

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

Characters in Bertolucci's Films

QADRI (in "the Conformist") Rational

Character Qadri is a middle-aged professor who left Rome for exile in Paris when the fascist movement quashed his freedom of expression. He is amiable, but also clever, if a little naïve.

Perceptive The professor is a wise man, especially in his understanding of human nature and the nature of fascism. When Marcello comes to Qadri's flat in Paris, where he has been in exile for ten years, the professor is curious about the younger man's motives. Marcello comes up with a memory of Qadri's lecture about Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave,' which is a description of how men are fooled by shadows, tricked by illusions that they believe represent reality. Qadri asks Marcello, like a teacher questioning a student, what the people see, and Marcello dutifully answers 'the shadows.' Qadri nods and says, 'Yes. Only the reflections of things. Like what's happening to you people in Italy now.' Marcello claims that the people would call their visions reality. 'Of course,' admits Qadri, 'they would mistake the shadows of reality for reality itself.' Marcello stares at him, realising that this is a description of himself, a man confused about himself. The scene is cleverly shot to reproduce the darkened cave, with light coming in from one window and casting shadows on the far wall. But Qadri is clear-sighted.

Naïve The learned professor is no fool—he correctly suspects Marcello's motives from the beginning—but he is naïve. That is the word Anna uses to describe her husband after he has dismissed any real hostility between him and Marcello. 'My husband makes a point of being naïve,' she says. That innocence is later dramatised in the sensational final sequence, when he is killed. Qadri is driving along a snowy road, unaware that Marcello is following. Suddenly, a third car skids to a stop some distance in front of him and blocks the road. Anna is anxious, fearing danger, and pleads with him not to get out of the car. But he is concerned that the driver of the third car may be injured. 'I should look and see,' he says to Anna and walks to his death. He should have realised that it was a trap, a fake car accident, set up by his enemies. But Qadri is not a naturally suspicious person. He wants to see the best in people. A fatal flaw when fighting fascism.