

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Themes in Antonioni's Films

Loneliness

Overview A primary theme of the director's work is loneliness. 'Often my characters are isolated,' he said in 1969. 'They are individuals looking for social institutions that will support them, for personal relationships that will absorb them. But most often they find little to sustain them. They are looking for a home.' Beginning with his early films (the famous trilogy in the 1950s) and continuing right up to his last major film (*The Passenger* in 1975), his main characters, whether men or women, whether wealthy or working class, are loners, socially isolated and emotionally empty. Critics have used the French term *ennui* (with its connotations of bored or jaded) to describe this state of alienation of the characters. They may appear to have everything (such as Giuliana in *Red Desert*, Lidia in *The Night*, Vittoria in *The Eclipse* and Rosetta in *The Girlfriends*), but Antonioni reveals their inner disorientation and sometimes their total loss of identity. In order to highlight this state of loneliness, many of Antonioni's films focus on frivolous group pursuits. All-night parties (*The Night*), vacations (*The Adventure*), the fashion world (*The Girlfriends*) or indeed the film industry itself (*The Lady Without Camelias*) display the vanity and affluence that the films puncture in order to expose the loneliness behind the façade. Looking at the long arc of his work, we notice that his primary theme of internal loss and isolation reaches its apogee in his final masterpiece, *The Passenger*, in which the journalist David Locke actually abandons his identity and assumes that of another man. But, even this drastic attempt, to escape from alienation fails. Knowing that the director's aim is an intense psychological exploration of the human condition helps us to understand the films as a whole, whose characters are usually drifting in plots that are often elusive.