

THE ROMAN CIRCUS OF
**BERNARDO
BERTOLUCCI**

IT'S A LONG WAY FROM PARMA TO
STARDOM, BUT A
SMALL STICK OF BUTTER
HAS HELPED GREASE
THE WAY FOR THE
CONTROVERSIAL
ITALIAN DIRECTOR

BY PIETRO DI
DONATO



Bernardo Bertolucci is tall, large-boned, soft-fleshed, with a long, equine, Periclean head and the identical face of Ninetta, his very handsome mother. Put a dress on him and he would be Ninetta (excepting her open, honest expression), what with his ample, straight thin nose, delicate Etruscan lips, fine chin, and small dark penetrating eyes. The whole aspect tells of a consciously plumbed, integrated being. But one not without a certain unhealthiness. We are at the exhibit of Guerreschi's *Vietnam Suite* in Rome's Galleria II Fante di Spade on Via del Ripetta. The work before us has photos of hilarious mannequins, "Dickie" and "Patty" Nixon, Coca-Cola bottles, the Stars and Stripes, and "With Love" in torn bleeding parts of Vietnamese baby bodies. Bernardo is still smarting from the accusations of profanity and obscenity surrounding *Last Tango in Paris*. He tapped Nixon's head in the painting and said, "This criminal Nixon person is obscene, not *Tango*. The comedian Nixon's bombing is por-

Alex Eizen

BERTOLUCCI I told Bernardo that the posters were better than Fellini's movie. "That's the secret of our cinema; Italian film is not moving pictures, but moving posters."

nography, and John Wayne's cowardly *Green Berets* is flat perversion, but positively not my *Tango*.

"The two protagonist forces today are Communist and Fascist. The clown Kissinger's detente is a bad, expensive Hollywood movie. There is no in-between reality. The world scene is the idealistic left against the unregenerated right to the absolute death." He studied me and added firmly in his improvised English, "I am a Communist Party membership."

In his gentle hesitant way he wanted to know if I also was a "Socialist." I could have told him that I joined the American Communist party the night the United States murdered my *paesanos* Sacco and Vanzetti in the electric chair. But instead I said: "Communism has become too fucking bourgeois and capitalistically cancerous for my speed. Revolution has missed the true boat and is left with the ship of Judas-mass fools. I'm out to destroy those who have the mark of the beast. I am the man who comes singing and dancing, heralding the Apocalypse and Last Judgment."

Bernardo Bertolucci, the overgrown kid, looked at me perplexed.

Rome is a theater where life is a moment-to-moment drama. We went to Rosati's on the Piazza del Popolo for espresso. Gian Carlo Fusco, the writer with the monocle, said to Bernardo, "Our Di Donato is laying the prostitutes. He fancies all the women of Rome, including the skinny one who frightens one into a hard-on, La Fallaci—I don't know how he does it." I said I wish it were so, and added that I had seen Oriana Fallaci in the Italian *Playboy* office, and that all we did was size each other up and nod.

Along the Via del Ripetta, by the Church of Santa Maria Porta Paradisi, is a mortuary. I convinced Bertolucci to go in with me. In a candlelit chamber an old male corpse with artificial flowers tossed on his feet lay awkwardly and disgustingly on a sheeted table. A black-edged poster said the deceased had fought the good Marxist fight and was duly mourned by his staunch Italian Communist Party comrades. None of the assorted weepers recognized us—which was not flattering. The attendant asked Bertolucci if we were relatives.

"We are all related in the scheme," said Bertolucci.

"Ah, yes, *signore*," said the attendant, "today, with science, the whole fucking world is one village."

As we descended the steps of the cheerless *mortuario funebre* we bumped into Vanno Caruso, wife of the Venetian painter Giulio Turcato. She said

she had lived across the street for years and had never entered the house of the dead. Bernardo said to see funerals was good luck.

Titian-haired Vanna—a movie director in her own right (is there anyone in Rome who isn't a movie director?)—is not impressed by Bernardo's brand of communism. Vanna Caruso's father was the Fascist police commissioner of Rome who blithely countersigned Adolph Hitler's order for the reprisal torture and execution of 335 young hostages held in the Adreatine Cave. Communist partisans summarily shot Caruso.

Bernardo's apartment lies on the Via del Babuino above Via Margutta, where the poet-painter Alfonso Gatto and Fellini live. To the left is Monte Pincio, the Park that begins Villa Borghese, and to the right, the Medici palace. The Church of Trinità dei Monti and the exquisite Obelisk look down the Spanish Steps. All Bernardo's belongings were packed, mostly books and metal cases of film reels.

On the terrace commanding this old part of Rome he said, "I'll miss this panorama. There will be an emptiness. I'll have to abandon the plants I have so often talked to. My new place on the Via della Lungara does not have a terrace.

"Walls remember," Bernardo continued. "You yearn for change, especially in the morning. But when it comes, you want to stay. Departures always make one feel traitorous."

In Italy, elegance, the fruit of 3000 years, is the unwritten law tacitly obeyed by all except gypsies, beggars, artists, and saints. Bernardo was dressed in the predictable role of the precocious moviemaker who had "arrived": suede jacket, silk shirt, gaudy neckerchief, Levi's, and tooled cowboy boots. He wanted to go to Clara Schiavolena and ask her to rent him her duplex until his new apartment on the Via della Lungara was renovated according to his design. He, his girlfriend Fiammetta, and I came down to Via del Babuino, a raceway. Although we took precautions before crossing, Bernardo was almost run over by a speeding pretty girl motorcyclist. Bernardo shouted, "You almost killed me!" The girl turned and sang back, "*Vaffa n'culo!*" ("Go get fucked up your ass!")

