

Movie discussion resource

Claire Darling (2019)

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Genre: 'a lighthearted drama with fantasy elements'

Rating: M (mature themes)

Length: 94 minutes

Director: Julie Bertuccelli

Cast: Catherine Deneuve, Chiara Mastroianni, Alice Taglioni

Country of origin: France

Based on the best-selling novel Faith Bass Darling's Last Garage Sale by Lynda Rutledge



Synopsis: In Verderonne, it's the first day of summer and reclusive millionaire Claire Darling (Catherine Deneuve) wakes up hearing voices, convinced to live her last day. The action takes place over a period of just 24 hours. Claire is an old lady, and decides impulsively to clear out her beautiful house full of family heirlooms, antiques, paintings and objects d'art, laying them out on the front lawn of her mansion. Each object stirs vivid memories of her flamboyant yet tragic life. She is determined to sell everything - Tiffany lamps to the collection clock. A horde of curious passersby and opportunistic neighbours fight over the ridiculously underpriced antiques. A friend of her daughter Marie drops in and is bewildered by the impromptu garage sale. She tries to buy back things from buyers leaving. She saves one of the music boxes, leading her to remember her first time as a little girl, entering the house and being captivated by the beautiful things. She remembers the way Mrs Darling lovingly showed her her collection. She calls her childhood friend Marie to come back from Paris. Marie is obviously frustrated at seeing strangers carry off a painting of her grandmother and family furniture. The reunion between mother and daughter is frosty as they have not seen each other for 20 years. Mrs Darling still harbours a grudge about the family ring she has accused Marie of stealing and shut her out of her life. She blamed her husband for the death of their son. When Marie returns to the family home, she tries to stop the madness of the garage sale, and to work out the reason for her mother's impulsive decision.

(Note: The director filmed the movie in the estate of her own grandmother, and mother and daughter in the film are mother and daughter in real life)

General questions for discussion

Some general questions might provide enough framework for you to discuss the movie:

- ❖ 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?
- ❖ Where is God present in the story? Where does God seem absent? What Christian themes speak into the context of this narrative?

What are we without our memories?

"Who we are is just a collection of stories that we tell ourselves over and over again. If that's true, we're all just the composition of our memories, pieced together in whatever ways we can make sense of. As a survivor of complex trauma, I live in a nest of painful and even confused memories, rearranging the pieces that never feel settled or composed. I live in a near-constant state of remembering, but the act of remembering is not always visual or conscious". *(Sam Dylan Finch)*

Memories can be anchors in our lived reality, but they are not always reliable. When an individual experiences a traumatic event, whether physical or psychological, memory can be affected. Memories can be 'mis-remembered' through grief, guilt and trauma, and may result in further trauma, or as ways to deny truth. In the movie, Claire flits in and out of memories, and all three female characters experience nonlinear moments that build into hallucinations. What is truth?

=> Discuss the dissonances and hallucinations Claire experiences with her memories and ways you may resonate with the mis-remembering of past experiences.

What are we without our most treasured possessions?

Lynda Rutledge, the writer of the book on which the film is based on said, "I'm a great collector of things; I feel uneasy in apartments that are too sparse. And I'm a big fan of garage sales and flea markets. The people selling their stuff lay themselves bare without realizing it. These objects are a window into their family history. They are shot through with experience, they have flesh and a soul".

Possessions can act as an extension of ourselves. They may remind us of our personal history, our connection to other people, and who we are or want to be. Wearing a uniform may convince us we are a different person. Keeping family photos may remind us that we are loved. A home library may reveal our appreciation for knowledge and enjoyment of reading. Acquiring and holding onto possessions can bring us comfort and emotional security. But these feelings cloud our judgement about how useful the objects are and prompt us to hang onto things we haven't used in years. (Melissa Norberg, Jessica Grisham, *The Conversation*, 2019)

The KonMari method of de-cluttering ('does this item bring you joy?') is a global phenomenon. What happens when possessions do bring joy even if they are unused? Do we keep 'things' or throw them out? What is the role of 'things' when it comes to memories? Or family photos or paintings?

Will we be remembered by the 'things' we leave behind or what will be our legacy?

"They say that collecting is a way of banishing death – always pushing it away, because you can always find another piece to an endless puzzle. And this infinite edifice, through its accumulation and composition, becomes a work in itself, a knowing reflection on the incongruous world of our human fabrications. So selling these objects is an even bolder act for Claire Darling since, as she tells the priest, they helped her through the trials in her life. Accepting that all these objects she bought and cherished will outlive her and can have another life is nothing less than accepting her death". (Lynda Rutledge)

=> *Discuss your own relationship to possessions, especially emotional attachment. Is 'downsizing' a challenge for you in terms of what you own, or do you welcome ways to keep things simple?*

Complexity of mother/daughter relationships

"Despite what we prefer to believe, the female of our species isn't hardwired to love her offspring. The lack of maternal warmth and validation can warp a daughter's sense of self, and makes her lack confidence in or be wary of close emotional connection, and shapes her in ways that are both seen and unseen. The unloved daughter is diminished by the mother-daughter connection". (Peg Streep). In the early 70's Nancy Friday began her research that explored the unique interaction between mother and daughter, which was published as *My Mother/My Self* (a good read!). The research emphasised that the greatest gift a good mother can give remains unquestioning love planted deep in the first year of life, so deep and unassailable that the tiny child grown to womanhood is never held back by the fear of losing that love, no matter what her own choices in life.

=> *we each carry different experiences of mothering, and women will have their own stories about their particular mother/daughter relationship. The movie may open opportunities to share some of those experiences; pastoral sensitivity will be needed for listening as well as speaking.*

Resolution of conflict

When Claire ends up in hospital, Marie is at her side. Claire is finally warm to her daughter. She tells her she loves her. Marie shows her mother the ring she re-found that afternoon (that Claire had accused her of stealing and had led to estrangement for 20 years). Mrs Darling gives it to her. It is a precious family heirloom that has passed from grandmother to mother, to daughter. It seems to be the only object Claire seems to value. Marie is overcome with emotion and hugs her mother, only to be pushed away by her. The wonderful moment for Marie when a break-through seems to be reached with her mother is shattered in the next moment when rejection continues as if nothing had happened between them.

=> *The ebb and flow of coldness and warmth in relationships can be complex and challenging. Sometimes the rhythm is constant, and confusing. Sometimes it may be at intervals of many years. Or sometimes the rhythm is with our hopeful hearts and aching reality. Are there ways you have encountered this and how may you have learned to come to terms with it?*

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