

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## THE GIRLFRIENDS (Le Amiche) 1955

Michelangelo Antonioni

### OVERVIEW

Antonioni's fourth feature film, *The Girlfriends* was the first of many to be sourced from a novel. In this case, the inspiration came from a 1949 novella by Cesare Pavese, *Tra donne sole (Among Women Only)*. The film depicts the superficial and cynical society of wealthy young women in Turin, especially the glamorous world of fashion. As in many films, the director uses the lives of women to express fundamental problems afflicting Italian society as a whole. The film is also notable for its depiction of Turin as a city, with its arcades, cafes, boutiques, dark streets and broad avenues. Since the central event in the story is a suicide, it is noteworthy that the writer Pavese killed himself in 1950 (apparently because of a failed love affair) and that Antonioni directed a segment called 'Attempted Suicide' ('Tentato Suicidio') as part of a composite film (*Love in the City, L'Amore in Citta*) in 1953. *The Girlfriends* won the Silver Lion award at the Venice Film Festival in 1955, and its director won the prize for Best Director from an association of Italian film journalists in the same year.

### PEOPLE

Clelia	Clelia is the manager of a dress shop.
Cesare	Cesare is the architect of the dress shop.
Carlo	Carlo is his assistant.
Rosetta	Rosetta is one of the girlfriends.
Momina	Momina, also one of the girlfriends, is separated from her husband.
Mariella	Mariella is another of the girlfriends.
Nene	Another girlfriend, Nene is an artist.
Lorenzo	Lorenzo, also an artist, is engaged to Nene.

### SYNOPSIS

Clelia has come from Rome to her native Turin in order to open a branch of a fashion salon. In the hotel room next to hers, she finds Rosetta unconscious from an overdose of sleeping pills. Soon, Clelia meets the other girlfriends, and their male friends, whose reactions to the suicide reveal their characters. Rosetta tried to kill herself because of a doomed love affair with Lorenzo, who is engaged to Nene. Clelia looks after her shop, where she is attracted to Carlo, the architect's assistant. Momina flirts with Cesare, the architect, but then goes back to her husband. Mariella flits around the edges, without much impact. Rosetta and Lorenzo carry on their love affair, leading Rosetta to hope that he will break with Nene and marry her. That hope is dashed, she throws herself into a river and dies. When the news reaches her salon, Clelia denounces the uncaring society that allowed Rosetta to die. Unable to continue to work in Turin, she is offered a similar post back in Rome. Before she leaves, she explains to Carlo that they would not have been happy together. He watches from a distance as her train leaves the station.

### SCENES

#### Part one

*Attempted suicide* Well-dressed Clelia checks into a hotel on her return to her native Turin, where she is about to open a new clothes shop. Minutes later, she finds a woman lying unconscious in the next room. The woman, who has taken an overdose of sleeping pills, is Rosetta.

*Clelia's shop* Clelia goes to see how her new shop is coming along and argues with Carlo, the architect's assistant, about the slow progress. Eventually, the architect himself shows up and apologises for the delay, but Clelia demands the work be completed within a week.

*Searching for answers* Momina and Mariella look up Franco, the man Rosetta was with the previous night, but he can tell them nothing. Momina visits Clelia and asks for her help in finding out why Rosetta took the pills. She knows that Rosetta called someone that night and enlists Clelia in her effort to discover the telephone number. Clelia is reluctant but agrees, and the two women bribe a chambermaid to find out the number from the switchboard operator.

*Lorenzo and Nene* Momina and Clelia go to an art studio, where they find Lorenzo, a painter and the person whom Rosetta apparently called. The girlfriends accuse of him of having had an affair with Rosetta, whose portrait he has just painted. Lorenzo says he knows nothing about her suicide attempt, and laughs off any suggestion that he is responsible. A ceramic artist called Nene, who is engaged to Lorenzo, listens to this conversation with interest.

*Clelia and Carlo* At the nearly-finished shop, Clelia follows Carlo to his usual lunch place and they share a meal, during which their mutual attraction is evident. The girlfriends come into the café and invite Clelia to join their outing, pointedly omitting to invite working-class Carlo.

*Outing* A reluctant Rosetta joins the others on a windswept seashore. The girls and their male escorts scamper down wooden stairs to the beach, where they see courting couples and discuss public kissing with their typical nonchalance. Although they chat, flirt and joke about love, Rosetta wanders off on her own.

