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LUCHINO VISCONTI'S
LUDWIG



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CAST

Helmut Berger Ludwig
Trevor Howard Richard Wagner
Silvana Mangano Cosima von Bülow
Gert Fröbe Father Hoffman
Helmut Griem Dürckheim
Izabella Teleżyńska Queen Mother
Umberto Orsini Count von Holnstein
John Moulder-Brown Principe Otto
Sonia Petrovna Sophie
Folker Bohnet Joseph Kainz
Heinz Moog Professor von Gudden
Adriana Asti Lila von Buliowski
Marc Porel Richard Hornig
Nora Ricci Countess Ida Ferenczy
Mark Burns Hans von Bülow
Maurizio Bonuglia Mayr
and
Romy Schneider Elisabeth of Austria



CREW

Story and Screenplay

Luchino Visconti

Enrico Medioli

In Collaboration with

Suso Cecchi D'Amico

Directed by

Luchino Visconti

Director of Photography

Armando Nannuzzi

Music by

Robert Schumann

Richard Wagner

Jacques Offenbach

Edited by

Ruggero Mastroianni

Art Director

Mario Chiari

Costumes

Piero Tosi

Produced by

Dieter Geissler

Ugo Santalucia



THE LAST ECCENTRIC IN A FAMILY OF ECCENTRICS

by Peter Cowie

When Luchino Visconti began shooting his long-cherished film biography of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, he was 65, and at the peak of his fame as a director for the cinema, the theatre, and the opera in Italy. He had worked for years on his film about Marcel Proust, and in the face of mounting obstacles he decided finally to abandon it in favour of *Ludwig*. His co-screenwriter, Enrico Medioli, who had worked on *Rocco and His Brothers* (*Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, 1960), *The Leopard* (*Il gattopardo*, 1963), and *The Damned* (*La caduta degli dei* (*Götterdämmerung*), 1969), visited Bavaria with Visconti in 1968, marvelling at those intricate, extravagant castles built by a monarch who, in the words of Richard Wagner, was “the last eccentric in a family of eccentrics”. Together with veteran scriptwriter Suso Cecchi d’Amico (who had co-written Visconti’s *Senso* back in 1954), the two men fashioned a narrative that would run from the 19-year-old Ludwig’s coronation in 1864, to his suicide in 1886.



To understand the Italian maestro's fascination with this most deranged of European monarchs, one must examine the personality of Visconti himself. Born in a palace in Milan, Visconti (or the Duke of Modrone, as he was known formally) could trace his family tree back over twelve hundred years, to the era of Charlemagne. His father, elegant and charismatic, had married a well-to-do bourgeoisie heiress to a pharmaceutical fortune. It was an 'arrangement', much like the wedding of Ludwig to the unfortunate Sophie in the film. The heraldic device of the Visconti family showed a coiled dragon devouring a young cherub which, to judge from the comments of Visconti's ex-lovers, may well have been an accurate metaphor for his private life.

Like Ludwig, Visconti was a man of contradictions. He rejoiced in luxury, with numerous servants and a chef who, each morning, would bring him the menu for the day's meals while Visconti was being attended to in his dressing room. But, at the same time, he was a confirmed Communist. Early works like *Ossessione* (1943), *La terra trema* (1948) and *Rocco and His Brothers* reflect Visconti's interest in the proletarian class, while *The Leopard*, *The Damned*, and *L'innocente* (1976) join *Ludwig* as ruminations on the aristocratic world. Medioli, the talented scriptwriter of seven of Visconti's later films, has said of his director that "*Ludwig* reveals something which concerned him very closely: his zest for life, his greed, his humour, his joyful side and also his moments of acute hypochondria, when he hid away and let nobody see his predicament". Visconti barely noticed the French New Wave, or the arrival during the late 1950s and early 1960s of new filmmaking tools like the Nagra sound recorder, the Arriflex camera, or Kodak Tri-X Panchromatic stock. His early

works like *Ossessione* and *La terra trema* were striking examples of Italian neo-realism, but with the passing years Visconti grew more committed to an operatic approach to cinema. *Ludwig* may not be 'stage-bound' but its treatment of actors in a spatial landscape belongs unmistakably to the stage.



Ludwig Otto Friedrich Wilhelm (1845–86)

During the shoot, Visconti discovered that he was in fact related to the Wittelsbach family, which from 1180 until 1918 had ruled Bavaria without challenge, and of which Ludwig was but the most bizarre embodiment. Forever beguiled by dynastic issues, he identified at a profound level with this hapless monarch who struggled in vain with his demons. Like Ludwig, Visconti could feel a passionate involvement with women (Coco Chanel and Maria Callas, for example) and sought to conceal his homosexuality. The comparative discretion with which Visconti describes Ludwig's bacchanalian gatherings reflects his own reluctance to 'come out'. Indeed, the scene in which Ludwig watches, mesmerised, a young man-servant bathing nude in a lake makes it clear that his fiancée Sophie and his cousin the Empress Elisabeth will forever be 'beards' for his sexual proclivities. It has its antithesis in the bedroom encounter between Ludwig and Lila von Bulowski, the vulgar actress who seeks, and fails, to seduce the king on his own double bed.

