

My Brother is an only child

In Italian movies social conflict, class struggle, ideological warfare, political contention, is often expressed through sibling rivalry.

“My Brother Is an Only Child,” directed by Daniele Luchetti from a script he wrote with Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli, is a lively contribution to the grand tradition of Italian fraternal cinema. A weightier, longer specimen can be found in “The Best of Youth” (2003), an epic mini-series also written by Mr. Petraglia and Mr. Rulli. In that story brotherly love and strife provided the scaffolding for a long, intricate chronicle of Italy’s transformation over four decades, from the 1960s until just about now. The scope of “My Brother Is an Only Child” is narrower, and its focus more psychological than sociological, but like “The Best of Youth” it takes its energy from the ferment of the 1960s, and follows two brothers (Accio and Manrico) driven to the left and the right by the centrifugal force of the times.

The director’s efforts to convey the immediacy and the spirit of that eventful era gives “My Brother Is an Only Child” an inevitable air of nostalgia. Still, nostalgia for those crazy old days has its attractions, even (or perhaps especially) if you weren’t there. And even though much of “My Brother Is an Only Child” feels a little familiar, the characters are interesting and vivid enough to engage your sympathy. Elio Germano’s performance is especially agile and engaging.

And there are enough details to impart the flavors of the time and place: Accio and Manrico’s father brandishing a crucifix at a political meeting; a leftist student orchestra playing a “corrected,” Marxist version of “Ode to Joy” being disrupted by a fascist gang defending Beethoven by any means necessary. That scene, violent, ardent and absurd, presents a tableau of what is best in “My Brother Is an Only Child”: Accio and Manrico, allies and antagonists, bound and separated by love, politics and art.