



The Main Feature

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L'Eclisse (Eclipse)

Italy/France 1962
126 mins Certificate PG

Director	Michelangelo Antonioni
Screenplay	Michelangelo Antonioni, Tonio Guerra, Elio Bartolini, Ottiero Ottieri
Cinematography	Gianni Di Venanzo
Music	Giovanni Fusco
Art Director	Piero Poletto
Producers	Raymond and Robert Hakim
Cast	
Monica Vitti	Vittoria
Alain Delon	Piero
Francisco Rabal	Riccardo
Lilla Brignone	Vittoria's mother
Rosanna Rory	Anita
Mirella Ricciardi Marta	
Louis Seigner	Ercoli



Cast your mind back sixty years, to the new releases of 1962, as the average WNCC member will surely have little difficulty in doing. Dramatic blockbusters with strong story lines and sharply characterised protagonists dominated the box office – like *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Longest Day*, *How the West Was Won*, *Dr. No*, *The Manchurian Candidate* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse*, winner of a Special Jury Prize at the 1962 Cannes Film Festival, is a very different kind of film, and not perhaps one for the faint-hearted. Although it weighs in at around two hours, not a great deal happens. *Author's note: if you don't want to know more of that, skip the next two paragraphs.*

In the opening scene the central character Vittoria (Monica Vitti) leaves her cultured older lover Ricardo. She then joins her mother at the frantic, boom-and-bust Rome stock exchange, itself almost a major character in the film. There she meets young broker Piero (Alan Delon). They get together, sort of. As far as plot goes, that – apart from some interludes she spends with friends, and the dénouement (if you can call it that) delivered in a stylistically celebrated closing sequence– is about it.

Nor are the protagonists especially enthralling. Unhappy Vittoria is a void. Not knowing what to do with her life, she is the very embodiment of what much later came to be called 'lacking agency'. Superficial

Piero is driven only by money and materialism. Both inhabit mask-like faces, and bodies which can move almost as automata.

But plot and characterisation may be beside the point here.

Cast your mind back again, to the forces shaping people's lives in the early 1960s and beyond. The living memory (or amnesia) of poverty, totalitarianism, war, loss. The weakening of traditional bonds and values. The rise of rampant consumerism. Unparalleled economic growth. Accelerating urbanisation, and sweeping, modernist new developments. Anticolonial independence struggles in Africa. The threat of nuclear annihilation. *L'eclisse* acknowledges these major historical currents; the above-mentioned films largely escape from them.



In this estranged modern world, how are people to live their lives, to form relationships and to find or create meaning? Antonioni raises questions, he does not suggest answers. No wonder critics opine that in works like *L'eclisse* he 'redefined the concept of narrative cinema'.

The film, which is sumptuously shot in black and white, rewards intensive looking. It is full of striking,

disquieting images, as if the environment were controlling or constraining the people in ways of which they were wholly or partially unaware, or expressed some other plane of reality. The sound (sometimes cacophonous), and the silence, also take on a substance of its own, almost independent of the characters.

The setting for much of *L'eclisse* is the then uncompleted EUR district of Rome, planned and partially built under Mussolini so as to celebrate Fascism and host the projected 1942 World's Fair (the *Esposizione Universale Roma*). Federico Fellini, who himself used EUR as a backdrop in *La Dolce Vita* (1960), said it provides "an artistic atmosphere as if you were in a painting, beyond any law except perhaps the aesthetic ones. A place where there are no relationships other than those with solitude and objects." *L'eclisse* is the final part of Antonioni's so-called 'alienation trilogy', which began with *L'avventura* (1960) and *La notte* (1961). Both also won international awards, in Cannes and Berlin respectively.

Antonioni died in 2007. In his obituary Nigel Andrews commented: 'A glacial anatomist of love, despair and the alienating tropes of modern life, he seemed to come from another country and culture than the one inhabited by Fellini, De Sica, Visconti, Pasolini and Bertolucci.' How significant is Antonioni's work today? Danny Leigh rightly states that 'Few of Europe's grand 1960s directors have seen their reputation sag like Michelangelo Antonioni, now sniffed at as ponderously self-important.'

Stephen Dalton on the BFI website judiciously observes, 'Of course, Antonioni's track record as a cinematic philosopher, sly political commentator and godfather of contemporary art cinema will always remain open to debate. But there is no denying the sublime, hypnotic, still-fresh beauty of his classic films. He may have elevated tedium to the level of high art at times, but Antonioni was also a supreme visual stylist who, occasionally, whether by accident or design, gazed directly at the mysteries of the human soul.'

I hope you find poetry in *L'eclisse* to compensate for any tedium. After all, an evening at WNCC should never be wasted.

