Modernity and Death: The Leopard by Giuseppe Di Lampedusa

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There [in literature] we still find people who know how to die.

FREUD

DESPITE OUR LITERARY preoccupation with violence and death, it is extraordinary in this day to find a novel about dying. Art, or what passes as art, can readily depict the contortions of death; it can only through much greater effort and with a more delicate hand present the living of life as a preparation for death—to present death not as a terminal event, the sudden, unexpected ending of a life, but the dominant theme lived throughout a life. Indeed, the problem of writing about dying is made the more difficult by our fear, which compels us to prefer to read about death rather than dying; yet alongside of that is our need to come to an understanding of death which makes dying one of the great subjects of art. Death demands but a rhetoric; dying an aesthetic and a philosophy.

Contemporary literature, dwelling on the fact of death with stupid morbidity, assumes that the tragic is to be found in the violent interruption death effects, annihilating a promising future and transforming the past into an apparent refuge. Death is seen to separate the hero from his unrealized future and his happier past. This treatment of death is the opposite of the traditional philosophical one in which life is lived in full awareness of death, and one central concern of life is to embrace death as a natural culmination rather than a violent interruption. Perhaps preoccupation

1 Delivered at a meeting of the William Alanson White Society, March 6, 1968.
with death rather than with dying is a function of a change that has come about in the way we regard the past. This change is part of what we mean when we use the terms, *the modern* and *modernity*.

We no longer look back to a past with longing in the belief that there was a golden age when men were happy, at peace with one another; but we do believe now, partly as a disillusionment about the possibility of a happier future, that each individual has the possibility of a happy time in his childhood. The dialectic of beliefs about the past is curious, for it moves from the postulation of a golden age, to the rejection of that in favor of a commitment to progress and the better time to come, to the rejection of both in favor of—all that is left to us—the possibility of a carefree childhood. However, substantiation that there ever was such a time for any person requires private recollection, the truth of which is dubious since we all know what tricks our wishes play with memory. Each one of us, then, by assumptions of modernity, suffers a private and privileged "golden age," or at least the belief that one might have been happy once.

The present is therefore isolated; neither a future of expectation, nor a past of comforting recollection has any reality and as such any real causal relationship to the present. In that isolation one cannot "prepare" for death, since the sense of life-continuity is denied. Death must come as a violent, unexpected, and annihilating intrusion.

Another consequence of the modern attitude toward the past is that the dialectic of beliefs and doubts about the past subjects narrative art—such as that we find in the historical novel—to an odd limitation: The past it conjures up cannot be believed to be a golden age, nor can it be grounded in any sort of private recollection. All storytelling then, is the storyteller's lie about the past; we have come to regard historical fiction as a kind of fantasy.

Stating the issue this way, one recognizes an old thesis: Plato first suggested this to be the necessary condition of story, and his willingness to belabor the thesis derived from his conviction that philosophers, not poets, are the only true knowers. His motive was self-seeking, for he wanted to subordinate story to philosophy where, he was convinced, lay the truth, if truth were possible for man. One of philosophy's possessions was the stern willingness to inquire into, and possibly to gain knowledge of dying well. In contrast
to this sober, argumentative exploration of dying, the poets depicted dying as horrible and death as fearful; their example could only induce an unhealthy and non-philosophic anxiety.

We today have created a literature based on Plato's aesthetic of poetic untruth without having as a concern the subject of dying, for it is, as Plato predicted, too painful for most to contemplate seriously. But why could not literature now take up dying as a serious theme? If it should do so, it would then fall into that rare genre, philosophical literature, of which, despite Plato's denial, we have had few examples in the past, and even fewer in the present.

When we do encounter philosophical novels in our time, they are usually "novels of ideas" in a didactic sense; but the work I discuss here is, I believe, a philosophical novel concerned principally with the theme of death, yet it is not a novel of ideas in the didactic sense. Rather, it assumes as a foundation, without being explicit about this, the political vision of Plato and the psychological insight of Freud. The mind that produced The Leopard was aware of the dangers within historical narration due to the change modernity has wrought in the power of narrative art. Modernity suspects all portrayals of the past as mere expressive discharges of the present, rooted in private and cultural psychic needs. Questions of truth in art are considered irrelevant largely because we have come to accept, unquestioningly, an expressive theory of art in the place of the imitative or mimetic theory of art, within the logic of which truth could be defended as an artistic value.

But what are we to make, given our assumption of the expressive theory of art, of a novel in which the hero himself exhibits the complexities of a man accepting the changes of modernity, yet perpetuating in his private concerns the traditional attitudes of the past towards death? The writer in this case is clearly taking the problem of modernity and death as a subject for reflection, and even dares to suggest in this setting that truth may be an object of his story.

I

The protagonist of The Leopard, Don Fabrizio, Prince of Salina, is a Sicilian aristocrat, yet a man of revolutionary involvement for he is born into the ancien regime and compelled to live through the Risorgimento of the nineteenth century. He is witness to the several kinds of government men frame for themselves and
the many character types for whom they function poorly and well. In himself he sees the sorrowfully impotent man of passion and the joyously effective man of intellect. Yet neither aspect of himself can stay in the assurance of its proper place any more than the governments of decadent Bourbons and progressive Garibaldini can convince us of the right and better order. For both in the self and in the polity, these sides exist; now one, now the other has ascendancy, which is to say overcomes the other only to be overcome in its turn. So considered, this novel could be called a representation of the relativity of all patterns of self and state which we try, forever unsuccessfully, to structurally coerce with ideas and actions.