Helmut Berger, who had lived with Visconti since 1965, was the perfect choice to play Ludwig because his own life mirrored much of that of the Bavarian king. All three men held similar beliefs: that artistic success is beyond price, and that one should follow one's tastes and instincts if necessary outside the rules and duties of 'society'. This idealism, which is little by little corrupted by vice and indulgence, inexorably evaporates and all that remains of Ludwig's febrile ambition are the castles in Bavaria, harking back to the Versailles of Louis XIV and a premonition of Ceaușescu's palaces in Romania.

Romy Schneider, at the time well-known to older German audiences by virtue of her appearance in the trilogy of films about "Sissi", the Empress of Austria, loathed the idea of playing the same character in *Ludwig*. Visconti, a close friend, persuaded her that she would be presented as a mature woman, and no longer as the frivolous teenager who had romped through the *Sissi* movies (1955–57). Trevor Howard makes an irascible yet touching Wagner, dependent on Ludwig for the staging of *Tristan und Isolde*, and for his austere, custom-built opera house in Bayreuth. He has the leonine head and thrusting jaw that distinguished Wagner in real life. His affectionate treatment of Cosima von Bülow, then wife of his complaisant friend and conductor Hans von Bülow, is in tune with the tenderness of his music used by Visconti. Izabella Teleżyńska's role as the Queen Mother brings into focus the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in 19th century Germany, for it is she, a Protestant, who must visit Sophie and her Catholic family and 'persuade' her to marry Ludwig.

The most disconcerting element in the screenplay concerns the framing structure, as 'witnesses' address the camera in



solemn tones, while testifying before a court of inquiry into Ludwig's competence to govern. Such moments are stitched into the narrative of the film, bringing us back to earth just as the deranged activities of the monarch seem to be holding sway. If these declarations are without exception a condemnation of Ludwig, Visconti offsets their severity with the character of Dürckheim (played by an excellent Helmut Griem), who at crucial junctures delivers a passionate and ultimately affecting defence of the need for freedom, and sympathises with the claustrophobic predicament of a monarch as sensitive as Ludwig. By featuring the character of Ludwig's brother, Prince Otto, handsome, timid, and finally unhinged, Visconti reminds us that the entire Wittelsbach line, and not just Ludwig, was subject to 'abnormalities', due in large part to in-breeding.

Although he often used contemporary composers like Nino Rota and Maurice Jarre, Visconti adored the Austro-German musical legacy. Anton Bruckner's *Symphony No. 7* serves as a refrain throughout *Senso*. Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 5* resonates at the quivering heart of *Death in Venice* (*Morte a Venezia*, 1971). And as Wagner himself has a considerable role in *Ludwig*, the use of his music is quite justified. The melancholy, if also orgasmic, strains of *Tristan und Isolde* underscore the king's own morbid personality, while the 'Siegfried Idyll' acts as a counterpoint to the genuine love that Ludwig feels for his cousin, the Empress Elisabeth. In a charming tribute to Wagner, Visconti recreates the scene in the composer's lakeside villa in Lucerne when a chamber orchestra saluted the composer's wife Cosima on her birthday with this most poignant of melodies. Visconti prefers the quiet, sensual, regretful music of Wagner to the often bombastic

arias that mark the major operas, and he achieves a mesmeric symbiosis between subject and music with the Prelude to Act 1 of *Lohengrin*. Ludwig saw himself as Lohengrin, and sometimes even referred to Sophie as Elsa, the ill-fated heroine of Wagner's opera. The king had a grotto constructed at the castle of Linderhof which replicated the Cavern of Venus in *Tannhäuser*, in which the unfortunate singer loves, and loses, the two women most precious to him. In the film, Visconti replaces the soaring, sexual ecstasy of Wagner's cavern with a dark, dank, and futile encounter between Ludwig and his shallow lover, the *jeune premier* of Bavarian theatre, Josef Kainz.

Wagner, however, finally abandoned Ludwig, his friend and patron. This explains why the last third of the film contains almost no music, as if to emphasise the void in the king's life without the composer at hand to give voice to his tortured emotions. Had Ludwig not been so generous, *Tristan und Isolde* might never have been staged in 1865 nor the opera house at Bayreuth constructed at such expense in 1876.

The pace of the film may slow to that of a sleepwalker at times, but what *mise-en-scène*! Visconti knew more than any other Italian director when to track and when to zoom, when to regard a scene from a fixed camera position, and how, with adroit editing, to suggest haste and anxiety. He gives full rein to his aesthetic instincts during the lyrical ride through the snow when Ludwig and Elisabeth are at their happiest; and during the finale, as servants brandishing flaming torches hunt for Ludwig and his doctor in the reeds and undergrowth surrounding the lake at Linderhof.

Throughout his later years, Visconti laid emphasis on the formalities and rituals of social behaviour, and Ludwig commences with the 19-year-old prince's elaborate coronation. Long afterwards, when the Empress Elisabeth visits Neuschwanstein Castle, she enters the vast hall of mirrors, reminiscent of Versailles, where, by using extreme long shots, Visconti underscores Ludwig's grandiose and narcissistic obsessions. As the Empress has said earlier in the film, the young king thrives on illusion, the illusion of Wagner's success, and above all the illusion of being in love with her. Visconti's adoration of grand opera spurs him to introduce visual metaphors, such as the piano draped by Ludwig with black gauze after the news of Wagner's death, and the veil worn by Empress Elisabeth that somehow shields her from the harshness of the everyday, just as it does for the unfortunate Countess in *Senso*. In other sequences, fascinated by the aftermath of orgies, Visconti instructs Armando Nannuzzi's camera to drift trance-like over the entwined bodies of exhausted party-goers, such tableaux recalling *The Damned*, *Senso* and *Rocco and His Brothers*. Visconti describes how Ludwig becomes an alcoholic, and his paranoia renders him almost impossible for servants and advisers to handle. Consumed by bouts of raging toothache, the king grows more and more petulant with each passing month. By the close of the film, Visconti has painted a fully-rounded portrait of a man who sought to escape the constraints not just of monarchy, but also of the moral code that governed sexual expression in 19th century Bavaria.