I told Bernardo and Fiammetta we should go to Clara Schiavolena's by cutting through Via Gesù e Maria because there were wonderful posters of Fellini's latest work, *Amarcord*. The night before, Fellini had put on a preview for the embassy of Red China and friends. I said to Bernardo that I loved Fellini dearly but that the posters were better than the movie. Bertolucci said, "That's the secret of our cinema; Italian film

is not moving pictures, but moving posters."

We came into the farmers' market on Via Bocca di Leone, and at the corner of Via delle Lupo, where Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning loved and lived, Bernardo greeted the wrinkled Sicilian cobbler, Carmelo Sorbello. Eighty-year-old Carmelo from Catania, Sicily, is an abstainer and blames Italy's woes on alcohol and priests. He could detect on us the previous night's wine. Under his scrutiny, Bernardo confessed he had a bit of a Lambrusco headache, to which Carmelo shouted, "And you expect to be the number-one genius with shit poisoning your brain? *Puttana di la Madonna!* Being the biggest director in the world is a joke if you aren't man enough to master your vices. My child, I don't want to be annoyed by more vain resolutions. How many times have I told you that wine is man's foe? If you don't abide by my advice then *vaffa n'culo!*"

The greens vendors and the flowerwoman hailed Bernardo and wanted to be remembered to his parents. Someone said melodiously, "Hello, Bernardo and Peter." We turned; it was Federico Fellini. He had his pleasant white-haired cook with him; she was buying vegetables and fruits, and he, a bouquet of roses. He said his Giulietta had been hit by a car on her way to the dentist and was in the hospital of San Giacomo with contusions. Shaking his head he said, "Life is beginning to imitate my films—the damned automobile is the Frankenstein of Rome!"

Helping the flowerwoman was homely, graying, retarded Mario. Mario took Bernardo aside to show him a German porno magazine, *Vulva*. Bernardo kidded him, saying he was only 55 and far too young for sex and asked him what kind of a girl he preferred, blonde, red-head, or brunette. Mario made a pleat with forefinger and thumb, ogled it, licked it salaciously, and said, "The hole is all I need!" The flowerwoman made the sign of the cross.

Bernardo remembered that at that hour he was supposed to see Alberto Moravia in the Caffé Greco, so we continued along the Via dei Condotti, center of gravity of international fashion. Fiammetta paused to discuss pants suits with Nello the street sweeper. Nello has his hair styled at the one and only Pepino's, along with princes, and Bernardo intends to cast Nello as a Roman emperor. Nello knows the Ferragamos, Guccis, Puccis, Valentinos, and Schuberths. He gets discounts for friends and favors Schuberth's creations. That intersection is also the beat of four subteen gypsy sisters, seedling Lolitas. Filthy and barefoot, (Continued on page 112)

BERTOLUCCI *The leader, a ten-year-old with a gold tooth, lifted her apron, flourished her dirty little hairless cut, squatted before Valentino's fabulous window, and pissed.*

(Continued from page 62) wearing tattered men's jackets and aprons, singing, chortling, laughing, begging shamelessly, they psych the expensively dressed passers-by. The leader, a ten-year-old with a gold tooth, lifted her apron, flourished her dirty little hairless cut, squatted before Valentino's fabulous window, and pissed. The gypsies approached us confidently, saying to Bernardo and me, "Beautiful Marlon Brandos, thank you for your generosity," and calling Fiametta "beautiful Jackie Kennedy." When I said I resented being called Marlon Brando, pushed them aside, and told them to get lost, they spat and cursed us, made the "fuck you" gesture and the horns of the evil eye, and cried, "The cunt of your mother! *Figli di puttani, vaffa n'culo!*" But when

superstitious Bernardo gave them more money than they could have dreamed of, they lauded and blessed us.

In the Caffé Greco Bernardo said, "We moved from Emilia—the meeting of the ways—to Rome when I was 12. Father often brought my brother Giuseppe and me to this old place. Father wrote a poem about the Greco—it's here." Coming out of the Galleria ca' d'Oro across the street was Alberto Moravia with Dacia Marina, young daughter of a Sicilian duke, and Giorgio de Chirico. They joined us for *aperitivo*. No one has the Apollonian stance of near-centenarian De Chirico in his vicuña cashmere polo coat; and Moravia more than makes up for his white crop, badly crippled left leg, and toothless maw with his frenetic mesmeric ceaseless chatter

about—Moravia. Bernardo has reason to call him "*maestro mio*," if only for Moravia's *The Conformist*, which Bernardo re-created and bettered as a startlingly brilliant film. Bernardo said his father regarded two artists as true geniuses, Modigliani and De Chirico. Giorgio de Chirico, above impression, was bored. I asked him whom he considered the greats of filmmaking. "Greats?" he said. "You know absolutely nothing! You fool, cinema is not art!" And he disdainfully left.

With the pride of a little boy, Bernardo pointed to a framed poem on a pilaster near an old gold-plated mirror. It was three stanzas in 12 lines of jeweled words, entitled *Piccolo Autoritratto (Caffé Greco)*, and it was, of course, a small self-portrait by Att'lio Bertolucci. Bernardo told me that within the walls of Caffé Greco had been Casanova, Goethe, Gogol, Byron, Keats, future popes, even Orson Welles. As we were leaving a huge Fiat bus stopped, and Japanese tourists streamed out and scurried about the Greco snapping pictures.

