



Thursday October 26th 2023

L'Eclisse

Italy 1962 126mins Cert PG

The architecture of buildings, society and relationships rub up against one another in Michelangelo Antonioni's moody, broody tale of one love lost and another that may, or may not, be gained. The final part of a loose trilogy following *L'Avventura* and *La Notte*, he creates a place where the construction of emotions proves as immutable as the walls of the spaces his characters inhabit. Whispers of winds-of-change blow through this snapshot of the life of Vittoria (Monica Vitti) but, like so much in her world, they struggle to do more than skim the surface.

Antonioni is interested in the end of things and, in fact, the film has a slightly off-kilter post-Apocalyptic quality, particularly in its gripping last ten minutes when it seems its characters may each be the last person alive on Earth. Silence and ending (though not completion) also dominate the first few minutes of the film. Vittoria fiddles with objects on a table, a fan turns lazily as her soon-to-be-ex-lover (Francisco Rabal) stares into space, unable to construct a sentence that will stop her from leaving him - as Samuel Beckett would have said "Words fail".

The difficult transaction and longing cultivated in this scene runs through the whole film, a reflection on Italian society where cash and consumerism have come to dominate over personal connection and satisfaction. At the stock market where Vittoria's mother goes daily, it is money that changes hands, with the good looking, permanently on the move Piero (Alain Delon), one of its players. On a narrative level, *L'Eclisse* is simple enough, unfolding the story of Vittoria and Piero's growing attraction and asking whether they will commit. "I wish didn't love you - or that I loved you much more" says Vittoria, encapsulating the sense of being unable to settle for what she has.

Antonioni is also interested in abstract emotions, particularly those that his characters struggle to articulate. The rooms that he lets them wander in are used as a way of emphasising their loneliness and indifference. He is also aware of our emotions as an audience, toying with our expectations at moments when, for example, he includes a character we briefly believe to be one of the central pairing - but who turns out not to be.

Directorially, Antonioni is in no hurry and almost every frame of the film is a beautifully constructed joy, from the contrasts of light and shadow hinted at by the eponymous eclipse to the way he and cinematographer Gianni di Venanzo contrast Vittoria's languor against the almost perpetual motion of Piero, or 'trap' their characters in a mirror or framing device. One scene of 'blackface' may jar with modern audiences - although here it is simply used to emphasise the bigotry of the time.

Ultimately, the idea of a world in which characters may find more comfort in alienation than connection is something that speaks as much to our present day society as it reflects the universe of 1960s Italy.

At the 1962 Cannes Festival, Antonioni won the Special Jury Prize and was nominated for that year's Palme d'Or. Also, in 1963, along with Monica Vitti and Lilla Brignone, he was nominated as Best Director for the Silver Ribbon award of the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists.

Acknowledgments: Amber Wilkinson, *EyeforFilm*

"A poignant and lyrical essay on romance that [...] like good poetry, is not easy to get to, or elicit the same response in each viewer [...] but, for those who accept the director's challenge to work hard, there's a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel" Dennis Schwartz, *Ozu's Movie Reviews*

Leading Players

Monica Vitti	Vittoria
Alain Delon	Piero
Francisco Rabal	Riccardo
Lilla Brignone	Vittoria's mother
Rossana Rory	Anita

Production Credits

Director	Michelangelo Antonioni
Producers	Raymond & Robert Hakim
Screenplay	Michelangelo Antonioni, Tonino Guerra
Cinematography	Gianni di Venanzo
Original Music	Giovanni Fusco

Coming soon

November 30th **LUZZU** (Malta/USA, 2021, 94mins, Cert 15) Utilising the changing nature of sea-fishing on the sun-soaked island of Malta, writer-director Alex Camilleri casts his creative net wider, exploring questions of identity, loss and the burden of responsibility to one's past and the future. It's an impressive debut from the Maltese American film-maker, making the most of stunning settings and performances from his largely amateur cast.

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