

L'Isola di Arturo

("Arturo's Island")

Italy : 1952 : dir. Damiano Damiani : Titanus-Metro

: 93 min

prod: Carlo Ponti : scr: Damiano Damiani, Ugo Liberatore & Enrico Ribulzi

: dir.ph.: Roberto Gerardi

Vanni de Maigret; Reginald Kernan; Kay Meersman; Luigi Giuliani; Ornella Vanoni;
Gabriella Giorgielli

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ≠ Z ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2725a	3½	4	2	1,756	- - - - -	No	unseen



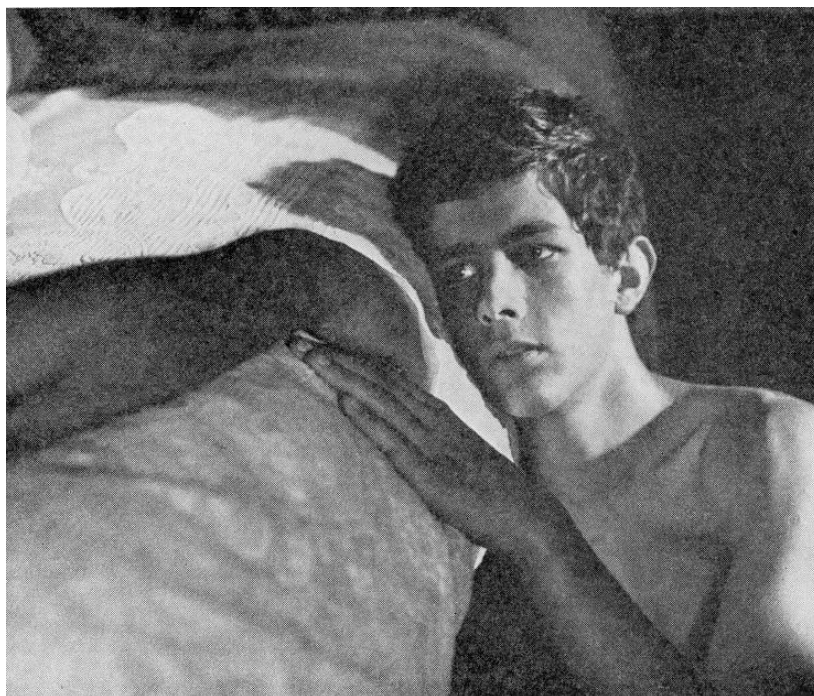
"In Damiano Damiani's "ARTURO'S ISLAND", the motherless Arturo (Vanni de Maigret) gazes at the sleeping father he idolises (Reginald Kernan)"
Source (and caption): Films & Filming May 63

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"An adolescent, whose mother died in childbirth, adores his father despite his countless trips during which he leaves his son behind alone on the island. On his return from one such trip he has a pregnant child-bride [sic] with him, whom he leaves behind with his son, about the same age. The trips turn out to be on account of a homosexual relationship with a thief, who is later arrested. The husband's wife saves him from a looming

scandal, but the disenchanted son leaves the island.

The dramatic confrontation of youth with the scarcely ennobling sexual realities of the parents is a beloved theme of Italian novels, but in being adapted to film it has the disadvantage that the viewer twigs what's going on far sooner than the protagonists. So too in this generally sensitive version of Elsa Morante's novel, which is only really convincing in the scene of the boy and his stepmother. *** "



Father-worship bordering on the homoerotic

Source: *Films & Filming* August 62

Films & Filming – May 1963 – review:

"A measure of pain during adolescence can be an aid to maturity, and the theory that the kid who learns young how to rise above vicissitudes will be all the better equipped to face life has been expounded in the cinema before now. A simplified but salutary example was Disney's **"OLD YELLER"**, which indicated that the death of a favourite dog is something a youngster can get over, and also that, without being completely callous, he can reconcile himself to another dog. By comparison, **"L'ISOLA DI ARTURO"** is arguably a less valuable social service, since it is strictly for adults; but, even so, it has the virtue of promoting compassion in several directions.

However, the real value of the work, as cinema, lies in Damiano Damiani's direction, which is an exemplary job: precise, succinct, and delicate. It needs to be; because the story, from a novel by Elsa Morante, stresses the adolescent period of preparation by means of enough problems to serve several melodramas. Admittedly, an adult film ought to be more complex than **"OLD YELLER"**, but Arturo's growing pains are carried to the other extreme. He lives on an island in the Bay of Naples and hero-worships his father, a man given to wanderlust. Arturo's mother died giving birth to him.

The independence he has acquired, perforce, during his father's frequent absences from home, has been helpful; and so, for that matter, has the dream-image he nurtures of becoming an as adventurous and romantic as he imagines his father to be. When his father arrives back on the island one day with a child-bride [sic], Arturo is jealous, but later, when his father leaves again, he falls in love with his step-mother of his own age, having assisted her as best he could through pregnancy. Also he develops a love-hate attitude toward his new baby brother; undergoes sexual initiation at the hands of a voluptuous woman of the island whose husband has absconded to Australia; grows perplexed when his father returns again, this time homosexually enamoured of a criminal who has just been transferred to the island prison; receives a bit of a beating-up from the criminal; and discovers that his father's travels have not been as extensive as he has been led to believe.

