



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO
(CINEMA PARADISO)
DIRECTED BY GIUSEPPE TORNATORE

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DIRECTED BY GIUSEPPE TORNATORE (1988)

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso tells the story of Salvatore Di Vita, a child passionate about cinema.

The film is set in the period between WW2 and the 1980s and starts by showing Salvatore as a middle-aged adult, when he hears the news that Alfredo, a man from his hometown, has just died. Still awake in the middle of the night, he thinks about his childhood and adolescence, shown in flashback.

Giuseppe Tornatore is a Sicilian director and writer, awarded a 'David di Donatello', the Italian Oscar, four times (for *The Star Maker*, *The Legend of 1900*, *La sconosciuta* and *The Best Offer*). He often collaborates with Ennio Morricone, who was in charge of the music for *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*. Childhood, memory and nostalgia are recurring themes in his films, which are often set in Sicily.

Why teach this text?

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso is a powerful and emotional film and Tornatore is considered an influential Italian director. The film touches on many of the themes of the Italian A-level: the Italian family; the brain drain (from the South to the capital Rome in this case); Italian customs and traditions; and, the development gap between the North and South. It is also useful to expose students to a different accent and the colloquial expressions of the Sicilian language.

The film touches on issues that most will experience at different point in their lives, showing as it does three separate phases of the life of Salvatore. Please note that there are multiple versions of the film. The most popular and positively reviewed is the one that lasts 155 minutes, which is the one discussed here. In the scenes cut, there is more focus on Elena, who has the chance to meet again the protagonist for the last time.

Ways to read this text

The protagonist leaves the small Sicilian village where he was born and moves to Rome, where he has better career prospects. The theme of emigration is still present in today's Italy, with the only difference that while at the time the exodus was towards the North (as well as to destinations like the United States), today young people tend to seek their fortunes abroad. The phenomenon of the brain drain is one of the main issues of contemporary Italian society, and the film portrays the range of emotions felt by a migrant/expatriate.

The initial urge to leave and the dislike of one's hometown are replaced later on in life with nostalgia and affection. One more important theme in the film is love and how it evolves in different stages of life. The protagonist is forced to choose between staying with his family (and the woman he loves) and his career.

Students

This film is a must-see for students interested in film studies, as it conveys the passion of someone who dedicated his life to cinema and shows the progress of technology in cinema in a forty-year time period. The universal themes of childhood, love and coming of age will certainly speak to a young audience. Moreover, it is possible to observe the changes in Italian family and society across the years. Some have even identified an expression of disappointment in the film with how Italy has progressed (or failed to) in the post-war period.

1. Themes

00.48.12 – 00.53.53 'Al fuoco!'

In Giancaldo, the parish priest attends private previews and rings a small bell each time he observes a scene that he considers sinful. As a result, all scenes containing partial nudity or even kisses are cut from the films. This creates dissatisfaction among the inhabitants of Giancaldo, who protest at the censoring of the scenes.

The sequence takes place late at night and the villagers want to see more films, but the priest pushes them out of the cinema, denying them once again the pleasure of entertainment. Alfredo decides to move some of the components of the machinery so that the image will be projected outdoors, in the public square. This is his gift to the villagers and makes the films no longer a service to be purchased but a public event to be shared and enjoyed with the rest of the community.

Unfortunately this small miracle is abruptly interrupted. At the time, films were printed on celluloid, a highly flammable material, and the projected reel catches fire. The flames severely injure poor Alfredo, as if he were receiving a divine punishment for committing the sin of bringing the magic out of the Paradiso.

This event is important because it allows Salvatore to take the place of Alfredo, and the man who won the lottery has the chance to use the money for rebuilding the cinema. This passage, combined with other scenes set in the theatre, shows how people used to live the film experience. The director portrays the sense of belonging of all members of the small community and how everyone has a specific role in it.

Inside the Paradiso all sort of things happens. People smoke, eat, drink wine, socialise, breastfeed and even make use of the services of a prostitute inside the theatre. For this reason, it becomes an important place for collective memory.

2. Characters

01.37.00 – 01.42.16 'Tu sei giovane, il mondo è tuo'

Since Salvatore's father died in WWII, Alfredo has become a father figure for him. Salvatore, who has just come back from military service, has a conversation with Alfredo at the seaside. In this conversation they talk about nostalgia, regret and the importance for young people to live their life and develop their potential, far away if necessary. Salvatore spends the night thinking about Alfredo's advice but also about Elena, the girl he is in love with, who lives in Sicily. For a few seconds the scene cuts to Salvatore in his bedroom decades later, still tormented by his choice.

In the passage that follows, his family (and Alfredo) gather at the train station to say goodbye. Alfredo whispers something in his ear. He orders him, with rage in his voice, that he has to forget about them and never contact anyone again. Alfredo has taught Salvatore everything he knows about cinema and life. As a child, working in the cinema operator's booth in Giancaldo was his greatest ambition. Now, thanks to Alfredo, he is starting to realize that life is not as simple as in the films: it's much harder than that and he will need to make sacrifices. He leaves the village, heading for Rome, where he will become a successful director.

An in-class discussion could focus on issues of contemporary Italian society (e.g. the North and South divide, economy, the brain drain etc.) and compare them with the situation during the time period in which the film is set. Love is also an important theme in the film, as the protagonist is forced to choose between love and his career. What is the role of love in the film?

3. Language

01.53.00 – 01.58.00 'Qua ci sono solo fantasmi'

In this scene the characters are speaking standard Italian instead of Sicilian, and with idiomatic expression in abundance. After decades of exile, it is time for Salvatore to face his mother and have an honest conversation with her. 'Ho sempre avuto paura di tornare,' admits Salvatore. 'E tu mamma... ti ho abbandonata. Sono scappato come un bandito'; 'Non ti ho mai dato una spiegazione.' Salvatore is filled with nostalgia and regret and tries to apologize for leaving the village and seeking fortune elsewhere.

'E io non te l'ho mai chiesta, non mi devi spiegare niente'; 'Hai fatto bene. Sei riuscito a fare quello che volevi.' His mother forgives him and understands him. She knows that life in his hometown did not have anything else to offer him. 'Ma finora non ho sentito mai una voce che ti ama veramente . L'avrei capito sai? Eppure mi piacerebbe vederti sistemato.' The main regret his mother seems to have is that he has never settled down with a partner. It seems that he hasn't really found a stable girlfriend after Elena.

There is a variety of tenses students can practice with, such as past perfect subjunctive and conditional:

'Come se fossi rimasto sempre qui'; 'Io l'avrei saputo.' The scene exposes students to a clear, well written dialogue that summarizes the themes of the film.

NB. Alfredo and Salvatore (as adults) are played by French actors who have been dubbed, although Italian dubbing meets high standards, so the mismatch of lips and dialogue is not that evident.

4. Cinematography

01.01.00 - 01.03.00 'cose più importanti'

Salvatore has achieved his dream, having taken over as operator, but Alfredo is telling him to continue his studies. He knows the boy is destined for big things and does not want him to follow in his footsteps. While Alfredo is talking to Salvatore and touching his face, the director fast forwards a few years ahead and when he removes his hand, the viewers see that Salvatore has become a young adult.

This shows how much time the two have spent together in the operating booth and how Alfredo has had a key role in different stages of Salvatore's life.

Further reading

- Baaria (2/11) Film CLIP - Four Bites (2009) HD. Baaria is a 2009 film by Giuseppe Tornatore set in Sicily. Most of the dialogue is in the Sicilian language. Many clips are available on youtube with varying subtitles: YouTube. (2015). Baaria (2/11) Film CLIP - Four Bites (2009) HD. [online]
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