

The novel *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, 1958) of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957)

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Abstract

The present study refers to the novel *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, 1958) of the Italian writer and the last Prince of Lampedusa Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Duca di Palma di Montechiaro (Palermo, 23 December 1896 – Roma, 23 July 1957), which was studied in the historical and socio-political context of Sicily and even of Italy, during the second half of the 19th century. This work is about an aristocratic family that evolves and is influenced by the historical and socio-political conditions of that time, where frustration and disappointment emerge, since the hope of the proponents about the Italian Unification from the expected demands will not come true. In addition, we refer to the narrative structures of this novel through a variety of critical readings.

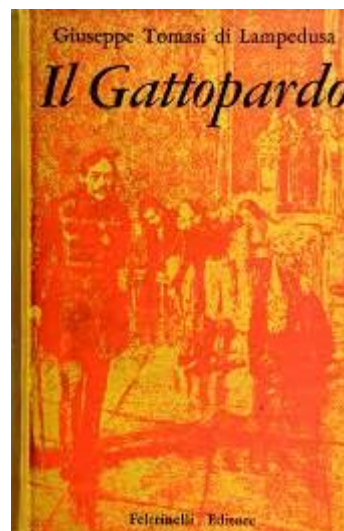
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Introduction

The book *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, 1958) is written around the end of 1954. It consisted of four chapters and in the meantime was enriched by Tomasi di Lampedusa. In the autumn of 1956 the publishing house refused to publish it because they considered it worthless and Tomasi di Lampedusa suffered from this reaction. Another attempt to publish it did not have a happy ending as they found many flaws and suggested changes. Tomasi di Lampedusa, meanwhile, wrote once again the entire novel in eight complete chapters and gave it to Lanza¹ shortly before he left to Rome and in a personal note stated that he would like it to be published but not at his own expenses (Buzzi, 1973:30-31).

The novel was rejected by both Mondadori and publishing houses. However, it was approved by the Feltrinelli publishing house, Giorgio Basani, and was November 1958. The rejection of the novel's version been due to its genre, as at that time tendencies with experimentation within the neorealist context (Casadei, Santagata, 2013:322-323).

There is also the possibility that the frustration, scepticism and pessimism that emerged from the acted as a warning, because of some ideological part of left-wing critics, since the scepticism and the protagonist were incompatible with the hope of most deprived classes and everything seemed to be immersed in a political and social stagnation (Casadei, Santagata, 2013:322-323).



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¹ Francesco Lanza, (Palermo 1934 - Pisa 2000), Italian literary critic, professor of French literature at the University of Pisa, Naples, Venice. In 1953 he met Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and a fruitful spiritual relationship was established between them.

Specifically, De Seta reports that since 1958, the year *The Leopard* was published, Marxist criticism has been into a war controversy over the aristocracy of the novel's protagonists as, the Prince expresses sorrow and nostalgia for its end, and the question was if it was right at that time to hear a voice representing a world from which with difficulty and fatigue they were trying to free themselves (De Seta, 2018:X-XI).

There was essentially a conflict between the pros and cons of the pro-aristocratic narrative which until then had prevented the revelation of the true meaning of which *The Leopard* was representative, and which had explained the reason for its success in Italy and abroad (De Seta, 2018:XI). O Tropea, M. (2000) characterizes it as a story of confusion both on the social and family level but also on the political level (Tropea, 2000:87).

Unfortunately, Tomasi di Lampedusa was not alive when his work was published and he didn't witness that his novel *The Leopard* was that kind of novel that could fascinate both the most and least demanding readers, thus achieved wider and fervent acceptance" (Spinazzola, 2012:82).

Finally, an interesting observation from Siciliano (2003) is that when he refers to the Cheetah he speaks about the greatness of a novel that gives the style of old gold which reflects the bitter case of Polygenesis which wanted to be an historical salvation for the islanders, but indeed he was not (Siciliano, 2003:199).

The novel *The Leopard* (Il Gattopardo, 1958)

The Leopard is a novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957) that chronicles the changes in the Sicilian life and society during the Risorgimento. It was published retrospectively in 1958 by Feltrinelli, after two rejections by the leading Italian publishing houses Mondadori and Einaudi, it became the top-selling novel in the Italian history and is considered one of the most important novels in modern Italian literature.