Although the story is told in the specific terms of Italy's consolidation under Garibaldini and King Victor Emmanuel, yet it is a universal—and therefore artful—presentation of interdependent realities: self and polity. In these terms, it is a novel which expresses an insight of the ancient world and the earliest literature we have from Greece. Because of the close dependence of self and polity in their ambivalences, the story must be told with an emphasis on shifting values. This is fictionally realized through the technique of shifting viewpoints, but without systematic perspective. Thus, it is not told with flashback, nor with chapters moving successively from one character to another—all this being far too artificial for the realities Lampedusa wishes to convey. Rather, it is told from an unusually omniscient present, our present of about 1959-1961, yet a present fully aware of the past both in its contemporaneous manifestation—how the past was in its presentness to those experiencing it—and in its pastness to ourselves who can only tell stories about it. The past is therefore permeated by a thoroughly twentieth century mind, and events are never without their relevant towardness to the present, while the present (our present, that is, as readers now) is always shown to be reminiscent of a pattern or duplication in the past.

In this way a tale of Sicily in the nineteenth century can mention the names of Freud, Eisenstein, the year 1960, the Second World War, and can indulge in novelistic editorials such as this: "it should not be forgotten that romanticism was then at high noon." (p. 118) Events can be compared:

put in modern terms, he could be said to be in the state of mind of someone today who thinks he has boarded one of the old planes which potter between Palermo and Naples, and suddenly finds himself
shut inside a super Jet and realizes he will be at his destination almost before there will be time to make the sign of the Cross. (p. 119)

The impression achieved is of a reality in which there is no crucial past or present, but rather all events participate in a tenseless world made by art. And yet, we come into this possibility of timelessness through the temporal unfolding of a story.

Timelessness confronts the self, phenomenologically, in the expectation of death. The novel sounds this preoccupation, as if a perpetual tolling, in the opening words: "Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen." As if closing this parenthesis, the death of Don Fabrizio concludes the main action of the novel; yet the book does not end there, but continues with a brief account of the survivors. This simple coda, once a trite novelistic device to tie up all the loose ends, becomes here a structural contribution to a central theme: Just as the shifting temporal perspective of the omniscient narrator establishes the timelessness of life lived through generations, so the survivors' thoughts and actions give us a shocking realization of what an individual death means. We are forced to look upon the Prince's death ultimately in the way we regard the death of any individual, including the death of the reader himself. For an individual death is always survived by the awareness of others even though its suffocation cuts off all events for the one who dies. From one point of view, therefore, death is a finality; from another, it is but a succeeded event. This is true in the world of literature as it is true in life. How this inevitable continuation of consciousness is handled in literature determines to a large extent the kind of work that is produced.2

Lampedusa's treatment of time determines the kind of novel he writes; he has removed any possibility of tragedy in the traditional sense. That is to say, the tragedy of reversal and recognition, in which necessity is realized by means of a plot with a beginning, middle, and end, has been deemed inappropriate precisely because in this case the work is a historical novel in the best sense, i.e., in the sense explained above of a novel that takes the self and the polity as mutually interacting. For the tragedy of reversal and recognition, inevitability must be realized in the actions of the hero; in The Leopard it exists for the hero, to be sure, not in his actions.

2 See the Appendix, which suggests continuities between La Chartreuse de Parme5 and The Leopard.
but rather in the principles of nature and of history. The Prince's expanding awareness of inevitable cosmic and historical processes constitutes a central theme of the novel. This, then, I suggest, is a tragedy, but not a tragedy of reversal and recognition; it is rather a tragedy of suffering.

Aristotle, with his usual thoroughness was careful to distinguish this kind of tragedy from that of reversal and recognition, of character, and of the spectacular:

There are four types of tragedy, the same number as the elements we mentioned earlier: the complex tragedy, in which reversal and recognition are the whole drama; the tragedy of suffering ...; the tragedy of character ...; and fourth, the spectacular tragedy ...

(Poetics, Ch. 18, 1455b32-1456a5.)

The tragedy of suffering, or, as I prefer to call it, the tragedy of endurance and decline, exhibits inevitability in a different way from the tragedy of complex action. The inevitability derives from forces clearly distinct from the protagonist's will and intention, and therefore a distinctive literary form is allowable—perhaps the literary form is required by plot structure. One of the liberties this kind of plot permits is to be found in the coda at the end of the novel in which we learn what happens after the Prince's death. This structural peculiarity is a function of the tragic subject. In contrast, a tragedy of reversal and recognition cannot allow itself the excess of an afterthought, a literary coda. The structural boundaries of the tragedy of suffering are, in this case, established quite differently from those imposed by reversal and recognition, and these differences are in themselves an interesting problem for inquiry that I cannot pursue here.

The tragedy of endurance and decline has its rules and its limitations just as does the tragedy of reversal and recognition. One of its problems is to show that the suffering self is a function of a larger order, which I will call the political; thus the subject of the tragedy of suffering, most broadly stated, is the relation of soul states to history. Their interdependence is one of the themes of The Leopard. Beneath the accidents of time, there is a constancy of the self in its forms and developmental phases, just as there is a constancy in the forms and progressions of the state. Here the state is Sicily, whose spirit survives in all the political orders impressed upon her.
Lampedusa's technique for bringing together the self and the state is the great house of Donnafugata, which stands at once as ancestral and intimately personal history for the Prince. Through the house this novel establishes parities of self and reality which define what the characters are. Donnafugata, its hidden rooms revealing the inner lives of past generations, especially their religious and erotic sufferings, its muteness symbolizing the inevitability of death, first establishes parity between the Prince and the generations of his family; secondly, between the family and the history of the state of Sicily; finally, Donnafugata is the link between the human and the governing rhythm of the cosmic order.

