

A SURVIVAL GUIDE WITH AN “OPEN HEART”: POSITIVE EMOTIONS IN OUR LIVES

Whether we like it or not, we all tend to divide people into categories, usually based either on physical characteristics or on aspects of our personalities. These categories carry either a positive or a negative connotation. At the very top of the list of “pros” are people with an open heart.

The defining characteristic of these people is their emotional nature. Research suggests that “open-hearted” individuals can align their positions on controversial issues in their lives by relying primarily on their “heart.”

Here are eight things about people who “follow their hearts”:

- They take a little time to make a decision.
- They have exceptional understanding.
- They speak openly about their feelings and are not ashamed of them.
- They tend to be extroverted.
- They become anxious very easily.
- They have a well-developed instinct.
- They are people who bring joy to those around them.
- They genuinely experience all their emotions and act accordingly.

Do you think with your heart or with your mind? If you believe that there are no people who think with their hearts, you are very much mistaken. There are people around us who make decisions and act on the basis of their emotions rather than primarily on reason. Good-natured and cheerful, these “open-hearted” people enjoy life. As we have said, they are guided mainly by their feelings.



They are the people whose faces are adorned with a sincere smile. No, they do not live in a parallel universe, and not everything in their lives runs smoothly. They are, however, naturally optimistic and positive. They always have a kind word to offer, and their jokes are often what “break the ice.” Their good mood is contagious, which is why you find yourself seeking them out whenever you feel down; their energy is often enough to make even your difficult day a little better.

They understand how futile it is, after all, to be constantly angry or to go around looking miserable. Laughter comes easily and spontaneously to them; you do not have to tickle them just to see the slightest smile. Above all, these people know how to enjoy themselves wholeheartedly. They will go out without giving it too much thought, and they will not waste time in endless discussions about whether the venue plays the music they like or where they should meet.

They would rather spend their energy having a good time, and they have a unique gift that helps them do just that. That is why every group of friends has one or more people with these characteristics: their very presence guarantees that the evening will be a success. They are usually the first to sway to the rhythm of the music, encouraging everyone else to get up from their chairs and join them on the dance floor. When traditional island music is playing, they will join hands with the people next to them. They will introduce themselves and offer you a glass of wine from their table. They will smile warmly at the doorman who lets them in and thank the person who brings them the menu.



These are precisely the kinds of customers every venue wants. They will leave shortly before or even after closing time, humming the lyrics of the last song the band played as a goodnight tune all the way home. And they manage all this simply because “open-hearted” people have managed to decipher, at least to some extent, the hidden meaning of life.

They do not waste their time on pettiness, intrigue, or backstabbing. They do not get angry over the slightest thing, nor do they look for excuses to argue. They do not complain about having to get up early, nor do they scowl when someone else gets to the empty seat on the bus first. They have learned to see the bright side of things without treating strangers with suspicion or reserve. Most importantly, they have achieved what we all desperately strive for: they do not concern themselves with other people’s malicious opinions.

The first image that comes to mind when we think of these people is a heart outside the body, giving and sharing itself. Clearly, this is an unrealistic and entirely symbolic image. For many, however, such openness is ultimately seen as victimhood and exploitation.

