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| Visconti, Luchino (1906-1976) |
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| Luchino Visconti (Luchino Visconti di Modrone, Count of Lonate Pozzolo; b. Milan, 2 November 1906, d. Rome, 17 March 1976), was an Italian theatre, opera and cinema director, and a scriptwriter. Visconti began his career in 1936 in Paris, as a director and costume assistant for Jean Renoir. In Paris, his position brought him into contact with a number of anti-fascist militants and leftist intellectuals that had a profound impact on his own politics, such as the writer and director Jean Cocteau. In the 1940s Visconti settled in Rome, where he joined the Communist party (to which he remained bound for the rest of his life) and began to collaborate with the journal *Cinema*. In 1942, with Pietro Ingrao, Mario Alicata, and Giuseppe De Santis, he realized *Ossessione*,based on the 1934 James Cain novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Although Rossellini’s *Rome Open City* (1945) is generally considered to be the founding movie of Italian neorealism, for many critics Visconti’s *Ossessione* (1942) is a precursor of the ‘movement,’ depicting a bleak and hopeless world. |
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Although Rossellini’s *Rome Open City* (1945) is generally considered to be the founding movie of Italian neorealism, for many critics Visconti’s *Ossessione* (1942) is a precursor of the ‘movement,’ depicting a bleak and hopeless world.  In 1945 Visconti worked on *Giorni di Gloria*, a film-documentary on the Nazi-fascist occupation of Italy, and in 1948 he wrote and directed *La terra trema*. The latter is an adaptation of Giovanni Verga’s novel *I Malavoglia* (1881) and is centered on the story of a family of Sicilian fishermen. The film echoes Antonio Gramsci’s concern with the ‘southern question’ and his call for a new national alliance between different popular sectors. After several years dedicated to the theatre, Visconti returned to the big screen with *Bellissima* (1951). This story — of a plebian woman whose dream is to turn her child into a future star — offered, like *Siamo donne* (1953), a look behind the scenes of the film world. With *Senso* (1954), an adaptation of the 1882 novel by the Italian writer Camillo Boito, taking place during the 19th century Italian *Risorgimento*, Visconti distanced himself from the neorealist path, combining realism and romanticism. In the years following, Visconti returned to the opera and directed Maria Callas in Verdi’s *La traviata* and Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*.  In 1957, continuing the series of great literary adaptations, Visconti completed *Le notti bianche*, inspired by Dostoevsky’s *White Nights*. In 1960 he returned to neorealist features with *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, the tragic story of a Southern family migrating to Milan in search of fortune. Its violence and crudity, along with Visconti’s political opinions, prompted harsh criticism of the film, but it was still awarded the *Silver Lion* at the *Venice Film Festival.*  After *Rocco e i suoi fratelli,* Visconti’s next major film was *Il Gattopardo* (1963), which reinterpreted Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s 1958 novel about the decline of the Sicilian aristocracy at the time of the Italian *Risorgimento.* Winner of the *Palme d'Or* at the 16th Cannes Film Festival, the filmestablished Visconti’s fame in Europe and the United States. In 1965, Visconti received the *Golden Lion* at the Venice Film Festival for the nocturnal film *Vaghe stelle dell’orsa*. Inspired by Sofocles’ *Electra* and Gabriele D’Annunzio’s novel *Forse che sì, forse che no* (1910), the film depicts the incestuous relationship of Giovanni and Sandra. Two years later, with *Lo straniero* (1967), Visconti readapted, via a sort of oneiric realism, a classic of existentialist literature, Camus’ *The Stranger,* but the movie did not meet much success.    *La caduta degli Dei* (1969), which echoes Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* (1901), is the first movie of Viconti’s German Trilogy; the trilogy also includes *Morte a Venezia* (1971) and *Ludwig* (1973) and intertwines the themes of beauty and death. At the end of the shooting of *Ludwig*, the director was hit by a stroke that left the left side of his body paralyzed. Despite his state, he directed his last two films, the openly autobiographical *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974), and *L'innocente* (1976), an adaptation of Gabriele D’Annunzio’s novel of the same title (1892). Visconti died in the spring of 1976 from a severe thrombosis. Filmography: *Ossessione* [*Obsession*] (1943)  *Giorni di gloria* [*Days of Glory*] (1945)  *La terra trema* [*The Earth Trembles*] (1948)  *Bellissima* (1951)  *Siamo donne* [*We, the Women*] (1953)  *Senso* [*The Wanton Contessa*] (1954)  *Le notti bianche* [*White Nights*] (1957)  *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* [*Rocco and His Brothers*] (1960)  Episode ‘Il lavoro’ [‘The Job’], in *Boccaccio '70* (With contributions by Mario Monicelli, Federico Fellini and Vittoro De Sica; 1962)  *Il Gattopardo* [*The Leopard*] (1963)  *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* [*Beautiful Stars of the Ursa*, also known as *Sandra*] (1965)  Episode ‘La strega bruciata viva’ [‘The Witch Burned Alive’] in *Le streghe* [*The Witches*] (1967) produced by Dino de Laurentis  *Lo straniero* [*The Stranger*] (1967)  *La caduta degli Dei* [*The Damned*] (1969)  *Morte a Venezia* [*Death in Venice*] (1971)  *Ludwig* (1973)  *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* [*Conversation Piece*] (1974)  *L'innocente* [*The innocent*, also known as *The Intruder*] (1976) |
| Further reading:  (Bacon)  (Giori)  (Nowell-Smith)  (Servadio)  (Tonetti)  (Wagstaff) |