

'Death and the Maiden' a wild ride through revenge, justice

Greg Hamilton

For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Roman Polanski's latest directorial effort, *Death and the Maiden*, is a masterfully woven series of complexities that boils down to one simple lesson.

NEVER underestimate the wrath of a woman scorned. If you do, beware of the consequences because revenge is a bitch; and if she's anything like Sigourney Weaver's character, you can kiss your ass goodbye.

That out of the way, we can talk about the film.

Based on a play by Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* is a psychological whipping match, a war that wrestles with guilt and innocence, rationality and madness and twists with the perceptions of the audience. Polanski is at his finest in this psychological realm. He thrives on the isolation and intensity that the story is grounded in and transplants this spirit into the heart and soul of the characters.

Sigourney Weaver is Paulina Escobar - a woman haunted by a life shattered 15 years earlier when she was tortured and raped as a political prisoner somewhere in Central America.

Death and the Maiden

Sigourney Weaver, Ben Kingsley

Director: Roman Polanski

Rated: R

★★★★

Still very much a prisoner to the past, and living in the country of her previous capture, Paulina is the embodiment of paranoia. She always keeps a gun within reach and turns out all the lights whenever she sees anything suspicious. Her character is not unlike Ripley from the *Alien* trilogy, only her demons are clothed in flesh and bone.

In a strange twist of fate, Paulina's husband Gerardo (Stuart Wilson), who works with human rights issues, comes home late one stormy night with a rare visitor - Dr. Miranda (Ben Kingsley), who picked up Gerardo because his car had a flat.

A perceptive one, Paulina thinks she might know this "visitor" all too well. His voice is that of one of her previous tormentors. With this suspicion, Paulina



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Paulina (Weaver) questions her captive, Dr. Miranda (Kingsley).

takes Miranda prisoner, pushing *Death and the Maiden* into its methodical journey - a journey that pries into the crevices of crime and punishment and holds the attention of the audience like that of a captive jury.

Wanting her captor to confess, Paulina puts Miranda and his alleged despicable acts "on trial," with her husband serving as the doctor's defense attor-

ney. Unfortunately for Miranda, his prosecutor is also the judge and executioner. It's a kangaroo court, and the good doctor is about to take a trip down under.

Not since *Silence of the Lambs* has there been a film so psychologically engrossing. Once Miranda is Paulina's captive, the lines between justice and revenge begin to blur and the truth becomes a mystery.

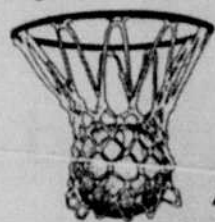
Kingsley's role as Miranda is the crux upon which all this tension is balanced. The master of understatement, Kingsley reveals little about his character, making the audience work for every hint of guilt or innocence. Is his guilt hidden behind years of training, or is he truly innocent? The enigma of Miranda is a credit to Kingsley.

The most engrossing character, by far, is Paulina. She is a multi-faceted character who seethes with a controlled fury that won't be sated until it's had its pound of vengeful flesh. Her past violations are a part of her soul, and Weaver brings this to life with a tour de force performance. Weaver should receive that Oscar she's been pining for. The same goes for Polanski and possibly Kingsley. Both deliver Oscar-deserving work that shouldn't be overlooked.

Death and the Maiden is by far the best picture released so far this year. It challenges the audience and doesn't shy away from being provocative. As a play on film, Polanski stays faithful to its claustrophobic structure and, as a result, produces a roller coaster of a film.

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