LAMPEUSA'S _IL GATTOPARDO_: FIGURE AND TEMPORALITY IN AN HISTORICAL NOVEL  

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Through the progression of the fictional narrative _Il Gattopardo_ develops simultaneously a model of historical change and a critique of that model. Not content with this sleight of hand, Lampedusa presents both model and critique by means of the seemingly antithetical modes of allegory and irony, and more precisely through the interaction of the two. This heterogeneous mixture defines _Il Gattopardo_ as a certain type of modern narrative, at once insightful and mystified, in which the potentially disruptive functions of self-knowledge are contained only through the complementary and no less vigorous operations of _méconnaissance_.

The characters of the narrative may be arranged schematically in relation to the central figure of Don Fabrizio, noble and powerful, described even in his worst moments as “un uomo di scienza . . . uno scettico.”

The exemplary figure of the old guard is Sua Maestà, Ferdinando II (whose post-1848 military tactics earned him the epithet “King Bomba”) with an occasional supportive voice supplied by Don Fabrizio’s brother-in-law, “quel Mâlvica.” Between them, with the later and much more open addition of the “scimmiete” of the ball scene, these two figures represent a peculiarly Bourbon

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combination of tradition and gaucherie, emblems of a class still powerful but in obvious decline. Opposite them and still in the first rank stand the figures of Italy's political, economic, and cultural future, Sedara and Chevalley. Though Chevalley is of the lesser nobility, his piemontese origins and French name, as well as his spirited optimism, indicate the distance between him and Don Fabrizio. Sedara represents a class on the rise, replete with the self-assertiveness and narrow perspective traditionally attributed to the profiteers of economic flux. Indeed Chevalley, in his conference with Don Fabrizio, offers his opinion of his companions in Italy's future as "gente senza scrupolo e senza prospettive" (209), thus recalling a prior condemnation, voiced in surprisingly similar terms, of "la gente nova e i subiti guadagni." In concert with Sedara's sudden economic and social ascent (the second due to the coming marriage of Angelica to Tancredi) the "meriti" of Don Calogero are depicted somewhat more generously in the latter portions of the book (157 ff), although his markers are still by no means all positive, as the sight of exposed drawers at the conclusion of the ball scene amply demonstrates.

Beneath this first rank there stands a second, positioned as a mirror image of the primary group. These secondary characters are not unimportant to the narrative and for brief periods may even threaten to eclipse their primary counterparts, as Don Tumeo in the hunting scene in Chapter III or Don Pirrone in his return home in Chapter V. But even when they attain prominence these characters remain dependent, functioning only in implicit relation to their primary counterparts. It is true that there is a general difference in class as well, that the second rank also serves as a bridge between the elevated stratum of Don Fabrizio and its distant opposite, the pit of "Peppe Mnerda." But as important as these distinctions of class may be in historical terms, they are not categorically determinant in defining interrelations among the fictional characters, since the characters themselves represent clusters of abstract qualities, economic, political, cultural, and intellectual, rather than monistic social entities.

In this regard Don Pirrone may be seen as the secondary counterpart of Don Fabrizio, a type of surrogate ecclesiastical Principe who enters S. Cono just as triumphantly as Don Fabrizio had earlier returned to Donnafugata and who dispenses moral and

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3 Inferno, XVI, 73.
political advice with the same mixed success as his Excellency. Like Don Fabrizio before him, Padre Pirrone manages at his personal loss to effect a solution to the familial difficulties heightened by the vagaries of “amore” during “l’estate di San Martino” (176,232). And the Jesuit betrays his deep and somewhat elitist sense of kinship with the Prince in his lamentation of the all too rare solaces of life, “matematiche [e] teologia” (230). Finally, flanked on either side of Don Pirrone are Ciccio Tumeo, the hunting companion at Donnafugata, and Ciccio Ferrara, the bookkeeper of the house outside Palermo.

It should be noted that in psychological terms all these characters, as well as the many others supporting them, may be termed secondary in their essential lack of self-knowledge, Don Pirrone in his openly biased and occasionally facile simplifications, Tumeo in his unknowing “snobbism,” and Ferrara in his dissimulating “anima illusa e rapace di un liberale” (40). As we have seen in regard to the characters of the first rank, the narrative’s most condemnatory remarks are again reserved for the figure representing the rising capitalist class, Ciccio Ferrara, who unlike his counterparts Russo and Sedàra does not even act on his own initiative. Consequently, the verbal echo of Ferrara’s seemingly cordial, “Tristi tempi, Eccellenza,” (40) serves to separate him from his knowledgeably unmystified interlocutor just as the narrative ordering of Don Pirrone’s earlier “Brutti tempi, Eccellenza” had demonstrated the fundamental similarity between the thoughts of the priest and those of his restive companion on the dark road to Palermo (28). That the valued term thus becomes self-knowledge indicates the importance of this function both for Don Fabrizio as the dominant character and, no less significantly, for the entire text.

Moving back and forth across these three realms there is a central mediating figure, but it is not the Prince. Indeed, Don Fabrizio could serve as mediation in terms of knowledge and, at times, in terms of attitude, but he does not act—or more accurately, he refrains from action in the world of men. Moreover, at the same time that this faculty of vision allows him to see the world for what it is, it forever separates him from that world. He pays for this singular turn of mind in the unbridgable gap between himself and the villagers he wishes to counsel, who cannot distinguish between his “ragionamenti” and the expected “uscite ironiche” (124), as well as in the distance between himself and his social peers, who avoid him not
so much “per rispetto,” as he believes, “ma per timore” (256). And he pays physically in “quella congiuntivite cui era soggetto” (126). In concert with this narrative primacy of thought over deed, the events of the historical period, of the military, economic, and social turbulence of the Risorgimento, fall not within the narrative proper but in the interstices between segments. Rather than venturing outside his carefully delimited sphere, Don Fabrizio receives and interprets reports from emissaries of the world of time and change, some of which serve to make up the dialogical frame of narration (as, for example, those furnished by the King, Russo, Ciccio Tumeo, Chevalley, and Pallavicino). In this way, the narrative concentrates not on the historical world but on the play of consciousness within its central character, a figure twice removed from what he terms “i fatti” and fully at ease only when in the presence of those few who seem to demonstrate “un animo simile al suo” (288), or better, when left to himself and the pure feeling of Bendicò or the predictable abstraction of the stars. The novel is filled with the residua of history, with overt “realistic” references to event and personage. But as far as the narration is concerned the events of recorded history exist as pure exteriority, having vanished to leave only traces of themselves, reflected in the energy of the characters’ reactions and in the narrative’s abstract model of change.

