



FILM: **AFTER LOVE**

FDG RATING: 4.4

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Aleem Khan: *director*

Joanna Scanlan: *actress, Mary Hussain*

Nathalie Richard: *actress, Genevieve*

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## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **AFTER LOVE**

Discussion Summary written by Joan Gower

Mary Hussain's loving husband Ahmed, captain of a ferry that crosses between Dover and Calais, France, dies unexpectedly at the beginning of the movie. Mary, an English woman who became a devout Muslim when she married Ahmed, is devastated. But soon discovers that Ahmed has a secret - a long term relationship with a woman, Genevieve, in Calais. Planning to confront his lover, Mary travels to France. However, words fail her when she meets Genevieve outside her home. Genevieve, a more sophisticated, confident woman, assumes that the tongue-tied Mary dressed in traditional Pakistani clothing has been sent by an agency to help her clean and pack up the house as she is moving. She sets Mary to work doing laundry and cleaning. Mary carefully folds 2 of Ahmed's shirts before placing them in a plastic bag to take back home to Dover with her.

Mary is shocked to discover that her husband has a son who is about 14. Solomon is annoyed that he does not see enough of his father and resents his mother blaming her for this "because you see other men when he's not here". Mary becomes more involved in their lives as she returns and continues to help them prepare for their move. She begins to see that Genevieve's life is not an easy one and Genevieve discloses to her that she is jealous of the Pakistani wife Ahmed has back in England. Ahmad has led her to believe that his wife is Pakistani. Perhaps he feels she will be less jealous of a Pakistani wife. Certainly she is likely to be more tolerant of his culture's obligation to stay with a Pakistani than an Anglo wife.

Mary is fascinated by Solomon and finds herself caring about this boy, a shadow perhaps of the son she might have had. Her son died when he was a baby. Powerful imagery of the White Cliffs of Dover crumbling in the center and a growing crack in the ceiling of Genevieve's bedroom ceiling as Mary lays on the bed beneath it evoke the cracks and fissures in her life and her crumbling world. Solomon begins to develop a relationship with Mary as she discovers that he is gay and promises to keep it a secret. He also tells her that he has always wanted to visit his father in England and be a part of his life. Eventually, after the family completes their move to a new house Mary tells Genevieve that Ahmed is dead and that she is his widow. Fireworks ensue, Genevieve castigating Mary for coming to her home, going through her things, poking about in her closets while Mary declares that she is the one who has been humiliated.

But resolution is reached in the end. As the movie concludes Genevieve and Solomon are in Mary's home, Genevieve going through Mary's and Ahmed's closet while Mary listens downstairs to the footsteps overhead. Solomon listens to a tape Ahmed made for Mary when they were teenagers and he was visiting family in Pakistan. Mary presses the tape into his hand telling him to keep it. They visit Ahmed's grave. With empathy instead of bitterness the two women bond over what they have in common, the man they loved. As the movie concludes the 3 of them walk to the top of the white cliffs of Dover and look out across the Channel where a ferry is crossing just as Mary did for so many years as she waited for Ahmed to come home.

### Comments

After Love was a resounding favorite with the group showcasing how an overwhelmed Mary gets involved in the life of her husband's French "wife" and son. "Dramatic and meaningful", "a lot of feelings but not a lot of improbability," "many shots without dialogue that showcased feelings" were some of the group's comments. The movie showed that love comes in many forms and that people can love more than one person. One possibility raised was that if Mary and Ahmad's son had lived the relationship might never have happened with Genevieve. She provided a son which was something he did not have with Mary.

From Mary's first realization of the second relationship she is hit with a sense of betrayal but as time passes and she gets to know the other family the feelings turn to empathy. By the end a bond has formed between Mary, Genevieve and Solomon. The movie is an unexpected take on the situation of a woman discovering her husband's second family after his death. The scene where Mary lies thrown back in the water on the beach as the waves roll first around, and then over her, tugging her this way and that illustrates how she is torn by the situation and the emotions roiling inside her. One participant noted that in the end each woman is left with something. Mary has the community she has become a part of through her life with Ahmad. We see a celebration for a new baby at the end of the movie as the baby's head is shaved with Mary ensconced with her Pakistani community. Genevieve is left with Ahmad's son.

There was agreement that Joanna Scanlon's performance as Mary was masterful. Cinematography was excellent with gorgeous scenery. There was some disagreement as to how Solomon and Genevieve ended up in the cemetery with some people feeling that Mary had invited them, others speculating that it was Solomon putting pressure on Genevieve to take him to England that had resulted in the invitation to Mary's. At least one person felt that Mary had encountered Genevieve and Solomon in the cemetery and had extended the invitation to her home after running into them. Regardless of people's opinions on this point, there was agreement on what an original and meaningful movie it was with ultimately a happy ending.

Rating 4.36 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.) A resounding two thumbs up.



See you at the movies! Adriane Dedic, [adedic@pacbell.net](mailto:adedic@pacbell.net) [www.filmdiscussiongroup.com](http://www.filmdiscussiongroup.com)