



MOVIES

Review: In 'Two Men in Town,' a Parolee Is Hounded by a Cop

By A. O. SCOTT MARCH 5, 2015

Paroled after serving 18 years in prison for the killing of a sheriff's deputy, William Garnett tries to build a normal life in a small border town in the New Mexico desert. William, who converted to Islam in the penitentiary, buys a used motorcycle, finds a job at a ranch and begins a romance. His peace is threatened by a grudge-holding sheriff and by an old friend who wants to drag William back into his criminal ways. His parole officer does what she can to head off what seems like an inevitably tragic turn of events.

William's struggle is at the center of "Two Men in Town," a somber, slow-moving drama directed by Rachid Bouchareb. The film, a remake of a 1973 French policier starring Alain Delon and Jean Gabin, is above all a showcase for a superb group of actors. Brenda Blethyn as the parole officer and Harvey Keitel the sheriff are the bickering faces of legal authority, each one a prickly blend of toughness and compassion. Luis Guzmán as the bad old buddy and Dolores Heredia as the kind new love interest are expectedly excellent. Above all, Forest Whitaker, as shrewd and graceful as ever, conveys William's infinite sorrow and simmering anger.

The desert landscapes are gorgeously shot by Yves Cape, but "Two Men in Town" never seems to fully inhabit its setting. Nor does the schematic, occasionally clumsy story do justice to the skills of the cast. Mr. Bouchareb, whose previous films include the sweeping World War II drama "Days of Glory," is a methodical, thoughtful director, and this movie's best moments find William in solitude or at prayer. But neither his inner turmoil nor his conflicts with the people around him come into sharp enough relief, and the gravity of his situation never fully takes hold.

"Two Men in Town" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). Violence and profanity.

Two Men in Town

Opens on Friday

Directed by Rachid Bouchareb; adaptation and dialogue by Olivier Lorelle, Yasmina Khadra and Mr. Bouchareb; director of photography, Yves Cape; edited by Yannick Kergoat; music by Eric Neveux; production design by Yan Arlaud; costumes by Graciela Mazon; released by Cohen Media Group. Running time: 2 hours.

WITH: Forest Whitaker (William Garnett), Harvey Keitel (Bill Agati), Brenda Blethyn (Emily Smithy), Luis Guzmán (Terence), Dolores Heredia (Teresa), Ellen Burstyn (Mother Garnett), Tim Guinee (Rod) and Reg E. Cathey (Supervisor Jones).

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