

## THE GOLDEN DOOR



Nuovomondo (The Golden Door)

Directed by Emanuele Crialese

Produced by Bernard Bouix Tommaso Calevi Alexandre Mallet-Guy

Written by Emanuele Crialese

Starring Charlotte Gainsbourg Vincenzo Amato Francesco Casisa Filippo Pucillo  
Vincent Schiavelli

Music by Antonio Castrigano

Editing by Maryline Monthieux

Distributed by Miramax

Release date(s) May 25, 2007 (US limited) September 22, 2006 (Italy) Running time  
120 min.

Country Italy

Language Italian, English

Budget ~ €10,000,000

Nuovomondo literally, new world (The Golden Door) is a 2006 drama based around a family's migration from Italy to New York during the beginning of the 20th Century. The film is set in both Italy and The United States. The film is written and directed by Emanuele Crialese. Vincent Schiavelli, whose character was originally planned to play a major part, died during the filming, forcing his role to become a supporting character. The movie premiered at the Venice Film Festival on September 8, 2006 to critical praise and seven nominations (with six wins) at the Festival. Many praised the director's focus on sound and visual composition. Others focused on the lack of typical iconography of the time (such as the Statue of Liberty).

Martin Scorsese will be featured in the marketing for the film. He will also introduce the film at the Tribeca Film Festival.

### Plot summary

During the turn of the 20th Century, the poor Mancuso family (headed by the widowed Salvatore, Vincenzo Amato), from Sicily, Italy, emigrates to the United States. They dream of the land of opportunity, where giant vegetables are grown, people swim in milk, and coins fall from the sky. Salvatore takes his family, as well as his fiery and proud mother, Fortunata (Aurora Quattrocchi). While on the ship to America, many men find the British Lucy (Charlotte Gainsbourg) attractive. For administrative reasons, Lucy wants to marry Salvatore on arrival on Ellis Island. He agrees; he understands that she is not in love with him yet, but expects that will come.

At Ellis Island, the families undergo extensive and humiliating physical and psychological examinations and questioning. Pietro (Filippo Pucillo) is about to be sent back for being mute, and Salvatore's mother may be sent back for insufficient intelligence.

### Critical reception

The film received generally favorable reviews from critics. The review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes reported that 72% of critics gave the film positive reviews, based on 74 reviews. Metacritic reported the film had an average score of 74 out of 100, based on 22 reviews.

Ann Hornaday of *The Washington Post* named it the 7th best film of 2007. Wesley Morris of *The Boston Globe* also named it the 7th best film of 2007.

### Awards

The movie won six awards at the Venice Film Festival, including two awards for Best Film (the CinemAvvenire and Pasinetti Awards), along with the FEDIC, SIGNIS, Silver Lion, and UNICEF awards. It was also nominated for a Golden Lion award. The film was also nominated for a European Film Award, for the Film of the Year. The film was Italy's submission for the 79th Academy Awards, but was ultimately passed over in final nominations.

## THE PEDAGOGICAL SHEET

### QUESTIONS

#### *“ THE GOLDEN DOOR” BY EMANUELE CRIALESE*

- 1) What are the most emblematic scenes in this film very similar to ones seen in “ Civic O” by Citto Maselli and “ Letters from the Sahara” by De Seta?
- 2) What is the symbolical meaning of the dream scene?
- 3) The arrival of the protagonists in the New World is full of disillusionment due to the Americans’ prejudice towards the new immigrants. What is the most important event that negatively struck both the protagonists and the viewers?



### ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the most emblematic scenes in the film “ The Golden Door” by E. Crialese very similar to ones seen in “ Civic O” by Citto Maselli and “Letters from the Sahara” by V. De Seta?

The hard way towards hope

Feet in the foreground, bleeding hands clinging to a rock, aching injuring feet climbing along an impassable and difficult path are the common scenes to the three films and the main symbols of the protagonists’ moving to a new country.

Moving means an extremely difficult travel and psychological sufferings due to the separation from a hostile but beloved land, from an unhappy poor but reassuring childhood birthplace. Moving to a new town, a new country means physical strain and pain but well accepted because it can improve their life quality condition.

The birthplace where the poor migrants had thought of spending the whole life, where they had placed all their future expectations reveals now to be hostile, without work openings; so there is only a chance for them : moving trustfully towards other places to

have a respectable life because only through sufferings they can realize their expectations of life.



2) What is the symbolical meaning of the dream scene?

Milk is the most genuine, natural, primary nourishment and was surely the basic food, synonymous of a more comfortable life for a simple primitive society like the Sicilian one at the beginning of the 20th century.

The first scene in a dreamlike atmosphere represents the emigrants' future life expectations when they arrive in the New World; in fact the hard decision of leaving and giving up their hometown full of survival problems is rewarded with the great illusion to get to America where everything is seen in a very ideal view. The evidence of this illusion is emphasized by receiving postcards from The New World with pictures of exaggerated sizes of vegetables, carrots, tomatoes, as symbols of wealth and abundance, a way of deceiving uneducated, undeveloped hesitant people to leave their lands.

We understand from the milk bath scene that these poor emigrants flatter themselves to have a comfortable quiet work life abroad in spite of an extremely hard travel.

The last final scene of the milk bath emphasizes the hope of reaching a dreamt new country; so milk is reassuring, it evokes the sweetness and the indissoluble bond with the motherhood because only a mother breast-fed us.



3) The arrival of the protagonists in the New World is full of disillusionment due to the Americans' prejudices towards the new immigrants coming from Italy. What is the most important event that negatively struck both the protagonists and the viewers?

The I-Q Test is. The word "prejudice" on an Italian dictionary is defined as "an anticipated judgement, a wrong opinion which depends on a limited knowledge of the facts or an acritical acceptance of the present conditions".

This definition corresponds exactly to the behaviour of the Americans who tested Italian immigrants at their arrival in the New World in the 19th and 20th centuries.

We can understand this prejudice during the short dialogue between a young English lady and an American doctor testing the Italian immigrants' I-Q;

The English lady: "I believed that you were looking for infectious diseases".

The American Doctor: "Unfortunately it has been scientifically proved that the lack of intelligence is hereditary and consequently infectious too. We cannot allow that our citizens mingle with less intelligent people."

The lady (ironically): "What a modern view!!!"

The consideration that the Italians were gifted with a modest IQ might be justified by the absence of knowledge of the Americans' inner world and values but not by the prejudice making reference to a scientific precise acquisition and assumption that such a poor intelligence could spread quickly as a virus, capable of infecting other subjects.

Today we are astonished when we consider these practices used in America to test poor immigrants worthy of becoming American citizens without considering them like human beings gifted with knowledge, abilities and skills.

Nowadays Italy represents the New World for the immigrants coming from Eastern European, Asiatic and African countries. But what is our behaviour? Is it similar or different from the American one? Are we sure that we represent "the modern Americans" for them with the same prejudices, racial and religious antagonisms towards them?