

The Sweet Body of Deborah (Il dolce corpo di Deborah)

Italy / France | 1968 | 95 minutes

Credits

Director	Romolo Guerreri
Screenplay	Ernesto Gastaldi
Photography	Marcello Masciocchi
Music	Nora Orlandi
Cast	
Deborah	Carroll Baker
Marcel	Jean Sorel
Suzanne Boileau	Ida Galli
Philip	Luigi Pistilli

In Brief

Marcel and Deborah (the aforementioned actors) are a young couple honeymooning in Europe. After much soft focus petting and lovey-dovey stuff, they decide to go to Geneva, the city where he grew up. This turns out to be a less than brilliant idea, for they soon bump into a rather browned off friend of his, Philippe (Luigi Pistilli). The reason for this ire is that Marcel's ex had killed herself in desperation after he left to seek his fortune in America. Consumed by guilt, he decides to visit her parent's house, but finds it deserted. While searching around several strange things happen; lighted cigarettes appear in ashtrays, a haunting piano melody is heard and a death threat is delivered from a disconnected telephone.

Understandably, the ardour of the newlyweds cools somewhat. This is even more unsurprising given the fact that his idea of a romantic evening out is to visit a strip club or see a boxing match. In an attempt to rekindle the spirit of their trip they hire

a villa in Nice. Carroll attempts to entice her husband into the bedroom by stating "Here's the most important room in the house..." Jean replies "What, the kitchen?!" (?!?). One bad move can be considered inopportune, but two are something else entirely. No sooner have they settled down with some nice martinis than George Hilton appears leering over the garden wall, gibbering on about being the serpent to their Adam and Eve.

From this point on everything becomes unfeasibly complicated. The relationship between the protagonists (and between the audience and the protagonists) is continually altered and played upon. All actions are designed to push us into re-evaluating our impression as to what exactly is going on. The climactic revelations are satisfactory and cynical in equal measures, and the whole thing is surprisingly bloodless, relying upon tension and confusion to instil its effectiveness.



Critique

In many ways Deborah can be seen as an archetypal pre-Argento giallo. The motivating factors are greed, lust and hatred rather than pseudo-psychological disturbance. The photography is at times experimental, using fragmented lenses and illuminating shadow techniques. The music is suprisingly wistful, prominently featuring soft, wordless female vocals. The influence of Antonioni's BLOW UP (66) is interesting. An attempt to be an anti-thriller, it actually succeeded in kick-starting an entire brace of the types of films it was criticising. It also introduced the psychedelic trappings that would be exaggerated as time passed on. Here we are treated to some very silly costumes and an outrageous disco scene. Someday I am finally going to get around to writing my epic thesis upon 'The History Of Popular Culture As Espoused Within Night-club Sequences Of Modern Cinema', but after watching this I am too busy picking up my digestive tract and thrusting it back into my ruptured sides. The phrase "chicken on a hot-wire" has never been more appropriate.

The superb (and small) cast also scores top marks. This was Carroll Baker's first Italian thriller after fleeing from a broken marriage and the debacle that was Harlow in Hollywood. So good is she in this that she went on to play the same 'superficially vulnerable but actually...' role in about another 10 films. George Hilton plays the first of many untrustworthy smoothies and Jean Sorel is fine as the somewhat beleaguered husband

Romolo Guerrieri can be seen as a craftsman rather than a visionary, but there isn't necessarily wrong with that. His impressive filmography also includes two other thrillers (The Detective (69) and The Double (71)) both of which are well worth investigating.

Review by Matt Blake

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