

Beyond The Pale: "I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE" —Churned Out or Churched Out?

Written by Dave Canfield

Monday, 18 October 2010 12:27



Horror is a religion or at the very least, a spiritual pathway. No greater proof of that (in the inverse) currently exists than the remake of I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE, whose marketing has been marked most obviously by a campaign to make sure the film is released unrated in as many theaters as possible. The idea seems to be that if horror fans really love the “cutting edge” they’ll demand to see it this way. Sadly the truth is, the marketers do have a point. A rated, and thus necessarily truncated version of this film would be pointless not because it would violate the aesthetic of a complex work of art but because it would then fail to deliver the only thing I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE (2010) has to offer.

If I’m not being clear let me suggest it this way: The idea is that an unrated horror film is being provided to the public out of some deep love for the genre, the fans, and freedom of speech in general.

This isn’t true.

It is, however, a dangerous diversion from a far more important truth that should horrify any culturally literate, spiritually sensitive human being. Here we have the moneylenders in the temple of horror telling the faithful fans what is good for the soul.

Meant as a sincere religious imprecation I state “My God.” If the smirk on my face causes you to mistake me for a cynic I apologize. It’s not a mark of cynicism but of a journalist (one who watches and records) watching and reacting with honest dubiousness to the folly of how art and commerce collide, dilute each other, and finally dissipate almost entirely into the dust of history- leaving what matters untalked about, unheralded, unheeded. It is the story of our age, of fallen, fallen man.

The reason people hated moneylenders wasn’t just because they were set up in the temple but because they leant money out at exorbitant rates of interest. The sin itself was referred to as

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usury. It was a practice designed to steal from those who could least afford it. Take much and give little. But here we have a case of bait and switch as well. Whatever virtues one may afford the original I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE (and for a solid identification of them, try Joe Bob Briggs' audio commentary on the Elite Entertainment Millenium Edition DVD), this new version has been mostly cited for bringing nothing new to the table when in reality it barely belongs at the table at all.



The remake of I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE isn't really a horror film. To what part of our liturgy does it subscribe?

To be sure, our church membership is wide ranging in it's appreciation of what the genre can offer; but can any of us say that we regularly attend horror films simply to see actors speak, squibs explode and faces melt? Does violence itself make a horror film? Those who do are merely visitors to the altar who flatter themselves that the violence itself is what the genre is about at it's core. In the case of I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE those who do, have, like the film itself, stepped almost entirely outside the loose but very real boundaries of horror into the abyss that culture always has waiting. It is an abyss that swallows money; a black hole from which no dollar escapes and nothing comes out in return. It is nihilism so utter that one is thinking "How can something have entered my mind and heart only to have left me emptier than before?"

Nihilism is not horror, but the absence of.

Horror moves, horror grieves, horror shocks and horror disgusts. Horror comes back to haunt, horror makes us tremble, horror displaces us from somewhere. It is the ironic Good Samaritan that, finds us, beats us and leaves us to bleed on the side of the road, it's most substantial mercy being a signpost it often leaves that points to where we are and where we can consider going next.

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Horror above all things is. We sense its connection to something bigger, something true and immovable, something I dare I say it is Holy, Sacred, awe inspiring. Something that though necessary, needed, craved is bound to turn our hair white and blind us on the road. Something that whispers and screams simultaneously, "In the darkness, take my hand, follow, for all around is danger and death and there is no other way." Horror suspends our disbelief leaving only raw inescapable belief.

Nowhere but in its scenes of depraved violence does I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE (2010) invite suspension of disbelief or interpretation as more than a special effects demo reel. It is badly written, misinterpreting the originals already confused intentions. It is badly acted, nowhere in the film do we encounter a person who truly seems a person rather than a pose. And most importantly the film does not even achieve the unease the ending of the original provoked emerging as at best a testament to the impotency of rage, the flatlined emotional void of revenge.



And because of these things, the film gives us nothing to feel, nowhere to lay our praise, nothing to worship. It points to nothing higher than the blood soaked earthed, the lye filled bathtub. It is like the crows in one of its climactic scenes who demand the gift of sight from those who have seen too much. It is like the revenger who can only repeat back to others what was said to him, madly aping cruelty without satisfying justice. The ancient horror maxim, "The blood is the life," is lost on it. The new version of I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE is a moneylender in the temple, taking more than it should, ignoring the true purpose of the church it has unlawfully set up residence in and treating the suffering need of congregants as a feeding trough.

{comments on}