The figure who does most to develop this model, the narrative’s mediating character, is Don Fabrizio’s alter ego, his nephew Tancredi. It is Tancredi who first offers the seemingly circular formulation which has such an effect on Don Fabrizio and which every other major “Garibaldian” character, from Russo to Chevalley, serves to echo in some way: “Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi” (36). But of course this optimistic formulation, representing an apparently total resolution of change and stability, of flux and stasis, is not the sole position taken within the narrative. Paolo, Tumeo, Maria Stella, Concetta and others all openly refuse, at one point or another, to recognize either the necessity or the fact of change. It should be noted that their positions are undercut by emotional reactions to anterior perceptions of personal failing, just as even the purest optimism of the “garibaldini” is clearly buoyed by desire for adventure and/or profit. Don Fabrizio’s original response to the indications of change must be determined at least in part by his strong sense of class and tradition, by his feeling of consanguinity with those of the
"medesima risma" (260). By the period of Chapter I Don Fabrizio's vision has clearly set him off from "suo cognato Mâlvica . . . portavoce della folla degli amici" (18) as well as from the Bourbon royalty. But until Tancredi's expressions of optimism and his putative revolutionary actions Don Fabrizio has literally no way to turn. Though in many respects he regards himself as a man of "gusti moderni" (254), his position and interests seem to link him irrevocably to the forces of the past and to what Don Pirrone terms, perhaps too generously, the robust "memoria collettiva" of his class (224). In a way, then, Tancredi would seem to furnish an almost miraculous bridge back to the world, the mediation through which Don Fabrizio may at once retain the essence of his past and win the future. The following diagram might serve to clarify our conclusions up to this point, with the fading Bourbon past on one side, the energetic Garibaldian future on the other, and Don Fabrizio in the middle. The characters are divided into primary (upper) and secondary (lower) levels. The vertical arrows indicate social/political rise or fall, whether actual (solid) or potential (broken). The arrows angled across vertical sections represent the lines of greatest stress in terms of both class and individual character.

The incident of the "pesche forestiere" at the end of Chapter II provides a more specific frame of reference for these abstract relationships. When Tancredi encounters his uncle before the
fountain of Amphitrite and pretends to reprove him for lascivious interests (cf. 35), Don Fabrizio fears he wishes to broach the subject of Concetta, with its curious miasma of both love and death. But of Concetta Tancredi says nothing. Instead they examine the “pesche forestiere,” and Tancredi voices his approbation of his uncle in this alternate role of “agricola pius.” The next scene is the ceremonial dinner, during which the mere presence of Angelica is sufficient to arouse the natural interest of all the males, the Prince included, “vecchio cavallo da battaglia com’era” (91). At dinner Tancredi tells the story of the garibaldini’s entry into the convent and ventures the double entendre that proves so fascinating to Angelica and, in turn, so disturbing to Concetta. At the evening’s conclusion Don Fabrizio retreats to take a moment of solace alone with the stars and Bendicò, after which he can sleep: “Basta, dormiamoci su.”

On the next day comes the visit to the convent, no longer that of the tumultuous “garibaldini” and the future but rather that of Beata Corbèra, the Santo Spirito, and the past. In accordance with the letter of feudal privilege, and perhaps to make amends with Concetta (goddaughter of the deceased King Ferdinand), Tancredi requests permission to enter as a follower in the Prince’s retinue. At this point there is some confusion, as well as an especially caustic rebuke by Concetta, and the matter is dropped. The visit proceeds, and Tancredi disappears. The reader’s discovery in Chapter VIII that in terms of the narrative only one of these convents is “real” takes on crucial importance for subsequent interpretation, but for the moment it need not concern us.

The chapter concludes with Don Fabrizio’s vision of Tancredi delivering the ripened peaches to an unexpected destination. As in the scene by the fountain Tancredi is again dressed in dark blue, “il ‘colore della mia seduzione,’ ” and once more Don Fabrizio notes his step is “leggero come un gatto” (86, 103). What the Prince fancied in imagination his nephew accomplishes in deed, transporting the remarkable fruit where Don Fabrizio could not, or would not, go. As his uncle watches unseen behind the window, Tancredi moves along with the domestic at his back, deftly avoiding the narrative’s playfully constructed emblems of both the old guard (“monello spadaccino”) and the new (“piscia di mulo”), and at last gaining the suddenly respectable and no less figurative “porta di casa Sedàra.”

Several further comments should be made in regard to the implications this incident holds for the central characters. First, as a
mediating figure, Tancredi manages to maintain his position of energetic optimism through almost the entire text. He switches from disreputable “garibaldino” to soldier of the King, a new and perhaps different “Maestà” but royalty nonetheless, titular head of “l'esercito vero” (173). With Angelica he takes the voyage to “Cythera,” beyond the worldly limits of time and space and into the land of “desiderio perenne.” On their return to the “world of the living” (187) Tancredi appears certain not only of the joys of the future but also of the seigneurial privileges of the past, once again turning his uncle’s fancies of “lussuria atavica” (112) into virtual realization: “ed a lui parve davvero che in quei baci riprendesse possesso della Sicilia, della terra bella ed infida che i Falconieri avevano per secoli posseduta e che adesso, dopo una vana rivolta, si arrendersse di nuovo a lui, come ai suoi da sempre, fatta di delizie carnali e di raccolti dorati” (176; Italics mine).

Once more it should be noted that this is an extremist position, an important aspect of the narrative’s model but not that model’s sole affirmation, nor Don Fabrizio’s. Indeed, the Prince indicates repeatedly that the very fact of worldly change implies neither cyclical stability nor improvement but debasement: “e dopo sarà diverso, ma peggiore” (213). The Prince and his land may be caught up momentarily within the Vichian “flusso della storia universale” (211), but in response to Chevalley’s heartfelt exhortations to collaborate, Don Fabrizio offers only the traditional enigmas of the island, the timeless solace of “il sonno” and that of pure abstraction, “perché noi siamo dèi” (210).

For Don Fabrizio, then, his young nephew cannot finally represent the way back to the world. The bridge Tancredi constructs provides the material fortune and the feminine “bellezza” necessary to accompany his self-knowledge, personal energy, and familial tradition. But he has a further requisite attribute, youth and its concomitant optimism, that in very mundane terms both gives him the future and forever denies it to his uncle. Don Fabrizio, “a cavalcioni” between two worlds, remains to the last in the dilemma of “un uomo di scienza . . . uno scettico.” Or, as Paul de Man has written in an essay on allegory and irony:

> Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic. It can know this inauthenticity but it can never
overcome it. It can only restate and repeat it on an increasingly conscious level, but it remains endlessly caught in the impossibility of making this knowledge applicable to the empirical world.4

At this point it becomes important to distinguish Don Fabrizio from his figurative alter ego. This process of distinction is carried on within the text itself, as a counterpoint to the more continuous and forthright assertions of similarity, beginning with the same fountain scene we have already discussed: “Per la prima volta gli sembrò che un senso di rancore lo pungesse alla vista del ragazzo” (86). This splitting of the subject in regard to the functions of maturity and love serves to define both the figure of the Prince and that of Tancredi. It is not surprising, then, that the resolution of the Prince’s interior “rancore” is to be found neither in the barred world of his past nor in Chevalley’s future of Aristotelian potentiality, nor yet in Tancredi’s illusory mediation of youthful enthusiasm. The ironist’s knowledge that originally separates the Prince from the world continues to bar his re-entry to it, offering resolution only in the transcendent imagery of pure and timeless perfection, in the stars and in death.

