THE GREAT GOD PAN

Format: Feature Film.

Genre: Gothic Horror/Psychological Thriller

Setting: London and Wales: 1868/1888

Overview:

This is an accomplished literary adaption that is rarely seen in an unproduced screenplay. The screenwriters should be congratulated as they have overcome a number of difficulties in their adaption, from the original horror novella that is fragmentary.
The adaption captures the suffocating atmosphere of Arthur Machen's 1894 seminal work in contained settings that allow for the story to be condensed. The screenplay effectively contrasts British decorum with the primordial terror of pagan cosmic horror.

Logline:

When Dr.Raymond's operation, witnessed by his friend, Clarke, on Mary Vaughan pierces the spiritual barrier separating this world, Mary loses her sanity.
The repercussions are witnessed years later when her daughter, Helen, becomes the doyen of London Society with terrible consequences that drives men to madness and suicide.

Strengths:

Period authenticity. The dialogue is rich, evocative, and the exchanges are strengthened with discourses concerning beliefs of the period. It is not pedantic, and appropriately formal.
The screenplay successfully translates Machen's dense prose horror into striking visual tropes.
The dread is witnessed in the reaction of Dr. Matheson who sees Helen's traumatic death scene that so shocked Victorian readers. Matheson suffers ill-health afterwards, with night terrors, and dies of a heart-attack whilst posting a letter to Clarke with his testimony of what occurred that night.
Helen acts as a mirror to the suppressed desires and secret vices of high-society gentlemen, making her a compelling, multi-layered threat because of her origins and the true nature of her parentage.
The episodic natures of the novella has been condensed here, as already mentioned, with all the major plot developments depicted.
Another strength is that the screenwriters have given the major

characters forenames that were never mentioned in the source material. The main characters: Dr.Marcus Raymond, Edward Clarke, Stephen Villiers, and Dr.Robert Matheson are finely characterized. However, Helen Vaughan remains the eternal enigma. One will be surprised that Helen is never seen in full on screen, or speaks. Her countenance is left to the imagination. That is only fitting.

Everything is ambiguous, as it should with solid material such as this when ancient beliefs, and modern thought, are brought to a traumatic conclusion.

The denouement is disturbing, when Helen hangs herself in her bedroom. Many lives change after this night. It is Dr. Raymond; he bears the greatest guilt, who is convinced Mary, Helen's mother, would bow at the knee of "the great god Pan" and see what was behind the veil when it lifted, should have been brought to account. He remains an elusive, peripheral figure in this adaption.

Final Verdict

The screenplay delivers a unique blend of disquieting horror. Its vivid imagery creates sophisticated themes, and a deeply cinematic grasp of the Gothic period. This will play well with audiences who are familiar with Machen's work.
It could be turned into a thought-provoking, commercially viable psychological gothic horror that will play well in theatres.