is a movement that followed modernism. Although these movements contradict each other in certain elements, they are still similar in few of them. Postmodernism takes over these elements and at the same time creates new elements and methods. Postmodernism appeared not only in literature, but also in music or fine arts. Among the most famous postmodern authors are E. L. Doctorow, Vladimir Nabokov or David Foster Wallace. It is stated in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*, that postmodernism evolved from the 1960s, in a decade which marked great progress in society. In the literature, this period was characterized by experimentation with language, creative thinking, a new approach to life and irrationality. In their works, literary authors criticized the situation in society, becoming a kind of revolutionaries who expressed their dissatisfaction with the help of books. Postmodernism became even more widespread over the years, and the prefix post- began to be associated with many other social environments, for which the second half of the 20th century signified new possibilities and ideas. The term postmodernism remained popular until the end of the century, but its greatest expansion, gained especially in the 1980s, ended after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as this situation marked the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the associated beginning of a new social, cultural, political and economic era.¹³

2.2. Plagiarism or Postmodernism?

As already mentioned, Jerzy Kosinski became very popular in the United States after the publication of his first works. Many people, even from the upper echelons of society, to whom Kosinski got thanks to his wealthy wife, enjoyed listening to his engaging and thrilling experiences of the war in Europe. The greatest reaction was aroused by the 1965 novel *Painted Bird*, which many readers considered autobiographical because it resembled Jerzy's narrative of war experiences, and the protagonist of the novel was

¹³ Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction* (Amsterdam – New York, 2005), 13–37.

about the same age as Kosinski himself during the Second World War. Although Kosinski and his family were hiding during the war because of their Jewish origins, there is no evidence of Jerzy leaving his parents during this period. When asked whether it was an autobiography or not, Jerzy Kosinski never directly answered. It was not until 1976 that he added a statement to the new edition of the novel, denying that the work was autobiographical. His books became popular in the United States, and Kosinski was considered one of the most significant postmodern authors. After some time, however, the opinions of literary critics who questioned the authorship of Kosinski's books began to be voiced. The first novel that critics became interested in was *Painted Bird*. According to them, it was not possible for Kosinski to learn English at the level at which the work was written in the short time since his emigration to the United States. It later emerged that Kosinski was secretly hiring translators. Another accusation of plagiarism occurred after the publication of the novel *Being There*, as its plot is very similar to the *Career of Nicodemus Dyzma* by Polish writer Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz. In response to these allegations, Kosinski wrote *The Hermit of 69th Street*, in which he ironically quotes almost every piece of information and which contains an incredible number of footnotes. However, the growing criticism of his works had a significant psychological impact on Kosinski and was probably one of the factors that contributed to his suicide in 1991.

3. Being There

Being There is the sixth book published by Jerzy Kosinski's and also one of his most popular work. This novel was firstly published in the year of 1971. A film of the same name, based on the book and directed by Hal Ashby, was published eight years later. This one hundred- and eleven-pages long novel starts with the inscription "For KATHERINA v.F. who taught me that love is more than the longing to be together."¹⁴

The story of this novel takes place in the United States of America during the second half of the twentieth century. This period is associated with a significant technological boom, including the invention of television. It is television and the new perception of reality associated with it that plays an important role in the whole story. This new technical invention completely fascinates the main character of the novel, a gardener named Chance. As written in the novel "The set created its own light, its own colour, its own

¹⁴ Jerzy Kosiński, *Being There* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1983), 5.

time. It did not follow the law of gravity that forever bent all plants downward.”¹⁵ Chance, who had spent his entire life in the Old Man’s house, and who had never known anything but the house and garden, had no experience of living outside this safe area. This is probably why he is so fascinated by television; it is his only contact with the surrounding world. The reason Chance had spent his entire life in the Old Man’s house is because he is an orphan, and the Old Man decided to take care of him. As for the name, “His name was Chance because he had been born by chance.”¹⁶ Although Chance was by no means smart, he was a good worker. “Chance would do exactly what he was told or else he would be sent to a special home for the insane where, the Old Man said, he would be locked in a cell and forgotten.”¹⁷