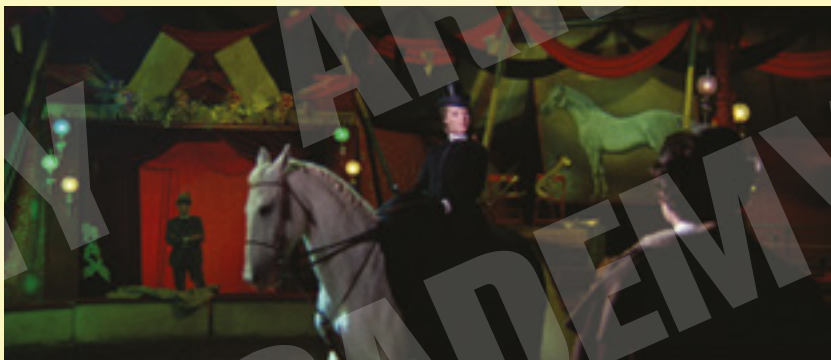
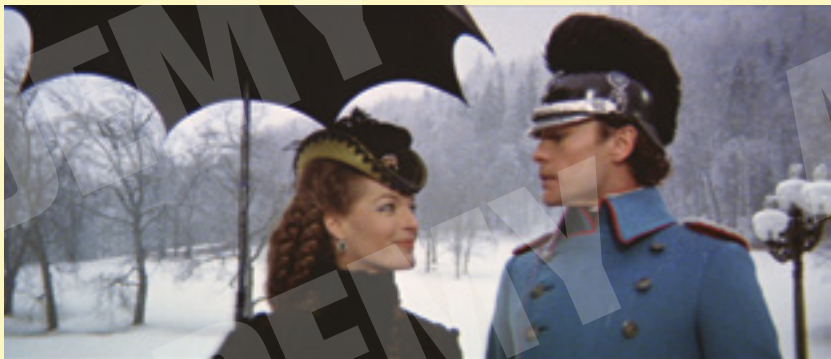
More than any of Visconti's films, *Ludwig* fell prey to investors who felt that the director's spending reached on occasion the profligate levels of Ludwig himself. When Visconti suffered a

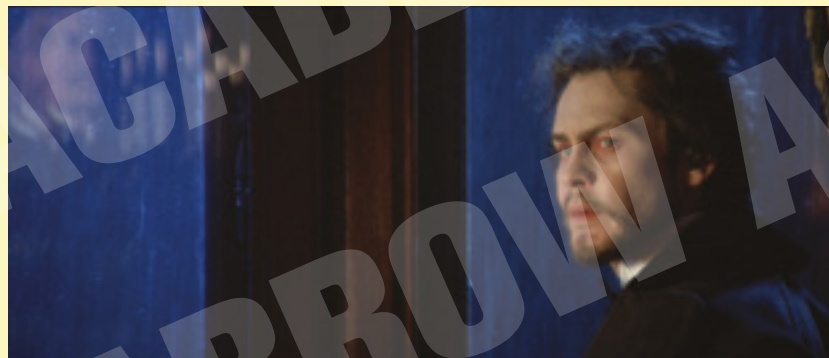
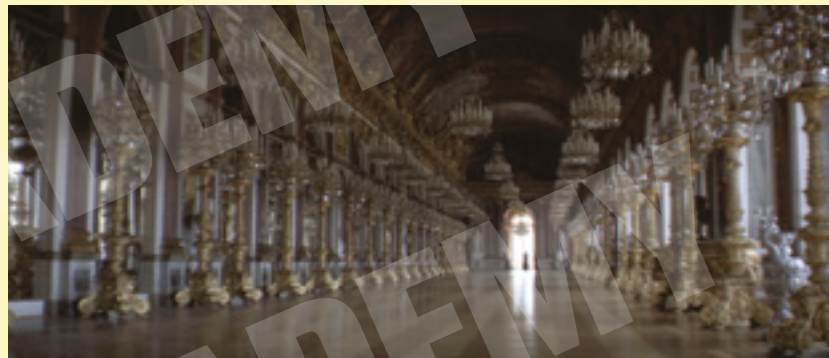


stroke in the midst of the shoot, the horizon darkened. Control of the movie was effectively removed from the Italian maestro, and sequences were reduced in length or cut altogether. In a desperate attempt to comply with the exigencies of the distribution system, *Ludwig* was released sometimes in a version of two-and-a-half hours, sometimes three hours and five minutes, and, a decade after its initial release, at just over four hours (close to Visconti's original aspirations). This new Arrow edition represents the fullest version of the film in accordance with the wishes of Visconti's estate.

