

MOVIES

Romance And Memory

*Oriane at the Roxy is
mysterious and
memorable.*

By John Feffer

Oriane, the Venezuelan-French co-production playing at the Roxy, is a lyrical disinterment of the past: a film midway between poetry and archaeology. Although there are moments of romantic excess, the unfolding spectacle of the narrative excavation is endlessly intriguing.

The scene of Oriane's "dig" is a decaying hacienda on the coast of Venezuela. The owner, Oriane, has recently died, and her niece, Maria, must decide on the future of the property. Visiting the hacienda, Maria ponders the uppermost layer of the site — the long-unused rooms, the closed windows and wardrobes, the dust so thick it hangs in the air.

As she handles familiar objects, Maria descends to the film's second level: memories of a childhood visit to the spinster Oriane, when Maria's teenage curiosity threatened to unearth the secrets of her aunt's past. Eventually, through another series of flashbacks, this third level emerges: the tale of forbidden passion involving the young Oriane and her adopted brother, Sergio.

Tying together these three levels of narration are a collection of artifacts that accumulate significance as they reappear in the film. The family photograph that includes Oriane and her young playmate Sergio seems innocuous at first, but then young Maria finds it hidden in the false bottom of a box. The poison the servant Fidelia uses to kill rats appears to be a gratuitous touch, but not so later when a certain mysterious powder is added to a certain water carrier. The swing, the painting of Oriane's father, the jewelry box, the kaleidoscope — each of these objects offers up its mystery to keep the plot going.

Ironically, however, as we descend through history and come closer to the mystery of Oriane that the young Maria so desperately wants to uncover, the story becomes less interesting. The ambiguities of all the various objects disappear, leaving the audience with a conventional ballad of young love. To make matters worse, some rather overripe symbols begin to clutter the drama: birds symbolizing freedom, unbridled horses symbolizing unbridled passions, a discarded doll symbolizing the end of innocence.

Nevertheless, it is the process by which we come to the mystery and not the mystery itself which occupies the better part of the movie. Director Fina Torres' ability

to represent visually how the past penetrates the present makes up for any lapses in plot. In addition, there's the beautiful soundtrack of classical music, the evocative cinematography that captures the various textures of light and dark, and the understated acting of Doris Wells (Oriane), Daniela Silverio (Marie) and Mirtha Borges (Fidelia).

These poetic elements coupled with a fascinating narrative technique make *Oriane* not a great movie, but a sufficiently captivating find.

Oriane opens today, October 16, at the Roxy Screening Room, 2021 Sansom Street.Δ