

Padre Padrone

("Father Master")

Italy TV : 1977 : dir. Paolo Taviani & Vittorio Taviani : RTI : 114 min

prod: Tonino Paoletti : scr: Paolo Taviani & Vittorio Taviani : dir.ph.: Mario Masini

[Fabrizio Forte](#)

Saverio Marconi; Omero Antonutti; Marcella Michelangeli; Nanni Moretti; Marino Cenna; Stanko Molnar; Pierluigi Alvau; Giuseppino Angioni; Fabio Angioni; Giuseppe Brandino; Mario Cheri; Giuseppe Chessa Perle; Domenico Deriu; Pier Paolo Fauli; Mario Fulghesu; Antonio Garrucciu; Pietro Giordo

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ≠ Z ☠	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3077a	3½	11	1	-	- - - - -	No	unseen



A son is a mule, and must expect to earn his keep, in Sardinia

Source: Film Review 1978-79

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Life story of Sardinian shepherd's son Gavino Ledda, who is taken from school prematurely to tend the sheep and remains illiterate until his military service. After that his language studies get him as far as university level, which amounts to a rebellion against traditional paternal authority. A remarkable case history was given an equally exceptional film treatment whereby, in sound and image, the stultifying solitude of the little shepherd is rendered tangible, and even the brief moments when it is broken by just a small sound carry a liberating charge. **** "

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Sad, illiterate Sardinian boy, brutalised by his peasant father, still grows up to master Greek

and Latin and graduate college. Even sadder still, uninvolved and curiously forgettable. Based on an autobiographical book by Gavino Ledda. ** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"The author recounts how he grew up with a violent and tyrannical father. A vivid chunk of autobiography with food for thought on several levels, and a clever piece of film-making to boot. ** "

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"A boy (Saverio Marconi) is pulled out of school by his tyrannical father (Omero Antonutti), beaten and sent to tend sheep in the mountains - but he rebels.

Grim, frightening view of rural life and patriarchal oppression. It's based on a true story, and looks like it – although the Taviani brothers sometimes descend into melodrama and over-emphatic use of Egisto Macchi's music, to tell us what we should be feeling. Though made in 16mm for Italian television, it found an appreciative audience in the cinema and won the Palme d'Or and International Critics' Prize at Cannes. 6/10 "

"It is filled with stunning images, with surprising and even shocking mixes of visual beauty and savage sounds... What bothered me was not the obscenity but its potential for unwanted laughs" - Clancy Sigal, **Spectator**

"Completely convincing... marred only by occasional lapses from the verissimo style."
- Patrick Gibbs, **Daily Telegraph**

"A good picture that is racked by its ambition to be a great one."
- Stanley Kauffmann

"The film entraps us in a sumptuous world of its own." - Claude-Marie Tremois, **Télérama**

"What will overwhelm British filmgoers.. is the sweep of the imagination displayed... Not since the early days of the Soviet cinema have a pair of revolutionary film-makers come so close to embodying on the screen the ideals of heroic humanism."

- Alan Brien, **Sunday Times**

"It manages to be assertive without being dogmatic, and is a resilient and optimistic challenge to out-worn, out-dated ideas. Should be, must be, seen."

- Virginia Dignam, **Morning Star**

"This bleak, desperate account... is almost unbearable. After thirty minutes I wanted to leave. Ten minutes later I couldn't."

- Margaret Hinxman, **Daily Mail**

"This splendid film, abounding in originality and energy and surprise and human optimism"

- David Robinson, **The Times**

"The Taviani Brothers have gone back to the soil broken by Rossellini and De Sica and refertilised it in fresh, surprising ways. Their film, a work of desolate poetry and harsh physical power, is a gritty tribute to the spirit of survival."

- David Ansen

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Gavino Ledda – who himself appears at the beginning and end of this affecting film – was a small peasant boy who, in the late 1940s, wanted an education, something that was understood by neither his father nor the primitive Sardinian society in which they lived. Taken out of school, he spends most of his adolescence up in the mountains looking after his father's sheep. Later, it suits his father to have the boy join the army and learn a trade; Gavino decides that he wants to go on to university. He returns home, when father once more makes him a shepherd, but Gavino determines to return to the mainland. At this point the film moves towards greatness; throughout, fortunately, the stylistic tricks of its writer-directors are less in evidence than usual.
*** "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Adapted from one of Italy's all-time best-sellers, it's about the struggle of an ignorant shepherd boy [*sic*] to escape his domineering peasant father who hates reading and civilisation. This slow-paced epic follows the author from childhood to his graduation from college and personal reconciliation with his difficult father. A straightforward, moving film.
***½ "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"A Sardinian shepherd manages to free himself from his family, educate himself, then return home to fight an overdue battle with the figure who oppressed him, his father. "PADRE PADRONE" is a terrific subject, a true story that illuminates a universal problem: how can one man make a positive stand against his own patriarchal society? The boy's acquisition of language is a key factor, and the film's triumph is that it actualises this in an extraordinarily emotive way: after a consciously theatrical introduction, it presents fragments of experience (landscape, sounds, routines) which cohere into a vision of nature and human society as the boy matures."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Although slow-moving, this low-budget film is a riveting account of a young Sardinian's traumatising relationship with his overbearing father in a patriarchal society. The son bears the brutality, but eventually breaks the emotional bonds. This quietly powerful film depends on the actors for its punch. In Sardinian (Italian dialect) with English subtitles. ***½ "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"This is the simple story of a boy's growth into manhood under the despotism of his father. At age six, Gavino (played as a child by Fabrizio Forte) is pulled out of school and taken by his father (Omero Antonutti) into the mountains to become a shepherd. His father tries to control his son's life in every respect, with a comportment bordering on the sadistic. As he grows to manhood, Gavino (played as a young man by Saverio Marconi) begins to discover things for himself and rebel against his father's authority, eventually escaping from the patriarch's rule but encountering his changed father one last time in the denouement.

