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'Between Two Worlds' - a moving French film in Orinda

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Photo provided

Beyond the shock effect of a close-to-documentary film about those at the bottom of the social order, the French film "Between Two Worlds" talks about the impossibility of differing social classes to really connect. It also questions the possibility of lying without cheating, or the moral justification of dissimulation to serve a higher purpose. The movie is served magnificently by French star Juliette Binoche ("The English Patient" - Oscar for Best Supporting Actress - 1996) surrounded by a cast of amateur actors playing themselves.

The movie begins with a middle-aged woman who appears at her wit's end and financially desperate, seeking a job with the French State employment agency. She has moved away from an abusive marriage, she says, has not worked for 20 years and now needs to make a living on her own. The only job that seems possible is that of a janitor. She will do anything, she says. That is how Marianne Winckler's journey starts. In

the city of Ouistreham, located in northwestern France, Winckler works and interactions with women in similar difficult situations, broken families, immigrants, vulnerable people who are easily discounted and abused by the companies that employ them. Ouistreham also has a port with a ferry and when all else fails, becoming a part of the ferry cleaning crew is the job from hell that becomes the last resort for those who can't get anything better.?

But Winckler is not exactly what she pretends to be. She makes little mistakes that betray her difference, until the full story is revealed and the friends she has made among the hard-working women feel betrayed and used, in spite of what might be Winckler's real motivation.

Forget any glamorous idea you might have about France. This is not a film about the charm of a little port in Normandy, its cheerful inhabitants and their wonderful cuisine. It is about what it is really like to be "have-nots" living in the shadows of those who "have." The group of workers are made mostly of women, rough women who often have to feed a family, and among whom a real solidarity exists. Binoche as Winckler does not wear any visible makeup in this movie, her eyes are red with tiredness and her wrinkles show.

Winckler is surrounded by a cast of women from Ouistreham playing their own roles. One of them especially, H el ene Lambert who plays the betrayed friend, is totally on par with Binoche, the Oscar-winning actress. The result is poignant. It is almost a documentary of the lives of these women forced to work at a furious pace that breaks their bodies for a pittance. The movie shows the humanity of these mostly uneducated women as they live their hard lives. They are shown as multidimensional heroines who laugh, love, and fight for respect, even when they don't get any. Their courage is tremendous. Especially in this post-COVID time, the movie asks about the place in society of all the service people who take the jobs nobody wants and remain mostly invisible to the rest of the population.

The film also shows with finesse the difficulty to communicate between different social groups. It does not try to pretend that there is solidarity when people are from very different worlds, even if friendship and respect can happen. "Between Two Worlds" is not an optimistic movie with a happy ending and redemption, but it can create a catharsis and renewed respect for our fellow human beings living invisibly and servicing us.

"Between Two Worlds" is brought to Orinda by the local nonprofit, the International Film Showcase. It will play for at least a week starting on Aug. 25. Tickets at www.orindamovies.com/

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