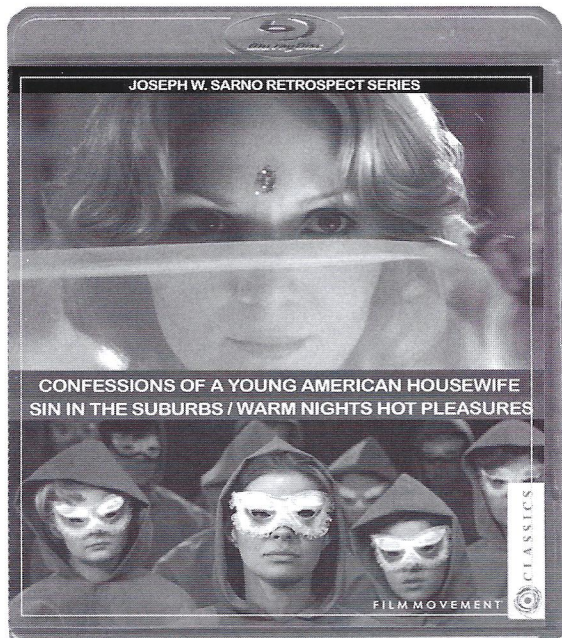


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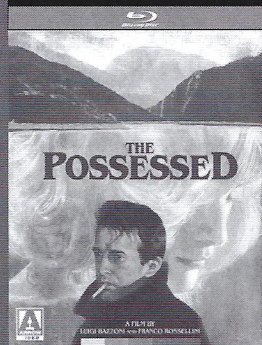
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THE POSSESSED

Directed by Luigi Bazzoni and Franco Rossellini
(1965) Arrow Academy Blu-ray



The Possessed, while not an overlooked classic, remains a fascinating rediscovery—a smart and stylish thriller that refuses to go gently into any genre pigeonhole.

Crime novelist Bernard Giovanni (Peter Baldwin) returns to the lakeside resort village where he often summered as a boy. The ostensible purpose of his out-of-season visit is to research a new book, but what he really wants is to renew acquaintances with Tilde (Virna Lisi), a beautiful chambermaid he met at the hotel the previous summer. It's not to be; Tilde is dead. Her death was ruled a suicide but Bernard's friend, local photographer Francesco (Pier Giovanni Anchisi), has evidence that Tilde

was pregnant—and may have been murdered, possibly by her boss, wealthy hotelier Enrico (Salvo Randone). Other suspects include Enrico's son Mario (Philippe Leroy), his daughter Irma (Valentina Cortese), and Mario's wife Adriana (Pia Lindstrom), among others. Bernard becomes fixated on getting at the truth, doggedly continuing his investigation even after contracting the flu, which makes him feverish.

Historian Tim Lucas (*Video Watchdog*) categorizes *The Possessed* as a *giallo*, as does critic Richard Dyer (who appears in an on-camera appreciation of the film), the claim remains shaky, based almost entirely on the presence of broad thematic concerns the movie shares with many later *gialli*. *The Possessed* does not look or feel much like a *giallo*; it lacks the graphic violence, shameless nudity, and brazenly exploitative *elan* that are characteristic of the form. In truth, as Dyer notes, it plays more like a European art film from the same era. For instance, like Fellini's *8½* (1963), it shifts seamlessly between the narrative present, Bernard's memories, and his dreams (including, in this case, fever-induced flashes of intuition). And as in *8½* movement between these various states are indicated only by changes in lighting. Bernard's fever-dreams recall the arresting dream sequences from Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957). And since the story features a writer-protagonist whose point of view may not be entirely reliable, *The Possessed* also invites comparisons to the work of writer-director Alain Robbe-Grillet. As in many art films the story is full of detours, none of which seem like detours. Although it's a solid mystery, *The Possessed* aims higher than simply being an entertaining Whodunit.

However it may be classified, *The Possessed* is a marvelous-looking movie. Cinematographer Leonida Barboni devises distinct black and white lighting schemes for the picture's various modes, shooting "reality" in beautiful, silvery hues and everything else in eerie, stark, ultra-high-contrast, with the grays seemingly bleached out. First-time directors Luigi Bazzoni and Franco Rossellini (Bazzoni apparently did most of the work; Rossellini never directed again) leverage Barboni's brilliance with dramatic camera setups and smooth camera tracking shots, keep the pace lively, and elicit persuasive performances from the cast. Lindstrom, Cortese, and Randone all turn in fine work, but the whole project turns on Baldwin's fully committed, carefully shaded portrayal of Bernard. This was one of Baldwin's final acting credits. Afterward, he concentrated on directing, mostly for television.

Arrow's presentation of *The Possessed* is sublime. Featuring a new 2K scan from the original camera negative, it's unlikely *The Possessed* looked this handsome even when it premiered. This 1.85:1 transfer remains clear and sharp even during the film's radical lighting changes, and there's almost no visible print damage. The 24-bit PCM uncompressed mono sound is pin-drop clear on both the English and Italian (with removeable English subs) audio options.

Lucas' commentary is typically well-researched and insightful. He does an especially nice job of placing the film within the context of various trends in Italian cinema during the 1960s. Dyer's visual essay on *The Possessed*, which runs 25 minutes, is also informative. Also on board are: a 12-minute interview with makeup artist Gianetto de Rossi; a 16-minute interview with assistant art director Dante Ferretti; and a 30-minute interview with director Francesco Barilli (a friend of *Possessed* director Luigi Bazzoni and his brother, director Camillo Bazzoni); as well as the film's Italian and English trailers. The interview subjects tend to ramble.

The Possessed is a uniquely original motion picture. Imagine if Michelangelo Antonioni had directed *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, or if Dario Argento had directed *L'avventura*—that's the best summation imaginable for a film that has been somewhat obscure until now.

Mark Clark