

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Characters in Bertolucci's Films

JOE (in "Luna") Emotional

Character Joe is a moody teenage boy, whose busy mother does not have enough time for him. He can be sweet but also rude, self-centred and yet generous. In short, he is as contradictory and erratic as his mother. But being only fifteen, the adult worlds of love and sex are confusing and hurtful for him.

Innocent Young Joe is on the threshold of his fifteenth birthday when he meets Arianna, a girl of similar age and inexperience. Soon, they have sex in the cinema, watching a Marilyn Monroe film, but rather than illustrate his maturity it reveals his innocence. When he says that he wants to go 'inside her,' she asks if he knows how because she's 'never done it.' Joe laughs and says, 'You're excused. I'm a virgin, too.' She asks what comes first, and he says, 'We kiss.' Then he asks her to help him take off his jeans. She unbuckles his belt and rips them off. 'Christ!' he yells. 'You didn't have to pull them all the way off!' Poor Joe is trying to act like the stars he sees on the movie screen, sexy and in control, but every time he speaks, it reminds us that he is a kid.

Angry Joe is unhappy from the moment we first see him at the breakfast table in New York, and he grows angrier with each scene. The rage finally explodes toward the end when he drives off and leaves his mother by the roadside. She has just called him a 'junkie' and driven at speed down a narrow road, almost crashing the car. When a tire bursts and she fixes it, she screams, 'Sometimes being a mother can be a real pain in the ass.' Hearing that, he roars off before she can get back into the car and doesn't go back for her. Neglected and now verbally abused by his mother, he can't take it any longer and causes her to walk miles before someone picks her up. His anger at his mother is intense and he doesn't care if she has to walk to the next town.

Lonely From the very beginning, we also know that Joe is lonely. Neglected by his mother, he takes up with the 'wrong crowd' in Rome and becomes an addict. There are several scenes that illustrate his isolation but one stands out. He has left the house and wandered into an abandoned building site in order to shoot up without being seen by his mother. He is, however, watched by a poor boy who speaks to him in Italian, which he can't (yet) understand. Joe's replies in English, telling the youngster about the New York baseball team, whose manager has just unexpectedly retired. It's a big loss to Joe, who obviously loved the team and regarded the manager as a surrogate father. After giving details of the manager's achievements, he says to the young boy, 'Oh, you don't know anything about baseball. You're Italian. All you guys do is play soccer.' He continues on like this for a minute more, speaking to himself. Sitting in the vast and echoing, half-built structure, his only audience is a boy who doesn't comprehend what he's saying. Joe is lonely.