From the observatory of his house, the Prince searches for the source of order and inevitability in the stars. The flux of daily experience hides the orders of life from us, but when we recognize heavenly constancies we begin to suspect, as the Prince does, that all of nature, including our own seemingly chaotic experience, is orderly and ultimately understandable as well. The heavens he studies with scientific detachment help him to see himself; yet his awareness of an analogy between the cosmic order and human life does not lead him to postulate a Dantian universe presided over by a personal eminence; rather, it leads him to reaffirm the order of life that Sicily and his family seem naturally to foster, an order of totemic scientific naturalism indigenous to the pagan past. The conflict within the Prince and his Sicily is powerfully stated at the very beginning of the book where, following the Catholic service,

The divinities frescoed on the ceiling awoke. The troops of Tritons and Dryads, hurtling across from hill and sea amid clouds of cyclamen pink toward a transfigured Conca d'Oro, and bent on glorifying the House of Salina, seemed suddenly so overwhelmed with exaltation as to discard the most elementary rules of perspective; meanwhile the major Gods and Goddesses, the Princes among Gods, thunderous Jove and frowning Mars and languid Venus, had already preceded the mob of minor deities and were amiably supporting the blue armorial shield of the Leopard. (p. 16)

Out of the pagan past the Prince of Salina plucks his armorial identity, a totem beast boastfully representing those qualities the Prince would find in himself, ruthlessness, power, and wiliness. None of the Prince's fellow "beasts" has his nobility, and none who come after him can command the esteem he enjoys. "We were
the Leopards, the Lions, " says Don Fabrizio; "those who will take our place will be little jackals, hyenas; and the whole lot of us, Leopards, jackals, and sheep, we'll all go on thinking ourselves the salt of the earth." (p. 214)

When the story opens, Fabrizio is the last noble animal isolated on an island of lesser beasts. Here is a fine comical possibility exploited throughout the novel. For example, as the Prince watches the women at a ball he felt like a keeper in a zoo set to look after a hundred female monkeys; he expected at any moment to see them clamber up the chandeliers and hang by their tails, swinging to and fro, showing off their behinds and loosing a stream of nuts, shrieks, and grins at pacific visitors below. (p. 255)

The dancing men remind him "of crows veering to and fro above lost valleys in search of putrid prey." (p. 258)

But the identification with animals is not simply a metaphorical issue in the book; it grows out of a natural condition of life in the tradition the Prince represents, for he lives close to the wild animals he both nurtures and hunts:

It was a wild rabbit; its dun-colored coat had not been able to save it. Horrible wounds lacerated snout and chest. Don Fabrizio found himself stared at by big black eyes soon overlaid by a glaucous veil; they were looking at him with no reproof, but full of tortured amazement at the whole order of things; the velvety ears were already cold, the vigorous paws contracting in rhythm, still-living symbols of useless flight; the animal had died tortured by anxious hopes of salvation, imagining it could still escape when it was already caught, just like so many human beings. (p. 123)

The dying rabbit is at least offered a moment of compassion, but what of the men everywhere dying for the King, or for the new Italy? Don Fabrizio recalls that a dead soldier was found in the garden of his house in Palermo. The mutilated body fills him with disgust and anxiety: "But the image of that gutted corpse often recurred, as if asking to be given peace in the only possible way the Prince could give it: by justifying the last agony on grounds of general necessity." (p. 22) The Prince can give no such justification in the terms that come lightly to the lips of his contemporaries: one dies for the King, an ideal, for duty. Dying is more mysterious than that, and it is his search after the mystery of death
which leads Don Fabrizio on his daily hunt. For hunting and stargazing are like activities inquiring into the ways of nature. Hunting, as Machiavelli points out, is the physical counterpart to the mind's search for understanding.

On his hunting expeditions the Prince is accompanied by his dog Bendicò, a central "character" of the story, for Bendicò opens the book and closes it. He brings life and vigor into the deadening routine of prayers; he is the last image of the Salina house:

As the carcass was dragged off, the glass eyes stared at her with the humble reproach of things that are thrown away, that are being annulled. A few minutes later what remained of Bendicò was flung into a corner of the courtyard visited every day by the dustman. During the flight down from the window his form recomposed itself for an instant; in the air one could have seen dancing a quadruped with long whiskers, and its right foreleg seemed to be raised in imprecation. Then all found peace in a heap of livid dust. (p. 320)

Bendicò's end simply reaffirms a quality of animal life that allows the novel to treat its central theme of death the more fully, for in their dumbness animals are like death, and in their closeness to us they are a sometimes comforting, more often disquieting, reminder of our own mortality.

But there is a crucial difference between the animal and man, a difference simply but relevantly stated by Wordsworth in "The Fountain":

The blackbird amid leafy trees,
The lark above the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.
With Nature never do they wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free:
But we are pressed by heavy laws;
And often, glad no more,
We wear a face of joy because
We have been glad of yore.

Because Bendicò is an animal, lives in a bestial time parenthesis, the author can use him to make ironic comments on the relation...
of a living form to its fate. Bendicò, in grotesque literalness, survives death—indeed he remains with the House of Salina long after the Prince is gone, but the dog's presence is a stuffed one, and his end but trash.

Bendicò helps us to see another aspect of our lives more clearly: In Sicily particularly, because of its ambivalence of pagan and modern, the human finds it hard to realize and assert itself above the animal conditions of life. No matter how civilized a man may be—the Prince is, among his family and his countrymen, most civilized—what is human in him must suffer the coercion of the bestial.

One way to cope with this force in the self is to exercise one's animal compulsion in adversary relationships; but the Prince cannot find one among his peers able to meet his physical and intellectual powers. Therefore he is lonely, forced to pit himself against the only forces that at all come up to him: rude nature and death. The Leopard has not the objects of prey upon which to exercise his potency; on an island of fowls and jackals, he is alone. His physical and intellectual powers untested, the Prince lives as if the ordinary world is vulgar and witless. The best he can do is sharpen his manners on his family and his yokel tenants; his intellect seeks its match in the totally otherworldly pursuit of astronomy. The consequence for the Prince is sad, and herein lies one of the grounds for asserting that this is a tragedy of suffering. In both manners and intellect, the Prince is less impressive and developed than he might be were there a social and intellectual world worthy of his talents.