In this way Venus and her promised “appuntamento” become the image not only of his later years but, as he comes to discover, of his entire existence. For she was always there, “sempre fedele, aspettava sempre don Fabrizio alle sue uscite mattutine, a Donnafugata prima della caccia, adesso dopo il ballo” (273). And these are also the terms of his final journey: “Giunta faccia a faccia con lui sollevò il velo, e così, pudica, ma pronta ad esser posseduta, gli apparve più bella di come mai l’avesse intravista negli spazi stellari” (291). As Tancredi’s optimistic formulation of worldly change had seemed to accomplish before, this image from a transcendent realm does resolve the apparent antinomies of flux and stasis, change and stability. However, for Don Fabrizio it is not the beginning of time, but its end.

As each image of the “real” world of “carcasses and blood” becomes resolved in another of death and so of time, Don Fabrizio moves not into the world but out of it. This progression is already under way by the narrative’s opening scenes, with the garden of the

dead soldier and Bendicò's carefree excavations among the fancied
"tumuli di smilzi giganti" (15). And the entire trip to the Prince's
favorite estate, to the garden world of "Donnafugata," is part of this
same process. Don Fabrizio can know this unbridgeable distance
between himself and the world of men and event, but he cannot
eliminate it. Any attempt to do so leads finally to the nausea of
inauthenticity, as fully sensible as that felt amidst the "stomachevole"
ambience of the Bourbon palace or the "scimmiette" of the ball
scene. And by the end he knows this, too. The dance with Angelica,
stage-managed by Tancredi, furnishes at the high point of the
narrative a moment of near union with a purified yet earthly
divinity, with what Ciccio Tumeo characterizes as "l'odore del
paradiso" (264). But the moment ends with the final and inevitable
sense of separation: "Solivogliono stare gli innamorati, o magari con
estranei; con anziani e, peggio che peggio, con parenti, mai"
(265-66). Now more than ever the stars, "le sole persone per bene,"
have come to represent Don Fabrizio's only possible "uscita di
sicurezza" (263).

There is, of course, another ironist at work within the text,
operating both through and beyond the youthful astuteness of
Tancredi and the aging skepticism of Don Fabrizio. Despite recent
criticism to the contrary, the narrator distinguishes himself from his
characters as well as from the fictional events of his narration, both
in terms of voice and knowledge. It is this essential narrative
difference which permits the narrator not only to present his
characters through the seemingly immediate style indirect libre but
also to regard them from an established distance, speaking in his
own voice detached from both character and event. Very often the
implicit judgments underlying this detachment appear synonymous
with those of Don Fabrizio himself; but this is not always so, and the
narrative attitudes toward all the central characters tend to become
more openly critical as the novel progresses (see especially the ball
scene, 264-65). Part of the effect of separation is achieved merely
through verbal self-identification, often implying knowledgeable
complicity with the cultural elements of the background ("come si
usa da noi," 107) or with the perspective of the implied reader ("il

5 For examples of this willful confusion between protagonist-narrator-author, see
especially: Gian Carlo Ferretti, Letteratura e ideologia. Bassani, Cassola, Pasolini (Roma:
padre del nostro Gesuita,” 217; “rincresce dirlo,” 92). This type of
verbal detachment fades as suddenly as it appears, thus
exemplifying the essentially “synchronic structure” of the ironic
intrusion. Yet in terms of the overall narrative, the ironic
knowledge that shapes the fundamental relationship between the
narrator and his own narration is not synchronic but continuous, as
we shall see.

Two further sources of peripheral distraction within the text can
be attributed to the status of Il Gattopardo as an historical novel. One
of these, emphasized in narrative theory by Kenneth Burke and
others, is simply the added detachment on the part of the reader
who knows the “real” results of historical change, and who is thus
constantly forced into a confusion between fictional and historical
setting as well as between fictional causation and historical result. In
this way, every evaluation of historical incident occurring within the
narrative serves the double function of drawing the willfully
mystified reader into the world of the fictional text and at the same
time forcing him to recognize his position of externality as
consummately knowledgeable observer.

The second source of “historical” distance is provided by the
narrator himself, in the repeated allusions of personages and events
falling outside the historical frame of the énoncé. These references,
such as those to Freud, Eisenstein, and the hydrogen discoveries of
World War II, are often scientific in nature and are thus of the type
Don Fabrizio himself might note. Again, these scattered references
serve the paradoxical function of linking the narrator (and through
him, the implied reader) to the attitudes and interests of the
dominant character at the same time that they establish a striking
distance from the temporal limits of his world, moving the narrator
ever closer to the “contemporary” and now clearly external world of
the implied author and reader. Through the play of apparent
immersion in the fictional world and knowledgeable separation
from it, the narrator defines the inevitable duplicity of his

6 de Man, op cit., p. 207. It is important to note as well the Stendhalian tone of the
cited passages.
7 See: Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, revised ed. (New York:
Vintage, 1957), pp. 320-21. Burke also notes the socio-cultural implications of this
intentional confusion.
8 That is, the author implied within and immediately behind the entire text,
“scrip teur, not ec rivain,” as Barthes has stated perhaps too succintly. See: “Écrire:
Verbe intransitif?” in The Structuralist Controversy, op. cit., p. 135.
relationship to his text, a relationship that is seemingly parallel to that established between Don Fabrizio and his ironist’s perception of “the world.” But these relationships are neither synonymous nor truly coincident, even in their fundamental duplicity. For through the further separation of the implied author not only from the énoncé but also from the process of énonciation, the self-identified figure of the narrator is forever barred from even the illusion of coincidence with the fictional character to whom he appears so similar in both attitude and knowledge.