The story begins on the day the Old Man dies. When a simple-minded Chance finds out that the homeowner has died, he shows no emotion and spends the rest of the day watching television. The very next day, the gardener’s life changes completely. After lawyers ask him to leave the house, Chance finds himself in a hitherto unknown world. Just minutes after leaving the house, Chance, fascinated by what he sees, becomes a victim of a car accident, when a passing limousine presses him against another car. Not knowing what to do, the gardener is lying on the sidewalk when a woman gets out of the limousine and immediately tries to help him. This woman, Mrs. Eve Rand, or EE as being called by her friends, will play a very important role in Chance’s life. She offers him an examination from a doctor who works in EE’s house, where he takes care of her sick husband. She is also the one who, after Chance introduces himself as Chance the gardener, calls him Chauncey Gardiner. Chance has no objection to that name, as people also have two different names on the shows he enjoys watching on television. Shortly after arriving at the residence, Chance meets EE’s husband. Mr. Rand is a chairman of the board of the First American Financial Corporation. Although he is already old and sick, he is a very rich and influential man who is even a close friend of the President of the United States. Mr. Rand is reconciled to the fact that his life is coming to an end and sees Chance as his ideal successor. Not only in terms of the First American Financial Corporation, but also as a future partner for EE. Chance agrees to offer to stay in the residence until his injury heals. The next day, Chance is told that the President of the United States is coming to see Mr. Rand, and that Mr. Rand wants him to join the meeting.

¹⁵ Kosiński, *Being There*, 10.

¹⁶ Kosiński, *Being There*, 12.

¹⁷ Kosiński, *Being There*, 12.

After a long debate about the current poor economic situation in the United States, the President and Mr. Rand ask Chance for his opinion. Not knowing what to say, Chance starts talking about the only thing he knows. About the garden. His primitive description of the individual seasons fascinates the President, who considers these simple words to be very thoughtful and with a tremendous hidden meaning. Chance's opinion on inflation caught the president's attention so much that he referred to it during his speech at a meeting of the Financial Institute later that day. From that moment on, Chance came into the public interest, especially by journalists. Everyone wants to know as much as possible about the mysterious Chauncey Gardiner. Barely a few hours had passed since the president's speech and Chance is already so well known that he is invited to an evening television show called THIS EVENING. His appearance on television is a great success. Although Chance said nothing but a few sentences about how to care for the plants in the garden, the audience interpreted his words as a wise and thoughtful explanation of the current economic situation. After Chance returns from the TV studio, EE visits him in his room. She decides to tell Chance that she is in love with him and tries to seduce him. However, Chance is more interested in watching television than in establishing relationship with EE. The next day, Chance accompanies EE at the United Nations reception. During the reception, Chance not only stunned the Soviet Ambassador Skrapinov, but also surprised journalists by saying he only watches television and does not read newspaper. Of course, the journalists did not think of the possibility that Chance could not read, so they assessed his statement as bold and progressive. Given Chance's recent popularity, the President of the United States as well as the Soviet Ambassador needed as much information as possible about this man. However, none of them was satisfied with the results of the work of their secretaries. No information could be found about Chauncey Gardiner's entire life. Due to a lack of evidence, the Soviet Foreign Department thinks Chance is in fact one of the leading members of an organization that wants to carry out a coup in the United States. The investigation by the United States secretary considers Chauncey Gardiner to be an agent of a foreign power. The story ends at the Capitol Hill Ball, where a group of brokers discusses a potential candidate. The group begins to seriously consider Chauncey Gardiner as a possible candidate on the board of the First American Financial Corporation. Meanwhile, Chance leaves the hall and finds himself in the garden. He is finally back in a place he knows the best. Chance is filled with peace.

3.1. Interpretation of Chance's behaviour

As already mentioned, *Being There* is one of the Kosinski's most popular book. No wonder, then, that this novel has been the subject of many reviews, analyses, critiques and interpretations of the plot and characters. The uniqueness of this work lies mainly in a kind of freedom with which the reader can interpret the story. While one reader may consider the main message of the whole novel to be the inability of the public to distinguish a simple-minded man from a diplomat, another reader may see the message in Chance's character as a definition of what kind of people appear in politics and state leadership. I decided to compare my understanding of the novel with three receptions which describe various aspects that appear in the story.

The main character of the novel *Being There*, Chance Gardener, raises many questions regarding his behaviour. From the very first line of this novel, the reader is forced to examine Chance's character, look for certain order in his thinking, and try to predict his future actions. However, Chance significantly complicates this analysis for the reader, especially by the irrationality of his actions and decisions. The first factor that is difficult to characterize is his interpersonal relationships. Although it is written in the book that Chance is an orphan and grew up in the Old Man's house, not much attention is paid to his feelings. When Chance talks about his relationships with other people, he seldom expresses feelings. Chance's overall approach to society seems vague, with him being most satisfied when wandering alone in the garden. Due to his life so far spent only in the house and garden, he has no experience and connections with the outside world. There are no records of Chance's entire life and he practically does not exist for the authorities.

