

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso Film Summary

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso by Giuseppe Tornatore

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Context

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso is Giuseppe Tornatore's fun-loving, nostalgic tribute to cinema. The story begins in a small town in Italy where Toto, a young, mischievous boy, is growing up. Toto loves the theater, and at this time, the theater was the hub of the town. After his father's death, Toto's mother was forced to raise him and his sister on her own. Thus, Toto was able to have some liberty concerning where he went and what he did. Most of Toto's time was spent in the projection booth with the old operator, Alfredo. Alfredo taught Toto about film and projection, helping Toto keep his dream of someday making movies alive.

Toto eventually grows into a young man named Salvatore. He falls in love with Elena, but her parents refuse to allow their relationship. One fateful day the couple is supposed to meet but Elena never shows up. Salvatore tries to find her, but she is lost to him forever. He is forced to go off to the army, and he returns home a couple of years later to find that everything has changed.

After spending several sad and lonely months in the town, Salvatore leaves for good. Alfredo tells him to never come back. The only way he could ever come back would be to leave for many years, only returning when the time away gave him a perspective on his life. Salvatore leaves to find his way in life and eventually becomes a famous movie director and producer.

When Alfredo dies, Salvatore finally returns to his town. All his old memories are stirred up, and he visits the places that were once such a major part of his life. He also sees Elena again, and they share one passionate night. They both realize the truth: Alfredo lied to them both because he wanted Salvatore to realize his childhood dream of becoming a great maker of movies. Salvatore finally returns to his home after the Cinema Paradiso is destroyed to make way for a parking lot. He watches an old film strip given to him by Alfredo's wife - a series of love scenes Alfredo had to keep out of the early censored films - and he appreciates the old man's actions and is thankful for the love he experienced.

Giuseppe Tornatore's film pays tribute to the importance of film, not only in Salvatore's life but also in the lives of people who lived in towns such as his. These towns revolved around the theater, and Tornatore's film brings the viewer back to that way of life, if only for a moment. The acting in the film is exceptional, and the characters are touching.

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso received many awards when it was released. The film was nominated for the Golden Palm at the Cannes Festival and won the Grand Prize of the Jury. At the European Film Awards, Philippe Noiret won the Best Actor award, while Giuseppe Tornatore won the Special Prize of the Jury. The British Academy of Film and Television Arts awarded the film with the following five awards: Best Actor, Philippe Noiret; Best Actor in a Supporting Role, Salvatore Cascio; Best Film not in the English Language, Franco Cristaldi and Giuseppe Tornatore; Best Original Film Score, Ennio Morricone and Andrea Morricone, and finally Best Screenplay - Original, Giuseppe



Tornatore. In the States, *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* won the Best Foreign Language Film Italy at both the Academy Awards and the Golden Globes.

Summary and Analysis

We see Salvatore's mother trying to call him from Sicily. She wants to let him know that Alfredo has passed away. We learn that Salvatore has not been home in over 30 years. His sister doesn't believe he'll come, but his mother keeps saying that he'll remember. In his car, Salvatore heads home. There, he finds out that his mother has called. She is coming to Rome and wants to see him. She also said that Alfredo died and that the funeral is tomorrow.

Salvatore lies in bed and remembers his childhood. Salvatore adores Alfredo and loves to watch the way he works at the movies. Alfredo warns Salvatore that if the film catches on fire he would be terribly hurt. Alfredo cuts out the scandalous scenes in the films.

Salvatore gets into trouble with his mother because he used the money for food to see a movie. Alfredo and Salvatore, whom he fondly calls Toto, ride on a bicycle through the countryside and discuss friendship. They get back to Salvatore's home and find out that the film pieces Alfredo gave him caught on fire. Maria makes Alfredo promise that he won't let Salvatore in anymore. She wishes that her husband would come home, but Salvatore tells her that he's dead. She breaks into tears.

Salvatore stands outside watching the theater sadly. He finally figures out a way to get in. He convinces Alfredo's wife to let him take Alfredo his food. Salvatore apologizes for getting Alfredo into trouble and tells him he thought that the story about film catching on fire was a joke. They sit down and talk about the old days of film where if you didn't crank fast enough the film would catch on fire. Alfredo tells Salvatore that this is no job for him - there is no future in it.

