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# SHUN LI AND THE POET

*a film by Andrea Segre*

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## Synopsis

Shun Li works in a textile factory in the outskirts of Rome in order to get her papers and enable her eight-year-old son to come to Italy. She is suddenly transferred to Chioggia, a small city-island in the Veneto lagoon, to work as a bartender in a pub.

Bepi, a Slavic fisherman, nicknamed “the Poet” by his friends, has been a regular at that little pub for years.

Their encounter is a poetic escape from solitude, a silent dialogue between cultures that are different, yet not more distant. It is an odyssey into the deep heart of a lagoon, which can be both the mother and cradle of identities, which never keep still.

But the friendship between Shun Li and Bepi upsets both the Chinese and local communities, who interfere with this new voyage, which they are perhaps simply too afraid of.

## Director’s notes

Two needs gave rise to the idea of the film: on one hand, the necessity to find in a story, at the same time both realistic and metaphoric, a way to speak about the relationship between the individual and cultural identity, in a world that increasingly tends to create occasions for contamination and identity crises; on the other, the desire to talk about two important places in my life that are very emblematic of Italy today: the multiethnic outskirts of Rome and the Veneto, a region that underwent extremely fast economic growth, which has gone from being a land of emigration to one of immigration in a very short time.

In particular, Chioggia, a small lagoon city with a large social and territorial identity, is the perfect place to narrate this process with even more emphasis.

I still remember my encounter with a woman who could have been Shun Li. It was in a typical Veneto pub, where local fishermen had been going for generations. The memory of this woman’s face, so extraneous and foreign to these places weathered by time and worn by habit, has never left me. There was something dreamlike in her presence. Her past, her history, the inspiration for the story all came to me just looking at her. What kind of relationships could she build in a region like mine, so little accustomed to change? This question was the starting point for trying to imagine her life.

*Io sono Li* is also a synthesis of my work as a director of documentary cinema, in which I have been dealing with mainly two themes over the past ten years: migration to Europe (*A metà, A sud di Lampedusa, Come un uomo sulla terra, Il sangue verde*) and the social and geographic territory of the Veneto (*Marghera Canale Nord, Pescatori a Chioggia* and *La mal’ombra*).

My various experiences in directing documentary cinema have enabled me to appreciate not only the story of what is real, but also in what is real, helping me to understand how it is possible to discover the intimate and profoundly human dimension of reality, also of the pressing and current themes in today’s society.

In *Io sono Li* I wanted to respect the methods and styles of documentary cinema, by also working with unprofessional actors and always choosing locations in the real world.

At the same time, the precision and subtleness of the language of Oriental cinema and of some important examples of international independent cinema have been important traces in order to be able to narrate the atmospheres and places I chose for this film.



*For six hours it rises, for six hours it falls.  
The lagoon often changes face and colour.  
Because the water goes in and goes out, the tide rises and falls. Every six hours.  
And when the water in the lagoon changes, everything changes.  
Except the silence. There is always the silence.  
It stays there.  
Sweet, infinite and weak.  
It stops time.  
It gives the mind space to think.  
It holds stories and memories you did not know you knew.  
And it never leaves you alone.  
Like a mother.  
Like the smile and the cry of a mother.  
This is Shun Li, the sweet pain of a mother in the deep silence of the lagoon.  
And this is why Shun Li has the strength to make the old world of a fishermen's pub  
tremble. Make it fall in love. Make it afraid. Make it change.  
It is impossible not to listen to the wind of Shun Li and it is sad to decide to block it or  
isolate it.  
Unfortunately that is what our world decided to do.  
But it is also what the cinema can show.*

Andrea Segre



## Production notes

I had collaborated with Andrea Segre on his documentary *La mal'ombra* and then again with *Il sangue verde*, I knew him and there was a relationship of mutual respect. Succeeding in making a feature film together that narrates the present and the pressing themes of our territory, merging the language of a documentary with a more cinematographic vision, was a challenge I felt was very close to the path we were following in our society. The strength of the story, its protagonist, its dreamlike dimension, yet at the same time rooted in the real world, the intermingling of local elements with the opening up to Asia, and the beauty and narrative power of places I knew well, convinced me that it was an adventure to set off on without hesitations.

