



FILM: **LIVING**

FDG RATING: 3.8 ☺☺☺☺○

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

Oliver Hermanus: *director*
Bill Nighy: *actor, Mr. Williams*
Aimee Lou Wood: *actress, Miss Harris*

DATE: June 18, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **LIVING**

The 2022 film, *Living*, is such a familiar story about an aging person who receives a terminal diagnosis so needs to make up for lost time and “live” to the fullest. The story feels a bit repetitive and this film had no original revelations or twists but featured an award-winning performance by Bill Nighy, (nominated for best actor Oscar), and beautiful staging and cinematography, transporting us to 1953 London, where Mr. Williams sits behind a bureaucratic desk, at the head of rows of workers in the county Public Works department. He is a lonely gentleman stuck in a boring, public servant’s job. On his desk are stacks of files, one file in particular, a petition from a group of women, that requests for the council to have a World War II bomb site redeveloped into a children’s playground. The women have been sent with their petition from department to department, escorted by Mr. Williams new employee, a young enthusiastic Mr. Wakeling. We watch as Mr. Wakeling is stymied at every step by the typical stagnated, slow bureaucratic process and attitude of dismissal, so that the petition completes the usual circular rounds of departments and ends back with Mr. Williams, who places it back in his pile of paperwork, making clear to his colleagues his intention to take no further action.

You could set your clock by Mr. Williams dependability so it is completely out of character when one day, after learning about his terminal illness, he leaves his desk early, opting to withdraw half of his life savings, purchase a lethal amount of sleeping medicine, and commit suicide in a seaside resort town. Unable to go through with it, he stops at a tavern where he meets a young writer, Mr. Sutherland, suffering from insomnia and so decides to give the sleeping pills to him. Williams says he doesn’t know how to “live” which prompts Sutherland to take him for a thoroughly entertaining night on the town. Williams replaces his traditional bowler hat with a fedora after his bowler hat is stolen by a prostitute and the pair go to bars, sing, drink heavily and attend a striptease/burlesque show.

Another pivotal character is very young Miss Harris, a former colleague who requested a letter of reference from Mr. Williams as she was offered a management position at a local restaurant. He envies her youthful vigor and seeks out her company, confiding in her about his terminal condition. But he still hasn’t told his son and daughter-in-law although he attempted to a few times.

As expected, he decides to do something worthwhile in the time he has left and rallies his office to construct the children’s playground for which the women who launched the petition, are exceptionally grateful. We agreed that one of the more poignant scenes is seeing him at dusk sitting on one of the swings softly singing an Irish song from his childhood.

One discussion participant didn’t but into his “awakening”. Another criticism is that we never learn about his back story, which made the plot feel thin, superficial. His immediate change in attitude seemed abrupt. We didn’t see any indications that this is what he would like to do but ends up in public works and then doesn’t act on any helpful proposals. Others really liked the story, thought the movie was well constructed, and beautifully filmed. An insightful comment was that just before dying, he actually experienced the greatest part of living.

Our score for *Living* is a lively 3.8 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

Footnote: *Living* directed by Oliver Hermanus from a screenplay by Kazuo Ishiguro, adapted from the 1952 Japanese film *Ikiru* directed by Akira Kurosawa, which in turn was partly inspired by the 1886 Russian novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy.



See you at the movies!
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