Throughout the seasons and the years we see the people in the town grow and change. The town crazy man is still there saying "The square is mine! The square is mine!" The films at the theater change and Salvatore and the others grow older. Alfredo and other men come in when the children take their end-of-the-year tests. They are trying to get their own diplomas for finishing school. Alfredo sits down near Salvatore and tries to get answers to the questions from him. Salvatore helps Alfredo by giving him the answers. In return, Alfredo teaches Salvatore how to play the movies.

One night a mob gathers outside the Paradiso. They want to see the film but the theater is full. They try to break down the doors, but the police keep them out. Alfredo decides to help everyone see the movie. He duplicates the film on the side of a building across the street. Thus, everyone gets to watch the film in peace. Alfredo is filled with pride at having helped make this into a great night. However, the owner tries to make everyone pay for the movie being shown outside. The people claim that the square belongs to everyone - and the town fool claims it as his own! Suddenly, the film stops as the film catches on fire. Alfredo hurries to put out the fire, but he cannot make it stop. People run from the theater in panic, and the Paradiso slowly burns. Salvatore hurries to the film



room to check on Alfredo, who has no one to help him. Salvatore pulls Alfredo out of the fire to safety. However, Alfredo is blinded in the accident.

Later, everyone stands in the square in horror looking upon the charred remains of the Cinema Paradiso. They stand there discussing how they will never be able to reopen. However, a man named Ciccio has become wealthy, and he reopens the theater in grand style. At the reopening, Alfredo is not there. However, Salvatore helps take over the theater and the priest offers a blessing. During the film, Alfredo comes in and Salvatore is elated. Salvatore tells Alfredo that he may not go back to school because he's working now. However, Alfredo tells him that although he now needs the Paradiso and the Paradiso needs him, Salvatore must still go on to bigger, better things. As Alfredo moves his hand over Salvatore's face, Salvatore ages and becomes a young man.

Salvatore tries to convince Ciccio to open a second theater, but Ciccio says that is impossible. Finally, they try to run two theaters using one film, but the crowds are very demanding and do not like to be kept waiting for the other parts of the film. The plan fails miserably, as people can't see the film on time.

A while later, a man shows Salvatore and Alfredo a new type of film that cannot catch fire. We watch as Salvatore continues working in the theater through the years, even when he is sick or tired. We also see Salvatore having his first sex on the floor of the theater with a young woman from the town.

Eventually, Salvatore begins to practice filming his own stuff. He uses scenes from life in the town. One day he spots a new girl in town through his camera, and we find out that she is the bank owner's daughter. As Salvatore and some of the other young men watch her, they start racing to pick up something she dropped and return it to her. Salvatore wins the race, and he meets Elena for the first time. His friends beat him up for winning, but he has finally met the girl of his dreams.

Salvatore develops a terrible crush on Elena. He tries to talk to her but he always makes a fool of himself. Finally, he calls her one night to tell her his feelings. However, he ends up telling her mother instead, who threatens to call the police. Salvatore tells Alfredo about the situation, and Alfredo tells him a story about a princess and a soldier. The two met and the princess told the soldier that if he could wait for 100 days and nights under her balcony, then she would be his. The soldier waited until the 99th night. On that night, the princess watched as the soldier picked up his chair and walked away. Alfredo tells him he has no idea what this story means.

Alfredo and Salvatore go into the church, and Salvatore watches as Elena enters the confession booth. He sends the priest over to talk to Alfredo, who says that he is having doubts. Salvatore enters the priest's side of the booth and talks to Elena. She tells him that he got her into trouble with that phone call, and he apologizes. He tells her that she's beautiful and that she makes him nervous every time they meet. He reveals that he is in love with her. At that moment a woman comes and asks to be forgiven, so he blesses her. Elena tells Salvatore that he's sweet but she doesn't love him. He says he'll



wait until she does. He will wait outside her window every night, and when she changes her mind, she should open the window.

Through wind and storms, Salvatore stands outside her house just as he said he would. He even misses the New Year's celebration with family and friends to stand outside her house. One night while he is working, Elena shows up in the film room, and they embrace. As they are kissing, the film goes out, but they pay no attention. The two then begin a series of enjoyable afternoons and evenings spent together - young and in love. One day, they are out driving and their car breaks down. They stop a car, and it turns out to be Elena's father, who is not happy about the situation.

In the theater that night, they watch the film on a new tool called a teleprojector. Elena's family is in the theater, and she sneaks into the bathroom so she can talk to Salvatore. She tells him that her family is going to Tuscany as soon as school is out. She tells him that he can come up there secretly, and they can meet.

