

The Crowd and Tearing of Beauty - Comment on “Malèna”

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Abstract: The film “Malèna” depicts the tragic fate of Malèna, which is her individual tragedy and is accomplished through the common action of the “group” in the small town; The crowd formed by the “group” in the small town perpetrated collective violence against the “beauty” of Malèna, thus the film criticizes the ugliness of the “group” through Malèna’s beauty and the tearing of the beauty.

Keywords: “Malèna”; the crowd; the group.

INTRODUCTION

Italian director Giuseppe Tornatore released the film “Malèna” in 2001, following “The Legend of 1900” and “Cinema Paradiso”. The film is set in a small Italian town during World War II and depicts the tragic fate of the sexy and beautiful Malèna from the perspective of young Renato. The film has won many awards: nominated for *Best Cinematography and Best Original Score* at the 2001 Oscars; nominated for *Best Original Score and Best Foreign Language Film* at the 2001 Global Awards; nominated for the *Golden Bear Award* at the 2001 Berlin Film Festival; nominated for *Best Director and Best Actress* at the 2001 European Film Awards, in addition to winning the *British Academy Film Award, Golden Satellite Award, Silver Ribbon Award* from the Italian Film Journalists Association, and the *Italian Film Journalists Association Award*.

At present, domestic reviews of the film have analyzed it from patriarchal perspective, stating that “the film spends a lot of time portraying Malèna’s feminine beauty and Renato’s developed and precocious sexual impulses, which itself has a strong ideological aspect of patriarchal culture.” [1] Malèna’s beauty, sexiness, and softness satisfy male viewing desires. Some comments also suggest that the film “profoundly portrays the twisted ugliness and evil of society and humanity in war under the guise of eroticism, successfully blending beauty and cruelty through the portrayal of Malèna’s captivating beauty and the disappearance of beauty, thus presenting a tragic and cruel character...” [2] There is also an analysis of the film from the perspective of a young boy’s growth, but the “group” in the Sicilian town in the film has not received enough attention. In fact, whether it is the tragic fate of Malèna, the growth of the male protagonist Renato, or the ugliness of human nature, they are all completed under the joint action of the group in this small town, and the chaotic nature of this group further exacerbates the film’s analysis of human nature, and its criticism is also further enhanced.

1. ENCOUNTERING “GROUP”: INDIVIDUAL TRAGEDY

Individuals living in society inevitably establish various connections with others, thus forming groups. Individuals who are independent of the group yearn for the acceptance of the group. At the beginning of the film, as the residents of the small town cheer for the country’s decision to declare war, the protagonist Renato obtains his dream bike and excitedly crosses the street, riding it to a group of slightly older young boys. This bike becomes his passport to join the group. At the same time, the heroine, Malèna, with her tall, plump figure, coupled with her special marital status (her husband’s life is uncertain on the front line battlefield), makes her independent from a larger group of men and women from the entire

town. Malèna suffered unbearable pressure from men's lecherous covetousness and women's uneasy and kind-hearted jealousy, and was destined to be lonely, and she was imprisoned in 'silence' and forced to endure the external expectations of her 'elegant temperament, aloofness, independence, and emotional loyalty'. [3] But in reality, when the audience appreciates the film, they will never forget Malèna's high head, flowing wave like long hair, proud, sexy, and elegant. It seems that she is bearish and indifferent to everything outside, and she has become an alternative figure independent of this group, at the mercy of others' opinions. Not only did Malèna face exclusion from the small town of Sicily, but her father was also ridiculed by everyone. As a Latin teacher, he was naturally deeply influenced by traditional thinking, and his daughter's living situation was also like a heavy stone in his father's heart. In class, children who should have been pure hearted and devoted to reading only the books of the sages used his daughter as a laughing stock and made fun of him. The bombing during the war, which only killed him, may also be considered a relief for him. Even at his funeral, which should have been a serious and solemn occasion, men dressed in dignified black lined up anxiously, taking the opportunity to comfort Malèna, hoping to take advantage of the situation and gain some advantage. Their level of obscenity was beyond words.

