



MORRICONE

Once upon a Time in America

In between shooting *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968) and *A Fistful of Dynamite* (1971), Leone fell in love with a 400-page novel about Jewish gangsters, *The Hoods*. Harry Grey, the author's pseudonym, himself an ex-gangster, wrote it while doing time in Sing Sing. Leone met him at the end of the Sixties and was intrigued by this ex-hoodlum who responded with monosyllabic answers – 'Yes, no, maybe' was all he was able to drag out of him – and represented none of the glory of criminality as depicted by Hollywood, who also shared with him the same imagination, formed in cinema theatres. Leone understood that *The Hoods* would give him the opportunity to work, not on mythical characters as in his previous work, but on the Myth itself, on its transmission, on film genres and their derivations, on the infancy of the 20th century in a collective Recherche du Temps Perdu.

The construction of this cathedral (as Enrico Medioli called the preparatory work) took a long time. Eleven years passed between the making of *Once upon a Time in America* and his previous film, *A Fistful of Dynamite*. In an interview, Leone paraphrased Joseph Conrad when joking about the enormous amount of time it took to make the film: 'I believed it was an adventure. Instead, it was life.' According to those who collaborated with him between '67 and '77, Leone didn't work on a script, instead the story evolved through infinite oral versions. The cinematographic rights to the novel weren't initially available and after many fruitless attempts it would eventually be Alberto Grimaldi, the producer of some of Leone's earlier work, as well as films by Fellini, Pasolini and Bertolucci, who managed to free up the rights and ask Norman Mailer to write a screenplay. Leone didn't find that first draft interesting and for the rewrite he gathered an extraordinary group of Italian screenwriters around him: Franco Arcalli (Bertolucci's brilliant collaborator), Enrico Medioli (writer of seven screenplays for Visconti), Leo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi (who, in Mario Monicelli's film *My Friends*, reinterpreted the theme of friendship in an entirely new way). Later on, a young critic named Franco Ferrini joined the group (and, much later, during the final drafting of English language dialogue, Stuart Kaminsky). Medioli said: 'None of us screenwriters are American, none of us are Jewish, none of us are gangsters. Everything is filtered through the cinema, rather than through literature.'

At the centre of the story are Noodles' memories, shredded by the effects of opium, saturated with nostalgia, impossible to retell in chronological order, but *Once upon a Time in America* isn't a biopic, it is the memory of a man's life who, for over 30 years, has been examining and re-examining, over and over, his whole existence, specific details and events, obsessively retracing words, gestures, echoes from his past.

The result of this lengthy writing process was a screenplay of almost five hours in length, proving too much for Grimaldi, defeated by his experiences with Bernardo Bertolucci's *1900*, which had been released in two parts. In 1980, Leone met with Arnon Milchan and Warner Brothers and finally it appeared as though the film was on the verge of being made, also because Robert De Niro had accepted to play Noodles. De Niro offered him the

possibility of letting 'Pinocchio become a real boy', thereby freeing him from the role of puppeteer and allowing him to become the narrator. The pairing of James Woods and Robert De Niro added an authentic and realistic force to the screenplay, which Leone's cinema had not previously known.

Leone is the singer of this anthem to the cinema. However – and it goes without saying – if he hadn't had some of the greatest artists from the golden age of Italian cinema by his side, he would never have been able to create a gem so precious, so richly faceted, so luminous. As in his previous films, Morricone's soundtrack is in perfect symbiosis with the images, but here, for the first time, it contains some famous songs from the 20th century (as well as Rossini's *La gazza ladra*) and is an integral part of the narration: it supports the jigsaw puzzle narrative structure, thus allowing us to temporally locate Noodles' memories. Ennio Morricone already had the soundtrack prepared in the mid-Seventies and during the shoot it was used to inspire the actors, as they did in the silent era. The film was shot over nine months in Paris, Lake Como, New York, Rome, Miami, Venice, New Jersey and Montreal. It was one of the last epics to be shot before the advent of the digital age. Everything we see actually existed in front of the camera. Art director Carlo Simi, costume designer Gabriella Pescucci and cinematographer Tonino Delli Colli achieved a miracle of storytelling, recounting three eras with meticulous attention to detail, precision and scrupulous veracity while working between North America and Europe.

