



THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE

"Irreverently lays out the case that Jesus Christ never existed." -Newsweek



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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur

Posted September 5, 2007 | 06:59 PM (EST)



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How easily a film can be misunderstood. Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* tackles the prickly subject of British troops occupying Ireland and the men and women who rise up to fight against them. As a British subject (born in Bermuda) with Irish blood who has spent most of his life in America, I can see all sides to the conflict and be dispassionate. But almost no one in England or Ireland can.

A few scenes of British soldiers mocking and belittling Irish men caused outcries that the film

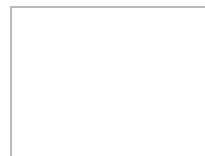
was anti-British (often claimed by those who hadn't seen it), even though they're balanced by another scene where a British soldier describes his despair and pain at the situation they're in.

Lost in the shuffle is the quiet, heartbreaking film itself, which follows two brothers (one played by the eerily beautiful Cillian Murphy) who join the IRA in the early 1900s to fight against the British and then get drawn into the Irish Civil War of the Twenties. It won the top prize at Cannes in 2006 and went on to be Loach's biggest box office hit to date. But since Loach's box office is invariably modest and it barely made a ripple in the US even among critics, it deserves to be discovered again on DVD.

There you will discover one of the film's painful, central truths: how violence corrupts and corrodes. The violence begins with attacks on foreign soldiers occupying your country. Then it spreads to killing Irish people you've never met who collaborate with them. Then it spreads to killing friends you've known all your life who cracked under torture and pain of death and suddenly you find yourself pointing a gun at your own flesh and blood.

None of this undermines the political arguments at play in wanting the British gone. It's just the way it goes - war is hell, even if the war is justified. And violence is poisonous. But seeing how violence turns on you so quickly should give anyone pause about turning to it before all other

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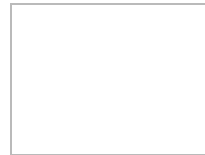
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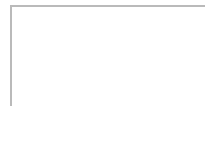
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options are exhausted. Twice. Don't miss this one.

Other DVDs out this week: *Shakespeare Was A Big George Jones Fan: Cowboy Jack Clement's Home Movies* (\$19.98; Shout), a ramshackle celebration of the maverick Nashville songwriter, producer and all-around Falstaffian nut; *A Curtain Raiser & Other Shorts* (\$29.95; Kino), works by the deliriously talented and diverse director Francois Ozon; the acerbic and entertaining sitcom *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia* Seasons 1 & 2 (Fox; \$39.98); *Cheech and Chong's Up In Smoke* (\$14.98; Paramount), which unlike the drug it celebrates has not grown stronger with the passage of time; *The City Of Violence* (\$24.95; Weinstein Co.) which is admirably restrained on boring plot points and common sense and admirably unrestrained in nifty action sequences; *The Office* Season Three (\$49.98; Universal), a sitcom which keeps getting better and *30 Rock* Season 1 (\$49.98; Universal), a sitcom which might; *Demetri Martin Person* (\$19.98; HBO), a stand-up act from the *Daily Show* correspondent who proves himself an amusing combination of Henny Youngman and Stephen Wright (the further away he gets from standard standup the better he is); the somewhat improved third season of *Desperate Housewives* (\$59.99; Buena Vista); the dull second season of *Prison Break* (\$59.98; Fox), which looks like it should have been a one-season telenovela and called it a day; the Miss Marple-like *Hetty Wainthropp Investigates: The Complete Collection* (\$149.99; Acorn), who has naughty taste in sidekicks; and *Alibi* (\$24.95; Kino), a little-known but remarkably stylized gangster flick from 1929.

