

Please note: The photo-essay simply tells the story of the film in intermediate-level Italian. This is a basic, literal translation to assist Italian learners understand the text. In writing our photo-essays, we aim for a fluid Italian and write a translation to match it. We hope that this language-learning tool will be engaging and enlightening. It's no substitute for material written at a native-language level that explores the film in depth!

The images are an important part of the photo-essay. Each paragraph refers to specific images. Even if you don't understand Italian, please read this translation alongside the Italian version on the blog, so that you can see the screenshots that go with the text. These visuals help us to know the movie better: they not only enrich the story, but they also show camera movements, editing, the symbols chosen by the director and thematic ideas. You will also have access to the links to other references in the blog itself.

Thank you, and enjoy!

Forbidden Games, Part I

Original title: Jeux interdits

René Clément, Dir. (1952)

Summary

During World War II, a little girl's parents are killed along with other refugees fleeing Paris. Paulette is taken in by a peasant family and develops a bond with their son. Together they find a way of coping with the death that surrounds them.

The film opens as Paris residents flee the city for the safety of the countryside. We see them crossing a bridge by bike, car and horse-drawn wagons. They're bringing with them all they can carry.

At the sound of planes, the refugees run off the bridge and scatter, in search of protection.

Under the falling bombs, they cling to the earth as if that will keep them safe.

The bombing finished, the refugees rush to the road. We see a couple and their little girl climbing up the hill to their car. But the car won't start, blocking the path of a crowd that is frantic to get moving.

A few men break away from the group and push the car down the hill. Running to the car, the little girl, Paulette, retrieves her puppy, Jock, from the front seat.

Her parents gather as many suitcases as they can and turn back up to the road. But the planes return, sending people back to cover.

Our family finds shelter next to a stone wall. But the puppy breaks free and runs away. Paulette takes off after him.

Her parents pursue her across the bridge.

When they reach her, Paulette has got the puppy. But a burst of machine gun shots from an airplane hits them, killing her parents.

Paulette watches as the planes fly off. We see that she and her mother are wearing matching dresses.

When Paulette touches her mother's face, she doesn't move. Paulette stares, trying to make sense of it. She picks up the quivering puppy and strokes him.

A runaway cart passes by, without a driver and with a terrified horse, running along the bridge.

Now that the planes have gone, the road fills up again. A man, seeing that Paulette is lost and alone, picks her up and puts her next to his wife in his cart.

"Your dog is dead!" the woman tells Paulette. "Throw him away!" She grabs Jock out of Paulette's arms and tosses him into the river.

Paulette gets down from the cart and looks over the side of the bridge. She sees Jock floating down the river.

Paulette crosses the bridge and runs along the river bank as Jock passes her. A German plane is flying overhead, and we see the runaway cart, too.

Paulette retrieves Jock from the water and keeps walking.

The camera cuts to a boy leading a cow. The boy sees the horse and cart and asks the other peasants in the field what it is doing there. One of the men approaches the horse, but the animal is startled by the plane overhead and runs away, trampling him.

In all the confusion, the cow Tintine has run off. The boy chases after her.

Paulette, meanwhile, is alone in the woods and cradles her dead puppy in her arms.

As Tintine approaches, Paulette finally begins to cry. Tintine tries to cross the stream.

At that moment, the boy arrives.

"You couldn't have stopped her?" he asks Paulette angrily.

"No," she answers. "I have my dog."

He asks where she's from and she points toward the bridge. "And where is your mother?"

"She's dead."

"And your father?"

"Dead."

At this point, the boy recalls that if he doesn't return that cow, his father will whip him. He asks Paulette to help him, but she says she can't, because she's holding her dog. He proposes that if she leaves her dog, he'll give her another. So, she sets Jock gently down and steps over the little stream.

Holding hands, they run off together to find the cow.

While they walk along the road home they introduce themselves. The boy's name is Michel. Paulette tells him that she is from Paris.

As Michel puts the cow in the barn, the children hear a racket of barking dogs. Michel's father comes to get a pitchfork. The children peek around the corner to see what is going on.

With the aid of the pitchfork, Michel's father chases away the neighbor's dog, and when the neighbor – Mr. Gouard – shows up, the men exchange insults and accusations. Apparently, this is part of an ongoing feud between the two. The children watch.

