

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF IÑÁRRITU

The Revenant is an overlong action flick in search of an abiding allegory

Mexico-born director Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu is custom-built for Hollywood. Like Hollywood, Iñárritu is neither as deep nor as heavy as he believes himself to be, and he regularly mistakes size and scale for epic seriousness. Since he burst onto the scene in 2000 with *Amores Perros*, and up to his Oscar turn last year with *Birdman*, Iñárritu has been making a practice of philosophizing with a hammer, turning supposedly heavy spiritual and existential themes (*21 Grams*, *Babel*) into sophomore courses in reductive obviousness and false epiphanies.

Unlike Clint Eastwood, who is a serious director disguised as a blockbuster director, Iñárritu remains a pig in a poke: an action man tartered up like an artist manqué, or a lead-off hitter who's argued his way into batting cleanup. The funny thing is that if Iñárritu leaned more heavily on his true talents — visual splendor, narrative drive, choreographed mayhem and pulling strong performances from brand-name actors — he'd likely achieve the heft and breadth to which he so desperately aspires. He's constantly reaching for Stanley Kubrick and Terrence Malick, when he's got Eastwood and Spielberg in his back pocket.

Iñárritu's latest film, *The Revenant*, is a case in point.



LEONARDO DICAPRIO LOOKS FOR HIS OSCAR IN *THE REVENANT*

Iñárritu takes this simple and rather bland revenge tale and dolls it up like a treatise on retribution and forgiveness, stretching a small lump of putty into a two-and-a-half-hour string of circumstances that drags and dangles and tangles all over the place. The movie opens with a ferocious bang, as the native Arikara ambush a fur-trapping party working the Louisiana Purchase; visually and tactically, the scene rivals the gut-punching oomph of the D-Day landing in *Saving Private Ryan*.

But from here, the core story — of a good guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) rising from near-death to hunt down the bad guy (Tom Hardy, stunning as always) who wrecked his life — gets mired in unsubtle philosophical moments that are as insulting to endure as they are beautiful to

behold, such as the moment when DiCaprio happens upon the bunk majesty of a stampeding herd of CGI-generated buffalo.

The Revenant isn't a bad movie; strip away the fabricated flab of its moral gravitas and you've got a pretty good action flick. Unfortunately, it is neither intended nor edited nor packaged as an action flick, and that's the problem. To pick out the prize, you've got to gulp down a gutful of the kind of weakly liberal moral excelsior that the Oscar crowd swills by the bucket — the wish-fulfillment fable that survival equals moral rectitude, that the primitive past has a pure heart and that capitalism is redeemed by its own nostalgia for what it so willfully destroyed. (*Regal Cinemas*, *Cinemark 17*)

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