Despite what we have said so far, it would be inaccurate to claim that Lampedusa’s novel relies exclusively on irony as its mode of presentation. Indeed, in many ways the apparently antithetical mode of allegory seems to dominate. The allegorical elements of the narrative appear from the very first pages, beginning with the frescoed images of the gods and including the figure of “il Gattopardo” itself. These mythological and zoomorphic representations occur within the consciousnesses of the principal characters as well as apart from them, in the occasional discursive sections during which the narrator speaks solely in his own voice. In structural terms these constant mythological associations, classical, Christian, semitic, and eastern, also serve as principles of diegetic organization for certain portions of the text. In this way, Tancredi’s appropriation of the reputedly magical “frutti . . . giallognoli” (86, 139) recalls Hercules’ theft in the garden of the Hesperides, just as the lovers’ withdrawal into the fabulous world of “desiderio perenne” recalls the ideal yet restricted consummation of Eros and Psyche.9

There is also a wealth of allegorical reference to more properly “literary” sources, including Aesop’s political fables (255), the Don Quixote, the “fuga di Angelica” (again a relationship that evokes desire only while not consummated), as well as clear references to Dante’s special perspectives on the historical degeneration embodied in the old man of Crete (79), the “aiola” of the transitory world (138), and the transcendent stars of eternity.10 Finally, the

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9 This episode furnishes a further parallel to The Chartreuse de Parme. Furthermore, in Stendhal’s work, according to de Man, the introduction of this particular allegorical allusion serves to thematize the insurmountable disjunction between Stendhal himself and his text (see: de Man, op. cit., pp. 208-09).

10 The four rivers could indicate the biblical creation as well (“adamitico,” p. 79). For Dante’s “aiuola” see: Paradiso, XXII and XXVII.
literary/legendary name of Tancredi and the mythological one of Fabrizio (fabbro: smith-Vulcan) tend to emphasize the active ability of the younger character as well as the essential ambiguity of the older. In this ambiguity, and through his own interior discourse, Don Fabrizio is ironically tied to and distinguished from that other figure so difficult of definition, initially “un cornuto” (57) and only afterwards the apparent victor: “Lui stesso aveva detto che i Salina sarebbero sempre rimasti i Salina. Aveva avuto torto. L’ultimo era lui. Quel Garibaldi, quel barbuto Vulcano aveva dopo tutto vinto” (286).

This mixture of active allegorical intertextuality and “realistic” presentation accounts for the ease with which seemingly mimetic details take on symbolic values of love and power within the narration, as we have seen, for example, at the conclusion of Tancredi’s “theft.” Indeed, history itself, in its factitiousness as an abstract model of change exterior to yet in some ways incorporated within the text, provides a link between the allegorical and mimetic functions, so that the passage of the reigns of the gods serves to parallel both the rhythmic changes of nature and the transfer of sovereignty between the two historical “Re” (46, 107). In this dependence upon anterior models, the mode of allegory tends to provide a source of depth and temporal duration in apparent opposition to the spontaneity of irony. Yet despite their seeming antinomy, the two modes in fact exist simultaneously within the text, in a relation not of opposition but of interaction.

Examination of the hunting scene at the beginning of Chapter III might clarify the nature of this process. The chapter begins with a seemingly objective description of seasonal change, a subject broached several times in the course of the narrative:

La pioggia era venuta, la pioggia era andata via; ed il sole era risalito sul trono come un re assoluto che, allontanato per una settimana dalle barricate dei sudditi, ritorna a regnare iracondo ma raffrenato da carte costituzionali. Il calore ristorava senza ardere, la luce era autoritaria ma lasciava sopravvivere i colori, e dalla terra rispuntavano trifogli e mentucce cautelose, sui volti diffidenti speranze (107; Italics mine).

Whether the background reference within the passage is to the previously mentioned “colpo di stato di Giove contro Saturno” (46)

or to the unsuccessful revolt of the Giants (which would correspond more precisely to the text's stated return of one King) is not of pressing importance, at least for the moment. Rather, the most significant aspect of the passage is the ease with which the natural, mythological, political, and historical associations are carried through. The fact of change is noted, but it is quickly mitigated by the return of monarchical stability. At the same time, political power is more closely restrained than before ("raffrenato") in the historical form of a "constitutional" monarchy. The Kingdom is unified and peaceful, with hope tempered only by caution, and there is room once more for "colori" and "trifogli" (thus picking up the image of Tancredi's now official "tricolore" of Chapter I, 36 et passim).

However, this unobtrusive process of allegorization is not the only mode of presentation within the chapter's introductory paragraphs. A few lines later, the narrator, now openly self-identifying, illustrates the results of the scarcity of game in the Sicilian landscape: "così come don Ciccio si reputava fortunato se a sera poteva sbattere sul tavolo un coniglio selvatico, il quale del resto veniva ipso facto promosso al grado di lepre, come si usa da noi." The metaphorical relation coniglio-lepre depends not on mythological or political reference but on the narrator's knowledge of Sicilian "usanzè." Furthermore, this is a coded body of custom in which the narrator himself shares ("da noi"). At the basis of the metaphor is a misrecognition, perhaps originally spontaneous, motivated either by hope or the self-deception of despair, but now conventionalized into formal, agreed upon practice (see, for example, the unremarked presence of "lepri" in the formal dinner scene of Chapter II, 93). Unlike the presentation of the previous paragraph, here the metaphorical relationship at the core of language is purposefully dissected ("ipso facto") by the knowledgeable narrator, who later, at least on this particular point, refuses further self-mystification ("Era un coniglio selvatico," 120). This theory of metaphor as a trope depending upon identity through transference is developed throughout the text, and here takes the form: error → lie → convention.¹² Such a clear statement or ironic self-knowledge on

¹² This is somewhat similar to Rousseau's theory of the origins of language, as well as to Vico's. See Paul de Man's discussion of Chapter III of "l'Essai sur l'origine des Langues" ("Que le premier langage dut être figuré," in which the relation "homme → géant" is discussed, with the intervening passion of fear occurring between perception and naming) in "Theory of Metaphor in Rousseau's Second Discourse," Studies in Romanticism, 12, No. 2 (1973), 475-98.
the part of the fictional narrator should logically abolish the confusion between referential and figurative discourse, thus rendering further allegorical presentations of the type of the previous paragraph impossible. Nonetheless, the narration does not cease, nor does the narrator desist in his balancing of the two modes of discourse openly coexistent within his text.

The continuation of the fictional presentation in the face of this stated narrative self-knowledge serves to indicate, on the part of the narrator, an instance of active méconnaissance. As such, it furnishes a structural parallel for the psychological reactions of Don Fabrizio. The Prince enters Donnafugata knowing, as Tancredi has stated, that in some ways change is inevitable, both in historical and personal terms. This incontrovertible process provides enough of a threat to Don Fabrizio’s most highly valued mental state, his “pur dubbia calma,” that he not only permits himself to be deceived but initially contributes to his own deception, thus assuring not only change but also debasement: “Ed il Principe, che aveva trovato Donnafugata immutata, venne invece trovato molto mutato lui, che mai prima avrebbe adoperato un modo di dire tanto cordiale; e da quel momento, invisibile, cominciò il declino del suo prestigio” (74).

