

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE ADVENTURE (L'AVVENTURA) 1960

Michelangelo Antonioni

OVERVIEW

The Adventure was the first instalment in Antonioni's trilogy, which included *The Night* (1961) and *The Eclipse* (1962). When the film was booed at Cannes in 1960, the film-maker tried to explain its message this way: 'Why do you think eroticism is so prevalent today in our literature, our theatrical shows, and elsewhere? It is a symptom of the emotional sickness of our time. But this preoccupation with the erotic would not become obsessive if Eros were healthy—that is, if it were kept within human proportions. But Eros is sick; man is uneasy, something is bothering him. And whenever something bothers him, man reacts, but he reacts badly, only on erotic impulse, and he is unhappy.' Despite the initial hostility shown by audiences, the film won the Jury Prize at Cannes that year. Shot with panoramic landscapes, clever close-ups and stunning architecture, it is one of Antonioni's masterpieces. Three times it has appeared in the *Sight and Sound* critics' list of the ten best films of all times.

SYNOPSIS

This haunting story follows the doomed love affair between Claudia and Sandro, who is the fiancé of her best friend, Anna. When Anna goes missing on a cruise in the Mediterranean, Claudia's loyalty to her is severely tested. In Anna's absence, Claudia no longer has any excuse to deny her attraction to Sandro. The slow-burn of their sexual love is enacted in the company of Italy's post-war, shallow elite, who own yachts and villas. Their love affair is overshadowed by Claudia's guilt and ends when she discovers Sandro with another woman.

PEOPLE

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| Anna | Anna is the daughter of a retired diplomat. |
| Claudia | Claudia is Anna's friend. |
| Sandro | Sandro, an accountant, is engaged to Anna. |
| Corrado | Corrado is a rich man on whose yacht the story begins. |
| Guilia | Guilia is his young wife. |
| Patrizia | Patrizia is a rich countess. |
| Raimondo | Raimondo is her admirer. |

SCENES

Plans Outside their large house on the outskirts of Rome, Anna talks with her father, a retired diplomat. She is about to embark on a few days cruise on the Mediterranean with her fiancé, Sandro, and her friend, Claudia. Father and daughter exchange cryptic remarks about 'truths' and 'secrets' before the father expresses his doubt that she will marry Sandro.

Impulse The two young women are driven to Sandro's apartment. Outside on the street, Anna expresses ambivalence about wanting to meet Sandro, although she hasn't seen him for a month. On impulse, she rushes up the stairs to his apartment, where he is busily packing. Leaving Claudia to wait outside, she takes him to bed and they make love. Sandro points out that her friend is waiting for them outside, but she says, 'Let her wait.'

Woman overboard Sandro drives Claudia and Anna to the seacoast, where they board a yacht along with four others: Corrado, his wife (Guilia), Lady Patrizia and her admirer (Raimondo). The young men and women sunbathe and chat, until they reach a set of volcanic islands near Sicily. As one of

the men pedantically names the various islands, and the others speak of their danger, Anna plunges into the water and Sandro jumps in after her.

Shark When the boat stops, Anna cries 'shark!' and Sandro swims out to rescue her. Later, inside a cabin in the yacht, Anna admits to Claudia that 'the whole shark thing was a joke.' Claudia suggests it was intended to make Sandro protect her, and Anna does not contradict her. In the same scene, as the two women take off their swimsuits, Anna tells Claudia to wear one of her own blouses because it looks better on her. It is a revealing, see-through blouse, while Anna herself puts on a plain top.

Patrizia Patrizia, a wealthy aristocrat on the cruise, endures the sexual attentions of an admirer, Raimondo, while Claudia watches. Patrizia is desperately bored by Raimondo's passion and lights a cigarette after she permits him to touch her breasts. 'I find it amusing, like a dog,' she says to Claudia.

Argument The groups leave the boat and wanders about one of the small, rocky islands. Anna and Sandro go off on their own, and she explains to him that she is not satisfied with their relationship, but he brushes aside her anxieties, saying, 'We'll have lots of time to discuss all this when we're married.' They fail to reach an understanding, and Sandro goes off to lie in the sun.

Disappearance Later, when the group decides to leave, they discover that Anna is missing. Raimondo thought he saw a small boat passing, which might explain her disappearance. Sandro complains that she has disappeared simply to annoy him, but the dangerous waves and stormy sky suggest something more menacing.

