

## CHARACTERS in MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI 's FILMS

### Contents

*Open or closed to New Experiences*  
*Agreeable and Disagreeable in Social Relations*  
*Conscientious or Unconscientious*  
*Rational or Emotional*

#### 1. Open

*Mark*, in *Zabriskie Point*, is one of most open characters in all Antonioni's films. He is a confident is a confident young man who shares the ideals of the radical movement but is too much of an individual to join it. He is surly, sarcastic and reckless, but also fun-loving, affectionate and serious, all at the same time.

*Daria* Mark's free spirit is perfectly matched with that of Daria in the same film. She is a spirited is a spirited and optimistic young woman, who embodies the values of the hippie movement of the times. She is vivacious, playful and sympathetic, but not naïve. She has a strong sense of herself, expresses her ideas clearly and, above all, responds to the peacefulness of the landscape at Zabriskie Point

*The Girl* Like Daria, the unnamed girl in *The Passenger* is young and carefree, but also wise beyond her years and offers David help and advice. She has no name, no backstory and no future. She is a companion and a witness. She is elf-like in her spontaneity, her sly smile and her wispy hair. Unbound, she seems to float above the problems that David suffers from. She is also fiercely loyal to David.

*Thomas*, the photographer in *Blow Up*, also possesses a fun-loving spirit, although he is less counter-culture and more establishment. He character is, in fact, based on a real-life fashion photographer in the Swinging 60s in London.

*Claudia (The Adventure)* is a good friend to Anna and a loyal lover to Sandro; unfortunately, those two roles conflict. Although she is confused and torn by that conflict, compared to the narcissism and decadence of the other characters, she appears as a genuine and sympathetic person. Unlike them, she is capable of spontaneity and ruthless honesty. When asked to explain what she meant by saying that her childhood was 'sensible,' she answers, 'I mean, without money.'

*Adreina (The Cry)* is another survivor in the fast-moving world depicted in the film. Of all the women, she is least bound by family or history, the most open and free. She is also the lowest in the social hierarchy, working as a call-girl when necessary. She is spunky and spirited, but lives on her own and welcomes Aldo's companionship.

*Clara (The Lady without Camelias)* is the star of the story, a dazzling beauty who is launched overnight into a romantic leading lady. Coming from a working-class background, she is overwhelmed and manipulated by others. Slowly, she gains self-confidence, but it is too late. Throughout the story she is kind and considerate, though also passive and conciliatory.

*Corrado (Red Desert)* is a young man who is planning a big mining project in south America. He is thoughtful and ambitious, with a watchful face that suggests he is always considering something. Although he is restless, he has the ability to understand Giuliana. And yet, something is left unexplained in his vague plans and eyes that search for a place to settle.

*Paola (The Story of a Love Affair)* is also a person with strong ambitions and a sense of herself. She married a boring rich man and lives her luxurious life as if she deserves it. Unsatisfied in marriage, she

seizes the chance when Guido reappears in her life, unleashing a powerful desire to love and be happy. As with the marriage, however, she manipulates her love affair and guides it toward disaster. If she has a virtue, it might be that she is clear-eyed and practical, though even that quality is useful when she wants to get her way.

## 2. Closed

*Aldo (The Cry)* is a nice-looking, working-class man with traditional values and little else. He is taciturn and gloomy, yearning for something he doesn't know and can't define, as if a mysterious inner destiny is moving inexorably toward an end he cannot see. Although he is broody and occasionally strikes someone, his basic nature is kind and compassionate.

*Lorenzo* Although he comes from a different social milieu, another man with a weak ego is Lorenzo in *The Girlfriends*. 'Oh, the artist!' exclaims one of the men when Lorenzo blows his top at the dinner following the opening of Clelia's shop. It is an apt comment that sums up troubled Lorenzo. Although he is engaged to sensible Nene, he feels inferior as an artist and thus turns to naïve Rosetta for comfort. Even he describes himself as 'weak', and that appraisal could be seen as another example of his self-pity.

*Guido (Story of a Love Affair)* is closer to Aldo in social background and morose temperament. Like Aldo, he suffers from an inability to form a romantic relationship that will last, and, like Aldo, he lacks self-confidence.

*David (The Passenger)* appears to be a successful journalist, but he reveals his weakness when he attempts to change his entire identity and fails. Throughout the film, he is frustrated, confused and loses his way, both psychologically and geographically.