This same process occurs when Don Fabrizio receives the news of Concetta’s youthful affections. The Prince strives to reduce his personal anxiety, arising in part from sudden awareness of his own inevitable “invecchiamento” (80), by following “la naturale tendenza che aveva a rimuovere ogni minaccia alla propria calma.” This is the same type of perceived threat which has at times led him as far as willful self-deception: “. . . gli aveva fatto trascurare l’osservazione del bagliore ferrigno che traversava l’occhio della ragazza quando le bizzarrie alle quali ubbidiva erano davvero troppo vessatorie” (82-83). The result of this particular disturbance, crucial to later developments within the narrative, is that Don Fabrizio first solves the problem in abstraction, within his own mind, and then goes to sleep (“e si appisolò,” (85). This is an instance of the intentional retreat into the calm of “un sonno che rassomigliava al nulla” (31) which punctuates Don Fabrizio’s reactions through the first three chapters (98, 118) and which, according to the Prince himself, defines the condition of the entire island (204).

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13 Simonetta Salvestroni notes a similar process of “amarezza—rasserenamento” as does Ferretti, though in much more general terms. See: Simonetta Salvestroni, *Tomasi di Lampedusa*, Il Castoro, diretto da Franco Mollia (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, Feb., 1973), pp. 68-69; and Ferretti, op. cit., p. 64.
In fact, this modus vivendi of eliminating noticeable difference between the past and the future is what permits Don Fabrizio to sleep, by virtue of its effective reduction of the anxiety arising from a prior perception. This is also the structural core of the méconnaissance which permits the confusion of Tancredi's original formulation of historical change as well as the blurring of distinction, in Chapter III's opening paragraph, between “absolute” and “constitutional” monarchy (a confusion heightened by the initially ambiguous “come”). The contingent effects of debasement remain suppressed from consciousness, to become fully recognized only later, if at all. As the non-recognition of a partially perceived fact, this process works to reduce the anxiety of the original perception, replacing the tension of difference with a transient state of fictional identity, leading to peace felt as a pleasure. This psychological combination of action and passivity, with its obvious Freudian overtones, is eventually thematized in the text by virtue of Don Pirrone's depiction of the universal human condition: “tutti noi, egualmente soggetti alla doppia servitù dell'amore e della morte” (p. 227).14 In purely formal terms the structure of the Prince's psychological méconnaissance is again that of metaphor itself, momentarily abolishing necessary difference through a false assertion of an identity which in turn threatens to become prolonged as convention. This process is equally essential to Don Fabrizio's mental functioning and to the completed form of the narrative as a fictional metaphor for historical “reality”. Similar to the narrative's coniglio-lepre model of transference, both méconnaissance and its linguistic counterpart arise from a passion (anxiety, fear, love, hope) that appears absolutely anterior but in fact results from a prior perception. As long as the structure's active antecedents remain hidden from view it continues to function, either by permitting a man's existence in the world or by allowing the continuation of the fictional text despite a certain amount of self-knowledge. However, as the pressure of awareness increases, or as the momentary disjunction of irony tends toward self-prolongation, the model itself threatens to deconstruct, vanishing in the cataclysm of self-knowledge. And this, as we shall see, is precisely what happens within the narrative of Il Gattopardo.

14 The basic theory of pleasure as the result of a reduction in anxiety is present as early as the Interpretation of Dreams (1900), though the fuller distinction of “Eros” and “Thanatos” does not occur until the later works. See: Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920).
But for the time being, of course, the narrative does not cease its fictional progression, nor does Don Fabrizio cease to utilize the forms of fiction and even those of “malafede” (52). Indeed, the Prince insists repeatedly upon the social necessity of “buone creanze” both before and after the opening of Chapter III. The same character capable of concise deconstruction of the figure of others’ naive “amore” (84 et passim) as well as of detecting the conventional deception at the heart of political “metaphor” (“512=512”), is equally subject to both the pleasures of abstract constructions and the very power of naming (“l’autentico Gattopardo”).

A crucial scene in this regard is the killing of the “coniglio selvatico” (120), alluded to previously:

Don Fabrizio si vide fissato da grandi ochi neri che, invasi rapidamente da un velo glauco lo guardavano senza rimprovero, ma che erano carichi di un dolore attonito rivolto contro tutto l’ordinamento delle cose; le orecchie vellutate erano già fredde, le zampette vigorose si contraevano in ritmo, simbolo sopravvissuto di una inutile fuga: l’animale moriva torturato da una ansiosa speranza di salvezza, immaginando di potere ancora cavarsela quando di già era ghermito, proprio come tanti uomini.

It may initially appear that the principal textual reference (“proprio come tanti uomini”) is directed toward the self-deluded and now fallen members of the pre-rebellion aristocracy (“Quel Màlvica! Era stato sempre un coniglio,” 56). However, intervening between Màlvica’s futile departure and the useless “fuga” of the hunters’ prey, there occurs yet another flight, that of Don Fabrizio himself: “il dilettto dei giorni di caccia era altrove, suddiviso in molti episodi minuti . . . nel fuggire, insomma” (107-8). And in the previously cited passage, the very symbol of “inutile fuga” is the rythmic contraction of the now grotesquely vigorous zampette.

As we have seen before, Don Fabrizio’s progressive movements, first to Donnafugata and then into the “immemoriale silenzio della Sicilia pastorale,” seem to lead him away from the world and from time itself: “Si era subito lontani da tutto, nello spazio e ancora di più nel tempo. Donnafugata con il suo palazzo e i suoi nuovi ricchi era appena a due miglia, ma sembrava sfiadita nel ricordo come quei paesaggi che talvolta si intravedono allo sbocco lontano di una galleria ferroviaria” (108). This flight occurs in the midst of, and at least partially in response to, the process that Don Fabrizio himself terms “la stupefacente accelerazione della storia.” In certain ways
this escape appears successful, utilizing the mediation of abstract image to annihilate the last traces of temporality ("sembra sbiadita nel ricordo come quei paesaggi che talvolta si intravedono... "). But in the terms of the narrative this very "fuga" from time and place occurs in time and in space. And even the artistry of Don Fabrizio's imagination does not succeed in permanently erasing "Donnafugata... e i suoi nuovi ricchi". Like the animals he chooses to hunt as a pastime, he is himself "incappato" in the "congiuntura sociale" of his time and of his class (12). Differing from them, as well as from "quel Mâlvica," Don Fabrizio both feels and recognizes the nature of his situation. In the succeeding portions of the narrative it is this combination of distinguishing self-knowledge and willful self-mystification which eventually separates him from the most compatible of his fellows. But the motivated méconnaissance in which he momentarily indulges, the perception of the Sicilian landscape as further removed in time than Donnafugata or even than "una utopia vagheggiata da un Platone rustico," is foredoomed both by its nature as a fiction and by its occurrence within the necessary progression of time.\(^{15}\) Just as the previous metaphorical expression of hope, "Grazie a Dio, mi sembra che tutto sia come al solito" (70), represented not only a wish but also an underlying anxiety based on prior perception of change, so Don Fabrizio's half recognized and half relished flight during the hunting scene represents the tension of the two times common to both narrative fiction and cognitive life, of isolated moment and continuing progression. At this point we may return to the basic image of the opening section of Chapter III, with its as yet indecisive mixture of departure/return, victor/vanquished, hunter/hunted, living/dead, now fully recognizable as a metaphor not only for flight and its perception but for time itself.