Search The group scours the rocky landscape of the island looking for Anna, but they can find no trace. Sandro tells the others to go to the nearest police station and report Anna as missing. Corrado says he will stay and so does Claudia, though Sandro says that she will only be a hindrance. The three of them find a rough shed in which to spend the night.

Doubts Claudia declares that she is confident Anna is alive, citing as evidence her charade about the shark. Sandro admits that they had an argument, in which she said that she wanted to be alone. Claudia pointedly asks why, implying that Sandro didn't treat her well, but he does not answer. Later, Sandro complains that Claudia blames him for Anna's disappearance. Overcome with sadness, Claudia goes out onto a cliff and screams Anna's name.

Sandro and Claudia Claudia wakes up early and watches the sun rise. Searching for her clothes, she finds the blouse that Anna gave her and goes out onto the steep cliffs, where she finds Sandro already staring out to sea. As they talk, he wants to know what Anna told her about him, and she wonders if she could have prevented her disappearance. Their shared affection for Anna brings them together in the light of early morning. He grabs her when she stumbles, and they lock eyes for a moment.

Police The police arrive and carry out an extensive search but without any results. Claudia breaks down with grief when she contemplates the horrible death that might have befallen her friend. The group quarrels among themselves, accusing one another of indifference.

Arrivals Anna's father arrives in a boat and is told that his daughter had been reading the Bible. This reassures him that she didn't commit suicide because 'no one who believes in God would kill themselves.' Next, a police helicopter arrives with the news that a boat run by smugglers has been intercepted in nearby port. Anna's father and Sandro decide to go there with the police.

Illlicit kiss Before he leaves, Sandro follows Claudia on to the yacht and kisses her. Startled, but not angry, Claudia breaks off and runs away. When the others depart, she decides to undertake her own search of the other islands, agreeing to meet up with the group at Corrado's house in Palermo.

Smugglers In the station, Sandro listens as the police question the smugglers about their boats. At one point, he barges into the room and roughs up one of the suspects but is told to leave. Sandro learns nothing about Anna's disappearance.

Train Claudia is sitting in a train station preparing to go to Palermo. When Sandro walks into the waiting room and offers to go with her, she tells him not 'to complicate' things.' As the train arrives, she begs Sandro not to follow her, but he leaps on at the last moment.

Sacrifice Inside the moving train, she tells him to go away. It's better if they deny their love and 'sacrifice' themselves before it's too late. Sandro replies that 'sacrifice' makes no sense because Anna is no longer around. But Claudia is troubled by the idea of her taking her best friend's fiancé as a lover. Sandro pleads with her to come away with him. She feels confused and begs him to leave her alone. Sandro gives in and gets off at the next station.

Searching Sandro finds the journalist who wrote the story about Anna's disappearance. His attempt to talk with the journalist is hampered by a huge crowd gathered to gawk at a sexy young woman giving an impromptu press conference. After the journalist reveals that Anna was seen in a nearby town, Sandro goes to check, but the 'sighting' of Anna turns out to be vague and unhelpful.

Frivolity Meanwhile, Claudia is staying with the others at Corrado's villa in Palermo. Their frivolous talk about Anna's disappearance disturbs Claudia. One man points out that 40,000 people go missing in Italy every year. An older woman chuckles at the suggestion that 'he did away with her.' Claudia hears a car, which he hopes is Sandro. But it is not him.

Sex Having read about the sighting in the paper, Claudia arrives in the same town and meets Sandro. Driving toward another reported sighting, they stop and make love on a hillside.

Anna? Driving on, they find the hotel where Anna might be staying. Claudia tells Sandro to go in alone, while she waits outside. When she sees Sandro coming down the stairs with someone, she hides. It is not Anna, but Claudia hates herself for betraying her.

Ambition From the rooftop of a building, Sandro talks about his frustrated ambition to be an architect and his disappointment with his current job as an accountant. Claudia says she believes he could build beautiful things, but he says nobody wants buildings to last these days.

Proposal Suddenly, Sandro asks Claudia to marry him, but she can't give him an answer. In the morning, Claudia is buoyant, with her doubts seemingly resolved and happily in love with Sandro. Her bubble is burst by a frown on Sandro's face, but they agree that it's not necessary to say they love each other.

