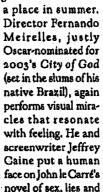
RollingStone

The Constant Gardener ***

Ralph Fiennes, Rachel Welsz, Bill Nighy

Directed by Fernando Melrelles
A sizzling political thriller that
ends summer on a high note

THIS LATE-AUGUST RELEASE COMES in the nick of time to prove a point: Movies that give a damn do have



dirty politics in modern Africa. Pre-

Ralph Fiennes meets all the challenges of playing Justin Quayle, a British diplomat in Kenya who would rather tend his garden than deal with the difficult questions he's asked by Tessa Abbott (Rachel Weisz). She's a firebrand activist who thinks the Brit higher-ups, led by Sir Bernard Pellegrin (Bill Nighy), are in league with a pharmaceutical company to use suffering Africans as guinea pigs for drug experiments. Justin is a little scared by Tessa and a lot attracted.

That this eventual marriage of opposites works is mostly due to a tacit agreement that Justin will turn a blind eye to Tessa's relentless goading of Her Majesty's operatives. But when she dies in an alleged car accident, Justin's eyes are slowly opened. Rumors fly that Tessa had been getting it on with the African doctor (Hubert Koundé) who died with her, Justin's jealousy

is fueled by his lago-ish colleagu (Danny Huston), Flashbacks of th couple – in and out of bed – allor for several teasing points of view.

The movie kicks in hard as thriller when Justin takes up Tessa cause. He travels to London, Berli and Nairobi, risking his career an his life to uncover a political cor spiracy that might also reveal th truth about his wife. It's a love stor between a man and a ghost, an Fiennes and Weisz give every ger ture and glance a haunting eroti urgency. The underrated Weisz i electrifying in her richest role t date. And Fiennes plays this reluctant hero like a gathering storm, hi performance growing in power a passivity ceases to be an option. Hi embrace of Africa, which Meirelle and his gifted cinematographe César Charlone, present as a rebuk to global indifference, is his embrac of Tessa. In negotiating the slipper slope of political and personal con mitment, Meirelles emerges wit one of the year's best and mos provocative movies. Long after it' over, you still feel its sting.

