

MAY, 2013

Volume 13, No. 2

## FILM REVIEW

### *Amour*

Have you ever felt a sense of gratitude to have someone in your life, even though he or she was dying or perhaps even already deceased? Have you ever felt tenderness for an older adult and observed a similar state of wonder at the world that you often glimpse in a young child or a pet?

*Amour*, the 2012 Palme D'Or Winner at Cannes by acclaimed director Michael Haneke, is a movie to be celebrated, enjoyed and discussed openly. Too many have seen this film and walked away downcast. Some may say that movies are meant to provide escapism. To them, I ask, then why watch such hard-hitting classic films such as *Ordinary People* which discusses family secrets and suicide, and *Kramer Vs. Kramer* which discusses divorce and child custody?

Art reflects life and life reflects art. Too often, death is cast aside from open discussion, as if we cannot deal with this fundamental fact of existence. Some psychotherapists such as Irvin Yalom contend that the fear of death (often repressed) lies at the heart of many of our anxieties. They would enjoin us to gain a heightened awareness of death (perhaps even write our own obituary!) so that we could live our lives with more appreciation and purpose.

*Amour* follows a couple who are both retired music teachers – now in their 80s (French screen legends Emmanuelle Riva and Jean-Louis Trintignant). They are still very much in love and active in their appreciation of music specifically and the arts in general. The woman suffers a blocked carotid artery, which surgery cannot repair.

Remarkably, *Amour* does not medicalize this couple's journey. Instead, the film follows a complex emotional trajectory with very little actual plot. The couple grows closer together – and develops a very private language – with few words, some songs from childhood, personal anecdotes and photographs. Even the couple's well-meaning daughter (Isabelle Huppert) cannot penetrate the couple's insular world.

One of the most remarkable parts about watching *Amour* is noticing that the plight of the daughter – caught in a stagnant marriage – is just as distressing (if not more so) than the cognitive and functional decline in the mother and the severe caregiver strain in the father. After all, the daughter is still vibrant and alive and has the ability to live a different life – if she so chooses.

Rather than telegraphing hope, love and tenderness overtly through dialogue, *Amour* shows these emotions through metaphor, gesture, and symbol. For example, a recurring motif shown in the film involves opening the windows of the locked apartment – a clear symbol of “gasping for air” and

survival. The final scene of the film – although brief – shows the doors of the apartment ALL OPEN – at last. This is a clear symbol of hope and transcendence – all the more powerful because no words have been uttered.

I was moved by *Amour* in a way that few movies have affected me before. I was moved to tears more than once, but I was even more moved by the demonstration of resilience, care and genuine fondness between two people who have had a full and fulfilling life together. Their very real and private anguish does not preclude the possibility of healing, hope and transcendence – in fact, their pain only serves to underscore their utter devotion to each other.

*Reviewed by Jim Perretta*

**Jim Perretta, PhD** was born and raised in suburban Chicago. He currently resides in Guelph, Ontario, and works as a clinical psychologist in a rehabilitation hospital. Besides working in the helping professions, his activities and interests include reading, writing, exploring the great outdoors, spending time with family and friends, dancing, and laughing whole-heartedly.



#### TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically as an open access journal, available at no charge. You may choose to print your downloaded copy of this article or any other article for relaxed reading.

We encourage you to share this article with friends and colleagues.

**The International Journal of Healing and Caring – On Line**

**P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099**

**Phone (609) 714-1885 Fax (519) 265-0746**

**Email: [center@ijhc.org](mailto:center@ijhc.org) Website: <http://www.ijhc.org>**

**Copyright © 2013 IJHC. All rights reserved.**

**DISCLAIMER: <http://www.wholistichealingresearch.com/disclaimer.html>**