

L'Albero degli Zoccoli

("The Tree of Wooden Clogs", "The Clog Tree")

Italy : 1978 : dir. Ermanno Olmi : RAI / Italnoleggio Cinematografico

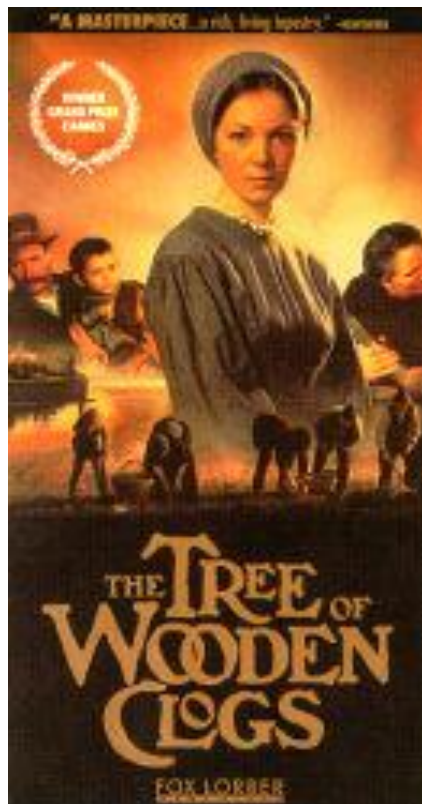
: 190 min

prod: : scr: Ermanno Olmi : dir.ph.: Ermanno Olmi

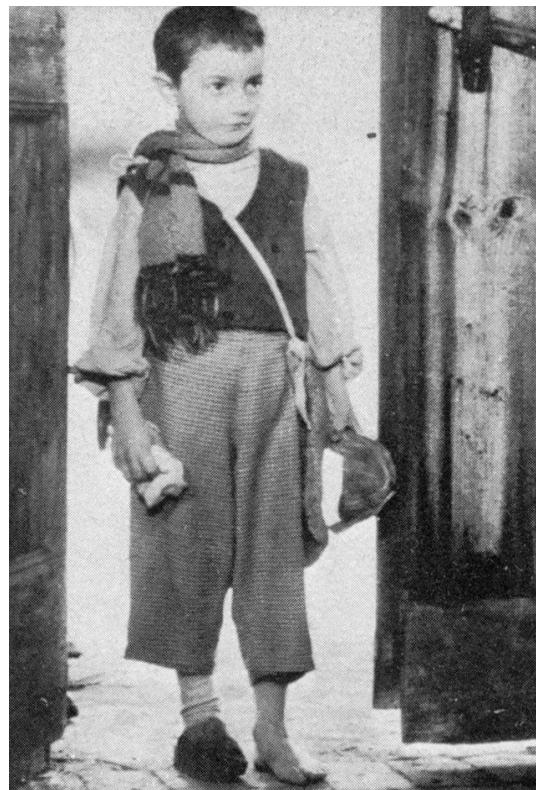
[Omar Brignoli](#)

Luigi Ornaghi; Francesca Moriggi; Antonio Ferrari; Carlo Rota; Pasqualina Brolis;
Francesca Villa; Teresa Brescianini; Giuseppe Brignoli; Maria Grazia Caroli;
Battista Trevaini; Giuseppino Sangaletti; Massimo Fratus

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	♂	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3588a	4.5	11	5	1,785	-	3	-	-	-	No	unseen



Source: Amazon.com website



Source: A Pictorial History of the Talkies

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
1996 review:

"A year in the life of a community of peasants in Northern Italy, just before the turn of the century. Simple, quietly beautiful epic; a work of art. ****"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Chronicle of five families of agricultural labourers on a huge Lombardy farm at the end of the last century, which ends as one of the fathers secretly cuts down a poplar to make clogs for his schoolboy son, and on discovery is sacked on the spot.

