

# A reflection on goodbye, children and the butterfly's tongue



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There is often the instance when a relationship is going smoothly very well and something happens that immediately puts it at a halt or breaks it down and pulls the people away from each other. Goodbye, Children and The Butterfly's Tongue both end this way, in tragedy.

Jean was separated from Julien after being caught as a Jew in Goodbye, Children and Moncho was separated from Don Gregorio as the latter was arrested for being an atheist in The Butterfly's Tongue. Add to that, both films show betrayal involved in the arrest of the characters. Both films are episodic, which is shown in their focus on conversations and long scenes of silence that describe how the relationships of the characters developed. Then, they end leaving the audience in thought, wondering how Julien and Moncho would have felt when they have grown up and realized more fully what they have done; same goes with the victims, what could have happened to Jean and Don Gregorio in prison.

They make the audience put themselves in the feet of the characters, which can easily be done since both film are realistic and universal in portraying betrayal and war, matters found in every region of the world. Goodbye, children" was uttered by the Father Superior quite a few times to the students as he was leaving with the guards. Being the title of the film, it means that this is symbolic. The phrase could mean an end to the innocence of the children since they had been exposed to the cruelty of reality at that time. This also includes an end to security and education that the children needed and enjoyed in the boarding school since the school's reputation had been tainted and, thus, closed. " Goodbye, children" means farewell to a sheltered-life and hello to the reality of war.

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The Butterfly's Tongue, on the other hand, is also symbolic. Don Gregorio, the teacher, said that the butterfly's tongue is curled inside and is stretched out when it sips the nectar of a flower. I can relate this phenomenon to Moncho's behavior at which the title serves as a metaphor. Moncho, at the beginning, was a shy boy who was afraid of going to school. His potentials were curled or locked up inside for he still had not found the right avenues of demonstration.

But when he started going to school, he became more talkative and expressive. He shared what he learned to his family and asked them questions that lead to him telling them what he learned. He became interested in everything, which is characteristic of school-aged boys. He acquired the courage to ask things for himself such as going to the circus with his older brother. His being was opened to the environment which he enthusiastically observed and participated in through his curiosity.

In these events, the butterfly's (Moncho's) tongue (potentials) is loosened up and just as the butterfly savors the nectar, Moncho delights in his experiences especially in his moments with Don Gregorio. Conversely, a pessimistic interpretation of the title is also possible. The butterfly's tongue is stretched out when Moncho lashed out accusations towards Don Gregorio while chasing and throwing stones at him. The flower's nectar is drained away just as Moncho's beautiful relationship with Don Gregorio is sapped off its purity.

Though both films end in betrayal, one of them cannot be clearly identified as such. Julien's glance towards Jean that revealed the latter's true identity

was unintentional. Maybe Julien did it out of curiosity or concern, but it was clearly not to expose Jean to the guards. It was an involuntary accidental act that did not mean anything evil. Hence, it can not be labeled as betrayal per se. On the other hand, although Moncho did not fully understand the full implication of being an atheist similar with Julien regarding the Jews, his acts were severe compared to Julien's.

At a very young age, he already knew the difference between right and wrong even if the distinction may be blurred by anyone to whom he looks up to such as his parents. When he shouted accusations to Don Gregorio, this could be passed as an act to obey his parents and an act influenced by his mother's and father's acts. What made it severe is his continuance of it, his chasing the truck that bears Don Gregorio and his throwing of a stone towards Don Gregorio. He chose to do these. His parents only said a few phrases then stopped.

Only a few people ran after the truck and threw stones at it. So he could have chosen to shout a few words to mislead the authorities, or could have chosen to remain with his family or could have just run after the truck like others did. But he did not. He turned against his former trusting and congenial attitude to Don Gregorio toward one of spite and ill will.

He was disloyal to Don Gregorio which was ultimately exemplified by throwing a stone at him, an intentional act. Truly, the butterfly's tongue lashed out aggressively. Comparing the main characters, Julien and Moncho, of the two films, I am affected by Moncho's character more. He was initially portrayed as a cute, shy and innocent young boy, thus I thought it unlikely of

him to be able to perform his latter acts. I was also touched by his relationship with Don Gregorio.

It was really something special, one which I will surely treasure even in adulthood if I were Moncho. In addition, I have a soft heart for old people; and Don Gregorio is surely one that I will greatly like and will be attached to. He is a very kind, sweet and thoughtful old man who genuinely cares about his students, who is devoted to his teaching and who loves his profession. He is really someone to look up to and admire. So when Moncho performed his betrayal, which once again was unlikely of him, I was emotionally surprised; I was hurt because of my affinity with Don Gregorio who cared about Moncho very much.

Don Gregorio did not deserve such treatment, if not for the arrest, for Moncho's acts. The Butterfly's Tongue definitely affected me more than Goodbye, Children since the former was able to establish a bond with me making me feel what Don Gregorio must have felt. Whereas in Goodbye, Children, I only felt like an observer wondering what could have happened to the characters afterwards and it was only at that point that I tried to put myself in the characters' shoes. Besides my connection with the characters, The Butterfly's Tongue's betrayal was more evident to me, adding to the reason why I was more involved in it.

It was able to suck the pleasing mood out of me since the ending was depressingly prominent.