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Author(s)	Deborah Young
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PORTUGAL



THE VALLEY OF ABRAHAM

Vale Abraão

VANCOUVER IFF '93

Portugal/France/Switzerland, 1993, 187 minutes

Director: Manoel de Oliveira **Production Company:** Madragoa Filmes **Producer:** Paulo Branco **Screenplay:** Manoel de Oliveira **Cinematographer:** Mário Barroso **Editor:** Manoel de Oliveira, Valerie Loiseleux **Leading Players:** Leonor Silveira, Luís Miguel Cintra, Cecile Sanz de Alba, Rui de Carvalho, Luís Lima Barreto **Print Source:** Instituto Portugues De Cinema **Sales Agent/Distributor:** Madragoa Films

The Valley of Abraham is the most accessible of Manoel de Oliveira's work to date. Though over three hours long, the film's strong storyline makes it as engrossing as a rich 19th century novel. Certainly one of the most cultured directors alive, de Oliveira begins *Valley* 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, she even marries a passive doctor (Luis Miguel Cintra) she doesn't love, and begins to have affairs.

But de Oliveira (who, at 85, has hit his stride) throws viewers a curve ball full of mischievous irony. The film's great device is an off-screen narration, constantly commenting on the images and giving them a different slant. The narrator keeps busy advancing the plot and interjecting heavy bouts of psychological and social analyses . . . the effect is stimulating.

Uniformly stunning locations in the Portuguese countryside are rendered expressively by Mário Barroso's silken cinematography, and the costumes and decor give the film a magical atemporal quality.

Deborah Young, *Variety*

Selected Filmography: *Aniki-Bobó* (42), *The Past and the Present* (71), *The Satin Slipper* (85), *The Cannibals* (88), *The Divine Comedy* (91)