



FILM: **THE WHALE**

FDG RATING: 3.4 😊😊😊😊⊙

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

Darren Aronofsky: *director*
Brendan Fraser: *actor, Charlie*
Hong Chau: *actress, Liz*

DATE: April 23, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE WHALE**

Brendan Fraser definitely earned his best actor Oscar for portraying Charlie, a reclusive, morbidly obese English teacher who tries to restore his relationship with his teenage daughter, Ellie, who he hasn't seen for eight years. Charlie left his wife and daughter to be with his male lover, Alan, who happens to be the brother of Liz, a nurse, Charlie's current only friend, the only person he allows to see him. Liz's brother, Alan, was Charlie's romantic partner, as well as a member of the New Life church. Liz blames New Life for her brother's extreme unhappiness—because he was told his sexuality went against the will of God—which eventually led to Alan jumping off a bridge and killing himself which led to Charlie uncontrollably binge eating. Ashamed of his appearance, Charlie teaches his online writing course using a webcam with his camera turned off. His students have never seen him. Ironically, he tells his students that what he wants from them is authentic, honest writing.

Knowing that his health is chronically failing, and desperately wanting to reconnect with Ellie, he offers her the \$120,000 in his bank account if she spends time with him without her mother's knowledge. Ellie relents when he agrees to help her rewrite a school essay. Ellie turns in the essay without reviewing it resulting in a failing grade since it was not the topic of the assignment. Charlie had given Ellie a copy of a critical essay of Moby-Dick she wrote in eighth grade, as he considered it the most honest essay he has ever read. Ellie initially rebukes him as he attempts to reconcile one final time, though she reads the essay aloud at Charlie's insistence. The final scene brings closure to their relationship but was a bit overly dramatic for some discussion participants. We weren't as impressed with Ellie's Moby Dick essay as Charlie is. In the essay, Ellie explains that the "boring chapters" of Moby Dick, as she calls them, hold valuable significance, as they are present so Melville can try and save us from his "sad story". In his mind, the essay represents the good that Ellie harbors in her heart, the confirmation Charlie needs that he made one thing right in his life. Though this should be a very impactful point of the story, it fell a bit flat for most of us.

We really liked Hong Chau's performance as Liz, especially since this was such a different role from her portrayal of the celebrity chef's assistant in *The Menu*, which we all agreed was an outstanding, performance. The filming of *The Whale*, all in one dark room, exacerbated Charlie's tragic condition for the viewer. "It seemed more like a play and perhaps should have stayed a play", was one opinionated comment. But Fraser's physicality, movements, as this morbidly obese man were very believable. Not to mention the makeup which was phenomenal.

Themes of honestly in relationships, wanting acceptance, love, loss, regret are woven through the film. Liz's relationship with Charlie "nailed it" observed one discussion participant. She sincerely cared for him but was also an enabler. We also respected Charlie for trying to reestablish his relationship with his daughter. However, he keeps saying he's sorry throughout the film and this got on our nerves a bit. He also repeatedly uses the adjective "amazing" especially relating to Ellie although most of us saw her as more bratty than amazing. And a few of us found it very uncomfortable and extremely sad to watch Charlie gorge himself with candy bars, pizza, sandwiches, and more. Another comment was that it is a story worth telling...it sheds light on a segment of our population, providing some insight on how people that size exist and cope. *The Whale* served up a palatable score of 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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