The issue of society perception is described in *Jerzy Kosinski's "Being There: Coriolanus" in Postmodern Dress* by Herbert B. Rotschild and Jerzy Kosinski. In this work, the authors clarify a certain similarity between the character of Chance from the novel *Being There* and the character of Caius Martius Coriolanus from Shakespeare's tragedy *Coriolanus*. The fact that Jerzy Kosinski even directly quotes a part of this particular Shakespeare's play in the novel proves that the similarity between these characters is not accidental. As described by Rotschild et al., the main similarity of these works lies in politics. In Shakespeare's play, Coriolanus tries to fight the politics of the time. However, *Being There* shows that current politics does not differ much from the early republican Rome politics. The authors also find the main contrast between the

character of Chance and Coriolanus in their approach to society. While for Coriolanus the opinion of others is important and influences his opinion of what he is for himself, for the simple-minded Chance only his own opinion is important, and he is not interested in the other people opinions. The authors of this publication also contrast the importance of social status. For Coriolanus, the reputation of his family and his own deeds were very important as they shaped society's view of himself. On the other hand, in contemporary politics, where an individual's past and privacy are many times more of a nuisance, a person without a background is considered an ideal candidate. Such a person is not influenced by anyone who would try to abuse his past. Rothschild describes Chance, who has spent his entire life in isolation from the outside world, has no single hospital record, insurance, bank account or driver's licence, and whose accent cannot be attributed to any community across the United States, as an example of a perfect candidate for current politics.¹⁸ Outside the political environment, however, the lack of evidence of his past is rather difficult for Chance. A perfect example is a situation in the Old Man's house, where a lawyer asks Chance for any evidence or document confirming his existence. Chance's answer is quite logical. "But you have me, I am here. What more proof do you need?"¹⁹ This conversation between Chance and the lawyer depicts the absurdity of today's society, when documents are needed to prove individual's existence. On the question of Chance's future fate after the end of the story, Rothschild and Kosinski explain his role absolutely aptly.

That character never existed as a person, but rather as an image and, unrelayedly, a being. The image belonged to the public eye; the being belongs to itself. Images come and go, and beings exist as themselves anywhere. Only persons have a future, because only persons have a past, and they have a past because their existence and their reality are relational.²⁰

The plot of the *Being There* is greatly influenced by the postmodernism. The novel *Being There* was written in the postmodern era and the plot together with the characters completely prove it. A certain illogic in the behaviour of the main protagonist, his depicting in a society in which he does not fit in, an emphatic depiction of violence,

¹⁸ Herbert B. Rothschild, Jr., Jerzy Kosinski, "Jerzy Kosinski's 'Being There: Coriolanus' in Postmodern Dress," *University of Wisconsin Press* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 50–63.

¹⁹ Kosinski, *Being There*, 23

²⁰ Rothschild, "Jerzy," 63.

sexuality and sexual desires, and the theme of politics in which unprecedented changes take place, are obvious characteristics of this literary movement. The title *Being There* itself probably has a connection with these elements. It could be interpreted as the presence of the main protagonist in a certain place, in this case in politics, but whether this presence is only physical or also mental depends on the individual understanding of the novel by each reader. The postmodern aspects in this novel and their comparison with a work written in a different literary style is examined in the *Being there, being There: Postmodernism and Post-Colonialism: Kosinski and Malouf* by Garetti Griffiths. In this publication, the author compares two literary works. The first, the book *An Imaginary Life*, written by Malouf and depicting the end of life of the poet Ovid, who was relegated to exile, is chosen as an example of post-colonialism.²¹ Among the main features that characterize post-colonialism and appear in the book, Griffiths cites “linguistic displacement, physical exile, cross-culturality and authenticity or inauthenticity of experience.”²² The second book, *Being There* by Jerzy Kosinski, Griffiths presents as an example of postmodernism. As the elements characterizing postmodernism, Griffiths considers “the fragmented structure, the disconnected and episodic narrative, the absence of closure, and the displacement of concern from the author to the reader.”²³ Jerzy Kosinski often uses these elements in his works. Kosinski’s view of the situations in which he puts the main characters of his books is best explained by Norman Lavers. He argues that Kosinski’s view is that it is necessary to accept situations in which violence, murder or other dramatic features occur as a natural part of life. This is the only way one will not be surprised when such a situation happens. In his books, he considers murder, violence and pain to be common and natural parts of human life. He considers it important in the life of an individual to be aware of this fact and to reduce the level of sensitivity.²⁴ Griffiths argues that the similarity between the two works is also at the level of some kind of terrorism, which appears in the story and manifests itself by rejecting logic and order and trying to disrupt the sequence and consistency of the text. However, Griffiths finds the main similarity in the final images of both stories. According to him, both of these texts balance on the thin line between what is real and what is imaginary. While Malouf’s text emphasizes material elements and the narrator tries to describe the environment in

²¹ Garetti Griffiths, “Being there, being There: Postmodernism and Post-Colonialism: Kosinski and Malouf,” *The Johns Hopkins University Press* 20 no. 4 (October 1989): 134.