During the advanced editing stages the issue of duration arose: the first version had a running time of four hours and 20 minutes. Milchan and Warner Brothers expected a film of no more than 160 minutes, but Leone had his film in mind. At the end of the struggle the American version, with the scenes re-edited in chronological order and not approved by Leone, lasted 1 hour and 34 minutes, while the European version, presented at Cannes in May 1984, lasted 3 hours and 49 minutes. Several sequences had been eliminated, which, thanks to the stubborn will of the Leone family, the perseverance of The Film Foundation supported by Gucci and the rights owner New Regency, we have been able to find and re-insert where Leone had originally intended them. Beginning and end frames of the cut scenes allowed us to identify the exact place they were deleted from. Leone often recalled many of these scenes with regret, such as the appearance of Louise Fletcher, Oscar winner for *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, as the director of a cemetery, which disappeared from the film along with the scene of Deborah (Elizabeth McGovern) reciting as Cleopatra. This newly reconstructed version lasts 4 hours and 15 minutes.

All the characteristic elements of Sergio Leone's cinema are to be found in *Once upon a Time in America*: myth, death, friendship, memories, robberies, betrayals, a much anticipated duel, the 'visual' presence of the soundtrack, the amazing use of dolly shots and camera movement. However, the film is very different from his previous work: thriller, melodrama, citations from gangster cinema classics, as well as the cinema of Chaplin, Welles and neo-realism all come together in a voyage towards oblivion and death, in which we slowly discover, within this unreal cinematographic grandeur, Noodles' desperation and anguish. In this circular story, where everything is always postponed and remains inalterable, in an America which is no longer the country where dreams come true, but where power can only ever end up ground to nothing, Noodles is an antihero with the aura of an epic character, an exile that can no longer return home, because home only exists in his

memories. Observing happenings from a cosmic perspective, examining his characters with compassion and emotion, once again Leone depicts human myths, but here we also find the miracle and mystery of their existence. De Niro’s memorable ecstatic smile in the film’s finale is a liberating betrayal of cinematic conventions, but it is also a logical conclusion to a film which Leone considered to be ‘a sort of death dance at the birth of a nation... [where] all my characters stare death in the face.’ It was to be the last frame of his cinema. Leone died in 1989, while at home watching Robert Wise’s film *I Want to Live!*

Gian Luca Farinelli, Director of Cineteca di Bologna

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA

Directed by: Sergio Leone
©: Embassy International Pictures
a P.S.O. International release
Presented by: Arnon Milchan
Production Company: Rafran Cinematografica *
Executive Producer: Claudio Mancini
Produced by: Arnon Milchan
Executive in Charge of Production: Fred Caruso
Montreal Crew Production Manager: Ginette Hardy
Production Supervisor: Mario Cotone
Unit Manager: Walter Massi
New York Crew Production Co-ordinator: Gail Kearns
Production Auditor: Gianna Di Michele
Accountants: Fausto Capozzi, Sergio Rosa, Diana Di Michele
New York Crew Accountant: Dominique Bruballa
Montreal Crew Accountant: Lucy Drolet
Location Manager: Attilio Viti
New York Crew Location Manager: Robert Rothbard
Montreal Crew Location Manager: Pierre Laberge
New York Crew Location Controller: Herb Hetzer
Consultant to the Producer: Robert Benmussa
Dialogue Director: Brian Freilino
1st Assistant Director: Fabrizio Sergenti Castellani
Assistant Director: Luca Morsella
New York Crew Assistant Directors: Dennis Benatar, Amy Wells
Casting: Cis Corman, Joy Todd
Screenplay by: Leonardi Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Enrico Mediolì, Franco Arcalli, Franco Ferrini, Sergio Leone
Additional Dialogue: Stuart Kaminsky
Based on the novel The Hoods by: Harry Grey
Director of Photography: Tonino Delli Colli
Cameraman: Carlo Tafani
Montreal Crew Special Effects: Gabe Vidella, Special Effects Unlimited
Film Editor: Nino Baragli
Editing Co-ordinator: Maurizio Mancini
Art Director: Carlo Simi
New York Crew Art Director: James Singelis
Set Designer: Giovanni Natalucci
Construction Manager: Tullio Lullo
Costume Designer: Gabriella Pescucci
New York Crew Associate Costume Designer: Richard Bruno
Assistant Costume Designers: Raffaella Leone, Marina Frassine
Costumes: Tirelli
Make-up Dept.: Nilo Jacoponi, Manlio Rocchetti, Gino Zamprioli
Hair Dept.: Maria Teresa Corridoni, Renata Magnanti, Enzo Cardella
Titles and Optical Effects: Studio 4
Music Composed and Directed by: Ennio Morricone
Pan Flute: Gheorghe Zamfir
Sound Recording Mixer: Fausto Ancillai
Dubbing Editor: Robert Rietti
Stunt Co-ordinator: Benito Stefanelli
Studio and Synchronization: Cinecittà