The novel is the story of Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina, a 19th-century Sicilian nobleman caught in the midst of civil war and revolution. As a result of political confusion, the prince's position in the island's class system is eroded by newly-moneyed peasants and "shabby minor gentry." As the novel progresses, the Prince is forced to choose between upholding the continuity of upper class values, and breaking tradition to secure the continuity of his family's influence. A central theme of the story is the struggle between mortality and decay (death, fading of beauty, fading of memories, change of political system, false relics, etc.), and abstraction and eternity (the prince's love for the stars, continuity and the resilience of the Sicilian people).

The novel is mainly set during the period of the Risorgimento, specifically when Giuseppe Garibaldi, the leader of the famous Redshirts, swept through Sicily with his proletariat army known as the Thousand. The novel starts in May 1860, when Garibaldi's Redshirts have landed on the Sicilian coast and are pressing inland; they will soon overthrow the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and incorporate it into the united Italian Kingdom under Victor Emmanuel. The plot focuses upon the aristocratic Salina family, which is headed by Prince Fabrizio. Don Fabrizio is the patriarch of the family as well as the keeper of its strict code of conduct and Roman Catholic ritual.

Prince Fabrizio finds marriage with his overly puritanical wife to be physically unsatisfying, and thus keeps a series of mistresses and courtesans as well as indulging in his hobby of amateur astronomy. He is drawn to his nephew Prince Tancredi Falconeri whom he sees as having noble

qualities. This affection is somewhat diminished when he discovers that Tancredi has joined Garibaldi's Redshirts. On a trip to Salina estate in the town of Donnafugata, the Prince learns that the mayor, Don Calogero Sedara, has become wealthy through uncouth business transactions and political influence and that his wealth now rivals that of the Salinas. When Sedara introduces his extraordinarily beautiful daughter Angelica, Tancredi has fallen in love with her, to the dismay of the Prince's daughter Concetta, who loves Tancredi. Although aware of his daughter's feelings, the Prince accepts the inevitable and helps arrange Tancredi's engagement to Angelica. The couple passes a blissfully innocent period of engagement.

Fabrizio is offered the position of the Senator in the new Italian state, but he refuses it. Angelica is introduced to Palermo society at a lavish ball and despite her background she easily slips into the role of the countess to be. The narrative then goes forward with two decades and finds Prince Fabrizio on his deathbed, surrounded by the family. The Prince considers that he will be the last true prince of the Salinas, the last leopard. A final chapter takes place in 1910 when Concetta, now seventy, is living in the family's home with her two sisters.

As for the heroes of the novel, in May 1860, Prince Salina Don Fabrizio Corbera and his family are at their home near Palermo. The news of the Garibaldi's landing in Marsala of Sicily finds them there and in chaos. Don Fabrizio, fully aware of what is happening, observes developments and events with passivity and scepticism and sees that all these are signs of the end of an era for the class to which he belongs, the aristocracy. He knows that the old system can no longer survive.

Don Fabrizio is married to Maria Stella and they have 7 children: Carolina, Paolo, Concetta, Katerina, Francesco-Paolo, Giovanni and Chiara. Another important character of the novel lives with them, a member of the church, Father Pirone, who is always next to the Prince.

His beloved nephew Tancredi Falconeri, young and ambitious, sees the rise of the bourgeoisie and announces his decision to join Garibaldi's military operation, explaining that "If we want everything to remain as it is, then everything must change." Don Fabrizio allows him to participate, although he disagrees. Father Pirone, seeing the passive reaction of Don Fabrizio, begins to fear that an agreement between the liberals and the monarchists will harm the church. But the Prince is convinced that even in the face of all these changes, the position and property of the aristocrats will not suffer any damage.

The same year in August and due to all these developments the family moved to Donnafugata, where their summer residence is located. During a meal, the Mayor of Donnafugata, Don Calogero Centara, is presented to Prince Salina, accompanied by his daughter Angelica. The Prince's needy nephew, Tancredi, falls in love with Angelica and in October reveals his feelings to his uncle. At the same time, a referendum is being held on the annexation of Sicily to the united Italy, where the result was now positive.