'Accident' Sandro goes out for a walk in the piazza, where he admires the old buildings. Glancing at an architectural drawing by an art student, he knocks over the ink pot and ruins it. Confronted by the angry young man, Sandro claims it was an accident.

Departure Back at the hotel, Sandro tries to make love to Claudia. She resists and explains that, though she wants to, she is too upset about Anna. She also feels guilty about not staying in contact with Anna's father and convinces Sandro that they should leave.

Party They check into a hotel, where Sandro's boss and his wife are hosting a party. Claudia says she is too tired to attend, but Sandro wanders around the party and claps eyes on several attractive women. Unable to sleep, Claudia gets up and goes to the room of a woman friend's, where she admits that she is afraid that Anna will come back and spoil her love with Sandro.

Betrayal Searching for Sandro in the now empty hotel ballrooms, she finds him having sex with a woman. Shocked, she runs out of the hotel. Sandro follows and finds her crying while staring at a church. He sits down on a bench and also starts to cry. Walking up behind him, she puts a hand on his head to comfort him. Neither speaks as they look out at Mt Aetna in the distance.

THEMES

1. Society

upper class 'Adventure' is a clever title for a clever film. As a common Italian euphemism for serial one-night stands, it conveys both the immorality of post-war Italy and the emptiness of strangers passing like ships in the night. In their desperate search for love, the characters are no longer guided by a moral compass. They are all lost, disappeared like poor Anna, on an adventure into uncharted waters, the *terra incognita* of a society that has abandoned the church while chasing consumer affluence.

decadence Flitting all around this central pair of Claudia and Sandro are the rich, fashionable, crass and narcissistic crowd, who take them on the cruise and whose party they attend at the end. Husbands belittle wives, wives cheat on husbands and no one gives a damn about anything other than themselves, except their pet dog. Giulia, the young wife in this decadent set, is said, by her husband, to 'be like Oscar Wilde. Give her all the luxuries, and she can do without the necessities.' A luxurious villa, a fancy yacht, an expensive car define these people, the new elite, the new generation of professional men and women who run the country. But the vacuity of life is found not just among the wealthy. Cameo appearances by a journalist, a chemist and his wife, and ordinary men on the street reveal the existential absence at every level of society. It is not just Anna who has disappeared—it is a whole civilisation.

religion The film-maker slips the 'church' into several key scenes. After seeing that his missing daughter has been reading *Tender is the Night* (a novel about moral decadence and mental instability among Americans in Europe, including in Rome) and the Bible, Anna's father declares that she could not have committed suicide. 'Anyone who believes in god,' he says, 'would not take her own life.' Later, when Sandro suddenly asks Claudia to marry him (still not knowing if Anna is dead or alive), Claudia hesitates to take that final step of betraying her best friend. 'I wish I could see things more clearly,' she cries and grabs hold of a rope that rings a church bell, which is connected to other church bells in the town. The chorus of bells is exactly the kind of clarity that she has been seeking. In another scene, Sandro maliciously spoils an artist's drawing and is about to get involved in a fight, when everything stops because a long line of black-clad novices and priests file out of a church. But the most devastating image is the modernist, white church built on the side of a road in a deserted location. Claudia peers through the shuttered windows and cries out 'Is anyone there?' All she hears is an echo. The church is empty, its ideals disappeared, its teachings forgotten. Sandro wonders why the church was built at all.

2. Love

Sandro and Anna: dysfunctional love: Sandro and Anna are engaged to be married, but from the very beginning we see little signs of love between them. In the opening scene, Anna's father casts doubts on the success of their relationship. Moments later, Anna expresses her own misgivings to Claudia before impulsively going up to Sandro's apartment and having sex with him. But her face and whole demeanour reflect her inner dissatisfaction. Next, on the boat trip, she pretends to be threatened by a shark only to make him rescue her, and then on the island they quarrel about their future. When Anna disappears, it is symbolic of their empty relationship.

Sandro and Claudia: doomed love

Claudia The entire film can be viewed as the unfolding of Claudia's sexual response to the brooding presence of Sandro. Her attraction to him is blocked at first by her loyalty to Anna, but her friend's disappearance becomes for her an opportunity. A woman capable of showing joy and playing games, she has to fight to keep her desire in check. Even when she makes love, the film-maker has tailored the shots to present Claudia as a person motivated more by love than lust. Her beatific face radiates with light not heat.