Before moving from the third chapter we should return for a moment to the allegorical confusion of the opening reference. As noted previously, the continuing use of mythological allusion, begun by the narrator and attributed to almost all the Sicilian characters as well, lends an aura of allegorical duration not only to the text as

\(^{15}\) Cf. Freud on the temporal play within the dreamer-dream relationship: "By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all leading us into the future. But this future, which the dreamer pictures as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into the perfect likeness of the past." The Interpretation of Dreams, tr. ed. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 660.
literary artifice but to the popular consciousness of the “gente” as well: “Venere brillava, chicco d’uva sbocciato, trasparente e umido, ma già sembrava di udire il rombo del carro solare che saliva l’erta sotto l’orizzonte” (108). However, even the attribution of a certain flexibility in popular perspective does not fully account for the narrator’s apparently willful and repeated confusion of Saturn and Jove, and especially not for the blurring of political distinction between absolute and constitutional monarchy. Indeed, both these distinctions have already been made within the text itself (“Del resto, neppure Giove era legittimo re dell’Olimpo,” 46). Nor is this the only such instance of aporia within the narrative. For even taking Tancredi as the active Hercules of the theft in the spring-fed garden, and Don Fabrizio as the god’s elderly exemplar rising in the fashion of an “Ercole . . . fumante” (79) to the heavens, this still does not resolve Tancredi’s repeated distinction between his uncle’s role as libidinous rogue and “agricola plus” (87, cf. 35).

One manner of resolving this confusion is simply to regard both characters as dual avatars of the various principal deities, with “il sole” as the island’s only true ruler. And in many ways this position of intentional ambivalence is the one adopted by the text. Thus, Don Fabrizio serves in one way as the figure of Saturn, the Romans’ agricola plus prudently cultivating his garden world. And in another way he is the elderly roué of Jovian repute, the hero of both “la sguadrinella” Sarah and Mariannina during his Palermitan descents. Tancredi, already linked to his uncle through physical resemblance (“occhi azzurrini”), intellectual attitude, and in part through birth, becomes Don Fabrizio’s agent and full representative both in the arena of sexuality (“un tantino ignobile. E lui [Don Fabrizio] stesso era come Tancredi,” 98) and in the world of political power. For it is precisely the half-mortal Hercules (in the alternate opening reference) that Jove requires in order to repulse the Giants’ revolt and effect a safe return to his throne. On Tancredi’s part this complex relationship of synonymy is thematized by his lingering Narcissian glance at his own “correttezza elegante” just prior to the “triumphal” entry into Donnafugata: “Quando aveva tirato fuori l’acqua dal pozzo a molti usi, si era guardato un momento nello specchio del secchio, e si era trovato a posto . . .” (63). And again this seems entirely appropriate, considering the neatly circular nature of his original historical formulation, a formula of the type recently under vigorous attack in Italy as “antistoricismo.”
But at this point it is important to note that this is the very model of historical change which is never permitted to stand alone in the text, without its complementary and continuous critique. Balancing the motivated ambiguity underlying the first paragraph ("re assoluto ← re costituzionale") is the series of previously denoted shifts of mythological dynasty, each entailing its particular and significant social change. In similar fashion, Don Fabrizio’s semi-willful illusion of the annihilation of time within the Arcadian countryside is soon balanced by the text’s “fable” of the irrepressibly industrious ants, heralding the age of the little man already under way beneath “il sole costituzionale”: “Ma se una fucilata aveva ucciso il coniglio, se i cannoni rigati di Cialdini scoraggiavano già i soldati borbonici, se il calore meridiano addormentava gli uomini, niente invece poteva fermare le formiche” (121). The original mythological misapprehension may thus be seen as an instance of the same confusion of the two aspects of time which has permitted the occasional self-mystification of Don Fabrizio, but which has not finally succeeded in returning him to the world either in his own “character” or in that of his nephew. In terms of allegorical reference, the alternating separation and confusion of the two gods, Saturn and Jove, exactly parallels the attempted splitting of the “subject” of Don Fabrizio in defense of the precarious balance: knowledge/mystification. To cite de Man on the subject-object relation:

The dialectical relationship between subject and object . . . is now located entirely in the temporal relationships that exist within a system of allegorical signs. It becomes a conflict between a conception of self seen in its authentically temporal predicament and a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this self-knowledge.

The process of allegorical confusion, just as that of historical, social, and psychological méconnaissance, permits Don Fabrizio to maintain a sense of personal control even against the onrushing


“fatti.” This same desire for stability, achieved under the auspices of abstraction, may lead as far as the convincing illusion that even “gli astri obbedissero ai suoi calcoli (come, di fatto, sembravano fare)” (15). But in presenting the opposite view, effected through character, narrator, and contrasting segments of textual organization, the narrative manages to develop both model and critique as two essential elements of the same process, each providing implicit review of the other. In some ways the island, and the nation in which it officially shares, has remained the same; yet in other respects, socially, politically, culturally, all is perceptibly different. Furthermore, it is important to note that on these matters the total narrative becomes progressively clearer, even to the point of ultimately “deconstructing” the illusion of all the gods (258), whereas Don Fabrizio remains to the end willing to face real change only if he can maintain some inner sense of control and stability. Thus, he can very astutely explain the underlying nature of Sicily (in conversation with the well-meaning outsider, Chevalley) claiming for himself the lack of “la facoltà di ingannare se stesso” (207) and only a moment later admit, “ed io stesso, del resto, se queste cose le avesse dette lei, me ne sarei avuto a male” (212).