From this profusion, Damiani has wrought a film of astonishing subtlety, which not only expresses the agony of adolescence (everything is seen from Arturo's viewpoint) but utilises the medium of cinema with surpassing skill. Here is a director's film if ever there was one; but it is important to acknowledge the contribution of Roberto Gerardi, whose camerawork

cryptically reflects the other-worldliness of the island and its surrounding waters, as well as weaving superb but unemphatic compositions in the interiors of the decaying old house where Arturo lives. Also important are the three principal performers: Vanni de Maigret as Arturo, perceptive and sensitive and only sixteen when the film was made; Kay Meersham as the child-bride *[sic]*, infinitely more credible than she was in Buñuel's melodrama "THE YOUNG ONE", and Reginald Kerner as the father, making a most accomplished first film appearance for which his former occupation (psychoanalyst) gave him, no doubt, special qualifications.

But the triumph is indubitably Damiani's. From the too-muchness of his material, he has moulded a true film, in which many details impinge and accentuate to just the right degree: a wristwatch, a dead seagull, a gun, and a melon from which a bite has been taken, all play their pertinent parts in a film that never wastes a frame.

And yet, of course, a masterpiece is not born of interpretation alone. "L'ISOLA DI ARTURO" is no masterpiece. Each of its plot components is valid enough but, taken together, the conglomeration is excessive; no denying it. What emerges is a staggering victory of direction over material; a film to be faulted for the prodigality of its content, but admired for the deftness of its form."

- Gordon Gow

Excerpt from **Films & Filming** - August 1962
- article on the 10th San Sebastian Film Festival, where this won the Concha de Oro:

"...Italy had a big success with "L'ISOLA DI ARTURO" by Damiano Damiani. This young director improves remarkably. After ten interesting documentaries he made "EL ROSSETTO", a study about the corruption of youth, as seen through the eyes of the Neo-realist scriptwriter Zavattini. The film had a certain testifying quality, courage and sincerity. His second work, "IL SICARIO", dropped somewhat, but the third has again the virtues of the first, plus a far more sure hand in the rhythm of the story-telling.

Damiani's technique is quite conservative but already strong. As for the plot, if Damiani has always given corrosive testimonies, here he has gone further. I remember no other film with

such a clear description of homosexuality *[sic]*. Arturo is a boy living on a small island. His mother died when he was born. As a result, and according to Freud's theories, he gets a complex of guilt for his mother's death and a fiery, masochistic love for his father. The father has taught him things such as the meaning of Alexander the Great, "unsurpassed in force and beauty". Suddenly the father marries and brings a 17-year old wife to the island. But he is not interested in her and leaves the house after fifteen days. Left alone with the boy, the stepmother develops all sorts of feminine solicitude to him. He first hates and then falls in love with her.

The father returns and we now learn that he is in love with a rather handsome thief in the local gaol. Further, we know that it was he who used his influence to transfer the convict to that prison, and that the prisoner was condemned partly because of the father's crimes. When the boy realises all this, his love for his father drops. The convict is freed and Arturo's father installs him in his own home and the boy is bestially beaten by the vulgar gigolo. The father sticks to the gigolo, who has threatened to marry if the father doesn't behave. Then they decide to leave together for a nice trip abroad.

Again the son is thrown in the stepmother's arms. But at the culminating moment the father comes back with his face brutally deformed by his lover. The wife knows her husband needs help. She is a model of Italian femininity, full of religion and abnegation. She tells the husband that the son has just left the island. So she sacrifices her love for the boy, and devotes herself to that pitiful man.

I have described the plot to show how far Damiani can go. That such a film can be made at all, and that it can be applauded by such a puritanic audience as that of San Sebastian, may give an idea of Damiani's delicate, poetic treatment. And in spite of some too melodramatic or literary situations, the work has a psychological accuracy that saves it from being ridiculous." - Peter Baker

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times

Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times note:

"A 16-year old left alone with his new stepmother falls hopelessly in love with her."

Daily Mirror note:

"A boy left home alone in a huge mansion is plagued by nightmares. Thriller with Reginald Kerner. * "

No further information currently available. The *Daily Mirror*'s pocket synopsis bears no resemblance whatsoever to the actual plot, as summarised so comprehensively by the *Films & Filming* reviews. The only other title which springs to mind where an adolescent son is confronted with his father's homosexuality would be the sensibly liberal and understated US TV film "**THAT CERTAIN SUMMER**" (72) with Scott Jacoby as the boy, Hal Holbrook his father (living in San Francisco, where else?) and a young Martin Sheen as dad's live-in lover.

I have "sic"d the term "child bride" above because (i) it is a tabloid cliché, and properly to be despised as such, and (ii) if the girl is 17 as stated, then - irrespective of the age of consent in Italy at that time - she is certainly no child, unless the term is meant now to embrace sexually active older teenagers. The same review speaks of Arturo's sexual "initiation" by an adult woman without any hint of moral disapproval. Well, there's that famous old double standard wagging its head again.

See subject index under SEX & SEXUALITY.