*Man trouble* The outing breaks up when Rosetta overhears unkind remarks about her and attacks her friends. Clelia accompanies her home on the train and lends a sympathetic ear to her problems. Rosetta is open about her lack of interest in life and admits that her depression is the result of a troubled romance.

*Clelia and Carlo* Clelia goes straight from the train to the shop, which is ready for opening the next day. Finding Carlo there alone, she expresses her gratitude and falls into his arms. Later, though, tells Carlo that it was a moment of weakness and he says he understands. Their difference in social class is then exposed when they consider buying furniture for the shop and when they visit the poor neighbourhood where Clelia lived as a little girl. Carlo wishes she hadn't left because then they might have fallen in love, but now she is a rich lady from Rome.

*Nene's success* Nene receives a call from her dealer, who tells her that a gallery owner in New York wants to hold an exhibition of her ceramics. 'Lorenzo will be overjoyed,' she cries with happiness. 'No, not Lorenzo,' the dealer says. 'You. Your work.'

*Rosetta and Lorenzo* As these two walk along a river bank, Rosetta admits that she is in love with Lorenzo. She says it began when he painted her portrait and made her want to kill herself because he is engaged to Nene. When she says it won't happen again, Lorenzo takes her under a tree and they kiss passionately.

*Secret revealed* All the girlfriends, minus Rosetta, drop in at Momina's flat. They discuss men and tease each other about who has 'home-making skills' and who has 'other skills.' After Rosetta, fresh from her outing with Lorenzo, arrives, Momina and Clelia ferret out her secret. Clelia chides her for betraying Nene, but Momina tells her to enjoy herself while she's young. Nene suspects something when Rosetta hands her the matchbox on which Lorenzo has sketched her face.

*Momina and Cesare* Cesare arrives just as the ladies depart, allowing Momina to flirt with him. They are sitting on the couch, when she tells him that he shouldn't be cross with her, despite her frivolous nature. He says he is tired, but she says we all are but must pretend. Noticing their reflection in a window and jumps up. 'Look!' she cries. 'We look like a married couple.'

## Part Two

*Clelia and Carlo* With her shop fully open, Clelia is hiring models. Noticing that one girl is flirting with Carlo, she at first rejects her and later apologises to Carlo for being jealous.

*Rosetta and Lorenzo* They are now in a full-blown love affair, meeting in hotel rooms to have sex. Rosetta wants Lorenzo to tell Nene about them so they can get married, especially if Nene goes to New York for her exhibition. Rosetta also hopes that they could live in Momina's apartment, which is empty because Momina has gone back to her husband. After Lorenzo dampens her hopes, Rosetta hurries to the gala opening of the shop.

*Rosetta and Nene* At the grand event, with models twirling around before clients, Nene takes Rosetta aside and explains that she knows about the affair. Trying not to hurt Rosetta, Nene suggests that Lorenzo doesn't really love her. When Rosetta says that she can't give him up, Nene decides to go to New York and let her have Lorenzo. 'I'm leaving out of love [for Lorenzo],' she says.

*Rosetta rejected* When Rosetta tells Lorenzo that Nene knows everything and is going away, he is silent. Later, at the dinner following the event, he bursts out in anger when someone praises Nene's art. With his ego bruised, he mocks them for 'not caring about anything' and for thinking he's a failure. When Rosetta tries to console him, he tells her that he 'doesn't need anyone.' Back in their studio, Lorenzo and Nene reaffirm their love for each other.

*Suicide* Rosetta's corpse is dragged from the river and put in an ambulance. Jump-cut to the fashion salon with wealthy women worrying about their weight and what colour cocktail dress to purchase. When the news of the suicide spreads among the ladies in the salon, one says, 'It's like from another world.' But Clelia cries out, 'No. It's from this world.' She berates Momina for her callousness and calls her a murderess. 'You killed her! You and your cynicism.'

*Clelia and Carlo* When Carlo hears the news, he calls Clelia and they agree to meet in her hotel lobby. Before he arrives, Clelia speaks with the owner of the salon. They agree that, after her outburst in the salon, she cannot remain as manager, but the owner offers her a similar position in Rome. When Carlo arrives, he overhears Clelia booking her train ticket to Rome. Having expected their meeting to be the start of a relationship, both of them are sad. Clelia explains that, although she cares for him, they would never be happy because she could not be a traditional wife. They agree to meet at the railway station café so that he can say goodbye. Carlo doesn't go to the café, but he watches unseen as the train departs with Clelia looking expectantly out the window for him.

