

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Characters in Bertolucci's Films

ANNA (in "the Conformist") Open

Character Anna is young, beautiful and brave. Married to Professor Qadri, she works as a ballet school instructor and has firm anti-fascist convictions. She is as sharp as she is lovely. Protective of her naïve husband, she is quick to sense danger.

Perceptive Within minutes of meeting Marcello and Guilia, Anna senses that something is wrong. Her dog barks at Marcello, and she comments that the dog doesn't hurt her friends. She invites the newlyweds in and serves coffee, but only to Guilia, pointedly leaving Marcello to serve himself. Like her dog, she has instinctively realised that Marcello is an enemy, a source of danger. As they talk, she directs her comments to Guilia and invites her to go shopping. Marcello wants to join them, but she says firmly, 'No. Shopping is for women. Men only pay.' When Marcello has left the room, to talk with Qadri in his study, Anna turns to Guilia and asks, 'I'm curious. Did you sleep with him before you got married?' She is gathering information to be used in what she knows will be a conflict with this dangerous fascist spy.

Committed Anna is a woman firmly committed to the anti-fascist cause. She displays this allegiance in a scene when Marcello tells her that he wants to run away with her. 'We can live in Brazil,' he says. 'I have friends there.' She says, 'And I have friends in Italy. Here is a letter.' It turns out to be written by a prisoner who describes the details of his torture by the fascist authorities. When Marcello asks why she had him read the letter, she shouts, 'Because you're a fascist spy. A grass! You disgust me.' Her angry words pour cold water on Marcello's dream of running away with her. She could never leave her husband for a man whose politics she detests.

Sexuality Anna's sexuality appears to be defined, at least in part, by her free-spirit and political allegiance to anti-fascism, both of which feed her hatred of authoritarianism. She dresses and moves with a self-awareness of her sexual appeal, slinking around in loose-fitting garments that suggest laxity toward social conventions, something that both confuses and attracts Marcello. She unleashes her erotic charge, and partial nudity, on Marcello in an attempt to shield her husband from what she assumes is his murderous plan. Anna's unconventional sexuality crosses gender boundaries and includes a seduction of Guilia in the hotel room and a stylised display of lesbian adoration when they dance together before an admiring crowd.

Sexual freedom Although she is married, and is devoted to her husband, Anna is a sexually liberated woman. This quality is dramatised in a conversation with Marcello, who has just been watching her play erotic songs for Guilia, his wife. Her first words are accusatory: 'Do you often spy on people?' And when Marcello says that she has the eyes of a beautiful woman he saw recently, she continues to throw verbal darts at him. But she also leads him on with questions about who this woman was and what they did together. When he grabs her and attempts to kiss, she resists. But not for long. A second later, she is rolling around on the bed with him, kissing him with relish. In terms of her sexual desire, the scene is enigmatic, inconclusive. It isn't clear if she wants to make love with him, or even if she would let him, but she has enjoyed a few delicious moments of kissing a man she suspects of being a fascist spy. She doesn't always allow such political niceties to spoil her sexual pleasure.

Sexual manipulation Another side of Anna's complex sexuality is revealed in a later scene, when Marcello comes to her ballet school, where she is teaching in a tight-fitting leotard. Like the fairy-tale prince using a glass slipper to track down Cinderella, Marcello uses the label of Anna's ballet slipper to find her. When he yanks her into a private room, she neither resists or consents. Inside, after he makes his declaration of desire, she forces him to read a letter from a prisoner tortured by the fascists in Rome. Then she says that he 'disgusts' her, that he is a 'grass,' 'a snitch', a 'rat.' Someone who 'sings' to the authorities. Now that she has unmasked him, she can manipulate him. He says he will give up his

assassination mission and return to Rome. But Anna says, 'No, you won't because you're a coward.' Then she slips her leotard off her shoulders and stand half-naked in front of him. She walks up to him, he turns away, but she tells him to hold her. When they embrace, she says softly, 'I'm frightened. Don't hurt us.' Having humiliated him and called him a coward, Anna uses her sexual powers to disarm Marcello and ask for his protection. If she is embarrassed by her erotic display or hesitant to ask for his help, it doesn't show. Mata Hari would be proud of her performance.