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Certainly the mental aberrations of the aristocracy hold endless fascinations—but their re-examination ought to provide just a little something more than a freak show. Visconti's *Ludwig* doesn't even provide a good Grand Guignol; it is the kind of "historical" that permits a giggle early on—and doesn't even develop into a belly-laugh; it is simply a waste of talent and time all around.

If you close your ears and your mind, your eyes, of course, can feast upon sights and scenes (all seemingly introduced by close-ups of galloping horses) of mid-nineteenth-century Bavaria and the luscious interiors and exteriors of those crazy castles (complete with indoor grottos, endless mirrored halls and disappearing furniture) that Ludwig squandered his money on. That Visconti, who used his sensuous sense of time and place to such elegant and eloquent effect in *The Damned* and to only elegance in *Death in Venice*, would be fascinated by Ludwig is understandable; Visconti's tendency to grand-operatic cinema could have built-in excuse, what with Ludwig's non-abysmal-architectural claim to fame being his rule-long patronage of Richard Wagner and lifelong dedication to all the romanticism and mythology that Wagner embodied in his music. I am sure Visconti had some striking master-plan in mind, and it may well have been in the film that was originally scheduled to open here last December. Since then he has been re-editing the film, which now runs 2 hours and 53 minutes, 13 minutes shorter than originally announced. I daresay all the coherence vanished in those 13 minutes.

Ludwig offers us the Greek-goddish Helmut Berger as the Greek-goddish king who came to the throne at the age of 19 in 1864 and died 22 years later after being confined as insane for some years. And for hours, with a forwards-backwards series of episodes and statements, we explore his advancing lunacy, his unrequited love for his cousin (Romy Schneider, looking lovely and remarking, "We've always known Ludwig is a bit eccentric"); his chumminess with Wagner (Trevor Howard here, noting bitterly in private that he must depend on "this half-witted boy, latest lunatic in a family of lunatics" but leeching on him nevertheless), and his degenerating into playing footsie with his footmen and lusting after the lederhosen boys. His hairline recedes, his teeth turn black (an attempt is made to make them appear missing, which they don't) and he looks paranoid as all get out. Then he and his shrink go walking—and then they're both dead.

There is no apparent intelligence in the way all this has been stuck together, let alone the way in which mind-shriveling dialogue has been assigned various mouths. Ludwig says, "To be king is not easy," and announces cheerfully, "Drowning is a fine death—there is no mutilation," capping it with "I am an enigma and I want to remain an enigma forever—to others and to myself." Better Visconti should have respected the poor man's wishes.