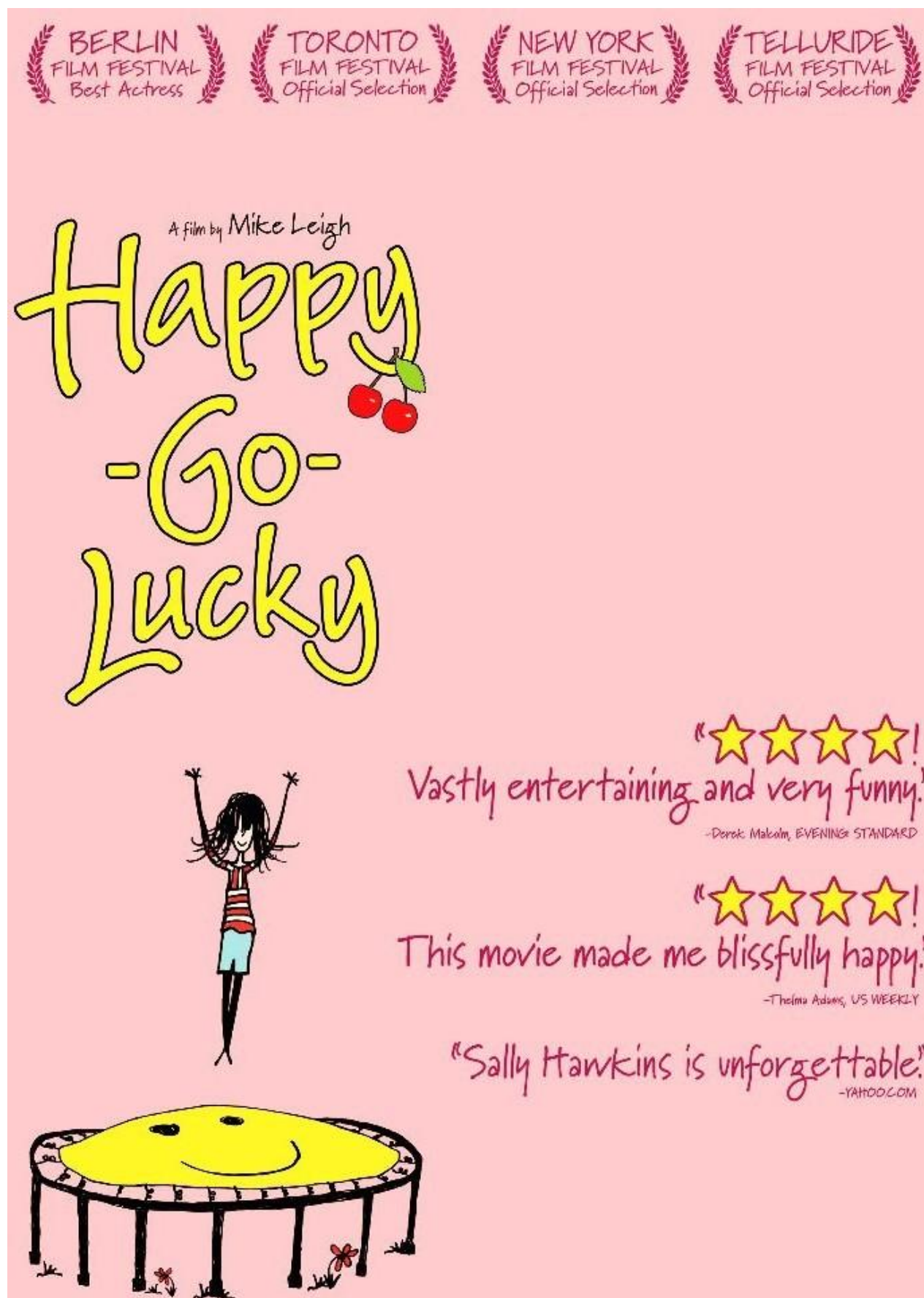
In the age of rampant self-interest in which we live, where relationships and emotions are devastated by the ease with which everything becomes superficial and by hypocrisy, anything humane tends to be labelled “oversensitivity.” “Open-hearted” people do not establish boundaries in advance. They place their faith in love for everyone around them: a kind of love that has been devalued and trampled upon, a word that has become a cliché on so many people’s lips and has lost its flavour.

“Open-hearted” people are precisely those who refuse to keep repeating this “cliché.” They trust their instincts and allow them to play a leading role in their lives. They are the people who have not forgotten how to love. If human relationships are a game of strategy and manoeuvring, they refuse to play it.

“Open-hearted” people know how to give many chances to the important people in their lives with whom they form close family, friendship, or romantic bonds. To some extent, they want to do the same with everyone they meet: to walk in their shoes, feel their pain, understand their needs, and interpret their behaviour.

They will turn their backs on people they wanted to keep in their lives only after exhausting every possibility for patience and tolerance. Thus, you cannot take it for granted that “open-hearted” people will always be there for you. They will not remain forever like beacons, waiting for you to bring your ship safely into harbour. They will give you a resounding X and leave precisely when you have begun to assume that their generosity will never end.

They will not do this to take revenge or to make fun of you. And they certainly will not do it as a strategy, hoping to move or shake you. They will simply have had enough. And their departure will be final. Are you still wondering who will be the one to lose?



The Film “Happy-Go-Lucky” — An “Open-Hearted” teacher

In Mike Leigh’s fresh and delightful comedy Happy-Go-Lucky (which won the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the Berlin Film Festival in 2008), we take a look at a few chapters in the colourful life of Poppy, a genuinely cheerful primary-school teacher in North London. Her life is full of joy and optimism, which sometimes infuriates the miserable people around her because Poppy simply does not “fit their mould.”



Poppy at work in her classroom — oh, to have been one of her pupils!



