



FILM: **THE DARKEST HOUR**

FDG RATING: 3.0 ☺☺☺○○

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

Joe Wright: *director*

Gary Oldman: *actor, Winston Churchill*

Kristin Scott Thomas: *actress, Clementine Churchill*

Lily James: *actress, Elizabeth Layton (Elizabeth Nel)*

DATE: February 18, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE DARKEST HOUR**

It's too bad John Lithgow wasn't given the role of Churchill in the film *The Darkest Hour* because according to a large contingent of our film discussion group who are addicted to the TV series, *The Crown*, Gary Oldman doesn't hold a candle to Lithgow's Churchill. Another observant discussion participant noted that as a character study, Oldman didn't carry the authenticity of the role. For the rest of us, Oldman's performance was transformative. He WAS Churchill (makeup made Oldman almost unrecognizable) and absolutely carried the film.

In the opinion of another resident reviewer, it was a decent historical epic focusing specifically on Churchill's unlikely appointment to Prime Minister in May 1940, after the downfall of Neville Chamberlain. Churchill had opportunistically shifted blame for his Norwegian debacle to Chamberlain in order to replace him. The film balances the great orator's public triumphs with more vulnerable private moments of self-doubt. We also see how devoted his wife, Clementine (Kirsten Scott) was and while being very stoic herself, she was able to support him and act as Churchill's social conscience. Recognizing Churchill was being brusque and rude and rather overbearing, she convinced him to bring people alongside him saying that he needed to make them love him.

The movie paints Churchill as the lone politician willing to defy Hitler and to declare war "at any cost" if necessary, when so many wanted to seek peace, hoped for a truce, and did not want a repeat of the bloodshed of the Great War. As Nazi Germany swept across Western Europe, threatening to defeat the United Kingdom, and with the Allied army cornered on the beaches of Dunkirk, many in the highest levels of the government wanted to negotiate a peace although it would mean the loss of British sovereignty. Churchill makes the ultimate courageous decision "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, ..."

For those of us who appreciate the ability of films to make history come alive, we were caught up in the dramatization of this monumental moment in time and the oratorical power of Churchill's speeches.

Others were put off by the historical inconsistencies and exaggerated dramatization. A few critical reviewers mentioned the strong performance of Lily James as Elizabeth Nel, Churchill's personal secretary, who was at his beck and call, often taking dictation at many odd hours and having to decipher his actual words as he spoke with a slight lisp with a cigar in his mouth, sometimes resulting in notable errors.

We acknowledged *The Darkest Hour* with a decent score of 3.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. 5 is the best.



See you at the movies!

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