Originally filmed by the Taviani brothers for Italian television, **"PADRE PADRONE"** is a fine example of a strong ensemble telling a story naturally, without intrusion by the directors. Using both professional actors and untrained locals from the Sardinian countryside, this story of the virtual imprisonment of young Sardinians by the sheep and pastures of their land unfolds simply and yet with great power. The winner of the grand prize at the Cannes Film Festival of 1977, the tale is based in truth: the real-life Gavino underwent similar experiences before escaping at age 20, going on to become a linguistics professor, and writing a book about his experiences. ***½ "

Film Review 1978-79 review:

"One of the most critically acclaimed Italian films of the year, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's **"FATHER MASTER" / "PADRE PADRONE"** (Artificial Eye) was a grim story (apparently true and made originally as a two-part Italian television feature) about primitive family traditions in Sardinia - the brutal snatching by father Omero Antonutti of his small son (Saverio Marconi) from school to a rigidly

enforced isolation looking after the family's sheep high in the rugged mountains."

"..the most innovatory work [from Italy] was undoubtedly **"PADRE PADRONE"**, by the brothers Taviani, whose earlier films had been looked on as avant-garde and hard to release. Beside this story of a Sicilian shepherd, even Fellini's **"CASANOVA"**, Rosi's **"ILLUSTRIOUS CORPSES"** and the meteoric fame of Lina Wertmüller appeared no more than predictable."

"Grim but apparently true story - originally made as a two-part Italian TV feature - about primitive family life traditions in Sardinia, where the small son is snatched from school by his father to be brutalised into accepting the isolated life of a shepherd boy in the hills. Through the chance purchase of an accordion he finds music and then, in his late twenties, escapes to become educated and a writer. A rough-around-the-edges film, but powerful and convincing: the Grand Prix winner at the 1977 Cannes Film Festival."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Forte:

"A shepherd's life, however peaceful in theory, isn't always a happy one, particularly if you work, as in **"PADRE PADRONE"**, for a violent and neurotic father in the mountains of Sardinia. Gavino Ledda's only slightly fictionalised autobiography gave the Taviani brothers the canvas for a beautiful but disturbing film whose childhood scenes are among its most unforgettable.

The little Gavino is brusquely removed from school by his father and assigned to a life of almost total isolation. When he tries to run away, he is caught and beaten. When he meets and talks to another shepherd boy, he is beaten. The only release for the boys is sex with chickens or a resigned donkey. After ten years of lonely boredom, Gavino becomes almost an animal himself, even losing the power of speech. But eventually he escapes, wins himself an education, and becomes a writer.

The crop-headed Fabrizio Forte conveys marvellously the gradual chilling of natural warmth and the loss of hope, in surroundings which at first are frightening and then merely miserable. To those not condemned to work there, of course. They look idyllic."

[no listing in "Rating the Movies (1990)",
"The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on

Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide
1995" or "Variety Movie Guide 1993"]

An embarrassing oversight from any book which purports to be a serious film guide. The film still has relevance to a post-industrial world, both in stressing the liberating potential of a conventional education, and in its parallels to the use of child labour in third world countries today. Clearly the author would side with the lobby which characterises all child labour as a form of exploitation, regardless of its social context, but the fact that Ledda's father was such an unreconstructed thug only serves to cloud the question.

Children are not brought into the world as a philanthropic bequest to the nation, and the economic realities of life in what we now call "developing countries", weighed against the level of education attainable in remote impoverished villages, make it by no means self-evident that children's best interests – and those of their families – are well served by rudimentary schooling. It is also cruel, in other words, to raise false hopes in children that they will escape the social limitations of their parents. The egalitarian aims of compulsory universal schooling are not always met by the standards of education delivered to the poor.

Other films which have torn away the rose-tinted view of pastoral life and childhood on the farm include "**PELLE EROBREREN**" ("Pelle the Conqueror") and "**BROTHER TO THE OX**" (also based on an autobiographical account of a boy sold into bonded farm labour), while the desperate hunger of a poor family to give their son a schooling was the lynchpin of the tragedy in "**L'ALBERO DEGLI ZOCCOLI**" ("Tree of the Wooden Clogs") made in Italy the following year.

See subject index under **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TITLES, CRUELTY / NEGLECT / MALTREATMENT, FARMS & FARMING**, [OSCAR WINNERS / AWARD WINNERS](#) and (albeit alarmingly) **SEX & SEXUALITY**.