The Prince cannot help but misunderstand himself in this setting, and the story makes clear the extent to which the man Don Fabrizio is misled, almost distorted, one might say, by the impoverishment of his realm. When two British naval officers ask Don Fabrizio what the Garibaldini hope to accomplish, he answers (in English): "They are coming to teach us good manners, but they won't succeed, because we are gods." 3

The Prince's comment on himself is at once true and filled with misunderstanding, for he has indeed manners and a godlike mien,

3 There is a curious distortion here in the English translation of the book. This sentence, in English in the original, comes out in the translation as "because we think we are gods." [emphasis added] I believe the grammatical simplicity and sureness of "because we are gods" are intended.
but they are absolutely of no account in affecting political events. His misapprehension follows from his belief that a man ought not care to affect events, that the best for an individual is understanding. And yet his purpose in understanding is, covertly, to be able to control events. The Prince is not aware, but we are aware, of the manifest and latent wishes he expresses.

Manifestly, the Prince has his escape and his superior in the heavens, for they in their simple intelligibility and might are worthy of a person's total yielding of himself.

The soul of the Prince yearned out toward them, toward the intangible, the unreachable, which gave joy without being able to ask for anything in return; as many other times, he tried to imagine himself in those icy reaches, a pure intellect armed with a notebook for calculations: difficult calculations, but ones which would always work out. "They're the only really genuine, the only really decent being," (Esse sono le sole pure, le sole persone perbene.) thought he, in his worldly formulae. (p. 101)

The escape and pleasure afforded by astronomical calculation, the feeling of power derived from observing the stars "docile to his calculations, just the contrary to human beings," is an activity of sublimation very like death. The Prince thinks,

Let's leave the Bendicòs down there running after rustic prey, and the cooks' knives chopping the flesh of innocent beasts. Above this observatory the bluster of the one and the blood of the other merge into tranquil harmony. The real problem is how to go on living this life of the spirit in its most sublimated moments (momenti piu sublimati), those moments that are most like death. (p. 54)

Yet the stars are not wholly independent of human affairs; there must be a meaningful relationship between human caprice and cosmic order. The fact of a mirroring is suggested in the names of two women—the Prince's wife, Stella, and Tancredi's fiancée, Angelica. The astronomical order is somehow linked with the sensual world of love. Love and death are related, and to discover how they are related is the truth pursued by the Prince.

Crudely stated, the answer the Prince finds is that death unites the woman of earthly longing with the woman of heavenly aspiration, the two Aphrodites of whom Plato speaks in the Symposium. In terms of the life of the Prince, this means that in death he is able at last to unite sensuality and intellect, (the seemingly
contradictory aspects of the self) with the apparent inconsistency of feminine qualities, for women are at once attractive and troublesome, promising peace but bringing more often restlessness and dissatisfaction. Only in death does a woman fulfill the promise of peaceful sensuality. In the treatment of this difficult theme Lampedusa combines two traditions, one Romantically poetic, the other introspectively psychological. Romantically, the theme finds its purest expression in Keat's "Bright Star," which brings love, death, and heavenly power into one grand gratification completing and closing a life.

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleeping Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel forever its soft fall and swell,
Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

I believe it is this poetic statement which best opens up to us the meaning of Don Fabrizio's final vision, the moving description of which closes Chapter 7.

II

Yet this is not the source of Lampedusa's theme, for the treatment he accords it is obviously dependent upon another, far less poetic inquiry, part of Freud's speculation on love and death. The final revelation of the Prince's character grows out of a somewhat unsatisfactory, but deeply insightful essay written by Freud in 1913, "The Theme of the Three Caskets." Here Freud explores a recurrent literary situation: the choice by a man of one of three women. Examples are to be found in myth (e.g. Paris' choice of Aphrodite), in fairy tales, and in literature, especially in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*. In all the examples cited by Freud, one pattern emerges: The fairest, the truest,
the most desirable is the youngest. Yet choosing her and possessing her is fraught with difficulties. Success in settling the selection brings with it apparent happiness, but often death as well. The significance Freud finds in the theme is that it unites the preoccupation of men with love and death through depicting the three women in the life of every man, the mother, the mistress, and finally the woman who receives him at the end of his life, death or "Mother Earth." That the third is represented as the most desirable is a displacement; i.e., the successful suitor chooses the beautiful one because in this way the ugly inevitability of death is transformed into the freely chosen gratification of one's most intimate desires.

Lampedusa has self-consciously provided another literary instance of this theme, and yet has done it without forcing the didactic issue because the symbolism works within the world constructed and the characters' relationship to one another. That I trace the theme in this way does not imply I find the treatment artificial or superimposed gratuitously upon the story. Rather, the life and death of Don Fabrizio allows an alliance with an ancient and recurring literary subject because his life is defined by an ideological ambience peculiar to Sicily in whose past and present, in whose social and political affairs, we see the violent efforts to cope with an essentially pagan antiquity. It is against the pagan tradition and its conflict with Christianity that the Prince's relationship to women must be seen.

In his wife, Stella, and his daughter-in-law to be, Angelica, the Prince imagines that he might find the Venus of his rational deliberations and the Venus of erotic love respectively. But in his wife he finds repressed sensuality which subordinates pleasure to the restraint of Christian superstition; in his daughter-in-law, the appearance of unbridled sensuality without the ability to give or receive gratification. Although he longs for a relationship of complete superiority and subjection or, alternatively, of mutual dependence, he finds that there is no sympathetic understanding that would make either possible. These women suggest to the Prince the two sides of wifely decorum and sensuous abandon that a man might seek in his mistress.

