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PROGRAM NOTES

Stunning Imagery In Bertolucci's *1900*



Robert De Niro and Gerard Depardieu in "1900."

By RICHARD SPRINGER

A film, unlike a mathematical formula, is not the sum of its parts. In director Bernardo Bertolucci's epic "1900," fine acting coexists with overdrawn characterizations, stunning imagery precedes static plot development and unforgettable scenes appear as regularly as forgettable ones.

Given: uneven quality, too brutal violence, simplistic politics, four-hour-length; "1900" manages to rise above its faults. Like one of those giant, 19th-century French canvases, the film portrays an epic battle with sure, broad

strokes.

SYMPATHIES

Some early critical comment led one to expect a pro-leftist, highly polemical film, which is not the case. While Bertolucci's sympathies are with the peasants and against the fascists and exploitive landlords, he is ambiguous in his feelings about the 19th century aristocracy as represented by the Berlinghieri family patriarch (Burt Lancaster).

In "1900" Bertolucci obviously criticizes the landowners who were too weak or too greedy to fight the rise of the fascists, but he also is pessimistic about the rise of

the working class. If one is to take the ending of "1900" seriously, Bertolucci is saying that mechanization and bureaucracy continue to subvert the rights of the workers, who had a hard, but idyllic life under the fairer Italian aristocrats in the 19th century.

CAST

Outstanding in the cast are Lancaster and Robert De Niro as Lancaster's grandson who attempts to carry aristocratic traditions into the fascist era, while the world collapses around him. Sterling Hayden, as the peasant patriarch rival to Lancaster and Gerard Depardieu as Hayden's bastard grandson are also good. The relationships between Lancaster and Hayden and between De Niro and Depardieu are richly developed and underscore Bertolucci's ambiguous feelings toward the landed gentry. The film will end its San Francisco run at the Stage Door Theatre soon.

The four-hour film was cut by Bertolucci from a five-hour, 20 minute version. "At first I considered it an imposition to cut it," he told one interviewer. "Then I discovered it could become a privilege — a year after I made the film I saw things I liked less. I've shortened many scenes — what has changed is the rhythm of the film, not the meaning. Also, it was a little 'terrorist' to have a film that lasted more than five hours."