We have already noted the use of the dual imagery of abstraction at the conclusion of the ball scene (Chapter VI), picking up the images of the “uri” of Chapter I and leading to the death scene of Chapter VII. And Don Fabrizio’s reaction to Pallavicino’s potentially disturbing remarks about both political and stellar matters should be noted as well: “. . . E come andrà a finire? C’è lo Stellone, si dice. Sarà. Ma lei sa meglio di me, Principe, che anche le stelle fisse, veramente fisse non sono’ ” (271). Only a short time after this Don Fabrizio again opts not for the flux of Pallavicino’s knowledgeably stated uncertainty but instead for the Dantesque abstraction of “le stelle fisse,” in the personification of Venus and the hope of that last “appuntamento.” These two central political discussions of the later portions of the text, one with Chevalley, the other with Pallavicino, are implicitly paired by their position at the conclusions of Chapters IV and VI, with the important structural intervention of Don Pirrone’s visit to S. Cono. In this way, as Don Fabrizio tends to separate ever further from those around him, the fiction itself moves beyond the internal limits of his views, proceeding by means of disjunctive narrative arrangement along the dual lines of examination and contrast. And with contrast comes the potential for detached review.
Up to this point the analysis has remained focused on elements either noted or clearly implied with the narrative progression. But in regard to the misapprehension of the reigns of the deities, there is an aspect which at first the narrative appears to suggest only vaguely. As a Roman deity, Saturn is more often associated with the Greek Cronus, the Titan overthrown by his son, Zeus (Jove, Jupiter), and to whom Don Fabrizio seems to be compared more than once (as in the description of his “innocente nudità titanica,” 79). Oddly enough, it is precisely during his most Saturnian scenes (in the early shaving scene, or in the garden at Donnafugata) that Don Fabrizio tends to regard Tancredi not as an avatar of himself but rather as “un altro,” fully capable of inspiring indignation (35) and even “rancore” (86). These two instances hinge not only on elements of temporal passage but also on sexual activity, and as such seem to indicate something more than the mere confusion of the dualistic aspects of stability and change, as the Cronus → Zeus model would indicate. With the addition of the romantic element, Tancredi, along with the unpleasant “subject of Concetta,” threatens to become fully an Other, not only in terms of political power but of sexuality as well. Don Fabrizio may harbor a vaguely Oedipal jealousy of the Tancredi-Angelica relationship (112, 162, et passim), but he is necessarily barred from open apprehension of these particular feelings in regard to his daughter. Don Pirrone, in broaching the subject, unwittingly suggests the most terrifying threat of all, forcing Don Fabrizio into the untenable position of the second deity who stands behind the Roman Saturn, not Cronus but the Titans’ father and previous ruler—born of the earth yet god of the heavenly “stelle”—the figure of Uranus (cf. 120 infra). This is the very fate, not only of dethronement but of forthright mutilation, against which Don Fabrizio reacts so vehemently because so unknowingly. He can gain Tancredi as a son only by permitting him to become Other, thus either accepting him openly as a threat or giving up the essential, “youthful” part of himself that Tancredi represents. And it is only as the conversation in the garden turns safely to other topics, to the “pesche forestiere” and the people of Donnafugata, that the Prince finally regains his former feelings for his nephew. This full méconnaissance, indicated only by the Prince’s otherwise inexplicably severe reactions and by the apparent confusion within the narrative text, provides a substantial measure of the underlying energy of the following scenes, in both structural and thematic terms. In his own
words Don Fabrizio depicts his people as a race apart: "Noi siamo dèi." But he does not say, or seem consciously to know, which ones.¹⁹

By the time of the opening scenes of Chapter III, then, the three possibilities of temporal succession have all been clearly stated: that nothing will change, that all will change yet remain the same, that all will be different. In schematic terms these positions might be represented in an arrangement similar to the earlier diagram of character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saturn</th>
<th>Sole</th>
<th>Jove</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of Motion</td>
<td>Motion without Change</td>
<td>Full Motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uranus</td>
<td>Cronus →</td>
<td>(Tancredi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again this deployment indicates an apparent attempt on the part of the narrative to create a "natural" mediation between two polar opposites.²⁰ The first position represents not so much true temporality as the annihilation of time, achieved only by means of Don Fabrizio's willful dream in the Sicilian countryside and through the island's metaphorical "sonno." The second is represented by the circular passage of the seasons and Tancredi's original political assessment; while the third is depicted most typically in the text's various negative evaluations of the social and political elements of the new regime. As we have seen, Don Fabrizio adopts each of these positions at one time or another, progressing through a spiraling series of alternations in regard to both the historical and "personal" elements of the narrative.

As before, it is important to note that in terms of the narrative what seems the central mediation is in fact neither "natural" nor successful, since the members of the original opposition are not truly


²⁰ For a similar treatment of narrative in diagram form (again dealing with issues of sexuality and temporal progression) see Edmund Leach's "Genesis as Myth," in Genesis as Myth and Other Essays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 7-23.
opponent entities but two aspects of the same underlying function. Don Fabrizio’s escape into timeless abstraction is no more effective against the necessary degeneration of his physical corpus than is the island’s “morfina” against the rising forces of the new regime. The overall effect of the narrative’s multi-layering of reference is neither to denigrate nor valorize Don Fabrizio’s situation, but to expose him in the fundamental irresolvability of his predicament in personal, social, and historical terms. Through the generative energy of its essential méconnaissance, his willful flight from time ends not in Arcadian escape but in the ultimate “silenzio” of death, and of violent death at that. As in the opening myth, the necessity of temporal progression begins not with Zeus but with Cronus, behind whom lies the original mutilation forever barring the way back to “eternity.” Don Fabrizio is fully at ease only with the earth [“fratello dei suoi rozzi villani,” (88)] or with the timeless and controlled abstraction of the stars. And again, the one mediating position he cannot indefinitely maintain is the “solar” méconnaissance of motion without change.

In its basic elements, then, Don Fabrizio’s is a critique of both perception and judgment. Crucial of its resolution is the ironist’s distinguishing apprehension that knowledge, as a dominant term, contains within itself not-knowing, the ultimate inability to “know all.” Rather than annihilating exterior existence this knowledge then takes the world itself, in both immediate experience and abstract model, as the “text” upon which its critique is effected, progressing by turns through readings and misreadings. In a parallel process, the narrative initiates and carries forth a critical examination of its own, encompassing and transcending Don Fabrizio’s. We have already seen one element of this in the narrator’s concise deconstruction of the metaphor “coniglio-lepre.” There are many similar instances of this type of patent linguistic investigation, beginning with the “parole bellissime” of the straw man Màlvica (18) and including the mocking “Verbo → frac” analogy of the dinner scene (89). However, as the narrative develops, this procedure takes a new and precarious turn, pointing its analysis increasingly toward the very validity of language. Don Fabrizio’s mystified “subjects” cannot distinguish between his use of irony and referential statement, a challenge which at times even the narrator declines: “(Non era mai possibile conoscere quando il Principe ironizzasse o quando si sbagliasse.)” (148). For Don Pirrone’s sister Sarina the
world around her threatens to become “una edizione . . . illeggibile” (234), just as earlier the narrative found discrimination between the “real” avatars of the Quixote to be so “difficile” (142). Finally, even the Jesuit father manages to hide the nature of truth not in silence but in discourse, through utilization of the casuistic distinction “favola—menzogna” (241).

As these instances of linguistic inquiry mount up within the text, their effects spread beyond individual characters and even beyond confinement to the narrative’s discursive portions. A central moment in this process occurs during the Prince’s review of his life, in the course of which the narrative first denotes the valued “conversazioni” with Giovanni “prima che questi scomparisse” and then parenthetically appends: “(alcuni monologhi, per esser veritieri, durante i quali aveva creduto scoprire nel ragazzo un animo simile al suo)” (288; Italics mine). The seeming innocence of the clarification only serves to underline the importance of the potential negation. Up to this time the background figure of Giovanni has been consistently presented as the Prince’s natural likeness, as the absent “type” whose role Tancredi fills in exchange. However, this casual notation, contaminating the previously unquestioned indications of the rapport between the two, causes a moment of narrative vertige that is difficult to resolve. Through it, the essential reliability of the Prince’s perspective is put in doubt. This notation joins its predecessors as a further representation of the limitations of language. Yet at the same time it initiates a process of forced review, by means of which the reader is directed not only forward, through apparent prefiguration, but also back against the narrative development, in a search for information which now appears solely as absence.

