



*Last Year at Marienbad*



LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD

AUTHOR: Original scenario and dialogue by Alain Robbe-Grillet

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PRODUCERS: Pierre Courau (Precitel), Raymond Froment (Terrafilm)

STARRING: Delphine Seyrig, Giorgio Albertazzi, Sacha Pitoëff.

With: Mmes Françoise Bertin, Luce Garcia-Ville, Hélène Kornel, Françoise Spira, Karin Toeche-Mittler and Messrs Pierre Barbaud, Wilhem von Deek, Jean Lanier, Gérard Lorin, Davide Montemurri, Gilles Quéant, Gabriel Werner

ASSISTANT TO MR RESNAIS: Jean Léon

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Sacha Vierny

CAMERAMAN: Philippe Brun

SETTINGS: Jacques Saulnier

SOUND ENGINEER: Guy Villette

CUTTING: Henri Colpi and Jasmine Chasney

MUSIC: Francis Seyrig

The shooting of the exteriors and natural settings for the film was done at Munich (the palaces of Nymphenburg, Schleissheim, etc.). Studios Photosonor, Paris

Script girl: Sylvette Baudrot

The film lasts one hour and thirty-three minutes.

The em dash (—) represents a slight pause, more emphatic than the meaning of the text suggests.

Opening with a romantic, passionate, violent burst of music, the kind used at the end of films with powerfully emotional climaxes (a large orchestra of strings, woodwinds, brasses, etc.); the credits are initially of a classical type – the names in simple letters, black against a grey background, or white against a grey background; the names or groups of names are framed with simple lines. These frames succeed each other at a normal, rather slow, regular rhythm.

Then, gradually, the frames are transformed, grow broader, are embellished with various paraps which finally constitute a kind of picture frame, at first flat, then painted in *trompe l'œil* so as to appear to be three dimensional.

Finally, in the last credits, real frames are presented, complex and covered with ornaments. At the same time, the margin around them has widened slightly, revealing a little of the wall where these pictures are hung, the wall itself decorated with gilded mouldings and carved woodwork.

The last two credit pictures, instead of constituting separate shots, are gradually revealed by a sidewise shift of the camera which, without stopping on the first frame when it is centred, continues its slow, regular movement, passes across a section of the wall containing only woodwork, gilding, moulding, etc., then reaches the last frame, containing the last name or names of the credits, which could begin by less important names and end with the major ones, or even mix them, especially towards the end. This last picture has a considerable margin of wall around it, as if it were seen from farther away. The camera passes across this without stopping either, then continues its movement along the wall.

Parallel to the development of the image during the credits, the music has gradually been transformed into a man's voice – slow, warm, quite deep but with a certain neutral quality at the same time: a fine theatrical voice, rhythmical but without any particular emotion.

This voice speaks continuously, but although the music has stopped altogether, the words are not yet understood (or in any case, are understood only with the greatest difficulty) because of a strong reverberation or some effect of the same sort (two identical soundtracks staggered, gradually superimposing until the voice becomes a normal one).

X'S VOICE: *Once again—I walk on, once again, down these corridors, through these halls, these galleries, in this structure—from another century, this enormous, luxurious, baroque—lugubrious hotel, where endless corridors succeed silent—deserted corridors overloaded with a dim, cold ornamentation of woodwork, stucco, mouldings, marbles, dark mirrors, dim paintings, columns, heavy hangings—sculptured door frames, series of doorways, galleries—transverse corridors that open in turn on empty salons, rooms overloaded with an ornamentation from another century, silent halls...*

Beginning at the end of the credits, the camera continues its slow, straight, uniform movement down a dark gallery of which only one side is seen, lit only by regularly spaced windows on the side not shown. There is no sunshine – it may even be twilight. But the electric lights are not turned on – at regular intervals a lighter area, opposite each invisible window, shows the mouldings that cover the wall more distinctly.

The field of the image includes the entire wall, from top to bottom, with a thin strip of the floor or the ceiling, or both. The shot is not taken from directly opposite the wall, but at a slight angle (towards the direction in which the camera advances).

The wall thus revealed, regularly explored yard by yard, is the same wall as that already glimpsed between the two last

picture frames of the credits – that is, a surface decorated by a profusion of baguettes, ogees, friezes, cornices, brackets and stucco embellishments of all kinds.

