

Published August 17th, 2022

'Lost Illusions' - how great literature can give birth to excellent entertainment

By Sophie Braccini

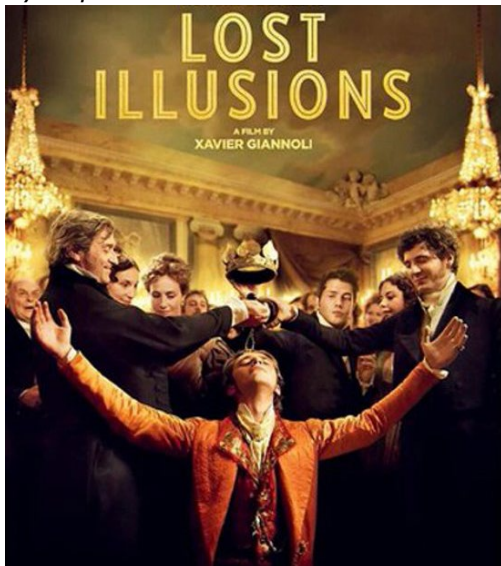


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Honoré de Balzac wrote "The Human Comedy" during the first part of the 19th century in France. There, without any indulgence and with great sharpness, he painted a changing world where capitalism was emerging, where social classes were intermingling in a big post revolution maelstrom, where those who had the guts and not too many scruples could reap the benefit of a changing world order. It was an exciting time, it was a cruel time. It was the time of youth like Lucien de Rubempré, the hero of the movie "Lost Illusions" presented on Aug. 26 at the Orinda Theatre for a week. The French movie with English subtitles has all the ingredients of the novel and makes for supreme entertainment, with many elements of reflection about our time, as the human comedy of today may play on a different stage, but the characters are the same.

Rubempré is a romantic young man who dreams of becoming a published poet. He feels he is vegetating in his small provincial town. His only door into the sophistication he craves is Madame de Bargeton, an aristocrat married to a rich but rustic old husband. She and Rubempré become lovers and when she escapes to Paris and her family, he follows suit. The young man is thrown without preparation in a complicated world in

which social codes evade him. Soon cast away from his patroness he has to fend for himself and finds an outlet for his wit in writing for controversial liberal publications. The gifted young man soon makes the choice to master the rules of that world full of deceitfulness and manipulation and starts his own social climb, at the expense of his conscience. But the enemies he made during his ascension will use his vanity to summon his demise.?

The times described here are that of the beginning of capitalism. Profit, fakes and pretense are leading the dance. Industrialists and bankers are the growing power that will soon take on everything. Investments are made in liberal publications that are still legal and proliferating, and financial corruption reigns. For the non-aristocratic and poor person who wants to succeed, compromise is the inescapable step.?

Some players in the Human Comedy are pure. Some are redeemed by real talent, or by love. Most will not survive and the naive will perish.

The actors cast in the main roles are delightful. The innocent, the rotten, the hypocrite, the righteous are portrayed perfectly. The cinematography is beautiful, the old Paris, the palaces, the wretched quarters, the places of pleasure, the costumes, all add to the eyes' pleasure given by the film. It is a long movie, two and a half hours, but the rhythm is such and so much is happening that time flies watching it. Long after the movie ends, the characters of the story stay with the spectator. It is hard to remain untouched by this dive into the roots of our capitalistic world.

"Lost Illusions" will run at the Orinda Theatre for one week starting Aug. 26, brought to Contra Costa County by the International Film Showcase, a Lamorinda nonprofit. Tickets at Orindamovies.com

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