From Clara Schiavolena's terrace, were it not for an occasional TV antenna, you would think you were beholding the tile roofs, chimney pots, and attics of Michelangelo's day. Blonde, slate-eyed Clara the Sicilian said, "Bernardo, you're going to Parma to prepare your film. Why bother to rent this place? If you suddenly find you need it, just move right in, and I'll go to the country house in Bracciano." She had leased it to *A Clockwork Orange* Burgess but had reserved quarters for herself.

Bernardo invited her to Caesarina's, which you could almost reach out and touch on Via della Croce. Caesarina has seven tables. You cannot tell from the street that it is a restaurant. High-ranking government officials and film stars feel fortunate when they find a seat.

Bernardo had chicken *cacciatore*, polenta, ricotta, and a bottle of Lambrusco just like a North Italian. I deliberately brought up the subject of success. Bernardo said success, having to do with quantity, was inevitably vulgar, something that had to be digested and gotten over with, so that one could go on. Clara said, "The truth about glamor and success is the whore at the altar, the policeman without his uniform, the bartender in the morning sunlight, and the body in the morgue. Art and artists are tawdry when it comes to character. As you know, I lived with Mino Paoletto for 28 years. He used my flesh, he picked my brain. I was his courage, his dreams, his imagination. 'Clara, help me with the scenario. Whom should I cast? What do you think of this? And what do you think of that? He didn't make



"Now, that's what I call an attractive display of window boxes!"

a move without Clara. Suddenly he abandons me and marries a young woman who will not even permit him to mention my name. Now it is as though he never knew me. He is a complete stranger. Film directors are cowardly ingrates. Why can't directors be men?"

We listened in sympathetic silence, although we knew all about it, and Bernardo Bertolucci had that disarming faraway look of a child.

I rode the train from Rome to Bertolucci's native Parma. Surely nothing could shock sophisticated Parma, city of the Etruscans, Gauls, Goths, Byzantines, city of the despotic Farnese dynasty and also of the Bourbons. Parma is the temple of things rare and beautiful—theaters, musicals, ballets. Now Parma is Marxist Red, the opulent *città grassa*—fat city—of North Italy's Emilia Romagna emblazoned with Bertoluccian conquest.

It was a cold night in the Piazza Garibaldi. The warmly dressed few dozen formed the nocturnal confrontation of factions—the literary club of the ripened well-off, the apostles of Parmesan culture—self-ordained devil's advocates, critics, and judges, all eager to lock horns over *Tango*. Among the reputables were priests, atheists, zealots of the left, right, and center, an antique dealer, a hotel manager, a restaurant man, lawyers, professors, a fag hairdresser, and three doctors—a dermatologist, a specialist in rectal cancer, and Bernardo Bertolucci's very popular pediatrician uncle. A journalist said, "Censor a film, even the very worst, and the idiot masses flock to it as to a shrine of miracles."

The priest admonished, "We are not treating reality. It is only a film of fiction from Bernardo's technical fantasies. There is no need to be sacrilegious."

Lofreddo, the Fascist journalist said, "We continually say *Vaffa n'culo!* and finally one of our townsmen has immortalized it in a cinematic form. The phrase *Vaffa n'culo!* will now become as immortal as 'God wills it' and 'I shall return!'"

"We Parmesans," said the medical student, "are noted for cheese, violet perfume, and now unpasteurized-buttered-bugging—"

The dermatologist interrupted, "*Contraception a la Marlon via Bernardo!*"

"No, seriously," continued the young man of Parma's School of Medicine. "The cinema, originally called the bioscope, is the craft of visual duplicity. Pictures move and occupy the eye and do not allow the full play of reason within the context of sensible reality."

"I'll explain," the hairdresser chimed in. "Marlon gets his erection into Maria's anus."

"The reaming is presumed," the rectal-cancer specialist corrected. "Pasolini is less refined than Bertolucci. He would



have shown you the real thing, Marlon's prick going up the old dirt road. Come on, are we thumb-sucking children?"

The medical student was off again. "All right, all right. Then under his direction she cuts her fingernails and manipulates his anus, without the benefit of a disinfecting, sterilizing suppository or the refreshing services of a bidet. All impromptu, yes? Of course. Where is the board of health in all this? Now, elementary hygiene tells you that without thorough colonic irrigation, the terminal area of the large intestine houses feces residue that ferments from blood-temperature heat and is replete with its concomitant noxious humors. Right? Fact. Further, Bertolucci implies Maria Schneider was a rectal virgin. Her yelling and pain under stallion Brando should have suggested anal bleeding. But anyway, *paesani*, we are dealing with scatological exercises by coprophiliacs! Fact!"

"I resent your vulgar values!" the antique dealer cried. "This kind of talk is enough to make one vomit! *Last Tango in Paris* is sheer high tragedy. The sodomy was symbolic of profound poetic suffering! You owe the truth an apology!"

"My wife and I perform 69 and fancy positions that make the Schneider-Brando dog act look like the efforts of novices," one of the lawyers bragged. "But, God forgive me, we do not call it art!"

A bearded queen with a female basset hound on a leash said through his eerie,

battery-powered artificial larynx, "Butter to grease the ways—salted? sweet?—better than oleomargarine. I simply love Marlon. He lives the part. Marlon has a prettier rump than Roman Polanski!"

