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Oltre Il Bene E Il Male

(Beyond Good And Evil)

(ITALIAN-FRENCH-W.

GERMAN-COLOR)

VARIETY 10-12-77

Variety

10-12-77
Paris, Oct. 10.

United Artists release of Clesi Cinematografica S.P.A., Lotar Films, UA (Paris), Artemis GMBH production. Produced by Robert Gordon Edwards. Stars Dominique Sanda, Erland Josephson, Robert Powell, Virna Lisi. Directed by Liliana Cavani. Screenplay, Cavani, Franco Arcalli, Italo Moscati; camera (Color), Armando Nanzuzi; art director, Lorenzo Mongiardino; music, Daniele Paris. Reviewed at Salle Ponthieu, Paris, Sept. 27, '77. Running time, 127 MINS.

Lou	Dominique Sanda
Nietzsche	Erland Josephson
Paul	Robert Powell
Elizabeth	Virna Lisi
Gast	Philippe Leroy
Mother	Elisa Cegani
Andreas	Michael Degen
Forster	Umberto Orsini

(English Soundtrack)

Liliana Cavani has used the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, as a starting point for a free, fictionalized look at three unusual people attempting to live together in spiritual liberty in the late 19th century during social and political repressiveness in Germany. Though not biography, it may mean more to those with some backgrounding in Nietzsche.

Played with keen assurance and perception by Swedish thesp Erland Josephson, an Ingmar Bergman regular, he seems an establishment figure rebelling by sheer freeing of instincts against the restraints of the day and his hypocritically sanctimonious and pious family, not to forget an overbearing, almost incestuous attitude towards him by his sister.

At 38, at a time in his life of solitude, little recognition of his philosophical books, he meets a Russian girl of 21 of Jewish ancestry who seems to be achieving the freedom he believes in. A young man, Paul (Robert Powell), a friend and disciple of his, intros him to her. Both love her free spirit, her refusal to bow to convention. But she also demands her physical freedom as they decide to live together.

Their first times of ease and complicity are eroded by Paul's need for her and perhaps his reluctance to admit his own homosexuality. At a time of drama, when Paul tries suicide, she gives in to him as Nietzsche watches. They break up as the philosopher's syphilis begins to deteriorate his mind.

Though times are now permissive, the film's subject still has timeliness in characters trying to

live beyond the accepted norms. There was already strong anti-semitism in Germany and even attempts by Nietzsche's sister and her anti-semitic husband to change his works, which were eventually used by Nazis for their Aryan and superman theories.

But Nietzsche was against anti-semitism and also idealism and nationalism. He felt that only by going against them could life be attained. He had gotten syphilis from an Italian prostitute whose simple giving gave him more, he insisted, than his learning. Film depicts his hallucinations of the Devil, who even does a ballet with a Christ figure when he, Nietzsche, is under dope. This could easily be cut, for it is gratuitous.

Dominique Sanda is strong, attractive and dominating as this early free woman, while Robert Powell is somewhat strident as Paul, whose acceptance of his homosexuality leads to being raped and killed by some German workers. Not as lurid as Ken Russell's treatment of historic figures, or wallowing in grotesques as Federico Fellini's, Cavani still does not quite achieve a fully coherent distillation of the characters and their times.

It thus needs careful handling. One of her lovers tries to commit suicide to get her to marry him and this harrowing scene could provoke nervous laughter. But it reflects the romantic dregs of the era alongside the changes mirrored in the three protagonists, who stood for liberty of action but also a disavowal of pity, plus a selfishness to achieve it.

Well-lensed, with an acceptable English track film appears specialized but could find audiences on its intriguing look at personal attempts to find awareness. Cavani's more questionable recent pic about the complicity of victim and victimizer, using a Nazi and concentration camp inmate, "The Night Porter," brought polemics. This one may likewise create discussion, pros and con, to help pull more selective auds, while more general chances are unpredictable for this literary, engrossing but questionable tale of human decision and comportment.

Virna Lisi is effective as Nietzsche's hysterical sister and other thesp's lend adequate support to the leads. It could be tagged as grotesque posturing by some, or an absorbing attempt to humanize life concepts by others. —Mosk.