

I Bambini ci Guardano

("The Children are Watching Us"; aka: "The Little Martyr")

Italy : 1942 : dir. Vittorio De Sica : Scalera / Invicta

: 85 min

prod: Franco Magli : scr: Cesare Giulio Viola, Margherita Maglione & Cesare Zavattini :

dir.ph.: Giuseppe Caracciolo

Luciano de Ambrosis

Emilio Cigoli; Isa Pola; Adriano Rimoldi; Giovanna Cigoli; Ione Frigerio; Maria Gardena; Dina Perbellini; Nicoletta Parodi; Tecla Scarano; Ernesto Calindri; Olinto Cristina; Achille Majeroni; Giovanna Ralli; Marcello Mastroianni

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2108b	4.5	6	4	1,577	-	-	-	-	-	No	<i>unseen</i>



Source: NFT Bulletin Apr/Jun 67

*De Sica's film brings the dimensions of Victorian melodrama to the themes of infidelity, desertion and family break-up, making it a Grand Guignol counterpart to other hand-wringing 1940s films on divorce and its impact on young children. History is written by the winners, they say, and it's certainly the case that today's loudest advocates of the Child Abuse lobby prefer that we forget – in the 40s and 50s, the most flagrant form of "child abuse" was called **divorce**.*

Source for still : Great Italian Films



Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"A four-year old child catches his mother with a lover and is sent to relatives in the country. When back home, he runs away on seeing the lover again, through which his father notices what's going on and commits suicide. The first film which announced De Sica's neo-realist period (the screenplay is by Cesare Zavattini) is not just a convincing melodrama, but also contains an unusual critique of those bulwarks of fascism: the family and the masculine sense of honour. A walk-on part by Marcello Mastroianni. *** "

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"The first of De Sica's great films concerns the effect on a four-year old boy of the separation of his parents. It is a simple piece, and unforgettable. *** "

Great Italian Films review:

"The best known of Vittorio De Sica's early, serious films as a director is this little gem, based on a novel that interested De Sica, Cesare Giulio Viola's "Prico". **"THE CHILDREN ARE WATCHING US"**, which depicts the disintegration of a marriage as painfully witnessed by the couple's little boy, marked De Sica's first association with Cesare Zavattini, a

screenwriter who would prove to be the most important and longest enduring of his collaborators. Filmed in 1942, **"THE CHILDREN ARE WATCHING US"** seems to belong to the thirties not only in its costuming but also in the attitudes of its characters.

Prico is the solemn-faced little son of a seemingly loveless union between a self-contained, middle-class businessman named Andrea (Emilio Cigoli) and his pretty wife Ines (Isa Pola), who has been carrying on in secret with a handsome young man (Adriano Rimoldi) she meets in the park. On one such outing, she takes Prico to watch an outdoor puppet show while she enjoys a lovers' rendezvous. Prico notes their intense, quiet conversation and refuses to greet his mother's "friend" at her bidding. The man persuades Ines to leave her family and come away with him, and after tucking the boy in for the night, she takes advantage of her husband's absence at a meeting and disappears.

Unable to cope with sole responsibility for a child, Andrea tries unsuccessfully to foist Prico on his sister-in-law and the boy's grandmother. When it is decided that Prico will remain with his father and their housekeeper Agnese (Giovanna Cigoli), Ines suddenly reappears, asking Andrea to take her back. Although he does so, it is only because of the boy. The marriage becomes like a business transaction, improving only slightly when the family takes a

seaside holiday. When Andrea must return home on business, he leaves Ines and Prico to enjoy themselves, ignorant of the fact that his

wife's lover, with whom she had broken off, has traced her



The face of Luciano De Ambrosis, in these stills at any rate, conveys nothing of the "sweet innocence of childhood" – as some adults prefer to think of it. On the contrary it seems a strikingly mature face for a four-year old, and the film appears to convey quite well the instinctive radar of small children – who can intuit deeper meanings in the words and body language of adults, even when they haven't the experience to recognise what those meanings import. Did Prico see suicide in his father's eyes at their final meeting? Children are not so "innocent" as adults suppose.

Source: Great Italian Films

whereabouts. Ines proves too weak to resist when her friend insists he cannot live without her. Little Prico sees them together again and attempts to follow his father home.