A dignified man confided to me, "Don't get the wrong impression of the local street critics. Regardless of what they say, they are extremely proud of Professor Attilio Bertolucci's sons. The boys, Bernardo and Giuseppe, were called the Gemini, Castor and Pollux. Did you know that the father is a famous poet?"

"I can see Bernardino in short pants. With the least threat of bad weather they bundled him up with earmuffs, gloves, shawls, and sweaters down to his ankles. He was addicted to the cinematic world of make-believe. He buried himself in moviehouses. The tallish lad would come out of the theaters into the sunshine pale as a mushroom and blinking his eyes."

"Professor Attilio was also a film critic for the *Gazzetta*. Everybody saw Bernardo's father, his large craggy face and scholar's hunched shoulders, crossing the piazza, books under arm, wearing his wide-brimmed poet's fuzzy fedora on the hottest days. Or pedaling his bicycle fanatically like a long-distance racer in from the countryside, ritualistically stopping to admire the baptistry and mopping his sweat. I remember when he made Bernardo read all of Gide under the family mulberry tree."

"If you find Parmesans a bit strange,

BERTOLUCCI *They were going to erect a 100-foot white marble statue of Bernardo Bertolucci holding a stick of butter made of 14-carat gold.*

it's because we are descended from the ancient Celts and still respond to the call of the Druid."

One said, "Art fights imperialism with allegorical booby traps. Deciphered, *Tango* is an utter denunciation of Western society."

A Maoist dissented. "*Last Tango in Paris* is neither polemical warfare, Parisian chic, nor a South American dance. Besides the misnomer, it is flaccid perversion, literary intimidation, and cultural terrorism. In *Das Kapital* Karl Marx never wrote that bungling was revolutionary, nor does the *Communist Manifesto* recommend pricks in asses. The masses have been reamed enough!"

"Attilio has written old-fashioned, authentic poetry," the hotelier added, "clear streams from the Castalian spring. But his overeducated son produced false art with *Tango*. Though I am a Christian Democrat I can see Bernardo has not been true to his Moscow-Peking ideology."

"You all miss the mark," the antique dealer rejoined. "*Tango* is a beautiful film of the soul that requires preparation to absorb. But on second thought I agree that Bertolucci is a cocktail of many people, nothing original, a confused intellectual and a superb technician."

Lofreddo the Fascist thundered, "Imbeciles go to the movies! I'll tell you about real life! I had a dream of a girl in a curtained stall of the world's most expensive restaurant in Paris. She ate and drank until I thought she would burst. I put my fur-lined coat on the bench under her and was happily sodomizing her. She cried, 'Quick. Take it out. I must—!' and *Madonna mia* she back-fired and covered me and the coat! Where is the movie that will show that? That, sirs, is life!"

Bertolucci's uncle, the hearty pediatrician Dr. Maurizio, appeared and they pressed him. "Of this splendid film," he said eloquently, "I cannot talk. All the critics of the universe have spoken with their best hosannas. It's a runaway success that speaks for itself. The people fly to it as to a bona fide poet and genius. Bernardo had nothing dirty or vulgar in mind."

"There are also mediocre poets."

Bertolucci's uncle was working up anger, and almost shouting said, "You only dare to attack Bernardo behind his back. History will vindicate my nephew. Go read the slander of Puccini's treacherous colleagues and see who today is thought of as one of the world's greats."

"Oh, yeah? Fellini, Antonioni, even Godard have snubbed the film. Godard ran out in the middle of the movie, 'Too much, too much,' and Pasolini is alleged

to have remarked, 'I'll never greet Bernardo again!'"

Bertolucci's kinsman said, "Envy! Fellini is a school child still sniffing girls' bicycle seats. Godard is *nouveau vague*, Antonioni is a foggy roach in the woodwork, and Pasolini is old hat. Have they made millions on one work like my nephew? They are jealous. It is understandable."

With righteous indignation, though patently enjoying it, the Bertolucci relative started to walk away, saying, "My soul is free—I don't have to listen." Disappearing into the star-bright Emilian night, Bernardo's uncle roared, "Fine townspeople! Love is never chaste. Marxist or no, moralist or no, only the pigs make chaste love. Strong cowardly blows from so small an assembly! Your frothings are invidious semantics. Results count! Money talks! Are you on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*? Have you been invited to lunch with the Kennedy women? Pigsty? By God, *Tango* spells love!"

We all laughed, then decided to get out of the cold and go to the bar for drinks. On a street poster of Brando standing with his hands up, waiting to be prostrate-pronged by Schneider, someone had written with brown spray paint, "We want him naked," signed, "Sex Power!"

In the bar, we made many fertile jokes about the subject and had a rollicking time. Before the Parmesans went home, they swore to me that opposite the great Giuseppe Verdi monument with all the statues of the four lions pulling a chariot, they were going to erect a 100-foot white marble statue of Bernardo Bertolucci holding a stick of butter made of 14-carat gold.

"Without clothes," said Lofreddo, "so that on hot summer days the breezes will cool and refresh his own controversial ass!"

