

Women's International Film Series

'Nowhere in Africa' tells a different Holocaust story

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski
managing editor

"Schindler's List" made it damn near impossible for any film about the German atrocities during World War II to compete emotionally with the 1993 Holocaust epic. "The Pianist" couldn't do it. HBO's "Band of Brothers" couldn't do it. "Jakob the Liar" wasn't even close, and most documentaries are hardly as affecting as Spielberg's masterpiece.

"Nowhere in Africa" doesn't try to compete, and it succeeds because it tells a different story with the same arduous details, the same humanity and none of the directness. The distance is geographical, forcing the characters to sometimes live like prisoners. However, the human emotions of loss, loneliness and defeat are as vivid in this film as in any film that shows the bodies being piled into mass graves. "Nowhere in Africa" relies on the commitment to its characters in order to share its artistic vision of this true story.

The film is told mostly from the perspective of a child who must move with her mother to Africa in order to avoid the fate that awaits many of their Jewish brethren. At a 1938 New Year's party, Jettel Redlich (Juliane Köhler) receives a message from her husband, Walter

(Merab Ninidze), telling her that the Jewish community in Nairobi has put up the money for the woman and her daughter to come to Africa. Jettel is a socialite in her German household. She considers herself to be German, not Jewish. She has German friends and loves the German culture. For her, being Jewish isn't a large part of her life.

The Nazis won't see it that way, and Walter knows it. He tells his wife to bring their little Regina (Lea Kurka) and necessities for life (a fridge) to the Kenyan farm he now works at so they can be saved from the inevitable. Jettel leaves her family and goes to her husband. Jettel, however, doesn't see the Nazi regime as a threat and leaves behind the fridge to save her fine china. Her denial strains her marriage, once in Kenya, but her daughter begins to assimilate to the life.

Regina befriends the family's loyal cook, Owuor, and learns the language, but her mother discourages the behavior. "A white child is not a black child," Jettel tells her daughter, preparing Regina for a return to some level of normalcy. That doesn't happen, and once her husband informs her of the German looting of Jewish shops, Jettel begins to realize the true horror that faces Germany.

Jettel is a fascinating character, and

despite the fact that the daughter, a child, is telling the story, Jettel's conflict is a brilliantly constructed, subtly and effectively. She has her own racism in Africa, so strong that her husband takes her to task on it. "The way you treat Owuor reminds me of some people in Germany," he tells her at the end of an argument. Köhler's portrayal of Jettel is quiet and sympathetic, though the character can be as insensitive as the men at Nuremberg.

The film, however, tells the daughter's story, though she is often treated like supporting character. She doesn't face the same anti-Semitism that her parents saw back home. By the end of the film she says she doesn't even remember Germany. She is innocent, but never naïve, making childish observations about the treatment that she receives at an English school once her family is forced from the farm. Interestingly enough, Regina is more out of place with those Europeans than the Africans.

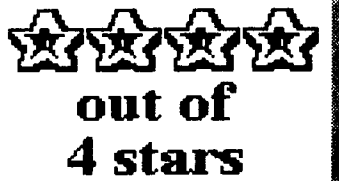
I loved the characters in this film, and by the end I felt like a personal confidante. The actors get their due because they are on screen, but without director Caroline Link creating an intimate style. Regina and Jettel could have seemed more naïve than delicate. Even the father, who wears his emotions on his sleeves, isn't overwhelming because



Juliane Köhler and Merab Ninidze in the Holocaust drama "Nowhere in Africa."

Link doesn't let the stress-induced outbursts shatter the intimate family portrait. "Nowhere in Africa" is rated R, because people have real sex in this movie. Not the cleaned-up Hollywood sex, but real passionate sex involving the married couple. What the MPAA doesn't tell you is that there is poetry in the love-making, just as there is poetry in the rest of the film. "Nowhere in Africa" is a filmmaking achievement that I thought I would never see after "Schindler's List," making Link's drama the seminal Holocaust film of the 21st Century.

"Nowhere in Africa," directed by Caroline Link and starring Juliane Köhler and Merab Ninidze, will be screened as part of the Women's International Film Series. The event takes place at 7 p.m. on Tuesday in Reed 117. Admission is free



'Eternal Sunshine' is eternal bliss



Jim Carrey brightens up Kate Winslet's life in "Eternal Sunshine." FOCUS FEATURES

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski
managing editor

"Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" is as enduring and surreal as the relationship in the film. It's a romantic comedy that could only come from the eccentric mind of writer Charlie Kaufman, but like Kaufman's other efforts ("Being John Malkovich"), this film becomes convoluted as it tries to be too clever. Luckily, there are enough beautifully effervescent moments from the delightful and poignant romance to make us fall in love, despite the flaws.

The film begins with Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet) falling in love—for a second time. Anyone who has seen the trailer knows Joel and Clementine had the memories of their first go-around erased, but they have managed to make it back to each other.

Flashback. Joel crying in his car after he tries to give Clementine an "I'm sorry" present. The scrappy, working class romantic finds comfort in two of his friends, a perpetually embattled couple (Jane Adams and David Cross), who tell him of Clementine's procedure. Joel and Clem had a bit of a spat, but the impulsive sweetheart took it too far. She probably did it on a lark, they tell him. Because the clash was so sudden, Joel needs to see the memory-erasers himself. He goes to the offices of Lucuna Inc. and once he sees memory erasing really is possible, Joel signs on to eliminate Clementine.

