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ALAIN RESNAIS'

# LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD

(L'Année Dernière à Marienbad)





# L'ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD

(Last Year at Marienbad)

## CAST

X..... Giorgio Albertazzi  
A..... Delphine Seyrig  
M..... Sacha Pitoëff

and:

Françoise Bertin, Luce Garcia Ville, Françoise Spira, Helena Kornel, Karin Toeche-Mittler, Pierre Barbaud, Wilhem Von Deek, Jean Lanier, Gérard Lorin, Davide Montemury, Gilles Quéant, Gabriel Werner

## TECHNICAL CREDITS

Producers ..... Pierre Courau, Raymond Froment, Alain Resnais

## TECHNICAL CREDITS

Producers ..... Pierre Courau, Raymond Froment  
Director ..... Alain Resnais  
Script and Dialogue ..... Alain Robbe-Grillet  
Photography ..... Sacha Vierny  
Cameraman ..... Philippe Brun  
Editors ..... Henri Colpi, Jasmine Chasney  
Music ..... Francis Seyrig  
Sets ..... Jacques Saulnier  
Costumes ..... Bernard Evein  
Mlle. Seyrig's gowns ..... Chanel  
Sound ..... Guy Villette, Jean-Claude Marchetti, Rene Renault  
Jean Nery, Robert Cambourakis  
Orchestra Director ..... André Girard  
Organ Soloist ..... Marie-Louise Girod

Black-and-White Dyaliscope

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, VENICE FILM FESTIVAL, 1961

## L'ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD

by

Richard Roud

After the enormous success of *Hiroshima mon Amour*, one might have predicted the same kind of acclaim for *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*, Alain Resnais' second feature film. But even before the film was finished rumor began to circulate that *L'Année Dernière* was a strange, difficult film — one that would make *Hiroshima* look like a Jerry Wald Fox production. It was put up before the Cannes Festival selection committee, but it was reportedly rejected by André Malraux himself, who is supposed to have said, "It's too good for Cannes." Understandably somewhat annoyed, the producers refused to show it out of festival, and kept it under wrappers all summer long hoping for Venice and the Lion of St. Mark.

It was a long shot, but it paid off. *L'Année Dernière* was chosen for

Venice, and the 22nd Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica will be remembered in years to come as the festival that gave the golden lion, in the face of strong opposition, to *L'Année Dernière*.

At the gala first screening, most of the audience sat trembling in apprehension waiting for the film to begin — would they *understand* it? The blame for this atmosphere of dread lay partly with Robbe-Grillet: his interviews and press statements had the unfortunate effect of making *L'Année Dernière* sound like a pure essay in the higher reaches of non-Euclidean geometry. And perhaps it is that, too. But novelists' critical theories have often been harder to understand than their novels, and as *Jealousy* turned out to be pleasantly easy to follow, so *L'Année Dernière* was remarkably easy to take. It is true that the film is pitched on many levels, and the story can be interpreted in several different ways. On a first viewing, however, one plumps for a particular interpretation; the next time, another may prevail; and perhaps only on a third viewing would one be able to grasp the multiple interpretations, perceiving the force of the ambiguities even as one opted for one's own interpretation. If you feel that films should be completely assimilable on a first screening, then *L'Année Dernière* is not for you.

The first time round, then, I identified with and believed in the hero, X. Last year in a luxury hotel in Marienbad, X fell in love with A. She is married (or at least living with) M, whom she does not love but whom she is reluctant to leave, for it would mean giving up as well her highly ordered and formal existence which, if ultimately unsatisfying, yet protects her from the dangers of passion and freedom. She begged for time, and asked X to give her a year to make up her mind. The year has passed, and X has returned to Marienbad to claim her. At first A denies all knowledge of the events of the previous year, but gradually under the force of his love and persuasion, she gives in. The events of the preceding year are evoked, and finally A agrees to leave Marienbad — to leave the straight line, the granite slabs, and the frozen statues of the formal gardens and to "lose herself forever", alone with X.

Resnais and Robbe-Grillet have developed a technique briefly used in *Hiroshima mon Amour* — there is no past, no present; neither future nor conditional. Or so it seems, until one realizes with a shock half-way through the film, that one is not even sure *when* the film is taking place. Are the events of this year and last already over, or are this year's events happening now, or are we at the still point of the turning world?

"Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end which is always present."

No one has dared to deny the perfection with which Resnais has directed *L'Année Dernière*; its formal beauty and its rigorous composition. Image, sound, dialogue, music, camera movements, are all autonomous, interacting one with another to create patterns of extreme complexity and brilliance.

But even more important, perhaps, is the fact that it is the culmination of a whole series of films — a new kind of film in which the story is not the most important element. A kind of film in which the director deliber-

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ately chooses a thin, fable-like story in order to be freer to express himself and his view of life, his interpretation of life. *L'Année Dernière* deals with some of the most important subjects: love, memory, freedom, but it does so in a completely integrated fashion. As Alain Robbe-Grillet put it, in his preface to the published film script, "The real thing that makes the cinema an art is that it creates its reality through its forms. It is through its forms that we must look for its real content. And this holds good of any work of art – the novel, for instance. The choice of a narrative style, a grammatical tense, a rhythm of phrasing, a vocabulary, carries more weight here than the anecdote itself. One can't imagine any novelist who would be content to hand over his story to a *metteur-en-phrases* whose job would be to write out the text for delivery to the reader. The writer's idea when he begins work on a novel allows both for the story and for the way he's going to tell it. Often it's the latter which takes shape in his mind first, in the same way that a painter might think of a canvas composed entirely in vertical lines before deciding that what he's actually going to paint is a group of skyscrapers. As far as I'm concerned, at least, it is the same for a film."

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