The next day I returned to Rome. By the Bernini colonnade of St. Peter's I took the 62 autobus that wound up the long slope of Monte Janiculum to the street named after the Garibaldian Red-shirt, Giacinto Carini, an area built for the Fascist bourgeoisie during the florid prosperity of Mussolini's comic-criminal opera, *Imperium Romanum*. On the top floor of Via Giacinto Carini, 45, is the home of the Bertolucci family. They have lived in the same brown apartment since their migration from Parma 21 years ago. Spread before the Bertolucci terrace is Rome: its haloed hills, masses of russet-tile roofs and clay-colored stucco houses, Vatican City, Castel Sant' Angelo, the Colosseum, Baths of Caracalla, Villa Borghese, the Forum, the Campidoglio, Sant' Giovanni in Laterano, in-

numerable squares, monuments, and palaces, and directly below, along the Tiber, the Via della Lungara with the dread prison Regina Coeli at number 29, and Bernardo's new apartment in the Palazzo Corsini at number 3.

Evalina Bertolucci, 'Ninetta,' was born in Australia of Italian mother and wild Irish revolutionary father. She met Attilio at Bologna University where she was laureate with her thesis on the pagan poet, Catullus. She is a professor of English. Attilio Bertolucci came from landed gentry and was educated in Parma, Bologna, and Rome; besides being steward of the profitable terrain passed on to him, he made himself a literary critic, art sage, film reviewer, professor, editor of eclectic magazines, and—crowningly— noted poet.

Ninetta served tea with honied pastries from the oven; all was proper: family china, silver, and ivory napkin rings. As on other visits, Ninetta was at the fore in the conversations; Attilio admires her, grinning benignly.

There was the air of studied frugality that the ethical affluent indulge (orange and lemon peels converted to marmalade). The poet's gray worsted suit was painfully neat but exploited to a shine, and the cordovan shoes seamed, worn, affectionately saddle-soaped, and newly heeled and soled.

On the coffee table was Aubrey Beardsley's book with a faded oval photo of the exotic young Englishman on the cover. Near Attilio's armchair on a low bench were a bargain-store record player and albums of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Louis Armstrong.

Attilio said, "On his tenth birthday Bernardo asked for and received a 16-millimeter motion-picture camera. Ninetta and I knew he would be different from the general run of movie bugs who film jackanapes, soccer games, and meaningless things. He wrote a scenario, *In Search of Mystery*, and cast his three little cousins. His story was about four children who hunt through the forest for a 'teleferica' that transmitted and received handwritten messages by beams of light refracted from the past, present, and future, revealing the destiny of mankind. They acted it out as though not knowing whether the *teleferica* was a remembrance from the womb and infancy . . . or a dream.

"From the savings of his five-dollars-a-week allowance he had the negative developed and ran showings for a fee. So you see I became Bernardo's first producer—which I had secretly hoped for. In his second movie he follows the semination, birth, nursing, brief happy life, and butchering of a pretty female suckling pig for market, and his camera

continues through to the meat being bought, cooked, and eaten by human carnivores.

"Our son is a dedicated celebrant of the movie camera, and the cinema has been his ordained order ever since he received his First Holy Communion and the simple Kodak gift that went with it."

From beneath beetling brows Attilio said, "Bernardo is a precise son; he figures out and plans everything backwards and forwards and leaves nothing to chance. Our Bernardo knows exactly what he is doing."

Bernardo was supposed to have been in the province of Parma for ten days, but it was three weeks before he got back to Rome. When I arrived for family dinner, it was raining heavily. A swarthy priest with sparkling black eyes and pronounced dimples came to meet me and have one of my books, *Tre Cerchi di Luce*, autographed.

"Father," I said, "forgive me my disease, curiosity. What made you become a priest—how and why did you decide?"

He said, "I have always been a priest, as 'God is always the same.'"

Ninetta asked him to stay for dinner. He obliged by drinking wine, thanked her, and said he had to press on to Clara Schiavolena's. Later I was apprised that he was far gone in love with a nun, and

that they were wont to ritualize their agapae in a neighbor's guest bedroom (God bless!).

Ninetta came in from the kitchen.

"How is the rice?" said Attilio.

"The rice is perfect."

He took out his watch, put it to his ear, rubbed it apprehensively.

"Ninetta, why aren't the boys here by now?"

"How should I know? The boys will be here."

He said to me, "Hours ago Giuseppe called from the garage in the basement. He and Bernardo borrowed my car. I don't like driving. It's a good car, an honest Fiat, only 13 years old. You know, we keep cars going. But there's a first time for any machine to fail, possibly in a dangerous place. The traffic in Rome has become a nightmare, and when the sun goes down it is a scene from Walpurgis night. I could never understand mechanical things. I confess I am inferior to the violence of technological facts."

He fussed and fretted and walked about the smallish room. He had Ninetta check the time with the kitchen clock. Ninetta said patiently, "If either or both boys do not appear punctually as promised he immediately generates uneasiness. As minutes pass his worry increases. He never fails. I often wonder if it's a form

of pleasure. In any event, Bernardo and Giuseppe are forever children to him."

"This doesn't make sense," said Attilio. "Have they had an accident? There must be something wrong. If nothing is wrong, why don't they call and reassure me?" The phone rang; the boys had been detained but were on their way.

"You see?" said Ninetta.

When Attilio heard the elevator and then his sons' footsteps, he beamed. Bernardo, 33, and Giuseppe, 30, embraced and kissed their parents, whom they had not seen for . . . hours. Ninetta Bertolucci is the queen, the great mother of the gods. But then, is there a street in venerable Rome that does not adore the Madonna in house corners and in wall shrines?

