

Review #82 : *The Woman in Question* (1950)

Dirk Bogarde and Jean Kent

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Made in the same year as Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, whose **ambiguous multiple perspective** it shares, **Anthony Asquith's** British murder mystery has a real feel for film noir mood...



SYNOPSIS

Jean Kent plays Astra, a fortune-teller at a seaside fun fair. The character dominates the entire movie despite her murder before the action begins. As the police begin to gather evidence, they interview the people who knew her, and **several different sides to her character emerge**. What makes the business entertaining is the **deceptive and droll variety**

not alone of the evidence given but also the shadings with which it is staged. When the victim's housekeeper tells her story of the slightly disordered career of the departed, she visions the murdered dame as a **serene and elegant sort of queen.** But when the victim's sister bitterly describes her as a wanton tramp, or the latter's slick boyfriend, young magician **Dirk Bogarde**, recalls an unlikely partner who tried to seduce him, the character as well as the occupation of the victim appear something less than refined.

And so it goes through the remainder. An elderly gentleman who has a bird shop across the street presents a charming waif, even more so, a **sublimely romantic estimation of the deceased,** while a sailor, who kept company with the lady on his visits to England, has another point of view. *But who is the murderer, and what was his motive ?*



Seen in the numerous flashbacks, Jean Kent has a grand time, seizing the opportunity to play so many varied roles, sweetly saccharine when playing the good girl, vamping it up when playing the reverse. Like *Brighton Rock*, Asquith's film has a real feel for noir mood, and uses its **seedy seaside atmosphere brilliantly.** With a cast boasting **stand-out turns from a young Dirk Bogarde and a scene-stealing Hermione Baddeley,** *The Woman in Question* is a **superior murder mystery** for all fans of film noir !

REVIEW

The routine solution of a murder is here unfolded in a **neat and humorous way**. Under the expert direction of **Anthony Asquith**, who has put his distinctive stamp upon other British pictures as *The Browning Version* and *The Winslow Boy*, this little tickler strings together the assorted flashback accounts of five persons who knew the murdered woman as they are given to the questioning police. And out of the evidence thus assembled, the deduction of 'who done it' is cleverly made.

It is not the mystery so much as the **nimble twists and wry indications of personality** that give this little gem its appeal. **Jean Kent**, who made herself distinctive in *The Browning Version* as the venomous wife, does a neat job of **turning the lively facets of the woman in question** in this piece. **Hermione Baddeley** as the housekeeper is delightfully coarse underneath her pinch-nosed airs, and **Charles Victor** is amusingly soapy as the bird shop suitor from across the street. **John McCallum** as the thick-skulled sailor is also flavoursome in his role, while **Duncan Macrae** is serenely devastating as the dead-panned detective who breaks the case. And, as said before, this structure gives actress Jean Kent a lot of fun angles to play, from proper lady to seductress to a drunken slut to an almost child-like ingenue, and yet she never gives the sense that we truly know it all, letting all these **angles say more about the person painting the picture than their subject**. By the time we find out who killed her, we're able to see that even that vision may have been something of a perversion itself !



This little gem won't knock you out of your chair for sure, but it will certainly stimulate your nerves ! I enjoyed it a lot ! +++