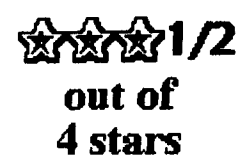
The majority of the film takes place inside Joel's mind. We see the memories fade. Faces become distorted. Buildings fall apart. Books disappear off of shelves. As Joel, who is unconscious through the procedure, revisits his own memories of Clementine, he realizes that the old adage "Tis better to have love and lost..." is a universal truth. His dream-state becomes a race in and out of memories that don't involve Clementine so he preserves a part of their relationship, somewhere in his mind. Going inside Joel's head is a voyeuristic experi-

ence, more so than just simply watching a couple's external film life. And Carrey makes us feel welcome. The performance is his best since "Man on the Moon" and with only that exception, his best ever on film. It's a droopy, bittersweet performance that doesn't back away from the intimate moments, moments he's never had a chance to take on in any other role.

Unfortunately for Carrey, Winslet steals the show. It's an equally unique performance for Winslet, but her spunk and spontaneity is more than what her character or even director Michel Gondry might have asked for. She's refreshing, and changes the entire tone of the film with the line "Nobody's ever given me a piece of jewelry I liked before."

"Chemistry" isn't the word I would use to describe what Winslet and Carrey had in this film, though. The romance is too sincere to use a term reserved for what Jennifer Lopez and Ralph Feinnes had in "Maid in Manhattan." Only David Gordon Greene's "All the Real Girls" takes a more honest look at working-class love and heartbreak, though "All the Real Girls" isn't bogged down by Charlie Kaufman's quirkiness.

In the end, the relationship between two background characters emphasizes the film's core. I'm not talking about what Kirsten Dunst and her lover have. (That sub-plot was a Kaufman's major screenwriting downfall.) No, the perpetually embattled couple mentioned above serves as the example of a real relationship in the film. They fight, but you know they love each other in spite of their squabbles and aggravations. That's what Joel sees when he's forced to relive his moments with Clementine, and that honesty, that look at the imperfection of true love, is what stands out.



"Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," directed by Michel Gondry, is currently showing at Tinseltown.

'Dawn' rises to the occasion

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski
managing editor

The main reason I hated George A. Romero's 1978 version of "Dawn of the Dead" was the film, despite the cheesy makeup and ridiculous acting, took itself seriously. It didn't have the psychological horror elements of its predecessor "Night of the Living Dead," and the so-called critique of consumerism never pans out because "Dawn" was too chintzy of a production to affect the audience in any real way.

In the bigger-budget remake, seriousness is hardly what director Zack Snyder is going for. "Dawn of the Dead," Version 2, has a perverse sense of humor and even more sadistic sense of gore. It's a film with a B-movie sensibility but an A-movie budget, and the 2004 "Dawn" is a scream because of it. The make-up is better. The acting is solid. This "Dawn" is just fun as hell.

Like the original, "Dawn of the Dead" takes place in a shopping mall, where survivors of walking dead attack find safe-ish haven. There's Ana (Sarah Polley), the nurse; Kenneth (Ving Rhames), the cop; Andre (Mekhi Phifer) and Luda (Inna Korobkina), the expecting couple; and Michael (Jake Weber), the copy machine repairman—all with enough brains to make a radio out of a coconut. Inside they meet their share of left-over zombies from the janitorial staff, but they also meet C.J. (Michael Kelly) and his security crew, who attempt to turn the mall into a police state.

That doesn't last long, especially when Terry (Kevin Zegers), the crew's youngest member, goes over to the side of the cop and the nurse. From there it's routine. They play with the toys in the mall. They shoot some zombies. They bring some other survivors. They deliver a zombie baby. Routine.

"Dawn of the Dead" is your usual horror flick, but it's splashed with style and humor that is makes the illogical and disposable plot entertaining. One scene has a shooting game that requires the assassination of zombies that double as celebrity look-alikes. Jay Leno, Burt Reynolds and Rosie O'Donnell are all killed by a guy who kind of looks like Ted Nugent.

The humor is highlighted with music that is more appropriate for a 1960s sex-comedy than a horror film. While the characters are enjoying



Sarah Polley and Ving Rhames fight off the zombies in "Dawn of the Dead." UNIVERSAL PICTURES

the mall's commodities, a crooner sings a campy version of Disturbed's hardcore song "Down with the Sickness" over the exploits. Even elevator music isn't ignored as part of the wacky soundtrack.

Oh, there are scares in the film, but they are nowhere near as entertaining as the comedy. New York Times film critic Elvis Mitchell called this version of "Dawn" a big budget Troma film. For the most part, it is, but that's exactly why the film works. For any person out there who might attempt to find a deep theme to the film, there isn't one. No critique of consumerism. No "Lord of the Flies" parallel. Nothing. That leaves open the possibility for corny horror entertainment, which is the only thing anyone can ask for from a Romero remake.



"Dawn of the Dead," directed by Zack Snyder and starring Sarah Polley and Ving Rhames, is currently showing at Tinseltown.

A&E
Event
Spotlight

The Studio Theatre Presents
Little Shop of Horrors

March 26, 27 and 31 and April 1-3 at 8 p.m.
March 28 and April 4 at 2 p.m.

Student Tickets \$5
General Admission \$7
For Tickets Call 888-6242