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Il male oscuro
(The Obscure Illness)
(ITALIAN)

March 2 1/90 — Variety

Rome An Artisti Associati release of a Clemi Cinematografica production. Produced by Giovanni Di Clementi. Directed by Mario Monicelli. Screenplay, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Tonino Guerra, based on Giuseppe Berto's novel; camera (color), Carlo Tafani; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; music, Nicola Piovani; art direction, Franco Velchi; production manager, Domenico Lo Zito. Reviewed at Rivoli Cinema, Rome, March 8, 1990. Running time: 114 MIN.

Giuseppe Marchi.Giancarlo Giannini
Wife.Emmanuelle Seigner
Girlfriend.Stefania Sandrelli
Psychiatrist.Vittorio Caprioli

■ **Mario Monicelli's "The Obscure Illness" illustrates the pleasure of watching solid professionalism and intelligence at work. Pic has done little business at local wickets, but should have a run in other European situations. It could be a fest candidate.**

Giuseppe Marchi (a frazzled, middle-aged Giancarlo Giannini) is a scriptwriter pressed for cash, struggling to finish an absurd screenplay on Judas Iscariot for a harried Roman producer. His father dies. Pic opens with a flashforward to Giuseppe on shrink Vittorio Caprioli's couch, denying his dreams about his father.

A sly comic tone gives otherwise familiar happenings an edge of sophistication. Giuseppe leaves girlfriend Stefania Sandrelli for a 17-year-old blond (Emmanuelle Seigner) he meets at a taxi stand. The girl, who is quite an armful, throws herself into his bed, gets pregnant, and drags him to the altar.

Meanwhile, Giuseppe has his first attack of a hysterical illness. Rushed to the hospital, he's operated on for a perforated ulcer, but after opening him the doctors can find nothing the matter. Another one diagnoses a floating kidney, sending the imaginary invalid into a spate of body braces.

Marriage to pretty Seigner calms him down for years. Then, while his family is on vacation, he has another "attack" and starts seeing a psychiatrist. More years pass. The day he finally announces he's cured, his wife informs him she's had a long-standing affair. Giuseppe abandons his home and opts for

lonely isolation on a bare patch of land in Calabria.

Giannini puts a heavy note of weariness under the outward Roman frenzy of the neurotic intellectual, able neither to sell out nor to get past chapter one on his novel. Seigner is a surprise as the child-wife, who grows up as the years pass, selfish but in her own way also self-sacrificing.

Sandrelli makes a sympathetic ex. Her brief return at pic's end is a melancholy coda. Caprioli is one of the screen's most likeable shrinks, keeping to the spirit of understated humor that pervades "Obscure Illness," a tone that recalls Italo Svevo.

Monicelli walks sure-footed on a tight screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Tonino Guerra, who adapted Giuseppe Berto's far-ranging novel without going out of cinematic bounds. Professional standards are more than upheld by Franco Velchi's sets, Carlo Tafani's cinematography, and Nicola Piovani's score. — *Yung*.