

Irrational Man – Review

“Anxiety is the **dizziness** of freedom,” says Abe Lucas, a **weary**, impotent philosophy professor, and one of two voice-over supplying protagonists in Woody Allen’s latest rumination on will, **fate** and “the reason for living.” Joaquin Phoenix is perfectly **suited** for the role - a kind of less hedonistic reflection of his private investigator in last year’s *Inherent Vice* - and complemented well by Emma Stone, here playing Jill Pollard, making her second **appearance** in an Allen film following her **charming** performance **opposite** Colin Firth in *Magic in the Moonlight*.



To reveal too much about the film’s story would **spoil** the surprise of the **tangled**, morally complex **web** Allen spins, but fans of the director will be pleased to hear that, in many ways, it recalls his *Crimes and Misdemeanours* in its **dark**, complicated **themes**. Lucas is a man who arrives at Braylin College, his new place of work, surrounded by rumours and **hearsay**. His real story is more surprising than the **gossip** that follows him, and it finds him at something of a crossroads in life; tired and dejected and unable to find peace. “You suffer from *despair*,” Pollard tells him, frankly. “How comforting that would be,” he replies.

How Lucas learns to live “a decent life” again is another surprise, and it’s one that takes the film to some **deep**, existential levels. Lucas is a difficult character to sympathise with, as Allen’s main characters often are, but Phoenix makes him as compulsively **watchable** as any of his other roles. Stone, meanwhile, is a perfect fit for Allen’s world, where the innocence and optimism of **youth** so often clashes with the cynicism of the **elder**, more jaded generation. It’s another triumph for late-period Woody Allen: as intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking as *Midnight in Paris* was unabashedly entertaining, and a **showcase** for his talent in casting, direction and **knotty**, intelligent storytelling.