

Essay on motion picture analysis: the legend of 1900

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



The Legend of 1900 is the first English language film by Giuseppe Tornatore, the Italian filmmaker of the award winning Cinema Paradiso. Released in 1998, the story is set a hundred years earlier, and is based on the life of 1900, an orphaned boy who is raised, lives and dies on a four tier cruise ship names SS Virginian . The story has several underlying themes and symbols masterfully illustrated through 1900's interaction with those around him and his outright refusal to ever disembark from the ship. However, the central theme is that of the beauty of time, that does not change or adapt, but lives beautifully for a generation and then dies a dignified and eloquent death. Yet, few of those who inherit the next era have the sense to appreciate what is past or to acknowledge its beauty. The eternal nature of time is overshadowed by the feeble character of change.

Some movies will arouse in viewers complex feelings that cannot be expressed or unraveled. The Legend of 1900 is such a movie. It tends to fill the viewer to the brim with extraordinary emotions but words falter when one attempts to elucidate them. The film may be likened to a mirror, wherein a viewer interprets themes and symbols as they appear to them. One of the very first themes noticeable in the story is the inability of humans to let go of things that they love. When Danny Boodmann, 1900's adoptive father, has the opportunity of identifying the boy's biological father, he chooses not to tell the truth to 1900. He loves 1900 and is far too afraid to lose him. As a result, 1900 is left with no one to look after him once Danny passes away. This reluctance to ' let go' is most dramatically shown through 1900's own refusal to part if the Virginian, which has become his home, his world. He does not leave the ship even though he knows that he will die if he stays

onboard. This is refusal to disown objects or people we are most accustomed to is a quintessential human trait. Its depiction in the Legend of 1900 is beautiful, tragic and pragmatic, all at the same time.

The story also casts a false sense of loneliness around the character of 1900. Having been hidden and protected throughout his childhood, he does not have the kind of social relationships that an average boy would. As Max Tooney narrates the story of his early life, 1900 appears to be a child who is lost and unfortunate. However, this perception changes once his musical prowess is revealed. Is 1900 really lonely? He is imbued with endless musical inspiration, brilliant talents and colorful notes. He is perfectly content in his own world. On the other hand, people living 'normal' lives without instinctive talents and unique aptitudes, have nothing within them but blanks. They are not approved of and satisfied in this world and that is why they are constantly surrounded by loneliness, even when they have large social circles. 1900 stands out in stark contrast as he does not strive to win anyone's approval but is showered with adoration for who he is. In essence, he epitomizes the contentment that every generation needs and craves but never quite manages to attain.

As a human being in a mortal world, one is given various titles and identities. Named by parents at birth, one has to provide proof of their identity and very existence at every step in life. Whether it is registration for residence; attaining an ID card when one turns 18, registration at school and later the acquisition of work permits, one's identity is constantly under scrutiny. When introduced to others, one is called someone's child, parent or friend.

However, what is the true identity of a person in the world? When stripped all

legal certifications of identity, what remains of one's self? These are questions that have for ages plagued philosophers and common people alike. 1900, a boy without a birth certificate, does not belong to any country in the world, he does not even have a name in the traditional sense. No trace of his existence can be found if he dies. He has no tomb for his body, in fact, no one except Max knows of his fate. Although there is no proof of his existence or record of his death, 1900 is an individual. Uninfluenced, untouched, unmolded, he is what nature intended him to be. For those who have lived in a century where the youth proclaimed 'individualism' as their right, 1900 cuts a perfectly individualistic figure.

It can also be said that his life is a reflection of existentialism. He despises rules and regulations of this society. His refusal to disembark is actually the expression of his fear of the unknown, larger world beyond his own. He realizes that his identity, his contentment lies within the Virginian. His interactions with passengers give him a fair glimpse of the outside world and he despises it. He attaches more importance to himself than to the acceptance by others. The father of Jazz is easily defeated and disdained by him. His talent can win him fame and wealth but he is not willing to separate himself from music and refuses to commercialize it. Instead, he prefers to make live performances on the ship, using his music to touch hearts. He can travel in music and find love. He even sacrifices his love for the girl in favor of his life on the ship. He would rather sink with the Virginian than compromise his life for the sake of merely existing in the world.

1900's life is filled with short, yet extremely meaningful relationships.

Whether it be his bonding with Danny - his adoptive father, his love for girl

for whom he considered stepping ashore for the first time in his life, his brief encounter with Jelly Roll Morton, or his friendship with Max, while none of these relationships last, each has a deep impact on 1900s life as well as those who have interacted with him. Fragmented and broken relationships have been the bane of the 21st century where emotions have become increasingly diluted. When people live their lives in the fast lane, it becomes difficult to make meaningful bonds. Hence, one often has large social circles, but not a single person who can be called a true friend, who would be bothered enough to take the initiative to save your life. 1900 has not had the kind of guidance that most children have in terms of social interactions. Yet, through his nature and talent, he is able to form meaningful relationships, even if they are short lived. Leaving a lasting impression and making an eternal place in someone's heart and mind, that is what legends are made of.

Works Cited

Baxter, G. M. Plot Summary for The Legend of 1900. 1998. 20 April 2013 .