Cast

Robert De Niro (David ‘Noodles’ Aaronson)
James Woods (Maximilian ‘Max’ Bercovicz)
Elizabeth McGovern (Deborah Gelly)
Joe Pesci (Frankie Minoldi)
Burt Young (Joe)
Tuesday Weld (Carol)
Treat Williams (James ‘Jimmy’ Conway O’Donnell)
Danny Aiello (Police Chief Vincent Aiello)

Richard Bright (Chicken Joe)
James Hayden (Patrick ‘Patsy’ Goldberg)
William Forsythe (Philip ‘Cockeye’ Stein)
Darlanne Fleugel (Eve)
Larry Rapp (Fat Moe)
Richard Foronjy (Officer ‘Fartface’ Whitey)
Robert Harper (Sharkey)
Dutch Miller (Van Linden)
Gerard Murphy (Crowning)
Amy Ryder (Peggy)
Olga Karlatos (woman in the puppet theatre)
Mario Brega (Mandy)
Ray Dittrich (Trigger)
Frank Gio (Beefy)
Karen Shallo (Mrs Aiello)
Angelo Florio (Willie the Ape)
Scott Tiler (young Noodles)
Rusty Jacobs (young Max/David Bailey)
Brian Bloom (young Patsy)
Adrian Curran (young Cockeye)
Mike Monetti (young Fat Moe)
Noah Moazezi (Dominic)
James Russo (Bugsy)
Frankie Caserta, Joey Marzella (Bugsy’s gang)
Clem Caserta (Al Capuano)
Frank Sisto (Fred Capuano)
Jerry Strivelli (Johnny Capuano)
Julie Cohen (young Peggy)
Marvin Scott (TV interviewer)
Mike Gendel (Irving Gold)
Paul Herman (Monkey)
Ann Neville (girl in coffin)
Joey Faye (adorable old man)
Linda Ipanema (Nurse Thompson)
Tandy Cronin (1st reporter)
Richard Zobel (2nd reporter)
Baxter Harris (3rd reporter)
Arnon Milchan (chauffeur)
Bruno Iannone (thug)
Marty Licata (cemetery caretaker)
Marcia Jean Kurtz (Max’s mother)
Estelle Harris (Peggy’s mother)
Gerritt Debeer (drunk)
Jennifer Connelly (young Deborah)
Margherita Pace (body double for Jennifer Connelly)
Alexander Godfrey (newstand man)
Cliff Cudney (mounted policeman)
Paul Farentino (2nd mounted policeman)
Bruce Bahrenburg (Sergeant Halloran)
Mort Freeman (street singer)
Sandra Solberg (friend of young Deborah)
Jay Zeely (foreman)
Massimo Liti (young Macrò)
Louise Fletcher (cemetery curator) *
Scott Coffey (teenager) *
Francesca Leone (David Bailey’s girlfriend) *
Chuck L. Low (Deborah Gelly’s father) *
Ron Nummi (waiter) *
Ryan Paris *

