

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Characters in Bertolucci's Films

GUILIA (in "the Conformist") Agreeable

Character Guilia is a young, middle-class woman of little intellect, just the normal sort of wife that Marcello wants. She is likable and lively but somewhat shallow, naïve and spoiled. She wants to get married and enjoy life, in that order.

Carefree The first time we see Guilia is in her parents' flat when Marcello arrives with a large bouquet of flowers. It is a comfortable apartment, with a maid who opens the door and takes the flowers to Guilia, dressed in a stylish striped dress. 'Today, I absolutely need your flowers,' she says to Marcello she skips up to him. 'I was thinking of going to a fortune teller. I want to know everything about you.' She sits down, looks lovingly at him and sighs, 'Darling.' Then she leaps on top of him on a couch. They roll around on the floor until the maid walks in with the flowers. Marcello is embarrassed and jumps up, but Guilia says, 'What's the matter? We're engaged.' Then, without a pause, she runs over to a gramophone and puts on a dance record from America. Prancing around, she swings her hips and smiles at her fiancé. She doesn't have a care in the world.

Docile Simple-minded Guilia is impressed by money, status and beauty. And in the hands of the more sophisticated Anna, she can be easily influenced. All this is evident in the scene, where she and Marcello go to the apartment where Anna lives with Professor Qadri. From the beginning, Guilia is flattered by the attention she receives from the worldly Anna. Marcello says she is hostile, but Guilia protests, 'Oh, no. She's very nice.' Soon, Guilia is sharing personal secrets with Anna about her past love life, lounging on a couch, wrapped in expensive furs and listening to romantic songs. 'Will you really let me keep these?' she asks, flinging the fur wrap around in the air. Anna tells her to keep them for as long as she wishes. 'Oh, thank you,' Guilia says and buries her head in the fur. Sated with the furs, the music, the coffee and cigarettes, docile Guilia leans back and luxuriates in Anna's company.

Sexuality Guilia has the normal sexuality that Marcello craves. She is not a virgin when she marries, although she is not ashamed of that fact. She has a finely-tune awareness of her physical body, likes to dance and to feel pleasure. Far from a prude, she responds to Anna's sexual advances but is not sure if she should.

Sensual Guilia displays a highly sensual nature in a key scene that occurs when she and Marcello are travelling by train to Paris after their wedding. It begins with her coy admission that she is not a virgin and that she was seduced by an old man, the family's lawyer. But when Marcello shows interest in her story of that childhood seduction, and as she begins to describe it in some detail, she shows her sensuality by sighing and rubbing against Marcello. 'I was well-developed at 15,' she says with some pride. 'He squeezed me so hard I almost fainted.' Overcome with passion or pain, she doesn't say, but the former is implied. When he laid her on the bed, she says, 'I understood everything and all my strength left me.' She had succumbed and 'he did everything he wanted to me.' She does not speak with any disgust or guilt. The whole scene, which is shot in a soft and seductive yellow light, suggests her fully-budded sensuality.

Innocent Although Guilia's sexual appetite is considerable, given her bourgeois background and mentality, it has not strayed from the conventional path. Not until she meets up with Anna, who seduces her. Innocent Guilia is not seduced all at once but in a series of moves, including the 'girls going shopping' and listening to sexy songs. But it culminates in a scene in a hotel room where Guilia and Marcello are staying. With Marcello out, Anna is stroking Guilia's long leg. 'You don't mind if we stay like this?' she asks and Guilia says she does not. Anna leads her to imagine scandalous situations, such as, 'If I weren't married, I...' Still rubbing her leg, Anna moves her hand up her thighs and kisses them. Guilia is laying back on the bed with an ecstatic smile. When Anna touches her clitoris, Guilia's face registers concern and she momentarily puts a hand on Anna's hand. A second later, her face changes

and says, 'you naughty girl,' as she lies back down and smiles again. It is a subtle performance of facial expressions and few words, which express Guilia's corruptible innocence.