The movie theater moves outside for the summer. Everyone gathers by the water in their boats to watch the films. Salvatore reads a letter from Elena that tells him she has just found out they are moving to Palermo in October so she can study at the university. Salvatore spends the summer sitting alone, missing Elena. He receives letters from her as his own joy of the days. One night at the movie, a huge thunderstorm breaks and Salvatore just lies in the rain. Suddenly, Elena is on top of him. She has just returned that day. They kiss passionately in the midst of a terrible thunderstorm.

At the Cinema the next day, Ciccio receives Salvatore's draft card. Salvatore tells Elena that as a war orphan he doesn't fall under the draft. He has to go to Rome for a few days, but he will be able to return after that. She tells him that her father will never understand: he wants her to marry the son of a business partner. Salvatore is depressed by the news, and the next day he sadly prepares everything for the new guy at the theater. Ciccio tries to cheer him up by saying he would never replace him permanently at the theater.

Salvatore waits for Elena to arrive on the bus she promised to come on, but she never shows up. Alfredo arrives and says he will wait with Salvatore for Elena to arrive. Alfredo actually agrees to be in charge of the film while Salvatore goes to look for Elena. Salvatore arrives only to find that no one is answering the door. Elena's mother sits inside ignoring the knocks. At the theater, the film breaks and Alfredo cannot fix it on his own.

When Salvatore returns to the theater, Alfredo is very angry with him. Alfredo tells him that neither Elena nor anyone else came while he was gone. Salvatore puts up the film and posts a note on the board.

Salvatore goes to the war, where he keeps being put off by the captain. On the phone one day he finds out that Elena's father was transferred and suddenly, he begins to receive his letters back. Salvatore tries to get the captain to let him go home on leave, and finally his discharge comes through after more than a year.



Salvatore returns home and stands alone in the middle of the square. Someone new is working at the theater. He goes to visit Alfredo, who no longer goes out of his home anymore. Salvatore pulls him out and they talk about Elena. Alfredo says that's probably how it was meant to be and that everyone has their own destiny. He asks what Salvatore is going to do with his life, but Salvatore doesn't know. Salvatore says that he knows why the prince left after all that time. It would have killed the soldier had she broken her promise, so he was able to keep up the illusion that she was waiting on him by leaving. Alfredo tells him to do as the soldier did and leave. "You have to go away for a long time... many years... before you can come back and find your people," says Alfredo. For once, Alfredo isn't quoting a movie - he's saying his own words. Alfredo tells Salvatore to get out of there. He doesn't want to talk to Salvatore anymore; he wants to hear others talking about him. As Salvatore prepares to leave, Alfredo tells him to forget them all. Never to write or give into nostalgia. He tells Salvatore that if he ever comes back, not to come see Alfredo, who won't let him into his house. Salvatore thanks Alfredo for everything, and Alfredo says, "Whatever you end up doing, love it. The way you loved the projection booth when you were a little squirt."

In the present, Salvatore visits his mother. She is so excited to see him. She asks him if he wants to rest, and he says that it is only an hour by plane. "You shouldn't have said that after all these years," she tells him. She has decorated his room with pictures of old films and projection equipment. At the funeral, Salvatore walks with Alfredo's weeping wife. Alfredo left something for Salvatore that he needs to pick up before he leaves. As they walk with Alfredo's casket, they pass the Cinema Paradiso. Salvatore looks around the crowd and sees Ciccio and others whom he knew as he grew up. He learns from Ciccio that the theater is closed and the city will be putting in a parking lot. At dinner that night, Salvatore tells Ciccio that he doesn't know when he's leaving. Then, the studio calls to find out his plans.

Salvatore later goes by the Cinema Paradiso. He wanders around inside the remains of his old home-away-from-home. As Salvatore walks around his hometown, he is recognized and asked to sign autographs. He sees a woman who looks almost like Elena as a young woman. He drops his glass in astonishment. That night Salvatore watches the film he made of Elena all those years before. He sees the girl again the next day. Salvatore talks to his mother later about how she has survived so many years alone. She explains that she simply remained faithful to his father and then later to him and his sister. She tells him, "If you're loyal, you are forever alone." She apologizes for calling him, but he tells her he has always been afraid of coming back. He apologizes for leaving and never returning or giving an explanation, but she tells him she thinks he did the right thing. She tells him that for years she would lock the door and feel like she was leaving someone outside.

