



Anatomy of a Fall

150 min

February 18, 2024

The opening scene of *Anatomy of a Fall* achieves a rare, special kind of disorientation, one baffling enough to make the viewer question reality. Sandra (played by Sandra Hüller), a writer, is being interviewed in her home by a graduate student about her work. But it's nigh impossible to parse the questions and answers, or the subtly flirty vibes between interviewer and interviewee, because loud music is blasting all through the house, something they try to ignore but eventually acknowledge as insurmountable, postponing the conversation until later. Sandra's husband, Samuel (Samuel Theis), is working upstairs in the attic, playing music on a huge speaker, but we don't see him, and his motivation for such obnoxiousness is never explained. If Sandra is annoyed, she barely shows it; the viewer mostly identifies with the poor graduate student, mercifully excused from a dynamic loaded with tension. Only as *Anatomy of a Fall* progresses does it become clear that this opening scene exists not to land a confusing blow, but to dump a puzzle in the viewer's lap: an emotional mystery that ends in Samuel's shocking and seemingly inexplicable death. This movie, Justine Triet's Palme d'Or-winning thriller, co-written by Triet and Arthur Harari, is somewhat of a whodunit. After this bizarre interview gets cut short, Sandra and Samuel's visually impaired teenage son, Daniel (Milo Machado Graner), takes a walk through their French mountain town with his seeing-eye dog. When he returns, he finds his father sprawled on the snow, dead, having fallen from the attic and suffered a blow to the head. Sandra is swiftly arrested as the only suspect, and a court case ensues, with Sandra striving to prove her innocence and get to the bottom of what exactly happened to her husband. Triet, wisely, does not approach the movie as a fictional facsimile of a true-crime tale, a sifting of forensic evidence and police examination. Rather, this is an emotional excavation, one that seeks to untangle the strange mess of clues laden in that opening scene. What could cause a partnership to deteriorate into such awkward hostility, and are those marital resentments enough to explain someone's death? The film's greatest strength is Hüller, a German actor who manages to portray Sandra as a total enigma while retaining the audience's sympathy throughout. She appears baffled by her husband's death and insists that she wasn't involved. A celebrated author who deftly switches between German, French, and English while she's being interrogated on the stand, she's the kind of heroine that's easy to root for but just as easy to envision being at the center of a dramatic twist. Triet teases out details in flashback through the long and involved ceremony of the French legal system. Some of the details of Sandra and Samuel's marriage are specific—they're both writers, but she is the far more successful one, which has led to resentment over the years. What if a domestic drama got crossed with a courtroom thriller? *Anatomy of a Fall* is the glorious answer.

Transforming the way people see the world through film