Document Citation

Title	**L'avventura**
Author(s)	Gerard Hurley
Source	*Diablo Valley College*
Date	
Type	program
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	5
Subjects	Antonioni, Michelangelo (1912), Ferrara, Emilia-Romagna, Italy
Film Subjects	L'avventura (The adventure), Antonioni, Michelangelo, 1960

Last week in a writing workshop (Comm 115) I showed the cover of this program to students who, for the most part, had never heard of L'Avventura, or Antonioni, and who generally have shown no overt interest in "cinema," "the art of the film," or movies with subtitles. I asked them what they would judge this movie to be from the design. If you can judge the movie from the cover, they said, L'Avventura is not a happy movie, it's not amusing, it has something grey about it, it is a movie of pieces, it has a puzzle in it, and it probably fits together somehow. This very provocative design easily communicated the core of today's film to my students most of whom can "read" a drawing more easily than they can read prose.

The same design was used for the poster advertising L'Avventura on campus. I wonder how many of my students it will attract to the film, and, of those who come, how many will be puzzled, put off, annoyed, and finally, the most mysterious of classroom epithets -- "bored?" At least, no one can say that Chuck Overton's poster and cover design is misleading for it does suggest the essence of L'Avventura truthfully.

L'Avventura is the only film shown at Diablo Valley College in six years (other than Flaming Creatures) which I have not wanted to publicize very fully: teachers have not been encouraged to bring classes, or tie the film to writing assignments; there have been no dittos to colleagues promoting L'Avventura, even though many of us feel that it is a landmark in world film history.

My hesitancy in trying to pull in the mass-man college audience reflects a firm conviction that everything isn't for everyone: each of us need not go to the same church, have the same dinner guests, buy the same prints, listen to the same music. My hesitancy may possibly reflect an inherent cultural snobbism. Most probably it stems from my knowing that L'Avventura is a difficult film which will puzzle and disturb many of our students in a situation (unlike that of the classroom) where there is almost no possibility for feedback and follow-up discussion.

I revere L'Avventura and do not want it to be disliked. I don't want students dragging themselves out muttering "how awful!" or staying and filling the theater with the sort of hostility which I can feel like magnetized darts bouncing from student to screen to wall to projector . . .

It is impossible to argue briefly with some kinds of critical response---like one from an English teacher who said that L'Avventura put his rear end to sleep. This is like dealing with the student who told me that Moby Dick was too long to read.

Perhaps students geared to reading novels can take L'Avventura. I wonder, however, if students raised on TV, who can "read" film much faster than book-bred people, who are not conditioned to media which are literary and linear (Marshall McLuhan's word), but who have no trouble with the fast editing of The Knack and A Hard Day's Night -- will such students not have difficulty with Antonioni's masterpiece?

The subject matter of L'Avventura -- if it could be separated from the film (which it cannot be)-- would put no one off. Darling is about many of the same people and the same moral problems. But this essentially meretricious hit--and Fellini's La Dolce Vita, 8½ and Juliet of the Spirits, or Last Year at Marienbad -- do something with the themes of moral depletion and emotional frigidity which L'Avventura does not. They compromise and make anomie and alienation easy to take: have your cake and eat it, too! be titillated but feel moral! get your kicks and be Puritan-pure, and know all the time that to be like Julie Christie, or Marcello, or Sophia, or Liz and Dick would be O.K. If you feel warm and tingly all over when you look at Time's spread on Jacqueline

Kennedy in Seville (and oh! there's Princess Grace!), go see Darling. Forget L'Avventura.

Antonioni makes no compromise with your standards as you watch his people -- men and women dealing in externals, via sex, cut off from their pasts, and from each other, living in a moral vacuum, albeit with some elegance, grace, and style -- discover themselves. With repeated viewings of the film, you learn more of them: not just Anna, Sandro, and Claudia, but Giulia, Corrado, Patrizia, Raimondo, the old fisherman, the druggists, the call girl. . . A first viewing lets you see how Anna's father argues that his Bible carrying daughter couldn't have killed herself. Maybe on the first viewing, probably on the second, you see that she also had Tender Is The Night in her valise. Then you have to ask what this might mean about Anna's state of mind on the trip. Her father doesn't notice or probably know the Fitzgerald novel. Do you have to notice it, and know what it might signify? How many books do you have to read to go to the movies?

Will an outline of the plot help? Here is Antonioni's own summary:

> Superficially, L'Avventura may seem to be a love story, perhaps a somewhat mysterious one. During an excursion, a girl disappears. This fact creates a void which is immediately filled by other facts. For the fiance and for one of the girl's friends, the search for her becomes a kind of sentimental journey, at the end of which they both find themselves in a new and quite unforseen situation.

Most movies let you know what happens to the main characters. In L'Avventura when some of the characters cease to be interested in the fate of Anna, the film leaves her, and goes with them. This is not like most fiction. It is very much like life.