The production history of *Io sono Li* thus started in July 2008 when we decided to present the project at the International Film Festival in Rome, in the section Fabbrica dei Progetti – New Cinema Network. *Io sono Li* (with the temporary title *Shun Li and the Poet*) was selected and awarded “Best European Project” for its “*original, poetic and deeply human approach to the subject of immigration*”.

In this occasion we met Francesca Feder from the French production house Æternam Films, who decided to co-produce the film and has been a part of our journey since then.

In the weeks that followed, Andrea Segre worked with the screenwriter Marco Pettenello on the first draft of the film screenplay, which was finished in time to participate in the Atelier of the 62nd Cannes Film Festival in May 2009, where *Io sono Li* was the only Italian project among the 16 selected.

In the meantime, a highly professional work team, on both a technical and artistic level, was defined and consolidated, which enthusiastically joined and supported the project, first and foremost the director of photography, Luca Bigazzi, who had also already had the occasion to collaborate with Andrea Segre in the documentaries *Magari le cose cambiano* and *Il sangue verde*.

The interest by the Chinese actress Zhao Tao, won over by the part of Shun Li, and by the actor Rade Sherbedgia in the role of Bepi, was immediate and fundamental, apart from Marco Paolini's involvement in the project since the start. The collaboration with Roberto Citran for the role of the Lawyer and Giuseppe Battiston for the part of Devis enabled completing the cast, which, in its final form, puts renowned actors alongside non-professionals selected from Chioggia, in line with a documentary-style approach.

*Francesco Bonsembiante*



## Cast

### Zhao Tao – *Shun Li*

Born in the province of Shanxi in China, an internationally renowned actress, with a degree in *Chinese Folk Dance* from the Dance Academy in Beijing, she has had the leading parts in the last five films by the director Jia Zhang-ke, including *Still life*, winner of the Golden Lion at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival.

**Filmography:** *Hai shang chuan qi* (2010) by Jia Zhang-ke (63rd Cannes Film Festival), *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010) by Isaac Julien; *24 City* (2008) by Jia Zhang-ke (61st Cannes Film Festival – official selection); *Wait* (2008) by Peng Tao; *Still Life* (2006) by Jia Zhang-ke (Golden Lion at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival); *The World* (2004) by Jia Zhang-ke (61st Venice International Film Festival – official selection); *Unknown Pleasure* (2002) by Jia Zhang-ke (55th Cannes Film Festival – official selection); *Platform* (2000) by Jia Zhang-ke (57th Venice International Film Festival– official selection).

### Rade Sherbedgia – *Bepi the Poet*

Born in Bunic, he is a refined poet and singer-songwriter, but above all one of the most well-known actors from former Yugoslavia. In the 1990's he moved to London and then to the United States, where he started working in Hollywood productions, winning roles in successful films and TV series, until building a solid international career. Noteworthy among his performances are: *Before the Rain* (1994) by Milčo Mančevski (Golden Lion at the 51st Venice International Film Festival), *La tregua* (1997) by Francesco Rosi, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1998) by Stanley Kubrick and *Fugitive Pieces* by Jeremy Podeswa, which he won the Marco Aurelio award for best actor at the Film Festival in Rome. In Italy he published the autobiography *Fino all'ultimo respiro* (ed. Zandonai, 2010).

**Filmography:** *In the Land of Blood and Honey* by Angelina Jolie (2011); *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by David Yates (2010), *The Code* by Mimi Leder (2009), *The eye* by David Moreau (2008), *Fugitive Pieces* by Jeremy Podeswa and *Say it in Russian* by Jeff Celentano (2007), *Batman Begins* by Christopher Nolan (2005), *Ilaria Alpi. Il più crudele dei giorni* by Ferdinando Vicentini Orgnani (2003), *The Quiet American* by Phillip Noyce (2002), *Mission: Impossible II* by John Woo, *Space Cowboys* by Clint Eastwood and *Snatch. Lo strappo* (2000) by Guy Ritchie, *Eyes Wide Shut* by Stanley Kubrick, *Il dolce rumore della vita* by Giuseppe Bertolucci and *Stigmata* by Rupert Wainwright (1999), *Polish Wedding* by Theresa Connelly and *Mighty Joe Young* by Ron Underwood (1998), *The Saint* by Phillip Noyce and *La tregua* by Francesco Rosi (1997), *Before the Rain* by Milčo Mančevski (1994).