At first dismissed without pity by the critical establishment (although Piero Tosi received an Oscar nomination for his costumes), *Ludwig* has become a cult movie which deserves to be seen in its full length and in high definition. For Visconti, it was to have been the third work in a tetralogy comprising *The Damned*, *Death in Venice* and the unrealised adaptation of Thomas Mann's 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*). Certainly, no Italian director has ever probed with such precision into the German psyche, nor rendered it in such exquisite and disturbing terms. ●

Peter Cowie has specialised in foreign-language cinema since the early 1960s. He is the founder of the annual *International Film Guide* (1963-2012), and author of some thirty books on the cinema, including studies of Welles, Coppola, Bergman, and Kurosawa.







CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

Compiled by **Michael Brooke**

After New York and London festival premieres of Luchino Visconti's full-length version, *Ludwig* opened commercially in various truncations – the US got the 173-minute cut, while the British critics were forced to review MGM's 135-minute version. Unsurprisingly, the reception was mixed on both sides of the Atlantic.

It may be one of my biases, but movies about royal personages usually strike me as being essentially comic. It has something to do with a lot of ordinary folk trying to act like royals, and usually succeeding in looking only like stage extras. The royals in *Ludwig* all seem a little second-rate, even Romy Schneider, who plays Ludwig's cousin, the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, with whom he thinks he is sort of in love. It also has something to do with the rhythm of drama in which so much emphasis is placed on the arrivals and departures of royal carriages, on entrances up grand staircases and on people walking regally through doorways. These things give *Ludwig* an air of self-importance that it doesn't deserve, any more than it deserves the almost nonstop Wagner and Schumann on the soundtrack. The images can't compete.

Vincent Canby, *New York Times*, 9 March 1973

Visconti was at one time considered one of the world's leading directors; his credits include *La terra trema*, *Rocco and His Brothers* and *The Leopard*. But his last three movies have left me completely indifferent, even the much-praised *The Damned*. Visconti seems to be at the mercy of his obsessions; he likes shadows, decadent luxury, madness, handsome young men, over decorated sets and Wagner, and so he makes movies that contain those elements at the expense of everything else. What finally happens is that scenes sink under the weight of great, but never explained portents; characters pause for silences pregnant with lack of meaning; and the reflected firelight flickers on the faces of actors patently at a loss to understand what Visconti wants of them.

Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*, 19 June 1973

It is, I can assure you, quite an experience. Physically alone, it is ravishing. But, more than that, it reverberates in the mind like the waking memory of some baroque painting suddenly come to life in a dream. It is, in fact, quintessential Visconti, suffused with everything that made the man one of the most complex, perhaps perverse, of all the post-war Italian maestros of the cinema.

Derek Malcolm, *Guardian*, 12 October 1978

The film's best half-hour, the one where it really holds together instead of breaking into inert set-ups that have to be prodded to make them move, concerns the king's patronage of Richard Wagner whom he seeks to make his court composer. Wagner is played by Trevor Howard in suits of burgundy velour which make him look as if he had decanted instead of dressed in the morning. [...] My guess is that Visconti, always an operatic talent, had intended the film's biggest set-pieces to be the premieres of Wagner's works, like *Die Meistersinger*. This would have given the film its resonance – and Ludwig his *raison d'être*. But it seems the MGM budget wouldn't stretch to it.

Alexander Walker, *Evening Standard*, 12 October 1978

Helmut Berger has generally seemed a limited actor, at his best with Visconti (*The Damned*, *Conversation Piece*). The figure of Ludwig has stirred him to work on a new level. Visconti concentrates on Berger's muscular, tormented face, more often than not half concealed by shadow or a defensive hand. Almost uncannily the figure ages and coarsens from the fairy-tale prince who ascends the throne in 1864 to the gross, gap-toothed yet still majestic recluse of the last days.

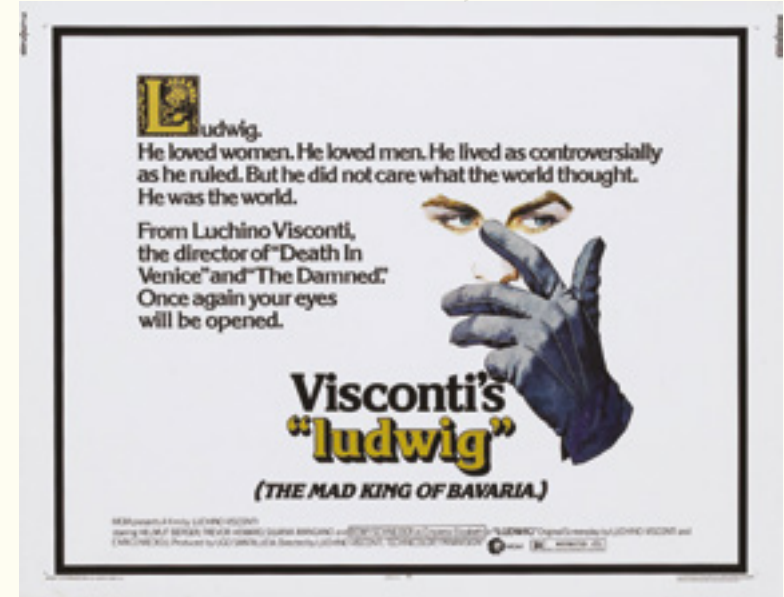
David Robinson, *The Times*, 13 October 1978

Miss Schneider shares some moments of uneasy would-be romance with Ludwig to the accompaniment of strains from *Tristan and Isolde*. (Theme tune elsewhere is Tannhäuser's 'O du, mein holder Abendstern'.) But everyone knows that Ludwig was really keener on the boys, and scenes of silent yearning with a servant in a firelit hunting lodge or watching a midnight bather in a lake link this film indissolubly to *Death in Venice*. The whole movie indeed is informed by a sense of closet desires, sometimes released, sometimes not, never quite happy even in their fulfilment. It is not Visconti's greatest film, but it is one of his most personal, powerful and deeply fascinating.

Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*, 13 October 1978

I can't say I was exactly enthralled by *Ludwig*, for the mad King of Bavaria comes across as a weak, ineffectual homosexual who did nothing with his life except provide financial support for Richard Wagner, build extravagant castles at enormous expense and lie about in darkened rooms with young men wearing shorts.

Ian Christie, *Daily Express*, 14 October 1978



The final scene, where torch-bearing platoons of soldiers search the swamps for the missing Ludwig, is the movie's finest. Elsewhere, the dynamism is bogus, as if Visconti had translated Chandler's famous advice, "If in doubt, have a man come through the door with a gun" as "If in doubt, have a coach drive up to a castle."

Philip French, *Observer*, 15 October 1978

Throughout, the eyes have it with the full-dress uniforms and uniform full-dresses, the medals and the jewels, often more eloquent than the people inside and behind them [...] A touch of Hitchcock as the frock-coated politicians besiege the castle gates of the homosexual, bankrupt sovereign under dripping umbrellas; a hint of *Wuthering Heights* when Elisabeth and Ludwig recall their childhood trysts like Cathy and Heathcliff in the frosty wastes; even a flash of the torchlight hunt for the monster in *Frankenstein* as the beaters search the forest for the black-fanged, ageing, runaway king.

Alan Brien, *Sunday Times*, 15 October 1978

I have no wish to condemn Visconti out of hand. He has been responsible for some stunning film-making (of which *Ludwig* has more than its fair share) and his place as a major filmmaker is assured. But I can't help feeling that he has never achieved his high ambitions and succeeded in making films which are both melodrama and history. In a bitter moment in *Ludwig*, Elisabeth, Empress of Austria, observes to an infatuated Ludwig: "Rulers like us have nothing to do with history, we're only a display." Perhaps the same has come to be true of Visconti's cinema.

Andrew Tudor, *New Society*, 26 October 1978

The longest version of *Ludwig* was finally reissued in the UK in 1981. Few reviewed it in detail, with even the normally completist *Monthly Film Bulletin* merely acknowledging the release in its 'Addenda and Corrigenda' section at the back of the magazine. However, it did prompt the following rave review from Julian Petley in *Films and Filming's* January 1982 edition. It is reprinted here in full with the author's permission.

Here at long last is the complete, four-hour print of one of Visconti's greatest films, originally released on the Continent and in the States in 1973 in a 186-minute version which was then further cut to 137 minutes when what little that remained of the film was belatedly shown in Britain in a dubbed version in 1978.

Ludwig completes a loose trilogy whose other two sections are *The Damned* and *Death in Venice*, three films in which decadence and eventual death of the central character mirrors the decline and fall of a whole society or an entire epoch: the Third Reich in *The Damned* and the Europe of *ancien régime* in *Death in Venice* and *Ludwig*.

A film of both great sadness and Romantic splendour, *Ludwig* does not, for all its grandeur, ignore history or confine it to the role of background noise. Visconti is not content simply to evoke or recreate: he explores, too. Thus, although at first sight *Ludwig* may appear little more than an elaborate, ornate fresco, it is also a representation of the workings of Church

and State in nineteenth century Bavaria set against the background of Prussian ascendancy and German unification: Ludwig's fall is nicely counterpointed by Bismarck's rise, whilst his "madness" is constantly set off against the "sanity" of the scheming, grasping, declining world around him. Much of the sense of historical and political context is provided by a framing structure (removed in the British truncated version) which presents Ludwig's life in a series of flashbacks arising out of the evidence given by witnesses, both hostile and friendly, before the Council of State in an attempt to have Ludwig deposed.

However, in the last analysis, *Ludwig* is nonetheless fundamentally a work of historical *reconstruction* and *reproduction* as opposed to distanced, critical *deconstruction*: Proust as opposed to Brecht, in spite of certain claims to the contrary. Indeed, in its insistent use of leitmotifs (madness, homosexuality, etc.) as structured principles, *Ludwig* recalls nothing so much as the Wagner operas by which the king was so obsessed. A whole cluster of these centre around Lake Starnberg: early in the film this is the scene of an overheated, thoroughly Romantic conversation between Ludwig and his cousin Elisabeth, Empress of Austria, in which he declares his impossible, idealised love for her (an impossibility underlined by the use of *Tristan and Isolde* on the soundtrack), reminding one of the royal interbreeding that is at least part of the cause of Ludwig's "trouble". Here, too, Ludwig eagerly watches one of his male servants bathing

naked (while his country is suffering military defeat at the hands of Prussia). Later, Ludwig and his servant Hornig visit the lake's Isle of Roses, and it is here that his sexual inclinations are fixed definitely for the spectator. And it is to Schloss Starnberg that Ludwig is sent after being deposed; in the long, extraordinarily painful arrival scene, he wanders through its bleak, bare rooms, followed by the crow-like, black-coated functionaries who have imprisoned him there, and hovered over by nurses in white whom one expects to pounce with a straitjacket at any moment. It is here, too, that Ludwig drowns.

