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MARRIAGE UNDER MUSSOLINI
Dominique Sanda in Bertolucci's 1900



THE NEXT TANGO

After the success of *Last Tango in Paris*, the 34-year-old Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci was considered a hot enough proposition for three major studios to back his next film *1900* - the most ambitious project in Italian cinema to date. Due to be completed next month after nine months' shooting, the film marks Bertolucci's return to political cinema, this time on a grand historical scale and with a large cast of international stars that includes French actress Dominique Sanda and American actor Robert de Niro (above), as young lovers. On page 20 *James Fox* reports from Italy; photographs by *Eva Sereny*



Sanda, as a lonely provincial, marries Alfredo (de Niro)

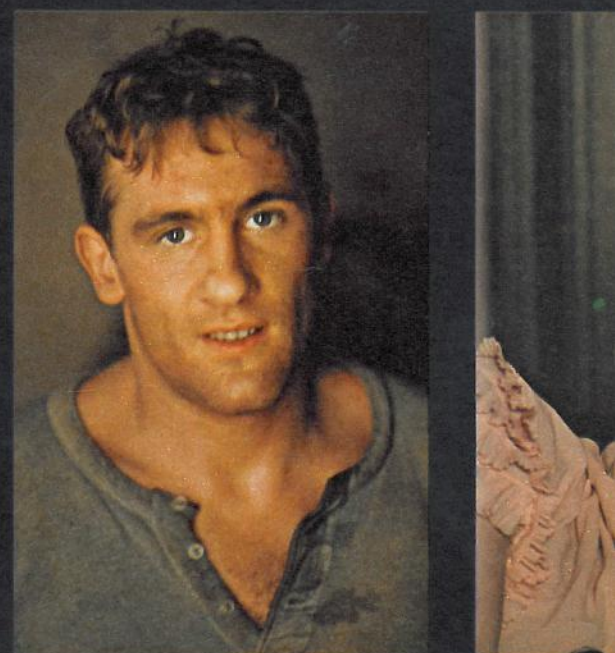


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With Bertolucci I am free, I can renew myself"



Donald Sutherland, as Attila, the Fascist foreman, berates a fellow Blackshirt after the wedding feast



Stefania Sandrelli and Gerard Depardieu. "He has the presence of a young Brando," says Bertolucci

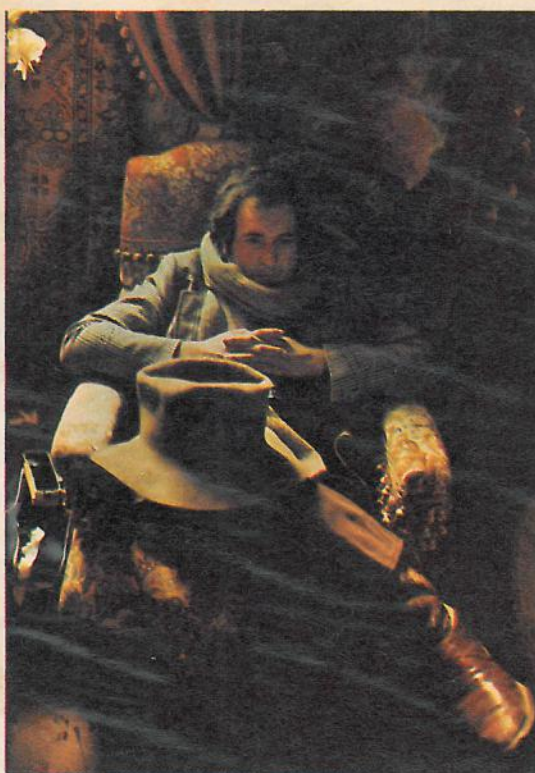


Sandrelli, revolutionary schoolteacher, expectant mother

It is freezing cold on location in the early morning. Next to the 'décor', as Bertolucci calls the set – the ornate drawing room of the Villa Saviola, where he is shooting near Parma – is a large airy kitchen, where the actors eat lunch and crowd round an enormous fire burning whole pieces of tree. Fog has come down over the entire Po Valley as far as Bologna. Technicians and actors have been inching their way to work from Parma and Casalmaggiore. Bertolucci tried to sleep on the interminable drive from Rivarolo del Re to the set in his Mercedes, then we tried to find a cafe open for a cappuccino. No comfort anywhere. By this time his stamina has become one of the more remarkable things about this film. He began shooting last June in the vineyards and meadows of Emilia when the temperature went up to 104°F. Now it's near to freezing. Swathed in scarves, wearing his outsize cap, Bertolucci's presence on the set in the early morning raises spirits. He radiates confidence, talks to everyone.