After Gouard has left, Michel's father notices the little girl.

"What's this?" he asks.

"Her father and mother are dead," answers Michel.

"What should I do about it?"

"We could keep her!"

Even though he is not happy with this idea, the father wants to keep the girl out of the hands of the Gouards. So it is decided: Paulette will stay.

"Come and tell us about it," he says to her.

They enter the house and find quite a bit of activity going on.

In the house, we see a man in bed, being tended by three people. The man is Michel's brother, Georges, who was injured by the wild horse. When Paulette appears, everyone stops and stares at her.

The father explains, "She comes from the road."

Michel pulls Paulette to him and announces proudly, "I found her!"

They give her a piece of bread and bombard her with questions. "You're from Paris?" "You saw the bombs?"

"Where are you from?" "What's your name?" "How old are you?"

She turns to her new friend: "Michel, I'm tired." He picks her up and puts her in bed.

A little while later we see Paulette with her eyes closed resting in the arms of Michel's father, who is reading the newspaper. Michel is studying, pencil in hand. His older brother, Raymond, is working on a piece of wood with his knife. He's making a model airplane.

Michel is not focused on his book. And he does not take the war seriously either. He puts his pencil under his nose as if it's Hitler's moustache and shakes his finger at Paulette, who has just opened her eyes.

Michel's sister, Berthe, enters looking at the back of the newspaper and exclaims, "It's the Gouards' son!"

"What is he doing there?" asks Raymond, in annoyance.

"He was decorated! At least he's doing his bit!"

That irritates Raymond even more, because it is true: he is not in the military.

Berthe comes and asks for a blanket for Paulette.

"Not mine!" says Raymond.

"She can have mine," says Michel.

"But we share the same bed!"

"Poor thing," says Michel's father, looking at the child in his arms.

"At that age, they don't understand," his wife comments.

"Seventeen dead on the bridge," interjects Raymond, "They can't even bury them like they should."

His father agrees, "If you die now, you don't even have a box."

"They just dig a hole and bury them like dogs," comments the young man.

"Hush. Don't say that," scolds the father: Paulette can hear everything.

The mother carries Paulette to bed.

Throughout the movie, René Clément has included beautiful details. Here, for example, we see someone drying a dish; earlier we saw Raymond working on his model airplane. There's always a loaf of bread on the table, with crumbs scattered around it.

When the others have gone upstairs, Michel's father brings the newspaper and sits on Georges' bed. "A German sidecar was captured," he reads aloud. "Are you okay?" Georges is not feeling well at all.

It takes Michelle, his mother and two sisters to get Paulette ready to go to bed. When at last they are leaving, taking the lantern with them, the little girl protests, "I'm afraid of the dark!"

"Call out my name if you're afraid," Michel reassures her before leaving. And the little one calls him immediately, loudly, over and over. "Michel! Michel! Michel!"

Downstairs, Raymond is not happy about the yelling. Their father instructs Michel to take care of Paulette. "Okay," says Michel happily, "I won't do my math!"

Upstairs the boy tries to make Paulette fall asleep, but the glare of the rockets going off in the night makes it difficult. Excitedly, Michel runs to watch through the window and calls the little one, too. But she refuses. Paulette is not only afraid of the dark, she's also afraid of the light!

She tells Michel that she doesn't want to stay at his house.

"But where would you go?" he asks her.

"I want to go to mama and papa on the bridge."

"They're not there anymore," he responds.

"Where are they?"

"In a hole."

"Like dogs?"

"Yes."

"Are they in a hole because of the rain? To stay dry?"

"Yes, it must be for that," he reassures her.

"But my dog... won't he be wet?"

With that thought in mind, Paulette finally drifts off to sleep and Michel leaves her.

That night, while everyone is asleep, Paulette cries out suddenly. Georges wakes Michel and tells him to go and take care of her.

Michel goes upstairs and talks to Paulette for a few minutes. He tucks her in and she falls back asleep.

But Georges is still awake when Michel returns. So, picking up the newspaper, the boy reads the story of what happened on the bridge.

It's morning. Michel and one of his sisters are having breakfast. Michel calls Paulette to have her come downstairs. Still putting on her dress, the little girl approaches Georges' bed.