The *aperitivo*, prosciutto, pork-liver sausage, sheep's milk mozzarella, olives, and wines had come from their Parma farms. Hostess Ninetta was her own cook and serving maid. The repast was obviously Parmesan: succulent veal knuckles, yellow corn polenta, *gnocchi* made of chestnut flour, long-grained rice with pine nuts, egg dripping, raisins, and capers. A large bowl held fresh raw artichokes, lettuce, radishes, carrots, celery, and scallions to be dipped in salt-and-peppered olive oil. The Bertolucci white wine was dry and casky, but the

Join the new **AMPEX** Tape Society

CHOOSE ANY ONE OF THESE TAPES FOR JUST 99¢



AMD 321
Ted Heath
Big Band Themes



AMD 322
The First
Class



AMD 323
Songs of
Jim Weatherly



AMD 315
5th Dimension
Greatest Hits



AMD 326
Golden Age
of Rock 'n Roll



AMD 302
Curtis Mayfield
Sweet Exorcist



AMD 325
Ronnie Aldrich
Way We Were



AMD 327
Very Live at
Buddy's Place



AMD 307
Gladys Knight
and the Pips

If you're a serious tape collector—Here's why you should belong to the AMPEX Tape Society

The AMPEX Corporation is the world's largest independent producer of pre-recorded tapes, cartridges and cassettes. For the low fee of \$3.00, members are allowed to purchase these tapes at a substantial savings. (Most new members find that they pay for the membership with the savings on just these tape purchases.) In addition, members will be under NO OBLIGATION to buy anything, while they are members—an important feature that allows members to buy as little, or as much as they want. But that is just the beginning . . .

Here is what you get as a member

* 12 issues of the AMPEX Tape Directory—the catalogue of catalogues: listings of pre-recorded tapes, the largest selection of tapes, cartridges, open reel and cassettes available anywhere (new and old)—with prices that you will find unbelievably low.

* Specially reduced price tape equipment offerings to members only—these have been so popular we must offer them on a first come, first serve basis.

* 4 big issues of the Tape Society's magazine—The Tape Collector, a quarterly devoted to keep members up-to-date on the latest in tape equipment, and the music world, people, places and tunes.

Check One: ☐ Tape Cassette ☐ 8-Track Cartridge ☐ Reel-to-Reel

JOIN TODAY!

☐ YES I want to join the AMPEX Tape Society. Enclosed find \$3.99 plus .35 for shipping and handling. Here is my tape selection that goes with my membership.

☐ I would like these additional tapes at \$3.99 each as my first membership benefit, plus .35 per tape.

Mail to: Ampex Tape Society P.O. Box 178 Elk Grove Village, Illinois 60007

☐ I do not wish to buy a tape at this time. Enclosed is \$3.00 for full membership privileges.

I enjoy the following types of music:

109

☐ Rock ☐ Classical ☐ Country ☐ Easy Listening

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please charge the above to my ☐ Master Charge ☐ BankAmericard ☐ American Express

My card no. is _____ Signature _____

BERTOLUCCI "Deviation is as popular as the drive-in and is expected and demanded as much as butchery and gore and psychopathy and hot—forgive me—'battered' popcorn."

red was fragrant, dark, chewable crimson gold.

Attilio speaks like his poetry—in laconic complete autonomies; lifting a glass he said, "Hail to thee, too, Dionysus, abundant in grapes! Let us rejoice in the seasons. . . . And after the seasons for many years to come!" I said his was a wonderful toast; he said it was Homer's.

My grim proletarian past does not quit; the Bertoluccis, monied by heritage and strangers to toil, are *preziosi* who remind me of fascinating lush hothouse plants. They are not the short, broad-jawed, callused, knotty-fingered Michelangelo-esque peasants and bricklayers like my South Italian *paesani*, and I never cease to marvel and be concerned at how people come into this world and live luxuriously without economic harassment, sweating and breaking their asses.

They were amused by my archaic dialect from the mountains of Abruzzi, and I found their crusty, crackling, gutty Parmesan speech peculiar. With espresso and Scotch we listened to parts of Verdi's *Macbeth* and Bellini's *I Puritani*, and a record I had brought from Abruzzi, *Lament of a Widow*, and Attilio fumbled the needle and ruined it. Then we enjoyed Louis Armstrong's trumpet.

On leaving I showed photos of my sons, Peter the doctor and Dick the actor. Ninetta tossed her head and proclaimed, "And I have two glorious sons!"

I pity the girl who tries to compete with the mother of the Bertolucci kids.

Bernardo's place is spacious and surgically severe in chalk-white. He does not greet effusively like Fellini, Zeffirelli and Pier Paolo Pasolini. There were young folk about—like wrought wraiths. Bernardo presented and praised his cameraman, an olive-skinned hook-nosed tight youth with an unwarranted fierce demeanor and a tense attenuated desirable girl who smoked desperately and looked as though she had been dipped in acid.

I said, "Bernardo, my editor wants to know if you are a homosexual."

"... Oh . . ." he said with the expression of a surprised cherub, "that probably comes from reading Ingmar Bergman's reference to the homosexuality in *The Conformist* and the lesbianism of la Schneider. Let me tell you, a director who makes pictures that lose money dies quickly. What they call perversion is commercial today. Just look at the attention that your American media gives to gay lib. Now, sodomy is as old as the mold and the filler. Devia-

tion is as popular as the drive-in and is expected and demanded as much as butchery and gore and psychopathy and hot—forgive me—'battered' popcorn."