Poppy, “in the best of spirits,” with her miserable driving instructor, Scott.

The film tells the story of Poppy’s seemingly uneventful life. She is a well-travelled teacher who enjoys herself without making demands, taking flamenco and driving lessons, spending time at the homes of friends and relatives, and sharing a small flat with her best friend and colleague, Zoe.

Everything is ordinary and peaceful. Poppy is honest about her feelings, sincere, supportive—almost like a natural social worker—and both discreet and attractive in her own way. She may appear irresponsible and flamboyant, but she is also highly sensitive and lovable. At thirty, she simply knows how to “live her life,” however dull it might seem.

She has a manipulative younger sister, who has recently become pregnant and smugly disapproves of Poppy’s relaxed attitude to life. But Poppy is unfazed. Between endless outings with friends, the unpredictable progress of her driving lessons with Scott, and her hilarious relationships with her young pupils, Mike Leigh watches her radiate energy. The character comes alive through the superb performance of Sally Hawkins.

At the beginning of the film, Poppy’s romantic life has reached rock bottom. Then Scott, her miserable driving instructor—a maliciously obsessive man who may or may not be a good person, as Poppy herself wonders—begins pursuing her in a strange way. She senses that he is pushing her to her limits. Anyone else might have called the police or beaten him up. But not Poppy.

Mike Leigh knows that he is not portraying the most beautiful woman in London, but rather a charming young woman who offers a second chance out of kindness, as well as a certain unspoken insecurity. At thirty, Poppy reassesses her life and considers her future in light of the new circumstances she faces.

For years, she has listened without judging, encouraged others, and closed the door of her home as though life never really touched her. But living vicariously is only half a life: perhaps without complaints,

but with an unfulfilled longing for at least one great moment. She eventually finds that moment in love, when she meets Tim, a social worker called to the school to deal with one of Poppy's pupils who has been displaying violent behaviour.



Poppy finally discovers love with Tim.

Poppy is like a smiling face that walks and talks—or, rather, “chirps.” She is the embodiment of happiness, an “ectoplasm,” an exorcist of misery and a reaction against a negative outlook on life.

In this lucky and happy surprise, which seems to be Mike Leigh's lightest and most unreservedly positive film, small tragedies naturally continue to lurk beneath the surface. But they come wrapped in a delightful package that seems more colourful than ever.

No, Mike Leigh has not softened in his old age. The director who pushed things to the limit in *Secrets & Lies*, *Naked*, and *Vera Drake* has simply turned the story around, reversing the usual trajectory of his films. Despite the director's track record, I could not find any irony behind the potentially misleading title *Happy-Go-Lucky*—or, more aptly, “Open-Hearted.”

With a screenplay written and developed by Leigh together with his actors (he is known to spend months working with them, improvising before filming begins), and with excellent, lively dialogue and imaginative, inventive scenes, Leigh has created a portrait of a woman who always looks ahead and tries to help those around her: children at school, including those with behavioural difficulties; a complete stranger living rough on the street; and her friends. She is a woman who “celebrates and enjoys chaos,” as Scott pointedly accuses her during one of their few driving lessons.

Through an observant and perceptive eye, Leigh captures something of the often dreary, even harsh reality of the modern, absurd lives of the working class in a multicultural society such as England. At times he uses absurd, subversive humour; at others, a sharp, critical gaze. This is particularly evident in the scenes with Scott, the meticulous and anxious driving instructor, brilliantly played by Eddie Marsan, who erupts into racist tirades and expresses his hatred of contemporary English society.

Leigh has created an excellent film, hilarious in many scenes, an astute character study and a comic mirror of our chaotic society. It is certainly his most cheerful and enjoyable comedy, although some scenes have an underlying bite. It is a funny film that sometimes hurts because of its truth.

Leigh uses Sally Hawkins to perfection as a way of countering the cruelty of people who treat someone they see as an easy target like a punching bag. Poppy does not act as a mirror and does not retaliate; instead, she repels misery with a smile, as though she were a poor conductor of it.

Poppy's journey is ultimately an affirmation. In this remarkably affirmative film by Leigh, which seems out of place not only among his own works but also within contemporary cinema, a woman becomes a vehicle for our self-criticism. The British director's achievement lies in making the whole undertaking seem spontaneous, even though we know how much importance he places on rehearsal and on the smallest details of dialogue.