"What's wrong with him?" she asks, "Is he sick?"

"A horse kicked him."

"What is that?" she asks, pointing at the crucifix above Georges' bed. There's a rosary over it.

"The good Lord," answers Michel's mother. "You've never seen him?"

"Yes, but I never knew who he was."

After a discussion, the family decides that they should tell the mayor or the police about Paulette; otherwise, they might be accused of stealing her. When Michel offers to go to the police, he is told that he must take care of the cows.

Raymond comes in on his bike, and his mother asks him anxiously, “What about the doctor?” But there will be no doctor to take care of Georges: he’s busy at the hospital, taking care of the victims of the bombings.

Paulette is at the edge of the woods. She reaches her dead puppy Jock, and with a little hatchet, begins to dig a hole close by the puppy.

But the little girl runs away when she sees the priest coming on his bicycle. She stands by a tree, holding the dog behind her back.

The priest sees her and comes over to talk.
“You’re not from here! Where do you live?”
“At the Dollé’s house. Papa and mama are dead.”
“Poor thing. Did you say a prayer for them?”
She shakes her head. “I don’t know how.”
“I’ll teach you. Put your hands like this.”

The man shows her how to hold her hands in prayer and also how to make the sign of the cross. But she doesn’t want to. “Don’t worry,” he tells her as he leaves, “Michel will teach you. He knows the catechism well.”

In the meantime, Michel has been searching for Paulette. She hears him calling her, but she runs off.

The little girl arrives at an abandoned water mill, still carrying the hatchet and the puppy.

When Michel arrives at the mill, he calls out to her from the other side of the stream, but she ignores him, busy digging another hole for her dog.

Then Michel comes in. When he sees what she is doing, he takes the hatchet from her and helps her to dig.

Then he has an idea. “We’ll make a little cemetery.”
“What’s a cemetery?”
“It’s where they put the dead to be together.”
“Why do they put them together?”
“So they’re not sad.”
“But my dog will be all alone.”

Paulette gently picks up Jock, lays him in the hole and covers him with soil.

In the meantime, Michel has gone up into the hayloft, to visit the old owl called the Mayor. “Don’t move,” Michel instructs him. Then, from behind the owl, he picks up a dead mole. He carries it away, promising the bird that he will bring him another one.

Michel goes back to Paulette with the “stolen” mole.
“We’ll need more!” she complains.
“There are plenty,” explains Michel.
“Cats,” she says.
He adds, “Hedgehogs ... lizards ...”
“Horses ... cows ...”

“Rattlesnakes!”

“Lions!”

“Tigers!”

At the end of the list, Paulette concludes: “People!”

Michel makes a cross out of some twigs. Paulette pulls a bracelet out of her pocket and they arrange it over the cross like a rosary. But Paulette is not satisfied. The rosary over Raymond’s bed is so much prettier ...

Michel is working hard, banging away with his hammer.

Downstairs, the father looks up and asks, “What are they doing up there?”

While Michel makes the crosses, Paulette practices her prayers.

Michel’s father comes upstairs. On seeing what the children are doing, the father slaps him so hard that he makes him fall over. Doesn’t he know that Georges is ill and needs quiet? In his defense, Michel explains that he is teaching prayers to Paulette.

But then the father sees the cross. “A cross in a house with a sick person?” he exclaims, horrified. “Do you want him to die?” The man tells the children he doesn’t want to see them together again and drags Paulette downstairs. As punishment, Michelle must stay upstairs and miss dinner.

The family is seated at the table. A cry of pain from Georges makes Raymond run to the bed. The man sees that Georges is spitting up blood.

Everyone gathers at the bedside. They try to clean and comfort the sick man, as best they can. The mother says, “So many people and we don’t even have a little prayer.”

Paulette speaks up: “Michel knows them.”

The father tells Michel to come down.

The boy protests, “I’m being punished.”

But his father replies, “Come down now. Say your prayers.”

Seated at the table, next to a loaf of bread, Michel recites the Ave Maria, stealing a few crumbs of bread. The family is at Georges’ bedside, their attention focused on him. Michel’s big sister also nibbles on bread as she watches over the sick man.

Continuing to recite the prayer, Michel goes closer to the bed. Paulette follows him. She joins in the prayer, “May God receive him into paradise.”

