

DARKEST HOUR (2017)

- Released on December 22nd, 2017
- 2 Hours 5 minutes
- \$30,000,000 (estimated)
- Directed by Joe Wright
- Written by Anthony McCarten
- Perfect World Pictures, Working Title Films
- Rated PG-13 for some thematic material

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek
- Demetri Panos

DEVELOPMENT

- On 5 February 2015, it was announced that Working Title Films had acquired *Darkest Hour*, a speculative screenplay by *The Theory of Everything* screenwriter Anthony McCarten, about Winston Churchill in the early days of World War II
- On 29 March 2016, it was reported that Joe Wright was in talks to direct the film
- On 6 September 2016, it was announced that Focus Features would release the film in the United States on 24 November 2017

WRITING (Anthony McCarten)

- This was a passion project for screenwriter Anthony McCarten
- Anthony McCarten is a writer and producer, known for The Theory of Everything (2014), Darkest Hour (2017) and Show of Hands (2008)
- Film about 20 days in which the world could have become a much different place if one man didn't stand by his convictions.

STORY/TOPICS

- "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." - Churchill (idea of never giving up)
- Pressures of country/war
- Family vs duty
- Historical context
- Differences between other historical/Churchill films

CAST:

GARY OLDMAN (Winston Churchill)

- Gary Oldman spent over 200 hours in makeup undergoing a radical transformation that necessitated "fattening" his body with prosthetics weighing half his own weight
- In an interview on The Graham Norton Show (2007), Gary Oldman said the cigar budget alone for the film was over £18,000 (\$30,000). At the end of filming, he had nicotine poisoning and spent a holiday getting a colonoscopy. He had managed to get through over 400 cigars
- Although he studied Churchill closely to get his performance right, Gary Oldman told the BBC in an interview that he felt playing Churchill had to be more of a creation than an impersonation and he tried not to be influenced by previous acclaimed screen versions of him, citing in particular those by Albert Finney and Robert Hardy
- Gary Oldman spent a year studying Churchill and his mannerisms before starting on the film
- "He sounds, he looks, he just embodies that character. When you are acting opposite him, you [are transported] to this kind of mini-universe." - Scott Thomas

- “I decided that once the script was finalized and there were various changes made to the script as it evolved, that I learned it like a play. I knew it long before I got to the set so I’d just have the material inside me and wouldn’t have to think about it. It’s like the old saying, ‘It’s not how well you’ve known something, but how long you’ve known it,’ so the role was in my DNA.”- Oldman

KRISTIN SCOTT THOMAS (“Clemmie” Clementine Churchill)

- “I asked about how she was when she didn’t like someone,” explained Thomas. “These are the little chinks into seeing who she really was. Some people are very good at making people feel comfortable, and others are very good at making people feel uncomfortable . . . I think that ‘Clemmie’ was somebody who was rather good at making people feel very, very small, and unimportant, and then, when she liked them, she would turn on this amazing smile, and charm, and wit, and everyone would fall in love with her. But she had the people she liked, and the people she didn’t, and I can really relate to that.”
- “I got a really lovely letter from [Churchill’s grandson] Nicholas Soames, saying that they’d all been to see the film, and they’d all loved it. I was really, really touched by that.”
- Nearly passed on the role. She received the script following a bit of a professional burnout, after filming 60-some movies in two languages. In 2014, the actress said that she was done taking on supporting parts to, essentially, lend credibility to “otherwise flimsy production[s].”
- “They weren’t giving Clemmy – me – enough to do,” she explains. “I told [Wright] he could get any old person to do this. So he rewrote the part to make it what it is now. I still think there’s more to be told about her.” - Scott Thomas

BEN MENDELSON (King George VI)

- King George VI was known as the "reluctant king" because he was forced onto the throne after his older brother (known as Edward VIII) abdicated over his romance with Wallis Simpson.
- “I was mostly interested in what I could see and hear. I was less interested in the various interpretations of the man. I knew the rough outlines of his situation. It was really to get a sense of where the stutter was and what feeling you get from him.” - Mendelson
- "I'm an Australian. So coming from Australia to England to play a royal, you don't want to half step."- Mendelson

LILY JAMES (Elizabeth Layton)

- “I was ready to break loose of the mold and try something different.”
- ABOUT OLDMAN: "I burst out laughing," James told us of seeing his transformation for the first time. "I met him as Gary, we did the read through, and then on day two or three of rehearsals he came in in full prosthetics. There's a book of photos that his partner has made, and there's one that she caught of me at that exact moment with my mouth wide open."
- "It's amazing and moving what the women who worked in the war rooms lived through and how they saw the world change," she said. "The war rooms were thriving with women. They are the unsung heroes, without them the body and the undercurrent of what was happening wouldn't have been there."- James

RONALD PICKUP (Neville Chamberlain)

- Sir John Hurt, who died last January aged 77, was meant to appear in the film as Chamberlain but was too ill to film any scenes.
- Pickup stepped into the role at the last minute when the originally cast John Hurt died just before production started.

