

# BROTHERS

US, 2009, Jim Sheridan



When the Danish film *Brothers* was released in 2003, it was topical because of the invasion of Afghanistan and the work of peacekeeping forces like those from Denmark. There was a certain remoteness for the Danish audience. Afghanistan was a long way away and the Danes were not at war. This made the telling of a story about the hardships of a soldier, the crisis of conscience and the pain in returning home after being released from capture, all the more powerful. The film was directed by Suzanne Bier.

It has now been adapted for the United States and directed by Jim Sheridan (*My Left Foot*, *In the Name of the Father*, *In America*). And this makes a great deal of difference, especially for an American audience. America is involved in the Afghan conflict. The war makes headlines every other day, especially with news of casualties. Even President Obama finds himself in a situation where he feels constrained to send more troops.

What will the American public make of a film which portrays heroes but portrays them in a questioning light? While the drama was more palpable in the Danish version, it seems more 'real' in the American version.

The action is transposed to Minnesota. Tobey Maguire (who often has a kind of monotonous voice delivery and a somewhat impassive face which he uses for the most part here) does have some opportunities to be more compellingly dramatic than usual, in the key scene of torture in Afghanistan and in the emotional trauma he experiences on his return home. Jake Gyllenhaal has the easier role as the younger brother who is a disappointment to his ex-Vietnam marine (a strong performance from Sam Shepard) and has served time. He becomes more engaging as the action progresses and takes on opportunities to redeem himself. Natalie Portman is the wife and mother.

Most of the action is in Minnesota, with scenes of action in Afghanistan, especially the imprisonment of two marines and the physical and, ultimately, mental torture which tests the metal and integrity of the hero. The film emphasises the toll that military service takes on families with absences, dangers and the homecoming which needs so much tolerance and understanding and time for healing (where and if possible).

After all this, the film ends somewhat abruptly, both emotionally and thematically. Some more explicit indications of the future would have been helpful. (And marketers have burdened the film with one of the most trite and misleadingly trivialising taglines: 'She is caught between the man she loves and the man who loves her', as if it were a melodramatic soap-opera.)

TObey MAGUIRE | JAKE GYLLENHAAL | NATALIE PORTMAN  
BROTHERS  
DECEMBER 4

THERE ARE TWO SIDES  
TO EVERY FAMILY