Sandro Sandro, on the other hand, is the embodiment of assertive male masculinity. He is a well-built man with a handsome face and healthy desires. He may not fully understand either Anna or Claudia, but he falls in love with them and wants to have sex with them. The fact that he 'replaces' Anna with Claudia (signalled by the blouse that Anna gives to Claudia) reveals his lack of nuanced appreciation of them as individuals. It is enough that both are attractive women. He desires them both and will not stop until he sleeps with them. Anna, the third figure in the triangle, has a normal sexual response to men, but she is too disturbed to show any pleasure.

Attraction Claudia's first sensual scene with Sandro takes place on the yacht. Anna is missing, and everyone is about to leave the island, when she goes by herself back to the boat. As she combs her hair in the cabin beneath the deck, she tilts her head to one side as if considering her beauty. Through the mirror, she sees Sandro descend down into the cabin. With the look of a frightened animal, she turns, puts away the comb and tries to escape through the narrow passage. But Sandro blocks her exit. He looks longingly at her, she does not speak, he takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. She grabs his hand, which is on the back of her neck, but whether to squeeze it or remove it is at first unclear. A second later, she rips it away and flees, again with fear in her eyes. Prior to this wordless first kiss, Claudia and Sandro had only touched hands once, although their mutual attraction was evident. In this brief scene in the boat, she reveals the conflict within her. She does not reject Sandro's advances altogether, but neither does she encourage them. It is a delicately balanced performance by a woman who is afraid of her own sexual desire for this man. Trapped below in the narrow confines of the boat, she is frightened by what might happen and flees to safety.

Indecision The story is told from Claudia's point of view, who is the central node of the triangle—friend of Anna and lover of her fiancé. For both the women, 'things are complicated' and 'absurd.' They are rent apart by conflicting impulses. Anna doesn't know whether she wants to stay with Sandro or not; her dilemma is quickly resolved by her disappearance. The rest of the film concentrates on Claudia's plight of falling in love with her best friend's fiancé, an agony that is made more intense by the fact that no one knows if Anna will come back or not. More than once, Claudia resists Sandro's overtures, but slowly she comes to accept that she has fallen in love with him. Now she has to live with the guilt of betrayal, a gnawing self-hate that induces vertiginous mood swings from ecstasy to despair. In terms of this central issue, Claudia is caught between the old morality and new hedonism. We can contrast her with Guilia, a somewhat younger and decidedly more shallow woman who openly flirts with an artist in front of her husband.

Guilt The key scene in dramatising Claudia's guilty over her betrayal is the one in which she makes love with Sandro on the hillside. She finally lets her sexual desire overcome her doubts and enjoys the love-making in the open air. Afterwards, though the devils begin to play up in her mind again. Beforehand, she says she never been so 'confused in [her] whole life.' But after making love with Sandro and apparently feeling happy, she is ensnared yet again by guilt. 'It's absurd,' she says. 'It's not right.' Her self-loathing is the price she pays for not having sloughed off the old morality as easily as the other members of the yachting party. For her, love cannot be right if it means betrayal.

Making love Claudia's second scene with Sandro occurs during their search for Anna, who is fast receding into the past. They lie together on a barren patch of ground overlooking a church. Without any lead in, the first shot is a close-up of Claudia, who laughs with joy as she jumps into Sandro's arms. Soon, they are kissing wildly and drop to the ground, out of camera, which shows a panoramic view of the Italian countryside. Next, we see her expectant face as he lies on top of her. Her hand goes behind his head, a repetition of her gesture in scene described above, but this time she uses it to draw him to her. Now, her face is ecstatic, filled with joy as she cries out, 'My love. Mine. Mine. Mine.' Close-ups of her face reveal her pure delight in making love to Sandro. She utters soft moans and gasps, her mouth wide open with pleasure. She is completely lost in the joy of sex. Tellingly, there is no nudity, no exposure of flesh, and possibly no penetration, but the raw energy of the sexual act is suggested by the sudden shift of the camera to a train that rattles through the countryside below them. Huffing ferociously, and churning at great speed, it is a brilliant symbol for the sexual intercourse that may or may not have taken place.

