

NOTES ON QUARTET

Present : M. EM . EO. A. S. J. R ages 68-93

4 women had seen the film before and it was the first viewing for the other three.

Brief introduction about the linear narrative and slow pace of the film. Some mention of press responses and comparison with *The Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Comment about the simplicity of the narrative and cinematography suggesting with a light touch issues of ageing.

First impressions: "super, lovely, moving, could see it again, Pauline Collins acting of dementia was so subtle, I have strong feelings about what should happen in a retirement/old people homes, loved every minute". The four women who had seen it before liked it even more this time and noticed details that escaped them the first time. Of the three women who saw it for the first time, two loved it and one of them was so moved that she did not want to talk about it immediately. One woman found it tedious with a predictable story, was bored and thought that the best bit was the credits in the end.

The music :"all these people were real life musicians". "What a memorial", "They were actually playing and singing", "As a musician I loved it". "It is known that music does keep you young", "With dementia music has been shown to have a good effect", "Music is the last thing to go". "Rigoletto Quartet is very famous. It is breathtaking but has no relevance to the film."

This led to some discussion about whether this was so - given Maggie Smith's character infidelity and TC's response to it.

The retirement home: the general comments indicated that the impression of the women were that people go into old people homes only when forced to. S: you usually get to a care home in an emergency. M: "All the people seemed so competent and well off. It seemed unlikely that they needed to leave their homes. Dementia is a key reason for people being admitted to care homes" R quoted Prof Kirkwood: "there are worse things that care homes..." and gave examples of retirement homes that also catered for the needs of later life. She also mentioned Diana Athill*. J: "Exhilarating

moment after the credits finish and the camera just stays on an ordinary scene in one of the big rooms in the home- there is a sense of business and the sound is the business of an orchestra tuning, of people practising, of people doing 'their thing'. A hive of activity – this home". S: "in my mother home everybody is in a wheelchair. They put her on drugs even though she did not need them. We had to intervene." ". EO: "Mental health - over and misdiagnoses of mental conditions is a real problem, one must always monitor the treatment of residents in care homes and give them as much control as possible".

On the cost of good care homes there was a debate about professional musicians being able to afford them. It was pointed out that Jane mentioned that she was a 'charity case'. M: "more money need to be out in the whole system".

EM: "it is not fair. Now young people are going to support us." LOTS OF DISAGREEMENT ON THIS. NEED TO WATCH OUT FOR THE DIVIDE AND RULE LINE . ALWAYS MONEY FOR DEFENSE. OLD PEOPLE CONTRIBUTE TO THE ECONOMY. AGEISM PERMEATES OUR CULTURE...

Idea of placing retirement homes next to nurseries and school so that visiting is easier.

Disability: M: "Apart from Maggie Smith with her stick - there didn't seem to be much incapacity" J: "The clarinet player and angina attack - indication of illness and intimation of death - Grief of Maggie Smith character leaving her home - Billy C having dizzy spell - Pauline Collins' dementia - Maggie Smith's hip -"repeating oneself" a bit of a laugh but distressing reminder - when Pauline Collins is lying in bed (after Maggie attacks her with flowers) and clearly confused, Tom C and Billy C look on concerned but also with fear. However much they prepare themselves for things getting worse the reality of when it does is grim. These were in addition to people in beds, going to hospital etc." R: "the creeping quality of old age disability - Billy C. behaviour and language due to a stroke affecting inhibition".

Other general comments:

M: It was a delightful fantasy but there was not enough to take me through. Not much subtlety. Some characters stereotyped. For example Michael Gambon. I much preferred the Marigold Hotel. It was jolly. With many different situations. It was sentimental but more interesting.

S: The film was not at all didactic. Found it very humorous. Specially Billy Connolly I was struck by the wisdom of it. Phrases like "just do it. What does it matter if it is not perfect" I liked the intergenerational aspect of the film, the respect it conveyed was wonderful. The first time I saw the film I thought that the speech of the manager at the gala was patronising, but changed my mind the second time. Very moved by Pauline Collins when she said "I have no husband, or children, I have you". Speaking about the way that Maggie Smith responded to PC when she was going to leave was good response - and accurate - in relation to someone with dementia. (You shouldn't disagree - but enter into their narrative).

EM: I usually do not like Connolly but he was all right. I did not like the black youth portrayed as ignorant i.e. clapping in the wrong place -GENERAL DISAGREEMENT-. Maggie Smith always plays rarefied roles. In real life they would have been getting pills throughout the day. (R. mentioned that pills in a glass were seen in the credits montage) This is one of those films that people may go to and that there's little about - but one day it will be seen as a classic.

A: I objected that they were getting married again. But then I am against marriage. The film was not slow. It held my interest.

R: the film has the feeling of recognisable 'lived experience': angina, dizzy spells, prostate pbs, search for words, repeating oneself etc... The film shows a resolution of old conflicts - an ageing issue-. People become more tolerant. We are not used to see on film friendship, caring shown here.

J: The first time I saw this film, I was so delighted by how kind and caring people were towards each other, and how wonderful the home was that I only noticed the obvious signs of disability/infirmity. This time I was more attentive to that, and made a list. (see above)

* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/apr/17/diana-athill-move-old-peoples-home>