They are possible objects of heavenly quest and earthly love, would they but fit the fantasy. They cannot, nor can a man ever find in fact the real counterparts of the ideal Uranian and Pandemian
Aphrodite. Every woman the Prince encounters—including his mistress, Mariannina—is something of a travesty on what he seeks among the stars and in his house. Only the one who comes for him at death realizes the perfect mating he longs for. That he happily departs with her is proof of his having lived as a pagan with the object of dying well. But much of his life was devoted to the proud, defensive belief that women of Christian charity might protect him and save him from death as if he were a child and they his mother.

This illusion of protection is sustained by his proprietary attitude towards the nuns of Donnafugata. Once a year, coincident with his return to his ancestral house, he visits the convent, access to which is allowed only to him and the King of Naples, a privilege of which "he was both jealous and proud." Towards the nuns, his feelings are those of a child toward the inviolable and consoling mother. They complete the trinity of women in the Prince's life, and indirectly suggest that King and Prince, i.e. father and son, share access to the mother.

His deeply complex involvement with woman, so carefully drawn in the novel, is contrasted with the cavalier, violating behavior of Tancredi who, we are told, was party to an assault on a convent. The Prince is shocked at this, not only because it is ungentlemanly, but also because it disturbs the delicate weighting of pagan and Christian so necessary to the preservation of Sicily. The Prince defends a tradition that depends upon the ambiguity of pagan and Christian conflict; Tancredi announces the new politics of revolutionary freedom. Tancredi's violations extend further than that, however, for he, with his fiancée, Angelica, makes an assault on the Prince's deepest self, the family past of the Salinas. Together the lovers penetrate the most secret rooms and corridors of Donnafugata, discovering hints of licentious perversions which excite their passion. The ancient house preserves the family unconscious; Tancredi would expose to light what has so far remained hidden. In this, his attempt at love, as in politics, he would deny ambiguity and complexity, seeking for the explicitly direct in libidinous expression. Therefore he and Angelica can find in their explorations no cease to their physical craving. And,

4 See pp. 99-100. Later we learn this to have been one of Tancredi's many fantasies.
indeed, the omniscient author tells us that they will never find satisfaction in love. But this is a way of saying, also, that the revolutionaries cannot create a world fit for men of possible greatness, like the Prince.

That he does have greatness near him is suggested by the fact that he can consider the new revolutionary state without feeling it denies him. He can examine the claims of the Garibaldini because they promise resolution of conflict; but he sees through the unreality of such a longing and naive social program. Yet his sense of political reality allows him to see that the new order must be given its place, just as paganism had to yield a place to the naivetés of Catholicism. Acceptance, however, is not acquiescence, and in this the Prince exhibits greatness of soul.

We are old, Chevalley, very old. For more than twenty-five centuries we've been bearing the weight of a superb and heterogeneous civilization, all from outside, none made by ourselves, none that we could call our own. …

Sleep, my dear Chevalley, sleep, that is what Sicilians want, and they will always hate anyone who tries to wake them, even in order to bring them the most wonderful of gifts; and I must say, between ourselves, I have strong doubts whether the new Kingdom will have many gifts for us in its luggage. All Sicilian expression, even the most violent, is really wish-fulfillment (oniriche): our sensuality is a hankering for oblivion, our shooting and knifing a hankering for death; our laziness, our spiced and drugged sherbets, a hankering for voluptuous immobility, that is, for death, again; our meditative air is that of a void wanting to scrutinize the enigmas of nirvana. (pp. 205-206)

With his sense of the past, and the eternal indifference of the true pagan to "progress" and the power of law to rule, [Chevalley, a bureaucratic friend, says, "But, Prince, the Senate is the High Chamber of the Kingdom! In it the flower of Italy's politicians (uomini politici italiani), chosen by the wisdom of the Sovereign, will examine, discuss, approve, or disapprove the laws proposed by the Government for the progress of the country; it functions at the same time as spur and as brake: it incites good actions and prevents bad ones." (p. 203)] the Prince can recommend to his peasants that they vote for the unification, though they in their atavistic shrewdness believe he is insincere. What does it matter if one or another rules? The Prince is far more interested in the stars than in states, more committed to death than to power. He suggests
that Don Calogero, one far beneath him in rank, be named to the Senate.

The Prince is able to accept the modern renovation, just as, at some distant
time, an ancestor of his was able to accept the proclaimed regeneration of
Christianity. The Prince inherited from that compromise his duties to the
church, which he meets in full; he supports Father Pirrone as his confessor
and spiritual guide, but without conviction; and for his part Father Pirrone
recognizes the ultimate hopelessness of his effort to "save" the Prince. He
sees that the Prince belongs to "a class difficult to suppress because it's in
continual renewal and because if needs be it can die well, that is it can throw
out a seed at the moment of death." (p. 230). The church has found no more
than toleration in the noble families, and Father Pirrone cannot triumph over
the stars.

During those moments of abstraction he seemed more intimately
absolved, in the sense of being linked anew with the universe, than
by any blessing of Father Pirrone. For half an hour that morning the
gods of the ceilings and the monkeys on the walls were again put to
silence. But in the drawing room no one noticed.

No one noticed because the others have lost the sense of the pagan past that
haunts the Prince. But the Prince's house is dedicated to the survival of the
pagan world.