## THEMES

### 1. Love

*overview* The main theme of this early Antonioni film is the complexity of love between men and women in a changing society. Each of the five girlfriends has difficulty finding the right partner for a lasting love and marriage. The primary focus, however, is on two contrasting types of love: the conventional courting of Clelia and Carlo versus the illicit love between Rosetta and Lorenzo. Another important narrative strand is rivalry in love, pitting Rosetta against Nene. Finally, there is Mariella, who is the silliest of the bunch and flirts with everybody. None of these characters ends up happy, though Clelia is perhaps the least hurt.

*Clelia and Carlo: class difference:*

*meeting* The conventional love affair between Clelia and Carlo begins in a completely innocent scene when she follows him to the very modest café, where he eats lunch every day. From inside the café, Carlo sees Clelia through the window, looking at him. It is a romantic image, the smiling woman seen through glass, which somehow renders her mysterious and desirable. When the elegant Clelia enters the café, Carlo says he's surprised to see her in 'such a place,' but she assures him that it has 'nice things to eat' and points out the croquettes on offer. They share a meal, during which she says it's sad that the refurbishment of the shop is nearly complete. He, too, admits that he'll miss it when it's over. 'It's never happened to me before,' he adds. 'Getting attached to a job?' she asks, implying that he could also be referring to something else, perhaps his attachment to her. His silence suggests that that is just what he meant. This gentle scene encapsulates the budding love between Clelia and Carlo. By coming into his usual café and demonstrating that she likes his kind of food (croquettes), she closes the gap between the high-status woman and working-class man.

*flirting* A second stage in the development of their love occurs right after the outing on the beach. Clelia has just taken Rosetta home and learned how her suicide attempt was motivated by 'troubles with a man.' She rushes to the shop, which will open up in the morning, where she finds Carlo about to leave for the day. They are all alone and she moves close to him, speaking in a low voice to express her gratitude for his tireless work. He is shy, and she takes the initiative to press against him and then fall into his grateful arms. Again, the tempo and atmosphere of this scene is in keeping with the genuine affection that these two characters feel for each other. Their passionate kiss is long overdue.

*contrasts* Not long after that scene, however, the possible love relationship runs into the class

barrier that separates the two characters. It begins when Clelia asks Carlo not to misunderstand their kiss. 'I'm a single woman, who sometimes needs comfort,' she says gently, trying not to hurt his feelings. Carlo appears calm when he responds: 'Don't worry. It happened once and it won't happen again. I get it.' That little crack in their relationship widens when Carlo takes her to see some furniture that he thinks is right for the shop, but turns out not to be Clelia's taste at all. Carlo is slightly hurt, but they continue walking through Turin until they come to a crowded courtyard of shabby apartments, where Clelia lived as a little girl. While she enthuses about her childhood, Carlo muses about what might have been. 'If you hadn't left,' he says, 'we might have met. And I would have fallen in love with you. We might even have got married and lived here. Because that's all I can offer you.' Their affection for each other is now tinged with regret

*separation* Any hope that true love would overcome social class and that the film would end triumphantly in marriage for Clelia and Carlo is dashed in a late scene. Clelia has decided that she has to leave Turin and is offered a job in Rome. She is booking her one-way train ticket when Carlo arrives in the hotel lobby, where they had agreed to meet before she made the decision. When he realises that she is leaving Turin, they sit down and Clelia talks to him. She explains that she was upset (over losing her job in Turin) and turned to him because he represents something 'true' in her life. She says that she cares for him deeply and would like to spend the rest of her life with him. Unfortunately, though, 'it's too late.' They should have gotten married when she was younger and lived in Turin. Now, she belongs to a different world. 'I cannot be a quiet little wife in a little house,' she tells him. She is too used to being a working woman, and if they lived together, one of them would be unhappy. She says it isn't easy to leave him, but she must. The entire scene is deeply sad because they love each other but met too late in life.

