



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# L'eclisse

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

I was 15 when I first saw Antonioni's *L'eclisse*. It was screened for only one afternoon at the Tooting Classic. I skipped school games to go and see it and as a result got slapped into a two-hour detention. The impact the film had on me in 1963 was devastating. It was unlike anything else I had seen, and it seemed to describe the kind of world into which we were moving – it was almost science-fiction.

*L'eclisse* was made some months before the Cuban missile crisis and my memories of it are strongly linked to that terrifying week of nuclear brinkmanship. I think that a premonition of a looming, unidentifiable catastrophe was what made the movie so disturbing.

It is difficult to communicate just how frightening that October in 1962 was at the time. We all lived under the threat of obliteration, the end of everything, *fine*. Subsequent international crises no longer felt so remote, each one could take the world to the brink again, and this time some maniac might press the button.

Antonioni's film was the first I saw that seemed to be made with acute awareness that the old myths, however comforting, were no longer adequate. It eschewed all certainties of characterisation, dramatic intent and narrative resolution. It was altogether a different sort of movie – it felt 'modern', its very fabric disturbed by an uncertainty that could now be said to underlie everything.

This is not to reduce *L'eclisse* to being 'about' the nuclear threat (although a newspaper headline 'The Atomic Age' appears as part of a montage during the film's climax, and is especially unsettling). Trying to describe what the film – or any other work by Antonioni – is about, is not a simple task as it can't be reduced to a plot synopsis, although it is definitely preoccupied with the narrative space between events, actions and intentional dialogue.

The opening scene is a long sequence set in an apartment showing two lovers, Vittoria (Monica Vitti) and Riccardo (Francisco Rabal), at the end of a love affair. Worn out from talking all night and past the point of having anything further to say, they are unable to make the definitive break.

Most films, I believe, would shoot the action prior to this – the night itself - but Antonioni is a director who focuses on what films leave out. Much of this scene is without dialogue. As it progresses, we increasingly become aware of an electric fan and, later, a razor. These objects, which in other movies would provide background noise, become, under Antonioni's direction, extraordinarily highlighted.

He is one of the most sensitive film-makers to the use of sound; aircraft propellers, car engines, ringing telephones, opening and closing of doors, footsteps on stone floors, all carry weight, not for any pointed narrative purpose, but as evidence of the technologies we communicate with, the machines we travel in, the cities we inhabit and adapt to.

There is a story in *L'eclisse*, but its emphases are similarly elsewhere than usual. Monica Vitti leaves the apartment and begins a walk that lasts, in a

way, for the majority of the film. Her journey is without any particular destination, a series of detours, explorations and, most importantly, distractions. These distractions are the substance of the story and include a brief relationship with Alain Delon.

A characteristic Antonioni sequence is the flight in a small four-seater plane from Rome to Verona during which we listen in to a virtually inaudible conversation.

Nothing happens in the conventional sense: the journey, which takes considerable film time, appears to have no dramatic aim or climax, sounds and images take over and become the dramatic content. As with Vitti's character, the film has a wandering, searching quality. Antonioni has been described as 'the poet of alienation', and this is shown by Vittoria's detachment from the world – which may be interpreted as either a sign of health or equally of neurosis.

There are two sequences, both set in the Borsa (the Rome stock exchange), which constitute the hub of the film. This is the world inhabited by Alain Delon's character Piero, a young stockbroker. It is observed with an anthropological eye for detail. Only in the stock exchange are people shown to be full of passion, energy and action; it is an emphatically male world, preoccupied with money, profit and deals, and one in which Delon is comfortable.

Duration is an important component of Antonioni's style (the park in *Blowup*, the desert house in *Zabriskie Point*, the rocky island in *L'avventura*, the space outside the hotel at the end of *The Passenger*). He films the Borsa with relentless curiosity, as if to say, 'look long enough and perhaps this place may reveal something of itself.'

If the narrative finds its organisation around the brief affair between Delon and Vitti, it is something of a shock when both characters simply slip out of the film altogether. The final time the couple are seen together, they make an arrangement to meet on a street corner. Neither one turns up, but the camera does. For a full seven minutes it records the world that carries on without them. Passers-by, seen in earlier scenes, take their regular walks; buses pull up, stop, drop passengers and drive on. Twice a person who might be Monica Vitti or Alain Delon turns out to be someone else. The streets empty and darken as day turns to dusk.

This is an extraordinary sequence, acknowledging that it has lost both the original characters and the narrative. Other lives, which we know nothing about, cross the screen and disappear, leaving in the end just the city – functioning, automatically, part of a vast man-made machinery, within which individuals find temporary escape and pleasure in passing sensations of motion and contact. It is a chilling viewpoint.

