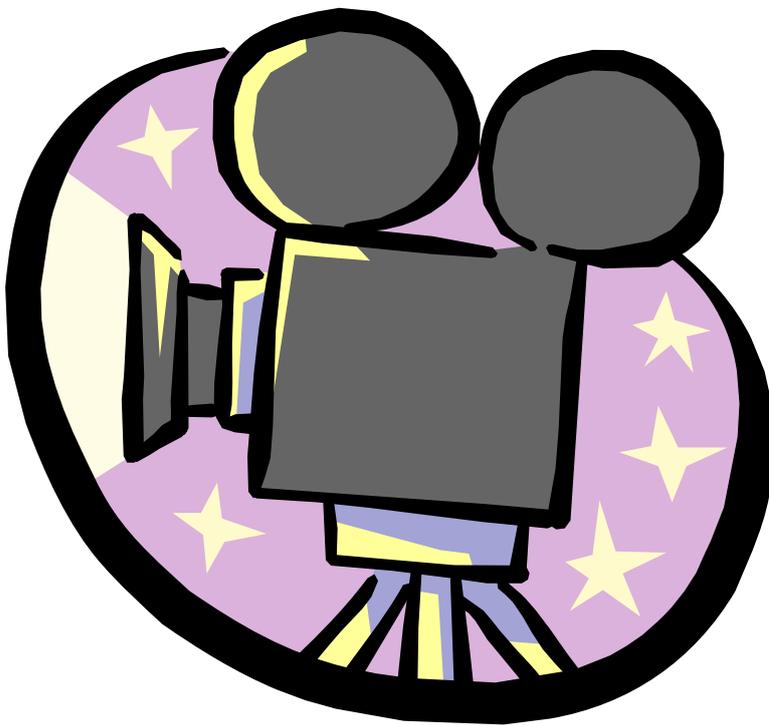


FILM: IL POSTINO – THE POSTMAN

Directed

by Michael Radford

Study Notes; A Hynes



Notes/Analysis

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Il Postino is set in a Mediterranean island in the early 1950s. It is a fishing village. The climate is hot, water is scarce and life is hard. The main employment comes from the sea.

Mario Ruoppolo fishes with his father. He finds work on boats and the sea is not to his liking. His father tells him he should try something else. Mario gets a job as a postman. It is a poor job that survives mainly on tips. There is only one person in the area Mario has to deliver mail to (most of the people are illiterate). That person is newly arrived, the poet Pablo Neruda. He is an **exile** (someone who has to flee his country because of oppression, or is wanted by the government, in this case the military have taken over in Chile). Neruda has come to Italy and settles in Mario's village. They slowly become friends.

Neruda is a celebrated world class poet. He is also a communist and this is why he has to flee Chile. The military authorities do not like his politics. Neruda is the 'poet of love' (Amor); the poet of the people (communist).

Mario decides that if communists love the people then surely Neruda will sign his book. That way Mario can go to Naples and try to impress the girls with his signed book from the great poet Pablo Neruda.

Mario tries to learn more about the Neruda. He looks up the map of Chile and identifies where Neruda comes from. He reads Neruda's poetry, especially the love poems, and learns more about the kind of writer and person the poet is.

Doing this allows Mario to talk to the great poet. When he comes to deliver the mail Mario talks about poetry. The film shows both men discuss what makes a poem.

Neruda advises that the most important elements to making a poem are simile and metaphor.

‘When you say the sky weeps what do you mean?’ Neruda asks.

‘That it’s raining,’ says Mario.

Exactly.

Later on the beach there is more talk on the making of poetry. Mario says after Neruda recites one of his poems.

Mario comments afterwards: ‘I felt like I was in a boat being tossed around by the sea’.

This is the experience of feeling that the poem gives to Mario.

Poetry expresses feelings and experiences, Neruda tells Mario... ‘if we’re open enough to allow it’.

Therefore if we read, listen or recite a poem we should be receptive to it, that is be able to ‘feel’ as the poet feels, to experience life as the poet experiences it, to learn and grow with the poem.

To become a poet, Neruda advises Mario, is to walk slowly and to ‘take a good look around you’.

Friendship is a major theme in this film. Love is another.

Friendship grows between Neruda and Mario. They come to respect each other – one is the great world poet who is nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature, the other is the ordinary working man who brings the mail and help the exile to settle in.

Pablo Neruda is a communist. Mario too is a communist and he stands up to the local politician who promises much (especially the major water works) but he also patronises the locals (as the scene buying the fish, much to the anger of the fisherman when Mario intervenes on purchase discount).

Neruda tells Mario why he is concerned about the oppressed of the world. He says that when he became a senator he visited the Pampas and the areas of the people who voted for him. He saw hardship, poor conditions for miners, an area that doesn't see rain for fifty years. He explains that 'to write the poetry of the oppressed' he had to have it published secretly in Chile.

It is a gentle, meaningful film told with **pathos** (understanding) and humour.

Mario falls in love with Beatrice Russo. He wants Neruda's advice. Neruda tells Mario about the poet Dante falling in love with a Beatrice.

Mario asks Neruda to write a poem to Beatrice. But the poet cannot do that. It's not 'his' love or inspiration. Mario has to write his own poems.

