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by J. HOBELMAN

THE ROSE KING. Directed by Werner Schroeter. Written by Schroeter and Magdalena Montezuma. At the Film Forum 1, through January 5.

LUDWIG. Directed by Luchino Visconti. Written by Visconti and Enrico Medioli. Produced by Ugo Santalucia. Distributed by Sacis. At the Carnegie Screening Room.

No less tormentedly homoerotic than *The Rose King*, albeit a good deal more heavyhanded and humorless, *Ludwig* opens with its subject being advised by a priest on the eve of his coronation as king of Bavaria and explicitly juxtaposes Catholic guilt-tripping with his first homosexual tryst. The film is dutifully campy: Ludwig (Helmut Berger) evolves from an imperious flouncer into a spacey vixen and finally an unshaven eccentric surrounded by a gaggle of hunky, knowing servants. But what *Ludwig* tries to describe, *The Rose King* is.

A whole theory of Italian cinema could probably be spun out of the dialectical relation between the impresarios of operatic spectacle—Blasetti, Fellini, Bertolucci—and the purveyors of gritty anti-spectacle—Rossellini, Antonioni, Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi. Visconti, who started at the latter pole and worked his way to the former, attempts to make *Ludwig* self-reflexive and critical but the

movie's overweening production values reek of vicarious identification. The filmmaker sets himself up as Ludwig's rival; his movie lacks the reproachful economy of *The Rose King* or Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's 1973 *Ludwig* (which cites Schroeter as one of the "geniuses of the age"). At best, it seems a kind of wide-screen *Dynasty* in cynically making the lives of the rich and famous fun for the plebes.

Still, fleshed out with additional scenes and direct address statements by various "witnesses," the restored *Ludwig* is considerably more coherent than the version M-G-M released in 1973 (for one thing, it grounds the king's paranoia—he's under police surveillance from the first scene on) and, if not a visionary masterpiece, is hardly the tedious botch it previously seemed. One caveat emptor: Although more than a half hour longer than M-G-M's cut, the *Ludwig* that was press screened was still nearly an hour shy of the advertised "complete" version. The full 268 minutes are promised for opening but it would be wise to call the theater for confirmation. ■