

THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR

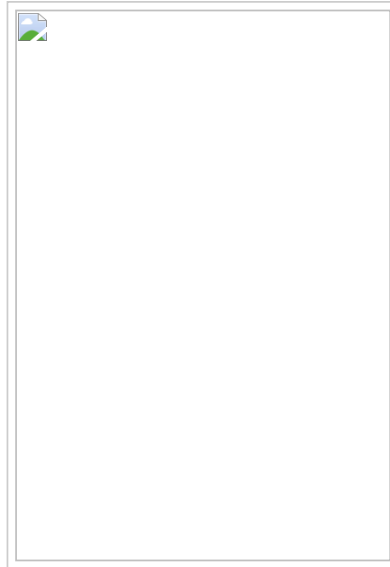
A LONG, STRANGE JOURNEY TOWARD A RETROSPECTIVELY INEVITABLE DESTINATION

MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2009

When QT attacks

By [Keith Uhlich](#)

As companion to the Tarantino piece below—and in the hopes of inspiring discussion—I'm here linking to Jonathan Rosenbaum's [most recent post](#) lambasting *Inglourious Basterds*. It's an angry, vital response to a movie I myself am loving more and more as I reflect on it, and it also makes reference to Daniel Mendelsohn's recent *Newsweek* article entitled "[Inglourious Basterds: When Jews Attack](#)", with which it should be read in concert. (Perhaps not so incidentally, Mendelsohn's Holocaust memoir *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* is the project that Jean-Luc Godard—whom Tarantino is frequently juxtaposed with, for good and for ill—is [reportedly eyeing](#) as his next directorial effort.)



The line of thinking that Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn articulate has been little expressed in the pre-release hoopla/puffery, at least from the articles I've perused, and is very much worth considering. Also of note: Over at *Some Came Running*, Glenn Kenny posted a [glowing review](#) of *IB* that one of our frequent commenters and sometime contributors—who goes by the handle "That Fuzzy Bastard"—responded to with pre-viewing reservations comparable to Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn (see that discussion starting [here](#)).

How best to describe where I part company with my colleagues? Simply that I don't consider the film a revenge flick in any traditional sense, whatever the mass media persona known as "QT" may spout in his carnival barker's desire to get butts in seats. For me, always: Tarantino's public face says one thing, his movies say another. *Basterds* is, to my mind, about the sheer impossibility of revenge, how it razes and perverts everyone who succumbs to it or who find themselves in its path. If audiences cheer the film with the mass fervor that Rosenbaum and Mendelsohn predict (and I think that's a pretty dubious proposition), they've missed the point. The Tarantino "cool" (never flawless) is the conduit to something deeper, disturbing, moving and profound.

My review of the film for *Time Out New York* will be published in this week's issue, and I'll link it [here](#) when it's available online. I also hope, in the coming weeks, to write at greater length about *Basterds* for the *House*, so keep an eye out.

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Keith Uhlich is editor of *The House Next Door*.

POSTED BY KEITH UHLICH AT 10:30 PM 

LABELS: DANIEL MENDELSON, INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS, JONATHAN ROSENBAUM, KEITH UHLICH, QUENTIN TARANTINO

9 COMMENTS:

 [Ryan Kelly](#) said...

Rosenbaum has had it in for Tarantino since the early 90s, but at the same time I really appreciated his brief thoughts and the Newsweek article he pointed to. That's more or less what I fear the movie could be, but after *Vol. 2* I can't imagine Tarantino making a movie that just relishes in revenge.

We'll see. I personally can't wait.

8/18/2009 10:01 AM

 [That Fuzzy Bastard](#) said...

Oddly, the Newsweek opening is the first thing that's made me actually sort of want to see I.B. The thing that bugs me isn't so much what it says about the Holocaust as what it says about the war on terror---I think most war movies are about the war that's going on during their making, not the war they're ostensibly about (see *M*A*S*H*, *Catch-22*, or the *Olivier Henry V*), and I.B. so far sounds like a movie that'll make Andrew McCarthy swoon.

8/18/2009 1:00 PM

 [Brandon](#) said...

I'm bothered by the Newsweek/Rosenbaum argument. I haven't seen *Inglorious Basterds*, but I'm not clear on why this particular case (having Jews kill Nazis and presumably Hitler) is so repugnant.

Maybe when I see it, I'll realize that Tarantino isn't actually empowering the unempowered (as he claims) but engaging in some bizarre form of Holocaust denial (as they claim). I weary of attacks which suggest that a film's inclusion of questionable material amounts to an endorsement of it. The concept reminds me of Park Chan-wook's *Lady Vengeance*, whose finale was simultaneously praised artistically while condemned morally.

I'm also bothered that Rosenbaum/Mendelsohn seem to suggest that this particular revenge fantasy is "worse" than others. Every time we're supposed to cheer a death sequence (in horror, war, western, what have you), is it not just as perverse as cheering for a Jew breaking out of history to kill a Nazi? I think most of us are mature enough to understand that murder isn't commendable, and I expect the basterds will feel less like real people than superheroes.