*Riccardo (The Eclipse)* is a kind of 'fall guy' in the story. He is a nice-looking, educated, normal sort of man, who cannot understand why his fiancé wants to break off their engagement. He doesn't like ambiguity or unexplained actions. He represents a masculine need for affirmation, and is the odd man out in a triangle that includes the androgynous Piero and the inquisitive Vittoria.

*Giovanni (The Night)* is similar to David in that he appears to be successful on the outside but is a failure inside. Like the 'passenger', he is a dead man walking, one of the sleepwalkers in the Broch novel that is mentioned more than once in the film. He is a writer who no longer writes, and a lover who can no longer love. Despite his unsympathetic character, his selfishness and bored banter, he is still charming. He has the desolate ambiguity of alienation seen in many Antonioni male leads—dashing yet pathetic.

*Aubrey Hallan (The Vanquished)* is another weak character. Confident and happy-go-lucky, a nice-looking man who writes poetry, he could be a charmer. But he is asocial, completely self-absorbed and vain, so much so that he commits a murder simply to prove that he can devise a perfect crime.

*Claudio (The Vanquished)* is the son of a wealthy father and doting mother, a good student and sincere boyfriend, he is a victim of the *zeitgeist* that sweeps him into the world of petty crime. The action that dooms him—shooting a man on a bridge—is spontaneous, unlike the other murders in the film, which are premeditated. Claudio's crime is a moment of madness that leads to his own sad end

*Anna (The Adventure)* is one of many Antonioni heroines who, like David, is lost, closed and morose. In sharp contrast to her friend Claudia, she is dark, closed and troubled. Her turmoil over Sandro casts a shadow over her appearances in the first third of the story, before she disappears. She is querulous, short-tempered and rash.

*Vittoria (The Eclipse)* is a similar character from a similar background: young, attractive and cosmopolitan. She has a strange, Sphinx-like beauty, pretty and yet morose. Most of the time she wears a sultry expression, as if her sexual desire has burnt out and left a mark. She is searching for love and can be flirtatious without even trying. She is often withdrawn but can also burst out into laughter. She is also a curious person, enquiring both about money and love, although she has no answers to either. She is hesitant about having sex with men, not from any moral primness, but from an underlying disquiet with the world. Her fluctuating, unpredictable moods dominate the film, which is told from her point of view.

*Lidia (The Night)* is another closed female lead character. Like Vittoria, she is unhappy in her romantic relationship (a marriage to Giovanni). Although she is perceptive, she is passive, almost inert and suffers from regret about her past.

Giuliana Perhaps the most closed character of all is Giuliana (*Red Desert*), who is a young mother and wife of a factory manager. From the first scene, she is disturbed, fearful and possibly psychotic, and it is later revealed that she tried to commit suicide. She has little or no support from her husband and gravitates toward Corrado, who shows an ability to understand her. Throughout the story, she is erratic and impulsive, though briefly happy and able to laugh. She is alone, without love and without the ability to love.

### 3. Conscientious

Sandro in *The Adventure* is a typical man, yet his character is anything but simplistic. He is a successful, wealthy man who owns two houses. He is also handsome and dynamic. In fact, he is a man who, as he admits, never sleeps. That restless energy, however, conceals a deep-lying disappointment of failing to become an architect. His inner conflict is that he has failed to express his creative energy. That failure imbues his character with a sadness that sometimes emerges from beneath the otherwise content surface.

Guido (*The Story of a Love Affair*) appears to be normal guy. He served in the war, he played rugby and now he tries to sell cars. His head is turned by the glamorous Paola, and her presence dredges up long-buried memories that burden him with guilt. Once that process begins, his sunny smile is replaced by a dark brooding expression. Throughout the story, he acts with dignity and kindness.

### 4. Disagreeable

*Patrizia (The Adventure)* is a rich, aristocratic and bored woman who loves only her dog. She is a minor character, but she and her lover enact a sexual scene (described above) that illustrates the decadence of the elite class put under the microscope in this film. She also embodies their frivolity and emptiness.

*Irma (The Cry)* is the most important of the four women in Aldo's life. She is also the most traditional, except that she has fallen in love with someone else, not because she is promiscuous or unfaithful, but only because that is what happened. Although she tries to break the news to him gently, it is a cruel and unexpected betrayal that ruins Aldo's life.

