

## The Awakening of Pity in Life Before Himself

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**The chronicle:** In 1975, the Lithuanian-born French writer Roman Gary published, under the pseudonym Emile Ajar, the novel "Life before him". Two years later, directed by the Israeli Moshé Mizrahi and starring Simone Signoret, the novel became a film, won three César Awards, a David di Donatello and the Oscar for best foreign film. In 2020, Edoardo Ponti, in his second feature film after "Cuori estranei" (2002), realizes an Italian remake convincing Sofia Loren to return to the set after 10 years of hiding (the mother is always the mother), keeping some characteristics, moving the action from Paris to Bari and modifying the atmosphere.

**The question:** The classic neto (and useless) that is repeated and every time a romanzo is adapted into film: meglio the novel or the film?

The races, as is well known, have value when the contenders have roughly the same chances of winning and when the jury is impartial. But here we are faced with two films that have to deal with the best filmic transposition that you can ever imagine: ours. Whoever reads, even unintentionally, becomes a screenwriter, costume designer, set designer, director and producer of himself. And since "every scarafone is beautiful to mamma soie", the jury is also biased. Ergo: the race does not exist.

There is, however, the faculty to reflect, to ask questions, to comment.

**The plot:** Which one? Novel, movie 1 or movie 2? We choose the version of Ponti. Momò is a Muslim child who arrived in Europe we do not know how and who, like so many other bambini, is at the mercy of himself. He survives by carrying out muggings and robberies until he is entrusted to the care of Madame Rosa, a former prostitute and Jewish Holocaust survivor, who makes ends meet by hosting (for a fee) and taking care of abandoned children or momentarily "parked" at his home. The initial mutual distrust changes, day by day, into understanding, confidence and affection. Momò, who in the meantime has fallen into the trap of drug dealing, finds in Madame Rosa the mother she no longer has and, when she realizes that her days are numbered by illness and old age, she decides to keep her promise: make her die at home.

In a southern Italy where the last and the marginalized struggle to find their legitimate spaces, the story of Momò, a Muslim child with a painful and mysterious origin, and of his meeting with Madame Rosa, a Jew and former prostitute who survived the Holocaust, a woman silently charged with violent traumas, comes to life.

To interpret it the iconic actress, as well as mother of the director, Sophia Loren who, reconfirming her iconicity, has however descended into a narrative universe not always able to enhance its intensity and calibrate it with the other scenic components, ending at times with overshadowing them. A story of differences and similarities, Life before itself tells how different origins can correspond to equal pains and needs, in view of a common future full of promise.

The cement of belong to the same.

The debut on screens, scheduled for the first days of 2020, is blocked by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ponti's adaptation deviates from the novel.

Fortunately Sophia Loren, 10 years after her last film, has agreed to return to the scene to play this pe.

After the failed debut on the big screen, initially scheduled for 3, 4 and 5 November 2020 but blocked (along with many others, again) by the new containment measures of the Covid-19 pandemic, the first feature film by Edoardo Ponti arrives on Netflix, *Life in front of him*. Adaptation of the homonymous novel of 1975 by Romain Gary, the Italian director keeps the characters but not the atmospheres: he chooses Bari instead of Paris and deviates from the history of the writer French for eras and cultures, showing and a reality at times fairytale - with allegories in computer graphics that nevertheless clash with the aesthetic and narrative system of the film - but raw, extremely current and necessary.

Appears on

Makes a film with

Life Before You is a 1975 novel by Emile Ajar (pseudonym of Roman Gary).

Life in front of it becomes already in 1977, a film directed by Moshé Mizrahi, the interpreter of the protagonist, Madame Rosà, will be an amazing Simone Signoret who with this film will win the Oscar.

Life in front of him returns today on the screens of the Netflix platform, set in a modern-day Bari with an exceptional interpreter Sophia Loren.

La vie devant soi is a 1977 French drama film directed by Moshé Mizrahi.

The subject is based on the novel of the same name by Romain Gary (written under the pseudonym Émile Ajar), which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1978. It is especially worth as a skill essay by Simone Signoret and by the excellent performance of Mohamed Zinet.

### In 2020 an Italian remake is made that sees pro

It tells the story of Madame Rosa, a former Jewish prostitute, living in a neighborhood where blacks, Muslims and Jews live together. Having escaped the concentration camp, she decides to raise the children of her colleagues. In misery, at the end of his days, he has one of his protégés beside him.

- 1978 - Oscar Award
  - Best Foreign Film (France).
- 1978 - Golden Globe
  - Nominated for Best Foreign Language Film (France).
- 1978 - César Prize
  - Best Actress - Simone Signoret.
  - Nominated for Best Art Direction to Bernard Evein.
  - Nominated for Best Sound for Jean-Pierre Ruh.