He inclined his head to one side and suggestively tugged at his earlobe. "In Rome they wink and say sighingly of just about every director—particularly the outstanding—'Ah, but he's an *orecchione*,' and indicate that he takes it in the 'ear.' Via Veneto gossip has it that his holiness heads the list."

Bernardo is familiar with the larva, the chrysalis, the imago of the cinema. He speaks calmly of *The Great Train Robbery*, D. W. Griffith, Mack Sennett, Pudovkin, Cocteau, Rossellini, Godard, and on and on. But he always ends with a hushed reverence for "il grande Luchino Visconti." He relates what Marshall McLuhan designates as "the reel world" to the influence of mysteries, superstitions, ideologies, religions, dreams, ideals, painting, music, philosophies, electronics, astral bodies, the occult, fads, sculpture, humanities, madness, and his fanatic endeavors for communication and communion.

I said, "What is an immortal film?"

He said, "You die in the theater . . . you are transfigured to something better and can never again be the same . . . you transcend and leave the theater a disembodied spirit . . . soul shriveled."

We agreed on King Vidor's *The Crowd*, a French film, *That They Might Live*, *Mother*, *Open City*, and touched admiringly upon *Trash* and *Mean Streets*. I said the only recent work that dug into me was Jean-Luc Godard's *Les Carabinieres*, and Bernardo said without humor, "Yes, the two robot killers roaming the world and violating humanity were Nixon and Kissinger in *Les Carabinieres*." In talking about box-office smashes he was anxious to know how I, leading Italo-American author, felt about *The Godfather*.

I'd kiss a director's ass only if the director were a sweet-smelling young girl, so I said, "Young man, I'll put it this way. At lunch with JFK and Premier Fanfani in the White House I met a noted Washington psychiatrist. Later he took me for a tour of a private 'rest' home for the rich. I saw a patient, a former national leader, with what I thought was a big unlit Castro cigar in his mouth. Introduced to the politico, I was shocked to see that the cigar was a firm human turd. When I showed my horror and begged him to spit out the goddamn thing he got on his high horse: 'This is a free country—God's blessed democracy. Sir, who is eating this delicious stuff—you or I?' I backed off and said, 'Senator, that delicious stuff happens to be shit, and bad

shit at that. With all kinds of good food available, why do you eat filth?"

"You fool!" he shouted, "I eat shit because I love shit!"

"So you realize, Bernardo, it takes two to tango—the movie and the audience. What the people pay five dollars a ticket to swallow is their problem, not mine." I didn't have to draw Bernardo a picture as to how I felt about today's vaunted box-office hits.

"For me interviews are artificial and demoralizing," he said. "This question-and-answer business is never spontaneous, involved, and organic, particularly when my mind is preoccupied with my new film, *Novecento* (1900). Parma is the setting. I will probably use Robert De Miro."

He ran his long soft fingers through his hair, played with his hands while thinking, lit a Marlboro, and then spoke in vague tones as if soliloquizing, "What can I say about myself? I am a happy pessimist, a despairing optimist, a pansensualist. Women are better creatures than men. Women understand my work; they need and relish my type of film brutality for a new dialogue with the opposite sex. There's the anguish of seeking one's identity in front of the image of father—can one ever equal one's wonderful father?"

He paused, and Attilio's image filled the room. "If life is an inferno of cowards, liars, and assassins, and sex is vicious, urinal, intestinal, and anal, then the guilt, the sin, the crime, the fault is not Bernardo Bertolucci's. It is rumored that I am cunning and a pretender. I really try to be honest. I have the benefit of a combination of harmonious circumstances, background, tradition, family wealth. My home environment was full of the arts and the world's literary classics. I knew Sophocles intimately at the age of ten, and I have obviated hang-ups, fears, distortions, and inferiorities. That permits me accurate measures, values, and ideals. . . ."

He did more toying with his cigarette than smoking, and then continued. "Like Raphael, I absorbed the techniques of the greats into my crucible and fused a completely individual Bertoluccian style. There was the verism of Rossellini, the fecund endlessness of doctor Fellini, the sociorealism of Francesco Rosi, the vivid naturalism of Pasolini, the camera poetry of Antonioni—it is a shame that Antonioni's fine work of art, *Zabriskie Point*, was not understood and appreciated by Americans."

Bernardo glows under his halo of the missionary. He said, "Empathy and revolution are in my blood; the plight of the suffering poor, the disenfranchised, the oppressed has always summoned

BERTOLUCCI "To do the great living 20th Century *alfresco* chapel has been with me from the moment I pressed the button of my first movie camera."

me. Pasolini helped me with my first professional film, *Accattone—Beggar*. At 21 I made *La Commare Secca*—the story of four crude and picturesque city youths affected by the death of a prostitute. My father, mother, brother Giuseppe, and a troupe of elated relatives escorted me to its showing at the 1962 Venice Film Festival. I left poetry for the cinema and imagined my Olivetti electric typewriter a motion-picture camera."

His dark, savage-looking young cameraman had to leave. Bernardo said with a strange reverence, "He . . . he is my cameraman!"

I said, "I know, you told me that before." Bernardo nodded, excused himself, took the uncommunicative fellow carefully by the arm as if he were made of thin glass, and accompanied him out to the Via della Lungara.

