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 Trio
Fabrizio Bentivoglio; Manuela Martinelli; Tonino Taufi; Rosario de Cicco;
Teresa Saponangelo

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. Sensitivey 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
persistance 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, unction and violence of a mediaeval preacher, a double dimension: ardent and unlikeable, that expresses extremely the contradiction of the film."

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".

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