

Entraînement à l'épreuve de compréhension écrite

Durée de l'épreuve : 30 minutes

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Read the following article and say whether the following statements are right (R) or wrong (W) by ticking the correct box. You do NOT have to justify your choices.

“Another Year”

Peter Bradshaw, guardian.co.uk, Thursday 4 November 2010

Like Monet with another clump of water lilies, Mike Leigh has returned with a new family-and-friends group portrait, a movie in which the distant sob or throb of sadness is never entirely absent (1). With its immersive sweetness and gentleness, this is another utterly confident and unhurried ensemble picture from Leigh, containing his distinctively extended dialogue scenes of unpointed ordinariness, and a lowered narrative heartbeat to which you have to make a conscious effort to adjust (2). His last film, *Happy-Go-Lucky*, tilted the tone to the "sweet" end of the bittersweet spectrum; *Another Year* takes us in the opposite direction, and to my ear, the neo-Dickensian cartooniness of his language (3), perceptibly normalised in recent films, is here lessened still further (3).

Again, Leigh uses repertory casting: Jim Broadbent and Ruth Sheen play Tom and Gerri – the joke is alluded to once, by someone else, with a giggle, and then forgotten. (4) They are a happily married middle-aged couple content with their lives, fulfilled in their careers, serene at the thought of reasonably imminent retirement and jointly devoted to their allotment. Spanning one year, the movie follows the passing of the four seasons with the resulting crop of fruit and veg. Tom is a geologist and land surveyor, and Gerri is a counsellor; Imelda Staunton appears in a tantalisingly brief cameo as a patient suffering from insomnia and depression. They have a grownup son, Joe (Oliver Maltman), who has evidently inherited his dad's breezy, sarky,¹ unreflective sense of humour, and whose still-unmarried condition concerns the parents not one whit (5).

Despite or perhaps because of their contentment, Tom and Gerri's home has become a magnet for lost and damaged souls. Tom's old mate Ken (Peter Wight) is an overweight boozier (6) with unresolved issues, and then there is Mary, played by Lesley Manville, a secretary in the GP's office where Gerri works. Mary is the character who kicks the narrative mechanism into gear. She is a lonely divorcee, superficially sparky and cheerful, (6) but parasitically dependent on her friends, and putting a tragically unconvincing brave face on the awful way her personal life is turning out. (She is a Mr Hyde to the Dr Jekyll of Sally Hawkins's Poppy in *Happy-Go-Lucky*; like Poppy she takes up driving with far less happy results.) The hysteric quiver in Mary's needy, wheedling laughter has a cry-for-help timbre, disturbing because at some level Mary needs someone to see through her pantomime. The neurotic music of Manville's delivery creates a plaintive, tragic dissonance with the film's actual musical soundtrack, a thoughtful melody with oboe and classical guitar featured prominently.

As the movie proceeds, the intensity of her affection for Gerri and Tom's family – she has known them for decades – takes the drama in an increasingly painful direction, and yet the

¹ Sarky : short, informal form of « sarcastic »

film's note of anxiety remains muffled and subsurface until the drama is blindsided by the explicit, violent anger of a sequence late in the narrative: a funeral in Tom's Lancashire hometown. This superbly moving section is managed and developed with masterly assurance.(7) Its stab of rage is shocking and yet almost a cathartic relief, and an indication of the limits of niceness. Afterwards, the action returns to London, and Leigh shows how Gerri and Tom's patience with Mary is running very low.

Since this film was shown at Cannes earlier this year, a division of opinion has emerged among audiences about its two lead characters, and I have found myself shuttling between these views.(8) Some think they are simply what they seem: sane, nice people, and instead of being on the alert for irony, we could and should simply admire them. But there is an alternative view: namely, that Gerri and Tom are not all that admirable, but subtly complacent and self-satisfied (9), and we are misunderstanding the parasitism of their relationship with Mary. Could it be that it is Gerri and Tom who are addicted to the cosy feeling of superiority that poor mixed-up Mary and Ken give to them, while they sympathise, roll their eyes at each other and easily pour these poor souls drink after drink after drink? After all, it is Mary who is shown keeping Tom's brother Ronnie (David Bradley) company, and bringing him out of himself. Tom and Gerri profess to adore Joe's girlfriend Katie (Karina Fernandez), who actually shows herself to be a little two-faced. Leigh and his cast have created a network of relationships that is more complex than it first appears, yet even here the conclusion might simply be that Gerri and Tom are adults who treat their friends as adults (10), no matter how damaged they appear to be: adults who must make their own decisions. Or perhaps it is that there is a quantum-economy of happiness in any group of people: the happiness of some means unhappiness in others.

The power of this film creeps up on you by stealth; its dramatic idiom is admittedly mannered in the Leigh style but shy of caricature, and designed consistently to abrade the audience's consciousness without irritating – fingertips down the blackboard, not fingernails. And, yes, still an acquired taste. But I found *Another Year* a deeply involving, intelligent, compassionate drama of the sort only Leigh can create.

1. Peter Bradshaw gives us a review of a new hilarious comedy by Mike Leigh.	R <input type="checkbox"/> W <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. The journalist suggests the film is rather slow moving.	R <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> W <input type="checkbox"/>
3. The neo-Dickensian cartooniness makes it very funny.	R <input type="checkbox"/> W <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Tom and Gerri are cartoon characters in the film.	R <input type="checkbox"/> W <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. They have a son whose unmarried condition worries them a lot.	R <input type="checkbox"/> W <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Ken's problems are weight and alcohol while Mary is a superficial woman.	R <input type="checkbox"/> W <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. The standout in the film is a long sequence about a funeral in Lancashire.	R <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> W <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Peter Bradshaw hesitates between two points of view about Tom and Gerri.	R <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> W <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Some think that Tom and Gerri are complacent and self-satisfied.	R <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> W <input type="checkbox"/>
10. The journalist suggests that Gerri and Tom are adults who treat their friends as children.	R <input type="checkbox"/> W <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>