

## Another Year

Mike Leigh, vivid chronicler of British life, wrote and directed “Another Year,” which features an older London couple as their lives rub up against friends in various states of dysfunction.

The year is presented over four seasons, each a chapter in the couple’s life, symbolically presented in the stages of a garden they carefully tend. Veterans Jim Broadbent and Ruth Sheen play the couple (Tom and Gerri), he a geologist, she a counselor, who’ve attained an easy-going, domestic bliss. Rarely do the movies show a genuinely happy, yet distinctive, husband and wife, but Leigh does it here, with his two actors making all the right moves of tranquil yet loving home life. It’s their own mutual care and comfort that contrasts so dramatically with their friends.

Among those dysfunctional friends is Mary (Leslie Manville, a regular in Leigh films). She is a needy near-alcoholic whose giddy presence conceals a life of unrelieved emptiness. She seeks for an affirmation she never finds and exhibits a desperate desire to connect with a man, even the son of her friends. This portrayal can be compared to other of Leigh’s unsympathetic characters who yet achieve full-rounded definition. Think of the baleful David Thewlis in “Naked” or the giddy Sally Hawkins in “Happy-Go-Lucky”—both figures that became very irritating--yet still remained somehow compelling.

Still, beyond the sour element of Mary, let me stress again the clarity Leigh achieves with the upbeat, sensible Tom and Gerri. Yet even their life is not all sunny: a late sequence has Tom sorting out the life of his very different, lower-class brother Ronnie (David Bradley), who has lost his wife and has a feckless son. In a poignant finale, we have the super-laconic Ronnie sitting, wordlessly, with the ever yearning Mary; one cryptic, one still yearning for--something.

Typically, Leigh makes movies with a steady, even pulse, a earned naturalism that eschews easy drama for the complexities of life, and that he does it again in “Another Year.”

*(The film is rated PG-13 and runs 129 min.)*

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