²² Griffiths, “Being,” 134.

²³ Griffiths, “Being,” 135.

²⁴ Norman Lavers, *Jerzy Kosinski* (Boston: Twayne, 1982).

which the story takes place and how it is perceived, Kosinski focuses mainly on existential elements. In the *Being There* book, the narrator does not try to influence the reader's perception in any way and the emphasis is mainly on the very existence of the main character.²⁵

Another important aspect that influences the reader's relationship with Chance is the very credibility of the story. The more relevant the setting, time period and theme of the story is to real life, the more interesting it is for the reader. It forces the reader to think about possible connections with the actual situation in society, or whether the characters in the story are a parallel to real people. If the plot is similar to reality, it gives the reader the opportunity to better understand the story or even predict its development. The question of the reality or fiction of the novel is addressed in the *Jerzy Kosinski's Being There, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance*, written by Mary Lazar. In this work, we learn that the story of Chance Gardener is not completely fabricated, but based on a real basis.²⁶ Widow of Jerzy Kosinski, Mrs. Katherina von Fraunhofer Kosinski, told Lazar that the theme of the story is based on the situation when Jerzy and his first wife, Mary Weir, visited the house of an ageing businessman in New York. Mary was interested in having some of the businessman's furniture donated to the museum after his death. During this visit, Jerzy met a very well-dressed gardener, who was fascinated by television and claimed to live in the house. To Jerzy, this man seemed very calm, innocent and immaculate.²⁷ This encounter apparently inspired him to create the character named Chance, whom Jerzy describes as "not necessarily a childlike character but a character who would combine the qualities of an ideal child-absolutely sinless-without any desire to err, to sin or to step into any situation that in any feasible way could possibly change him"²⁸ At the same time, however, he wanted this character to evolve. According to Kosinski: "Chauncey Gardener as a child had to grow up. His innocence had to be broken. He had to encounter reality in the most unpleasant form for the reader, not for him. Sex is an instinct of life and in my novel it was detached, as Chauncey Gardener was detached from his situation."²⁹ The people Chance meets interpret his statements according to their

²⁵Griffiths, "Being," 139.

²⁶ Mary Lazar, "Jerzy Kosinski's Being There, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance" *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, 31, no.2 (Spring 2004): 100–101.

²⁷ Katherina von Fraunhofer Kosinski, in email to Mary Lazar (June 17, 1995)

²⁸ Katherina von Fraunhofer Kosinski, in email to Mary Lazar (July 18, 1995)

²⁹ Katherina von Fraunhofer Kosinski, in email to Mary Lazar (July 18, 1995)

own understanding. Chance does not confirm or question their interpretation, which evokes in these people the feeling that they are right.

One of the main factors shaping Chance's behaviour is his strong influence by the television. Chance takes every possible opportunity to watch the screen, which is one of the main factors in this novel. As comical or exaggerated as Chance may be with his addiction to television, it is in fact television that is the reason for most of the events that happen to Chance throughout the story. The reason for choosing this particular addiction is probably Kosinski's sceptical view on this new technology. Although he appeared on television from time to time, Jerzy considered television as a threat that caused people to lose interpersonal relationships and lose the ability to control their feelings, as they only resolved all emotions by switching channels on their television screens.³⁰ The United States experienced a huge expansion of this media in the 1960s and 1970s, which really led to Americans being addicted on watching the screen, as they spent several hours a day switching programs with remote controllers. This was probably also the reason why Jerzy Kosinski decided to point out this problem and prove that prioritizing television over interpersonal relationships and feelings can cause problems. One of the examples that can be found in the novel is Chance's inability to engage in any sexual activity, not understanding any attempt at seduction by EE or even his inability to resist or disinterest in very intimate situations, as demonstrated by Chance's experience with another man during a United Nations fête.

