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AVVENTURA, L' (The Adventure), Italy/France, 1959-60

Cert: X. *dist:* Mondial. *p.c.:* Cino Del Duca Produzioni Cinematografiche Europee (Rome)—Société Cinématographique Lyre (Paris). *p:* Amato Pennasilico. *p.manager:* Luciano Perugia. *d:* Michelangelo Antonioni. *assistant d:* Jack O'Connell, Franco Indovina, Gianni Arduini. *story:* Michelangelo Antonioni. *sc:* Michelangelo Antonioni, Elio Bartolini, Tonino Guerra. *ph:* Aldo Scavarda. *ed:* Eraldo da Roma. *a.d.:* Piero Poletto. *m:* Giovanni Fusco. *sd:* Claudio Maielli. *l.p.:* Gabriele Ferzetti (*Sandro*), Monica Vitti (*Claudia*), Lea Massari (*Anna*), Dominique Blanchar (*Giulia*), James Addams (*Corrado*), Lelio Luttazi (*Raimondo*), Esmeralda Ruspoli (*Patrizia*), Renzo Ricci (*Anna's father*), Dorothy De Poliolo (*Gloria Perkins*), and Giovanni Petrucci, Angela Tommasi di Lampedusa, Enrico Bologna, Giovanni Danesi, Renato Pincioli, Vincenzo Tranchina, Franco Cimino, Rita Molè. 13,050 ft. 145 mins.

Sandro, a youngish architect who, having accepted easy success, has long ceased to cultivate either his talent or his susceptibilities, joins a small party given by Princess Patrizia in her yacht cruising off the north-east coast of Sicily. The mundane group also includes Sandro's fiancée Anna, daughter of an ex-ambassador, and her slightly patronised, less fortunate friend Claudia. After bathing they go ashore on a volcanic island. A storm rises, Anna grows desperate at the inadequacy of her relationship with Sandro, and when the time comes to leave it is discovered that she has disappeared. During the search of the island Sandro finds himself attracted to Claudia. Though fishermen are questioned about Anna without result, Sandro and Claudia refuse to give up hope. At first separately, then together, they visit places on the mainland where a strange girl is said to have been seen. After fighting a conventional feeling of shame and guilt, and the fading of hope that Anna will ever be found, Claudia becomes the mistress of her friend's former lover. One night, Sandro fails to return to Claudia's hotel bedroom. She finds him wretchedly embracing a worthless woman. Moved by the desolation, compassion and experience of the search, Claudia forgives Sandro. Anna is never found.

L'Avventura is not a mystery film, but exactly what the title implies: an adventure. It is an erotic adventure story whose central relationship is haunted, especially for Claudia, its leading character, beautifully played by Monica Vitti, by the constant reminder in the absence of her predecessor that sexual relationships are transitory and that her own amatory security is threatened with the same fate. To many, no doubt, *L'Avventura* will remain a mystery film, since its director, Michelangelo Antonioni, supplies few signposts, and his approach is that of the elliptical novel, with its emphasis on nuance and concentration, its rejection of nostalgia, pathos and terminological definition. But if the final achievement, which is epoch-making, has literary parallels, the means are triumphantly cinematic, for *L'Avventura* is visually coherent and rewarding to a degree unmatched in the Italian cinema since *Ossessione* and *La Terra Trema*. The scenes in the yacht reveal, expositoryly and without overt verbal comment, the remote relations between a silly society girl (brilliantly played by Dominique Blanchar) and her cynical husband; later, she is seen defiantly succumbing to the clumsy advances of a libidinous, aristocratic idiot of 17. On a train (how much time, Antonioni implies in a prolonged and yet incidental travelling shot, do we waste in a lifetime staring out of train windows), a young couple are observed

starting an affair. During the search, a chemist and his wife are seen to be at daggers drawn after a three-month marriage. These and numerous other incidents, quite unstressed, increase rather than dissipate one's concentration and understanding of the central relationship, at once strange and ordinary. And in some of the best sequences in the film, at an expensive hotel filled with idle, gossiping socialites, snatches of talk and behaviour reveal a society of illusions, of mechanically contrived happiness concealing an abyss of inner loneliness and surrender to egotistical materialism. The surprise, moreover, rests less in Antonioni's social penetration (for he is only too clearly ambivalent towards his grotesque, supine, luxury-consumed upper classes) than in his implacable rejection of untidy self-delusion. Only a few sequences earlier, a pack of Sicilian loafers are savagely observed, silently, wolfishly eyeing Claudia as she waits outside the hotel.

Technically, *L'Avventura* is as strikingly beautiful as a nude: the most Antonioni's almost Calvinistically pure images are clothed in is the sensuality of the love scenes. Elsewhere, one recalls the equally extraordinary shots of sun-drenched verandas and moonlit corridors; rocks and sea; the changing disposition of people in relation to their backgrounds and each other. It is, in fact, no exaggeration to say that *L'Avventura* is a film as revolutionary today as was *La Terra Trema* in its time. And it has the advantage over *La Terra Trema* in that it does not succumb either to flourish or to outwardly assumed political ideology. There remains the acceptance of Antonioni himself (this is only his second film released over here in a 13-year film-making career) as an inimitable, unique director—one of the handful who can claim to have extended the frontiers of the cinema with a film of complete sincerity, maturity and creative intuition.

Suitability: A.

P.J.D.