

## **Iris**

Often described as 'the most brilliant woman in England', author, philosopher and Oxford scholar Iris Murdoch met and fell in love with John Bayley, lecturer in English at Oxford, in the 1950s. A curiously matched couple, they were married in 1956 and theirs became one of the most celebrated literary unions of its day.

Based on Bayley's poignant biography *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch*, the film tells the story of the academics first and last years together when, in 1996, Murdoch was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

The blossoming of their relationship is told through a series of flashbacks while the film touchingly portrays Bayley caring for Murdoch until her death in 1999. And with the inevitable realism that entails: when the postman arrives with her latest – and last – novel, the once prolific author (who was famously quoted as saying she took 'half an hour off' between books) is unable to recognise it.

Not, however, a film about the novelist, philosopher, or even the gradual disintegration of Murdoch's mind due to Alzheimer's, *Iris* is essentially a love story.

Director Richard Eyre, said he would have subtitled it 'Enduring Love' noting: 'Iris is about forms of love and the way in which love changes and love endures. In a sense, it reflects on everyone, because in every relationship you have to accommodate the otherness of the other person and that's very much what it's about. It also explores how you can be separate beings in a marriage and yet the sum of the marriage is greater than its parts'.

Jim Broadbent who plays the bumbling Bayley won an Oscar for his role; Judi Dench, who one feels slipped into the skin of Murdoch to play this role, was nominated for one. And frankly deserved one for her compelling performance which she herself cited as 'the hardest work' she has ever done. Hugh Bonneville, remarkably similar in appearance to Broadbent, convincingly plays the young John Bayley, while Kate Winslett was chosen for the role of the young Iris.

Out of the four roles, Winslett's was the only one that seemed out of place: while she encapsulates Murdoch's free spirit, she can't help but come across as more Hollywood than Home Counties.

A marvellous and moving film filled with humour and, above all, humanity.

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