Sandro's desire Sandro's sexuality is clearly illustrated in a scene with Claudia toward the end of the film. To that point, he has played the normal lover, a man who desires the desirable Claudia, a man who has won her affection and slept with her. Now, though, he is disturbed. He has just come from the piazza, where he had the confrontation with the art student. Back in the hotel room, on the balcony, he looks out at the beautiful buildings that he wishes he had built. Annoyed, he throws away his cigarette and scowls at the church. He walks back into the room, closes the shutters with a bang and pushes Claudia onto the bed. His face is fixed with determination, almost anger, which confuses Claudia, who says she doesn't want to make love. 'Why not?' he asks and forces himself on her with fierce kissing. 'What's gotten into you, eh?' she cries. 'I feel as if I don't know you.' He reacts by sneering at her: 'Not happy with your new love affair?' She is shocked at this degrading comment, but he laughs it off, saying she can't take a joke. His frustration over his unfulfilled ambition, fuelled by the incident with the art student, has led him to seek self-assertion through sex. If

he can make love to a woman, then maybe he can feel he is man.

Sandro's betrayal Sandro's predatory sexual appetite is revealed in final section of the film, when he is at the party held in a luxury hotel. Having left Claudia asleep in their hotel room, Sandro prowls through the rooms filled with guests, including well-dressed and attractive women. He is by himself, feeling confident in his own good looks. He flirts with several young women and then sees a face that seems familiar. She stands on a floor above and looks at him. He, too, appraises her, like the nude paintings he has been admiring on the walls. Coolly, he draws on his cigarette and tries to remember where he has seen her. Then it hits him. She is the prostitute whom he saw during his conversation with the journalist. The camera then cuts to Claudia, who can't sleep and goes to look for Sandro. She finds him, as we do, smiling on top of the half-naked prostitute on a couch. Sandro has satisfied his sexual desire with her, a substitute for Claudia who he thought was asleep. His predatory instinct has overcome any pretence at fidelity.

Patrizia and Raimondo: decadent love The relationship between Patrizia, a rich society woman, and Raimondo, her admirer, illustrates the decadence of the upper class as a whole. The liaison is illustrated in one key scene on board the boat. Patrizia is doing a jigsaw puzzle, when her admirer Raimondo joins in her below deck. He looks at her longingly, which prompts her to sigh and say, 'What is it now, Raimondo? Do you want me?' Claudia, who is with them, starts to move away, but Patrizia says, 'No. Stay. There's no spark.' Raimondo lies down on a bench and looks beneath the table, where Patrizia offers him a view of her legs and possibly something more. 'All right?' she asks wearily. 'Happy, now?' He touches her housedress, which she recognises as a sign that he wants to fondle her. With another sigh of resignation, she leans back and permits him to touch her breasts while she distractedly lights a cigarette. She sits up again, ending his brief handful of pleasure. Raimondo then speaks to Claudia, describing Patrizia as the embodiment of debauchery, deceit and vice, and 'yet, she is faithful. A faithfulness born of laziness.' Patrizia says, 'Yes, it [fidelity] is the only thing I find amusing, apart from my dog.' Patrizia's lack of sexual response to Raimondo's fondling reveals the lack of passion in her veins. She is bored with desire but permits her admirer a little flutter of pleasure. Her whole performance displays resigned decadence.

Guilia and Corrado: infidelity The marriage between the young Guilia and the rich Corrado also represents the sickness at the heart of love affairs among the idle rich in the story. On the boat, Corrado (who is the owner) constantly belittles his wife, interrupting and contradicting whatever she says. Guilia counters his disrespectful behaviour by her audacious flirting with a young artist, which ends up with love-making (behind closed doors but obvious nonetheless).

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Claudia Claudia 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.'

