

Pianese Nunzio 14 Anni a Maggio

("Pianese Nunzio, 14 in May"; UK = "Fourteen in May")

Italy : 1996 : dir. Antonio Capuano :

: 115 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

Emanuele Garguilo; Nando Triola

Fabrizio Bentivoglio; Manuela Martinelli; Tonino Taiuti; Rosario de Cicco;

Teresa Saponangelo

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12th London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival (1998) programme review:

“Powerful, complex and controversial contemporary drama set in the poorest area of Naples. Father Borrelli is an outspoken Catholic priest trying to protect his downtrodden flock from the violence and corruption of the local Camorra (or Mafia). Nevertheless his high profile public stand against the gangs is severely compromised by his illicit sexual relationship with Pianese Nunzio, a teenage boy who he has rescued from the streets. Threatened by the Camorra and increasingly hounded by the authorities (who are trying to persuade Nunzio to denounce his protector for abuse [*sic*]) the priest is caught between his sense of moral responsibility and his deep feelings for Nunzio. Sensitively realised and strikingly shot, Capuano’s film also brilliantly depicts the unvarnished and violent reality of a rarely seen part of modern Italy.”

L’Espresso (19/9/96) – poorly translated – review from the above source:

“In the decadent district of Naples, known as Sanit..., a parish priest is an implacable enemy of the Camorra. The members of the Camorra put all kinds of pressure, open and underhand, threatening and insinuating, violent and promising, to make the boy denounce the priest¹, thus ridding them of a pugnacious enemy, liked and respected by the parishioners; and the boy gives in and makes his denouncement².”

¹ What boy? What are you **talking** about?

² About **what** ??

Such a brief summary³, which does not give a synthesis of "**FOURTEEN IN MAY**", already condenses four transgressions of modern behaviour, four provocations. Love between an adult and a young boy is shown not as a violation and blameworthy abuse, but as a feeling and pleasure that are harmoniously lived, and a relief for two different kinds of solitude. The possible compatibility between this variation of homosexuality and the most rigid public spirit. The boy’s denouncement is shown without disapproval but as a defeat, a betrayal of love, a yielding to corruption, a prevailing of criminality which (like others) exploits sex to bring ruin on a social opponent. The denial of Bassolini’s "new Naples", the persistence of the worst districts in a chaotic city filled with delinquents where the Law, knowingly or otherwise, is at the service of the Camorra: in fact, it is significant that it is precisely the apparently well-intentioned social workers and upright magistrates who investigate the boy’s behaviour and force him to make the denouncement.

If, at the Venice Film Festival, the film was the cause of so many irritated reactions, of such severe disapproval especially but not exclusively of the Catholic prelates, it is precisely because it contradicts the common sense tenets of newspaper and television journalists⁴, because it tries to restore to a relationship its complexity and depth, because it tries to oppose that dramatising scheme, that immediate blaming, that respectable criminalisation that are the weapons of imaginary modern ethics imposed by the

³ With all the salient points missing!

⁴ Another Camorra, in fact, but more powerful

scandalistic simplifications of the mass media, of the New Ignorance and by a substantial intolerance that goes hand in hand with a tolerance that is loudly proclaimed, invoked, claimed and organised. **"FOURTEEN IN MAY"** has quite a few merits in this sense: even though the nonconformist intentions are marred by something spurious and feverish, even though the carnal relationship between the priest and the young boy are narrated with taciturn caution and an almost sacral emphasis while the parish priest talks about eros being a form of saintliness, even though simplicity and spontaneity are lacking.

The complex style of the film is rather neo-Baroque that mingles folklore, terseness befitting a police investigation, rhythm of popular music, pleasing aesthetic effects, and melodrama. The soundtrack is a mixture of

Mozart and the Neapolitan spirit of the *Almamegretta*, harsh, confusing, passionate, combining Nino D'Angelo and Gluck; the exaggerated last scenes alternate the boy's denouncement to the magistrate and the images of the priest who is at the head of an anti-Camorra procession beneath torrential rain. Fabrizio Bentivoglio, who is a fine actor also because he does not fear difficult parts, confers on the character of the priest a very interesting depth of sensuality, unctiousness and violence of a mediaeval preacher, a double dimension: ardent and unlikeable, that expresses extremely the contradiction of the film."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001"]

The above notes are a decidedly poor translation of an over-written critique, which mysteriously omits to share with us the gist of the story. But note how it identifies the central pederastic relationship as "a variation of homosexuality" - in the teeth of the international gay movement, which has been at pains to disassociate itself from such relationships, denouncing them with all the gusto of political expedience. Either such affairs are a valid and healthy expression of the diversity of homosexual behaviour (legal or not), in which case the gay movement's attack on boy-love politics may be seen as rank cowardice, or else they are a separate strand of sexuality entirely, in which case the film had no place in a gay film festival. I fail to see how one can have it both ways.

Nevertheless it is a bold film, in these times, which portrays a pederastic relationship as something wholly positive, before the combined forces of the mafia and the social services can conspire to destroy it. The Catholic church has found itself embroiled in so many "child abuse" scandals latterly - in America, Ireland and Canada if not in Italy - that its reaction to this film was entirely to be expected. I doubt the film found a warm reception among the social worker ranks either. So far from it being "significant" that "seemingly well-intentioned" social workers should pressure a reluctant boy into incriminating his friend, this is entirely standard practice, and any youth worker who declined to do so would fall under immediate suspicion himself (but not herself). The wishes and feelings of the boy in such cases count for nothing - a willing partner is merely a "victim" in disguise.

Nando Triola starred earlier in **"VITO E GLI ALTRI"** (another street-boy drama, with the now-obligatory subtext of child prostitution). Nothing else is known of Emanuele Garguilo, who plays Pianese.

See subject index under **POLICE / SOCIAL WORKERS, RELIGION, STREET KIDS** and under **SEX & SEXUALITY** for more orthodox presentations of "sex abuser priests".