**Ron Peck, *Sight and Sound*, December 1994**

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## L'ECLISSE

*Director:* Michelangelo Antonioni  
*©/Presented by/Produced by:* Robert Hakim, Raymond Hakim  
*Production Companies:* Interopa Film, Cineriz, Paris Film Production  
*Production Inspector:* Giorgio Baldi  
*Production Manager:* Danilo Marciani  
*Production Secretary:* Dino Di Salvo  
*Assistant Directors:* Franco Indovina, Gianni Arduini  
*Script Supervisor:* Elvira D'Amico  
*Story/Screenplay:* Michelangelo Antonioni, Tonino Guerra  
*Script Collaborators:* Elio Bartolini, Ottiero Ottieri  
*Director of Photography:* Gianni Di Venanzo  
*Camera Operator:* Pasquale De Santis  
*Assistant Operator:* Erico Menczer \*  
*Stills Photography:* Sergio Strizzi  
*Editor:* Eraldo Da Roma  
*Assistant Editor:* Marcella Benvenuti  
*Art Director:* Piero Poletto  
*Costumes:* Bice Bricchetto  
*Costume Assistant:* Gitt Magrini  
*Make-up:* Franco Freda  
*Music:* Giovanni Fusco

*Music Director:* Franco Ferrara  
*Sound Recordist:* Claudio Maielli  
*Sound Mixer:* Renato Cadueri  
*Boom Operator:* Mario Bramonti

## Cast

Alain Delon (*Piero*)  
Monica Vitti (*Vittoria*)  
Francisco Rabal (*Riccardo*)  
Lilla Brignone (*Vittoria's mother*)  
Rossana Rory (*Anita*)  
Mirella Ricciardi (*Marta*)  
Louis Seigner (*Ercoli*)  
Ciro Elias (*the drunk*) \*

Italy/France 1962©  
126 mins

\* Uncredited

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## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### Persona

Mon 17 May 14:30; Fri 28 May 21:00; Wed 2 Jun 18:10  
(+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)  
Mon 28 Jun 21:00

### Touch of Evil

Tue 18 May 14:30; Mon 31 May 12:45; Sat 5 Jun 17:50;  
Sun 20 Jun 18:15

### The Tango Lesson

Tue 18 May 20:45; Wed 9 Jun 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by  
So Mayer, author of 'The Cinema of Sally Potter')

### Citizen Kane

Wed 19 May 18:00; Sun 30 May 12:40; Mon 21 Jun 20:45

### L'eclisse (The Eclipse)

Thu 20 May 14:15; Sat 5 Jun 12:10; Tue 15 Jun 17:50

### La Haine

Thu 20 May 17:50; Sat 29 May 21:00; Wed 16 Jun 21:00;  
Fri 18 Jun 20:40

### The Last Picture Show (Director's Cut)

Fri 21 May 20:30; Mon 31 May 12:50; Mon 7 Jun 17:45

### Steamboat Bill, Jr.

Sat 22 May 12:00; Thu 3 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:30

### Raging Bull

Sat 22 May 14:40; Sun 30 May 15:30; Tue 1 Jun 17:30

### Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)

Sat 22 May 21:00; Thu 10 Jun 21:00; Mon 21 Jun 14:30

### The Big City (Mahanagar)

Sun 23 May 12:10; Wed 23 Jun 17:40

### The Gospel According to Matthew (Il vangelo secondo Matteo)

Sun 23 May 15:20; Thu 24 Jun 17:40

### The Night of the Hunter

Mon 24 May 14:30; Tue 8 Jun 20:50; Wed 16 Jun 18:15  
(+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

**The Killers** + pre-recorded intro by Imogen Sara Smith,  
author of 'In Lonely Places: Film Noir beyond the City'  
Tue 25 May 20:30; Tue 8 Jun 14:30; Wed 23 Jun 17:50

### Alice in the Cities (Alice in den Städten)

Wed 26 May 17:50; Tue 1 Jun 14:30; Fri 25 Jun 20:45

### Eraserhead

Thu 27 May 18:20; Mon 14 Jun 21:00; Thu 24 Jun 21:10

### Man Hunt

Fri 28 May 18:10; Sat 12 Jun 16:00; Tue 29 Jun 14:15

### Sweet Smell of Success

Fri 4 Jun 15:00; Sun 13 Jun 15:45; Sat 26 Jun 11:40

### The Man Who Wasn't There

Fri 4 Jun 17:50; Sun 27 Jun 18:20

### The White Ribbon (Das weiße Band)

Sun 6 Jun 18:10; Sat 26 Jun 16:30

**Le Doulos** + pre-recorded intro by Professor Ginette Vincendeau,  
King's College London

Mon 7 Jun 14:15; Thu 17 Jun 20:45; Wed 30 Jun 17:45

### Bitter Victory

Sun 20 Jun 13:00; Mon 28 Jun 17:55

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## NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

### Ammonite

From Mon 17 May

### Sound of Metal

From Mon 17 May

### Nomadland

From Mon 17 May

### County Lines

From Fri 21 May

### First Cow

From Fri 28 May

### After Love

From Fri 4 Jun

### Fargo

From Fri 11 Jun

### The Reason I Jump

From Fri 18 Jun

### Nashville

From Fri 25 Jun

### Ultraviolence

From Sat 26 Jun

Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and contributor  
Janet Alder

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