STEPHEN DILLAN (Viscount Halifax)

- Stephen Dillane was born on March 27, 1957 in London, England. He is an actor, known for [The Hours](#) (2002), [Game of Thrones](#) (2011) and [Spy Game](#) (2001)

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- Churchill often disappeared from Downing Street or the Cabinet War Rooms and appeared somewhere in London, where he would talk to the public and find out what they were thinking. However, there is no record of him ever doing this on an underground train
- Near the end of the film, Halifax is depicted as saying that Churchill "mobilized the English language and sent it into battle." Although having Halifax utter the phrase can be excused on grounds of "dramatic license," the quote actually originates with newsman Edward R. Murrow, who used it in 1954. It was used again by American President John F. Kennedy in 1963, on the occasion of Churchill being given honorary U.S. citizenship
- The film takes place in May of 1940. In real life, Elizabeth Layton did not become Churchill's secretary until 1941
- In the movie's end titles, the director neglected to mention that while Churchill lost the 1945 election, he was indeed re-elected as Prime Minister in 1951 (the Labour actually won the popular vote, although the Conservative Party won the most seats.)

DIRECTING (Joe Wright)

- Joe Wright is an English film director. He is best known for *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), *Atonement* (2007), *Anna Karenina* (2012), and *Darkest Hour* (2017)
- Wright always had an interest in the arts, especially painting. He would also make films on his Super 8 camera as well as spend time in the evenings acting in a drama club. He began his career working at his parents' puppet theatre. He also took classes at the Anna Scher Theatre School and acted professionally on stage and camera
- Loves tracking shots:
http://www.imdb.com/list/ls025720609/videoplayer/vi1102034969?pf_rd_m=A2FGELUUNOQJNL&pf_rd_p=3497541362&pf_rd_r=1SMFRMPF0FDA2JR1FN1E&pf_rd_s=center-3&pf_rd_t=15021&pf_rd_i=tt4555426&ref=tt_pks_jw_dh_sm
- Director Joe Wright suggested that this film is directly relevant to the United States' political turmoil under the leadership of Donald J. Trump. He said, "There's a big question in America at the moment: what does good leadership look like? Churchill resisted when it mattered most, and as I travel around America I am really impressed and optimistic at the level of resistance happening in the U.S. at the moment. After George W. Bush was elected, it wasn't the same level; there was more apathy then. Now people are very vocal and that's really positive."
- According to Gary Oldman, director Joe Wright opted for a generous four weeks of rehearsal
- *Atonement*, *Pride & Prejudice*
- "Joe is a lovely guy. He's a lovely guy to work for and with. He gave me a lot of space, so I was able to pull stuff apart and we had discussions about pieces here and there," Mendelsohn explained. "There are few people with as rich a sense of texture and color and light. He's amazing with that stuff. His films feel very lush and tactile." - Mendelsohn

PRODUCTION (Bruno Delbonnel)

- By November 2016, *Darkest Hour* had begun principal photograph
- The producers had tried to locate a genuine pre-WWII Tube train to film the Underground scene. However, none could be obtained. Instead, 1959 Tube Stock carriage, very similar in style to 1938 stock, was hired from the Mangapps Railway Museum and cosmetically restored to resemble a wartime train
- Bruno Delbonnel was born in 1957 in Nancy, Meurthe-et-Moselle, France. He is known for his work on *A Very Long Engagement* (2004), *Amélie* (2001) and *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013)
- Often uses stylized color palettes featuring prominent warm tones (such as yellow and green) which tint the whole image
- Often uses film stock with a very apparent, well-defined grain structure
- "Joe is a very precise director. He mostly shoots with one camera. The dialogue scenes, he shot with two cameras and I had a lot more footage, but otherwise, he's one of these very precise directors that would do no more than 13, 15 setups a day, and would get those 15 setups really precise and really well executed." - Bonelli

EDITING/VFX (Valerio Bonelli)