USA/Italy 1983©
255 mins (+ 40min interval)
* Uncredited

MORRICONE

The Battle of Algiers (La battaglia di Algeri)
Sun 1 Aug 15:10; Wed 25 Aug 14:30

A Fistful of Dollars (Per un pugno di dollari)
Mon 2 Aug 20:45; Sat 7 Aug 11:30; Tue 10 Aug 20:50; Mon 30 12:20

Two Mules for Sister Sara
Wed 4 Aug 18:00; Sat 21 Aug 20:30

Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom (Salò o Le 120 giornate di Sodoma)
Thu 5 Aug 20:45; Tue 10 Aug 17:45; Wed 25 Aug 17:50

The Untouchables
Fri 6 Aug 17:45; Tue 24 Aug 14:30

The Thing
Fri 6 Aug 20:50; Tue 24 Aug 20:50

For a Few Dollars More (Per qualche dollaro in più)
Sat 7 Aug 14:00; Sun 22 Aug 12:10; Mon 30 Aug 15:00

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo)
Sat 7 Aug 17:10; Sun 29 Aug 18:20; Mon 30 Aug 18:15

White Dog
Sat 7 Aug 20:50; Fri 20 Aug 18:10; Fri 27 Aug 20:45

Once upon a Time in the West (C’era una volta il west)
Sun 8 Aug 12:00; Fri 27 Aug 14:00; Tue 31 Aug 14:00

The Mission
Sun 8 Aug 15:10; Thu 12 Aug 20:30; Thu 26 Aug 18:00

Days of Heaven
Mon 9 Aug 21:00; Tue 31 Aug 17:50

Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down (Atame!)
Wed 11 Aug 20:50; Thu 19 Aug 14:15; Mon 23 Aug 21:00; Tue 31 Aug 20:45

The Hateful Eight
Sun 15 Aug 15:00; Sun 22 Aug 18:00

Once upon a Time in America
Tue 17 Aug 17:40; Sat 28 Aug 11:20

The Legend of 1900 (La leggenda del pianista sull’oceano)
Sat 21 Aug 11:50; Sun 29 Aug 15:10

Cinema Paradiso (Nuovo Cinema Paradiso)
Sat 21 Aug 14:30; Thu 26 Aug 14:30

Promotional partner



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Thelma and Louise
Sun 1 Aug 18:00; Sat 14 Aug 20:35; Sat 28 Aug 20:20

Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice
Mon 2 Aug 20:40; Fri 13 Aug 20:45; Wed 18 Aug 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by Julie Lobalzo Wright, University of Warwick); Mon 23 Aug 14:30

Bright Star
Tue 3 Aug 20:30; Fri 27 Aug 17:50; Mon 30 Aug 18:10

Boyz N the Hood
Wed 4 Aug 17:45 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Leila Latif); Mon 9 Aug 20:50

Les Demoiselles de Rochefort (The Young Ladies of Rochefort)
Thu 5 Aug 17:50; Thu 26 Aug 17:40

The Big Lebowski
Fri 6 Aug 20:45; Mon 16 Aug 20:50; Wed 25 Aug 14:15

Only Angels Have Wings
Sat 7 Aug 12:00; Tue 24 Aug 14:15; Tue 31 Aug 20:30

A Farewell to Arms
Sun 8 Aug 12:20; Fri 20 Aug 14:30; Wed 25 Aug 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large)

Matewan
Tue 10 Aug 14:15; Sun 15 Aug 18:20; Sat 21 Aug 12:20

Cutter’s Way
Wed 11 Aug 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large); Tue 17 Aug 14:30; Fri 20 Aug 20:50; Fri 27 Aug 20:50

The New World
Thu 12 Aug 14:30; Sun 22 Aug 12:00

Big Wednesday
Thu 19 Aug 17:50; Sun 29 Aug 18:10

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