Is L'Avventura too long? Many popular films run longer. It is not the two and one half hours that disturbs many viewers but the deliberate pace of the film in which the rhythms are slowed down and elongated. Time is used not to show externalized events, but to express feeling. This distortion of time to achieve a psychological reality echoes Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc and other silent films of the late twenties rather than most Hollywood films, much of the new wave and recent British work such as Tom Jones. It is certainly not the cutting of American slapstick comedy and musicals.

Last year I had misgivings about showing Antonioni's L'Eclisse. Several teachers and many students have since told me that it was the best film we had and that it elicited more classroom discussion and cafeteria talk than any of the other films shown on campus during the year.

We will see what happens with L'Avventura. My feeling (although not my fear) is that for many students, L'Avventura will be "too long to read," like Moby Dick.

L'Avventura was made in 1959-1960. It won a special award at the Cannes Festival in 1960, and other international awards for direction, acting, and music. Antonioni wrote the story, shared credits on the screen play, and directed.
Aldo Scavarda was the director of photography.
Giovanni Fusco composed the music.
Piero Polletto was the scene designer.
The screenplay has been published in America by Orion Press, N. Y., 1963, in Screenplays of Michelangelo Antonioni.

Program notes by Gerard Hurley
Cover and poster by Chuck Overton

IDEAS AND FACTS

This statement was written by Michelangelo Antonioni and distributed at the Cannes Festival when L'Avventura was presented there.

There exists in the world today a very serious break between science on the one hand, always projecting into the future and each day ready to deny what it was the day before, if that will enable it to advance its conquest of the future even by a fraction . . . between science on the one hand and a fixed, stiff morality on the other, the faults of which are perfectly apparent to man, but which still continues to stand.

From the moment he is born, man is burdened with a heavy load of feelings. I do not say these feelings are old or out of date, but they are entirely unsuited to his meeds; they condition him without aiding him, fetter him without ever showing him a way out of his difficulties.

And yet man has not succeeded--so it seems--in unburdening himself of this inheritance. He acts, he hates, he suffers, impelled by moral forces and myths which were already old in the time of Homer. Which is an absurdity in our day, on the eve of man's first journey to the moon. But that is the way things are!

Man, then, is ready to unburden himself of his technical or scientific knowledge when it proves false. Never before has science been so humble, so ready to retract its statements. But in the realm of the emotions, a total conformity reigns.

During the last few years, we have examined, studied the emotions as much as possible, to the point of exhaustion. This is all we have been able to do. But we have not been able to find any new emotions, nor even to get an inkling of a solution to the problem.

I do not pretend to be able, nor would it be possible for me, to find the solution. I am not a moralist.

My film L'Avventura is neither a denunciation nor a sermon. It is a story told in images, and I hope people will be able to see in it not the birth of a delusory emotion but the method by which it is possible to delude oneself in one's feelings. For, I repeat, we make use of an aging morality, of outworn myths, of ancient conventions. And we do this in full consciousness of what we are doing. Why do we respect such a morality?

The conclusion which my characters reach is not that of moral anarchy. They arrive, at best, at a sort of reciprocal pity. That too, you will tell me, is old. But what else is there left to us?

For example, what do you think this eroticism that has invaded literature and the performing arts really is? It is a symptom, and perhaps the easiest symptom to discern, of the illness from which the emotions are suffering.

We would not be erotic, that is, the sick men of Eros, if Eros himself were in good health. And when I say in good health, I mean just that: adequate to man's condition and needs.

Thus, there is discomfort. And, as always happens when he feels discomfort, man reacts; but he reacts badly, and he is unhappy about it.

In L'Avventura, the catastrophe is an erotic impulse of this order: cheap, useless, unfortunate. And it is not enough to know that this is the way things are. For the hero (what a ridiculous word!) of my film is perfectly aware of the crude nature, the uselessness, of the erotic impulse that gets the

Sp #29782

better of him. But this is not enough.

Here then is another fallen myth, the illusion that it is enough to know oneself, to analyze oneself minutely in the most secret places of the soul.

No, that is not enough. Each day we live through an "adventure," whether it be a sentimental, a moral or an ideological one.

But if we know that the old tables of the law no longer offer anything but words too often read out and repeated, why do we remain faithful to those tables? There is a stubbornness here that strikes me as pathetic.

Man, who has no fear of the scientific unknown, is frightened by the moral unknown.

If you have an enemy, do not try to beat him up, do not insult him, do not curse him, do not humiliate him, do not hope that he will have an automobile accident. Wish, quite simply, that he may remain without work. That is the most terrible hardship by which a man can be struck. Any vacation, even the most marvelous of vacations, has meaning only if it forms a counterweight to one's fatigue.

I consider that I am especially privileged in this matter -- I do work that I enjoy. I do not know many Italians who can say as much.

That work is the most important thing in my life. It would be superfluous to ask what it gives me. It gives me everything. It gives me the possibility to express myself, to communicate with others. Considering the difficulty I have in speaking, I would feel as if I were nonexistent without the cinema.