Salvatore's mother is happy that Salvatore did what he wanted to do. She tells him that a different woman answers the phone every time she calls him, but she never hears in their voices that they love him. She would have loved to see him in love with someone and settled down, but his life is there. That night Salvatore sits outside Elena's apartment and watches her husband drive home. He calls her from a pay phone. She



remembers him, and he tells her he would like to see her. She tells him they are both old and there is no point in meeting. He hangs up, disappointed.

Salvatore stands by the water. Suddenly, Elena drives up. She says there were few places to choose from but she remembered this. He tells her that he looked for her and that he thinks she's still beautiful. He tells her that Alfredo died. Elena tells him that he knows her husband Boccia. They grew up together. She didn't marry the man her father had chosen because she didn't want to, and she was waiting for Salvatore. They both admit to never forgetting each other even though, as she says, Salvatore disappeared. He becomes angry, saying that she never showed up for the date. She tells him that she did. She was running late because of a long fight trying to convince her parents that they couldn't separate them. However, they had decided to leave Sicily once and for all and they did. She had just a little time and was hoping that they would come up with a plan to run away together. She saw Alfredo in the booth, but she couldn't wait for Salvatore to return. She told him that she was leaving that night. Alfredo listened, but then he told her to forget about him. Eventually, their love would burn out, but Salvatore only had one future. Alfredo tells Elena that Salvatore might kill him for what he's saying, but that she should leave for Salvatore's sake.

Salvatore is shocked by this secret. Elena told Alfredo she would take his advice, but before she left, she wrote Salvatore a note. Salvatore never saw the note because he posted it to the wall after he put up the film. She had left her address, but she tells him that he disappeared anyway. He tells her that he looked for her. He finally ran away and never returned when he couldn't find her, but he dreamt of her for years. They embrace. Salvatore can't imagine that everything could have ended because of the man who was like a father to him. He calls Alfredo a madman. Elena admits that she hated Alfredo too, but later understood his words. She tells Salvatore that Alfredo didn't betray him - he understood him better than anyone else. Had they stayed together, Salvatore would never have made his movies, which would be a shame. She has seen them all his movies. However, she says he never should have changed his name. They embrace passionately.

The next day, Salvatore visits Alfredo's wife. She hands him a film case Alfredo left for him. She tells him that Alfredo would watch his movies when they came on television because they made him forget his troubles. He would have people read about Salvatore from the newspaper. She says that Alfredo never asked about Salvatore and if people suggested calling him, he would get angry and say that Salvatore should never return to the town. He even told Salvatore's mother not to tell about his death.

At the Cinema, Salvatore digs through the papers on the wall looking desperately for Elena's note. On the back of a movie stamp called *The Cry*, he finds the note. He calls Elena later and suggests that maybe they could see each other in the future. She tells him that all is in the past and even last night was just a happy dream fulfilling the desires they never fulfilled as young people. He tells her that he will never agree with her. Later, everyone gathers in the square to watch as the Cinema is destroyed. Ciccio cries as he watches his theater fall to the ground. The crazy mime walks around saying,

"The square is mine. The square is mine" a final time as Salvatore watches. Finally, he leaves.

Back at his studio, Salvatore talks to his employees about business. Then he puts in the film that Alfredo left to him and watches as love scenes from over the years are played on the screen. The film is the spliced scenes from all Alfredo's early years of censoring.



Characters

Salvatore, played by Jacques Perrin (Adult), Marco Leonardi (Adolescent), Salvatore Cascio (Child)

Description

Salvatore is the main character in *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*. As a young boy growing up in a small town in Italy, Salvatore, called Toto as a child, falls in love with the cinema. The town has its very own cinema, the Cinema Paradiso, where Alfredo runs the projection room. Salvatore spends all his days there from his childhood into his teens. While Salvatore is still a boy, Alfredo is blinded by a fire, and Salvatore takes over the projection room. The two spend hours together, and Alfredo has great plans for Salvatore's future.

Salvatore, however, falls in love with Elena, the privileged daughter of a local banker. Alfredo believes that Salvatore will give up his hopes of someday making films if he marries Elena, so he does his best to keep them apart. Salvatore spends his life wishing that he was still with Elena. When Salvatore eventually sees her again when they are older and Alfredo has died, he realizes that his love for her is still alive. However, he also knows that his life and experiences made him the great director and producer he has become.