Historical reconstruction places no ideological or aesthetic interpretation upon events through distance or hindsight, but



Source: indeterminate

allows them to speak for themselves through a series of minute details, whereby the social protest becomes self-evidently clear. Olmi's extremely personal masterpiece is played by amateurs in the Bergamo dialect, which had to be subtitled even in Italy. A curiously two-faced portrayal of religion, which both gives strength and promotes further development whilst preaching resignation to one's place and circumstances. **** "

Halliwel's Film Guide review:

"In nineteenth-century Lombardy the lives of four peasant families are intertwined. Sensitive, novel-like investigation of times gone by; never very exciting but certainly never dull, despite the limits of 16mm and a non-professional cast. Scr: Ermanno Olmi * "

Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide review:

"The lives of four peasant families, all living in the same Lombardy farmhouse at the end of the 19th century, are slowly revealed in a mosaic of small instruments: the cultivation of prize tomatoes, the sending of a child to school, a wedding, the recovery of a sick cow. Almost documentary in style (shot in 16mm with non-professional players), this lovingly constructed

work is perfectly placid, deeply spiritual, and a moving tribute to the enduring relationship between the earth and those who work it. Using the simplest of narratives, the film re-established the international reputation of Olmi, who brilliantly sustains the Biblical symbolism of the expulsion from Eden, as well as political and religious sub-texts."

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"A year in the life of some Lombardy peasants in the 1890s. When critics start calling a film a work of art, it usually means there's nothing much in the way of a story. That's certainly true of this very beautiful evocation of a bygone era – a remarkable achievement in view of the fact that it was shot on 16mm film, and with non-professional actors. But it's almost entirely lacking in dramatic incident, and its Marxist, anti-exploitation message is spelt out at so sluggish a pace that it may test the patience of non-critics. 6/10 "

"The peasants, though not faultless, are seen through such a haze of adoration that Olmi's picture becomes anachronistic in a way, more of an exercise in fifty-year old sentimentality about the proletariat than a re-creation of 100-year old peasant life." – Stanley Kauffmann

"The period is caught with conviction and the peasants viewed with much sympathy, the only weakness for me being the absence of any

significant action and the slowness of the pace."
- Patrick Gibbs, **Daily Telegraph**



Source: *International Film Guide*

"It could go on forever and seems to. Respecting and admiring much, I was irritated by more." - John Coleman, **New Statesman**

"The miracle is that... works of art can still surface, and sometimes reach the height of [this film]." - David Robinson, **The Times**

"A masterwork" - Philip French, **Observer**

"Warm sympathy and precise observation go hand in hand."
- Virginia Dignam, **Morning Star**

"Long, leisurely and exquisitely photographed."
- Richard Barkley, **Sunday Express**

"What is truly miraculous about **"THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS"** is its fusion of the highest art with the humblest milieu. The utter helplessness of the poor has never been depicted with such unbearable irony, and this is not what the picture is about. Olmi shows instead that love is unconditional and that it can flourish blessedly even in the most difficult circumstances." - Andrew Sarris

"A work of art" - Maltin

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"A study of peasant life in Lombardy at the end of the last century as seen by a master. No plot, no professional players, but a richly detailed account of such matters as tilling, milling, a courtship, a country fête. A richly rewarding experience and the film that re-established Olmi internationally, though it would be rash to claim that it is a greater work than his lesser-known films, e.g. **"I RECUPERANTI"**, **"UN CERTO GIORNO"**. *** "

International Film Guide 1979 review:

"Ermanno Olmi's **"THE CLOG TREE"** - winner of the Palme d'Or at the 1978 Cannes Festival - is a comely, episodic work that swells to a kind of grandeur at the end. Set in Italy's Lombard region just before the turn of the century, it focuses on the cares, pleasures and rituals of a family of tenant farmers who beg shelter and education from the wealthy landlord. The subject may sound suspiciously like that of Bertolucci's **"1900"** [**"NOVO-CENTO"**], but in truth the films have little in common - with the Olmi more tender, more resigned, and ultimately the more successful of the two. Where **"1900"** is self-consciously historical, **"THE CLOG TREE"** is steeped in the rhythms of everyday life: work, meals, death, marriage, prayers and - for the fortunate gifted child - school. It's a cinematically luxuriant and elegiac film, as pointedly indifferent to drama as it is sensitive to detail. And it is not, I suspect, coincidence that the little incident - a man's felling of the landowner's tree to produce shoes for his school-age son - occurs more than midway through a loosely-knit narrative.

