

Critique of Dark Lullabies

good introduction

The film Dark Lullabies chronicles different types of journeys. The physical distance travelled--thousands of miles between three continents--is small compared to the emotional distance covered by the film's co-director, Irene Angelico. Because of Angelico's deep personal involvement, we can understand why it is so difficult for her to come to terms with the past, and why she makes the painful trip to Germany to seek answers.

The film begins with a dedication, then ^{we see} stills of Angelico's parents, ^{as the camera zooms} zooming in on her father. Angelico's voiceover precedes a dissolve of the shot--from one of her father, to a night view of a concentration camp, as seen through a fence of barbed wire. It is Dachau, where Angelico's father was imprisoned, for the crime of being Jewish.

The pictures from the family photo album seem to be simply a nice effect, until Angelico makes the point that the children of survivors have no older relatives, or scrapbooks, or photo albums or family heirlooms. All of the ^{elements} ~~things~~ which most people use to help form their identity are sadly missing from the lives of the survivors. The legacy of memory is all that they have to hand down, as we see at the first conference ^{which} Angelico attends in Montreal, ~~which is~~ about survivors and surviving. Almost all of the people who lived through the Holocaust are aged or dead. Angelico calls the children and grandchildren of those who survived, "a generation possessed by history". Despite the image

of such a generation of a haunted people, the Jews stress ^o the old tradition of "laughter in pain" (I can't spell the Hebrew version), so that despair does not destroy, but strengthens their will to survive.

road One of the film's most moving images is of the survivors at ^a conference in Jerusalem. There are several notice boards, crammed full of messages to long-lost relatives. Although there is little hope of finding people they have not heard from in forty years, hordes of people scan the lists, checking them according to the camp where they last knew their loved ones to have been.

Angelico's next stop on her road to the past takes her to the Museum of the Holocaust. She goes with an Israeli couple; the husband seems well-acquainted with the museum, acting as a sort of tour guide. The wife, however, has always stayed away from the museum, afraid of the terrible feelings it might stir. She walks silently through the museum. They read about experiments conducted upon concentration camp prisoners, and how twins were often the subject of vile and inhumane "scientific" experiments. "I know my mother was a twin," she says quietly. Her body rocks forward and backward repeatedly, as if she were trying to cope with the pain of knowledge, which she had feared so much.

The most difficult part of Angelico's journey is her trip to Germany. She mentions at least twice that no one would expect her to return to the place where her parents suffered so much. I think Angelico was perhaps trying to reassure herself that she

was doing the right thing. I ^{assumed} got the impression that she felt somewhat like a martyr. Of course, no one could blame her for having such feelings, considering the legacy handed down to her. Perhaps it just seems odd because usually ^e the narrator of a documentary is relatively impartial, and not part of the documentary's subject itself. / 900

The first thing that Angelico does in Germany is talk to different German citizens. She wants to know how much (if any) of the history of the Holocaust has been passed down to Germans. She ^{finds} found out that it was common for Germans to learn about the Holocaust from foreigners; perhaps shame or ignorance prevented their parents and teachers from telling the whole truth. One former concentration camp ^{was} ~~was~~ allowed to blend in with the surroundings, so that when a teacher ^{o.k.} ~~told~~ her pupils that it ~~was~~ a cemetery, her students had no thought of questioning her. One woman says she played there as a child, totally unaware of the history of the site.

Angelico interview^{ed} a man whose father was a Nazi. He said his father evaded the boy's questions or called them "silly". He explained to the boy later that "soldiers do not excuse themselves for doing ^(S.P.) their jobs." Angelico also visit^{ed} the retreat where Adolf Hitler spent time with Eva Braun. The site ^{became} ~~has become~~ a landmark, attracting tourists. The proprietress, who wrote a book about the life of Hitler, painted a rosy picture, with no mention of the atrocities ^{for which} he was responsible ~~for~~. The woman smiled sweetly as she defended herself with the statement:

"I have no records. I can only write about the facts". She implies^d that the Holocaust is^{was} myth rather than fact, and we must wonder whether she is an isolated case, or whether she represents the average young German, not knowing or caring to know about history's dark little secrets. / 500

The final leg of Angelico's journey is to Dachau, where her father was imprisoned. Although she has been dreading it, she feels compelled to go. The camp is very quiet, but the ghosts are very vivid for Angelico. We see clips of footage, of bodies being dumped into mass graves and other images too horrible for repeated viewings to ever lessen the shock. Similar footage was shown from time-to-time throughout the film, to remind us that it was not a nightmare, it was real. / 900

The famous Brahms lullaby is heard at the beginning and the end of the film. It is not clear why it was chosen as the theme to the movie. Maybe it is for the thousands of children who died, some without their families, all with a number on their arms. "Taps" is not for children; in their memory, the film reminds us of the lullaby^{us} their parents never got to sing. / 5000
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