



SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK

Autumn
Season
2009

Production year: 2008

Country: USA

Cert (UK): 15

Runtime: 124 mins

Director: Charlie Kaufman

Cast: Catherine Keener, Emily Mortimer, Emily Watson, Michelle Williams, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Samantha Morton

Written and directed by Charlie Kaufman (*Adaptation*, *Being John Malkovich*), this is a classic Kaufmanesque work: bold, bizarre and utterly baffling. It begins as a conventional tale of middle-aged disappointment and marital despair; that of a theatre director, Caden Cotard (Phillip Seymour Hoffman), whose body and life are falling to pieces as he tries to direct a provincial production of *Death of a Salesman*. After his wife, Adele (Catherine Keener), goes off to Germany with their four-year-old daughter, the lonely Caden gets involved with a series of women. From Arthur Miller-like realism, the film shifts to a kind of Gogol-meets-Coen Brothers surrealism — one character lives in a house that's always on fire. It makes sense to give up on trying to make sense of the film, and there's so much to enjoy, especially the fine performances from Hoffman, Emily Watson and Samantha Morton.



The Times

Caden Cotard, a miserable and hypochondriac theatre director, lives in Schenectady, New York, a place-name that whimsically mutates in the title, though nowhere in the script, to that obscure literary-critical term "synecdoche", meaning an image in which the part stands for the whole - for example, "head of cattle" meaning cow, or "crown" meaning king.

The film is either a masterpiece or a massively dysfunctional act of self-indulgence and self-laceration. It has brilliance, either way: surreal, utterly distinctive, witty, gloomy in the manner that his fans will recognise and adore, but with a new epic confidence, absorbing the influences of Fellini and Lynch. As with his previous films, *Adaptation* and *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, I had the uneasy feeling that one single idea was being extruded to an excessive length, but this movie's crazy emotional intensity and ambition really punched my lights out on a second viewing. And that protracted final sequence is quite extraordinary, in which the dying hero is instructed what to think and do, via a voice through an earpiece, while he stumbles through the wrecked stage-set of his self-created existence.

The Guardian