Analysis

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Alfredo, played by Phillippe Noiret

Description

Alfredo is an older man who runs the projection booth at the town's theater, Cinema Paradiso.



Analysis

Elena, played by Brigitte Fossey (Adult), Agnese Nano (Adolescent),

Description

Elena is the banker's daughter who moves to town when Salvatore is in high school. She falls in love with him even though her parents forbid their relationship. When her parents decide to move their family away from the little town, Elena hopes that she and Salvatore can run away and get married. When they miss each other, she leaves an address that he never finds.

Years later, Salvatore seeks out Elena, who now has a happy marriage and children. They share one final passionate night, but the next day she tells Salvatore it was the perfect dream ending to their love.

Analysis

Elena is a bright young woman who falls deeply in love with Salvatore. She hopes to marry him someday and even defies her parents so that she will have the opportunity. She is brave and courageous, but may be considered young and foolish by some.

Elena turns into a noble, kind woman who has never completely gotten over her first love. Although she tries to resist seeing Salvatore, her curiosity and her feelings push her to see him. She falls in love all over again even though the love lasts only one night. She is loyal to her husband and family and decides not to pursue a relationship with Salvatore any further.

Maria, played by Pupella Maggio (Old), Antonella Attili (Young)

Description

Maria is Salvatore's mother. As a young war widow, Maria tries to raise Anna and Salvatore well. She struggles terribly since she is on her own, but the town tries to help her. At the end of the film, we see Maria as a wise, old woman who is simply glad to see her son again after so many years.



Analysis

Although Maria is not a very developed character in the film, we are able to see her growth. As a young woman, she is angry and scared, but she loves her children. As an old woman, she has come to accept her life as it was and enjoy every minute of it.

Anna, played by Isa Danielli

Description

Anna is Salvatore's younger sister. As a child, Anna was very quiet and got along well with her brother. The adult Anna is angry that Salvatore never visits and feels like he is a stranger.

Analysis

Anna is a good woman but she feels that her brother has neglected the family by staying away for so many years. She does not care that he uses his money to provide for her; instead she wants her brother to be around. Despite her disappointments, she is glad to see Salvatore and welcomes him home.

Father Adelfio, played by Leopoldo Trieste

Description

Father Adelfio makes most of his appearances at the beginning of the film when Toto is a young boy. Toto served the priest at the church when he was a child, and he looked up to Father Adelfio.

Analysis

Father Adelfio is a kind man who cares about Toto's well-being. He is the spiritual leader of the town and tries to set a good example for everyone.

Themes

Live Life To The Fullest

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso concentrates on one main theme throughout the course of the film: live life to the fullest! In the beginning of the film, we see that Toto is full of life and joy. He is in love with film and spends all his free time sitting with Alfredo in the projection booth. Alfredo cares deeply about Toto and his well-being, so he does his best to train Toto not only to run the projection booth but also to understand and love film.

Alfredo encourages Toto to live in the real world and to enjoy real life, rather than to simply watch the films and wish for the lives of the actors. When Salvatore meets Elena, he feels that he is finally beginning to live. They fall in love and have a short but passionate relationship. They believe that they will stay together forever, despite all odds, but Salvatore learns the hard way that living life to the fullest means experiencing great pain as well as great joy.

Little does Salvatore know that Alfredo lied to Elena so that he could ensure that Salvatore would live his life to the fullest. Afraid that Salvatore would stop pursuing his dreams of being a great director because of Elena, Alfredo deceives them both. However, in the end, Salvatore, as a grown man, seems to understand that he would never have become a success in his career had his life gone any other way. He lived his life to the fullest as it was, and is satisfied to have known true love at least for a moment.

Love Transcends Time

In the film, Salvatore and Elena have a great love - a beautiful, passionate, pure first love, but they lose everything when Alfredo deceives them and helps Elena's parents separate them. For years, the two think of each other. Although Elena eventually gets married, she can never stop thinking of Salvatore, and Salvatore, pining after Elena, never marries at all.

Eventually, when Alfredo dies, Salvatore returns to his home town and sees Elena's daughter. He follows her, finds out where Elena lives, and realizes that she is now married to his childhood friend. Salvatore finds that his love is just as strong as it was so many years before. Salvatore calls Elena, and although she at first refuses to see him, she later tracks him down near the oceanfront.