Even more Wagnerian is a remarkable tour de force in which Ludwig languorously enjoys himself with his servants in a forest hut near Neuschwanstein decked out like Hunding's hut in *The Valkyries* (in which, significantly, Siegmund's and Sieglinde's *incestuous* coupling gives rise to Siegfried). But this scene also recalls quite irresistibly the Nazi orgy in *The Damned*: it's not only the shadow of the First Reich that hangs over Ludwig's alpine dreams, but that of the Third too.

Julian Petley, *Films and Filming*, January 1982 ●



WRITING FOR VISCONTI: AN INTERVIEW WITH SUSO CECCHI D'AMICO

by Peter Brunette

This interview with Suso Cecchi D'Amico (1914–2010) by Peter Brunette (1943–2010) originally appeared in *Sight & Sound*'s Winter 86/87 issue. Reprinted with permission.

The daughter of Emilio Cecchi, one of Italy's leading literary figures, Suso Cecchi D'Amico has been called the most significant screenwriter, along with Cesare Zavattini, to have worked in post-war Italian film. Now in her early seventies, she has been writing screenplays for more than forty years. She has worked with most of the major Italian directors, and most notably with Luchino Visconti, with whom she collaborated closely on some ten films; she has won the Silver Ribbon for best Italian screenplay three times. Her credits include Luigi Zampi's *Vivere in pace* (1946), Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Miracle in Milan* (1951), Renato Castellani's *È primavera...* (1950), Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954), *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960) and *The Leopard* (1963). The following interview took place in Rome, on 16 June 1986.

Peter Brunette: *How did you become involved in films?*

Suso Cecchi D'Amico: I was very lucky, I must say, because I had cinema in my home. My father was a critic and writer, and for a while in the early 1930s he was artistic director for the Cines studio, which was then almost the only production company here in Italy. The Italian cinema completely changed under my father's direction: for the first time intellectuals were invited to collaborate. Pirandello, for example, was asked to write a story for a film. I was about eighteen, and it was a big, big adventure for my sister, brother and me. It was then that I first met people I would later work with, like De Sica. He had just been discovered by Mario Camerini, who had given him the lead in a film called *Gli uomini, che mascazzoni...* [1932].

PB: *Your father was also responsible for Alessandro Blasetti's 1860 [1934] and Walter Ruttmann's Acciaio [1933].*

SCD: Yes. My father left the cinema shortly afterwards, though, because he didn't have enough time for his own writing, and because he didn't like dealing with the business end of things. But he never left completely, and people often came to ask him for advice.

Later, when I was about 25, some of the film people who were still coming to see my father would ask me to look at their screenplays to find out if they would interest young

people, something I have done since with my own children. Then, at a certain point, one of them, Carlo Ponti, asked if I would like to work on a screenplay with Alberto Moravia and Ennio Flaiano for a film to be made by Renato Castellani, who was then a young director. I accepted, and I have never stopped since.

I had already done some theatre translations for my father, two plays by Shakespeare and some other work, but my first lines in the cinema were written with Moravia and Flaiano for a film called *Avatar*, which was never made. I remember exactly when we were working on it, because right in the middle we had the news of the bombing of Hiroshima. Moravia was someone else I had known for years; even before *Time of Indifference* [1929] was published, he often used to come to see my father.

PB: *You also began working with Visconti at about this time.*

SCD: In the theatre. I translated Hemingway's *Fifth Column* for him, and later Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* and some light comedy. We also wrote a screenplay together. *La carrozza del Santissimo Sacramento*, but the film was never made because of some problems Visconti had with the producer. Later, it was made by Jean Renoir as *Le Carrosse d'or*, with Anna Magnani, but not from our script.

PB: *You said somewhere in an Italian interview that you*

always wanted Visconti to talk about a project as much as possible so that you find out his point of view. Is this how you see the role of the scriptwriter?

SCD: Yes. Everybody is so surprised that I have worked on so many different kinds of films. But my work has something of the artisan in it. And that is something I like very much. I mean, to understand what the director is interested in and what he does best, and then to give him something that suits him. At the end Visconti and I barely talked at all about the project itself, because I knew exactly what he wanted. For example, when I wrote the Proust screenplay for him, it was the easiest work I ever did, because we had talked about Proust for so many years that I knew which were the scenes he wanted and just what kind of picture he would like.

PB: *Did you ever want to become a director yourself?*

SCD: The director needs to be able to command, and I can't. Maybe I could have done a film, in secret, with my own money, but to risk other people's money would have paralysed me. So I write screenplays which are very rich, and full of detailed indications, but I never thought I had the right character for a director.

PB: *Do you think it has anything to do with being a woman of your generation?*

SCD: No. It's just a matter of character. My father was the same way. He had a strong character, but was not good at commanding.

PB: *On this subject, I've been struck by the fact that you were the only woman in neo-realism.*

SCD: But it was not because... I don't know why. Now there are many.

PB: *Did you encounter any patronising attitudes because you were a woman?*

SCD: Absolutely not. As I told you, I had known most of these men since I was a child, and we had grown up together. Maybe I was very lucky. I would say that my own story is not a general rule, because of the authority of my father. He always had open house on Sundays, and I met all the European intellectuals and some Americans. Right after the war, when William Saroyan came to Italy, the first thing he did was visit my father; I met Thomas Mann, everybody. It was a very full life. Things are different today. There are no more cafés, except maybe in Paris. Then there were three or four places where you always knew you would find someone. Artists, novelists, critics, really very few people. It was helpful to discuss projects, to get new ideas. We were poor but happy.