No sooner does the afternoon prayer end than:

The divinities frescoed on the ceiling awoke. The troops of Tritons
and Dryads, hurtling across from hill and sea amid clouds of
cyclamen pink towards a transfigured Conca d'Oro, and bent on
glorifying the House of Salina, seemed suddenly so overwhelmed
with exaltation as to discard the most elementary rules of
perspective; meanwhile the major Gods and Goddesses, the Princes
among gods, thunderous Jove and frowning Mars and languid
Venus, had already preceded the mob of minor deities and were
amiably supporting the blue armorial shield of the Leopard. They
knew that for the next twenty-three and a half hours they would be
lords of the villa once again. On the walls the monkeys went back
to pulling faces at the cockatoos. (p. 16)

The Prince and the Priest are each effective in his own world, guiding their
families, settling disputes, acting as lawmakers. But between them there can
be only the tie of a modest friendship, which survives the strained
relationship of sponsor and spiritual adviser. Whatever conflicts there are
between the first and second estates have been mitigated by years of living
together. Yet that
cannot survive the Risorgimento, which will strike at the foundation not only of the nobility springing from the pagan world, but also at the church. To preserve itself after the Risorgimento, the nobility must become allied with the new monied class, as Tancredi does with Angelica, joining the Salinas to the Calogeros; and the church must become bureaucratic. Each lapses into its more primitive self: the family of Salina into erotic paganism, venerating false relics and dubious paintings in a hideously decorated chapel; the church into smug literalism. Under the scrutiny of a young priest, trained in the Vatican School of Paleography, the relics collected by the surviving daughters of the Prince are declared fakes.

But the meddlesome interest of the church in the private devotions of the Salinas is not hurtful to the three old princesses; the effect of social change is seen in the personal suffering it causes. More disturbing than the enforced renovation and reconsecration of the chapel is the past that the censure awakens for Concetta, who so long ago hoped to marry Tancredi.

The concluding chapter of the book, taking place twenty-two years after the death of the Prince, carries us back to the vital moments of a family, now no more than dim memories distorted by wishes and unfulfilled desires. A dominant purpose of the story is here realized; for we see the impotence of the past in setting an enduring pattern for the future, yet recognize the staying power and print of the past on the reflections and memories of the individuals who have lived through. What really happened in those days when the Salina family was at Donnafugata? What really moved the Prince to deny Tancredi entrance to the convent? What was Tancredi's feeling towards Concetta? What does a man seek in revolution and in love?

Nowhere has truth so short a life as in Sicily; a fact has scarcely happened five minutes before its genuine kernel has vanished, been camouflaged, embellished, disfigured, squashed, annihilated by imagination and self-interest; shame, fear, generosity, malice, opportunism, charity, all the passions, good as well as evil, fling themselves onto the fact and tear it to pieces; very soon it has vanished altogether. And poor Concetta was hoping to find the truth of feelings that had never been expressed but only glimpsed half a century before! The truth no longer existed. Precarious fact, though, had been replaced by irrefutable pain. (p. 314)
There is in all human life the tragic conflict between the self and the larger events of which it is a part. What really was "the Risorgimento"? How can we understand it? Only through those who were part of it. But what was it to them?—not a historical period summed up in a paragraph, but part of a life endured, part of a reality lived through and coped with, the focus of reason's cunning, the ground of instinct's conditioning. The "truth" about the past is to be found in the persons who lived it; yet their selves are forever hidden from us, only possibly reconstructed through fiction. Outwardly, in historical statements proper, what is the difference between a society in which the peasants serve the Prince, or the Prince serves the peasants? Either way, independent feudalism or bureaucratic statism, the historical description hides the suffering selves.

The key to understanding changes such as the Risorgimento is in the nature of the persons who submitted and suffered. Yet they elude us unless they can be given life in art. Of the many art forms in which this possibility might be realized, the so-called historical novel is peculiar for it permits a revivifying that no other literary form can realize, the reciprocal relationship of the self and the state, or, in Plato's terms, the interdependence of souls and constitutions. History, Lampedusa wants us to see, is a succession of soul-states.

This theme, repeated again and again in the scenes of encounter between the Prince and those who act or would act in the political world, leads inevitably to the conclusion drawn by the Prince: There is no political role for him, because his person and the new state cannot be coordinate. When he is asked to serve as a Senator, the Prince declares his incompetence and, as he talks, breaks the cross upon the little model of St. Peter's, a gesture that conveys the impotence of an institution as a coordinate decline to his own. In historical terms, there is never the perishing of a self without the perishing of a political counterpart; never the passing of an institution without the destruction of persons. The era of manners has come to an end. We begin to see how much is contained in that single term manners. But the polity and soul-type to succeed is already on the scene, in the persons of Tancredi and Angelica. They shall be politically potent, the story seems to say, in proportion as they are impotent between themselves, while in the life of the Prince, political power is directly related to his success in intimate relationships.
Looked at in the light of a Platonic theory of psuche-politeia, the historical novel becomes an interesting and somewhat troublesome genre. Ordinarily, what we think of as the historical novel reconstructs history as events; it is a form of melodrama. But the historical novel realized in its capacity as a way to understand human action, is far different, recreating the historical by means of the personal. This is the great discovery of Stendhal, and the reason why, I believe, The Leopard is so close to The Charterhouse of Parma in its emphasis not only on the essential subjectivity of historical events, but in its theory of how the past is to be recaptured.5

In The Leopard, then, the changes that occurred in Sicily, to which we give the empty name Risorgimento, begin to take on the qualities of persons, and the events which we think of as "historical" are seen to be reorganizations of personal qualities—if we want to be Platonic, we say that one soul-type is succeeded by another soul-type.

