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Aisling Franciosi and Baykali Ganambarr in 'The Nightingale,' a story about an Irish convict sentenced to a British penal colony on Tasmania.

Far Better Films than the Oscar Nominated

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the peaceful annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany), Franz and his family were ostracized, and he was imprisoned and ultimately executed. This stunning film brings this hidden story to light and is, in my estimation, the best film of 2019.

It's not your typical anti-Nazi war movie. The courageous battles here are largely internal; Franz (beautifully played by German actor August Diehl in one of the very best and deepest performances of the year) is a farmer, not a philosopher, and he did not make his case in writing or with a microphone. What we know of his thoughts comes largely from letters exchanged with Fani (also brought beautifully to life by Austrian actress Valerie Pachner in another of the best performances of the year). What comes through is deep love simply expressed and questions held with intention. Unable to excuse or justify what is happening around him, Franz seeks counsel from the church, only to find that the church is in league with the Reich. (I read later that the local priest he visited had replaced another who was ousted for giving an anti-Nazi sermon.) His entreaty to the bishop ("If God gives us free will, we are responsible for what we do [and] what we don't do") is met with an appeal to his supposedly biblical "duty to the fatherland."

This meditative film guides us into the physical and psychic cost of Franz's unheralded stand. Although Franz describes his as "the smallest of crosses" in contrast to what he observes inside a Nazi prison and knows is happening outside, director Terrence Malick in characteristic fashion lingers on the exertion in every movement, the physical diminishment,

the burdens Fani carries at home as village children throw dirt at their daughters and she struggles to manage their farm without support even from family members. The expansive beauty and harshness of their mountain community mirrors the scale of the stakes for Franz and Fani, even while they encounter only opposition.

The arguments leveled at them sound hopelessly hollow from our safe distance, and inevitably turn to the pointlessness of Franz's stand. As the judge says to him, "Do you imagine that anything you do will change the course of this war? That anyone outside this court will ever hear of you? No one will be changed. The world will go on as before. You'll vanish." If we are honest, we can easily summon the shape such arguments take today, and perhaps hear the same fear or cynicism in our own mouths. Like the couple's friends, neighbors and family members, we too expect that the right choice will involve public affirmation; few of us stand up for the truth when it is unpopular and costly. We want to be good and win at the same time. We miss what Franz knows when a Nazi official urges him to simply sign the oath of loyalty to go free; he responds, "I am free already."

More than is typical of a movie about World War II, this film reflects the current stakes if we are willing to look and confronts us with the costs of true heroism, which is mostly unheralded. I was struck watching several interviews with Diehl and Pachner how the experience of physically embodying these two people had obviously transformed them. As is apparent from watching the film, Malick's directorial method involves a process of searching and embodiment that has the capacity to capture, for the artists and for us, what is most deeply

and ineffably true. Here he and his collaborators have captured the heartbreaking power of love to sustain courage, and the beauty and cost of standing firmly against injustice, even and most especially when no one affirms you.

2. "Us": Of all the omissions from the list of Oscar nominees, the complete shut-out of this film makes me most angry. None of the writers and directors recognized can come near Jordan Peele's originality and high quality of intention,

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