

Total Eclipse

Agnieszka Holland, an important Polish filmmaker (*Europa, Europa* and *The Secret Garden*) has, in *Total Eclipse*, taken on the task of depicting the fervent literary--and love--affairs of the 19th century French poets Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. Beginning with their meeting in 1871, when the precocious Rimbaud was but 16, *Total Eclipse* traces their scandalous peregrinations across Europe until their final break-up in 1875. Played by the fine British actor David Thewlis, Verlaine is shown as both mentor to and suitor of the capricious, brilliant Rimbaud, played by the hot young American actor Leonardo DiCaprio.

Written by longtime Rimbaud fan Christopher Hampton, *Total Eclipse* uses the historical facts while it aims to show the burning, non-conformist passion of the true *artiste*, ripe with the romantic notion of defying both conventionality and codes. Such a film should ideally leave viewers who are unfamiliar with the artists wanting to personally discover their work, but, sadly, such movie goers are more likely to leave this picture wondering what all the fuss was about.

Even the usually deft Holland and the intelligent Hampton cannot make their stars larger than the rather miserable lives we see them lead. Instead of poetic inspiration, we get meaningful looks and purposeful strides; instead of literary debate, we get nasty tantrums and tedious kvetching. Another Portrait of the Artist as a Young Schmuck.

One of the hardest things for a motion picture to achieve is to make the inner life of the writer vivid and believable on the screen; *Total Eclipse* is yet another attempt that misses that mark.

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