Moreover the panels are occupied by framed paintings, all located at eye level. These chiefly appear to be: old-style prints representing a garden *à la française* with geometric lawns, shrubbery clipped into cones, pyramids, etc., gravel walks, stone balustrades, statues on massive cubical pedestals, their attitudes stiff and rather emphatic. Also photographs of the hotel itself, and in particular of the corridor-gallery being traversed (showing, for instance, the diminishing perspective of the two walls). Lastly a (framed) theatre poster for a play with a foreign, meaningless title, the rest of the poster illegible except perhaps for a heading in larger letters: *Tonight only...*

The corridor-gallery may include columns and pilasters, lateral doors that are closed and doorways opening down long transverse corridors, or even onto halls and lobbies.

The entire setting is empty. Only occasionally, perhaps, at the corner of a hall or at the far end of a transverse corridor, a motionless, frozen servant in elaborate livery, or else a statue (but without a pedestal).

If a straight trajectory this long is impossible, it can be replaced by a labyrinthine series of corridors and salons, giving the same impression of a slow, continuous, virtually unending course.

During all this time, the same neutral and monotonous voice will continue speaking the text. The words, by the end of the credits, have become comprehensible to normal hearing.

X'S VOICE: *...where the sound of advancing footsteps is absorbed by carpets so thick and heavy that no sound can be heard, as if the ear of the man walking on once again, down these corridors—through these halls, these galleries, in this structure from another century, this enormous, luxurious, baroque—lugubrious hotel where endless*



*corridors succeed silent, deserted corridors—overloaded with a dark and cold ornamentation of woodwork, stucco, mouldings—marble, dark mirrors, dim paintings, columns, heavy hangings—sculptured door frames, series of doorways, galleries, transverse corridors—that open in turn on empty salons, overloaded with an ornamentation from another century—silent halls where the sound of footsteps is absorbed by carpets so heavy, so thick that no sound reaches the ear—as if the ear itself were very far away, very far away from the floor, from the carpets, very far away from this heavy and empty setting, very far away from this complicated frieze that runs just under the ceiling, with its branches and its garlands, like dead leaves, as if the floor were still sand or gravel...*

The images that accompany this text do not precisely correspond to the elements of the setting to which it refers. But the photography must have a constant character which is maintained, moreover, during the entire film – a distinct and bright image, even in the darker sections, giving everything a kind of varnished quality.

From the beginning, the camera has not stopped at any particular point, moving on without lingering over the more significant images (the garden). The latter, moreover, are not always very well lit, not being necessarily located opposite one of the windows that succeed each other at fixed intervals (the distances are constant and the tempo the same) on the other (still not visible) side of the gallery.

At the end of this gallery there is a door, or even a series of doors (as monumental as possible) that the camera passes through with the same continuous movement maintained since the end of the credits. Here, too, the ornamentation must be heavy, complicated, rather lugubrious. There may be columns, steps, porticoes. At the same time, the darkness becomes more intense, though not producing a grey photograph – on the contrary, there are some extremely clear details (highlights of

capitals, of various mouldings) seen against an equally distinct darkness, without it being apparent what source of light is responsible for these strange effects.

Finally a dark salon is seen, really very dark this time, where a light (vague at first, but gradually becoming distinct as the camera draws closer) is emanating from precisely the direction towards which the image is advancing. The salon is a kind of theatre, but not arranged in the customary manner: there are chairs and armchairs arranged in groups of varying size, merely turned in the same direction. All the seats are occupied: many men in evening clothes, and a few women, also very elegantly dressed. The faces are seen in profile or in three-quarters from behind, lit from in front by the light coming from the stage. All the bodies are quite motionless, the faces absolutely set, the eyes fixed. The light grows brighter towards the first rows, but the room keeps its character of a theatre, where the faces are illuminated by the very spectacle they are watching.

The offscreen text continues being read, without interruption, as the camera enters the room, then while the heads of the spectators file past. The tone becomes less neutral, more “impressive”.

X’S VOICE: *...or stone slabs, on which I advanced, as though to meet you—between these walls covered with woodwork, stucco, mouldings, pictures, framed prints, among which I was walking on—among which I was already waiting for you, very far away from this setting where I stand now, in front of you, still waiting for the man who will no longer come, who no longer threatens to come, to separate us again, to tear you away from me. (A pause.) Are you coming?*

After a silence, it is a woman’s voice (the woman is also not visible on the screen) that answers, in the same rather theatrical tone, but still measured, calm, cadenced – a beautiful, deep voice, but restrained: it is the voice of the actress who will be seen shortly afterward.

