

CA1021

# Understanding Cinema

## Movie: Oldboy (2003)

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When we were asked to pick one out of the four movies we'd been told to watch, Singin' in the Rain sounded like the most obvious choice to go with. It was a fun, light-hearted movie and was bang in the middle of one of my favourite genres. Oldboy on the other hand, couldn't have been further away from the kind of movies I enjoy. I'll even go out on a limb and say the movie disgusted me, was gory, and I was even forced to look away from the screen at some points when it got to be too much. It was a two-hour movie that took me four hours to watch because I kept having to pause and cleanse my mind. However, after some of the disgust and trauma wore off, I realised that is exactly the effect the movie was trying to have on its viewers. The more I think about the movie, the more chilling the storyline becomes, and at the end of the day, it's a brilliant plot, although I would never rewatch it. Even accidentally.

A thing I really liked about the movie is how a lot of the scenes which seemed absolutely unnecessary and didn't add much to the plot while watching started to make sense after the climax of the movie. All the seemingly random scenes tied up together in the end and made the story even more chilling. Though the movie is unabashedly gory and frightening, I honestly think that the true extent of the horror isn't realised simply by watching it. One has to play the movie back in their heads over time, recall minor details and get hit with the realisation the detail wasn't really that minor after all, it in fact makes things even more twisted.

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To elaborate, the scenes I'm talking about are mainly the sex scenes between Oh Dae-su and Mido. Right off the bat, it had become apparent that the movie was supposed to be a mystery thriller of some kind, what with Oh Dae-su's sudden imprisonment. So when they kept showing the sexual tension between him and Mido, I was pretty confused. Starting from the scene where Mido gets ambushed in the washroom, to her promising to have sex with him *some* day if not on that very day, and then finally, the elaborate sex scene between the two in a hotel, I couldn't understand why the writers thought trying to introduce a saucy love story to the plot would be a good idea. However, after it was revealed that Mido was in fact Oh Dae-su's daughter, those scenes suddenly became pivotal to the plot. The more you think about it, the more horrifying it gets, and the easier it becomes to relate with Oh Dae-su's manic breakdown towards the end of the movie.

Additionally, I found the fact that the movie took the effort to show Oh Dae-su trying to enquire about the whereabouts of his daughter only to let it take a backseat a little odd, but again, after the plot twist was revealed, even that made sense.

Another seemingly minor detail that played a bigger part in the movie later on was showing the white fairy wings Oh Dae-su had picked out for little 4-year old Mido's birthday, only to show her holding them later in the movie when the viewers also start to realise that they are in fact, father and daughter. In my opinion, this was also a great example of showing, rather than telling.

Moving on to a different aspect of the movie I'd like to talk about: Lee Woo-jin, the villain. Honestly, calling him the villain seems like a bit of an understatement. He is nothing short of a sadistic evil mastermind, and after his sister's "suicide", he dedicated his life to one thing only: completely breaking Oh Dae-su. He wanted Oh Dae-su to feel the exact same pain that he felt, and did everything in his power to make that happen. The fact that he wasn't impatient to get his revenge, and planned everything meticulously to the last detail despite the fact that it took more than 15 years to work out somehow scares me even more than all the gruesome

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scenes of physical torture because it shows just how dedicated he was to ruin Oh Dae-su.

He planned his revenge in an eerily surgical method: waited until Oh Dae-su had a daughter, kidnapped him while she was very little and wouldn't remember him very well (and saved a pair of flimsy toy wings for *15 years*), killed the mother so he could raise the child himself, released the man once his daughter had grown into a woman, ensured that they fell in love and finally ended up engaging in sexual intercourse with each other. He then revealed all of this to Oh Dae-su in a matter of seconds and watched with glee as his labour finally bore fruit. He was rewarded with watching this grown man completely succumb to his inner demons - the exact same demons he himself had once been haunted by - and knowing that he had won.

To me, the scene where he just stood and watched Oh Dae-su completely lose his mind and wreck himself was the most terrifying scene in the movie: he watched the scene unfold passively with a sly smile on his face and for the first time since his sister's death, it seemed like he finally felt at peace. And the fact that he only had one purpose in life up to that point was further solidified by the fact that he shot himself in the head minutes after he had assured himself that Oh Dae-su was now an utterly ruined man.

Finally, the quote "Be it a stone or a grain of sand, in water they both sink," which seemed inconsequential earlier in the movie took on a terrifying meaning as the movie progressed, and truly showed just how psychotic Lee Woo-jin was. He blamed Oh Dae-su for his sister's death despite the fact that he had very little to do with it and didn't hold himself (Woo-jin) accountable at all. In my opinion, that was the quote which solidified the fact that Woo-jin was a madman, and definitely more of a monster than a human.

Everything said, I would definitely not watch this movie again, because I do enjoy sleeping peacefully at night.