

## Document Citation

Title	[1900]
Author(s)	
Source	<i>New York Magazine</i>
Date	1977 Oct 24
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	91-92
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Novecento (1900), Bertolucci, Bernardo, 1976

1900 has now been reduced to a four-hour-and-twenty-minute English-language version (including intermission) that Paramount is releasing with Bertolucci's approval. Is this the film that launched 1,000 diatribes portraying Paramount as the mighty mogul and Bertolucci as the defenseless artist? Is this the "masterpiece," any abridgment of which would result in what one critic referred to as a "trailer" or a "classic comic book" travesty. The idea of a three-hour trailer or classic comic book struck me as funny until I saw the film, which in essence is a four-hour trailer and was, undoubtedly, a five-and-a-half-hour one when it was originally shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 1976. I don't know what the critics who defended the original as inviolate are saying now that the director has approved an hour-and-a-half-shorter version, but Bertolucci, a notorious last-minute cutter and snipper, is not a man who knows exactly what he wants to say and says it, and *1900* is hardly what you'd call seamless. (As to what had been eliminated from the original, critics who had seen both versions were hard put to say.)

The film is a chronicle of the peasant-landowner struggle from the year 1900 to 1945 as it transpires on the estate of the aristocratic Berlinghieri family. Burt Lancaster as the benevolent padrone and Sterling Hayden as the peasant leader, grandfathers of those who will grow up to be Robert De Niro and Gerard Depardieu, are the

---

titans whose struggle not only sets the stage for, but more or less upstages, everything that follows.

Bertolucci means to convey the inevitable ascendancy of the People through the epic sweep of history, but swooping crane shots convey nothing more than pleasure in camera movement for its own sake. Whatever feeling there is in Bertolucci's pageant is not for the land and its farmers but for De Niro and Depardieu in what is the kinkiest bit of star cinema masquerading as political parable since Lina Wertmüller.

Despite the Marxist framework in which it is couched, the relationship between De Niro and Depardieu is closer to the extended schoolboy crush of Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles*. If one attends to the erotic subtext of the film rather than to its polemical façade, the most interesting hindsights—are not historic but anatomical. But as attractive as these two actors are, to sit four and a half hours for their dorsal views (preferable to the frontal view displayed in an embarrassing three-way sex scene) is too high a price to pay.

Bertolucci's greatest mistake was the decision to release the film in its English version, not only because a grandiloquent dubbed Italian might have made palatable a multitude of verbal inadequacies and tinny-sounding scenes, but because De Niro most of all would have profited from dubbing. Speaking a sort of tongue-in-cheek colloquial English, he seems to be winging it from start to finish. He is so loose that a scene in the hay with Dominique Sanda has the rambunctious abandon of un-simulated lovemaking.

If Bertolucci's film did nothing else, it proved that nudity can be as degrading to men as it is to women. If there wasn't more nudity per square foot of film in this year's festival, there was certainly more star nudity than in any assortment of films outside private Hollywood collections.

Buñuel remains the only director who uses nudity with a discreet charm that contains both reverence and lechery and more extraordinary a feeling for both female and male fantasy. His new film, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, with its shifting but crystal-clear perspectives, was the delight of the festival. The 77-year-old director once again defied the strictures of both modernists and traditionalists by showing that film can be, at one and the same time, passionate and urbane, witty and erotic, surreal and dramatically coherent, formally adventurous and committed to the mystery of the human soul.