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Conversation Piece
(Gruppo Di Famiglia In Un Interno)

(ITALO-FRENCH-COLOR)

Luchino Visconti's probing look at generation problems and intellectual failure of his generation calls for careful handling.

Variety 3-26-75
Paris, March 25.

Gaumont release of Rusconi Film, Gaumont International production. Stars Burt Lancaster, Silvana Mangano, Helmut Berger; features Claudia Narsani, Stefano Patrizi, Elvira Cortese, Dominique Sanda, Claudia Cardinale. Directed by Luchino Visconti. Screenplay, Visconti, Suso Cecchi D'Amico from a story by Enrico Medioli; camera (Technicolor-Todd-AO), Pasqualino De Santis; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; art director, Mario Garbuglia. Reviewed at Antegor, Paris, March 12, '75. Running time, 120 MINS.

Professor	Burt Lancaster
Bianca	Silvana Mangano
Konrad	Helmut Berger
Lietta	Claudia Marsani
Stafano	Stefano Patrizi
Erminia	Elvira Cortese
Mother	Dominique Sanda
Wife	Claudia Cardinale

(English Soundtrack)

Called "Gruppo Di Famiglia In Un Interno" (Family Group From Inside) in Italy, "Violence et Passion" in France, the original English version, one of the rare pix made with synch sound in the boot country, is tagged "Conversation Piece." It eschews the usually operatic, museum-like pix of Luchino Visconti of late for a touching tale of the generation gap and the loss of life-contact of an intellectual.

Visconti, after a stroke, directed this in a wheelchair, reportedly. One might be tempted to read a personal portrait of the director in Burt Lancaster as an American professor with an Italian mother who has lived alone in a rich, highly-decorated Roman house after withdrawing from teaching and even society. But it is fictitious, according to Visconti.

The prof. apparently, is more interested in what man creates than man himself. He is addicted to collecting 18th-century British paintings of families called Conversation Pieces. Into this comes a haughty, middleaged, but still beautiful Italian woman who wants to rent his upstairs apartment.

Lancaster first refuses but is finally persuaded by her, her cute teenage daughter and her rich fiance. There is also the mother's lover, a young German, played with the right mixture of venality, decadent charm and intimations of decency by Helmut Berger.

The apartment is to be his but when big alterations create problems in the professor's apartment he finds it was taken only for a year and was not to be his. The professor gets tangled up with the young people despite himself.

He comes on them nude and turning on and even finds himself liking the gigolo who has a love for art and whom he helps after a beating from thugs. He, Berger, is finally found dead when he wants to leave, presumably killed by the Countess's husband, a neo-fascist who had been planning assassinations and had been informed on by Berger to save his own neck on a dope charge.

Visconti has kept this talky but rarely verbose pic in the two apartments with only an outside studio view of Rome. The decoration, the professor's isolation, but still tied to his past, in this house keep this from being theatrical or literary. Not poignant or moving, due to treating its characters sketchily, it still is touching as the professor ends alone and cries in a sort of self pitying and then transcendent manner for himself and the others.

The assorted accents are justified and even the peppering of blue lingo Americanisms fit these jet setters. Lancaster is highly effective as the professor and there are cameo bits by Dominique Sanda as his mother and Claudia Cardinale as his wife in short flashbacks to his earlier life in the house.

Pic deals with social disasters in talk rather than trying for too many visual metaphores. In these days of big spectacle this creates its own by deft decorativeness. Despite its interior setting, it was shot in Todd-AO. But Visconti has removed the shrill edge and overemphasis of his other pix on the fall of families and dynasties as "The Leopard," "The Damned" and "Ludwig."

He denotes the ineffectiveness of many intellectuals of his generation with many older people turning off or towards fascism while the young may be corrupted but not obviously so with that sad barrier that keeps them from helping each other. Steeped in Italo problems, pic still is international in impact.

It needs careful handling but could reach more selective auds on its theme with the Lancaster name a help. It is a pic that calls for special slotting due to its sometimes high falutin' but never empty or barren talk. Urban chances appear more promising.

Silvana Mangano is striking as the decadent noblewoman with the others also good as the fine art and technical work and use of classical music. —Mosk.