Torn Claudia tries desperately to avoid betraying Anna, while at the same time she fights to deny her attraction to Sandro. It is a conflict that tears her apart. A good illustration of the inner struggle occurs when she takes a train to avoid Sandro, only to find that he is on the train. She begs him to go away, to 'get this sacrifice [of denying their love] over with.' She is troubled by the reality of her increasing love for this man, who just three days ago was engaged to Anna. 'Who would have thought,' she says, as much to herself as to Sandro. 'You and Anna.' Shaking her head, she jumps up and shouts, 'How can it take so little to change, to forget?' Sandro says it doesn't take much. 'It's sad,' she says, 'so sad...I'm not used to this. I'm not ready for it...Sandro, why don't you help me?' He suggests that the only way they can help each other is to accept their love, but she won't hear of that. 'No,' she says, 'that's not it. Get off at the next station.' That is the last thing she wants—to lose Sandro—but her loyalty to her friend is an even stronger emotion. In a final, agonised attempt to reconcile the situation, she screams, 'Just let me be.' Throughout this scene, and indeed the last third of the film, we see Claudia tear herself apart, blaming herself for loving a man.

Joyful The depth of Claudia's despair is only equalled by the heights of her soaring joy. The see-saw of her emotions reaches its zenith the morning after they have made love and Sandro has asked her to marry him. As she dresses in their hotel room, she listens to a popular Italian love song and dances around mouthing the words, 'No, no. I will never let you go. You are mine forever.' Her face is

lit with manic joy as she prances around, playing the love-sick girl. When Sandro says, in a straightforward tone, that he'll meet her in the piazza, she swoons and impersonates the love-crazed singer. It is a total transformation from the guilt-stricken person of only a day before. Now, when she expresses such delight, we see how terrible her struggle has been.

Compassionate At no point in this long film does Claudia show hatred or act with anything less than kindness. Although she is sometimes flustered, frustrated and defiant, she is always sympathetic. The defining moment of her complex character comes in the final shot. She has just discovered Sandro having sex with another woman in the hotel. She, the betrayer, has been betrayed. It is the lowest point of her despair. She runs out of the hotel onto the street and stops, appropriately enough, in front of a church. She bursts into tears. Sandro follows, sits on a nearby bench and begins to sob. She approaches and stands close behind him. His has stopped crying, but he hangs his head. He turns to say something but stops, too ashamed. Slowly, unseen by him, she raises a hand, withdraws it and then places it on his head to comfort him. They are both broken-hearted, but he is the guilty one. She is the saviour.

Sandro Sandro 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.

Imperceptive Sandro is neither selfish nor coarse, but he does not always show emotional intelligence. An example of his inability to 'read' people is the conversation he has with Anna just before she disappears. They have been away from each other for a month, during which Anna has learned to live without him and she isn't sure that she wants to renew their relationship. They are exploring the island when she tells him about her doubts. He says, confidently, 'It's the usual uneasiness. It will pass.' When she says it's stronger this time, he smiles indulgently and says, 'Then it'll take a little longer to go away.' She insists that they talk about it, but he declares that 'words are becoming less and less necessary. Words cause misunderstanding. I love you. Isn't that enough?' But it is not sufficient for Anna, who confesses that she wants to separate from him because she no longer feels anything for him. He picks up a stone and hurls it into the sea with a gesture of frustration. Not knowing what more to say and resigned to not understand her, he stretches out on the rocks to relax in the sun. The scene reveals Sandro's lack of perception into another's feelings, even those of his fiancé. He has answers for every problem she brings up, a ready-made solution rather than a considered response. There is a smugness about him, a failure to recognise the seriousness of another's problem.

Matter-of-fact What little we glean about Sandro's work suggests that he is an accountant with a construction firm. Earlier, he might have had more aesthetic interests, but now he is focused on getting things done on time and within budget. Not a bad attitude to have when dealing with large sums of money, but not ideally suited to achieving rapport with a lover. This matter-of-fact approach is displayed in a scene when he begins to express his interest in Claudia. After Claudia says that his sweet words are just an echo of what he said to Anna many times, he has an unemotional answer. 'Let's say I did [say these things to Anna]. I was in earnest with her as I am with you.' Sandro does not want to see his infidelity because he is desperately in love with Claudia. However, he expresses himself in terms of logic, not love.

Regretful Another aspect of Sandro's character is illustrated in the scene when he and Claudia stand on a roof top and look out at the ancient piazza of a town. Sandro begins to speak about his youthful ambition to become an architect and his disappointment with his current job. He tells the story about being asked to give the estimate to build a school. He worked for a day and a half and earned four million lire. 'So,' he explains, 'I went on giving estimates for other people's projects.' Claudia says she believes he could build beautiful things, but he wonders who wants beautiful things now. 'All of this,' he says gazing out at the piazza, 'was built to last centuries.' During this scene, Sandro reflects on his failed artistic ambitions and accepts his current wealth with a note of regret. Still mulling his past, he walks away, hands in pockets, before suddenly turning around and asking Claudia to marry him. She, it seems, would could help him forget his disappointed past. It is one of the few scenes that endear him to the audience.

