

Il Sapore del Grano

("The Flavour of Corn")

Italy : 1986 : dir. Gianni da Campo

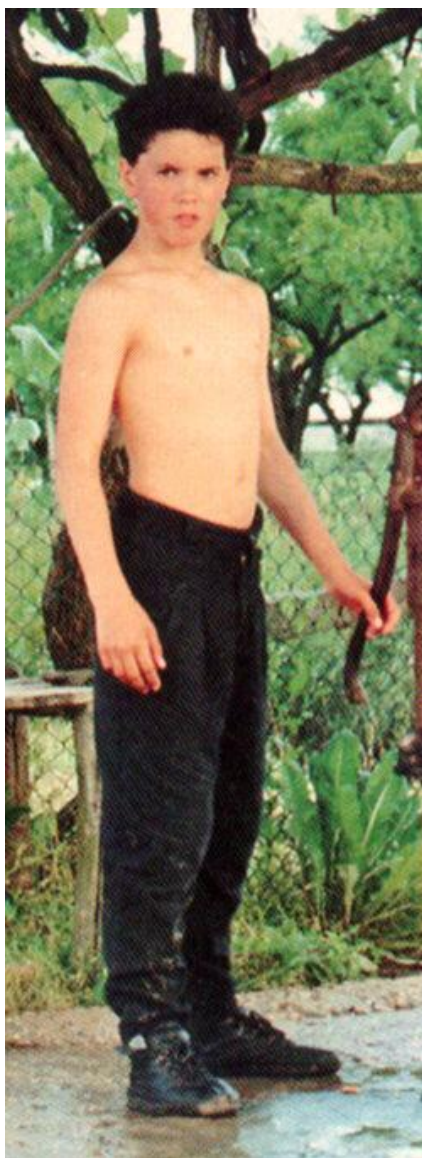
: 93 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Marco Mestriner](#)

Lorenzo Lena

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: Award Films International

Images in the Dark - An Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Film and Video - review:

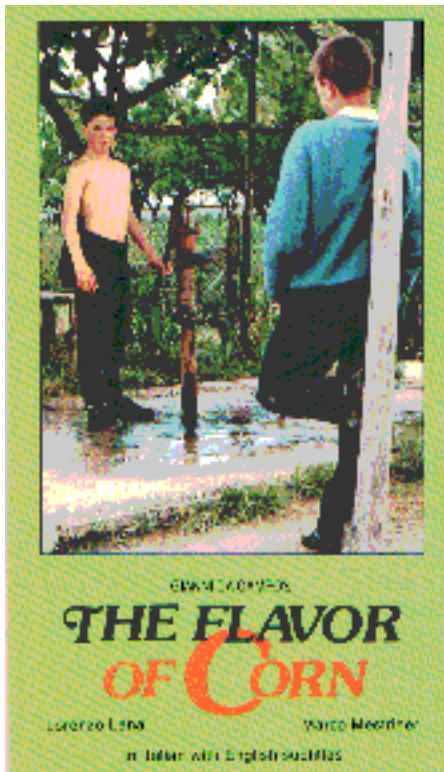
"Best likened in theme to the much more explicit Dutch drama "FOR A LOST SOLDIER", this tender drama of friendship and enveloping love between a young teacher and a 12-year old boy is hampered by amateurish acting and an overly serious tone. University student Lorenzo (Lorenzo Lena) travels to a rural region of Northern Italy for his first teaching assignment. The handsome young man discovers that Duilio (Marco Mestriner), one of his pupils, is in "puppy love" with him [*sic*]. Equally attracted (although initially platonically), Lorenzo becomes friends with the precocious boy [*sic*]; only after his self-destructive relationship with a woman ends does he consider the sexual attraction to the boy. Although the two never have sex - their affection is limited to holding hands, looking longingly into each other's eyes and a brief peck on the lips - their attraction for each other becomes increasingly intense. Their impossible relationship [*sic*] becomes strained after Duilio's peasant family suspects something is up and asks the teacher to cool his visits. A surprisingly tasteful, restrained, and bittersweet tale of first love and the internal conflict of accepting one's sexual feelings."

Commercial gay video distributor - Award Films International - review:
www.gayweb.com/106

"Lorenzo, a handsome first-year professor¹, arrives in an isolated Italian village with a quiet

¹ No, "schoolteachers" teach in schools...

demeanour and a passion to teach his innocent charges [sic]. Though his virile appetites draw him into affairs with disaffected women, Lorenzo falls under the spell of his most beguiling pupil, a dark-haired, starry-eyed 12-year old named Duilio. As Lorenzo's relationship with his heartless girlfriend deteriorates, he finds himself walking the fields with his loving student², enjoying tractor rides and quiet moments by the pond. When their idyllic friendship is questioned by Duilio's suspicious stepmother, Lorenzo is brought to a crisis of conscience. A dignified handling of a potentially explosive theme, "THE FLAVOUR OF CORN" is a bittersweet ode to male friendship and the confusion of first love. Unrated. Viewer discretion is advised. Contains nudity and mature sexual situations. In Italian with English subtitles. Running time: approx. 93 minutes. Item #80042 - \$59.95 "



Source: Award Films International

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video

² Or "pupil", as we say in English

Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



Love, Italian style – when it comes to 12-year old boys at any rate – chaste and virginal to a fault
Source: Award Films International

No further information currently available. Not a gay film in any sense then. The relationship portrayed is *homosexual* – by intent if not deed – but lies emphatically outside the narrow paradigm of gay culture. It is, if it's anything at all, a pederastic romance, and the gay world has been at great pains to ostracise that variant of homosexual life from its midst. Never mind the taste of corn then, taste the hypocrisy by which they still contrive to subsume man-boy affairs into their *own* social construct.