Des Coles



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Hollywood on the Tiber

Tonight's film is made by a celebrated Italian director. Cinecittà has influenced Italian cinema, and cinema more generally. Wikipedia sets out the story:

Filmmakers such as Federico Fellini, Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Sergio Leone, Bernardo Bertolucci, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Mel Gibson have worked at Cinecittà. More than 3,000 movies have been filmed there, of which 90 received an Academy Award nomination and 47 of these won it.

Cinecittà was founded in 1937 by Benito Mussolini, his son Vittorio, and his head of

and Dalmatia, and an international camp, including refugees from Yugoslavia, Poland, Egypt, Iran, and China.

After rebuilding in the postwar years, the studios – with an area of 400,000 m² the largest in Europe – were used once again for their post-production facilities. In the 1950s, Cinecittà, was the location for several large American film productions, like *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Beat*

the Devil (1953), *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954), *Ben-Hur* (1959), and some low-budget action pictures starring Lex Barker. Barker also featured in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and the studios were for many years closely associated with Fellini.

In the same period, the studios were used for international productions such as *Francis of Assisi* (1961), *Cleopatra* (1963), *The*

Agony and the Ecstasy (1965), Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), Fellini's *Casanova* (1976), and *La Traviata* (1982).

After a period of near-bankruptcy, the Italian Government privatised Cinecittà in 1997, selling an 80% stake. In August 2007 a fire destroyed about 3,000 m² of the Cinecittà lot and surroundings. The historic part that houses the sets of classics such as *Ben-Hur* was not damaged; however, a good portion of the original sets from the HBO/BBC series *Rome* was destroyed. In July 2012, another fire damaged Teatro 5, the vast studio where Fellini filmed *La Dolce Vita* and *Satyricon* (1969). A third fire in August 2022 destroyed part of a partially dismantled set depicting Renaissance-era Florence.

The studio is now accompanied by the theme park Cinecittà World.



cinema Luigi Freddi under the slogan *Il cinema è l'arma più forte* (Cinema is the most powerful weapon). The purpose was not only for propaganda, but also to support the recovering Italian feature film industry, which had reached its low point in 1931. Mussolini himself inaugurated the studios on 21 April 1937 (picture above). Post-production units and sets were constructed and heavily used initially. Early films such as *Scipio Africanus* (1937) and *The Iron Crown* (1941) showcased the technological advancement of the studios.

The studios were hit by the Western Allies during the bombing of Rome in World War II. Following the war, between 1945 and 1947, the studios of Cinecittà were used as a displaced persons' camp for about two years. An estimated 3,000 refugees lived there, divided into two camps: an Italian camp housing Italians as well as displaced people from Italian Libya

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinecitt%C3%A0>;
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24669179>

Comments and reactions to: **Seven Chances**

No of reaction slips received = 18

Average score = 7.61

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	1	1	6	7	2	1

Cannot link the two films together!!

Mad but funny. Good print

A hammy horror film but amusing all the same

Cute, comedic, continued

A very amusing blast from the past – the short film was excellent. It was good to laugh out loud

Absolutely love Buster Keaton. Always look forward to his films

Excellent film. Enjoyed a good laugh. But would not get away with lots of the scenes today

Keaton master stunt artist. Final chase is pure perfection

Fun to watch with a great chase, but one or two awkward moments from a 21st century

perspective

Really enjoyable, excellent acting, really funny

Comments and reactions to: **After Love**

No of reaction slips received = 22

Average score = 7.36

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	1	3	8	7	3	~

Slow burn, worthwhile, finely acted

Brilliant acting

Good film and acting. Brilliant how story unfolded

Terrific acting

Tear-jerker, gut-wrench story

Excellent observation of life, love and culture

Very good film, excellent acting, well-shot

Interesting story which was very well told

Difficult to follow, because of my hearing problems. But I was conscious of the film's quality and shall watch it at home

A surprisingly complex film with a towering central performance

Position	Film	Average score
1	The Duke	7.75
2	Seven Chances	7.61
3	Mandela and de Klerk	7.47
4	After Love	7.36
5	Flee	6.79
6	Day for Night	6.57

Forthcoming attraction: 8 December 2022 – **Guardians of the Galaxy**



Maybe you never heard of Guardians of the Galaxy, the Marvel comic franchise that wilts in the shadows while Spider-Man, the X-Men and the Avengers get all the love. Maybe you think a big-ass movie about wanna-be Marvel icons isn't worth your time. Snap out of it. Guardians of the Galaxy does the impossible. Through dazzle and dumb luck, it turns the clichés of comic-book films on their idiot heads and hits you like an exhilarating blast of fun-fun-fun. It's insanely, shamelessly silly – just one reason to love it. Rolling Stone