He leaves room for the actors to breathe and for the film to take shape, asking: "If everything is written in the screenplay, why go to the trouble of making the film?" Through improvisation and creative collaboration with his actors, Leigh does not impose a tightly scripted plot on the audience. Like life itself, the film simply flows: sometimes funny, sometimes not, and sometimes veering off course.

The film begins with Poppy practising her profession, which she transforms into a genuine vocation. Her liveliness and care for one of her pupils help her recognise that he is bullying a classmate. Her genuine concern for the boy ultimately benefits her, as she falls in love with the social worker called in to help him. You see, when institutions work...

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY A. Scenes with Poppy at school.

[ΕΞΟ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ Α. Σκηνές με την Πόπη στο σχολείο.mp4](#)

In a perhaps overextended, surreal scene, Poppy briefly manages to befriend a mentally disturbed homeless man in a terrifyingly desolate place. The empathy she shows towards this stranger, who appears dangerous and threatening, dispels any lingering thought I had that she was merely silly and cheerful. (What was I thinking!)

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY B. Meeting a homeless man.

[ΕΞΟ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ Β. Συνάντηση με έναν άστεγο.mp4](#)

We now focus on key moments in the film's plot.

When Poppy takes her first driving lesson, her positive philosophy of life comes into direct conflict with her dark, intolerant, cynical instructor, the "reactionary" Scott. Scott is emotionally repressed, has difficulty managing his anger, and is deeply unsettled by Poppy's relaxed attitude towards driving and life. As Poppy gets to know him, it becomes clear that Scott believes in conspiracy theories. His beliefs are attributed in part to his racist and misogynistic views, which make it extremely difficult for him to get along with others. Scott seems angered by Poppy's sunny personality, and this is apparently why he

accuses her of being irresponsible and unconcerned about safe driving.

Scott is extremely irritated by his student's choice of footwear—a pair of high-heeled boots—which he believes prevent her from driving properly. From the outset, he feels that Poppy does not take her lessons seriously and is careless.

Poppy, however, is capable of being responsible. At school, she notices one of her pupils bullying a classmate. Rather than getting angry, as we have seen, she becomes concerned about him and takes appropriate action. After speaking with the pupil, she reasonably suspects that he himself is being abused at home.

A social worker, Tim, is called in to handle the boy's case. Through his interaction with the pupil, the boy reveals that his mother's boyfriend has been beating him. Tim and Poppy begin dating.

One day, on her way home, Poppy sees Scott standing opposite the apartment building where she lives. When she calls out his name, he runs away. When she later confronts him, he denies being there and insists that he was at his mother's house at the time Poppy claims to have seen him.

Scott later sees Poppy with her new partner, Tim, and becomes angry. During Poppy's next and final driving lesson, Scott drives erratically and shouts about other drivers and society. When he hands Poppy his car keys, she tells him that he is not in a fit state to give a driving lesson that day and offers to drive him home.

Scott tries to take his keys back and physically attacks Poppy. She manages to get away from him. In a long, eventful conversation, Scott accuses Poppy of trying to seduce him, revealing his "romantic" feelings for her.

Using patience and understanding, Poppy waits until he calms down and then gives him back his keys, making it clear that this was their last lesson. Poppy thus proves that she can be serious when circumstances demand it. She is not blind to what other people think and feel. She gives them plenty of opportunities to repair their relationships with her, but when enough is enough, she walks away.

She handles the rapidly escalating situation with Scott in a way that is almost invulnerable: with steely courage and admirable discretion.

The film ends with Poppy and Zoe going boating together in Regent's Park. Zoe advises Poppy that "you can't make everyone happy." Poppy dismisses the advice with a smile. Then she receives a call on her mobile from Tim and asks him, "Have you missed me already?"

Now watch the following three selected scenes featuring Sally Hawkins as Poppy and the "toxic" Eddie Marsan as Scott, the driving instructor, whom the text describes as bipolar (approximately manic-depressive). Marsan gives us one of the most painfully hilarious supporting performances I have seen in cinema. Then watch the film's final scene straight through.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY C. The third driving lesson: Scott's view of the education system.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY D. Scott's anger.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY E. The final driving lesson and the film's conclusion.

[ΕΞΩ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ Γ. Το τρίτο μάθημα οδήγησης. Η άποψη του Σκοτ για το εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα.mp4](#)

[ΕΞΩ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ Δ. Η οργή του Σκοτ.mp4](#)



[ΕΞΩ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ Ε. Το τελευταίο μάθημα οδήγησης. Κατάληξη της ταινίας.mp4](#)



Poppy with her flatmate and best friend, Zoe, in the film's final scene.



