

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Bertolucci's '1900' sets the screen ablaze</b>
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Source	<i>San Jose Mercury News</i>
Date	1978 Feb 24
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	3E
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Novecento (1900), Bertolucci, Bernardo, 1976



# Bertolucci's '1900' sets the screen ablaze

By Vicki Reed Avidiya  
Movie Critic

**A**LTHOUGH Bernardo Bertolucci trimmed and trimmed, what he has created in "1900," his epic film of politics and economics at the turn of the century in Italy, can hardly be called sparse.

The celebrated 35-year-old Italian filmmaker, who cut his teeth on the likes of "Before the Revolution," "The Spider's Strategem," "The Conformist" and "Last Tango in Paris," provides a forceful, powerful motion picture rich in political discourse.

The story opens with the birth of two boys in 1900, in the agriculturally rich farmland of the Emilia Province in Italy.

One (Robert DeNiro) is the grandson of the master (Burt Lancaster) of Villa Berlinghieri, the other (Gerard Depardieu) is a bastard born into the family of farm workers led by their patriarch (Sterling Hayden).

It's the boys in blue against the boys in red as the feudal system breaks down in the ensuing years and the League grows among united farm workers. Fascist is pitted against socialist.

Some of the most superlative footage grants us insight into the ways of the people who eventually must go to war on their own farmland, struggling to gain or maintain power over one another's lives.

Considering the length of "1900" — the film is an abbreviated 4 hours from the 5 hours and 20 minute version Bertolucci preferred but could not get distributed — history can be made, as well, while it plays.

Bertolucci has insisted, like the jock in the after-shave television commercial who is slapped with the sweet smelling bracer, "Thanks, I needed that!" — that his cinematic view of those immensely important years in Italian's modern history is, indeed, better for the paring.

Still, I would have liked to have seen the longer version and not because I am dissatisfied with what this innovative and sensitive talent has wrought, but because there are at times a slowness in characterizations and a jarred continuity that one suspects is the result of what ended up on the cutting room floor.

I chose "1900" as one of my top 10 best films for the year and despite anything I might point to as flawed, the movie stands out breath-takingly in my memory for the vice-grip it has on a viewer as it alternately bedazzles and bewilders. Some of the violence is grisly as conveyed with sub-human intensity. It is not a tidy film, and at times need a more disciplined touch to compensate for its excesses.

De Niro, who was performing before the cameras of "1900" prior to his award-winning psychopath role in "Taxi Driver," is amazingly subdued — a tantalizing portrait for those for those of us used to his "Taxi Driver," "Godfather, Part II," and "New York, New York" portrayals. His chameleon qualities are especially apparent as we see him move from his 20s into the fivility of a tempestuous marriage, the rigidity of the landowners' stance, and finally the effete and powerless landowner in a circle where his claims are little better than the butt of jokes.

It is certainly Olmo, the peasant's grandson, who is the favorite of Bertolucci, and his bias becomes burdensome to the screenplay, robbing it of a credibility it never fully recovers during the 70 years the film encompasses.

Lancaster plays Alfredo's grandfather, looking



Dominique Sanda and Robert DeNiro in "1900"

✓✓✓ 1900 Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci; written by Bertolucci, Franco Arcalli and Giuseppe Bertolucci; from a novel by Norman Thomas DiGiovanni; produced by Alberto Grimaldi; photographed by Vittorio Storaro; edited by Arcalli; music by Ennio Morricone. Exclusive engagement through March 1 at Town and Country (Mann) Theater, San Jose. Admission: \$3.50.

Robert DeNiro .....	Alfredo Berlinghieri
Gerard Depardieu .....	Olm Dalco
Dominique Sanda .....	Ada Berlinghieri
Burt Lancaster .....	Alfredo Berlinghieri Sr.
Sterling Hayden .....	Leo Dalco
Donald Sutherland .....	Attila
Laura Betti .....	Regina

much as he did in the title role of last year's AIP release, "The Island of Dr. Moreau." Hayden is the rebellious peasant diety of Bertolucci, who plays his role in too stilted a manner for my taste.

Beyond these four, around whom in this male-weighted story all must seemingly revolve, comes Dominique Sanda. She is the free-living sophisticated Ada, at home with the sexual kinks, drugs and dalliance of the indulged classes, but unprepared for the duties of the master's wife which she is called upon to perform when Alfred inherits the Villa Berlinghieri.

Miss Sanda is superb, spinning her web at one moment and airing her snow white linen the next. She dominates scene after scene.

In outstanding performances are Laura Betti, as Alfredo's sexually aggressive, perverse cousin Regina, and Donald Sutherland as the menacing, ruthless and cruel Attila, Regina's husband.

Although Bertolucci strives to tell us a tale of two youngsters who grow side by side into the class expectations that will surely and irretrievably separate them — as landowner and serf — he has instead told much more about the hated Berlingheiris. (Thanks to inept make-up and costuming Depardieu presumably has found the fountain of youth in his socialist philosophies.)

The sheltering influence of upper class economics cripple the young Alfredo in the banks of the river running for frogs, teaching him self-service, defining a small controlled world where knees do not get scratched and trousers do not get torn.

It is Olmo who emerges as essentially the experienced, loving, mature, all-embracing man, who summons sympathy even for his old friend, rival and former master.

Alfredo shrivels before our eyes as the years take their toll but Bertolucci has him ever-yearning to run freely as he (and the director) imagine the peasants' life to be.

The ending is only what one must expect from Bertolucci, who can only be held to the yoke for so long before he must break free and innovate, borrow from the surreal.

Filming of "1900" began in the summer of 1974 and DeNiro would win his Oscar for best supporting actor as the young Don Vito in "The Godfather, Part II" in 1975. It has taken these four years to conform the immense and sometimes fanciful vision of Bertolucci to the big screen.

It is a film pregnant with promise, much of which it delivers magnificently. It is as multifaceted and sometimes sordid as the the darkest parts of human nature.

Parental guidance: Strictly an adult film, includes battles with excrement, masturbation, some nudity and a few, extremely violent scenes.

## What the Checks Mean

- ✓✓✓✓ Extraordinary
- ✓✓✓ Excellent
- ✓✓ Good
- ✓ Fair
- (none) Poor