



Film

Les Herbes Folles (2009)

Director: [Alain Resnais](#)

Time Out rating ★★★★★

Movie review

From Time Out Online

Reviewed at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival

Now in his late 80s, and over six decades after he made his first film, [Alain Resnais](#) shows no signs of having lost any of the artistic audacity that made films like 'Night and Fog', 'Hiroshima Mon Amour', 'Last Year at Marienbad' and 'Providence' classics of modern(ist) cinema. With 'Wild Grass' ('Les Herbes Folles') he has quietly outdone such 'innovative' fellow competitors for the Cannes Palme d'or as Park Chan-wook, Quentin Tarantino or (the Devil save us!) Lars Von Trier – besides making one of the most impressive and enjoyable films in the competition.

Taken from a novel by Christian Gailly entitled 'The Incident', the film explores with enormous wit, elegance and insight how one small, seemingly trivial event – the theft of a woman's purse – can lead, by the most improbable and digressive of routes, to something comparatively very substantial and significant: a matter, in fact, of lives and deaths. The purse in question belongs to dentist Marguerite (Sabine Azéma), and it is found, devoid of money and cards, by Georges (André Dussollier), who we presently learn is undergoing a mid-life crisis that makes him indecisive, sometimes reluctant to perform even the simplest of tasks (such as phoning the owner of a stolen purse to reassure her that it's been found), and prone to sudden outbursts of almost homicidal irritability.

The theft and discovery of the purse brings not only these characters together in a weird and wonderful story (related by a narrator sometimes reliable, sometimes not), but also Georges' wife ([Anne Consigny](#)), a policeman (Mathieu Amalric), Marguerite's friend and surgery partner ([Emmanuelle Devos](#)), and sundry others. In other words, it's one of

Resnais' more discursive pieces, gradually broadening out from the obsessive and often perverse mindscape of Georges to include a range of idiosyncracies, all dealt with with such a light touch that eventually the film quite literally spirals off into the ether, as exhilaratingly as one of the countless crane shots that discreetly litter the movie.

What's it all about? Ageing, passion, doubt, the need to let off steam, the desire to feel loved, the self-protective instinct; love, pain and the whole damn thing. If that sounds too much for one movie, remember how Resnais' 'My American Uncle' contrived to suggest the workings of the world through the microcosm of a rat's cage. This latest confection, light as a soufflé, effervescent as a glass of cold champagne, and bittersweet as chocolate, feels like a summation of all the best things in Resnais' oeuvre.

Author: Geoff Andrew

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