This treatment of change is brought out clearly in Chapter 6, "Going to a Ball," for here two generations meet and are seen in their stark contrast: fading ancestral tradition succeeded by waxing revolutionary progress. Everything in the scene is decadent: the setting of the old house, the effort to perpetuate a social milieu now dead, the remnants of the aristocracy:

... in recent years the consequence of the frequent marriages between cousins due to sexual lethargy and territorial calculations, of the dearth of proteins and overabundance of starch in the food, of the total lack of fresh air and movement, had filled the drawing rooms with a mob of girls incredibly short, unsuitably dark, unbearably giggly. (p. 255)

This is not only unreal to the Prince ["The crowd of dancers, among whom he could count so many near to him in blood if not in heart, began to seem unreal, made up of that material from which are woven lapsed memories, more elusive than the stuff of disturbing dreams"], but it suddenly becomes shockingly anachronistic to us:

From the ceiling the gods, reclining on gilded couches, gazed down smiling and inexorable as a summer sky. They thought themselves

5 This may be a clue to the bestowing of the name Fabrizio upon the Prince. (See Appendix.)
eternal; but a bomb manufactured in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was
to prove the contrary in 1943. (p. 258)

Lampedusa here has worked another trick of historical omniscience which
takes The Leopard beyond anything Stendhal would have thought appropriate,
although we may find the innovation in poor taste. The point, I think, is to
force upon us the radical nature of the political and psychic change which
occurred in the proper time of historical narration, by jumping its limitations
to our own violence, our own passively accepted destruction. We are the
descendants of those unlovely creatures upon whom the Prince looks with
disgust.

The revulsion the Prince feels, and presumably the revulsion we may feel
towards ourselves as we recognize ourselves, is soothe by the consolation
of human mortality. The Prince recalls the little procession, seen on the way
to the ball, of a priest and an acolyte, ringing the bell of death as they go to
bestow the Last Sacrament on a dying man. All will come to this. At the
thought the Prince is calmed, for, "when all was said and done, his own death
would in the first place mean that of the whole world." (p. 261) The death of
a man is always, whatever the political condition of his day, the end of the
world.

Is the Prince's death any more a finality now, now that his family in his
form shall not survive? Is not every Duke of Salina the last one, in his death?
However much the Duke loves Donnafugata, it disappears with him, though
the residue of dusty rooms, so intimately searched by Tancredi and Angelica,
will yield up their obscene impressions to others. Whatever Donnafugata is to
the Prince, we see that it is far different to his heirs. To each the past is
possessed in the exploration of it, but to each, what is apprehended differs.
This is the hard necessity of death: that the world ends with oneself, that the
seeming permanence of history is an illusion. When the Prince recognizes this
—and the novel exhibits to us his coming to this recognition—he is, as much
as any man ever is, ready for death.

Within the flux of social change, the Prince discerns a necessity as hard as
that of the heavens; his awareness of the unpredictable necessity of the earthly
is joined to his awe in the predictable necessity of the heavens. Heretofore,
the Prince has regarded the heavens as peculiarly "his" realm, for we are told,
"In his mind,
now, pride and mathematical analysis were so linked as to give him an illusion that the stars obeyed his calculations too (as in fact they seemed to be doing) …" (p. 19). Consequently, he loves them:

The soul of the Prince yearned out toward them, toward the intangible, the unreachable, which gave joy without being able to ask for anything in return; as many other times he tried to imagine himself in those icy reaches, a pure intellect armed with a notebook for calculations: difficult calculations, but ones which would always work out. "They're the only really genuine, the only really decent beings," thought he, in his worldly formulae. (p. 101)

While he has lived with the happy illusion that somehow the stars obey him, though he knows they do not, he has until recently lived with the belief that the terrestrial order does obey him, for he is the Prince whose domains are his by immemorial right. However, where he is supposed in fact to govern he is least puissant. Growing old, approaching death, he realizes that the earthly realm is no more his to rule in accordance with his will than the heavenly; both obey laws beyond human desire. The Prince ends his life more keenly, self-consciously aware of the necessities in both earth and heaven.

It is this recognition which brings him before us as possibly a tragic figure. Although not tragic in the sense of the hero of reversal and recognition, he is tragic in the sense already stated, of that kind of tragedy we find more often—the tragedy of suffering. Pathos marks every aspect of the Prince's actions, for he is aloof, remote, removed: Events are known through his reaction to them rather than through an effort to define the events themselves. Of course, this is part of Lampedusa's commitment to a vision of history that makes reversal and recognition in the historical context beyond the novel's grasp. What comes thereby centrally within the novel's grasp is the subject of dying.

The necessity of death enters the Prince's awareness with his realization that he commands little, and is subject to the necessity of unpredictable forces. The bond of affection which the Prince would have forged with other persons is never possible for him; rather his affect is directed to nature, to animals, and to his own end. In this simple sense a tragedy of reversal and recognition is irrelevant to the story because, as Aristotle noted, that requires two persons between whom there is a bond of love or hate. The
Leopard, in its concentration on dying, forges the bond of affect between the hero and those impersonal, nonhuman aspects of reality to which he, like all living things, must succumb.

In this sense, then, it seems to me appropriate to speak of *The Leopard* as a philosophical novel, for its concerns are the relationship between human actions and nature. If this is a theme which has an established genre, as I believe it does, then we can evaluate Plato's comment in the *Laws* to the effect that philosophers would necessarily make the best tragedians; they might be writers of pathetic tragedy, but they could not sustain the vision of a Sophocles.

The necessities that make the Prince a hero of tragic suffering are not nobly met with by the other characters, who fall far below the Prince. Tancredi might have been a political leader, were he not lazy and passive, content with conferred power in a new order. Angelica might die for love, were she not sensually self-conscious, incapable of giving herself to another. Concetta might have realized the Salina potentiality for fineness, if she were not dominated by the past; she lives her life with the stuffed carcass of Bendicò in her room, preserving around her the false memories of having been wronged. Too late she realizes that "there had been no enemies, just one single adversary, herself; her future had been killed by her own impudence, by the rash Salina pride." (p. 313) She has had no time to live life because she has been unable to face death.

