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Author(s)	J.H.
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THE CONFORMIST

1971

112 mins.

Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci; Screenplay by Bertolucci; from the novel by Alberto Moravia; with Jean-Louis Trintignant, Dominique Sanda, and Stefania Sandrelli.

The story hinges around the tormented psyche of a young Italian Fascist who must assassinate one of his ex-professors, and anti-Fascist living in France. The idea sounds fairly dull and would no doubt sound duller if you knew that the assassin gets married to his sweetheart during the intrigue. But though this is the story, this is not the way the story is told. The Conformist is a film which has the feeling of poetic exactitude. Each piece of film is carefully created and placed to evoke a specific image and to reveal only essential information. Perhaps it is because the plot is so banal that the film begins ahead of itself and slowly catches up with flash-backs. On the other hand, this method serves to de-emphasize the narrative and turn our attention to the moody sensuality of chaos in 1938. And truly, the viewer becomes absorbed with the moments Bertolucci creates for Trintignant than with the overall perspective of where the plot will lead.

Bertolucci of course has made his greatest impact recently with Last Tango In Paris (and it is of interest to note that he originally cast Sanda and Trintignant for the production). But, before he became a demigod to liberal Manhattan, he was a prize winning poet (1962) and directed his first film, The Grim Reaper (1961) at the age of twenty. His subsequent films, Before The Revolution (1963) and The Spider's Strategem (1969) have also recently been released for distribution in America. In all of his work there is a passionate dialectic between his revolutionary political thinking and a fear of conforming to the unthinking bourgeois roots he feels he may never escape.

J.H.