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Freelance writer and raconteur

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MEEK'S CUTOFF *** 1/2 out of ****
Opening day in limited release

Director Kelly Reichardt gets better and better with every film, and here she fulfills the promise of *Old Joy* and *Wendy & Lucy*. The latter starred Michelle Williams as a woman who lost her dog; her central riveting performance kept the slight story afloat.

Here, Williams is part of a marvelous ensemble, and while the plot comes fast and furious, it's presented in a low-key, ambiguous manner that suits Reichardt to a "t." In this Western set during the 1800s, three families are headed west with their guide Meek (Bruce

Greenwood). Meek is either lost or being urged by residents of the Territory they're headed for to steer newcomers away to a certain death. (Too many Americans might turn the Territory over to the U.S. in a vote, something certain independent settlers want to avoid.) Meeks may be clueless or cruel but they undoubtedly need water. The capturing of a "savage" gives them a chance to ignore Meeks and use this man to save them.

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There you go. That it's, all delivered in an open-ended manner sure to frustrate general audiences. But what a cast *Meek's Cutoff* offers. Paul Dano is wonderful as a weak-willed man who only seems strong compared to his hysterical wife (Zoe Kazan), a woman who sees Indians lurking behind every tree. The inestimable Shirley Henderson is wittily on target as a woman constantly keeping an eye on her wandering son and a husband who refuses water when it's scarce (to all of their detriment). Greenwood is wonderfully offbeat as the guide, and Will Patton is a rock of common sense as the husband of Williams, though their relationship is a little tense. (She's his second wife, and he seems uncertain about this woman with opinions.)

Without a hint of modernism, Williams creates a strong, fascinating character who insists on seeing the captured "savage" (Rod Rondeaux) as a man and not just an object of scorn or even pity. Exceptionally well-acted, quiet and observant, *Meek's Cutoff* is pure arthouse fare, which is meant as a warning for those who might want, you know, a little action or some answers, and as praise for a talented director coming into her own.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

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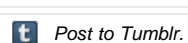
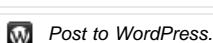
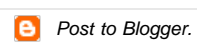
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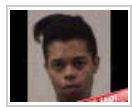


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scubalady 09:03 AM on 4/10/2011

2 Fans

Michelle Williams has been a favorite of mine since Me without you. Her performances in Land of plenty, Wendy and Lucy or Blue Valentine are riveting (I would have given her the Oscar!!).

So I won't miss this new collaboration with Kelly Reichardt. It looks promising.

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Even the poster for this movie is excellent.

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Michael Giltz 03:27 PM on 4/10/2011
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I hadn't seen the poster but checked it out thanks to your recommendation. It is indeed very cool.

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