ACTRESS'S VOICE: *We must still wait—a few minutes—more—no more than a few minutes, a few seconds...* (A silence).

The man's voice resumes, speaking the text more and more theatrically, as though on a stage.

X'S VOICE: *A few seconds more, as if you yourself were still hesitating before separating from him—from yourself—as if his figure, though already grey, already paler, still threatened to reappear—in this same place where you had imagined it with too much force—too much fear, or hope, in your fear of suddenly losing this faithful link with...*

The voice has gradually slowed, then stopped, suspended. And the actress's voice answers it, after a short silence.

ACTRESS'S VOICE: *No, this hope—this hope is now without any object. This fear of losing such a link, such a prison, such a lie has passed—this whole story is already over now. It came to an end—a few seconds...*

Having reached the first row of the spectators, the camera continues its movement, passing in review, from almost directly in front now, the faces aligned, frozen with attention, and brightly illuminated by the light from the stage. But the camera's speed has gradually decreased and the image finally comes to rest on a few motionless heads.

Then the shot cuts abruptly to the stage itself, brightly lit and occupying the entire screen.

The stage represents a garden *à la française* (or *à l'italienne*), recalling the prints glimpsed in the corridor – precisely copied, in fact, from one of them. A kind of gravelled terrace with a stone balustrade at the back (overlooking the invisible lawns), a statue at one side (on a cubical pedestal, one or two antique-looking figures whose grandiloquent postures seem to signify something, but what?) and on the other a portico or some columns, or the beginning of a pergola, a doorway through which someone might appear.

Two actors are on the stage, a woman between twenty-five and thirty, a man between thirty-five and forty, in formal dress

of the last century. They are both facing the doorway described above. The man is slightly upstage in relation to the woman. He is seen in profile, she in three-quarters from behind.

The actress finishes the sentence which her voice had begun offscreen at the end of the preceding shot.

THE ACTRESS: ...*more—it has come to a close...*

It is the actor, on the stage, who answers her, and no longer X's voice, which has been heard since the beginning of the film.

THE ACTOR: ...*for ever—in a past of marble, like these statues, this garden carved out of stone—this hotel itself with its halls deserted now, its motionless, mute servants long-since dead no doubt, who still stand guard at the corners of the corridors, along the galleries, in the deserted salons, through which I walked to meet you, at the thresholds of the doors thrown wide that I walked through one after the other to meet you, as if I was passing between two hedges of motionless faces – frozen, watchful, indifferent – while I was already waiting for you, for ever, and while I am still waiting for you as you still hesitate perhaps, still staring at the door to this garden...*

The actor and the actress have remained motionless since their appearance on the screen. They say nothing now, still not moving, and the silence lasts for quite a long time, until the sound of a clock chiming the hour (several clear, regularly spaced strokes) breaks the pose, the man remaining frozen, the woman turning around – not towards him, but towards the public (that is, towards the camera) to answer.

THE ACTRESS: *And now (then, after a pause, but without making the slightest gesture towards the man) I am yours.*

During the burst of applause from the (not visible) audience, the curtain falls. The two actors remain in the same position, without bowing. The curtain rises and falls twice more during the applause without the actors making a single gesture. The woman's attitude should be quite stylized here, like that of a statue: a certain position of the arm which raises her hand to

the hollow of her shoulder, a gesture readily recognizable when it recurs. The applause continues, very intense, very heavy, quite long – then gradually transforming itself into music identical to that heard at the beginning of the credits (very “end of a tearjerker”), whose intensity rapidly increases until it drowns out the applause, which fades out altogether while the curtain falls for the last time. And the shot changes.

Opposite: the room, now brightly lit. The applause is over, the spectators have stood up. They have formed groups here and there (the chairs not occupying the entire room). The camera makes a more or less circular movement through the groups. A few characters are still facing the (not visible) stage, no longer applauding, but still staring straight ahead, standing motionless, as though under the spell of the spectacle which has just concluded. These people are generally isolated – but others in the same position are also to be found within certain groups, which thereby assume a rather strange quality: a part of their constituents (one or two) not facing the centre of the circle. The intense and impassioned music continues with the same force, completely drowning out the sound of the conversation.

