



FILM: **SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE**

FDG RATING: 3.3 😊😊😊○○

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

Tim Mielants: *director*
Cillian Murphy: *actor, Bill Furlong*

DATE: January 19, 2025

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE**

The 2024 Irish film, *Small Things Like These*, stars Cillian Murphy who won a best actor Oscar for his role in "Oppenheimer". Here he plays Bill Furlong, a devoted father of 4 daughters. He runs a coal yard, and regularly delivers coal to the local convent. In one of the first scenes, as he approaches the convent, he sees a young girl frantically trying to stop her mother from pushing her inside the door and he hears the girl screaming, please don't leave me here. We are immediately hooked knowing something sinister goes on behind that door.

Bill is clearly haunted by memories of his past, but the film is vague about his mother's death when he was a child, and being raised by others who offered varying degrees of affection. On a following delivery to the convent, he discovers a young woman locked in the coal shed. When the head nun sees Bill at the shed, she rushes over and explains to Bill it was an accident.

When Bill mentions what he saw to his wife and a few others, they tell him to stay out of it. On another delivery, he ventures into the convent which is definitely off limits, but he sees through a large window that many young women are doing manual labor, laundry and other menial tasks. It is known that the convent cares for young unmarried women who have gotten pregnant. Bill's wife mentions that the convent feeds and clothes the women and gives them a place to live. But on another delivery, he finds the young woman again locked in the coal shed, mal nourished and freezing cold. He decides to bring the woman to his home to be fed and cared for.

We see that the nuns are using the women as slave labor. They were rude, abrupt, and accusing when Bill first tried to enter the convent. They say they are rehabilitating these unfortunate young women, teaching them a trade. But they are actually punishing them explaining "this is your penance." Their babies are taken from them and sold for adoption.

It was a system of Irish workhouses, historically referred to as The Magdalene Laundries, where unmarried mothers and other "fallen" women were forced into unpaid labor by the Catholic Church. They were over worked, not well fed, sometimes raped, and placed in mass graves if they died.

The film shows the extreme influence of the Catholic church and the fear people had of questioning anything the church did. Throughout world history, people have closed their eyes to horrific situations, choosing to look the other way, not wanting to acknowledge evil even when it is all around them. One published critic noted that the film deliberately uses small moments to examine one of the great questions of our time: how good people let bad things happen, and how we might push back.

We agreed that the film was understated, somber, very slow paced, but the performances were excellent. One discussion participant said he was impressed that with minimal words the performances were so powerful. The cinematography and settings captured the dirty grittiness of the coal town underscoring the dark moral dilemma that the townspeople struggled with. Those who read the book, said the book was better than the film, while others felt the film was gripping, engrossing.

Small Things Like These aroused a medium size score of 3.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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