

LOLITA VS. SAVING PRIVATE **ryan**

Forbidden love & violence vs. brotherly love and violence

Congratulations to SHOWTIME, the pay-t.v. channel for having the balls to air *Lolita*, a movie that could not get a cinematic distributor because of its shocking content.

Lolita however, is no more gross, gruesome or horrible than *Saving Private Ryan*. Quite the contrary, the opposite is true. The point is that I was able to see *Saving Private Ryan* on a big cinema screen, and could only see *Lolita* on cable t.v.

Lolita is a tale of brutal obsession, based on the Nabokov novel between a 50ish Humbert Humbert (Jeremy Irons) and Lolita (Dominique Swain). This is a story about disgust and despair, love and hate, desire and satisfaction, torment and tenderness. What is so frightening to Humbert is that his moments of greatest pleasure come in the arms of a 14-year-old girl (illegal in any state at any time), and this absurd paradox becomes his undoing, ruining countless lives in the process. The forbidden fruit comes with a tremendous price tag. And because the actors played their parts so well, this movie is quite shocking.

Watching Irons and Swain make out on-screen (although they never actually do IT) is sleazy and creepy, and had the feel of uneasy porn, in a dirty but arty kind of way. *Lolita* is heavy going. Dominique Swain's acting is brilliant. She's at once coquettish and child-like, probably the definition of every straight man's nightmare. This movie is heavy going, unlike the pale comparison starring James Mason in the 60's.

Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, while

a brilliant piece of movie-making, is one of the most truly violent and disgusting experiences I've ever seen at the cinema. Having been through that once, and puked on my popcorn (literally), it is an experience I can again do without. Not that *Saving Private Ryan* is not a 4-star movie, it is absolutely, don't get me wrong. The first 24 minutes are the bloody massacre of U.S. troops on Omaha Beach, D-Day, relentless blood and limbs blown off and you get the picture. Action shot after action shot of the most horrendous type, quite shocking and remorseless in its overwhelming devastation.

While *Lolita* evokes a violent reaction, it's obviously a different type of violent reaction. One has to do with violence and love and the other gun-blow-em-up violence. There is a subtle romance in the violation of *Lolita*, and while *Ryan* professes not show the romantic side of war, there are moments of camaraderie that betray that desire. But the reason I bring these two movies together is because of the way they were presented and marketed to us, the faceless, mindless masses in the dark.

Steven Spielberg has a lot of clout. As a result of this, he was able to make *Ryan* accessible to a wide national and international audience. Essentially, he was able to bring it to a big screen near you. Not that there is anything wrong with that, I worship the ground he walks on.

Sadly, when it came to director Adrian Lyne's clout, there wasn't any. Not even the box-office bankability of Jeremy Irons could muster one brave North American distributor

to show it to us. Sure, the subject matter in *Lolita* is a taboo, incest and pedophilia; there is no argument the but, really, is a distorted love story more horrifying than bloody limbs flying, literally seeing soldiers carrying the severed leg up the beach?

What is wrong with this picture? How could it be this day and age, that a movie as well directed, acted and produced as *Lolita* couldn't get any cinematic release in this country? The artistry of a movie suffers when it loses the big screen visual dimension.

The answer lies in the very essence that is the United States at the end of the 20th century. Where "the right to bear arms" is respected, but the concept of "freedom of speech" is not. Where blood, brutality and unspeakable acts of man's inhumanity to man is considered reasonable subject matter for a movie, but a story of love, however ugly or skewed is not. Violence has, in its own way, become fodder of our daily lives. We are somewhat immune from the horror associated with bullets. And I uproar over the President's alleged affair with a consenting adult is considered so outrageous that this country has lost the laughing stock of sophisticated people around the world.

But I digress if not for the tenacity of SHOWTIME, I would never have had the chance to see *Lolita*. I ordered SHOWTIME just to see *Lolita* on when it first aired. Plus I got THE MOVIE CHANNEL thrown in. Not a bad deal for a month. I planned to cancel SHOWTIME as soon as I had seen *Lolita*, but it's a good tier, and I have decided to keep it. They took a gamble, and it paid off for them as well as us. SHOWTIME has a website: <http://www.showtime.com>. You can register your approval and thank them. I certainly have.

And subscribing to SHOWTIME now will send a message to movie distributors that we will not be censored by them, not in this day and age.

Melanie Morningstar is Movie Critic for Wire

m²
BY

Melanie Morningstar