I went to take a leak. When I came back into the room Bernardo said, "The camera became my lyric instrument. I wrote scenario after scenario and pounded many doors without results. Nothing came easy. It took me two persistent years to convince old man Angelo Rizzoli, the publishing tycoon, to finance *Prima della Rivoluzione* (*Before the Revolution*). The title is from Talleyrand, 'Only those who lived before the revolution know the sweetness of life.' It's about middle-class revolutionaries ten years before the liberation, about the sweetness of life in my Emilia, about the poplars with their heads in the mist. There is an incestuous youth who falls in love with and lays his bourgeois, pretty aunt. The boy could have been myself, an immature rebel. Drawing much from my own experiences, *Before the Revolution* was a proving ground

indicating to me that I must later evolve a cultural hero. Every artist is instinctively his own hero."

The cunty-lean girl with the ratty eroded face brought Bernardo his choice Lambrusco. The kid, with her semblance of having been "distressed" or "antiqued," had insidious, overwhelming sex appeal.

"You see, Di Donato, to do the great living 20th Century *alfresco* chapel has been with me from the moment I pressed the button of my first movie camera. All my exertions have led to that vision. Now the millions from *Tango* make 1900 possible. Do you not agree that what we have to do has been with us from the beginning?"

"In a few words the outline is this: On the same day in 1900 two babies are born near each other in the Parma countryside. We follow them for 95 years. They grow as friends, one rich, the other poor, eventually becoming Fascist and Communist and enemies. There is anarchy, strikes, patriotism, war, then fascism and the Second World War, the flight from the good earth, the catastrophe of agricultural civilization, the agony of the deserted land, the evils of our technological age, the mad pace, pollution, physical atrophy, abdication of principles, spiritual cowardly forfeiture to robot surrender, and a whole cataplexy of many, many things.

"Toynbee said recently, 'We have seen our last days of freedom. The economic siege of the West will lead inevitably to civil wars or to totalitarian governments.'

"Italy is again going to bed with fascism. Bankrupt Italy is dancing on the Titanic. It is all upside down. The intelligent rich are Communist and the

miserable despondent ignorant have-nots are Fascist. The Mephistophelean CIA is all over the world like rotten syphilis. We here may soon become Chile-Italia. It will come as a drugged dream, a plague, quietly, smoothly, unresisted, accepted with open arms as the merciful anticlimax to an unendurable suspense. Social responsibility and continence seem too much of a burden for the common man.

"I'll probably end 1900 as a science-fiction spectacular. I must get this testament off my chest—before the H-bomb nullifies everything."

He had spoken resolutely with the limpid serene cadence of the crusading innocent. My first instantaneous impression of Bernardo Bertolucci recurred: an Italian Prince Myshkin with an aura suggesting the Messiah. Actually, Myshkin was not The Idiot. He just had stuff going that was far ahead of the people he dealt with—and that's like Bernardo, too. His mother had said that the morning after he had run his first film, *In Search of Mystery*, she had found written on the kitchen blackboard, "THE BEST DIRECTOR EVER BORN!"

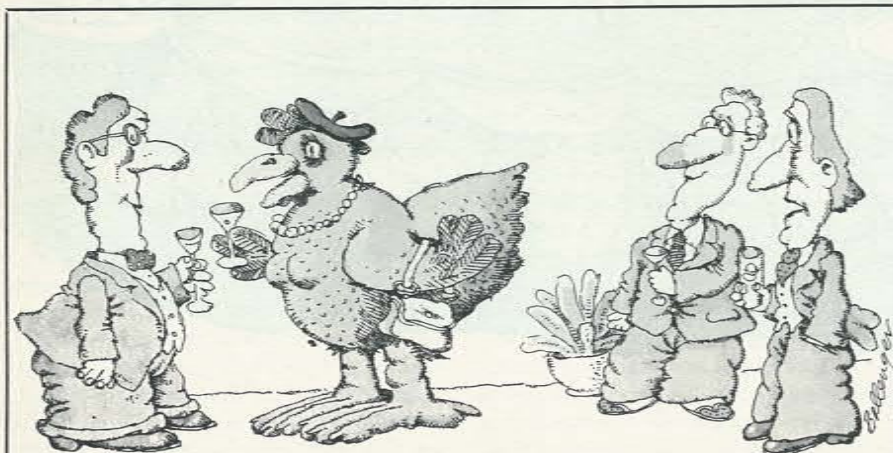
Attilio, who knows his son better than anybody—after all, he molded Bernardo—had said to me, "Bernardo follows Chekhov's dictum, 'If a musket is hung over the mantelpiece in the first act, it has to go off and shoot a character in the second act.' Every dot and title Bernardo puts into a film has a logic, a motive, a scheme, a purpose to an end."

I thought of how the big-shot director Paoletto had left my friend Clara Schiavolena after enjoying her for 28 years, and I said to Bernardo, "They say *Tango* made you dizzy, that you couldn't take it and got a swollen head, that it broke up your last relationship."

"Oh, no . . ." he said, "that simply is not true. Long ago my father and my mother instructed me to be above and beyond success. She became repressive. I became repressive. It is not good to be repressed. That prevented each of us from breathing, from bursting out, from seeking new ways."

On Alitalia to Kennedy, I was reading Professor Attilio Bertolucci's cleansing poetry. A Roman journalist was sitting next to me. He knew Attilio's work and said, "I recall Bernardo as a boy when he was an oblique curious fatted calf."

He inclined his head, reached for his ear, chuckled, winked, and said, "Do you know your precious Bernardo is. . . ." Then he suggestively tugged at his earlobe.



"She's not much on looks, but I hear she's a damn good lay."