

Danny Glover: cinema as a way of passing on values

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Cinema as a means of passing on values and emotions. This is what **Danny Glover**, the popular star of successful films (the *Lethal Weapon* series, *The Color Purple*, *Places in the Heart*, and *Silverado*), spoke about during his visit today to Busto Arsizio. In the morning, he went to the town hall for a few photos and a brief meeting with Mayor Farioli; in the afternoon, he visited **Villa Calcaterra, where he met the students of the “Michelangelo Antonioni” Film Institute**; in the evening, he was at the “Fratello Sole” cinema, with fans, for a free screening of *Switchback*. It was a full day (also of autographs) for Glover, the actor, director, producer, UNICEF ambassador around the world, artist and activist. He was welcomed, above all, by the Antonioni Institute’s director and (from 1 January) president of the BA Film Commission, Andrea W. Castellanza, who accompanied him on a sort of long interview covering a variety of topics.

“As a boy, I liked Italian cinema. It’s remarkable how life always has surprises in store, I’d never have dreamed I’d be here with Italian filmmakers; and I’d never have dreamed of acting in such Italian films as *Sicilian Defence*,” which was presented last year in Milan, during the BA Film Festival. “My career as an actor has alternated with my life as a citizen, in 33 years of passion for cinema and acting; in addition to making films, I’ve had the chance to work on global matters, in situations that have allowed me to be myself, be it Egypt or Palestine, on questions that also concern Italy, like immigration, pollution and global warming.” A good actor must have a sharp eye and an open mind, and, despite the characterisation that has made him known more for commercial films, Danny Glover has both; not to mention a great deal of sensitivity, which he evidently inherited from a good family.

“My mum and dad are still the greatest influences in my life. My mum, in particular, was extraordinary, a true force of nature; she was the first one in my family to graduate.” Martin Luther King was still to come, let alone Obama. **“My grandparents on my mother’s side were poor, country people,** who dared, who took risks, who moved to San Francisco, where I was born, thousands of miles from their home. I grew up partly with my grandparents, I got to know country life, what it means to pick cotton or to feed the pigs. This helped me in *Places in the heart*,” in which he played someone that lived in the country, who had to face members of the Ku Klux Klan. “My grandfather had understood that the country was about to undergo great change,” and he made his daughter study and graduate. Today, the President of the United States is a black man.

For Danny, Italy is an important point of reference. “Your cinema has a special history, I grew up with it, watching subtitled films; I remember *Bicycle Thieves*, the films of Fellini, and of Lina Wertmuller. As a boy, I spent a lot of time at the cinema, also because I had some problems with reading at school ...”

Of course, Danny also talked about **the work of the actor** in his conversation with

Castellanza, which the packed audience listened to with attention. “Characters grow, they change, it’s fascinating. Look at the part I played in *The Color Purple*; he’s ambiguous, complex, occasionally violent. The result of love that was longed for but not received, first from his father, then from the woman he loved but couldn’t have. And of directors? I had particular regard for Lawrence Kasdan, we understood each other immediately, we’re about the same age. When he contacted me, he said **he wanted to make a western with a black hero.**” **It was the beginning of *Silverado***, which came out in 1985. That unusual “black aspect of the West” would reappear, in a film for television starring and produced by Glover, *Buffalo Soldiers*. “In it, we described the use of coloured troops, between 1868 and 1892, against the American Indians. Paradoxically, 60% of us blacks have Indian blood in our veins. For example, my grandmother on my mother’s side had Choctaw blood. In the film, I contrast the position of a former slave with that of a black Seminole half breed.” **American history is less linear and “white” than it is made out to be** as a result of the political and economic power having always been in white, Anglo-Saxon hands. “But blacks, Mexicans, and the Chinese also took part in the expansion in the West,” said Glover, a committed defender of the rights of minorities; after all, **they too made America**, and took part in its epic deeds.

Values and moral choices can be understood from a work. “In the finale, the coloured soldiers intentionally let the surrounded Indians escape. It was fiction, but then, a great granddaughter of one Indian chief told us that, according to the oral tradition of her tribe, this is what actually happened.” In cinema, Glover told the children, you can talk about your own personal experiences, about values passed on, through the writing and the film account. This might sound strange, coming from someone who became famous with a successful series like *Lethal Weapon*. And yet, Glover pointed out that, behind the pure action, each of the four films **speaks about real, sincere problems**: the explosion of arms trafficking, of drugs, of immigration, of racism. “Making the choices for your career is in your hands,” was his parting comment to the students. “I think that, thanks to the incredible success of the films I’ve played in, I’ve been able to devote time to other things, **to act and create on the basis of the world that I’d like to see** for my children, and for my seven-year-old grandson.”

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