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Piccoli Fuochi

("Little Flames")

Italy : 1985 : dir. Peter del Monte : : 95 min

prod: Claudio Argento : scr: Peter del Monte & Giovanni Pascuto : dir.ph.: Tonino Nardi

Dino Jaksic

Valeria Golino; Carlotta Wittig; Mario Garriba; Ulisse Minervini

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Source: 30th London Film Festival programme

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"This film concerns a boy of six who loves a beautiful girl of seventeen. The boy's love is strong enough for him to have someone murdered for her. The public can't blame him: in his presence the girl is mostly naked, and acts very provocatively. Above all she is very lovely. The camerawork is below par, but the two young leads plays their parts in a convincing manner. *1/2"

30th London Film Festival – 1986 – programme review:

"A 5-year-old boy (played amazingly well by Dino Jaksic), left too much to his fantasies by his working parents, finds consolation with three "imaginary" friends, a clownish little

king, a dragon and an alien robot who plot his fantasy world for him. His more realistic consolation comes from the 18-year-old babysitter (new Italian actress Valeria Golino), whom he enjoys seeing naked in the bathroom, though he soon becomes jealous of her biker boy friend. The boy's obsession with fire leads him, pushed on by his Spielbergian pals, to commit an act of childhood cruelty of tragic proportions. As Italian novelist Moravia has commented, "Del Monte shows a realistic understanding of the world of childhood". Elegantly photographed and intensely acted, this is an offbeat film for Italian cinema in which the eroticism is not gratuitous, while realism and fantasy are subtly interlaced."

- John Francis Lane.

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

This film was broadcast in Holland as part of VPRO television's international *children's film* season. Viewed in that context it is something extraordinary, whereas it would be less intriguing if meant for an adult audience. This archive naturally opposes any bowdlerising of television for the under 12's, yet one would have to admit it does seem rather strong meat, both in its themes of jealousy and possessiveness, and in the implications of its climax.

What makes "**PICCOLI FUOCHI**" recognisably a children's film is the whimsy-wamsy subplot about the little boy sending out four imaginary companions – a dragon, a wizard, etc – to scour the world and bring him back "the meaning of love". They return from their quests, of course, with ambivalent answers, but meanwhile the boy has been exploring notions of his own.

He conceives a passionate and all-consuming devotion toward a teenage girl whom he first catches sight of in a park, only to discover later that same day she's to be his new nanny, or the family's au pair. On day one she allows him to stay with her and paint her toenails when she takes a shower. The intimacy between them is both physical and sensual.

Later, to his dismay and horror, he learns she already has a boyfriend older than herself, and possessiveness escalates into jealousy. He sends his dragon out to remove this competition, which is accomplished by setting fire to the lover while asleep in his bed. Arson-murders are not generally the stuff of children's films, although it's handled lightly enough, but nor is the possessive lust of a six-year old for a girl three times his age.

The word lust is not inappropriate, even given the extreme youth of the child, because Valeria Golino's role is almost explicitly that of a sex object. Her smouldering sensuality is the hook which attracts the boy's notice to her in the park, and there is nothing "maternal" about her behaviour with him. The boy experiences emotions for her that convention calls "adult" ones, and only his confusion, not his age, make the relationship something less than sexual.

The film ends with him abandoning his quest for the meaning of love, and being carried off in a spaceship by his dejected fantasy companions. An odd film, to say the least of it, and not especially well done. If intended as a parable for children about love and possession, its conclusions are far from clear. The director could be accused of projecting his own impulses toward glamorous seventeen-year old girls onto a mystified little boy, yet there is consequently a sensual charge to the film which is quite unexpected – some would say inappropriate of course – and any tacit recognition that children so young may have an active sexuality of their own has to be seen as a healthy step away from the chintzy nursery, so ably typified by the stock fantasy characters the film uses as the boy's emissaries. Not recommended exactly, but certainly intriguing.

Nothing else is known of Dino Jaksic. He's not listed in *The Moving Picture Boy*.

See subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL, FANTASY** and [SEX & SEXUALITY](#).