After the first reading of the novel *Being There*, the character of Chance Gardener seemed unclear. It was hard to characterize such a man and to decide whether Chance was just a simple-minded man who had no control over his fate or if there was any intention in his behaviour. It was crucial for me to study information about Jerzy Kosinski and also the period of the United States history in which the novel is set. The critical receptions mentioned above also helped me to begin to think about this book in a broader context and to look for connections with the events that shaped Kosinski's life. This interpretation seems to be most in line with the work of Garette Griffiths, mainly due to his accurate portrayal of the character of Chances and his behaviour and pointing out the changes in importance of the background of an individual throughout the centuries.

³⁰ Lazar, "Jerzy," 110.

3.2. Epiphanies in the novel

Although the novel *Being There* is relatively short, the story of the gardener who, in just three days, becomes one of the most famous people in the United States evokes emotions in the reader and the urge to think about how unexpected life can be. The main literary element that evokes these feelings in the reader is undoubtedly epiphany. The first person to use the term in a literary context was the Irish writer James Joyce in his work *Stephen Hero*, where he defined the epiphany as “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.”³¹ In other words, this term can be described as a moment of awareness, a sudden change of perspective, insight.

In the case of Chance Gardener, it is not easy to define this exact moment, given that during the three days we follow his life, he experienced several turning points. The first such moment occurs at the beginning of the book, when Chance discovers that the Old Man has died. For Chance, this means the biggest life change yet, when he is forced to leave the house in which he has spent his entire life. Another turning point happens the very next day, when Chance is hit by a car. For him, this event is a ruthless welcome to the real world outside the safe area of the house and garden. Such an event would send a clear signal to the vast majority of people to reconsider their approach to life. However, this accident does not upset or surprise Chance in the slightest. According to him, he even assumed this situation, as written at the book “I was just expecting something to happen when I had the accident.”³² Subsequent acquaintance with a woman who introduces herself as Mrs. Eve Rand, and whose chauffeur is responsible for the accident, arranges another life-changing situation for Chance in his hitherto monotonous life. By this event I mean Chance’s presence in the house of Mr. Rand, who is the chairman of the board of the First American Financial Corporation and who has connections with very influential people, even with the President of the United States himself. However, even such a strong experience in Chance’s life does not seem to mean any turning point or moment of awareness. He takes everything that happens to him as ordinary and natural. Despite his sudden popularity, public interest and encounters with influential people, these events do not seem to evoke any emotion in Chance. It is still mainly television that Gardener is most interested in and that he pays the most attention to. The situation where he himself

³¹ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (Ed. Theodore Spencer, New York: New Directions, 1963), 211.

³² Kosiński, *Being There*, 35.

appears on the television screen, on a device to which he dedicated his whole life and which was his only source of information and education, quite surprisingly still does not evoke a feeling of enlightenment in Chance's mind. He seems to take all these events associated with his sudden popularity only as a program on television, which he can switch if necessary. That is also why he does not object to the interpretation of his name as Chauncey Gardenier, as he considers this name to be his acting pseudonym. The moment, which from my point of view I perceive as a moment of enlightenment or epiphany occurs at the very end of the novel. It is the moment when Chance walks through the great hall, ignoring all the esteemed guests, longing for only one thing. He longs to open the door and find himself again in the place he knows best and where he feels safest – in the garden. This moment seems to me to be crucial for Chance's perception of the world. In the last three days, he had experienced things that many people could not even imagine. He met the most powerful people in the country, became an icon of a campaign promising an end to the economic crisis, was proposed as the successor to the Financial Corporation and yet only one thing was able to evoke feelings in him, and it is the garden. For Chance, the garden means an escape from the world into which he was thrown and which he does not understand. He found himself back in an environment he understood more than anyone else. Chance felt again the calm he was used to and so lacking. This final part strikes me as a true example of epiphany in the life of Chance Gardener. The final two sentences clearly describe Chance's feelings. "Not a thought lifted itself from Chance's brain. Peace filled his chest."³³

3.3. Film adaptation

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the film adaptation was released in 1979, eight years after Jerzy Kosinski published the novel. The main credit for making it happen probably goes to Peter Sellers, who played the role of Chance Gardener. As described in a work by Mary Lazar, in 1971, when the Times of London declared *Being There* as a Book of the Year, Sellers decided to contact Kosinski and try to persuade him to make a film based on a book. Obviously, Sellers pursued his own interests, since he wanted to play the main role in the film. According to Lazar, Sellers finally convinced Kosinski, despite the initial uncertainty. Kosinski's agreement to shoot the film was probably significantly influenced by the moment when Jerzy asked Sellers how he would play the