Only in the Prince is the man of contemplation strong enough not to be overwhelmed by the demands of scientific observation, and the man of natural appetite not overwhelmed by religious asceticism. These are characteristics that make him pathetically fit for the endurance of suffering. Unlike the hero of conventional tragedy, the pathetic hero must have a stability and inner power to persevere that sets him apart from other fragile persons, and from the weight of events. Pagan and empiricistic by nature, autocratic and domineering by fortune of birth, the Prince is able to cultivate manners. Thus protected, he can come to know himself. There is here a "moral" as urgent as that we associate with the more shocking tragedy of reversal and recognition.

The proper mis-en-scène of the tragedy of suffering is history, and it may be that the historical novel is the only genre to perpetuate this tragic possibility. Whether this be so or not, the tragedy of suffering in historical contexts such as those of *The Leopard*
shows us important truths about the past and the future as it relates to our lives.

The past can exercise upon us a charm, promising peace and security, while the future threatens with its dangers and uncertainties. Being always next to the future, we must try to give it form and meaning, and one way of doing this is to make it the harbinger of better times. In fact, however, the future holds our death; no matter how we promise ourselves the ease of betterment, we fear the future. Thus we turn once again towards the past, endowing it with all the grace, charm, unreal felicity we would find in the future. The human longing to possess the past in all its specificity and reality is in fact the impossible godlike demand to know the future. Only in art can we join nostalgia and omniscience; the tragedy of suffering, in the context of history, is this strange creation. Human longing to transcend the bounds of historical accident is realized in the acceptance of death, for to learn how to die one must honor the past for its qualities of life, and yet know that these are intensely, inevitably private. The tragedy of suffering then is, unlike other kinds of tragedy, sadly solipsistic: Its private visions are its only realities:

Suddenly amid the group appeared a young woman, slim, in brown travelling dress and wide bustle, with a straw hat trimmed by a speckled veil which could not hide the sly charm of her face. She slid a little suede-gloved hand between one elbow and another of the weeping kneelers, apologized, drew closer. It was she, the creature forever yearned for, coming to fetch him; strange that one so young should yield to him; the time for the train's departure must be very close. When she was face to face with him she raised her veil, and there, modest, but ready to be possessed, she looked lovelier than she ever had when glimpsed in stellar space. (p. 292)

The corollary to Freud's assertion that in literature we still find people who know how to die, is that in literature we may learn something of our death. In The Leopard we are presented with the fact that life is but a moment, "the tiny ray of light granted … between two shades, before the cradle, after the last spasms." (p. 259)

This is a banal truth, to which all would assent, but the literary work in which the statement appears is at once a consolation and a shock; for through it we vault the blinding urgencies of our actual present to inhabit, for a moment, the wider necessities of the
past and future of the Salina house. We see in the Prince's life the spindle of necessity and the consequences of choice. This vision, which lasts only as long as the book, cannot endure the importunate moments of everyday life. Back in our time-coerced lives where the future threatens, we lose the value of death because we fear it, while in the novel that denies the usual temporal order, we see that to deny time is to make death a part of life and thereby to confer upon life the only survival possible. This is to render life art-like, and that Lampedusa has done. In this way the literary arts survive modernity, which dealt an almost fatal blow to story in denying the stable truthfulness of the past.

APPENDIX

I have puzzled a good bit over the similarity between the names Don Fabrizio in The Leopard and Fabrizio (Fabrice) in Stendhal's La Chartreuse de Parme. I cannot assert that there is a dependency of Lampedusa's Prince upon Stendhal's character, but they certainly inhabit the same fictional space, and I have found making comparisons meaningful. For what it is worth, then, I shall note a few interesting similarities. They lead me to a final point about Don Fabrizio as a literary creation.

The emphasis in both novels is upon what we term "character," and Stendhal has made note of what he understands by that term in words that are relevant to Don Fabrizio as well as to Fabrice del Dongo: "J'appelle caractère d'un homme sa manière habituelle d'aller à la chasse du bonheur, en termes plus claires, mais moins qualificatifs, l'ensemble de ses habitudes morales." 5 So considered, both characters are "determined" by their relationship to religion and the stars. On this ground a significant comparison takes shape, for while Don Fabrizio is an astronomer, to whom the stars are symbolic of order and freedom and ultimately extensions of his sense of power through willing, Fabrice del Dongo is superstitious, a religious person by vocation only, and, like the Sicilian Prince, forced to endure a Jesuitical interference.

Both Father Pirrone and Prior Blanes are as it were "confessors," but in the first case Pirrone stands for the limitations of the church, while in the second Blanes stands for the heresy of presage in astrology. Both heroes have an escape in the stars, but for Fabrice they foretell wonders; for Fabrizio they exhibit wholly impersonal rationality.

Astronomy in both cases is the counterweight to religion, leading in the first case to simple superstition, belief in signs, hopefulness about one's future, and in the second towards rationalism. Religion is undermined by both. But more, religion would direct attention away from the
self, and both heroes are deeply self-involved. Stendhal, with his usual sharpness, puts it this way: … religion ôte le courage de penser aux choses inaccoutumées, et defend surtout l'examen personnel, comme le plus enorme des péchés; c'est un pas vers le protestantisme." 5, Ch. 12.

So considered, the heroes are alike in their search into themselves and the effort each makes to establish traditional (i.e. ancient) virtues in the face of the modern affective and moral reevaluation of those qualities. Significantly, the world they live in is counterpoised against the mythic past and remnants of myth in the present. Fabrice would join it in his astrological naïveté; Fabrizio would reuse it for his achievement as the great-souled man. Both must fail because of modernity; each must fail in the inevitability of his death. Thus both novels could be said to concern themselves with the theme of personal integrity in the modern world.

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