Suzy Feaydel Nassif: Happy-Go-Lucky — “Open-Hearted” (2021)



Edgar Degas: L'Absinthe (In a Café) (1876)

An atmosphere of psychological distance, isolation, and desolation.

Although his painting displays some characteristics of Impressionism, and despite participating in seven of the eight Impressionist exhibitions in Paris between 1874 and 1886, Edgar Degas (1834–1917) was never a committed member of the Impressionist group.

He had no interest in outdoor landscapes, preferring to focus on painting figures—mainly women, such as ballet dancers—in enclosed urban places of leisure. Despite his respect for academic art, Degas was decidedly modernist, both in his compositions and in his choice of subjects, and he created some of the finest paintings of this genre of his time.

Direct and penetrating observation of the world was always the cornerstone of Degas's painting. He loved to depict Paris's most popular cafés, which were regularly frequented by workers, prostitutes, bohemian artists, and writers.

L'Absinthe has a powerful emotional impact on the viewer because of its sad, lethargic depiction of its central themes: loneliness and exhaustion. The scene takes place in the fashionable Café de la Nouvelle Athènes, in Place Pigalle, at the foot of Montmartre.

The painting criticises the growing social isolation in Paris during a period of rapid development brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Degas used the figures depicted as symbols of the isolation and oppression experienced by many people, particularly bohemian artists and workers who did not benefit from the rapid advance of industrialisation.

The human figures are not facing the viewer but are arranged along an ascending diagonal line. With the greatest possible classical precision, they are separated from the viewer by a row of white marble tables that fill the entire foreground. On the left, the tables intersect at right angles.

A few objects have been placed on the tables: two rolled-up newspapers, the artist's signature, a matchbox, and a carafe of water. Notice how Degas has framed the image—cropping the man's arm and pipe—to create the impression of a "slice of life," a snapshot taken by someone seated at a nearby table.

This idea is misleading, however, because the painting was painstakingly created in the artist's studio rather than on location. Nevertheless, the painting conveys such a realistic atmosphere, in defiance of the conventions of its time, that it received a negative response from contemporary critics. Degas was even compelled to state publicly that the two models, who belonged to his social circle, were not alcoholics.

The shadows of the two bored, almost lifeless figures are also expressive and significant. They appear as silhouettes reflected in the long, blurred mirror behind them, "in the empty time of a stagnant space."

The painting has a powerful psychological dimension. The viewer's eye quickly leaves the bare tables and moves towards the centre of the composition, focusing on the faces and gazes of the two figures.

The two protagonists are together in the city, yet neither pays any attention to the other. Both are lost in their private worlds, isolated in silence.

The woman—an actress and a friend of Degas—sits in a state of static introspection, looking both gloomy and exhausted. Her face is pale, and she gazes down into the void, seemingly dazed by alcohol and absorbed in herself, perhaps melancholically recalling her past.

Her expression conveys disappointment, while her drooping hands suggest something close to self-pity. Certain details of her clothing seem sadly bizarre: the artificial elegance of the white bows on her shoes, the leafy, rippling fabric of her bodice, and the hat tilted on her head.