Georges is dead. Paulette goes to Michel’s side. “Your brother is dead? Will you put him in a hole?”

As Michel’s father is preparing the funeral wagon to carry Georges’ body to the cemetery, Michel climbs up and checks one of the crosses. He sees that he’ll be able to remove it later for the little cemetery he is making for Paulette! Satisfied, he runs off.

We see a soldier walking along the road and then a quick shot of the neighbors – the Gouard family – at the table.

The soldier hops over a wood fence, stands in front of the Gouard house and plays a trumpet. The Dollé family looks up. What could that horrible noise be?

The man continues to play the trumpet as we see Georges in bed with a big wooden cross on his stomach and a candle burning on the night table next to him.

With a kick, the soldier opens the door of the Gouards' cottage.
The Dollés look at each other. What is going on?

They run outside and stop at the doorway, looking toward the Gouards' house. Has their son, Francis, returned?
But the war isn't over yet...

Michel says that he will cut the grass for the rabbits. Grabbing a basket and a pair of scissors, he sneaks over to the side of the Gouards' cottage, peeks in the window and sees Francis.

Francis is talking to his father. Apparently he has deserted.

Meanwhile, Michel is stealing chicks from under a basket in the Gouards' yard. Mr. Gouard comes to the window. "What are you doing?"
"I'm cutting grass!" answers Michel and runs home.

The boy runs upstairs, where Paulette is still sleeping in her bed and he sets the baby chicks next to her pillow.
What a sweet scene!

The little girl wakes up and he hands her two chicks. We see that the animals are dead. "Look!"
"Oh, they're warm!"
"Are you happy?"
"Yes. You swear it wasn't you who killed them?"
"No, their eyes were closed. I thought they were asleep. I wanted to give them a drink."

Paulette is out picking flowers to make a wreath for the chicks.

She comes upon Michel's sister, Berthe, and Francis Gouard, who are kissing in the grass.

Michel comes over the hill, looking for Paulette, who is sitting playing with her flowers.

He shows her another cross that he's found for their cemetery.

The funeral procession for Georges arrives at the church.

At the beginning of the funeral service, the choir starts to sing. But Michel's father is still outside.

The mourners grieve ...

...the children are looking around seeing the wealth of religious items that they might take for their little cemetery.

In fact, they are actually counting them. "Look!" Paulette says, pointing to a shiny rosary at the altar. "That will be good for a bee."

Outside, Michel's father looks over the funeral wagon and he notices that the crosses are missing from the roof. Then he climbs up to check and then searches around, in case someone has stolen them and stashed them nearby.

The man goes to the doorway of the church and calls, “Michel, come here!” Everyone turns.

“I told you to check the crosses!”

“I did check them.”

“Go and look for them on the road.”

“I would have noticed them.”

“If they’re not lost, someone has taken them. Who would do something like that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe the Gouards’.” Then Michel runs back into the church.

The boy tells Paulette that his father knows the crosses are gone. But she has other things on her mind.

“Look at that!” she says, pointing to a big cross on the altar.

“It’s the priest’s,” says Michel.

“It’s pretty.”

Francis Gouard and his father are cutting wood. They stop to chat.

The father says it is too bad about Georges Dollé. If he’d known about the funeral, he would have gone. Francis says he would like to marry Berthe, but his father calls her a whore.

They argue and the father hits his son, making him fall. But Francis insists that he is going to marry Berthe.

When the funeral procession for Georges arrives at the cemetery, our two little friends wander among the graves, probably looking for things they can use for their own purposes.

Georges’ coffin has been lowered to the ground. The priest says, “A few words to a family that is having a hard time.”

Noticing a large cross that marks a grave, Michel says it would be good for a mare. Paulette points out one that would be good for a pigeon. And a very tall and thin one that would be good for a giraffe.

As he throws soil on his son’s grave, Georges’ father complains bitterly about the Gouards. He tells the priest that they have stolen the crosses from the top of his wagon. The priest asks if he has proof. Raymond says it’s because the Gouards think he is a deserter.

Meanwhile, our two friends are eyeing the cross that is to mark Georges’ grave.

Georges’ father puts the cross into the ground. His mother puts a little white cross onto it as the scene fades out.