

Satyricon

(ie: **not** "Fellini Satyricon")

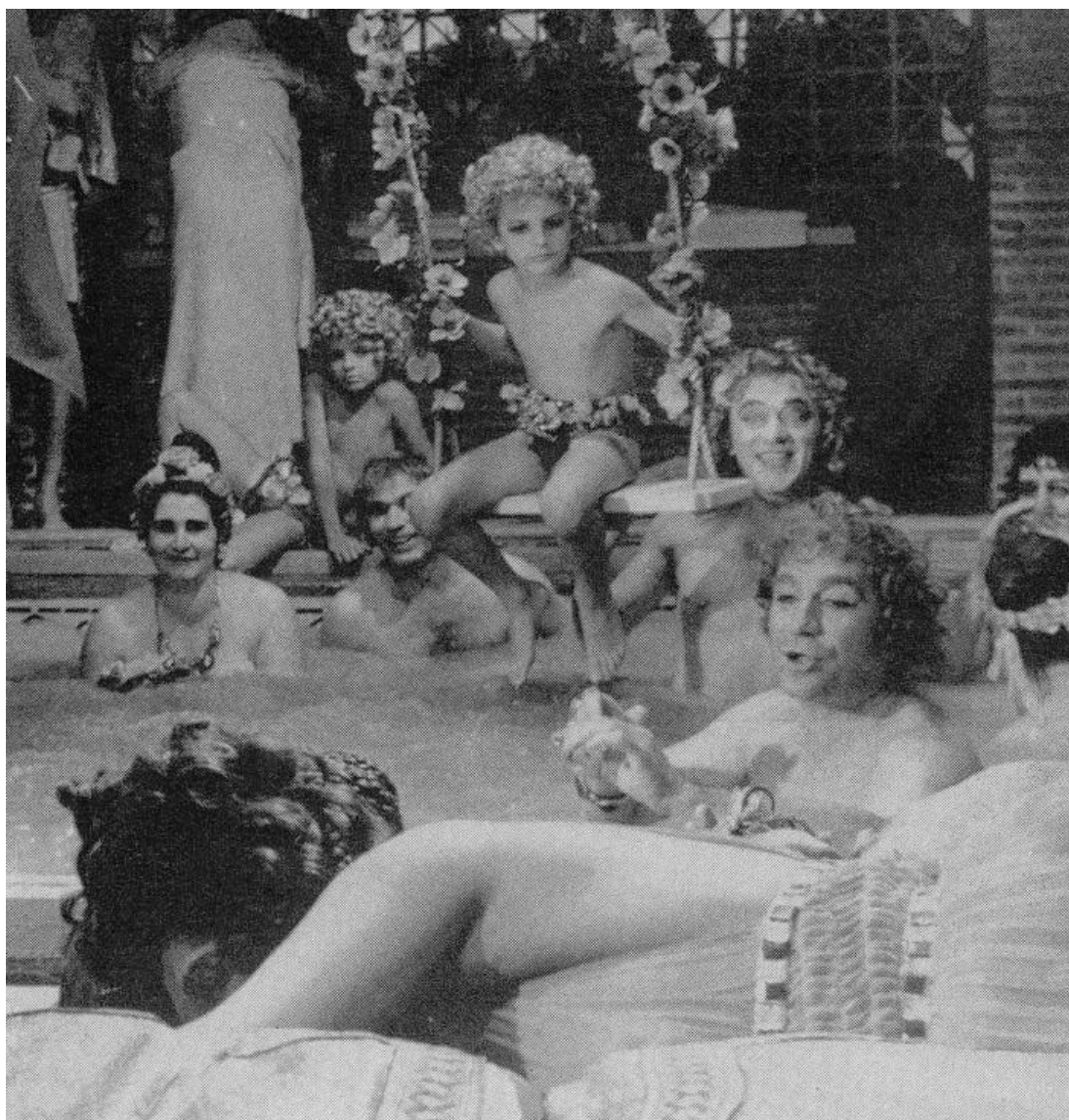
Italy : 1968 : dir. Gianluigi Polidoro :

: 122 min

prod: Bini : scr: : dir.ph.:

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Ugo Tognazzi; Laura Antonelli; Tina Aumont; Don Backy; Mario Carotenuto; Clara Colosimo;
Franco Fabrizi; Claudio Gora; Graziella Granata; Valerie Lagrange; Tito Leduc;
Paola Tedesco

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Kbytes	Ω	□	€	Z	⊗	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Banned films acquire an aura of martyrdom which takes no account of their intrinsic virtues or defects. Notoriety sharpens the appetite to view them and form one's own opinion. This is very likely the only image we shall see of Polidoro's quickie "cover version" of SATYRICON, released ahead of Fellini's... Source: Films & Filming

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"The vicissitudes of the student Encolpio, together with his friends Ascito and Oitone, in the decadent Rome of Emperor Nero. This quickie, made at the same time as Fellini's film, keeps more to the letter of Petronius Arbitro's abandoned fragmentary novel, but taste, style and imagination are missing. The result is tedious and boring, noisy and crass. The orgiastic banquet with the extravagant Trimalcione as host is here the finale - Fellini began his film with it. It's worth waiting for, because Tognazzi alone brings the right combination of decadence and irony to his part. *½ "

Excerpt from **Films and Filming** - September '69 - article on Italian cinema:

"... Porno or not Porno - that is the problem facing the Italian Cinema. After the Westerns come the Sexy series. I even read in some trade magazine "With the end of this season, one can safely say that Sex is on its way out". Presumably the writer was only referring to the movies. But I think he was over-optimistic, anyway, to judge by the titles lined up for release. The rival "**SATYRICON**" to Fellini's (whose version is now called "**FELLINI-SATYRICON**") was seized by the Rome police after only a few days of colossal Box Office business.