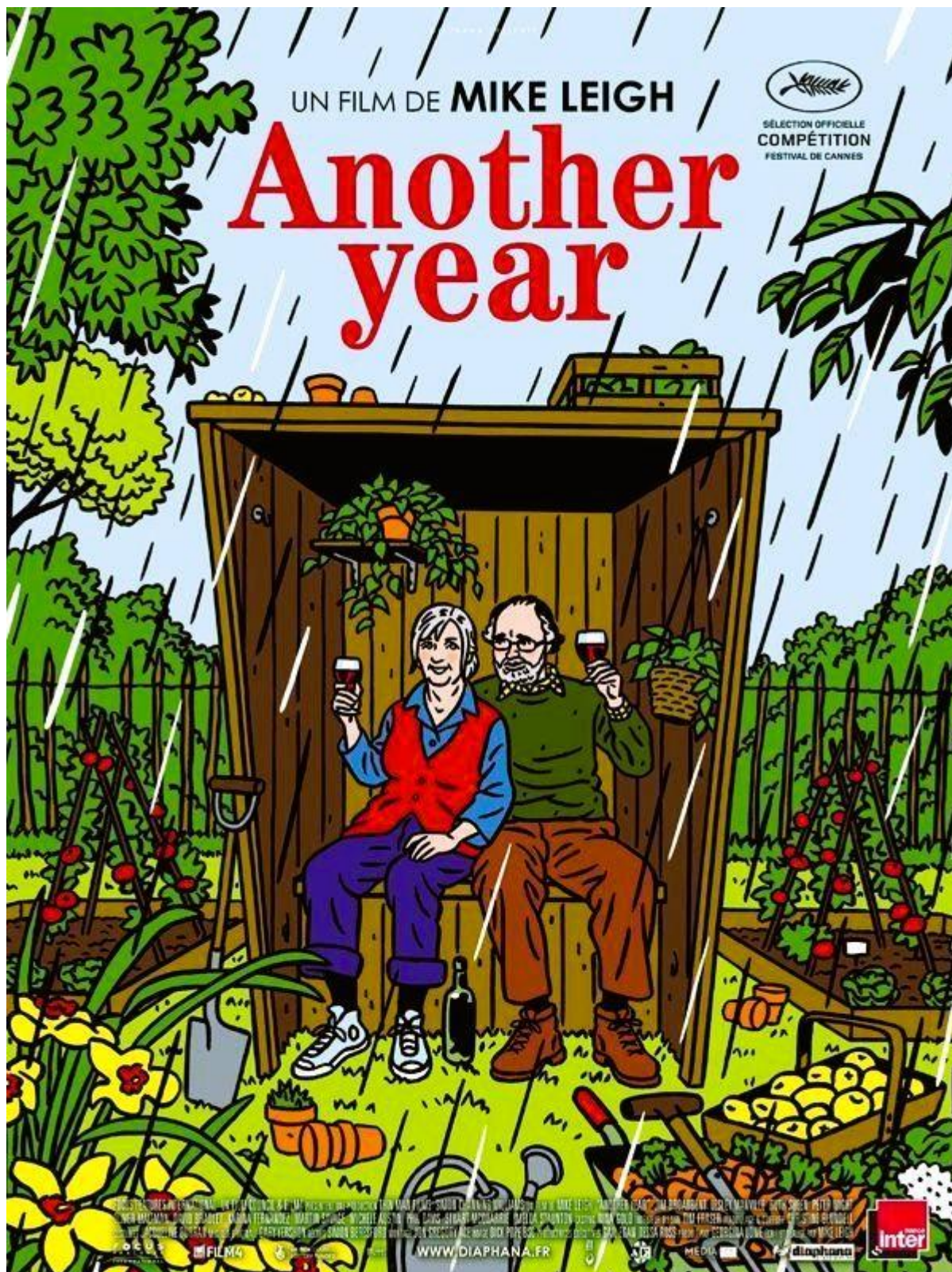
A glass of absinthe sits on the table in front of her. Absinthe was a particularly potent and harmful alcoholic drink, later banned because of its alleged hallucinogenic effects. Its principal ingredients are wormwood and anise.

The man beside her, also a real person and an engraver by profession, is more casually dressed. His ill-fitting hat is pulled down over his unruly hair. He smokes a pipe and looks in another direction, his gaze equally "empty."

He sits at an angle to the woman, a posture suggesting that he is either a stranger to her or an indifferent companion. This intensifies the woman's isolation even further.

The creamy and yellow tones, contrasted with various blacks, give the scene not only a melancholic, enclosed atmosphere but also a slightly delirious quality, perhaps suggesting the psychological effects associated with the drink after which the painting is named.

It is undoubtedly a sad image, because many of us may feel lonely and unhappy even when surrounded by other people.



Mike Leigh's Another Year (2010)

Mike Leigh's film *Another Year*, a 2010 comedy-drama, has already featured in our very popular exercise of 12 October 2023 on unsuccessful flirtations.

Here, we will focus on the brief appearance of the excellent actress Imelda Staunton as Janet, who

appears for only a few minutes at the beginning of the film.

Janet is middle-aged and struggling with insomnia. Her initial general medical examination, followed by an interview with a mental-health counsellor, confronts us with the bleak picture of her life.

By placing Janet at the beginning of the film, Leigh establishes precisely the right tone for the main story that follows, even though it is unrelated to Janet. Her appearance reveals the world the director intends to present in this film: he will not hesitate to show us pain and anguish, nor will he brush such issues aside lightly.

We now watch Janet's brief appearance in the film.

ANOTHER YEAR: The two scenes featuring Janet (Imelda Staunton).

[ΜΙΑ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ ΑΚΟΜΑ Οι δύο σκηνές με την Τζάνετ \(Ιμέλντα Στόντον\).mp4](#)

