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Author(s)	David Rooney
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VARIETY 10/19/76 2:00 P.M. **ALBERGO ROMA**

(ITALIAN)

A Medusa release of a Union PN production in association with Medusa. (International sales: Medusa, Milan.) Produced by Giorgio Leopardi.

Directed, written by Ugo Chiti, based on his play "Alegretto ... per bene ma non troppo." Camera (Cinecitta color), Blasco Giurato; editor, Carla Simoncelli; art direction, Eugenio Liverani; costume design, Gabriella Pescucci; sound (Dolby SR), Candido Raini; assistant director, Pierluigi Ciriaci. Reviewed at Nuova Isonzo Cinematografica screening room, Rome, Aug. 22, 1996. (In Venice Film Festival — Italian Film Week.) Running time: 98 MIN.

With: Alessandro Benvenuti, Tcheky Karyo, Claudio Bisio, Barbara Enrichi, Debora Caprioglio, Roberto Posse, Alessandra Acciai, Lucia Poli, Gianna Giachetti, Maria Cristina Macea, Laura Trotter, Lily Tirinanzi, Davide Bechini, Giorgio Panariello, Carlo Monni, Cecilia Dazzi, Patrizia Corti, Massimo Salvianti, Florens Fanciulli.

Popular playwright and screenwriter Ugo Chiti takes a disappointing step into directing with "Albergo Roma," an adaptation of his play about a Tuscan village in Mussolini's Italy that's full of gossiping vipers. A grotesque comedy peopled with a large ensemble of overplayed eccentrics, the film is handsomely produced but leaden and unrelentingly low on laughs, making it unlikely to prosper commercially.

Chiti's best scripts for directors such as Alessandro Benvenuti (cast here as the village peeping Tom) and Francesco Nuti employ irony, irreverence and an exaggerated view of human foibles. His directorial debut features those qualities in a story that ridicules hypocrisy, stupidity and the seeming respectability of power. But he fails to create even one sympathetic character, and smothers the comedy with tiresome hysteria and an oppressively fascist atmosphere.

Set in 1939, a year before Italy's entry into World War II, the story centers on the discovery of what appears to be a human fetus. The village gossips begin working overtime, but with il Duce due in town on an official visit, local Fascist party secretary Giorgini (Claudio Bisio) determines to avoid scandal by sweeping the situation under the rug and postponing an investigation.

The arrival during the night of Apolloni (Tcheky Karyo), a regime big shot from Florence, convinces Giorgini of the need to find a culprit fast, before his superiors beat him to it. Aided by his long-term mistress (Laura Trotter), he targets schoolgirl Margherita (Florens Fanciulli), considered a likely candidate to have gotten pregnant and aborted the baby, given the wanton reputation of her mother (Patrizia Corti).

Just as Margherita is declared a virgin by the local medic, closer examination of the fetus reveals it to be that of a pig. But the nosy porter (Benvenuti) at the Albergo Roma, where Apolloni has been laying low, discovers a much more brutal crime.

Chiti cranks up story's carnivalesque aspect by accompanying the feverish goings-on with the village orchestra's tuneless rehearsals for Mussolini's visit and by having lenser Blasco Giurato capture the odious gallery of characters from harsh, leering angles. Period production design (Eugenio Liverani) and costumes (Gabriella Pescucci) are polished, creating a sullen look full of blacks and grays, but pic has no charm or buoyancy. —David Rooney