Petulant Not long after that scene, we see the childish, self-absorbed part of Sandro's character. He and Claudia have spent the night in a hotel, Claudia is extremely happy and he strolls out to the piazza. Unable to enter a museum, he notices an ink drawing by an architectural student left out in the open. He dangles his car key as he scrutinises the sketch, comparing it with the original building. With a frown, he lets the swinging key knock over the bottle of ink and ruin the drawing. Confronted by the young artist, he asks how old he is. When the student says 23, Sandro says that he too was once that age. A possible fight is averted by the appearance of priests and students coming from a church, but Sandro has shown a mean streak. It is a continuation of his reflections on an unfulfilled ambition to become an architect. His behaviour is, at best, petulant.

Anna Anna is more troubled, less sunny version of her friend, Claudia. Whereas Claudia is open and joyful, Anna is closed and morose. 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.

Distraught Anna is troubled from the very start, long before she disappears on the cruise. That inner turmoil is evident in her first scene, when she and Claudia drive to Sandro's apartment. As soon as they get out of the car, in the street below, Anna changes her mind and says she's going to a café for a drink. Claudia is astounded. 'But you haven't seen him for a month,' she says. Anna looks at her with a pained expression. 'I don't feel like seeing him today,' she says. When asked why, she tries to explain, 'It's torture being apart, really... It's difficult keeping a relationship going, when one is here and the other is there. But then, it's easy, too. You can just think what you like when you like, do what you like. Whereas, when someone's facing you, that's all you get.' She is pacing around, nervously, attempting to articulate her feelings. She stops, stares at her friend and says, 'Understand?' It is a cry for help.

Impulsive Another sign that Anna is disturbed is her impulsive behaviour. She not only changes her mind suddenly but also takes rash decisions. This recklessness is illustrated in a scene on the yacht. Anna is kissing Sandro, who breaks off and suggests that they go for a swim. Someone says it's too dangerous, and the camera shows the jagged rock face of an island. Anna listens to the others chatter away about trivial matters, while Corrado names the various islands one by one. She can take it no longer. Flinging over her coat, she cries, 'How boring! All this fuss over a swim.' She dives into the water and, a moment later, cries 'shark,' prompting Sandro to swim out and rescue her. Later, when she is back onboard and alone with Claudia, she confesses that 'the whole shark thing was a joke.' When Claudia asks why, she says, 'Just because.' Anna acts without thinking and even she can find no answer afterward.

Distant Part of Anna's distress is her emotional distance from people, which is illustrated in an early scene. Having expressed her conflicting feelings about meeting Sandro, she makes up her mind. Turning to face Claudia, she says, 'C'mon. Let's go back.' At that moment, Sandro emerges on the balcony above them and shouts that he'll be down in a moment. Now, she rushes up the stairs and begins to undress. 'But your friend is waiting outside,' Sandro says. 'Let her wait,' is Anna's fierce reply, uttered with a wicked smile. She lies on the bed, and Sandro makes love to her. The camera focuses on her face, which registers about as much pleasure as if she were having her hair done. Anna is emotionally, even sexually, distant, long before she actually disappears.

Patrizia Patrizia 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.

Frivolous Patrizia's superficiality is comically illustrated during the cruise on the yacht. She doesn't wear a swim suit (too vulgar) and swans around in a sort of fancy nightdress. Emerging from a cabin below, she looks around at the sea as if it were *terra incognita*. 'Come for a swim?' someone asks. 'I had a dream I was swimming. Fancy that,' she says with a supercilious air. One of the men says jovially that if she gives him the yacht's flag, he will name several islands for her. 'Islands,' she muses. 'I never understood them. Surrounded by nothing but water. Poor things.' Patrizia is a vacuous, eccentric and self-absorbed woman, who cares more about dogs than people, and who thinks that islands exist for her to comprehend. She would be a caricature except for the brilliant dialogue.



(Sandro and Claudia, in an early scene)



(Sandro and Anna, in an early scene)