There is much humour in the scene when Neruda goes with Mario to the Inn. This is where Beatrice works. Neruda signs his autograph to a gift of writing paper he has given to Mario. He does this in front of Beatrice, much to the bemusement of Mario and to the surprise and new-born respect Beatrice acquires for Mario.

Another humorous scene is the visit of Beatrice's aunt to Neruda's house. In this scene we see the conflict between what we imagine (poetry) and what we do. Beatrice's aunt explains to Neruda that Mario's poem to her niece is disgusting. It

proves to her that Mario has bad intentions on the girl. Neruda is amused, since it is his love poem that she has him recite.

This is in stark contrast to the visit of Beatrice's aunt to the priest, in which his learning of the contents of 'Mario's' poem almost results in his refusal to marry Mario and Beatrice.

But in the end Pablo Neruda becomes a witness at the wedding of his new friends. The bond of both friendship and romantic love is sealed.

It is at the wedding that Neruda learns that his arrest warrant back home has been revoked. This will allow the poet and Matilda to return to their own country. It is an emotional moment, made after he has recited a poem to the bride and groom.

It is also a turning point in the film. Things move rapidly from here. Neruda is to leave. There is an emotional parting scene. Mario will miss Neruda. He says he will come to Chile with his family. Neruda tells Mario he will keep in contact.

There is a short lived prosperity in the village when the water works begin. Workers are fed at the Inn. Mario works in the kitchen.

Over the following year Mario reads the reports from newspapers of Pablo Neruda's movements. When the great poet visits Russia to give a prize and support the Russian people, Mario thinks maybe he'll come to Italy. But he doesn't.

When finally Neruda does visit Italy, he gives an interview and praises Italy for allowing him spend time there in 'solitude and happiness'. But he fails to mention Mario or Beatrice or the people he got to know in the village.

Mario defends Neruda. He is a great and busy man who doesn't have time to visit nor to be thinking of an ordinary man like him.

But Mario feels abandoned. Even the local politician (Di Cosaimus) can not keep his promises and the water works is stopped half way. It seems that everyone makes false promises in order to gain confidence with people. Perhaps it is further evidence for Mario that deep down Neruda has also made false promises. Still, Mario speaks up at the Inn to the politician. He is labelled simply hot headed.

A year later, 1953, a letter arrives from Santiago. It is signed by 'the secretary of Pablo Neruda', and requests the return of listed articles from the house Neruda lived in while in Italy.

When Beatrice and her aunt say Neruda has forgotten them, Mario defends the poet's decision not to correspond. He is a busy man, a great poet with much work to do. 'I'm the one who bothered him... and you say I was useful... I just delivered the mail... he knew I was not a poet but he tolerated me...'

Beatrice says Mario is a good poet, and she says she won't name her son 'Pabilito'. She loves Mario and love is greater than any friendship.

But Mario comes around. He listens to the tape recording he made with Neruda. Mario was asked how he would describe his village to Neruda's comrades and fellow citizens. Mario replies: Beatrice Russo.

With the help of his friend, Mario records the things that surround him. They record small waves and big waves, the wind in the cliffs, sad fishing nets in the water, the church bell with priest, a starry night, 'Pabilito's' heartbeat.

This is Mario's life. It is the life of the people on the island. It is beautiful and peaceful, it is where they work, walk, swim, marry, and have children, pray and celebrate. These are the things that make life, which also creates poetry, as Neruda had advised Mario.

The re-appearance of Pablo Neruda at the Inn is a **poignant** moment (revealing/ironic/full of meaning to the situation). He has come to visit Mario and his family. He has come to renew his friendship. He finds a young boy playing on the floor. His name is Pabilito.

Neruda discovers from Beatrice that Mario is dead. He died at a protest rally. He was about to read one of his poems on stage but got caught up in a police baton charge and there was a subsequent panic and riot. He died in the cause of justice.

This episode brings one of the themes to its inevitable conclusion: what Neruda writes and advocates, Mario dies for. Neruda, the love poet and communist, believes in justice for the oppressed, for workers, for freedom of expression. Mario dies in the belief that his poetry will inspire others to unite and bring better times to the world.

Mario finally expresses himself in 'the song for Pablo Neruda', which we watch as Neruda listens near the end of the film.

It is a sad ending but the friendship between these two men goes beyond death. Mario has a son, whom he has named after the great poet. His own poetry will survive and give joy to his family and to Neruda. There is a lesson here: never take people or what we see and have around us for granted.

Mario grew wise from his 'self-examination', from the reading of poetry, and through his love of Beatrice. And though he died before the birth of his son, his name and what he stood for will live on. He has 'found' himself a place and a name. It is his

place of birth, his wife and son, his friendships and comradeship, the cliffs and stars and waves and the church bells.

IL POSTINO has many similarities with DANCING AT LUGNASA.

Both are set in rural environments. Life is hard. Fishing and farming are the main employments. Both are set in the 1950s. The Catholic church has a big influence on the lives of the people, both socially and morally.

The Lundy sisters celebrate their life, even though it is hard. The village of Ballybeg celebrates Lugnasa (bringing in of the harvest). The island village of the film celebrates its culture also, though it is more a Catholic celebration than the more Celtic one we see in the drama. But both communities respect and celebrate the Mass.

The priest has a lot of control in the film, as he has in Dancing At Lugnasa. He is not an unreasonable man though, and in the drama we see the church bring its message across continents.