

Bertolucci's Me and You: a Look at Youth

Natasha Lardera (June 24, 2014)



Bernardo Bertolucci's first Italian-language feature in over 30 years and first feature in 9 years is about to open in New York City, on July 4th to be exact, and in more theaters across the US. *Me and You* is part of the Cinema Made in Italy Series, a major new initiative between Cinecittà Luce, the Italian Trade Commission and the film distributor Emerging Pictures that brings Italian films to American audiences.

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Me and You, (*Io e Te*, 2012), is the 4th film presented in the [Cinema Made in Italy Series](#) [3], “a major new initiative between [Cinecittà Luce](#) [4], the [Italian Trade Commission](#) [5] and the film distributor Emerging Pictures, bringing FIVE new films from FIVE auteurs of Italian cinema to American movie audiences in 2014.”



The first film presented as part of Cinema Made In Italy was [Paolo Sorrentino](#) [6]'s *The Great Beauty*, winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, which was followed by [Valeria Golino](#) [7]'s *Honey*, and [Marco Bellocchio](#) [8]'s *Dormant Beauty*. The last one will be [Gianni Amelio](#) [9]'s *A Lonely Hero*.

Me and You is a sensual coming of age story, based on a novella by [Niccolo Ammaniti](#) [10] by the same title. "Niccolò Ammaniti brought me his novella *Io e Te* hot off the press," the now wheelchair bound director has said, "It's been 30 years since I made a film in Italian."

I longed to hear Italian spoken in a film of mine, with Italian actors and to shoot in Italy. Reading the first few pages of the book, I felt a spark... of a new project... to become inevitably a movie. The novella's storyline had to change somewhat and had to go through several transformations. That's why I wanted Ammaniti next to me in the writing of the script, together with [Umberto Contarello](#) [11] and [Francesca Marciano](#) [12]. But some of the biggest differences between the novella and the film were not even in the screenplay. They happened during the shoot. It's the magic of cinema."

The 14 year old Lorenzo, played by Jacopo Olmo Antinori, has evident difficulties in relating with his peers. He needs the help of a psychologist, who is wheelchair bound. Then one day he gets the chance to finally be himself and do what he wants: he ditches the school's ski trip and decides to hide in his building's neglected basement.

He's armed with a satisfying supply of food, his favorite books and music and an ant farm. He is looking forward to spending an entire week alone where nobody tells him how to be a "normal" teenager. He is not aware that shortly thereafter his beloved retreat will be invaded by Olivia, played by Tea Falco, his older half-sister whom he has not seen in quite a while.

At 25, Olivia is a drug addict who's trying to get clean. Her delicate state makes co-habitation difficult, confrontation and old resentments come to the surface incessantly, and totally disrupts Lorenzo's plans. Their forced cohabitation also brings forth a need for affection and intimacy that will change the two characters into allies against all the unhappiness that this world can throw at them.

It all ends with a pact: Olivia will stop hiding from reality in drugs if Lorenzo will just stop hiding from the world.

Lorenzo and Olivia are two people who have tried, each in his/her own way, to escape ordinary life. It is a basement, a place that usually is connected to fear, darkness and even death, to tempt them to look at the world differently and consider different options.

"In *Me and You*, I made sure that this one cellar had a different look in every scene, a basement storage room designed to be transformed by the boy, Lorenzo, and by the lighting," Bertolucci has said, "I wanted the space to constantly have a different feeling to it, so that one could see something new as the story progressed."

In this basement, Lorenzo was looking for refuge in solitude, while Olivia was trying to vanish by becoming one with the walls onto which she pasted her own photographic image.

Bertolucci is still a force to be reckoned with. Seated rather than standing, the director looks at his characters straight in their eyes, he does not look down on them and on their adolescent affectation in a hermetic world.

Me and You reminds us of other works by Bertolucci: it evokes the claustrophobic confinement of *Besieged* and it indulgently observes the problems of youth like in *The Dreamers*.

"*Me and You* is about the longings, disappointments, struggles and dreams of two

young people," Bertolucci has said "I guess many of my films have dealt with the youth and their specific emotional issues and states. Now that I am over 70, I continue to be intrigued by youthful characters and by the challenge of capturing their vitality, curiosity."



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