³³Kosiński, *Being There*, 105.

character of Chance.³⁴ As described in Lazar's work, Sellers answered "I would not act him. ... I would be myself."³⁵ After Kosinski asked him for a short demonstration, during which Sellers picked up a water hose, he described Peter's acting as follows. "I have never seen anyone picking up anything as calmly, as purely, and with no anxiety."³⁶ After this experience, Kosinski agreed on filming, but demanded control of the script. The film became very successful and won a number of awards, including the British Film Critics Award for Best Film of 1980. The main characters of this film were also awarded. As Mary Lazar points out in her work, Sellers received, among other awards, an award from the National Board of Review for Best Actor, while Melvyn Douglas, who played the role of Mr. Benjamin Rand, won a Golden Globe and an Oscar for his performance. A perfectly chosen selection of actors guaranteed the success of this film. The acting performances of all actors in this film are completely flawless and create a unique atmosphere of the whole story. An important factor that creates the final impression of the film is also a well-chosen selection of locations. From the reception written by Lazar, we learn that the film was shot in Washington D.C. and in North Carolina, where the Biltmore Estate is located.³⁷

In the film, Ashby managed to perfectly capture the moments of misunderstanding that lead to a misinterpretation of Chance's speeches. An example is the scene where Eve Rand visits Chance in his room. While she tries to express her sexual desire and excitement, Chance pays all attention to the television screen. The situation culminates when Chance says, "I like to watch, Eve"³⁸ While Chance thinks of this statement purely in connection with watching television, Eve interprets his commentary as Chance's desire to watch her while masturbating. Several similarly absurd situations appear in the film. Hal Ashby also worked with indirect, at first glance perhaps not very obvious similarities between the characters. A great example is given in the work "*BEING THERE*" *AT THE END* written by Robert F. Willson, Jr. where a certain similarity and connection between the character of Chance Gardener and Benjamin Rand is described. "Most devastating of all the film's ironic truths is that despite the apparent differences in economic, social, and intellectual standing between Chance and Rand, they are twins locked up in a world of

³⁴ Lazar, "Jerzy," 104.

³⁵ Lazar, "Jerzy," 104.

³⁶ Lazar, "Jerzy," 104.

³⁷Lazar, "Jerzy," 105..

³⁸ Hal Ashby, *Being There* (United Artists, 1979), 1:51:13

illusion and dependent on machines for their survival.”³⁹ In Chance’s case, the word machine refers to the television, on which Chance really is addicted. This is also demonstrated in the scene where Chance leaves Old Man’s house and packs a remote-control TV channel switcher when packing his belongings. In the case of Mr. Rand, dependence on machines means medical devices on which he is dependent due to his poor health.

Despite the fact that several comic scenes appear in the film, the overall tone of the film is thought-provoking. Although Jerzy Kosinski was not a supporter of television, and in *Being There* his attitude is demonstrated by Chance and his addiction, it was paradoxically the film version that greatly increased his popularity. Together with the second film based on a book by Jerzy Kosinski, *The Painted Bird*, shot in 2019 and directed by Václav Marhoul, these are his most famous works, which remain vibrant to this day thanks to filming.

3.4. Different denouement in the film and the book

Despite the fact that the film was based on the book and the author of the novel, Jerzy Kosinski himself, was in charge of the script, it is possible to find several differences between the book and the film adaptation. This situation can probably never be completely prevented, as the final result is influenced by several factors. For example, a film has to respect a certain footage time, so sometimes it is not possible to shoot everything, and in addition, some specific scenes cannot be captured on the camera exactly as written in the book. An important factor that also influenced the partial differences of these works is also the time lag with which the film was shot. Eight years is a relatively long time period during which many changes have taken place. The society in the United States was constantly evolving, and so Kosinski’s main idea of portraying television as something new and unknown was no longer entirely relevant. At the same time, Jerzy’s opinion on this phenomenon probably developed, and in the film he was given the opportunity to draw attention to other problems that narrowed the society of the time. In her work, Mary Lazar also dealt with this transformation of the topics that Kosinski draws attention to. She claims that the film, unlike the book, does not pay much attention to the politics and situation associated with the Cold War, but instead emphasizes racial issues, which Kosinski perceived as a major problem and which has

³⁹ Robert F. Willson, Jr., “‘BEING THERE’ AT THE END” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 9, no.1 (1981): 60.

appeared in the United States for centuries.⁴⁰ This issue is also symbolized by the black maid Louise. While not so much attention is paid to this character in the book, she is mentioned several times in the film. The inequality between whites and blacks is also indicated in the scene where Louise sees Chance as a guest on a television show. Louise describes the United States as a “white man’s world”, where all you need to succeed is to have white skin.⁴¹ However, the main difference between the book and film versions lies in the different denouement.