### Marco Paolini – *Coppe*

Actor, writer and director, he was born in Belluno in 1956. Widely known for his *Il racconto del Vajont*, he stands out as a writer and performer of stories with a powerful civil impact (*I-TIGI racconto per Ustica*, *Il Sergente*, *Miserabili*, *Ausmerzen*) and for his ability to narrate changes in society through dialects and poetry. Fond of maps, trains and travelling, he draws his tales with special attention to the landscape, its changes and history (as in *Il Milione*).

**Filmography:** *Piazza Garibaldi* (2011) by Davide Ferrario, *In tempo, ma rubato* (2009) by Giuseppe Baresi; *Sanguepazzo* (2008) by Marco Tullio Giordana; *Teatro civico* (2003) by Davide Ferrario; *A cavallo della tigre* (2002), *La lingua del Santo* (2000), *Ritratti* (1999-2002), *Il toro* (1995) by Carlo Mazzacurati; *Caro diario* (1993) by Nanni Moretti; *I piccoli maestri* (1998) by Daniele Lucchetti.



### Roberto Citran – *Lawyer*

Born in Padua in 1955, he is one of the most renowned Veneto actor in films production, television and theater. He has worked with a great deal of Italian directors, such as Francesca Archibugi, Francesco Rosi and Carlo Mazzacurati – who directed him, among others, in *Il toro*, for which he received the Volpi Cup in Venice as Best Supporting Actor– and abroad with directors such as Rob Marshall and Peter Greenaway.

**Filmography:** *Passannante* by Sergio Colabona, *C'è chi dice no* by Giambattista Avellino (2011), *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore in Piazza Vittorio* by Isotta Toso (2010), *Nine* by Rob Marshall, *Le ombre rosse* by Francesco Maselli, *Generazione mille euro* by Massimo Venier (2009); *Notturmo bus* (2007) by Davide Marengo; *Lezioni di volo* by Francesca Archibugi (2006); *La vita che vorrei* by Giuseppe Piccioni, *Hotel Rwanda* by Terry George (2004); *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* by Peter Greenaway (2003); *A cavallo della tigre* by Carlo Mazzacurati, *El Alamein* by Enzo Monteleone (2002); *La tregua* by Francesco Rosi, *Le acrobate* by Silvio Soldini (1997); *Vesna va veloce* by Carlo Mazzacurati (1996); *Anime fiammeggianti* by Davide Ferrario and *Il toro* by Carlo Mazzacurati.

### Giuseppe Battiston – *Devis*

Born in Udine in 1968, he is one of the main actors in Italian theater and cinema; he has received multiple nominations for the David di Donatello award and won for Best Supporting Actor with *Pane e tulipani* by Silvio Soldini, *Non pensarci* by Gianni Zanasi and *La Passione* by Carlo Mazzacurati, which he also received the Silver Ribbon Award for.

**Filmography:** *Senza arte né parte* by Giovanni Albanese (2011), *Figli delle stelle* by Lucio Pellegrini, *La passione* by Carlo Mazzacurati, *Notizie degli scavi* by Emidio Greco, *Cosa voglio di più* by Silvio Soldini (2010); *Si può fare* by Giulio Manfredonia (2009); *Non pensarci* by Gianni Zanasi, *Giorni e nuvole* by Silvio Soldini, *La giusta distanza* by Carlo Mazzacurati (2007); *A casa nostra* by Francesca Comencini (2006); *La tigre e la neve* by Roberto Benigni, *La bestia nel cuore* by Cristina Comencini (2005); *Agata e la tempesta* (2004) and *Pane e tulipani* (2000) by Silvio Soldini.



## Andrea Segre

Director of film and documentaries for cinema and television, he is also a researcher in Sociology of Communication. For over ten years he has been particularly dedicated to the topic of migration and is the founder of the association ZaLab, which he develops both production projects and participatory-video workshops with.