When Elena and Salvatore meet again, they know that their love has transcended time. All the years are washed away, and they are young lovers again. They talk and the truth of Alfredo's deception is revealed. They finally embrace and consummate their love as they failed to do so many years before. The next day, Salvatore seeks out Elena, but



she tells him that the night made things perfect. She wants their love to remain forever timeless as a memory of perfection.

Time Gives Perspective

After Elena disappears, Salvatore is called off to be in the army. Rather than staying only a few weeks as planned, he ends up staying several years. When he returns to the town, he realizes that everything has changed - either that, or he has changed, and everything has remained the same. Either way, Salvatore cannot bear being back in the town, and he wanders around hopelessly. Finally, Alfredo convinces him to go away to make movies, telling him to never come back to the town or he will be sucked back into that way of life. Instead, Alfredo tells him that things will never make sense there until Salvatore goes away for a very long time and gains a new perspective.

Time gives perspective to the events in our lives. When events first happen, people respond immediately but often without a lot of thought. After being in one place for a long time, many people cannot interpret their lives without looking through the lens of that place. However, people who leave a location for many years and then return are generally able to begin making sense of the life they formerly lived there.

Salvatore returns to the town for Alfredo's funeral. He has not been there in many years, and he begins to see the town with new eyes. As he retraces his steps through his memories of his life, Salvatore is able to begin understanding all the things that happened when he was younger. He finds understanding, redemption, and forgiveness during his journey back to his past.

Style and Cinematography

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso pays tribute to the great films of the past. Director Giuseppe Tornatore pays tribute to the role that theaters played when films first became popular. He acknowledges that the theater was the central hub of a town, the town's heartbeat, at this time. Toto grows up in this world where the heartbeat of his whole life is the theater, and he learns to love film passionately.

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso is filmed in a way that makes it seem warm and friendly. Even though those who do not know Italian have to read subtitles, viewers still love the film. The setting of this film is Italy, and since it is shot there, the picture has a warm, inviting feeling caused by location and authenticity. The actors in the film give memorable performances, creating characters who are just as relevant today as they were when the film was first released.

There are actually two versions of the film. One is the original, shorter version that was released to theaters. Years later, director Giuseppe Tornatore released the Director's Cut of the film, which was over three hours long. The director's cut gives the story behind Salvatore and Elena's loss of communication and tells the story of their reunion as adults. The shorter version simply tells of their love and its loss but nothing more. Most viewers prefer the longer version because it answers the questions that they had been pondering since the film's release.

Motifs

Lost Love

Lost love is a common tool used to tell a story, and it does the trick in *Cinema Paradiso*. Tornatore presents the story around this theme and uses it to present the other themes of the story. Salvatore and Elena have a great and passionate romance just as one might see in the movies; however, their romance comes to a quick end when her parents whisk her away. For years, the two pine for each other and wait for their love to be rekindled. Although Salvatore never stops hoping, Elena eventually marries another and begins a family.

Because of their lost love, Salvatore leaves the town and does not return for almost thirty years. Alfredo tells him to leave and go out into the world to make his own life. Alfredo deceived them both so that Salvatore could be the great maker of movies that he always dreamed he would be. Their lost love becomes a never-ending point of pain for Salvatore, but he also makes great movies because of the pain.

Lost love is a point that the whole story clings upon. Had Salvatore and Elena stayed together, Salvatore would probably never have made films and become famous. Nor would Elena and Salvatore have had one final, magical night that rekindled their love when they were older.

Cycles of Life

In the three-hour span of *Cinema Paradiso*, the viewer lives a whole lifetime with Salvatore and his family and friends. We watch Salvatore grow from boyhood into a strong, spirited young man into a middle-aged man whose life still lacks love. We also see Elena change and grow as well as Maria, Salvatore's mother.

The changing lives of these characters demonstrate this theme. As their lives change, we see what challenges and heartbreaks each character faces over the years. For example, as a young boy Salvatore's greatest hope is to become a maker of movies and his greatest disappointment is when his mother refuses to let him go to the theater for a time. Later, however, he loses his one great love and spends years trying to replace her with no result. On the other hand, Maria is a troubled young woman after her husband's death, but grows into a serene woman in her later years.

Through each cycle, we see a different attitude from each character. We learn that time really does help people gain perspective and that love, especially a great love, never ends.