On the other hand, the young and naive boy Renato regards the beautiful and sexy Marina as his goddess in his heart. The letters that have not been mailed out are enough to show the boy's longing for Marina. He is dissatisfied with the slander and insult of the goddess in his heart by the people of the small town, and he retaliates by riding his bike to retaliate against the vulgar men who have insulted Malèna. Realizing his own weakness, he prayed for the protection of Almighty God, but when he realized that God had also failed to help him protect Malèna, he angrily pushed the statue of God down. In areas with strong religious beliefs, this obvious act of blasphemy is enough to show Renato's anger, which is a helplessness and anger that the selfless act of righteousness cannot be achieved. Although Renato's counterattack was insignificant, his actions have transcended concrete actions and risen to a symbolic significance. When all the men and women in the town unanimously targeted Marina, only an underage boy treated her fairly until Marina's husband, who had returned from the battlefield with a damaged body, searched for his wife. When the whole town remained silent about Malèna's whereabouts, Renato conveyed the message in another way, explaining the truth and allowing the couple to reunite, although Renato did not have the courage to tell him directly. It can be said that for Renato, who is still in a state of sexual confusion, Malèna is an unattainable goddess on one hand, but on the other hand, she is not refined. Like other men in the town, Marina is also regarded as an object of lust. This treatment in the film actually further highlights the collective evil of the people in the small town.

2. THE CROWD: ANOTHER FORM OF GROUP

Interconnected individuals make up a group, but a group is not simply formed by combining a group of people together. The formation of a group requires a common environment and a common psychology. However, the concept of "group" here is a neutral one. The term "group" in Gustave Le Bon's thought is not the sum of individuals gathered together in the general sense. From a psychological perspective, only when the emotions and thoughts of the people gathered together take the same direction, their conscious personalities disappear, and ultimately form a collective psychology. At this time, the group is Gustave Le Bon's group, or more vividly called the "mob".

The communities of Sicilian towns is a typical disorganized group. The mob and the group have consistency, but also their uniqueness. The mob more clearly highlights the negativity and destructiveness of the "group". The group in Gustave Le Bon's eye, more precisely, is a disorganized group, characterized by impulsiveness, impatience, lack of rationality, and lack of judgment, which can almost always be seen in lower forms of life evolution. Gustave Le Bon also cited women, barbarians, and children as examples. Such a group relies on the advantage of quantity, allowing individuals within the group to feel a strong force of "justice". At the beginning of the movie, amidst the leader's speech, the residents of the town cheered for the leader's wise decision, completely unaware of the brutality of war. In their passionate cheers, there seemed to be an exceptionally powerful force, a powerful force fighting for the leader and for the motherland. But in reality, the men in the film lack masculinity, and the women only gather together to chew on everyday life, without any sense of greatness. Regardless of the justice of the fascist war, it is clear from the cheers of the townspeople that they seem to understand the necessity of this war, but they have not truly engaged in the war at the national level, nor have they given the families or widows of the soldiers who participated in the war the help and respect they deserve. They even secretly rejoice that this war has given them such an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of Marina, whether close or far away. When Malèna's husband finally returned to the town with a physical disability, there was no awe, no sympathy, just sneers. In this sense, the group formed by the small town is a noisy, animal like mob driven by instinct.

In the film, the residents of the small town, regardless of gender or age, form a disorganized group against the sexy and elegant Malèna. The men in the group are extremely possessive of Malèna's sexiness, even resorting to physical violence to compete for her. However, no one cherishes Malèna with all their heart, and their affection is only an animal reaction. The men portrayed in the film lack the masculine qualities that men should possess, and are even feminized, lacking a sense of responsibility. Especially the lawyer who is almost the same age as Malèna's father is a clear example. In court, he spoke eloquently and revealed that Malèna's tragic fate was rooted in her "beauty", which was envied. The lawyer helped Malèna fight the lawsuit purely to take over her body. However, when it came to the serious marriage issue, he still had to obey his elderly mother's arrangements. How could a respectable lawyer marry such a morally corrupt woman? In fact, Malèna's fall is also the result of the despicable town men's destruction. The women in the group are just groups of three or five nagging and gossiping, without any thoughts. But these thoughtless men and women have a surprising consistency: collective cheers, collective anger, collective violence, and collective silence.