My thoughts are pretty disjointed, but then, so is Mendelsohn's argument. I'm interested to see how the film itself affects my initial response.

8/18/2009 5:34 PM

 [Matt Maul](#) said...

I apologize in advance because I've noted this before in a different HOUSE thread, but after reading the *Newsweek* piece, I couldn't help myself. :)

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I must point out the *The Dirty Dozen* (which the article references more than once) ends with a scene showing Reisman "gasing" a number of German generals and their female "companions" (who are clearly civilians) after locking them in an underground bomb shelter. Marvin as Reisman's saying "They gotta breath don't they" gets huge laughs.

On some level, this can certainly be seen as an act of revenge for the Holocaust by Reisman (who, in the novel, is actually half Jewish).

I haven't seen it yet, but I gather that the payback is presented at more of a fever pitch in *IB*. Nonetheless, *Newsweek* is off the mark for suggesting that it's somehow a new concept.

Just saying...

8/18/2009 7:08 PM

 Erich Kuersten said...

man, I can't wait to ready your review in TIME OUT, though I dread most of the dreck writing in there these days. I hope you don't have to write those dreadful pun photo captions.

Even so, puns aren't nearly as bad as critics who feel they have to stick up for some outmoded moral compass (as in god forbid Jews start killing Nazis in real life).

8/19/2009 1:02 PM

 Keith Uhlich said...

The review is up now, Erich. See the text above. It's the start of something more than it is fully fleshed out. Too much to address in 300 wds. Hopefully more to come.

And I do write some of those pun captions, but I'm a big boy. I can take the criticism. :-)

8/19/2009 1:10 PM

 Erich Kuersten said...

Even so, I try to avoid reviews if I know for sure I'm going to see a movie (then read everything right after), but I read yours - good show! It helps lower my expectations and reminds me to look out for UFA references, which sounds like the only way I'd be able to get through it.

I actually guessed your caption would be "A Knife to Remember" but "Knife to Meet you" is close enough.

The question now remains, is Tarantino in it, and if not, is casting Eli Roth just as bad?

8/19/2009 1:32 PM

 Fernando F. Croce said...

"The Tarantino "cool" (never flawless) is the conduit to something deeper, disturbing, moving and profound."

Beautifully put.

Haven't yet seen *IB* so I can't contribute much to the discussion, but I'm looking forward to the movie and also to more of your take on it, Keith.

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8/19/2009 4:14 PM

 Matt Zoller Seitz said...

Haven't seen the film yet either -- I'm planning on going tomorrow night. But I've always objected to the idea that the Holocaust must be treated with special care when depicted in works of pop culture, or that the most hideous aspects of it should not be portrayed at all. These sorts of objections arose when "Schindler's List" came out, then again with "Apt Pupil" and "Life is Beautiful."

Any historical event should be fair game for any artist to use for whatever reason he sees fit. The reaction from audiences, critics and other artists will ultimately determine whether the depiction is interesting and has some kind of creative or sociological merit. That's not the same thing as saying it's defensible or reputable, of course -- but worrying too much about the latter shackles the imagination of filmmakers, and can have a chilling effect which, if scrupulously observed, can erase the Holocaust from the public consciousness in every context save straightforward and "tasteful" depictions of the type seen in recent Oscar-winning documentaries and middlebrow feature films.

If the same admonitions were heeded in regard to other blots on human history -- "be sensitive and scrupulous or don't go there at all," or something like that -- some of the most fascinating movies would never have existed. Blaxploitation melodramas and comedies such as "Blazing Saddles" often indulged in payback fantasies against white racists (including slave owners in certain westerns), and I don't see how the art form, or the world, would be a better place if the filmmakers had been more cautious in their handling of loaded material. "The Night Porter" is a sick fantasy on Nazi themes, but I'm glad it exists; the mere act of arguing about it does more to get viewers thinking about Nazism and the Holocaust and its representations than any number of straightforward History Channel documentaries that seek to inspire nothing more than a morally superior "tsk, tsk, wasn't that awful!" reaction.

Granted, a good deal of the time, when filmmakers take a gutter approach to upsetting historical subjects, the result is crap, not interesting as art or anything else. But Hoberman, a critic I usually admire, has been making this particular point for years (with regard to movies mentioned higher up in this comment) and I am still not entirely sure what he'd like filmmakers to do differently, or why they should do it differently. Nor am I clear on why the Holocaust and Nazism should be treated with special care, compared to other grotesque events which, to their survivors and descendants, are just as upsetting, and in theory just as ethically fraught.

I hate to open up a can of worms without having seen the film yet, but this particular issue bugs me, and I'd be curious what other people think of it (particularly those who, like Keith, have seen Tarantino's new movie).

