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THE LATE Luchino Visconti was the prime example of the movie director as interior decorator. Visconti had exquisite taste in clothing and furniture, but he often allowed the story to be overwhelmed by the sumptuous sets. His last film, a period drama called **The Innocent**, is richly mounted, and there are many splendors in décor and design. Yet the sluggishly paced film misses many of the possibilities of a provocative story. Tullio is a languid aristocrat who ignores his wife and dallies with a beautiful countess. (The two women, Laura Antonelli and Jennifer O'Neill, are perhaps the most magnificent objects that Visconti's camera caresses.) When Tullio learns that his wife has initiated an affair with a prominent novelist, he finds his own desire for her rekindled. Husband and wife renew their love, whereupon Tullio learns that his wife is pregnant by the novelist. At first he tries to adopt a mature attitude, but he cannot accept the blow to his ego; he eventually destroys the child and himself as well.

The film's critique of male vanity and sexual hypocrisy obviously has contemporary implications. Unfortunately, Tullio is such a benighted sot, such an unredeemed male chauvinist that we never feel much sympathy for his plight. The character might have been endowed with more complexity by the actor, but Giancarlo Giannini gives a surprisingly parched, monotonous performance. Without a central character to inspire compassion and concern, *The Innocent* degenerates into a creaky melodrama. The story teases the mind, and Visconti's period recreations dazzle the senses, but the film never stirs the emotions. ■

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