Like Olmi's earlier and more pungent **"IL POSTO"**, **"THE CLOG TREE"** is concerned with lives a rung above penury and with the demands that physical labour exacts of the fragile soul. There are infelicitous moments, but on the whole Olmi's superb control of pace, and affection for his characters, render a series of often familiar incidents fresh and very moving. Two of my favourite incidents involve

a wedding couple who spend their first night together in an abbey, and a canny old man who imparts to his grand-daughter the secret that has brought him the earliest tomatoes in town.”

– Diane Jacobs

Movies on TV (1987) review:

“A turn-of-the-century peasant epic told through the eyes of a young boy in Bergamo. Director Ermanno Olmi is so close to his subject that he is incapable of sentimentality and untruth in art and observation. The pace is measured and the depth of observation is astonishing. **** ”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“Olmi's uncompromising reconstruction of peasant life in turn-of-the-century Lombardy marks a return to his origins in neo-realism and non-professional casts. Choreographed as an ensemble work that admits no star performers, the film takes its unhurried pace from the lives of the dirt farmers it observes – lives of repetitive drudgery punctuated by cautious moments of felicity.

Its gently muted colour camerawork succeeds in covering the exquisite landscape with a thin patina of mud, while for two of its three hours the changing of the seasons is the closest the film comes to a dramatic event. By showing peasant exploitation as neither triumphant Calvary nor action-packed drama, Olmi refutes both “1900” and “PADRE PADRONE”, and creates a near-perfect hermetic universe, punctured only in those rare moments when, as tautologous as the film's English title, he dots the “i's” on the amply demonstrated Marxist message. Still, a near faultless and major film.”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Stunning, epic masterpiece about the hardships in the life of a community of peasants in Northern Italy, just before the turn of the century. In Italian with English subtitles. Not rated. ***** ”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

“Postmodern neorealism. This naturalistic portrayal of Italian peasants neither glorifies their lives nor looks down on them. Olmi, who directed, scripted, photographed, and edited the film, concentrates on three peasant families (all finely acted by non-professionals) and their daily existence for the period of about one year. They live on an estate governed by a practically nonexistent landlord and work his land with the greatest of care and devotion. Interestingly, however, the least



Source: [indeterminate website](#)

important facet of “**THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS**” is its plot. Instead, the focus is on the bond between people, as well as their relationship to the land. Olmi resists the urge to overly moralise the lives of these people as he considers what is beautiful as well as what is stagnant about their lives.

At times he seems to suggest that here may reside a model for human existence, but he is generally content to present the film as an extended vignette. (It is interesting, though, how Olmi largely fails to consider the class relations structuring certain aspects of these people's lives.) A memorable picture which takes a sensitive, poetic look at a remarkable group of human beings without getting too romanticised about it, “**THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS**” was winner of the Golden Palm at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival, making it the second Italian film in a row to take top honours (the 1977

winner was the Taviani Brothers' "**PADRE PADRONE**"). ******1/2** "

Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "Variety Movie Guide 1993"]

[no listing in "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on

As closely related, then, to "**PELLE EROBREREN**" (88), at least in terms of period and setting, as to "**PADRE PADRONE**" (about a Sardinian shepherd boy) or "**NOVOCENTO**". For that matter, it might as well be compared to "[FARREBIOUE](#)" (France 46), a semi-documentary following a year in the life of a poor farming family in the Massif Central region. The drudgery of agricultural poverty evidently speaks to the consciences of cinema audiences and critics, notwithstanding the fact our insatiable demand for cheap meat and agricultural produce has driven small farmers to bankruptcy across Western Europe. It is easy to be nostalgic about something once you have effectively destroyed it. Ask an American indian.

Nothing further is known of Omar Brignoli, who plays Minek. Clearly a film to watch out for.

See subject index under **FARMS & FARMING**, [HISTORY](#), **OSCAR WINNERS / AWARD WINNERS** and possibly [SCHOOL](#).