PB: *What was it like to write screenplays in the neo-realist fashion, in common, sitting together round a table?*

SCD: We still do it that way. I think it's very useful, especially for comedy. But the main difference between Italy and America in this respect is that we give credit to everybody who had anything at all to do with the script, whereas in America they don't. We didn't care about it, because all the cinema professionals knew just who did what anyway. In the credits of *Bicycle Thieves* there is the name of Gherardo Gherardi, who was already dead when we began the script. I never met him. De Sica liked him very much and asked him to be involved in the film, so putting him in the credits was a sort of homage.

On *Bicycle Thieves* we worked for about four months, meeting people, going to places, getting from reality the ideas for the film, which are quite different from the original book. The idea of the theft of the bicycle is there, but all the steps leading to it are different.

PB: *Once a script was written, did you often go on the set?*

SCD: Yes, very much, when it was a film you cared about. Also because you always had to make little changes, especially shooting as we were in the streets. A situation would arise that would give you a hint about doing something differently, and there were always changes.

PB: *The process of making a film has always seemed to be more relaxed and spontaneous in Italy than it is in the United States.*

SCD: It depends on the individual. Rossellini, for example, was always very light and amusing, while Visconti was much more serious on set. De Sica was between the two – full of humour, and lazier than Visconti, but not as lazy as Rossellini. Also, Rossellini had little interest in the pictorial quality of a film, while for Luchino it was extremely important. Again, De Sica was between the two.

PB: *Let's talk about Visconti. There seems to be a certain fascination with decadence, especially in the later films.*

SCD: My father used to say, "Everybody thinks it's so easy to be decadent." (Laughter.)

PB: *How did you feel about it? Was this a theme that was important to you or were you simply attuning yourself to Visconti's interests?*

SCD: You have to remember Visconti's background, the kind of family he came from, the life he led before he started to work. The great discoveries that came from working with Renoir, then the big adventure of being arrested by the Nazis as a partisan. Luchino was also very different from the others because he had had so much experience in the theatre and in opera.



Suso Cecchi D'Amico with Luchino Visconti, Venice, 1971

PB: *What about The Damned? No other Italian director of his generation would have made the film in the same way, especially in terms of its focus on homosexuality and incest.*

SCD: Visconti knew these aristocratic families intimately, and he was fully aware of the decay of this society. He was speaking of things which were very close to him; for example, the life of his father. One can understand that he was telling stories he knew well. But they are always told from a moral point of view. There are no monuments: it's the story of a decay.

I didn't work on *The Damned*. Do you remember the story of Profumo in England? Well, that was the starting point for *The Damned*. And then it happened that I read a long report on the Krupp family, which I sent to Visconti. I myself had been to Germany only once as a tourist, and I didn't feel that I could write a story set there. But I thought it was a good idea for him. So I started work on Proust, and he went on to do *The Damned* with other people.

PB: *Tell me something about Visconti's homosexuality. Was it known to everybody as early as, say, the 40s?*

SCD: I think it was unknown to himself. Luchino had lots of experience with women; at one point he had to get married, and later on he had affairs. Then, as a good aristocrat and man of the Renaissance, he thought he could have boys as well, without realising that the balance was continually shifting in one direction. In the latter part of his life, it was only homosexual. But he would have been upset if you had called him a homosexual, and he spoke of homosexuals with contempt. He was really quite virile. And he also had a very strong sense of the family. He loved my children, and they loved him, and we used to spend a lot of time together at my house in the summer. He would be very strict with the children, but then sometimes he would bring one of his boys to the house. (Laughter.)

PB: *I want to ask you about some of things Gaia Servadio*

said in her biography of Visconti, just to set the record straight, especially concerning the masochistic element of his relationships. She says that he deliberately put himself in unhappy situations in which he would be hurt. Did it seem this way to you?

SCD: I must say, no. I think Gaia's portrait is *miles* away from the truth. She knew him very little, and saw him only a few times when he was already ill. I don't mean to criticise her work merely because she said unpleasant things about Luchino. I can also say some unpleasant things about him. But her portrait doesn't resemble him at all. Absolutely not.

PB: *What specifically doesn't resemble him?*

SCD: Nothing. Though it's true that there was one thing which always struck me as strange. He was so severe and patriarchal and honest, and he never did anything to please the critics or the producers. He always did exactly what he wanted. He was completely indifferent. But he also had friends whom he knew very well were thieves – for example, an architect whom he had working in the house – people who were known thieves. Luchino didn't care at all. This was so different from his normal judgement. He had an immense curiosity about those people who behaved so badly. He seemed to like to watch them. Other people he would send away for the tiniest lie, while at the same time he had this 'court' of bad people, thieves, mediocrities. Maybe it was

because he didn't care much for them, because when he cared, he would get very angry. He was furious with Helmut Berger when he suspected him of taking drugs.

PB: *Is it fair to say that Visconti was in some ways fascinated with sin and evil?*

SCD: Not really, because he was usually so severe. Then there were other times... The kind of people he had around him at the end of his life – his secretary, his nurse – were very... He was so proud, and to have to depend on someone else for everything was so difficult for him that I think the only people he could ask to do these things were people he despised. I can't think of any other reason. And I don't agree with what Gaia says about the masochism. Luchino could be *very* cruel; he was a very strong character. He could send people away brutally. He was not a man of our time. He was a kind of Renaissance *condottiere*.