Sometime next month he and his crew will shoot the last few feet of a drama so enormous that the final act is still unscripted. Then with his brother Giuseppe and his editor Franco Arcalli, both co-screen writers, Bertolucci will begin editing a mountain of celluloid, the work of nine months and the product of 6.5 million dollars. It is the most expensive and the longest film ever made in Italy, and when they get it down to three-and-a-half hours of viewing, will surely be one of the most beautiful to look at. "If it is not," says Giuseppe, who has been filming his brother filming *1900*, "I'll hit him on the head."

Last Tango proved that Bertolucci can make beautiful and commercial films, with help from his lighting man Vittorio Storaro. But this is his return to political movie making, and he claims that *1900* is the first political film of its kind. *Last Tango* (which grossed 50 million dollars) has made Bertolucci – Marxist and member of the Italian Communist Party – into a director who, at a time of economic crisis, is now backed by the three big studios, MGM, Paramount, and 20th Century Fox to make a film whose scope is worthy of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. *1900* will narrate the political history of Italy from then up to 1945 mainly through the lives and relationships of two characters from Bertolucci's own native province of Emilia – birthplace of Italian socialism and now the most important communist stronghold in Italy. Alfredo, played by Robert de Niro, the star of *The Godfather – Part 2*, is the son of a wealthy land-owning family. His counterpart, Olmo, played by French actor Gerard Depardieu (star of *Les Valseuses* with Jeanne Moreau), is the son of a peasant family who, when the story begins, were virtual slaves to their landlords. They live through the fateful years together – youth, war, the growth of unions, the rise of Fascism, the death of Mussolini in 1945 and the arrival of socialism in the Po Valley. Bertolucci uses the seasons to represent four different periods of an epic class struggle. What is new is that political ideology now becomes submerged in "drama and poetry" and his own operatic style. The way to get political reality



Bertolucci: class struggle in the Po Valley

across now, he says, is to make 'popular' movies.

Given the pressures – the nagging worry of being behind schedule, the hourly reminders of costs, and the endless reworking of the script to take in his own improvisations, Bertolucci is masterfully cool. "I feel very alone in the middle of all this machinery," he says. "I've gathered around me a crew who insulate me from the feeling of a grand production." He is using the same crew as in *Tango*, and much of the same that he used in *The Conformist* and *The Spider Stratagem*, both of which he shot in Emilia. "And Grimaldi has made a kind of wall between me and the U.S. studios. He protects me." Producer Alberto Grimaldi was largely responsible for arranging the backing.

There is a remarkable calm. The inside of the villa, where he was shooting the wedding scene of Dominique Sanda and Robert de Niro, was bathed in the golden glow of Storaro's lighting. Huge reflector screens pour on the light, which never shines directly in the actors' faces. The decor is rich, operatic, late 19th-century Italian, almost surrealistic. Alongside the family portraits are those of Garibaldi and Mazzini, heroes of the risorgimento. Invariably the equipment is set up for the long, lyrical tracking shots that Bertolucci is so fond of. So far, the technician estimated, the camera has travelled along 2½ kilometres of tracking rails.

Dominique Sanda, who won an Oscar for *The Garden of the Finzi Continis*, and Stefania Sandrelli both played in *The Conformist*, and both have star parts in *1900*. Sandrelli plays Anita, a revolutionary schoolteacher, and Sanda plays Ada, later to be the wife of the young heir to the big estate, and even later to go into mad seclusion and decrepitude. Maria Schneider walked off the set early on, after a publicised row with Bertolucci, leaving the field to Sandrelli. A bitter moment. Schneider, as an actress, had much to do with

Tango's success, from which *1900* springs. Eyewitnesses say she was hurt when Bertolucci failed to visit her for 24 hours after her arrival in the hotel in Parma. Next day on the set, there was an exchange. Schneider: "So we're going to work together?" Bertolucci: "Together?" As things deteriorated, it became clear that Schneider, fed up with being hounded as a sex object, blamed Bertolucci for exploiting her. She had used the phrase "the butter scene" to a newspaper. Bertolucci, enraged, accused her of talking like the Italian judges in *Tango's* obscenity trials and said she had become a "petite bourgeoise".

Bertolucci is clearly enraptured by Sanda's beauty. In his bitterness against Schneider, perhaps, he repeats that it was Sanda who should have been in *Last Tango*. "Since *The Conformist*," he says, "she has become a real actress. It's like finding a jewel inside glass."

"With him," says Sanda, "I could always renew myself, be free, go forward. He does not treat actors like fools. He likes them because he realises that they create his moments and make his colours. I have never met anyone like that who can ask for the best at the right moment. I've never found such an intense harmony. I found it with de Sica, but differently – in a sort of calm."

The other stars are Burt Lancaster, Sterling Hayden, de Niro and Depardieu who, says Bertolucci, "fills the space like a young Marlon Brando. He has an extraordinary intensity." Donald Sutherland plays Attila, the Fascist foreman to Alfredo, a role that three other actors turned down thinking it might be too antipathetic.