8/20/2009 6:11 PM

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So Yong Kim (1)
Sophie Barthes (1)
Stanley Cavell (1)
Stanley Kramer (1)
Stanley Kubrick (1)
Star Trek (4)
Star Wars (2)
Steadicam (2)
Stephen Frears (1)
Stephen Kijak (1)
Steve McQueen (1)
Steven Boone (7)
Steven Cooper (1)
Steven Spielberg (2)
Stuart Gordon (1)
Summer Hours (1)
Summer of '83 (2)
Summer of '83: Krull (1)
Summer of '83: Staying Alive (1)
Summer of '84 (8)
Summer of '84: Ghostbusters (1)

Summer of '84: Gremlins (1)
Summer of '84: Star Trek III: The Search for Spock (1)
Summer of '84: Streets of Fire (1)
Summer of '84: The Bounty (1)
Summer of '84: The Fourth Man (1)
Summer of '84: The Karate Kid (1)
Summer of '84: The Muppets Take Manhattan (1)
Summer of '84: Top Secret (1)
Summer of 84: Conan the Destroyer (1)
Sunshine Cleaning (1)
Susan Sontag (1)
Synecdoche New York (1)
T.V. on TV (1)
Tarsem (1)
Ted Kennedy (1)
Ted Pigeon (3)
Terminator Salvation (2)
Terrence Malick (6)
The Alligators Have Good Graphics (2)
The Auteurs (1)
The Auteurs Daily (1)
The Auteurs Notebook (1)
The Beaches of Agnès (1)
The Black Dahlia (1)
The Conversations (8)
The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz (1)
The Criterion Collection (30)
The Dark Knight (2)
The Diatribe (2)
The Far Country (1)
The Fast and the Furious (1)
The Frame-Up (1)
The Girlfriend Experience (1)
The Go-Between (1)
The Happening (1)
The L Magazine (1)
The Limits of Control (2)
The New World (5)
The Passion of Anna (1)
The President's Analyst (1)
The Ramen Girl (1)
The Rock (1)
The Soloist (1)
The Sopranos (20)
The Sopranos: Season 6 (20)
The Space Procedural (1)
The Transformers (1)
The Wall Street Journal (1)
The Wire (26)
The Wire: Season 4 (14)
The Wire: Season 5 (10)

The X-Files (1)
The X-Files: I Want to Believe (1)
Theater (4)
Theme Parks (1)
There Will Be Blood (1)
Three Monkeys (1)
Tilda Swinton (1)
Time Out New York (TONY) (4)
To See If I'm Smiling (1)
Todd VanDerWerff (97)
Tom Cruise (1)
Tom Stempel (30)
Tony Dayoub (3)
Top 10 (1)
Torchwood (26)
Toronto International Film Festival 2008 (2)
Tout va bien (1)
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (2)
Travis Mackenzie Hoover (13)
Treeless Mountain (1)
TV (1)
TV on the Internet (1)
TV Recap (310)
TV Review (3)
Two Lovers (1)
Ulrich Seidl (1)
UnderGroundOnline (UGO) (13)
Understanding Screenwriting (30)
Unraveling Michelle (1)
URL Change (1)
Vadim Rizov (98)
Vice Presidential Debate 2008 (1)
Victor Varnado (1)
Video (3)
Video Criticism (9)
video games (2)
Vindication (1)
W.M. Akers (1)
Wai Ka-Fai (1)
Walt Disney (1)
Walter Hill (1)
Watchmen (4)
Werner Herzog (2)
Wes Anderson (4)
Whatever Works (1)
Wilco (1)
Wilco (The Album) (1)
Will Lasky (3)
William Holden (3)
Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1)
Wim Wenders (1)

Woody Allen (2)
Written By (1)
Yasujiro Ozu (1)
Year in Review (5)
YouTube (1)
Z (1)
Zachary Wigon (14)
Zack Oberzan (2)
Zack Winestine (1)
Zen Pulp (1)

THE HOUSE CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Sepinwall
Bob Cumbow
Lauren Wissot
Craig
Jason Bellamy
Brad LaBonte
Sarah D. Bunting
Ryland Walker Knight
Matt Maul
Dan Callahan
Andrew Johnston
Jeffrey Hill
wstrobey
Tony Dayoub
Matt Noller
Jeremiah Kipp
Andrew Dignan
Dan Jardine
ed gonzalez
Andrew Chan
Simon Hsu
brandon
rob humanick
andrew schenker
Michael Peterson
Aaron Aradillas
Vadim
chris anthony diaz
Bob Westal
That Fuzzy Bastard
Dr. D'Oh!
tmhoover
Annie Frisbie
Hannah
mbpoland
Will Lasky
Luke
Elise Nakhnikian

Sheik Yerbootie
Paul Schrodt
Matt Zoller Seitz
Brendon Bouzard
Wagstaff
brotherfromanother
Ali Arikan
N.P. Thompson
Josh Shelov
Melissa Tuckman
Myles
Justine Elias
Jonathan Pacheco
Evan
Joan
Sheila O'Malley
Michael Crowley
J.J. Faulkner
James Martin Moran
John Lichman
barry maupin
Peet Gelderblom
Sean Burns
Ed Howard
kenjfuj
alsolikelife
Todd
m.b.
Steve Garmhausen
Edward Copeland
Keith Uhlich
Steven Boone
Logan
The Diatribe
Z. Wigon
Steven Cooper
Fernando F. Croce
Libby
Ross Ruediger
Simon Abrams
Max Winter
Foz
odienator
Ted Pigeon
