

EIFF – Oliver Sherman

by Ryan McNeely

There was an American TV series a couple of years ago called *Life*. It was about a cop who was wrongly convicted of murder and spent 12 years in prison, then was exonerated and returned to the force. His captain was played by Donal Logue and his nemesis was a Russian gangster played by Garret Dillahunt. There are two reasons I mention this: firstly, it was a really good series that not enough people saw (but is available on DVD), and secondly because those two actors are reunited in *Oliver Sherman*; a gut-punch of a movie about two soldiers and how each has adjusted to life after returning from war.

Dillahunt plays Sherman Oliver, a drifter who turns up at the small-town home of his former comrade-in-arms Franklin Page (Logue). Page is living the good life with his wife and two kids, and his good job at the mill. Oliver, on the other hand, has not done so well. The first shot of the film is the back of his head as he sits on the bus, with a huge scar clearly visible through his buzz-cut. As soon as Franklin opens his door the contrast between the two is clear. Page has grown out his hair, he has a beard, a bit of a paunch. He's comfortable. He's moved on so much, in fact, that he doesn't even recognise Oliver at first. Feeling sorry for the man, Page invites Oliver in to his home and his life. At first, Oliver seems almost childlike; he's shy and unfailingly polite, but without any sense of humour. Dillahunt plays him very deliberately restrained, in movement, speech, facial expression, everything. Waiting for this tightly-wound spring to snap is a huge tension-builder. It is to writer/director Ryan Redford's (working from the short story *Veterans*, by Rachel Ingalls) credit that he doesn't go for the easy ending. There's no Ramboesque rampage through town. That would have cheapened things, I think. We do get a glimpse at what Oliver is capable of, but even that is controlled (and mostly off-screen).

Logue and Molly Parker as his wife, Irene, are both exceptional, but this is Dillahunts movie. Hes innocent yet manipulative, compassionate but violent, and all in the blink of an eye. The title of the movie comes from a story Oliver tells Page about his time in the hospital: For almost a year he thought his name was Oliver Sherman. It was only when he got a letter that he realised it was the wrong way round. "Oliver Sherman", he says, "Almost, but its not right". Not just the name, theres the character in just five words. I couldn't have said it better myself.

This is a timeless movie. It is never said explicitly which war Oliver and Page were in. It could be any war of the last 50 years. The point is, though, the location of the fighting is irrelevant. Oliver spends a long time in hospital, yes, but once his wounds have healed, hes left to himself with nothing but a disability pension. He has no family, no friends. What might have happened if he didnt have Page? Who would have been to blame?

Oliver Sherman had its UK premiere at the Edinburgh Film Festival this year. I cant find any word about a full release, either to cinemas or direct-to-DVD, but it is definitely a film worth keeping an eye out for.

Here is a little taste:-