The book ends, as already mentioned, at the ball, when Chance leaves the hall and enters the garden, which again evokes a feeling of calm and peace in him. From my point of view, the book’s denouement is quite positive and believable, as it lets the reader think about Chance’s next fate, and at the same time this scene adds credibility to the novel, as this feeling of peace is well known to all.

However, the film version differs from this conclusion. In the last minutes of the film, we watch Mr. Rand’s funeral, during which the president’s advisers, discussing another possible presidential candidate, carry the coffin to the family tomb. While the President of the United States gives a mourning speech to a deceased friend, his men unanimously agree not to support the current president in the next election. These men eventually nominate Chance as the ideal presidential candidate, given his popularity in society and no records of his past. Chance, meanwhile, leaves the ceremony and wanders around the Rand’s estate. In the final scene, Chance comes to the lake, which he enters after a moment’s hesitation, but his feet remain afloat. After taking a few steps across the surface, he demonstrates the depth of the lake by immersing the entire umbrella below the surface.

This scene adds a whole new dimension to the film, since a person who has been presented as a simple-minded gardener has been portrayed as a man with a supernatural ability. It is not certain what Kosinski or Ashby wanted to say with this scene, but in my opinion, this supernaturalism dishonours and otherwise quite believable story. The depiction of Chance as supernatural, in my opinion, destroys all the relationship and sympathy that the viewer creates for Chance during the film. Chance is no longer portrayed as an ordinary citizen of the United States, but as someone who has a higher power over his destiny.

⁴⁰Lazar, “Jerzy,” 105.

⁴¹Ashby, *Being There*, 1:22:45–1:23:28

Conclusion

The second half of the twentieth century was the most significant period of the last century. After almost half a century of continuous warfare and economic crises, a new, modern society began to develop. Gradually, cultural stereotypes were abandoned, and the emphasis shifted from warfare to shaping society and building the economy. Although there have been several wars conflicts in these years, no one wanted to experience another world war, so resolving these conflicts as quickly as possible became a top priority. The United States has experienced a complete transformation of its entire society over the years. Undoubtedly, the most progressive events were those concerning racial inequality. For the first time in their history, Afro-American citizens have experienced the hope that things will move, and change will occur. Although this radical change had many opponents, the black population still managed to gain at least relative freedom. People like Martin Luther King, who were not afraid to come into a public eye and openly discuss these issues, made a significant contribution to this change. Unfortunately, many of them paid with their lives for their courage. This period could also be considered as the predominance of the young generation, as it was this generation that began to express their opinions in the post-war years. Young people wanted to promote new, revolutionary ideas, they longed for freedom and revolution. This situation was at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, as at this time probably the most significant countercultures in the history of the 20th century emerged. Many of these movement have had an international impact, and some, such as Hippies, still exist in these days.

The literature and art of the second half of the twentieth century moved on a whole new dimension and detached itself from the established techniques. Experimentation together with the creation of new trends became popular. Probably for this reason, some of the most popular and most appreciated literary and artistic works were created at this time. When Jerzy Kosinski emigrated from communist Europe to this developing society, he was apparently shocked by this progress. Freedom of speech, private property, a developing economy, none of this existed in post-war Europe. The domination of the Soviet Union maintained a firm order over the states of the Eastern bloc and placed great emphasis on ensuring that information from the West did not reach these states. However, Jerzy Kosinski quickly adapted to this world and soon began to take full advantage of it. His experiences of communist Europe and especially Russia were immediately warmly accepted in America. The reality of the communist regime seemed absurd to the American

public, so it is no wonder that they wanted to know more about it. Jerzy's first two published anti-communist books were a great success. However, Jerzy Kosinski wanted to write a larger work, and so he wrote *Painted Bird*, probably the most controversial novel of his career and American literature of the second half of the 20th century. This work was received inconsistently, especially because of the brutality and violence that is depicted in it. Nevertheless, Jerzy was given considerable fame, which he was able to take full advantage of. He liked to go to parties and attend nightclubs, where he sought the company of prostitutes. This vice was even tolerated by his partners, who were very wealthy citizens of the United States. The work *Being there*, described in this thesis, is one of his most famous novels. Although this work has only a little over 100 pages, the plot is very unique and well thought out. In the novel, Jerzy gives the main role to Chance Gardener, who in a few days becomes a very influential man in politics. As unrealistic as this story may seem, it is no longer so comical in the context of the American 1970s and 1980s. The huge number of new movements and organizations often led to the situation that people who were the leaders of the movement did not know what to do. A similar situation can be observed in this work.

