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## Fall Films to Stream

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William Greaves's documentary about the 1972 National Black Political Convention, Werner Schroeter's *Malina*, and a caper by King Hu.

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Newly up on [MUBI](#), *Malina* is a superbly crafted, thoroughly disturbing psychological thriller with a remarkable pedigree—adapted by Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek from the Austrian poet [Ingeborg Bachmann](#)'s only finished novel and directed by a chronically undervalued, world-class director, [Werner Schroeter](#) (1945–2010). It was also shot by Elfi Mikesch, a noted independent filmmaker in her own right. Most significantly, the movie is a vehicle for the greatest film actress of her generation, Isabelle Huppert.

Simply described, *Malina* is the story of a celebrated writer's nervous breakdown and descent into madness. An extremely high maintenance writer (Huppert), purposeful yet disorganized, and identified in the credits only as The Woman, does emotional battle with her apparent lover, Malina (Mathieu Carrière), and initiates a tortuous affair with a young Hungarian (Can Togay).

The movie begins with a nightmare that never exactly ends but continues to inform the subjectivity of The Woman's domestic space and workaday reality. The first half of the film is a posh romantic melodrama, full of high angles, that suggests a deranged gloss on one of Otto Preminger's florid Forties noirs, *Laura* or *Whirlpool*. Hallucinations and dreams proliferate. By the second half, The Woman's symptoms have grown worse. Once it becomes apparent that Malina is not her lover but something like a Jungian animus, *Malina* pivots to a mode that might be described as the Teutonic Fellini-esque. Albeit more stately, the pitch of overwrought hysteria that Schroeter achieves is unmatched by any director save the Polish wild man Andrzej Żuławski.



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Isabelle Huppert as The Woman in *Malina*, 1991

Obsessed by the memory of her Nazi father, Bachmann had numerous points of contact with her protagonist, whose father is also a Nazi, and who similarly suffers writer's block and lectures on Wittgenstein. (Bachmann referred to the novel as an "imaginary autobiography.") Schroeter ups the ante by visually quoting photographs of Bachmann and, by staging the movie's final half hour in a fiery apartment, referring to Bachmann's own tragic death. For this reason, *Malina* may strike Bachmann's devotees as crass.

But the artist Schroeter prized above all others was Maria Callas, and one watches Huppert as one would a diva at the Met. Present in every scene, if not quite every shot, Huppert does not give a performance so much as she sustains a two-hour aria of anguish. (In a way, the movie is a dry run for her even more amazing role as the central figure in Michael Haneke's 2001 adaptation of Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*.)

*Malina* is set in Vienna; MUBI is screening the film's international version with Huppert and Carrière undubbed, speaking in their native French (though the German dub is also available) and thus creating an additional undercurrent of displacement.

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