- Known for *Philomena*, *Hannibal Rising*, *The Martian*
- Bonelli, his assistant and the director lived and worked in the same rented house in Yorkshire. He would cut during the day and show edited scenes to Wright at night after the director returned from the set. They would also comment on the dailies, performances and how the film was shaping up.
- “Being on set was a really unique experience. Me, Joe, my assistants, his assistants, and [cinematographer] Bruno Delbonnel—we all lived together. I set up my Avid downstairs in the living room. I would cut during the day and then at night, we would watch rushes together.”
- “All [Oldman’s] takes were good, but Oldman gave different levels of intensity in his acting. Most important, from take to take, the actor worked on the details that shaped the performance—the way he delivered a line, or moved the cigar, or took a breath.
- “The most challenging scenes to edit were the war room sequences that had as many as seven pages of dialogue.”
- “Sometimes I was doing cuts of the sequence where I would focus particularly on reactions. I knew for some of those crucial scenes, the reaction shots were as important as lines of dialogue.” - Bonelli
- “When you watch the entire film and you maybe need to tone down a bit of some performance, you need to have the knowledge of, “Oh, there’s a take where he actually didn’t shout.” - Bonelli
- “In the cutting process, we worked in trying to create this pushing sense of a thriller. The last hour of the film is about four days in a row where Churchill has to make all these decisions, so I was always pushing from my point of view to keep the film tight through those four days. I think by the end, we got there.” - Bonelli
- Bonelli would cut a scene, then add original music without needing any temp tracks. They would send cuts and music back and forth, adjusting as needed, making the process of putting the film together organic.

SOUND/MUSIC (Dario Marianelli)

- Dario Marianelli is an Italian film composer. He is best known for his frequent collaborations with director Joe Wright
- Marianelli has collaborated with the director Joe Wright five times, on *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), *Atonement* (2007), *The Soloist* (2009), *Anna Karenina* (2012) and *Darkest Hour* (2017)
- In 2008, Marianelli won both an Oscar and a Golden Globe for the score of *Atonement*
- PHIL: I felt undertones of *Atonement*’s <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-mbEPZXBsk> especially Churchill exiting the train (it’s music that propels you into motion)
- Editorial received seven pieces of music from composer Dario Marianelli, inspired by reading the script before seeing any picture.
- First assistant, Tommaso Gallone, built temp tracks. The editor previewed cuts for the assistants and sometimes gave them things to edit so they could think of the whole of the film, not just the technical aspects.

PROMOTION

- The film had its world premiere at the Telluride Film Festival on September 1, 2017, and also screened at the Toronto International Film Festival

BOX OFFICE

- Total Lifetime Grosses (As of January 29th): \$45,483,782
- In the United States and Canada, the film began a limited release on 22 November 2017. In its first five days, it grossed \$246,761 from four theatres (an average of \$61,690), finishing 21st at the box office over the weekend
- The film had its wide release on 22 December 2017, alongside the openings of *Downsizing*, *Pitch Perfect 3* and *Father Figures*, and the wide release of *The Shape of Water*, and grossed \$3.9 million from 804 theatres over that weekend, and \$5.5 million over the four-day Christmas frame
- 85% of its audience was over the age of 25, with 30% being 50 or older

RECEPTION

- RT: 86% based on 228 reviews
- "*Darkest Hour* is held together by Gary Oldman's electrifying performance, which brings Winston Churchill to life even when the movie's narrative falters."
- Oldman received praise for his performance, with numerous reviewers labelling him a frontrunner to win the Academy Award for Best Actor.^[28] Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* wrote: "Get busy engraving Oldman's name on an Oscar... those fearing that *Darkest Hour* is nothing but a dull tableau of blowhard stuffed shirts will be relieved to know that they're in for a lively, provocative historical drama that runs on its own nonstop creative fire."
- Brian Tallerico of RogerEbert.com called the film "an acting exercise weighed down by costumes, make-up, and over-lighting", adding that "there's nothing new to the approach. It feels often like an obligation—a story that someone felt should be told again and a way to get a great actor his Oscar"
- Although Winston Churchill is usually celebrated as a British icon and a national hero, he is also a controversial figure on the British Left and the film's release led to many people posting articles on social media regarding Churchill's support for the usage of tear gas and poison gas, his support for eugenics and his role in the sinking of RMS Lusitania. For example, the popular left-wing actor and Labour supporter Ian Reddington even re-tweeted an article which described Churchill as "a vile racist, fanatical about violence and fiercely supportive of imperialism", while historian Louise Raw wrote an article for The Independent urging people not to forget "his problematic past"

SEQUEL/LEGACY