

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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Characters in Michelangelo Antonioni's Films

## **Vittoria** (in "the Eclipse") Emotional

**Character** Vittoria is a young, attractive and cosmopolitan woman, a translator from Italian into German and Spanish. 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 She is often withdrawn but can also burst out into laughter.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.

**Incommunicative** Vittoria's character is well illustrated in the first scene of the movie. She and her fiancé, Riccardo, are in his apartment. It is early morning, after a long discussion about their relationship and future. She handles various objects on a table, abstracted, unsure and hesitant. She stands at the window, draws back the curtains and retreats to a sofa, where she curls up into a ball like a little girl. He wants to know what she is thinking, and she says that she has made up her mind. She doesn't disclose what her decision is; rather, she picks up two coffee cups and takes them into the kitchen. She goes back, looks in a mirror, starts to speak but closes her mouth. Three long minutes pass until Riccardo burst out and wants to know why she is leaving him, but she is inarticulate, unable to explain her feelings. It's not another man, she says, and he is perplexed. 'Are you leaving because you don't love me or because you don't want to marry me?' he asks. 'I don't know,' is her answer, a phrase that she repeats several times in this scene. As she leaves him, she hands back a manuscript of his novel and says, 'Sorry, but I can't do this German translation for you.' The translator can't communicate her own feeling in her native Italian.

**Playful** Perhaps Vittoria's only endearing trait is her playfulness, which is enacted in several scenes. She has an imagination that seems to be stifled by the austere landscape around her apartment building and Riccardo's cold modernist apartment. The most vivid illustration of her ability to play act comes when she and a friend visit Marta, whose apartment is filled with objects and photographs from Africa. After Vittoria puts on a record of African drumming, she dresses up in a tunic, puts rings around her neck and thick bracelets on her wrists. Holding a spear, she prances around the flat in an imitation of an African dancer. Vittoria has completely transformed herself from the phlegmatic and static person into a woman of electric energy and startling movements. She is play acting, taking on the part of another personality. It is significant, also, that she does not speak during the scene—she only moves her body in tune with the music.

**Curious** Although, or perhaps because, Vittoria is not communicative, she is curious. She is an observer rather than a talker. She finds things 'complicated' and is rendered passive by that complexity, but she still wants to understand herself and others. The best, if somewhat bizarre, illustration of her curiosity comes when she follows a man out of the stock exchange. Piero has just told her that the aging man, who is shabbily dressed, has just lost 50 million lire. Curious, she follows him out onto the street and watches, like a sleuth, as he stops at a café to drink mineral water. When he leaves his chair, she furtively slides over and picks up the piece of paper he's been writing on. Turning it around and around, she sees that he has drawn a number of flowers. She is fascinated by this flower-doodling old man who has just had a terrible shock. It is all very Hitchcockian, the silent observer of a man seated at a café, the secret writing and the unexplained mystery of it all. Again, it is noteworthy, that throughout this scene, Vittoria does not utter a word.