

Comment for NPR's *All Things Considered*

The upset victory of "Shakespeare in Love" over "Saving Private Ryan" is not a big deal in itself. The hoopla and hype of the Academy awards mostly serve the commercial interests of a few, as well as the eagerness of many would-be "stars" and others to preen themselves in public, to sustain their egos with glitter. But with this selection the Academy of Motion Pictures fell short again, as it often does. Here was an opportunity to inject a measure of sanity into our society, and it was missed. Our youngsters are often so confused that they not only drink and drug themselves to death, but sometimes they also kill their classmates and teachers. By selecting "Shakespeare in Love" as the Best Picture, fantasy again won over reality. "Shakespeare" indeed has beautiful costumes and good acting, but it deals with relatively trivial issues. Not so "Saving Private Ryan." This riveting and well-made film powerfully highlights many of the values whose relative absence is already damaging millions of our children and many of our families.

What are these values that are in such short supply? "Saving Private Ryan" clearly illustrates

- that facing even grim realities is better than engaging in wishful thinking;
- that cowardice is pathetic, if not shameful;
- that war is cruel, but sometimes justified and unavoidable if we are to preserve our liberties and rights;
- that death and dying are real, not as they are portrayed in James Bond's movies and in Nintendo games,
- that real and often irreversible consequences result from people being shot;
- that excesses of compassion and good-will can kill;
- that loyalty, honor, duty and concern for the common good are not old-fashioned traits;
- that even in the midst of suffering, blood, gore and pain, life can have dignity, grandeur and meaning, and that when all is said and done, these mean infinitely more than having fun or being cool and hip.

Entertainment generally is merely a distraction, but great art, as in "Saving Private Ryan," also elevates and enriches us. Steven Spielberg is more than a film-maker. By producing "Schindler's List," "Amistad" and "Saving Private Ryan," he catapulted himself into a role of educator to the masses, using the powerful medium of which he is master. He successfully keeps our attention on scenes that people normally try to avoid, because experiencing them requires courage and fortitude. By nature, we humans follow the path of least resistance, even though doing so often endangers our common security, our decency and our well being, costing also personal integrity and dignity.

Winning the award as the Best Picture of the year would have pushed many more people to see "Saving Private Ryan," either for the first time, or again. It's worth it, for here is a movie with a potential to actually save lives. It shows convincingly how fragile existence is, and how wonderful. This is a film that ought to be seen by all, and especially by teenagers who prefer to not do so. It increases the regard for one's own life and for the welfare of others, and thus is an urgently needed antidote to our widespread permissiveness and thoughtlessness.

And besides, it is an exciting action movie.

Reuven Bar-Levav, M.D.