He has directed numerous documentaries: *Marghera Canale Nord* (2003, 60th Venice International Film Festival; a special mention at the RomaDocFestival); *Dio era un musicista* (2004, 62nd Venice International Film Festival); *PIP49* (2006, episode for “Checosamanca”, Eskimoso-Gruppo Feltrinelli and RaiCinema); *A Sud di Lampedusa* (2006, MedFest award at the 10th MediterraneoVideoFestival; finalist in the 13th Ilaria Alpi Award).

In collaboration with Jolefilm he made *La mal’ombra* (2007, 25th Turin Film Festival; 26th Uruguay Film Festival).

Among his most recent work: *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008), which has already won numerous awards (2.SalinaDocFest; special mention at the Vittorio De Seta Award and Gran Prix TeleFrance CMCA), presented at many festivals in Italy and abroad (Milan Film Festival; Visioni Italiane, Bologna; CinemAfrica, Stockholm; Sao Paulo Film Festival) and nominated for the David di Donatello, in the Documentary section; *Magari le cose cambiano* (2009) “Avanti!” award at the 27th Turin Film Festival; *Il Sangue Verde* (2010), CinemaDoc award at the Venice Days – 67<sup>th</sup> Venice International Film Festival.



## Production

### *Jolefilm*

JOLEFILM is a theatre, cinema and documentary production company located in Padua, born in 1999 to develop the projects of the Italian actor Marco Paolini.

Productions have aimed at developing public awareness of current topics tied to Italian and European territories, bringing out young talent and collaborating with renowned professionals in the field.

Among the latest film and documentary productions: *Il Milione. Quaderno veneziano* by Marco Paolini and *In tempo, ma rubato* by Giuseppe Baresi (2009), *Via Anelli* by Marco Segato and *Chi ga vinto ?* by Enrico Lando (2008), *La mal'ombra* by Andrea Segre and Francesco Cressati (2007); and for live television (La7) broadcasts of theatre performances by Marco Paolini: *Ausmerzen* (2011) *Miserabili. Io e Margaret Thatcher* and *La macchina del capo* (2009), *Album d'aprile* (2008) and *Il Sergente* (2007).

Francesco Bonsembiante has also produced the three *Ritratti* by Carlo Mazzacurati, dedicated to *Mario Rigoni Stern*, *Andrea Zanzotto* and *Luigi Meneghello* (2000-2002).

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### *Æternam Films*

Created by Francesca Feder, ÆTERNAM FILMS produces feature films and television productions.

The choices of Æternam Films are based on a desire and a need: joining artistic ambition and the pleasure of the performance, bringing the talent and the particularities of some selected cineastes to the attention of a large audience and following their career, like, in the past years, for Raphaël Nadjari, Wang Bing, Song Il Gon and Santiago Loza, whose films have been selected in the most renowned film festival such as Cannes and Venice.

Among the most recent films and documentaries produced: *Pauline et François* by Renaud Fély, *The Ditch* by Wang Bing, *Il sangue verde* by Andrea Segre (2010), *He Fengming - Chronique d'une femme chinoise* by Wang Bing (2006), *4 Murejes descalzas* by Santiago Loza (2005), *Spider Forest* by Song Il Gon (2004), *Extraño* by Santiago Loza (2003), *Flower Island* by Song Il Gon (2001), *Fatma* by Khaled Ghorbal (2000), *I'm Josh Polonski's Brother* by Raphaël Nadjari (2000), *The Shade* by Raphaël Nadjari (1999).

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## Credits

*Direction and Concept* Andrea Segre  
*Screenplay* Marco Pettenello *and* Andrea Segre *Photography* Luca Bigazzi  
*Editing* Sara Zavarise *Original music* François Couturier  
*General organizer* Nicola Rosada *Live sound recording* Alessandro Zanon  
*Sets* Leonardo Scarpa *Assistant director* Cinzia Castania  
*Casting* Jorgelina Depetris *Costumes* Maria Rita Barbera *Script supervisor* Gina Neri

### *With*

Zhao Tao, Rade Sherbedgia,  
Marco Paolini, Roberto Citran, Giuseppe Battiston

### *Produced by*

Francesco Bonsembiante, Jolefilm (Italy)  
*in co-production with*  
Francesca Feder, Aeternam films (France)

*in collaboration with*



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