The camera comes to a stop on a woman standing apart, twenty-five to thirty years old, beautiful but somehow empty (we shall refer to her by the letter A), quite tall, statuesque. She is seen in precisely the position the actress on the stage had taken as the curtain fell. But the camera does not hold this stationary shot long.

A series of stationary shots follows, showing the groups already seen before. The postures of the characters have not changed, or have changed very slightly. Some faces are still turned towards the stage, which is not visible. The discussions are occasionally animated, but always polite (and nothing can be heard because of the music). A few gestures, significant but incomprehensible (out of context), and also perfectly polite.

This series of shots must be shown quite rapidly. The young woman A, standing apart, is seen at least once again: she has not moved at all. This series must be interpolated with shots of certain new groups which are not in the theatre but in other salons of the hotel, and which are concerned with other occasions.

The theatre images are thus succeeded by a series of views of the hotel and of its inhabitants, in various places, at various times. These too are stationary shots, but their duration gradually increases. At the same time, the number of characters gradually diminishes, and their position in the image becomes increasingly marginal. These scenes are composed as a function of the setting, so as to place some ornamental fragment (or else nothing at all) in the middle of the field of vision, gradually relegating the human beings to the sides, either in a more or less vague foreground (fragments of bodies, heads seen from behind, etc.) or in the background in the form of more organized groups.

The music has gradually faded, and here and there a word can be heard emerging from a chance phrase, such as: *unbelievable... murder... actor... lying... had to... you're not... it was a long time ago... tomorrow... etc.*

Then, the music having grown quite calm – actually muted, except for an occasional sudden burst of sound – long fragments of conversation can be heard, such as:

*...see any connection – there is no connection, my dear, absolutely no connection, and the fact that he, or she, might have said or done certain things that would suggest...*

or else:

*... and an impossible climate besides. No hope of setting foot outdoors for months on end, and suddenly, just when you least expect it...*

or else:

*Did you see him yourself?*

*No, but this friend of mine who told me about it...*

*Oh, well then... told you...*

These fragments themselves are only partially comprehensible. Moreover the words grow slower as the rhythm of the series of shots abates.

The series of views of the hotel ends with a stationary shot possessing all the same characteristics, carried to their extreme. A slow scene. The image includes, at the far left, a blurred close-up of a man's head, cut off by the edge of the image and not facing the camera. It is x, the hero of the film, but the spectator can hardly tell him from the other characters who have appeared in similar fashion in the preceding images. In the centre of the screen in the middle distance is a clearly visible element of the setting – for instance a monumental mantelpiece with candelabra and a huge, elaborately framed mirror. Finally, to the right and in the background (preferably in another room, visible through a doorway), a man and a woman standing, talking in low voices. What they are saying is barely audible, as a vague whispering.

x's head, in the foreground, then turns in this direction, but not abruptly. The direction of his gaze is not indicated explicitly: it must seem merely possible that x is looking at the couple. Neither the man nor the woman seem to pay any attention to x (who is, moreover, quite far away).

The words are at first indistinct, virtually incomprehensible, then the volume rises slightly and the dialogue begins to be understandable, particularly the man's remarks, for he speaks with increasing volume.

MAN: *The others? Who are the others? Don't be so concerned with what they are thinking.*

WOMAN: *You know perfectly well...*

MAN: *I know you said you would listen to no one but me.*

WOMAN: *I am listening to you.*

During these remarks, the camera moves so as to centre the image a little more on the couple, but without coming any closer, still keeping them almost in the background. During this movement, x's head leaves the field of vision.

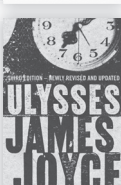
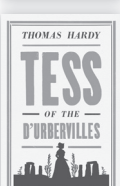
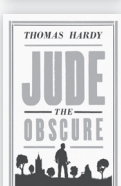
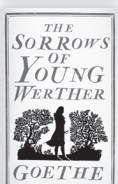
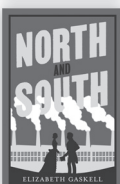
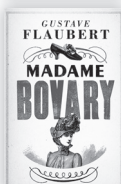
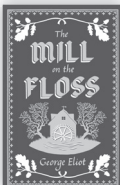
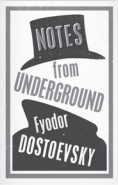
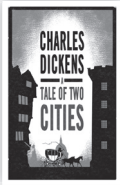
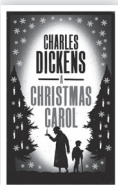
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