

Last Year at Marienbad: A scenarist, a director and a protagonist walk into some archetypes

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Abstract. As the 65th anniversary of the modernist masterpiece *L'année Dernière À Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*) (1961) approaches, we are reminded that this film demands a straightforward retelling. Because, in fact, nothing about this film is straightforward. The director, Alain Resnais (cited in Wilson, 2006:70), explains, 'In an international palace, a stranger meets a young woman and tells her the love story they lived the previous year. The woman denies this, the man confirms it and persists. Who is right?'. The film sees three characters inextricably linked together in a love triangle, nameless but for the knowledge of the script that describes them as A (Delphine Seyrig), the woman, M (Sacha Pitoëff), perhaps her husband or lover or guardian, and X (Giorgio Albertazzi), the man who is trying to win A for himself (Van Wert, 1977). The film remains one of the most talked about, owing to its many formal and narrative uncertainties. What actually did happen? What is the film even about?

Because the audiovisual essay is now an established form of scholarship (McWhirter, 2015), perhaps this form of analysis afforded by the digital age can shed fresh light on a complex piece of cinema history. This audiovisual essay pieces together the evidence to demonstrate that the film can be seen as a swim of images in the conscious and unconscious mind of the protagonist, X. These take place only in the pro-filmic time as the film unfolds. X has suffered some great tragedy – perhaps the death of the real A – but inhabits a stasis or purgatory and a physical space the spectator does not see. In what the audience does see, various archetypes adopt image representations (Anima as A; Trickster as guests; Shadow as M) with the purpose of having X heal and resolve his part in the tragedy and to move on with his life. The work is a battle between the memories and repressions of a conscious psyche versus the power of the unconscious seeking wholeness and unification. Who will win?

Video



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWpY9EAFU6Y&list=PLkDy9Pm-dHrPrKjE8Sv4WDiW4RtD54mbZ&index=2>

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