- David di Donatello (1978)
  - Best Foreign Actress - Simone Signoret.
- Madame Rosa, a Jew who has known all the suffering of nazi deportations and concentration camps, since she felt unfit for the profession of prostitute, has dedicated herself to raise the children of her colleagues still “in business”. His apartment is poor, located on the sixth floor, in a building and in a neighborhood that know of international ghetto inhabited as they are by immigrants of all races, ages and religions. Madame Rosa’s children also constitute a human kaleidoscope to which the elderly lady generously offers the rest of her soul and her poor life. When Madame becomes seriously ill Dr. Getz - a Jew “loved by all for his Christian charity” - would like to have her hospitalized. The clientele has now flown and Madame Rosa is alone with Moses, a Jewish boy, and Momò, the eleven-year-old boy on whom the dying woman has poured all her affection. Momò, struggling with a series of problems too great for her fourteen years, stands next to the one who made him his mother and, when Death is near, hides her in the secret cellar where she has created her own personal “Jewish nest”.
- “It is the classic film that will find the hypercritical and normal viewers clearly divided. The former, in fact, will find that the novel of the same name by Emile Ajar is much more lively for the freshness and depth of the dialogues or descriptions to which the technique of images and sounds take away incisiveness; they will notice that Simone Signoret’s excellent interpretation is such as to make up for the simplicity of a script that walks in squares like the reading of an autobiographical dialogue; they will conclude that Moshé Mizrahi has acquired considerable stature only eprché carried on the valid shoulders of the interpreter Signoret and Ajar writer (among other things awarded the Concourt Prize 1975 for this his novel). The common viewer, on the other hand, will unconditionally enjoy a film that speaks to him with simplicity, which moves deeply without availing himself of a false melodrama, which constantly maintains a balanced and modest tone (Film Reports, vol.84, 1978).

La vie devant soiisa 1977 French drama film directed and written by Moshé Mizrahi, based on the novel of the same name by Romain Gary (written under the pseudonym Emil Ajar), which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1978. It is especially valid as an essay of skill by Simone Signoret.

Madame Rosa (Simone Signoret weakened by age) is an elderly Jewish lady who has known all the suffering of the Nazi deportations and concentration camps, but has survived since she felt unfit for the profession of prostitute, she dedicated herself to raise the children of her colleagues still “in business”. His apartment is poor, located on the sixth floor of a building in the Parisian Banlieues in one of the neighborhoods that know of international ghetto inhabited as they are by immigrants of all races, ages and religions.

The many children raised by her constitute a human kaleidoscope to which the elderly lady dedicates herself with affection and generosity as much as possible, since her financial condition is not the best, since the mothers do not always pay for the maintenance of the children. We see the woman, rather pingue, trudging along the stairs to reach the sixth floor. It is evident that she is heart-sick for circulatory reasons every now and then she is enchanted.

When Madame becomes seriously ill and is no longer able to get out Dr. Getz - a Jew “loved by all for his Christian charity” - would like to have her hospitalized. The children have been withdrawn and Madame Rosa is alone with Moses, a Jewish child, and Momò, the little boy on whom the woman has poured all her affection. Momò struggling with a series of problems too big for his fourteen years (dead mother and psychopathic father who claims it) is in the end the only one who remains next to the one who made him a mother and, when death is near, avoids taking her to the hospital (as promised to Madame Rosa who is terrified by the doctors who sometimes insist on keeping people alive in a vegetative state) and hides her in the cellar secret, where she had created her own personal “nest”) remaining next to her for several days after her death.

The novel of the same name by Emile Ajar is much more lively for the freshness and depth of the dialogues or descriptions to which the technique of images and sounds take away incisiveness. The color that turns to the cuttlefish makes the story even more melancholic and flat than it is in the book and the script walks more by paintings than by actions. Moshé Mizrahi has acquired considerable stature only because he carried on the valid shoulders of the Signoret capital interpreter and Ajar great writer (among other things awarded the Concourt Prize 1975 for this novel). The viewer is puzzled by the Oscar awarded to a film that does not revive a story that could be interesting and engaging. The young actor who plays Momo is almost non-existent, perhaps blocked by the greatness of Simone Signoret.

After the missed debut on the big screen, initially scheduled for 3, 4 and 5 November 2020 but blocked (along with many others, again) by the new containment measures of the Covid-19 pandemic, the first feature film by Edoardo Ponti arrives on Netflix, *Life in front of him*. Adaptation of the homonymous novel of 1975 by Romain Gary, the Italian director keeps the characters but not the atmospheres: he chooses Bari instead of Paris and deviates from the history of the writer French for eras and cultures, showing a reality at times fairytale - with allegories in computer graphics that nevertheless clash with the aesthetic and narrative system of the film - but raw, extremely current and necessary.

In a southern Italy where the last and the marginalized struggle to find their legitimate spaces, the story of Momò, a Muslim child with a painful and mysterious origin, and of his meeting with Madame Rosa, a Jew and former prostitute who survived the Holocaust, a woman silently charged with violent traumas, comes to life. To interpret it the iconic actress, as well as mother of the director, Sophia Loren who, reconfirming her iconicity, has however descended into a narrative universe not always able to enhance its intensity and calibrate it with the other scenic components, ending at times with overshadowing them. A story of differences and similarities, *Life before itself* tells how different origins can correspond to equal pains and needs, in view of a common future full of promise.

