KINONIK

THE WITCH (LA STREGA IN AMORE) (1966)

Directed by Damiano Damiani

WEDNESDAY May 27th 7PM

SATURDAY May 30th 2PM / 7PM



Damiani made one gothic horror, and made it at exactly the moment the form was exhausting itself. **La strega in amore** releases August 1966, between Bava's Sei donne per l'assassino (1964) and Argento's L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970) — in the three-year gap when the Italian gothic cycle had run out of room and the giallo had not yet found its commercial shape. Barbara Steele's last major Italian gothic, Un angelo per Satana, comes out the same year and feels like a terminal object.

Damiani's film does something different. It keeps the gothic furniture — the witch-figure, the palazzo, the older woman as repository of dangerous knowledge — while evacuating the gothic apparatus almost entirely. The lighting is naturalistic (and gorgeous). The supernatural is ambiguous, possibly psychological. The moral economy is secular and bourgeois, closer to Polanski (Repulsion, Cul-de-Sac) than to Bava. What it points toward is the modern Italian interior as a site of psychosexual ruin — the giallo's actual native territory, four years before Argento codified its form.

Damiani changes Fuentes's translator (in Aura, 1962) into a historian, Sergio, brought to the palazzo to organize the papers of a dead general. The figure that emerges — the specialist whose cognitive equipment is exactly what makes him vulnerable, the cataloguer consumed by what he was meant to merely arrange — is the giallo protagonist before the giallo exists. The archive swallows the archivist. Damiani never returned to the gothic. The form he passed through this once was already dissolving as he touched it.