"I've been offered various fascist parts," said Sutherland, "but I could only be interested if it was put in a definite political framework. Actors are complaisant and subjective and they need a good, strong director who knows what he's doing. With Bertolucci it works from beginning to end. He goes beyond the script to build and refine. It's wonderful and refreshing. He has this complete organic control.

"I wanted to do it because Bertolucci was directing it and for what political opportunity it offered. I would like to try and project fascism in the U.S. where it is internally the greatest threat." Sutherland can often be seen studying a copy of Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. He is taking *1900* very seriously – as a political film. So is Bob de Niro who came to Emilia weeks before the shooting to bury himself in the landscape and learn to speak Italian.

Bertolucci and his co-writers worked for two years on the script, which he departs from in almost every scene. Italian actress Anna Maria Gherardi, who plays the mother of Robert de Niro, effected a whole change of scene by laughing madly during her husband's wake, when de Niro tells her of his plan to marry Dominique Sanda. She rushes forward asking hysterically, "Is she beautiful? Is she chic? Has she travelled?" The line was written then, says Bertolucci, because the face of Gherardi suggested it.

"Reality in front of the camera is more important than anything," he says. "If the

actor has been drinking, looks pale, I use it. It's a kind of expensive documentary. That is my technique. To use what I see there. Then the written personality disappears and in its place appears the true actor. But now for example I have no idea how I am going to continue this sequence. Last night we changed some of the dialogue. So I don't know technically how to do it. It annoys me. I am annoyed. I can no longer make decisions in advance. If I'm not in the *décor* with the actors I cannot decide a thing. But it creates enormous risks and contradictions." It demands a lot of confidence? "Yes, but I have that confidence."

The Emilian countryside that Bertolucci is so attached to is completely flat, criss-crossed with poplars and birch, with solitary farmhouses that glow brown in the winter light. The earth is rich, and the peasants traditionally more independent as a result. For months before the shooting, Bertolucci and his crew scoured the countryside for locals to play in the film alongside the stars. He found them in cowsheds, barnyards, in the street - the young boy who plays the young Olmo, for example, is the son of a local lorry driver. He has used local brass bands and clay pipe bands for the sound track. And he was surprised by what he found. "Here, unlike anywhere else in Italy, perhaps in Europe, the peasants have succeeded in preserving their culture. It's the only region in Italy that has survived the neo-capitalist attack. And I believe they were saved through Marxism."

"The first idea for this film was a need to go back to this land, to this countryside. I had made

Last Tango, which was very far from the life here and this kind of humanity and its problems. It was as if, after you have done something risky and dangerous, you have to go back home. Then I realised that it was much more risky here than in Paris, because it's very dangerous to go deep into yourself. This is the region where I was born, the region of my father and grandfather, so I have used not only my memory but theirs too."

Bertolucci's father is a poet and a critic, and Bertolucci himself won Italy's highest prize for poetry at the age of 21. Earlier films, *The Spider Stratagem* and *The Conformist*, were also shot in Emilia, the former in the beautiful Renaissance town of Sabionnetta. They all had a common theme of identity-seeking, an ambiguity of class loyalties, set mostly in glamorous surroundings. Bertolucci leans heavily on Marxist-Leninist terminology. If the pronouncements he makes, while he strides about the set, were not delivered so flip-pantly they would sound pretentious; as it is, he commented after one soliloquy, "I say any old thing".

"1900 is the century of a great Utopia which will become a reality. It's the century of the end of the bosses, and the death of the social and moral role of the bosses. I thought when I was writing this that I was going to fall into the same trap, of the fascination with the charm of the intellectual and refined country bourgeoisie. In my earlier films I was under the influence of this ambiguous and decadent personality. But in making this film I overcame that for the first time. I think there has

been a maturation in me. Because I think I can look objectively at the world of the boss family. One thing that fascinates me now is that the bourgeoisie is a condemned class. Anything condemned is very interesting."

And yet the ambiguities are still there. Bertolucci says that the characters of Alfredo and Olmo, the boss and the peasant, are really a double personality. "It comes from the schizophrenia, the split in me. I've always worked on that idea, and it has always worked on me." And Robert de Niro, playing Alfredo, finds it difficult. "The character is such an observer," he says, "and so ambiguous that it's very difficult to fill him in."

"This is a new way to make a political film," he says. "In almost all my films there is a political discussion either direct or detached. What has changed is the attitude towards political cinema itself. During the Sixties, one thought that political cinema could have a political effect. I believe that is an illusion."

Bertolucci now sees the ideological films of the Sixties as monologues which were boring to the great mass of cinemagoers - the very people that they were intended to influence. He now sees Godard as an elitist movie-maker for his lack of mass appeal. "In politics you must have dialogue," he says, "and I realised that I must change a little and go for a more popular kind of cinema. One was very partisan in 1968. And I was a bit afraid to change. But the contradiction was that one was trying to make films that were simply not popular. And that's a big contradiction" ●

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