Jerzy's attitude to new trends is quite noticeable here, whether it is his approach to television and the media, or to politics. We can also find a reference to the issue of racial inequality in the work, so it is quite certain that Kosinski was greatly inspired by the situation in the United States. Defining the epiphany in this thesis was not an easy task, as Chance is a very difficult person. Chance perceives situations that are completely turning point for the reader as common thinks. His feelings are also very vague, which makes him a very mysterious figure difficult to understand. To understand this work, it is crucial to study the historical and literary context of the time period in which the book was published. *Being there* is definitely not a book that should be read only once. With each subsequent reading, the reader encounters new and new details, which he did not notice in the previous reading, and which help to better understand the whole story.

In *Being There*, an individual understanding of this story is important, as many parallels can be found in this book, and each reader finds Chance's qualities in different aspects.

Resumé

Tématem této bakalářské práce je definovat kulturní a historické pozadí ve Spojených Státech v druhé polovině 20. století. Dále práce vysvětluje a popisuje pojem Epifanie, který je v tomto díle demonstrován činy hlavního protagonisty tohoto románu, Chance Zahradníkem. Teoretická část této práce je členěna do hlavních kapitol a podkapitol, z nichž úvodní kapitola se zabývá zejména literárním a kulturním kontextem doby. Jsou zde uvedeny základní informace o vývoji společnosti ve Spojených Státech po skončení druhé světové války a následně v dalších desetiletích 20. století. Důraz je kladen zejména na ekonomickou a společenskou situaci v zemi, a tak jsou v této kapitole vysvětleny zejména pojmy jako Studená Válka či Hnutí za Lidská Práva. Rovněž je zde část textu věnována válce ve Vietnamu. V následujících podkapitolách se práce zaměřuje na nejvýraznější kontrakultury 60. a 70. let. Je zde stručně představeno hnutí Hippie, jenž se výrazně vymezovalo proti válce ve Vietnamu. Následně je v této kapitole popsáno Hnutí za Ženská práva, jenž značilo přelomový okamžik v historii Spojených Států. Ženy žádají o rovnoprávnost s muži a vzniká několik legislativních úprav regulujících nepoměry v platovém ohodnocení či diskriminace v pracovních pozicích. Poslední kontrakultura představená v této kapitole je Hnutí za Svobodu Slova, což bylo studentské hnutí bojující za rovnoprávnost černošského a bělošského obyvatelstva, ale rovněž volalo po změně ve vzdělávání a přístupu ke studentům. Následující kapitola se věnuje důležité roli médií v 60. a 70. letech, neboť v těchto dekádách sehrálo klíčovou roli nové médium nazvané televize. Tento přístroj umožnil široké veřejnosti na vlastní oči zažít hrůzy války ve Vietnamu a výrazně přispěl ke kritice tohoto válečného konfliktu. Lidé se však na televizi stávali závislí, což je také jedním z ústředních témat románu *Byl jsem při tom*. Následující kapitola popisuje ropnou ekonomickou krizi, která otřásla Spojenými Státy na počátku 70. let. Následující kapitola se zabývá vlivem postmodernismu na tvorbu Jerzyho Kosinského. Definuje základní prvky tohoto směru a obsahuje příklady těchto prvků aplikovaných v Jerzyho dílech. Následující podkapitola se zabývá otázkou plagiátorství v díle Jerzy Kosinského. Toto obvinění vyplynulo z nápadné podobnosti Kosinského děl a tvorby zahraničních, pro Spojené Státy neznámých, autorů. Praktická část této bakalářské práce stručně popisuje děj románu *Byl jsem při tom* a následně se zabývá možnými výklady Chanceho chování, a to z různých perspektiv. Tvrzení

stanovená v této kapitole jsou podložena kritickými recepcemi zahraničních autorů. Následující kapitola se zabývá již zmíněnou epifanií a snaží se aplikovat tento pojem na zásadní situace odehrávající se v příběhu o Chance Zahradníkovi. V kapitole filmová adaptace je stručně popsána filmová verze tohoto románu natočená Halem Ashbym. Závěrečná kapitola se zabývá hlavními rozdíly v závěrečných scénách obou verzí.

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