*Gianni (The Lady without Camelias)* is a middle-aged movie executive, infatuated with his job and his ability to make a 'great' movie. In pursuit of his goals, he is controlling and insensitive toward others, especially Clara, his wife. His self-belief leads to marital and financial disaster, although by the end of the film, we see a more mature and detached man.

*Count Rusconi (The Lady without Camelias)*, a diplomat married to a rich man's daughter, is the villain of the piece. Slim, slick-haired and mustachioed, he has the looks of a matinee idol. Unfortunately, he is the real-life admirer of Clara and deceives her about his intentions. Ultimately, he shows himself to be vacuous and self-absorbed.

*Georges (The Vanquished)* is one of those young men who 'act big.' Given that the story is punctuated with references to crime movies, it's not unreasonable to suppose that he models himself after an American gangster actor of the 1950s, like Edward G. Robinson. Georges likes being in control of the somewhat anarchic gang, but he shows his true colours at the end when he disowns any responsibility for the murder of Pierre.

*Simone (The Vanquished)* is a shallow but pretty girl, who embodies many of the negative character traits identified in the prologue as defining the 'burnt-out generation.' She has only contempt for her hard-working father, brags about her loss of sexual innocence and coolly goes about seducing Pierre as part of the plan to murder him.

*Thomas (Blow Up)* is a professional photographer, mainly making money as a fashion photographer but also producing a book of art photos. Young, selfish, shallow and arrogant, he stands for the amoral and

rudderless generation of the Swinging Sixties in London. He treats his models with contempt and others with mild disinterest. Bored and fed up with life, he appears to have no interest in anyone or anything.

*Momina (The Girlfriends)* is the most cynical of a cynical group of women. She is the embodiment of the newly affluent class in 1950s Italy, who lived not only in Rome and Milan, but also in smaller cities, like Turin. From beginning to end, Momina is selfish, mocking and callous. It is an irony that while no one in this film ends up happy, cynical Momina perhaps comes closest precisely because she doesn't care.

#### 5. Rational

Piero (*The Eclipse*) is a young, enthusiastic and handsome man, who works as a broker in the Rome stock exchange. Although he is dedicated to his job, he is self-absorbed and shallow and acts like an overgrown adolescent.' He can be charming and playful, but he lacks any empathy. On the job in the stock exchange, he is a skilful and ambitious man, who knows how to play the game.

*Clelia (The Girlfriends)* is the outsider, the newcomer, which gives her a different perspective on the 'girlfriends.' But irrespective of that viewpoint, she is also clearly the only one with a set of principles, in both business and personal affairs. She is consistently sensitive to everyone, especially to Rosetta and also to Carlo, with whom she (sort of) falls in love. She is hardworking but not arrogant, business-like but not driven by money. Happy, well-adjusted and principled, she is rare among Antonioni's female lead characters.

*Ercole* Unlike the lean, hawk-faced Gianni, the producer Ercole (*The Lady without Camelias*) is a corpulent and fleshy man. Like Gianni, though, he is obsessed with making movies and sometimes goes berserk on the set. Still, he is always affable, practical and instinctively kind to others, particularly to Clara, whose career he has helped to create. In her hour of need, he is there to support her.

*Ugo (Red Desert)* is a businessman first, a father second and a husband last. He is dedicated to his job running the factory, he enjoys playing with his son and he is quick to blame his wife for her 'mistakes.' His bland face suggests a man untroubled by questions of conscience.

*Enrico (The Story of a Love Affair)* doesn't have a care in the world. He's rich, very rich, and married to a beautiful wife. His materialist brain doesn't understand that she needs more than fur coats, and his possessiveness sparks a fit of jealousy that results in his death.

#### 6. Emotional

*Rosetta (The Girlfriends)* is a character in sharp contrast to Clelia. Although she is nice-looking, she suffers from the *ennui* that afflicts many women in Antonioni's films. She is disillusioned by the social milieu in which she lives, the selfish and supercilious girlfriends of the title. But her malaise also has a second and more specific cause: her unfulfilled love for equally depressed artist Lorenzo. Despite her disappointment, she is capable of showing compassion to her rival, Nene.

*David (The Passenger)* is a journalist who has lost faith in his ability to report the truth, especially regarding the political situation in north Africa. He has abandoned his wife and a child in London and tried to escape into the desert, but he soon discovers that he still has habits that he cannot slough off. Although disenchanted with the world and himself, he shows brief moments of joy with the girl.