PB: *He always looks so fierce in his photographs – those eyebrows...*

SCD: He was terribly good looking. When he entered a room, no one could ignore him. He had a slow, solemn way of moving; there was always something very solemn about him. Burt Lancaster did two perfect 'portraits' of him. In *The Leopard*, he studied Luchino's every movement. Then he did it again in *Conversation Piece*.

PB: *Did Visconti realise what Lancaster was doing?*

SCD: No. Even when I told him earlier that he was the Leopard in the book, he said, “No, no.” There’s a famous photograph of Visconti showing Lancaster how to move, thinking he was showing him the character, but instead it was himself. And Lancaster got him down perfectly.

PB: *Can you tell me something about Le notti bianche [White Nights, 1957], which you worked on? When the picture came out, many critics were disappointed at the reversal from the political and realistic nature of Visconti’s earlier films.*

SCD: They said he wasn’t ‘engaged’ enough. Well, the film was financed cooperatively by Marcello Mastroianni, myself, Luchino and Franco Cristaldi. After *Senso*, nobody was interested in Luchino because they thought his films cost too much. Mastroianni had never done a serious film; he always played either a taxi driver or in some kind of light comedy. So, since we were all friends, we decided to do a very small film all by ourselves. Cristaldi, who was just starting as a producer, joined in to make it all possible. We chose this short story by Dostoevsky, and wanted to make a very small, ‘smart’ picture. But things got out of hand immediately. Luchino, who was in Venice for the film festival, called to tell me he had asked Maria Schell to be in the film, and I said, “Oh my God, but we have to pay her!” And we wanted to make a small, small picture.

That was the beginning. Then Luchino said that since the film was not meant to be realistic, it would be better to build sets in a studio rather than shoot in the streets. Building sets! We were terrified for months. Then, after we built an entire city at Cinecittà, Luchino decided that he wanted a smoky atmosphere, but since we couldn’t use real smoke, two enormous curtains had to be constructed specially for the film. That was absolutely Luchino. He had no sense of money. He was the most generous man I ever knew, and when it was his own money at stake he didn’t care at all. But the rest of us were completely terrified.

PB: *The point, then, is that the film was never taken very seriously by any of you?*

SCD: We just wanted to make something modest in a month or two. We were only trying to do a nice little film whose real purpose was to demonstrate that Marcello Mastroianni could act. Luchino, of course, didn’t demonstrate anything because the film ended up being so expensive. It was also this film, by the way, which led to [Mario] Monicelli’s *I soliti ignoti* [*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958].

To do something with this enormous set that had been built for *White Nights*, we decided to write another film. The title ‘I soliti ignoti’ (the usual unknown persons) referred to the headlines which had unfortunately begun to appear rather frequently in the newspapers concerning house robberies.



What happened, however, is that because Monicelli wanted to try [Vittorio] Gassman out in comedy, and Cristaldi wanted someone else for his role, by the time they got around to shooting we had to vacate the studio with the big set, which was originally the whole purpose of the film. In any case, we had a great time writing the screenplay. Monicelli is an excellent director of comedy. Unfortunately, we did a sequel a year or two ago, something I didn't really approve of, called *I soliti ignoti vent'anni dopo*. The screenplay is good, I can assure you, but...

PB: *What are you doing now? Are you still hard at work?*

SCD: Most recently I wrote a screenplay for Monicelli's *Speriamo che sia femmina* [*Let's Hope It's a Girl*]. It's a good film. Unfortunately, though, there hasn't been that much to do, because the film industry, as usual, is in such a state of crisis in Italy. ●

A NOTE ON THE ENGLISH SOUNDTRACK

This release presents *Ludwig* with its English soundtrack for the first time on home video. The soundtrack was originally created for the 173-minute version which played commercially in the US and, as such, portions of our full-length presentation necessarily revert to the Italian soundtrack where no English dialogue existed.

Furthermore, the 173-minute English-language version not only cut sections of the film but also re-ordered them and, on occasion, altered or added musical accompaniment. Viewers may notice some abrupt changes in the background music as a result. We could have excised these passages and made use of the Italian soundtrack during these moments, but decided it was best to present as much of the original English soundtrack as possible.

During the conform it also became apparent that some of the English-language narration did not match up to the full-length Italian version. We can only assume that these brief sections were rewritten to accommodate the cuts and re-ordering of the 173-minute version. As they do not fit *Ludwig* in its complete form we have decided to present them separately, as bonus features. ●



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Ludwig was restored in 2K resolution from the original 35mm camera negative. The audio was restored from the optical negative. All restoration work was completed at Technicolor, Rome under the supervision of Luigi Lupi, Movietime.





PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by **Anthony Nield**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Production Assistant **Liane Cunje**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**

Blu-ray and DVD Mastering **David Mackenzie**

English Audio Conform **Michael Mackenzie**

Subtitling **IBF**

Design **Nick Wrigley / enthusiasm.org**

SPECIAL THANKS

**Alex Agran, Helmut Berger, Michael Brooke,
Peter Cowie, Dieter Geissler, Uwe Huber, Julian Petley,
Elmar Podlasly, Barbara Varani, Rob Winter**



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