*Life before it* is also the story of the word "mother" in its many meanings. First of all, the mother par excellence, the mother of the director Edoardo Ponti, in fact, Sophia Loren. A woman who is not only the mother of a child but is also the godmother and symbol of an entire past and eternal cinema, which is and always will be a warning for today's. Emblematic then becomes the temporal passage of Loren from past to present, from classic to contemporary, through his participation in a film that meets his audience directly on a streaming platform, marking a small revolution. The word "mother" also refers to the concept of home, to that safe place to return to - just like Madame Rosa's home, now transformed into a kindergarten for homeless children, but also and above all an identity space to strengthen one's culture and at the same time to overcome geographical, linguistic and cultural borders.

A film full of themes, symbols and pertinent quotes to Victor Hugo's *The Miserables*, epic of the marginalized and the last par excellence. With strengths and weaknesses, *Life before itself* presents itself as a title with noble intentions and a vehicle of values already told but never repeated enough. A courageous debut, which did not lower its head in the face of the great crisis that is hitting the sector and solid, thanks to the possibility of counting on a face that has literally made history, able to guarantee the attention of different sectors of the public.

### Chiara Ghidelli

Mohammed, nicknamed Momo, comes from Senegal, is twelve years old and has lost his mother. He lives on theft and drug dealing; when he steals two silver candlesticks, Dr. Cohen, who takes care of him, tells him to return them to the owner, Madame Rosà. The woman is a former prostitute but above all she is a Holocaust survivor. In the house she hosts other children and Cohen asks her to take care of Momò as well. Cohabitation is difficult; the boy has a strong rebellious personality and escapes every rule. Little by little, thanks to the help of the shopkeeper Hamil and the trans Lola, things change and the relationship between the two becomes very intense.

Edoardo Ponti, in his second feature film after *Cuori estranei* (2002), tries his hand at the film adaptation of the novel by Emile Ajar, *Life in front of him*, which had already been brought to the big screen in 1977 by Moshé Mizrahi and which won the Oscar for best foreign film.

Ponti, who got help in the script from Ugo Chiti, makes a very balanced film in which the center of the story is the relationship between Madame Rosà - a very good Sophia Loren, directed here by her son and Momò (really very convincing the proof of the young Ibrahima Gueye) and that avoids falling into rhetoric.

Loren gives her character all the nuances of a tried, painful woman, marked by the past but very human. Ibrahima, a natural talent, is definitely very expressive, managing to convey grit, anger, loneliness but also that tenderness and that need for a true relationship that everyone feels (just see his gloomy when the little Josif, his roommate, leaves Madame Rosà to return to his mother). The supporting actors are also very good - Renato Carpentieri is Dr. Cohen, Abril Zamora is Lola and Babak Karimi is the Hamil shopkeeper - for a cast chosen with great care. Compared to the novel, the film is set in the hot and summer Bari of the present day. We predict for Sophia Loren at least a candidacy for the next David di Donatello (with probable victory).

**For life ahead of him: once again a great novel that inspires directors from different eras**

### PLOT

Life in front of her starts from the almost final scenes of the film to tell the story of Madame Rosà, an elderly woman, a Jewish survivor of the concentration camps, a former prostitute, who when she could no longer exercise her "profession", tries to get by welcoming children, children of prostitutes, in a sort of self-managed family home.

### PIN IT

Among his little guests, he is introduced by his friend and doctor, Dr. Cohen, the little Momò of Senegalese origin.

About this new young tenant of Madame Rosà, we do not know much.

Through some phrases of Dr. Cohen and also of the boy, it is clear that he migrated very young from his country and that there was a bloody event and he was orphaned.

Momò is in charge of the doctor who realizes that he cannot follow him as he needs.

Having learned that Momò has scippato an old lady, it is just Madame Rosà and taking advantage of the opportunity to bring back the stolen goods and apologize, proposes to Madame Rosà to take care of the boy.

The need for affection and to have a family prevail over anger and a sense of abandonment and loneliness.

Momò and Madame Rosà understand that even with different ages and different stories, they are much more similar and close than they thought.

And in the end a solid bond is created that will make Momò in turn become the one who will take care of Rosà and accompany her in her last stretch.

A novel that, moreover, had already been staged by Moshé Mizrahi and had also already won an Oscar.

"Being a very nice book I did not want to leave out even a page. We decided to focus attention on the relationship of friendship between Madame Rosa and Momò, which is beautiful, they are two beings who resemble each other despite the great differences" (Edoardo Ponti).

To re-propose a film and a theme that had already had such important awards, it took an actress who did not fear comparisons with the great Simone Signoret who I play Madame Rosà.

Fortunately, Sophia Loren, 10 years after her last film, has agreed to return to the scene to play this pe.

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