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Dark Fabric

THE LACEMAKER

Directed by Claude Goretta
Screenplay by Claude Goretta
and Pascal Lainé

Stripped down to its essentials, *The Lacemaker* resembles dozens of tear-jerkers about doomed, poor-meets-rich love affairs. The heroine, Pomme (Isabelle Huppert), is 18, a shy attendant at a Paris beauty salon. The hero, François (Yves Beneyton), is a bookish university student from a proper bourgeois family. The two

come together while vacationing in glorious Normandy, then return to Paris and set up house on the Left Bank. There the innocent, star-crossed romance suffers a heartbreaking fate at the hands of the cruel real world.

Surely there are few moviegoers who have not encountered *The Lacemaker's* kind of misty tragedy at one time or another, but the film's total impact easily exceeds the sum of its familiar parts. Armed with compassion, tough intelligence and a first-rate cast, Director Claude Goretta (*The Wonderful Crook*) has performed the rare alchemic stunt of converting a genre picture into art: though *The Lacemaker* has all the trappings of conventional ro-


mantic movies, its deepest—and most upsetting—concerns are purely its own.

At first Goretta allows us to luxuriate in love's spell for an hour or so, staging a series of tender scenes that describe the tentative, early episodes in Pomme and François's idyll. The mood is lyric, and the Normandy air is thick with affection: when the sensitive François takes the virginal Pomme to bed for the first time, we are too caught up in their unaffected eroticism to notice much else. Only after the lovers leave their vacation paradise does Goretta begin to reveal his hand: as François grows bored with the affair, *The Lacemaker* seamlessly goes from lush romance to harsh political parable. Like the French writer Guy de Maupassant, whom he quotes in the movie, the director is a master of sudden shifts in mood.

The movie's ideological position soon becomes clear. To Goretta, François's rejection of the defenseless Pomme exemplifies the way the rich exploit the working class. But, unlike so many recent ideologically minded films, *The Lacemaker* never sacrifices the integrity of its characters to its political message. Rather than turn François into a snotty villain and Pomme into a peasant saint, Goretta, an evenhanded Swiss, attacks the system that victimizes them both. The movie's title, with its allusion to 17th century genre paintings, suggests the delicacy of Goretta's style.

The key to the film's meaning, as well as its most remarkable achievement, is Huppert's performance as the heroine. Freckle-faced and slightly withdrawn, this actress creates an appealing young woman who is finally done in by her inability to articulate her feelings. The erudite François dismisses Pomme because he mistakes her silence for ignorance, and, lest we make the same error, the movie ends with the damaged and deserted Pomme staring accusingly at the audience. It is a devastating denouement—the kind we expect from heartbreak movies—but it is not pity for the proverbial jilted heroine that is disturbing. What Goretta forces us to confront at the end of *The Lacemaker* is the potential for inhumanity within ourselves. — **Frank Rich**

TIME, NOVEMBER 7, 1977



**"‘THE LACEMAKER’ IS MARVELOUS!
AND ISABELLE HUPPERT
IS MARVELOUS!"**
A story of loving and
searching, loving
and winning,
loving and losing!"
—Gene Shalit, WNBC-TV

**"Unforgettable! You
will be deeply
touched. Isabelle
Huppert gives one
of the best perfor-
mances of the year."**
—Bob Lape, WABC-TV

**"‘THE LACEMAKER’
IS A PURE, PER-
FECT MOVIE
EXPERIENCE AND
ITS GRAND SUR-
PRISE IS ISABELLE
HUPPERT."**
—Leo Lerman,
Vogue Magazine

**"Director Claude
Goretta's newest
and most deeply felt
film. The film is
dominated by
Isabelle Huppert's
magnificent
performance."**
—David Ansen,
Newsweek

ISABELLE HUPPERT
in
The Lacemaker
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A GAIMONT/ACTION/NEW YORKER FILMS RELEASE

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