Film Through the Years

One technique Tornatore uses to tell the story is to use the films through the years as a backdrop. In almost every scene in *Cinema Paradiso*, we either see a film or a movie poster. These backdrops help to mark the year and keep the viewer up-to-date on what era of film and Salvatore's life we are seeing. When Salvatore is a child, all the films are silent, but as he grows older the films become talkies, and they become more graphic.

Tornatore uses these films not only as a tool for marking time in Salvatore's life, but also as an homage to all the great films of the 50 years before the release of *Cinema Paradiso*. Tornatore grants the films shown in his film a special privilege and places them on the pedestal of great films.

These films also serve to enhance the story. In scenes where romance is a major part of Salvatore's life, romantic movies play in the background. When he is terribly sad, sad movies play in the background. The films reflect his feelings and emotions throughout his life. In the last scene, he is sad that his renewed relationship with Elena has ended, but he sees the romantic clips from the old movies and appreciates his life and the love they experienced.



Symbols

Cinema Paradiso

The Cinema Paradiso is the center of the town when Salvatore is a child. Nothing in town is more important than the theater. People go there to visit and enjoy each other's company. By the end of the film, the status of the theater has greatly changed, and it is condemned to destruction after being closed for years.

The theater represents the heart of the town and the old way of life. As a child, Toto loved both the movies and the people that he could see at the theater. In the evenings, the entire town would gather to watch films. The heart and soul of the town was in that theater. However, when Salvatore returns, he finds that the theater is now in the middle of a busy, crowded square. No longer a central, important part of the town, the theater has lost all its beauty and allure. The VCR has put the theater out of service, and the building is finally to be torn down.

When the theater is torn down, it is almost as if the life of the town is being put to rest. All the people from the old times have grown old or passed away, and the town's heart is slowing down. When the Cinema Paradiso is torn down to make way for a parking lot, the old ways of life are put to an end. However, as Salvatore watches the old film clips, we realize that even though the theater is gone, the memories and the films will always remain.

The Fire

In the beginning of the film, we see that Alfredo has given Toto some old film, first warning him that the film can catch fire easily. However, Toto is young and foolish, and he does not believe Alfredo. One day after Alfredo and Toto go on a bicycle ride, they return to find that while they were gone, the house caught on fire because Toto left the film too close to the lamp. Maria begs Alfredo to keep Toto away from the cinema forever.

The fire symbolizes both Toto's passion for film and the dangers for him in film. Toto loves film more than anything else in his life, and he would be happy to skip school and just stay in the film booth all day. However, Toto's passion for film is limited; he sees only the possibilities of working in the film booth in his small town. Alfredo, on the other hand, realizes the endless possibilities available to Toto thanks to his love for film. There are also dangers involved with these possibilities. For instance, Salvatore becomes very successful by creating films, but he also loses the love of his life because of Alfredo's lies.

Bells

Throughout *Cinema Paradiso*, we hear many bells. On the first viewing the bells are easily overlooked, almost unnoticeable. However, the more times one watches the film, the more one realizes that the bells often sound at important moments in the film. In some ways, they even precede the important events as if to let the viewer know that something important is about to happen.

When the story of Toto begins, we hear a bell ring that turns out to be a small bell in the church that is used for the priest's prayers. Toto wakes up, rings the bell correctly, and runs out to go to the Cinema Paradiso. He can scarcely wait to get out of the church to get to the theater, and we see that movies are already the great love of his life.

Additionally, before Salvatore meets Elena for the first time, the bells at the school are ringing. As films were his love as a child, Elena is his love in his teenage years. It is only fitting that bells should also precede her entrance into Salvatore's life.

If doorbells and phones ringing were also included into the bell category, each time these sound a new person or new part of a character's life appears. When Salvatore's phone rings in the beginning and his mother calls, he begins a journey back into the memories of his past. When he rings the doorbell at Elena's and no one answers, the days of his loneliness begin. Bells are important in Salvatore's life, always symbolizing change.



Essay Questions

Who is Toto?

Why is Toto's mother raising her children alone?

Why does Toto spend a lot of time with Alfredo?

What is the relationship between Salvatore and Elena?

What terrible accident happens to Alfredo?

How do Salvatore and Elena lose touch?

What brings Salvatore back to his old town?

What does Alfredo leave for Salvatore and what does it symbolize?

Who does Salvatore visit when he returns to his old town?

How do the film and the events resolve themselves?

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I think this section is incomplete? Analysis section for Alfredo is missing