

The movie: death and the maiden

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Movie Review The Movie: Death and the Maiden The movie Death and the Maiden directed by Roman Polanski in 1994 has been made on the basis of the famous play by the same name written by Chilean playwright Ariel Dorfman in the year 1990. The movie revolves around three characters; a former political prisoner of a country in South America, her lawyer husband and a seemingly friendly doctor who is identified by the woman as her tormentor during her days in prison. The movie portrays the vengeance of the woman and depicts the confusion of the husband about the truth underlying his wife's accusations. The central characters in the movie are played by Sigourney Weaver (as Paulina Escobar), Stuart Wilson (as Gerardo Escobar) and Ben Kingsley (as Dr. Roberto Mirinda). The movie is a mystery thriller which is set on the backdrop of the years following the fall of the oppressive government in a South American country. The country has not been given any name in the movie and could be any country in South America that has had a similar political history. The theme of the movie reflects the trauma undergone by the dissidents of the country that continues to affect the lives of the victims and their near ones long after the end of the dictatorship. The pain and trauma faced by Paulina in the movie gives voice to this issue. With a minimalist setting the director handles the complex and sensitive topic with elan. The story is not narrated in the traditional style of story-telling but goes round the darker corners of the human psychology. The situation is kept ambiguous and the course of events compels the viewers to confront the issues of physical and psychological torture that the dissident activists are subjected to, in a country with an oppressive government. The story moves around the different incidents that

lead Paulina to grow desperate to have her revenge on the doctor she happens to meet at a later part of her life who she recognizes as her former tormentor. The doctor is portrayed as an apparently friendly person who provides a lift to a man on a night when his car has broken down. This man happens to be Paulina's lawyer husband. Paulina, who had not seen the face of the sadistic doctor, that had led the gang of men to torture her and violate her modesty in the prison, recognizes this Dr. Miranda to be the same man by his voice and mannerisms. The movie leaves a space for ambiguity in the end, since it is not convinced by the actions of the characters, which one of the two is innocent. The doctor is shown as unaware of the events of Paulina's past that she relates him with, and her husband is caught between the words of his wife on one hand and that of the doctor on the other. At one point it appears to him that Paulina's outburst is an effect of the tormenting past she has had. The confessions by the doctor leads to a stunning revelation but does not convince whether he is truly guilty or has made the confession in front of Paulina in order to appease her and free her from her horrible past that has been haunting her. The performance of the actors is totally impressive and the director has been successful in installing the sense of dread into the minds of the audience. Death and the Maiden can be considered as the most riveting of all the films Polanski has made till date. The details have been captured through the sequences extremely well. It is a study of mental agony, paranoia and burning desire to revenge. The sequences are apt in holding the audience in suspense and the brilliant dialogues evoke a feeling of uncertainty in their minds throughout. In the movie Paulina is determined to avenge herself by taking a note of confession

from the miscreant for his deed, while it leaves the viewer to think whether it is just on the end of the doctor to endure the troubles in captivity and give such a confession, if, in reality, he is not the same man that had tortured Paulina fifteen years ago. However, although the movie is emotionally charged, the words of the characters have been portrayed as too ideological. The song 'Death and the Maiden' played by the sadistic doctor while materializing his lust for flesh and power has created the atmosphere of cold shrewdness and makes the name of the play appropriate. Reference Death and the Maiden. Dir. Roman Polanski, Perf. Sigourney Weaver, Ben Kingsley, Fine Line Features, 1994. Film.