The prince meets with Don Calogero to talk about Tancredi's interest in his daughter, the financial situation of both, but also the issue of the dowry. Tancredi, by developing this bond with the mayor's daughter, will benefit, not only financially, as he himself, though an aristocrat, is financially weak, but also in relation to his ambitions, as Calogero Centara represents the bourgeoisie, which is on the rise. Of course, with all these developments, Concetta, the Prince's daughter and secretly in love with her cousin Tancredi, remains disappointed. During the preparations for the upcoming wedding, the engaged couple spends hours together.

In the same time, Prince Don Fabrizio receives a visit from Cavalier Chevalier, who arrives in Donnafugata and discusses political issues and developments with the Prince. The Prince accepts

the offer to enter the Parliament with honour, but refuses his participation and in his place proposes the future father-in-law of Calogero Centara as the most suitable.

The following year, on February 1861, Father Pirone left his village for a short time, after 15 years since his father's death. The villagers are wondering about this aristocratic family that has lived with them for so many years and what their views are on political developments, Father Pirone analyses the Prince's character and the way he sees and faces the facts.

The next year, during a dance attended by the Salina family, Tancredi and Angelica, the Prince appears seriously sceptical of contemplating even death, with nothing else to look forward to. The only moment of distraction is when Angelica urges him to dance.

Twenty years later Don Fabrizio leaves Naples in bad health condition. He visits some doctors, and ends up in a hotel room in Palermo with the whole family by his side. There he will leave his last breath.

Many years later and while many people have passed away, in May 1910, his daughters: Concetta, Katerina and Carolina, try to save what they can from the family heritage. The bishop controls all the private chapels for the authenticity of their relics. It was found that most of what the three sisters were keeping were fake, and ordered to be destroyed.

At the end, even the family's embalmed dog, Bentiko, as per the decision of Concetta is thrown away. Something that the author himself mentions in a letter to a friend and notes that: "Be careful: the dog Bendiko is a very important character and is almost the key to the novel." This heraldic emblem is the key to destruction, in the sense that ruin comes even to a dog.

The feelings of the novel *The Leopard* are those of enchantment, frustration, negative outlook, pessimistic image which followed after the unification of the island with the rest of Italy. In this novel, responsibilities are attributed to all the social strata, since for the creation of the unified state and for who had the power, it is something that emerged not only through a referendum but also through parliamentary elections.

Therefore, there is no real change, since not only rule those who ruled and before, but they also do it with the consent of the people. Power is in the same hands and corruption and poverty persist. No struggle with the banner of patriotic ideals brought a single improvement in the daily life of the Sicilians, as a result of which the expression of feelings of pessimism increased, leaving no traces of optimism and hope on the part of the author.

Narrative structures of novel *The Leopard* (Il Gattopardo, 1958)

The author divided the work into eight parts and in each part the month and the date are written. Specifically, "Introduction to the Prince", May 1860, "Donnafugata", August 1860, "The Troubles of Don Fabrizio", October 1860, "Love at Donnafugata", November 1860, "Father Pirrone Pays a Visit", February 1861, "A Ball", November 1862, "Death of a Prince", July 1883 and "Relics", May 1910, as well as the place, for example the first and last chapters take place in the villa, the second, the third and the fourth chapters in Donnafugata, the seventh in the hotel Trinakria while the fifth and the sixth chapters which are both independent are in San Cono and Palazzo Ponteleone (De Seta, 2018:309-311). Also in each place, except for the seventh one which refers to the death of the Prince, there is a detailed list of the titles of the place. In addition, it turns out that Tomasi di Lampedusa showed particular interest in the spatial dimension of each part as a tool for organizing the material. Indicatively, the first part takes place in the

mansion, the seventh in the hotel Trinakria, so each part of the book corresponded to a location (De Seta, 2018:308-309).

The novel will end retrospectively when it is all over and it has become just a memory. This last part is fifty years after the beginning of the events and twenty-seven years after the death of the Prince.

In many reviews it is referred to the novel that it expresses both sarcasm and mnemonic depiction following both an historical line and a biographical story that includes the Prince's maturity until his death. Certainly in addition to the theme of unification, eternal immobility, inaction and abandonment of the island, also, includes the personal memory and image of the aristocratic world during its fall (Tropea, 2000:110).

The narrator of the novel *The Leopard* is heteronarrative and omniscient or otherwise narrator-God and the narration is done without focus or otherwise with zero focus. He expresses his own perspective on the narrated events but also leaves room for the perspective of the characters in the novel.