So *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* tackled the troubles, Michael Moore took on one of America's darkest days with *Fahrenheit 9-11*, the TV movie *The Day After* got people thinking about nuclear weapons and Tony Kaye's upcoming *Lake Of Fire* sets a match to the topic of abortion. What's your favorite movie that dove into an anguished, difficult issue? My guess is we're drawn to those that already reflect our views but perhaps there's one that changed your mind? I have a friend who became anti-capital punishment after watching an episode of *Hill Street Blues* so it can happen.

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I believe that film is playing in Toronto, so we should have a review soon to tell us if it's any good.

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Hotel Rwanda is an excellent film, but it didn't really change my mind about what happened to the people of Rwanda. It was horrific. It did, however, make me very angry at the U.N. and the rest of the international community.

So I am currently waiting for the release of a Canadian film, Shake Hands With The Devil, based on the book written by Gen. Romeo Dellaire, the man in charge of that U.N. envoy left neutered by the powers that be. I am hoping it will shed light on why the U.N. made the choices they did. (I'm too lazy to read the book right now. Maybe in a year or so.)

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There are so many movies that have changed me in so many ways. Thanks for asking. I've been watching a lot of "foreign" films lately. They can be so REAL, so truthful. Of late, here are a few that have affected me deeply:

Omagh - Ireland

Osama -Afghanistan (no, it has nothing to do with "him")

The Circle - Iran

Blood Diamond was incredible in the way the scenes of war seemed so believable. A heartbreaking movie that made me ache for days. I've always had a very deep level of respect for Leonardo DiCaprio, but this movie cemented that for me. He obviously believed in what this film had to say. For days afterwards, I thought about war and brainwashing and how a young boy can lose his soul under the right circumstances.

Also, a great great American film that showed me how an "other" can see "us" is The Brother from Another Planet that John Sayles did starring Joe Morton.

As a side note, did you see Cillian in 28 Days Later? "Eerily beautiful" is a really great way to describe him. As for the movie, EEK! Thanks for the reminder of The Wind that Shakes the Barley.

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I especially enjoyed the Iranian film The Circle as well. Remarkable that it even got made, frankly. I wouldn't have thought of The Brother From Another Planet but of course you're right.

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I just added The Wind That Shakes The Barley to the top of my Blockbuster Queue. Thanks for the suggestion, I can't wait to see it.

Hotel Rwanda made a big impression on me. I found myself thinking about that movie for weeks after I saw it.

Others that made big impressions were The Killing Fields, In the Name of the Father, Sophie's Choice, and Life is Beautiful.

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Hope you like it. Those are some powerful films. I remember catching up on the Oscar nominated films the weekend before the awards were being handed out and sitting in a massive, near empty theater in South Florida at the end of The Killing Fields, eeling stunned and overwhelmed by that film's finale, in no small part due to the fact that it was at the time one of the rare films to get permission to use a John Lennon song.

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Nice question, Michael.

First, the film that changed my life has to be '2001: A Space Odyssey.' It was the moment when we realize that even though the two astronauts have done everything to keep their voices hidden from HAL, the computer is lip reading. When the huge Cinerama screen plunged into sudden darkness to note the intermission I was stunned. The emotional impact of that stunning moment was so overwhelming that, for the first time ever in a theater, I realized that a film could be something more than mere entertainment.

The film that changed my mind is probably 'Soldier Blue.' It's not a particularly great western, but the military attack on the peaceful Indian village - though overwrought - had such an impact, my whole political attitude towards both the military - yesterdays and today's - and the plight of the native Americans was turned inside out.

Perhaps in an indirect way 'Soldier Blue' is responsible for my daily reading of the Huffington Post.

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2001 certainly blew a lot of minds, but you're one of the few people that didn't talk about the light show at the end or the general stoner mind trip and focused on Kubrick's riveting (if sometimes obscure) plot. That moment when you realize HAL is lip-reading is indeed a classic. And the interesting thing about Soldier Blue is that you can have your mind changed even by a film that won't necessarily stand the test of time. Thanks for commenting.

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