

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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Themes in Antonioni's Films

## Quest

*Blow Up* Thomas is never without his camera. He is forever in search of photographs, of homeless men, of lovers in the park, of anything that he finds interesting. He has a vision of a photography book, which he discusses with his agent over lunch. He thinks that the 'lovely' photos of the lovers in the park will make a good contrast with the gritty images of the desperate men he spent the night with in a doss house. His 'day job' of taking fashion photos does not hold any real interest for him, aside from making money. Thomas is a serious photographer with a clear vision.

*The Cry* The heart of this sad story is Aldo's unsuccessful search for stability and love. When he is forced to leave Irma, he leaves behind seven years of a near-marital, loving relationship. In each stage of his journey, he attempts to recreate that original strong bond, and each time he fails because there is no love. He has sex with two of the women, but that is not sufficient. He needs to re-establish a home, which would include his daughter. Rosina is especially important because she is the only surviving part of his former happiness with Irma. His long journey is a quest for something that he has lost, a search that brings him back to where he began.

*Girlfriends* Three characters have a quest in this film. Clelia's aim is 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'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. Lastly, 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.

*The Lady without Camelias* Clara, the star of this film in every sense of the word, has an ambition to become a successful actress. When that dream is derailed by marriage, she is frustrated and later takes acting lessons. The tragic ending shows her unable to land a part except in an inferior film. Her ambition is matched by her husband's desire to make 'great films.' At one point, Gianni makes a speech to Clara about his next movie being made with his 'own blood.' His ambition is so strong that it blinds him to popular appeal and ruins the career of his actress-wife.

*The Passenger* The film can be read as a personal quest by David. He is searching for the truth about the political situation in north Africa, but this is a convenient pretext for his more personal quest for a new identity. As a journalist, he travels a great distance, from his home in London to the Sahara Desert, in order to discover and report on the complex politics in an unnamed country in north Africa. He drives a utility vehicle to an isolated desert town. He records interviews with political leaders. And makes notes. But none of this satisfies him anymore, so he changes his identity. Maybe, he thinks, I can find what I'm looking for if I'm someone else.