

## Love Attempts to Infiltrate Horror in 'The Promise'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 24, 2017 - 8:20am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – So much of civilization’s story is lost in the mist of “winners write the history,” and even as recently as 100 years ago there are instances of world history that is not generally taught. “The Promise” is set during the World War I period, and has a love triangle in the midst of a little known genocide.

The love triangle is represented by a top drawer trio... Christian Bale, Oscar Isaac and Charlotte Le Bon, and the heartache of the situation has echoes of Dr. Zhivago, without the soap opera. The attempted ethnic cleansing of the Armenian people at the hands of Ottoman Empire-era Turkey is shown with a tense desperation that doesn’t let up, even in the end. The information about the cleansing is exposed through the lovers surviving through it, and puts a spotlight on humans who become a cruel beast, and victimizes a tribe of people just for being who they are. As with the Native Americans in the USA and the Jewish population in World War II Germany, the example of man’s inhumanity to man never ceases to chill the spine, especially in when it occurred such a relatively short time ago.

Christian Bale is American journalist Chris Meyers, a sole AP newspaper reporter reporting on warring factions in Ottoman Empire Turkey in and around 1915. He is having a relationship with Ana (Charlotte Le Bon), an Armenian woman who studied in Paris. The third player in the trio is an Armenian medical student named Mikael (Oscar Isaac), who has come together with the other two in Constantinople.



Mikael (Oscar Isaac) and Ana (Charlotte Le Bon) in ‘The Promise’

Photo credit: *Open Roads Films (II)*

Mikael's uncle is encouraging his nephew to woo Ana away from Meyers, even though the student is in the city because of a dowry and a promise of marriage to a woman from his village. When Chris is called away to cover a story, Ana and Mikael do connect, and this begins a love triangle that will be in the foreground of the Armenian genocide, in which Mikael will marry the woman from the village to survive – but the three are still destined to meet again.

The performances in this film are superb, and they handle the storytelling of this era of horror with the proper gravity and desperation. The script, which was co-written by Robin Swicord and the director Terry George, effectively expresses the situation of the cruelty that was involved in this history, which the Turkish government still denies ever occurred. Step by odious step, the lovers are on the run, and it is only through some shrewd and lucky interventions that they keep moving toward exile.

Christian Bale is particularly good as the American journalist (he's portrayed so many Americans it's hard to remember he's British). There is an urgency to his character, and although he is part of the love triangle, he indicates he loves the pursuit of the story as much as he loves Ana. Oscar Isaac keeps vividly creating memorable film characters. His Mikael is complex and conflicted, but keeps trying to do the right thing in the midst of unspeakable chaos. Charlotte Le Bon completes the trio, and sadly soldiers on despite incredible obstacles. The characters are symbols as much as real people, but they maintain their humanity.



In Love and War: Chris Meyers (Christian Bale) in 'The Promise'

Photo credit: Open Roads Films (II)

The film has had its share of controversies. The Turkish government refuses to acknowledge that the Ottoman government perpetuated the genocide, and director Terry George recently said that there was a concerted effort, through Turkish online infiltration, to downgrade the rating for the film on the Internet Movie Data Base. And interestingly enough, the New York Times reported this week that a smoking gun document had been deciphered by scholars, which may prove that the cleansing orders came from the government. The film, of course, has a time and place in our current situations, as those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it.

If anything, "The Promise" provides that war and murder inevitably has a human face, and eventually the casualties are too much to bear for either side. Countries and ideologies can wipe out as many of their perceived enemies as they can, but eventually they are left alone to face the consequence of the their sins. Film ratings on imdb can't alter that need for redemption.

*"The Promise" opened everywhere April 21st. Featuring Christian Bale, Oscar Isaac, Charlotte Le Bon and Shohreh Aghdashloo. Written by Terry George and Robin Swicord. Directed by Terry George. Rated "PG-13"*



[16]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]  
Writer, Editorial Coordinator  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]



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