#### *Rosetta and Lorenzo: unrequited love*

*secrecy* The first time we see Rosetta and Lorenzo together is when she has made an appointment to see him alone. As they walk along the river, they exchange hints of mutual desire but nothing explicit is said until Rosetta admits that she tried to commit suicide because of him. She explains that she fell in love with him when he painted her portrait. 'I felt as if you were caressing my face,' she says, 'even though you didn't realise it.' This declaration lifts Lorenzo's spirit, who feels himself a failure in his painting. Now, he guides her toward a clump of trees, where they kiss secretly and passionately. At this point, we aren't sure if Lorenzo is sincere or not. We know that he is engaged to Nene, but the nature of that bond is not clear.

*affair* Before long, their secret kissing evolves into a passionate love affair, with them having sex in hotel rooms. But in an extended scene, we also see that they are not in accord about their future. After one (unseen) love-making session, when Rosetta expresses restlessness, Lorenzo suggests that she get a 'real job' (not just an assistant in Clelia's shop). When Rosetta says, 'I'd like to be your wife,' Lorenzo starts to reveal his lack of interest in a long-term relationship. 'Marriage!' he exclaims in exasperation, 'that's all you women think about. Then what? You think you'd really be happy?' When she says that she loves him, he says sharply 'that's not enough. Nene loves me, too, but look how bored I am.' Rosetta wants to have a public love affair, not a secret one where they hide in hotel rooms. By the end of the scene, she makes Lorenzo to promise he will tell Nene about their relationship, but his promise does not inspire confidence.

*rivalry* The final stage in Rosetta's love affair with Lorenzo is enacted in a scene not with him, but with Nene. Without Lorenzo telling her, Nene realises what is going on and speaks to Rosetta in private. At first, she explains that Lorenzo has been depressed recently because his painting isn't going well. She suggests that he doesn't really love Rosetta and warns her 'to be careful' and 'not get hurt.' For her part, Rosetta declares that she cannot give up Lorenzo, but she doesn't want to hurt Nene, either. In the end, Nene says that she will go to New York and allow Rosetta to have Lorenzo. 'If we'd had children,' she says, 'I wouldn't have given in, but when it's just two people, whether married or not, only love can keep them together. And, it's because of love that I'm leaving.' That ambiguous statement seems to imply that she loves Lorenzo too much to deprive him of a chance at love with Rosetta. In any case, the scene is remarkable for the mutual compassion shown by the rivals. Neither is angry, and neither wants to hurt the other. But it is clear that Rosetta is the more desperate.

*separation and suicide* The final act in the tragedy of this love affair occurs when Lorenzo becomes enraged at a dinner and learns that Nene is going to New York. He storms out of the restaurant and

is followed by Rosetta. She tries to console him, but he is brutal and tells her that he doesn't need her. When we next see Rosetta, her body is being dragged out of the river.

### Momina: infidelity

Momina, who is separated from her husband until the end of the movie, is perhaps the one woman who has her cake and eats it, too. She has a love affair with Cesare, she advises an anxious Rosetta to enjoy herself while she's young and she tells Clelia that she doesn't understand such things (infidelity) because she's not married. When I'm up to something, I want my husband to know precisely because I do love him.' What exactly she means is left unexplained, but it is clear that she (and, by implication, the other girlfriends) does not believe in fidelity to friends or fiancés.

### Mariella: casual love

Mariella is the flightiest of the five girlfriends. She flits around the men, flirting but lacking the depth of character to actually embark on a serious love affair.

## 2. Quest

Clelia Clelia has one goal in life: to manage (and later to own) a successful fashion salon. From the moment she arrives on screen, her determination to make a success of her business trumps any other concerns. In the end, it is what prevents her from continuing her romance with Carlo: their marriage would fail because she would always prioritise her business.

Nene Nene's ambition is to be a successful ceramic artist. By the end of the film, she gets a big break when an art dealer in New York organises an exhibition of her work in that American city. But, unlike Clelia, she equally values her engagement with Lorenzo. In the end, she chooses to go to New York, but not for herself; instead, it is to allow Lorenzo to pursue his affair with Rosetta. After Rosetta's death, Nene and Lorenzo renew their engagement.

Lorenzo Lorenzo is driven by an ambition to become a great painter, similar to Clelia's determination in business. But there the similarity ends because Lorenzo is a self-pitying, weak-minded artist who is quick to offence. He is lucky that he has the kind Nene as a fiancé.

