

Document Citation

Title	Abraham Valley (Vale Abraão)
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Source	<i>London Film Festival</i>
Date	1993
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Vale Abraão (Valley of Abraham), Oliveira, Manoel de, 1993

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37th LONDON 19 FRI 20.00 NFT1 FILM FESTIVAL 1993

Abraham Valley

(Vale Abraão)

Dir/Scr: Manoel de Oliveira



Portugal/France/Switzerland 1993

Leading players: Leonor Silveira, Cecile Sanz de Alba,
Luis Miguel Cintra, Rui de Carvalho

Rt: 187 mins

UK Dist: Artificial Eye Film Distributors

Certainly one of the richest, most cultivated directors alive, Oliveira begins his film with a Biblical citation linking its breathtaking northern Portuguese locations with Abraham's exploitation of his wife Sarah's body. The expectation that this is a film about female victimization is strengthened when the young heroine Ema (Cecile Sanz de Alba) begins wistfully reading "Madame Bovary". As a woman (Leonor Silveira), she even marries a passive doctor she doesn't love and begins to have affairs. But Oliveira (who, at 85, has hit his stride) throws viewers a curve ball full of mischievous irony. The film is adapted from Agustina Bessa-Luis' novel, itself a reflection on Flaubert. *Abraham* deliberately confuses the Bovary comparison, forcing viewers to keep re-thinking literary and cultural givens. The film's great device is an off-screen narration, constantly commenting on the images and giving them a different slant. The idea that Ema is a dazzling, menacing beauty – underlined by the narrator – is something else from Silveira's quiet, slightly awkward charm, and the other players also reflect the narration's rich ironies. *Deborah Young, Variety*