The novel begins since May 1860. The first six chapters belong to 1860-1862, the seventh chapter in July 1883 with the Prince's death and after 25 years between his death and May 1910. The Sicilian Prince is the protagonist of the novel who according to Spinazzola (2012) appears as an example of a champion of human superiority. His nephew Tancredi will also be the one that the reader may like the most but without being identified (Spinazzola, 2012:80-81). "If we want everything to remain as it is, then everything must change," Tancredi argues, and for Siciliano (2003), Tancredi is described as a bold young man who takes risks and has the ability to foresee like a great politician (Siciliano, 2003:199). This phrase appears in the first chapter and is the most famous of the novel as according to Buzzi (1973) it summarises the author's philosophy, the vanity of History, meaning that the things change but only superficially and not substantially (Buzzi, 1973:111).

Tancredi is so determined to secure the dominance of power by joining those who want to renew the political system, but seeks to strengthen his social position by choosing to marry the daughter of the mayor emerging new social class.

According to Vitello, A. (2008) the faces of *The Leopard* move between reality and fantasy, history and invention. The protagonist is reminiscent of his great-grandfather who was an astronomer and his name was Julio who was married to Maria Stella, while Father Pirone lived in Julio's house and they were close friends (Vitello, 2008:374-375).

In the below table, is made the correspondence of the characters and the protagonists of the novel, according to Tomasi di Lampedusa. The revelation is made by the author himself in 1957 who wrote a letter to his friend Enrico Merlo (Squillacioti, 2002:137-138).

Prince di Salina	Prince di Lampedusa Julio Fabrizio (the author's great-grandfather)
Maria Stella	Maria Stella (Maria Stella Guccia)
Father Saverio Pirone	Francesco Saverio Pirone Cappellano di casa Lampedusa
Tancredi	Gioacchino Lanza
Donnafugata	As the village of Palma / as the Santa Margherita building
Caroline	Coincides with the mother of Julio Fabrizio, Carolina Wochinger

Regarding the urban images, they are few and in fact reference is made to the city of Caserta when the Prince visits King Ferdinand II, to the London where a son of the Prince resides and to the Naples. Palermo is also the only city with a description as the Prince visits Mariannina² (De Seta, 2018:397). While, the Sicilian landscapes are projected in many ways and cases. The reference to the climate, to the land of Sicily are combined both with the character of the Sicilians and with the social and historical developments. In other words, the characteristics of the Sicilian landscape are symbolic and not realistic (De Seta, 2018:434-435).

For the author, the landscape is an element of the narrative and it plays such an important role as if it were the face of the novel (Buzzi, 1973:81).

As for the language of the novel, it does not cause difficulties to the reader. Free speech is also used, dialogues and descriptions of landscapes. In terms of style and linguistic features Squillaciotti (2002: 145) states that the tone is imposing and serious.

Buzzi observes that Tomasi di Lampedusa tended to use descriptions frequently as there is no noun without his adjective. Especially when referring to the landscape there are made all the definitions as if the meaning of the noun it uses is not enough (Buzzi, 1973:88-89).

Tropea, M. (2000) mentions even more specifically for the diverse linguistic elements the presence of Latin especially by Father Pirone but also of French by the Prince, the Sicilian dialect used not only by the poor. There are also Neapolitan expressions. The language of the Prince, the Sicilian dialect is characterized as having a sophisticated artistic style³ elegant but also with linguistic local elements. There are used often superlative descriptions or adjectives, as well as unusual adjectives referring to the state of immobility in Sicily. (Tropea, 2000:110-117).

Conclusions

Siciliano (2003) comments on the uniqueness of *The Leopard*, considering it to be the vehicle of a great idea that looks directly at History through the bitter reflection and scepticism of the aristocratic Prince Salina. He also mentions that Tomasi di Lampedusa did not write the novel in order to escape from his present but because for the time being it was worth looking at the past to discover the dangers of the present.

Certainly reading *The Leopard* nobody can manage to find the positive or romantic side of History as all human endeavours are hopeless (Siciliano, 2003:199).

The cynical philosophy of Prince Salina is in fact the frustration of Tomasi Di Lampedusa and the novel's end of the Prince essentially reflects the end of a social order (Savatteri, 2006:36).

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² Mariannina is the prostitute that Don Fabrizio visits one night in Palermo accompanied by Father Pirone.

³ «stilizzatissimo» in English very stylized

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