It is done by language. Eschewing first of all the "potentially explosive" labels "pederasty", "paedophilia" or "man-boy love", they redefine it as the first flowering of *gay* attraction. The cannily ambivalent texts above employ the same dismissive terminology ("precocious", "innocent charges", "starry-eyed pupil", "puppy love") while defining the "impossible relationship" itself as a meeting of equals.

It seems fair to assume that the film itself does not even portray Lorenzo as a self-defined gay, but he is driven by a "heartless" girlfriend to "fall under the spell" of one of his "beguiling" schoolboys. The affair is not his responsibility, then, but his girlfriend's, or the boy's. His own attraction to Duilio is a "platonic" one.

The fact that the affair remains unconsummated certainly makes it easier for a general audience to accept it on its own terms (not to speak of censorship difficulties), and there's little doubt that "**DEATH IN VENICE**" (also falsely hailed as a gay film) would have had a frostier reception if Aschenbach and Tadzio had finally locked limbs in the surf. Equality in any personal relationship is not a question of size, or wealth, or age, and not of life experience either, but of mutual respect and agreement. The cinema is replete with tales of deep and passionate friendships between boys and men, which are not seen to be problematic because their love is not defined in terms of mutual sexual attraction. Society's hostility to pederasty then, is not about age or power differences, but a one-step displacement of its rooted hostility to homosexuality itself. The gay movement counts its chickens, and elects not to quarrel with that particular fox.

This criticism should not be read as homophobia on my own part – I am entirely homosexual as it happens – but as impatience with the equivocations of current gay rhetoric. Ethical compromise is a smelly fish, and gay culture reeks like Billingsgate on a hot summer day. In fact the tentative little romance played out in this film is one that most homosexual adults will readily identify with, remembering similar boyhood infatuations, and usually directed toward adult men. The above reviews suggest that some of them at least are still prepared to countenance an infatuation in the other direction, so long as they can label it "gay". I really have no patience for such double standards, taking cover behind all the gibberish of childhood "purity" and "innocence".

To my mind, the only questionable aspect of the situation is that teachers enjoy a position of special authority over their pupils, and to that extent an affair with one of them, male or female, 16 or 13, is as ethically dubious as between a doctor and patient. But even that does not follow universally. The philosophy of "*pedagogic eros*", or intimate teacher/pupil bonding on a one-to-one level, gave rise to several educational establishments in pre-Nazi Germany, both male and female ones, and played an important role in the formulation of a positive gay identity in the early part of the century. In essence, the belief was that mutual high regard flowing out of sexual affinity promotes excellence and greater commitment, both from teacher and pupil, that we learn best from those we love, and will strive harder to win their esteem.

"**THE MAN WITHOUT A FACE**" (93) sailed as close to this terrain as any English language title, but director/lead Mel Gibson balked at the internal logic of his script, and the film finally copped out by having Gibson falsely accused of "molesting" his pupil, and leaving town in order to protect the boy from the probing fingers of police doctors. The equation of Gibson's film became – the relationship was good because it was *non-sexual* – and not – the relationship was good, so what does it matter if it *was* sexual? What set out to be an indictment of small-town intolerance backed away from confronting a nationwide intolerance.

British cinema's closest shot to this same sensitive area was perhaps "**THE SPANISH GARDENER**" (56), in which the parental suspicion is never quite uttered, but where again Dirk Bogarde bows out of the situation with manly dignity so that a homoerotic relationship can safely be characterised as a lonely boy's "innocent" infatuation. It is perhaps too much to ask of any cinema that it should confront society's most deeply-ingrained taboos, but if as wise a film as "**LE SOUFFLE AU COEUR**" could take a clam, tolerant, even mildly amused look at incest, then a comparable work on this theme is long overdue. And no, "**LOLITA**" is not speaking the same language at all. For an excellent heterosexual stab in the same direction, see rather "**LEON**".

See subject index under [SCHOOL, SEX & SEXUALITY](#) and **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS**, many of which carry more than a glimmer of that same homoeroticism. The Dutch film "**VOOR EEN VERLOREN SOLDAAT**", mentioned above, pulls no punches at all (we see the man and boy engaged in anal intercourse) but the relationship it describes is more in the nature of a one-night stand – the man and boy unable to communicate in the same language, and the Canadian soldier of the title ultimately disappears with little regard to the boy's feelings. Needless to say, it has never been released in the UK or US, and needless to say, it too is claimed as a "gay" movie.