

OBSESSION

Directed by Brian De Palma
Produced by George Litto
Distributed by Columbia Pictures
Released in 1976

Boasting what could be the greatest score ever written for a motion picture (the second-to-last of Bernard Herrmann's illustrious career), *Obsession*, a twisted tale of kidnapping and regret, might have benefited by a larger budget and more careful attention to production design, costuming, and make-up/hair. We start in 1959 and practically everything looks the same as scenes set sixteen years later. Incongruities of a different kind emerge later, as we embark upon a very awkward scenario where the protagonist is making preparations (that's as far as it gets, thanks to the refashioned 'dream' assembled in the editing room at the last minute) to have sex with a woman he does not realize is his daughter. What is *she* thinking about all this? We have no chance to find out before the pair are reunited as father and daughter (she knew all along) at the picture's conclusion, and the hidden villain (our hero's fed-up business partner) is vanquished at long last.

The core of the film is the need for the father. Thinking she was abandoned by her dad (an impression happily fostered by Robert LaSalle, who manufactured the scheme and secreted the little girl away in Italy), Amy seeks revenge. The hero-father, Michael Cortland, only knows he has a chance to restore the past he lost, and losing all his money to save a woman he can re-fashion into his dead wife is a small price to pay to end the misery and guilt he's endured, as a result of his decision to deliver fake bills to kidnapers sixteen years earlier.

These scenes surrounding the second kidnapping are some of the most exciting in any movie, as we share Michael's grim determination (unlike in *Vertigo*, where the Secret had already been revealed to the audience, but not the hero). Even as he's being pulled into a whirlpool of hypnotic memory, risking utter ruin so he can change his future into an idealized past, we take the leap with him, having no clue what is going on. If only he can succeed, the kidnapping will free him as the marriage, alone, could never do. Indeed, all of us would like another chance—a shot at redemption—to escape the past. *Obsession* feeds that quiet mania. And even though everything is the same as sixteen years earlier (an ironic justification for the aforementioned anachronisms?), Michael is not afraid. This time he will not fail. He is ready to fight—win, lose, or die. But how far will we go, following this broken hero?

He is ready to kill.

Full of tricky camerawork and hypnotic sequences that don't really hold together once everything is explained, *Obsession*, despite its obvious Hitchcockian antecedents, is nevertheless a crooked marvel that deserves careful study; this is one film that isn't afraid to take risks.