



FILM: **MASTER GARDENER**

FDG RATING: 2.5 😊 😐 🕒 🕒 🕒

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Paul Schrader: *director/writer*
Joel Edgerton: *actor, Norval*
Sigourney Weaver: *actress, Norma*

DATE: August 20, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MASTER GARDENER**

The 2022 film, *Master Gardener*, had us intrigued at first, with the ruggedly handsome muscular horticulturalist, Norval, meticulously tending to the beautiful extensive gardens on the elegant country house estate (evidently a former plantation) of haughty, imperious, Mrs. Norma Haverhill. He also tends to her other needs so when she tells him her great-niece, Maya, who is dealing with a lot of personal problems, will be arriving to be mentored as his apprentice, we know this will not end well. As expected, Maya seduces Norval, Norma discovers their relationship and demands they both leave immediately. From this point on, the film is predictable, and trite with stilted dialog and flat stereotype characters.

Naturally, the theme of rejuvenation is symbolized by the flowers and plants but many of us thought the film tried too hard to relate the theme to the characters. Maya had gotten into drugs and by the end of the film has overcome her addiction. Norval evidently has a racist past as shown by the white supremacy tattoos covering his back but clearly is a different person now. Norma described her great niece as a half breed, underscoring the theme of racism which was alluded to with the plantation setting but she shows no sign of being rejuvenated.

We thought the film would be more interesting if we knew the back story: how did Norma meet Norval? What changed Norval from his ugly past? Where did he get his passion for horticulture?

Rejuvenation after addiction is a recurring theme in Shraeder's films. The expansive gardens will come back after being completely vandalized by Maya's druggie contacts, (the druggies, however, will continue their degenerative habits.) Evidently, Norval and Maya are on the road to rejuvenation.

Excellent performances by Sigourney Weaver as Norma and Joel Edgerton as Norval, despite stilted dialog and jagged transitions in scenes. One discussion participant thought the ending was too sweet with Norval and Maya living together as a married couple. Another observation was that the relationship wouldn't last. The major criticism was that the message was forced and pretentious. Dragged out too long, mixed up, disturbing, were other negative comments.

Master Gardener received a wilted 2.5 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!
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