

UNRATED

cinema of the extreme



Directed by Dante Tomaselli

English language

USA / 1999 / 88 minutes.
Colour

SPECIAL DVD FEATURES

Original Short film excerpt "Desecration" (4 mins)

Image Entertainment DVD Release

Region 1. NTSC. Dolby Digital Stereo
(1.85:1)

DESECRATION

Dante Tomaselli's feature debut kicks off with Grandmother Matilda (Irma St. Paule) climbing the stairs to the nursery in the attic, to the sounds of her grandchild, Bobby Rullo, sobbing. It's his fifth birthday and the room is strewn with balloons and gifts, but any joy has been bitterly destroyed when Matilda discovers her daughter dead on the floor, a victim of what appears to be suicide. The unmarried woman's death manages to unlock an Occult Key that bridges between Hell and Earth. Eleven years later, we see that Bobby's repressed upbringing, (plagued with guilt and anxiety by his Grandmother who blames herself for her daughter's death), and an unhealthy Catholic background, has left its mental and spiritual scars. The powers of God/Light have become stagnant due to corruption in the church (even the local priest is a drugs pusher), and the complexities of religious stigma and guilt has created an omnipotent Hell, the gates of which are opened when Bobby accidentally causes the death of a Nun with a motorised toy plane.

We are taken on a tour of the disturbed youth's psychosis that spreads its psychic tendrils into the real world. The Catholic church becomes the focus point for demonic activity, Nuns are viciously slaughtered, nightmares become reality, and Bobby's friends and loved ones are dragged into a surreal canvas of the underworld that looks like something Dali would have painted, following a reading of Lovecraft, and with a profound belief in animism.

Because the church is ineffectual in coping with the dark side, Bobby must confront the demons himself, and this gives Tomaselli some excellent opportunities to create nightmarish visions: demons with clown-like faces lick and lap at visitors to the churchyard gates (that symbolically serve as guardians of the portal to Hell), and innocents become possessed, dragged into Hades by the engulfing forces of nature that become tools of the underworld.

Most spectacularly Dante displays an acute sense of magickal and pagan awareness by having the powers of darkness infest the elements of earth, air, fire and water. This is conveyed via lighting and lensing, and some great foreshadowing techniques involving the use of fiery reds (feminine aggression/death/resurrection), barren earthy soil browns (ineffective strength/weakness/the Church) and serene sky blues (spiritual absolution/peace). Deep lens photography adds further surreal touches and several scenes involve the use of exaggerated set-building. Toys are much bigger than they ought to be, the nursery is portrayed as a fetishised dungeon, its puppets servitors to a dominatrix-like Nun, and repressed feelings of desire are unleashed via dreams in the form of phallic vegetation that spread their fertilized seeds of evil, choking those who would deny the black delights of the left hand path.

As a first time effort, with a budget of just \$150,000 and filmed on 16-mm (that allows Dante to inscribe his visions with richer hues), DESECRATION is pretty good. The film's early scenes are a little too disjointed and it takes time for the narrative (which is minimal) to kick in. Dante Tomaselli is an obvious fan of Argento, (filtered death scenes and assault by various household tools), and there's more than a nod to the thematics of Fulci's movies (especially THE BEYOND (aka GATES OF HELL) and DEMONIA, and his cousin Alfred Sole's ALICE, SWEET ALICE (aka COMMUNION) that shares Dante's sense of pessimism as regards Catholicism. Despite all this Dante Tomaselli's visions of darkness are more deeply felt, and as a result far more unnerving. The director's second offering HORROR (again encompassing Satanic principle) is due a release soon, and I'm pretty sure it's one to look out for.

Carl T. Ford

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