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Author(s)	Edward Guthmann
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'The Innocent' stilted, wooden

By EDWARD GUTHMAN

Luchino Visconti, the great Italian director of such lush cinematic tales as "Death in Venice" and "The Damned," is currently represented by his swan song, "The Innocent," made just before his death in 1976 and scheduled to open at Berkeley's Act One Theatre Friday, June 22.

It's a strangely stilted and wooden picture, and for all its sumptuous appointments, painterly camera work and pillowy visual beauty, lacking in the fire and tortured insight of his finest works.

Giancarlo Giannini, the star of Lina Wertmuller's "Seven Beauties," is the racked-apart, sexually hypocritical Tullio, whose boastful philandering is challenged when he learns that his meek cuckold of a wife has, in turn, gone a-cattin' for some action of her own.

It's the kind of theme (Sturm-und-drang self-destruction and sexual obsession) that hallmarked most of Visconti's work, but in this final effort one gets the feeling that the director made nothing but a frail attempt at self-parody.

Tullio, upon learning of his wife's infidelity, becomes rapaciously desirous of her for the first time in years. Heretofore, she was more a "sister" for him. With the knowledge of her affair, though, she develops a new dimension in his eye. So go the fickle ways of lust.

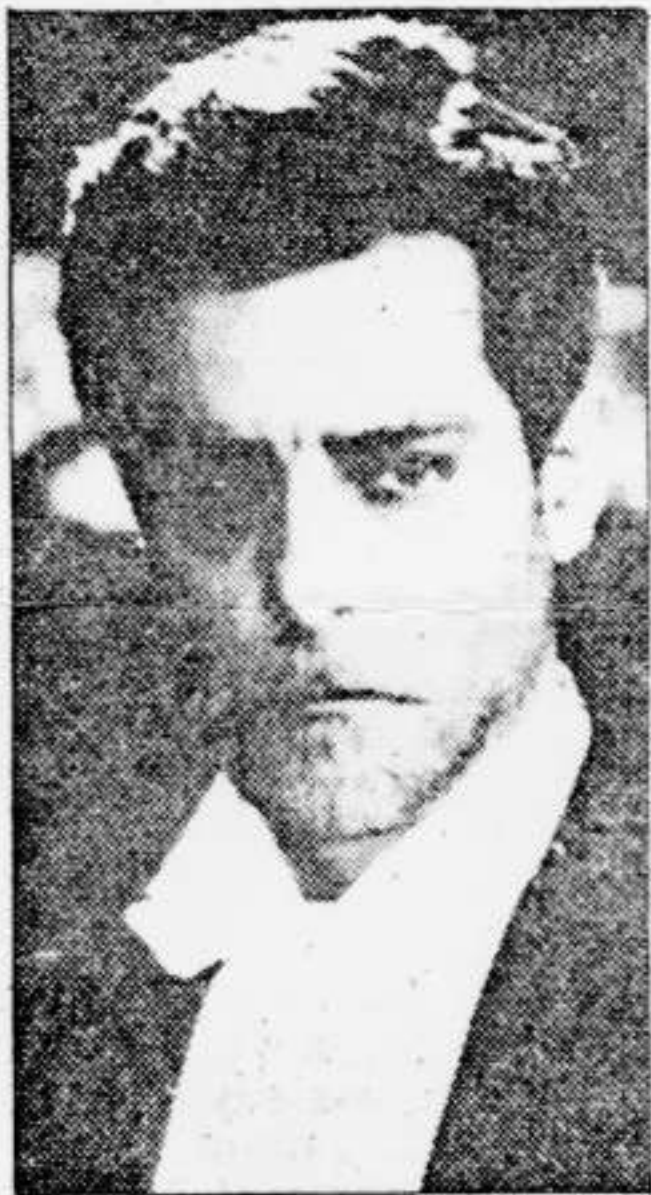
The luscious Laura Antonelli, who combines an enigmatic shyness with a full-blown carnal combustion, is most effective as the wife Giuliana. The film picks up steam during her love scenes with Giannini, making the aristocratic psychological armor that they wear in the rest of the film seem all the more suffocating.

The cruel irony that drives Tullio off the precipice of sanity is the knowledge of Giuliana's pregnancy by her lover. He encourages her to have the child — putting forth to his family the illusion that he is the father — while he inwardly plots to destroy the progeny of his wife's lust.

The sorest link in the film is Jennifer O'Neill's performance as Tullio's mistress, a smug and willful beauty who spurns Tullio when he comes to her desperately seeking solace after destroying his domestic

front. O'Neill's dialogue is totally dubbed, which makes for the wierd experience of seeing her mouthing English words, which are dubbed in Italian and then subtitled in English.

The audience that I watched "The Innocent" with, at a special benefit screening (for Pacific Film Archives) at San Francisco's Castro Theatre, laughed several times at the silly, operatic melodrama of this tale. I can't say that I was entirely bored — who would be with the flesh



Giancarlo Giannini

and fury of the Giannini/Antonelli combo? — but I'm not about to raise the banner for this picture, either.

For diehard Visconti fans, I recommend this film. For aficionados of the pomp and frillery of turn-of-the-century Italian upper class, an additional plus. But for those who want a little more for their money and their two hours in the theatre, I'd go with "Manhattan" or "A Little Romance."