

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

Characters in Bertolucci's Films

LUCY (in "Stealing Beauty") Open

Character Lucy is a young American woman on the cusp of womanhood. She is attractive, even sexy, but also childlike and physically awkward at the same time. She is candid yet shy, afraid of who she might be. She's also curious, seeking not only her father but also her identity. And she is sensitive, captivated by a four-year-old love letter, and responsive to beauty in poetry, art and the landscape.

Candid Lucy has the candour of a young American of the 1990s. Although sexually inexperienced, she is not afraid to talk about it, as is illustrated in the first scene with Alex, the writer. As they exchange ideas, while sharing a joint, she says that she's never had sex. It comes out almost accidentally, and she speaks quite casually, as if she were saying that she's never been to some famous city or country. This attitude toward sex is central to understanding her character. She does not regard her virginity in any religious or moral light. She is looking forward to losing it, hopefully with Niccolo, the person she has selected for herself. It doesn't quite turn out that way, but her openness concerning sex means that losing her virginity is not traumatic.

Wild teenager Lucy is sometimes contemplative, but sometimes wildly energetic. This aspect of her character is revealed in a brief scene, when Alex wonders if Lucy is still angry at him for revealing her secret about her virginity, Diana assures him 'that she's not giving it much thought' and points through a window. Inside, Lucy is throwing herself about with abandon as she listens to loud rock music (grunge) on her headphones. She sings along with the lyrics, flinging her arms in the air and nearly falling over. It is an unguarded moment, when we realise that pensive Lucy is still just a teenager, full of energy and searching for an outlet.

Searching Lucy's search for her father, which drives the narrative forward, is dramatized in several scenes, but nowhere more poignantly than when she and Alex read one of her mother's poem. They are lying side by side on his bed, his arm around her as he reads the tender words that describe the moment when her mother conceived her. When he reads the last line, she is in tears. 'It's my real father,' she says through her strangled sobs. He agrees, and after a moment's silence, she looks up at him, 'It's not you, is it?' He dismisses that idea with a laugh, and she mentions another man but adds that she's 'not sure anymore.' Suddenly, she sits up and says, 'Let's forget about it. I already have a father [step-father] I love.' The vehemence with which she speaks only reveals the strength of her desire to find her real father.