

Movie discussion resource

Amour ('love') (2012) DVD

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Genre: Drama (French language)

Rating: M (mature thematic material including a disturbing act, and for brief language)

Length:

Starring: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Emmanuelle Riva and Isabelle Huppert

Director & Writer: Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke

Winner of many awards including Palme d'Or & Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film



Brief synopsis

Georges and Anne are a couple of retired music teachers in their 80's enjoying life, content in each other's company. Anne suddenly has a stroke at breakfast that begins her harrowingly steep physical and mental decline as Georges attempts to care for her at home as she wishes. In the end, George, with his love fighting against his own weariness and diminished future on top of Anne's, is driven to make some critical decisions for them both. (Kenneth Chisholm) More here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amour_%282012_film%29

Questions for discussion

It's a harrowing but truthful story of the onset of physical and mental decline, with insights into both the person affected and the one who suddenly finds themselves as the carer, as well as how family respond to the changed circumstances. The filmmaking style is almost as a documentary with the camera simply following the activity. No bells and whistles here, just the confronting nature of day-to-day routine. It's a serious film, but not depressing in the sense of needing to avoid reflecting on these issues. Fruitful discussion will be had in sharing insights about the film and its story, and personal experiences.

Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

For richer, for poorer, in good health and poor....

Long after the bliss of the wedding day, the reality of the exchanged vows comes to be known when the health of a loved one deteriorates. This story is one response. What is the nature of love when demythologised from 'romanticized' love? What is the nature of love spoken about in the Biblical text often used in weddings: Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Cor 13:4-6). What inspired you in this movie and what challenged you?

Preserving dignity

There's lots of dignity to be lost – adult diapers, people talking about you in the third person, having to be 'fed and watered' and bathed. But being home in familiar settings may enable the person to feel they still have a sense of self-worth and identity and not just a patient in a bed in a care facility. There are plenty of challenges, though, in being a care provider for someone at home, and plenty that is 'lost' for the carer. What insights did the movie provide, and what insights do you have from those who have experienced being a carer?

Who are you?

Chronic illness and physical and mental deterioration can change the relationship between people who have lived with each other for many years and who know each other so well. How to care for the person you have loved, even when it seems they are no longer 'present' in the same way? How to be cared for by the person you have loved, when you can no longer do the simple things in life like going to the toilet on your own? What are the challenges in this scenario?

A rollercoaster

What emotions did you see in the couple – determination, resignation, frustration, serenity etc. How might you imagine you would be in similar circumstances – as the one who is ill, or as the one who is the carer? What support would you need to survive these harrowing circumstances – people, things, services, respite etc?

Second fiddle

The couple's daughter, Eva, is an occasional visitor. She seems to be tolerated, but there is none of the warmth and serenity extended to her that the couple themselves have shared in their day-to-day living before Anne's stroke. Eva is almost seen as an outsider, greeting with reserved hostility lest she interfere in their decision-making in response to Anne's situation. The onset of illness is devastating, but can also be divisive in families. Discuss.

The elephant in the room

"Life is so long," Anne says contentedly while she and Georges flip through an old photo album. They have lived their lives well, and with delight. Is it a shock, or to be expected, that after Georges tenderly reads a favourite book to Anne that he then smothers her? It is a premeditated and shocking act. It raises ethical, moral and legal issues. How do you respond to this act of someone who loves another so deeply that they would commit murder (or more kindly, to put the other out of their ongoing misery)? Is the capacity to breathe enough to determine 'living', when life has become so diminished?

A personal story for reflection

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/02/surviving-amour.html>

Later, when Anne, upon returning home from the hospital, made Georges promise she'd never have to go back, I thought of my grandfather's room in the geriatrics ward—of how we'd read the newspaper together on the edge of the bed he would die in, the bed my grandmother convinced the nurses to let her crawl into to sleep beside him. She'd insisted he be admitted, despite the fact there was nothing any doctor could do: for Anne and Georges, the ultimate act of love was Georges allowing and even expediting Anne's death, but for my grandparents, it was my grandfather allowing my grandmother to try to keep him alive. I remembered the day of his funeral, when I had to look away as my grandmother climbed into the back of the hearse and, dizzy with grief, knelt over the coffin she had begged the funeral director to open, so she could talk to his body one last time. I thought about her now: I always knew she would dissolve when he died, but I had not foreseen that her grief would sustain itself, essentially undiminished, for years. That she would transform into a person I often barely recognize. (Hannah Goldfield)