## 3. Leisure

outing One of the great set-pieces in this complex film is the outing that takes the five girlfriends and their male companions to the sea coast. In that cold, windy and sandy location, we see the main characters interact and reveal their various idiosyncrasies. The 'friends' turn on each other, bicker, quibble and insult one another. In this way, the outing enables the film-maker to give us insight each of the many characters.

fashion show Another important leisure is going to a fashion show, but the setting couldn't be more different. Now, the girlfriends and other clients are in their finest clothes, sitting on plush chairs and watching young women display the latest fashions. The idleness and affluence of the scene is then destroyed by the news of Rosetta's suicide.

## 4. Society

upper class The girlfriends, who go on outings and attend fashion shops, belong to the upper strata of society. With lots of time and money on their hands, they represent the *nouveau riche* who emerged during the reconstruction of the country after the Second World War. Traditional values are mocked, public kissing is common, casual love affairs are amusing and women are more interested in what dress to wear than in a friend's unhappiness. Antonioni chose the fashion world, with its focus on image, to represent this new culture of superficiality. By beginning with an attempted suicide and ending with a completed suicide, the film exposes the potential tragedies concealed by the glamorous façade of fashionable society.

cynicism One of the many scenes that reflects the cynicism of the affluent women in the film occurs in the dress shop, when it is revealed that Rosetta is carrying on an affair with Lorenzo, who is engaged to Nene. While Momina and Mariella seem mildly amused at this turn of events, Clelia is

shocked. 'What about Nene?' Clelia asks. 'What about your friendship with her?' Listening to Clelia's understandable criticism of Rosetta's betrayal, Cynical Momina reassures Rosetta that she needn't worry about old Nene. 'If she [Nene] doesn't know by now, she's as stupid as she is pitiful.' Again, Clelia protests, and Momina gives Rosetta advice: 'It's so difficult to find the right man, nowadays. Today's Prince Charmings snort cocaine and do the mambo. So have fun now, while you're young.' Her advice has tragic consequences for Rosetta.

*callousness* When the girlfriends travel together to the seaside for an outing, the callousness beneath their supercilious exterior is exposed. First, they spy a couple kissing on the beach and express only disdain for such innocent displays of affection. 'If a man kisses you in public,' Momina declares, 'it means he feels nothing.' Soon, they are all joking with each other about who should flirt with which man, and having counted up the pairs, Momina says, 'Right. There's no one for Rosetta.' Mariella laughs and says, 'Then she might as well kill herself for good.' Momina slaps her for being stupid, but Rosetta, who overheard the conversation, tells the others to leave Mariella alone. 'At least she's not hypocritical like the rest of you,' Rosetta says. This scene is significant in that it illustrates not only the lack of morality among the girlfriends but also their insensitivity to others. Rosetta's despair and eventual suicide are caused, in part, by her callous girlfriends.

*criticism* The director's critical view of the fashion world is boldly illustrated in a dramatic scene toward the end of the film. When news of Rosetta's successful suicide reaches Clelia's salon, one of her wealthy clients remarks that 'it's like from another world.' Hearing this, Clelia explodes. 'No!' she cries. 'It's from this world.' Having shocked everyone into silence, she goes on to condemn the thoughtless mentality of her own social circle. At the end of her outburst, she turns on Momina and calls her a murderess. 'You killed her! You and your cynicism.' We are left in no doubt of the message of the film: Rosetta's death symbolises the vacuity of these women's lives. Anyone one of them could have ended up throwing herself in the river. Rosetta was just the least confident and the most unstable among them.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Clelia** Clelia 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.

*Authoritative* Clelia is dedicated to her work, as illustrated in the scene when she first goes to the shop that is being fitted out in Turin. She rushes in, fresh from Rome in her stylish clothes, and immediately sizes up the situation. When it is obvious that the promised completion date will not be met (is it ever?), she starts to conduct an inquest. When told that several workmen are out sick, she has a sharp reply: 'Of course,' she says sarcastically, 'as soon as there's work to be done, there's an epidemic.' When Carlo, the assistant, is unable to get through to the architect on the telephone, she takes over and demands to talk to him. The architect soon arrives, full of high spirits at meeting Clelia, but the new woman puts him in his place within minutes. After he offers a few feeble excuses for the delay in work, she says, 'Anyone can see you don't have children.' When he asks how she could possibly have known that fact, her reply is tart: 'Children require responsibility.' She's the boss.