There was some legal dispute at first as to whether the film should be charged in one city for obscenity plain and simple, or in another city where the magistrate is convinced that the fourteen-year old boy playing Giton was "corrupted" by producer, director, scriptwriter and actors¹. This latter point will no doubt provide fascinating material for sociologists (not to mention sexologists), when the case eventually comes up in court. Producer Bini says that the boy didn't know what was going on as his close-ups were shot separately. The Magistrate was given an elementary lesson in film technique, explaining that in films it is possible to do such things. But if the boy was "corrupted", the Prosecution has to show that the boy's psychology, not to mention his sex life, have been seriously affected by appearing in the film.

¹ *Busy boy!*

At a moment in which all Italy is in a state of moral indignation (well, not all Italy) because of some high jinks that some minors have been up to in Viareggio, the case is going to at least distract attention from that particularly unfortunate story (where a twelve-year old boy died).

Meanwhile, the film has been seized, and producer Bini has been ruined. He is so indignant about it that he has published a pamphlet (which appeared in "*Le Figaro Literaire*") saying that in his view the sex films are today's equivalent of the neo-realist cinema, for "they reflect the reality of the country"! This may be stretching things a bit too far, but I can see his point.

He is also very angry about Franco Zeffirelli, who has set himself up as a moral crusader, saying that he felt ashamed to be Italian after seeing Bini's "**SATYRICON**". Lots of sarcastic remarks from Bini in his pamphlet referring to the naked backside of Romeo in Zeffirelli's film, not to mention this director's next project, which will be a film about Saint Francis. Anyway, Zeffirelli's "campaign" has not amused his colleagues, who have expelled him from the "Film Authors Association". Zeffirelli's reply: "If there is such a Mafia amongst directors and authors in this Association, and freedom of opinion is not allowed, then I am delighted and honoured to have been excluded".

Of course, Bini is also bitter because after years of courageous production making artistic films which more often than not failed at the box-office, and in particular the Pasolini films, he has seen the first film by Pasolini outside of Bini's company, "**THEOREM**", prove one of the biggest hits of the season. And if "**THEOREM**" hadn't been seized by the police it would never have made such money. What makes it harder for Bini is that the Magistrate described Pasolini's film as a work of art and therefore immune from criticism on a moral basis. Nobody is likely to call Bini's "**SATYRICON**" a work of art and the press have not even come to its defense. If it does ever get released by the Court it will then have to compete with the "**FELLINI-SATYRICON**" which, so FF assures me, is a chaste film!

The fact remains that of the 254 films passed by the censors in 1968, only 37 were forbidden to minors under 18 and only 48 were forbidden to under 14s. The films which have caused the wave of "moral indignation" - and the stampede

to the cinemas of millions of obediently pious (?) Italian Catholics, in spite of their church ruling the films "Unfit for Everyone" - are mostly non-Italian, such as "LES BICHES", "THE FOX", "THERESE ET ISABELLE", "I AM CURIOUS - YELLOW", "THE SERGEANT", not to mention the classic "HELGA", and somewhat less noticeably, its sequel "HELGA AND MICHAEL"... "

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. How we miss those all-important quotation marks around words like *corrupted* and *moral indignation*. The furore so hypocritically stoked by Zeffirelli around Bini's exploitation epic is very probably more interesting than the film itself, which was subsequently released, and shown in the UK. One would like to know the verdict in the court hearings (as to the irrevocable harm sustained by the unidentified 14-year old actor) and whether any subsequent cuts were imposed before release. The film's only relevance to this archive is in the character of Giton, the delectable slave boy hungered after by Encolpius and his best friend. In Fellini's film, Giton was played by Londoner Max Born, age unknown, but doubtless over 18. Fellini described him as "a whore with an angel's face".

Heavily made up and scantily-clad, the diminutive Born could pass for a younger boy even in his close-ups, although it was actually braver, or at any rate more risqué, of Bini to use an actor more closely approximating boyhood. As the still overleaf shows, he also employed young boys in fright wigs as delectable extras in his tableaux of debauch, but he was neither the first nor the last commercial director to do that. Giton's age is not, in any case, given in the original Petronius text. Although he flirts with both, his hand is ultimately won by neither of the friends (Fellini has him marrying a sea captain) and he quickly disappears from the story. Only disjointed fragments remain of the original (unfinished) work, which of course allows directors considerable license in stitching the anecdotal episodes together.

Taking the *Speelfilm Encyclopedie* review at its word, however, this would seem comparable to Tinto Brass' awful "CALIGULA", or to Pasolini's scatological bawdy period films - "THE DECAMERON", "CANTERBURY TALES", "ARABIAN NIGHTS" and "SALO" - each of which contains momentary indulgent winks at a pæderastic sensibility. Scarcely surprising, since the director himself clearly had an appetite for teenage youths.

See subject index under **CENSORSHIP / BANNED FILMS, HISTORY, SEX & SEXUALITY** and **SLAVERY**, and of course, see "FELLINI-SATYRICON", that too a very self-indulgent and meandering work. For another eruption of blustering Italian censorship, see Mai Zetterling's "NATTLEK" from which, on its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival, the public were barred, only professional critics being permitted to view it. It concerns a son's sexual obsession with his mother, having been witness as a small boy to her flamboyant orgies.