Andrea now decides to place Prico in a boarding school, where their final meeting leaves the boy in tears as his father bids him *addio*; the humiliated Andrea is intent only on suicide. After his funeral, Ines and Agnese visit the school to inform Prico of his father's death and to console him. But the boy cannot feel anything for his mother; instead, he runs to the motherly Agnese. Ines stands looking on with a mixture of coolness and parental guilt. As the headmaster urges the boy to embrace his mother, Prico goes to her. But neither can reach out to the other, and the child retreats to the safer shelter of the school. The sweet innocence of childhood [sic] has been brought to a wrenching and premature end.

Despite Renzo Rossellini's too syrupy background music, this is quite a realistic portrait of dysfunctional family life, bourgeois-Italian style. And at the centre of its success is the wonderful performance De Sica elicits from four-and-a-half year old Luciano De Ambrosis, whose sensitive reactions to the varying antagonistic moods of his unhappy parents seem uncannily natural for one so small."

Excerpt from **World Cinema – a Short History**:

"...Inevitably Zavattini's total ideal of the neo-realist cinema had to be compromised, not least in many of the films which he wrote himself and which always betrayed an inescapable fondness for sentimental and dramatic conventions. Nevertheless this conscious return to reality was to have a deep and far-

reaching effect upon the post-war cinema. Zavattini formed a fruitful collaboration with the former *jeune premier* Vittorio de Sica (born 1907), beginning with "I BAMBINI CI GUARDANO" (1943) which used professional star actors, but dealt with problems of family life with an honesty and frankness which provoked strong disapproval from the fascist regime. In succeeding films they were able to move closer to Zavattini's stated ideals, improvising action on location..."

NFT bulletin – April/June 1967 – review:

"I BAMBINI CI GUARDANO" is De Sica's fifth film, and the first to treat a serious subject. It is the story of the effect on a four-year old boy of his mother's adultery and his father's subsequent suicide. De Sica does not, however, assign any blame: the mother, technically the guilty party, is given least attention and the film concentrates almost exclusively on the child's reactions. Directed with minutely loving care, the child's responses are examined with almost clinical precision." - Sight & Sound

CVMC video retail/rental website review:

"A woman considering running off with her lover abandons her husband and son, Prico (Luciano De Ambrosis), approximately four years of age, for three days, then returns for the boy's sake. Her boyfriend will not take "No" for an answer, however, "stalks" his mistress and tries to make her give in. Prico is witness to most of this, fears his mother will once more leave him, finds himself confused and having nowhere to turn as the adults around him prove consumed by only their own interests. Tragedy certainly awaits, but the question is "What form will it take?" A sad little film from renowned director Vittorio De Sica; a real winner for those who don't mind getting a bit depressed. De Ambrosis does an exceptional job. Recommended!

Rated NR: adult themes [sic]

Language: Italian (with English subtitles)

Categories: Boy Films, Little to Preteen, Drama."

Cast:

Andrea (the father)Emilio Cigoli
Prico**Luciano De Ambrosis**
Ines (the mother)Isa Pola
Ines's loverAdriano Rimoldi
AgneseGiovanna Cigoli
GrandmotherIrene Frigerio
Signora UbertiMaria Gardena
Aunt BerelliDina Perbellini
GiulianaNicoletta Parodi
Signora RestaTecla Scarano
ClaudioErnesto Calindri
HeadmasterOlinto Cristina

[no listing in "Classics of the Foreign Film", "The Companion to Italian Cinema", "The Italian Cinema", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



Source: indeterminate

No further information currently available. The fact that a film of this kind, from a major international film-maker, can be ignored by virtually every film guide on the UK market, demonstrates well enough the need for an archive such as this. De Sica went on to direct "**SCIUSCIA**" ("Shoeshine", '46) and "**LADRI DI BICICLETTE**" ("Bicycle Thieves", '48), both of which won Best Foreign Film Oscars.

Another tale concerning the impact of a mother's infidelity on her son was "**BRENNENDES GEHEIMNIS**", filmed three times, most recently by Andrew Birkin, but that was straight melodrama, with none of the harsh observation of the neo-realist school, and that story is set in an ambience of privilege, whereas De Sica trained his eye on the poor.

The Moving Picture Boy gives no background on Luciano de Ambrosis, but says he was actually 7, which sounds far more plausible. He made a half dozen other films 1944-47, among them "**I FIGLI DELLA LAGUNA**" (45) and the inevitable "**CUORE**" (47).

See subject index under [BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL](#), **THE CHILD AS PASSIVE OBSERVER** and [DIRECTORS](#), but see also **DIVORCE / CUSTODY DISPUTES**, because this so obviously touches on the generalised anxiety in Western culture during the mid-twentieth century about the imminent collapse of the nuclear family.