*Caring* In contrast with the other characters, especially the heartless Momina, Clelia is a considerate person. This quality is vividly demonstrated in the scene that follows the disastrous outing on the seaside. After the others say unkind things about Rosetta, Clelia is the one who accompanies her on the train journey home. While the others acknowledge that Rosetta is still very fragile, after her suicide attempt, Clelia takes the initiative to look after her. On the train journey, she consoles Rosetta and draws her out of herself. Genuinely interested in her plight, she asks Rosetta why she doesn't get married. When Rosetta says she doesn't believe in 'Prince Charmings', Clelia tries to convince her that she needs to have an interest beyond herself. 'That's why I've offered you a job,' she says. 'So you can look outside yourself. We can't live without other people.' When Rosetta complains about the trivial nature of life, Clelia tries to cheer her up. 'Life's made up of many things,' she says to her, 'some good and some bad, it's true. But there are so many things that matter. Like affection and love.' This long conversation on the train stands out because Clelia is sincerely trying to help Rosetta, something that is rare in the film.

**Rosetta** Rosetta 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.

**Depressed** Rosetta is depressed because she is lonely, hounded by her mother at home and taunted by her girlfriends in public. During the train conversation with Clelia (described above), she reveals some of her feelings. She doesn't believe in marriage, she says, because there aren't any Prince Charmings in reality. Under Clelia's tender gaze, she opens up further and tries to explain what made her attempt to kill herself. 'I don't know why I did it,' she says. 'I thought about it a lot. That one day I'd put an end to this.' By 'this', she says she means 'my life, my parents, my girlfriends...Because they're all just the way they are. You saw them. My girlfriends. Why should I live? To decide what dress to wear?' This scene reveals that Rosetta's depression is caused not only by her unrequited love (for Lorenzo) but also her alienation from life. In this sense, Rosetta joins a long list of Antonioni heroines who suffer from this malaise.

**Romantic** The other side of Rosetta's emotional coin is her unrealistic romanticism, as illustrated in a scene with Lorenzo. They have become lovers, meeting frequently in hotel rooms to have sex in the afternoons. After one such love-making session, Rosetta speaks of her frustration that she cannot be with Lorenzo in public. 'I don't like sneaking around like this,' she says. 'I want to be your wife.' Lorenzo tries to dampen down her hopes with some cool-headed talk about the problems of marriage, but she is undeterred. Now that she has slept with Lorenzo, the next step should be a public acknowledgement of their love and, eventually, a wedding. Unfortunately, her desperate desire for romance clouds her vision and she cannot see that Lorenzo is in it for the short term. When that brutal truth is revealed, she can see no way out and commits suicide.

**Lorenzo** 'Oh, the artist!' exclaims one of the men when Lorenzo blows his top at the dinner following the opening of Clelia's shop (see Key Moment described below). 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.

**Self-pitying** Lorenzo suffers from a lack of confidence in his art and his relationships. His sense of inferiority is heightened when he finds out that Nene, his fiancé, has been invited to exhibit in New York. Not only that, she is also going to leave him behind. When he hears that news at the dinner party following the opening of Clelia's shop, his self-pity comes to fore. And when someone makes a harmless joke about Lorenzo's art, he explodes and hits the man. 'No, no, I don't need your pity or your understanding,' he cries in anguish. When someone says that he has misunderstood the joke, he fumes, 'Yes, I'm wrong. I'm always wrong. Always a failure.' This is the only scene of violence, and only the second scene of anger, in the film, which is otherwise dominated by a cynicism too knowing to show emotion. Lorenzo is a man who suffers from a sense of inadequacy. He doesn't want others to pity him. His self-pity is more comforting.

**Momina** Of all the many cynical characters in this film, Momina is the most cynical. 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.

**Sardonic** Momina scarcely ever says anything without using a mocking voice, lest someone should somehow mistake her words for sincerity. At times, she is witty, but at others she is plain mean-spirited. A good, or bad, example is her comment on the windy seaside during the outing. The girlfriends are having a fun time, joking and poking fun at each other. Suddenly, Mariella notices that Rosetta is wandering off on her own toward the water's edge. 'Shouldn't we stop her?' Mariella suggests. But for Momina that isn't necessary. 'No,' she says, 'if she were to throw herself in this water, she's truly hopeless. I'd only kill myself in nice weather.' After seeing the film, we might hope that she finds the right weather to do just that.



(From left to right: Clelia, Nena, Mariella and Momina)



(Nene, left, and Rosetta)



(Clelia, left, and Rosetta on the train)