3. MALENA'S BEAUTY TORN APART: GROUP VIOLENCE

Malèna's beauty lies not only in her voluptuous and sexy figure, but also in her arrogant temperament. The arrogance of temperament stems from its loyalty to marriage. The portrayal of Malèna's inner spirit is described through the "voyeuristic" behavior of the young protagonist Renato. Accompanied by soothing music, Malèna holds a photo of her husband and dances gracefully. This scene in the film portrays Malèna's loyalty to her marriage. Loyalty represents a kind of goodness, and goodness constitutes another kind of beauty. But in the small town composed of a group of disorganized people, Malèna's beauty combined with goodness became a piercing pain that pierced almost all the men and women in the town. In the eye of a group of disorganized people, Malèna is the embodiment of lust that triggers chaos and violence.

At first, the women in the small town did not take extreme actions towards the chaos "caused" by Marina, except gossiping. However, Malèna's becoming a German military prostitute was the best evidence they could use, which led to the trial on the square after the German army withdrew. The crazy women became impartial judges, conducting fair trials and punishments on the "witches" in the small town. Malèna's downfall has elevated the nobility of the women in the small town. They vented their anger on Malèna, replacing her black wavy hair with uneven "yin-yang" hair. The woman who violated her own body and ruined the customs of the small town had no need to cover up, so she tore apart her clothes. While the women were committing violence, the men who were originally eager for Malèna fell silent, and even Renato stood quietly on the side. Renato's behavior in the film can also be explained by the Gustave Le Bon's group. Gustave Le Bon believed that individuals in the group experienced a "disappearance of brain activity and a rise in spinal cord activity, a decline in intelligence, and a complete change in emotions". [4] After that, he also discussed individual individuals in the group, stating that "anyone who has a skeptical spirit and believes that it is extremely difficult to discover 'certain truths' in political and social issues has no status in the group; When faced with intense public emotions, he particularly feels powerless: because he realizes that what he wants to oppose is not only a wrong behavior, but also the 'power of the majority' and the paranoid attitude towards implementing such behavior" [3] So Renato was just silent because he didn't want to be the target of public criticism, and if he did, he might end up like Malèna.

The residents of the small town stood on the platform of justice and tried Marina. In fact, Marina was destroyed by the harshness of the crowd. The residents of the small town did not sympathize with a weak woman who lost her loved ones and had no one to rely on in the context of war, but instead added insult to injury. The men used her weakness and helplessness to covet her body, and the jealousy of the women tore apart Malèna's beauty. The collective violence of the small town residents towards Malèna reflects their moral evil, which is one of the ugly forms. Karl Rosenkranz analyzed ugliness in nature, spirituality, and art, and concluded that ugliness is not necessarily the opposite of beauty. He listed a series of words such as "miserable, depraved, vulgar, superfluous, arbitrary, rough, empty, terrifying, disgusting, hollow..." [5] to describe various ugliness. If these words are matched with the group of men and women in the film, it can also highlight the film's critical purpose of tearing apart the ugliness of the group through Malèna's beauty.

4. CONCLUSION

The original name of the film was "Malèna" after the female protagonist Marina, and it has been translated into "The Beautiful Legend of Sicily" in Chinese. This poetic name also to some extent praises the female protagonist for maintaining her original noble spirit after encountering group violence in the cruel war background. When Malèna and her husband, who was disabled in the war, return hand in hand at the end of the film, cross the street again, and enter the lives of the town residents several years later, what attracts the town residents the most is precisely Malèna's external beauty.

The town residents are still amazed by her dignity and beauty after being tortured by fate. The film elevates Malèna to the height of a “legend”, not because Malèna’s beauty remains after experiencing ups and downs, but through Malèna’s individual fate to reflect on the entire town residents. The town residents seem to have forgotten that Malèna’s experience is intricately linked to their collective violence, and have no reflection or guilt about their collective crimes against Malèna. “The Beautiful Legend of Sicily” is a critique of the ugliness of the group through the beauty of Malèna and the tearing of the beauty.

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