



eye4:movie

PRIVATE FEARS IN PUBLIC PLACES Charlotte's Web



Directed by Alain Resnais
Starring Sabine Azéma, Andre Dussollier, Isabelle Carre, Laura Morante, Pierre Arditi, Lambert Wilson, Claude Rich

By the mid '80s, the celebrated French auteur and intellectual Alain Resnais (*Last Year At Marienbad, Hiroshima Mon Amour*) turned his attention from cinematic experimentation to mostly filming popular plays. In this adaptation of English playwright Alan Ayckbourn's *Private Fears In Public Places*, Resnais transports the characters to a wintry Parisian setting but has otherwise remained faithful to the original material.

Real estate agent Thierry (*Dussollier*) shows apartment hunter Nicole (*Morante*) around an upmarket, but somewhat poky, little unit in the fashionable district of Bercy. Nicole is not satisfied, given that her fiancé Dan (*Wilson*) has insisted on having his own 'study', and points out to Thierry how awkwardly a large room has been split in two by the addition of an unsubtle dividing wall.

A middle-aged bachelor who lives with his lovelorn sister Gaëlle (*Carre*), Thierry employs Charlotte (*Azéma*), a devout Christian, to help out around the office. Having politely accepted her offer to lend him a video recording of a religious television program, Thierry is astonished to discover that the tape also includes rather raunchy footage of a woman (who appears to be Charlotte) in various stages of undress and ecstasy.

Charlotte also works part-time as evening care-giver to barman Lionel's (*Arditi*) perennially rude and intolerant invalid father (*Rich*) – who is never actually shown on-screen, although the aftermath of his tantrums is plain enough to see on Charlotte's face.

While Resnais wilfully plays up

the theatricality of the piece, sometimes shooting scenes top down – in which the characters roam from room to room as though they were laboratory rats negotiating a maze – there's a delicate balance of naturalism in their performances and the truthful emotions they convey. It's a beautifully shot and acted film, but for the most part it remains a rather bleak and pessimistic snapshot of loneliness.

In a recent interview Alain Resnais compared the various characters to insects caught in a spider's web, in which their individual struggle to break free sent ripples through the web that the other characters could feel but ultimately do nothing to stop. *'The sense of solitude is irreversible,'* he notes. *'There's no cure for the desire not to be alone. It's the eternal quest for happiness. It's easy to believe it's within your grasp and hard to accept that it's a figment of your imagination'.*

TIM STEWART

***Private Fears In Public Places* screens at UWA's Somerville Auditorium from Monday, February 25, until Sunday, March 2, as part of the Lotterywest Festival Films season.**