The partial negation within the explicit contrast “conversazioni—monologhi” is the penultimate figura leading to the text’s most disturbing expression of self-knowledge, the fully “metalinguistic” moment of Concetta’s concluding discovery.21 As Tassoni unwittingly furnishes the revelation of Tancredi’s “frottola guerrresca” (312), the narrative calls into question not only Concetta’s relation to her past but also the basic enigma of original motivation in regard to each of the central characters. The very scene that

21 The use of this terminology, in a sense that is obviously epistemological rather than theological, is adapted from Erich Auerbach. See: Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 73, 157, et passim.
Concetta had originally considered an emblem of a lost battle may in fact have been an indication of Tancredi's underlying affection: "'era tanto cara che se non mi fossi trattenuto la avrei abbracciata li davanti a venti persone ed al mio terribile zione'" (313).

This alternate reading for Concetta's delusion "ormai quasi storica" can be supported in part by a cursory review of the text. From this later perspective both the garden scene and the scene at the "real" convent appear intentionally ambiguous. As for the dinner scene itself, its placement should be recalled within a chapter dominated by the active perceptions of Don Fabrizio, whose bias in regard to a Tancredi-Concetta alliance may be qualified in ways beyond his immediate apprehension, as we have seen. Furthermore, Don Fabrizio's reactions remain a source of inexplicable vexation to him even after the union of his nephew and Angelica has been assured (265). And it is important to note that the Prince's original reaction was not in favor of Angelica but of anyone else except Concetta, even though the narrative was perhaps preparing the way through the quiet verbal echo Sutèra → Sedàra (84). Finally, the narrative does not fail to note the true nature of Tancredi's hidden status as a "partito . . . desiderabile" (252), thus supplying conclusive affirmation of his ability to attain success in the world regardless of the financial underpinnings of the marriage "contract."

This is not to say that Concetta now appears to have withdrawn from the contest too soon or that the Tancredi—Angelica pairing was not inevitable. The central point of the concluding scene is not to affirm either side, but to shade both of them, or any other seemingly "definitive" reading, with irresolvable doubt. If the reader chooses between the various possible interpretations, as the desire for mastery of the material may well tempt him to do, he only adds another motivated "palata di terra . . . sul tumolo della verità." For on this critical point the narrative remains purposefully inconclusive:

Ma era poi la verità questa? In nessun luogo quanto in Sicilia la verità ha vita breve: il fatto è avvenuto da cinque minuti e di già il suo nocciolo genuino è scomparso, camuffato, abbellito, sfigurato, oppresso, annientato dalla fantasia e dagl'interessi: . . . tutte le passioni . . . si precipitano sul fatto e lo fanno a brani; in breve è scomparso. E l'infelice Concetta voleva trovare la verità di sentimenti non espressi ma soltanto intravisi mezzo secolo fa! La verità non c'era più. La sua precarietà era stata sostituita dall'irrefutabilità della pena (315).
This culminating instance of textual self-knowledge demonstrates what Kenneth Burke has termed the ironic "perspective of perspectives," a function which Jean Ricardou has lately rediscovered as the "mise en abyme."\(^{22}\) At this point in the text the irony previously present as both trope and epistemological perspective becomes fully thematized as a mode of narrative presentation. In its retroactive effect upon the entire narrative, this statement knowledgeably deconstructs its own essential fictionality, as well as that of all judgment motivated by underlying human passions, either psychological or material ("annientato dalla fantasia e dagl’interessi"). In so doing, the narrative supplies a systematic duration to the apparent spontaneity of its ironic elements, thus becoming a metatextual allegory of its own temporal presentation. As a critique of human perception in time, *Il Gattopardo* becomes the story of its own factitiousness, the rise from "la verità . . . scomparsa" to historical novel. In this way, the narrative demonstrates the unity of its basic temporal organization. To quote again from de Man: "Yet the two modes, for all their profound differences in mood and structure, are the two faces of the same fundamental expression of time."\(^{23}\)

In terms of the theory of narration developed within the text, Lampedusa’s thus becomes an historical novel to the second power, arising from the stated conflict between the referential and figural functions of language and providing not a choice between the two but instead a knowledgeable statement of its inability to judge. Just as the island’s skeptical inhabitants respond to even the simplest questions with the intentional “enigma” of ironic withdrawal (42), so the diegetic progression of the narrative seems at first to indicate and then to deny solution.

Yet once more it is imperative to note that the narration does not terminate with this moment of reflexive knowledge. Just as the text’s "demystified" dominant character longs for the timeless yet specious unity of created myth to provide the salve of both explanation and transcendence, so the narrative continues in the active fusion of its two presentational modes. Concetta demonstrates the continuing


effectiveness of figural representation in her sudden revulsion at the sight of “il povero Bendicò,” just as the image of the concluding “fall” becomes a metaphor for the entire house, as Jeffrey Meyers has shown.\(^{24}\) Ironically, as the narrative’s caveat so plainly exemplifies, it is this very knowledge of its limitations that inspires narration to continue. In both “worldly” and fictional terms, then, every approach to truth may be seen to lead not into silence but back into the self-mystifying passions of speech, in an unending process of self-allegorization.

As a book about time, and about human self-perception in time, part of the fascination of Lampedusa’s novel would seem to spring from the sense of “fallimento” inherent in its review of “il Risorgimento.” Moreover, its critique appears to draw further energy from the corresponding atmosphere of disillusionment following the short-lived triumphs of the Italian Resistenza. Despite unprecedented popular success, or perhaps because of it, the novel has not yet received abundant critical attention in Italy, discounting the original misapprehensions and accusations of “antistoricismo”.\(^{25}\) Again perhaps ironically, Lampedusa’s book enters its historical moment as the diagnostic representation of a perspective whose only cardinal sin is “quello di ‘fare,’ ” that of doing anything at all. At once analysis and potential “sfida,” it thus embodies what remains the unresolved predicament of the post-war period, self-knowledge without final self-destruction.


\(^{25}\) As a continuing example of this type of critical méconnaissance see Contini’s very brief treatment of the book as “una gradevolissima ‘opera d’intrattenimento’ ” in Letteratura dell’Italia unita, op. cit., p. 887. For a summary of the criticism of Lampedusa in Italian, French, German, and English, see: Giuseppe Paolo Samonà, “Lampedusa e la critica,” in Il Gattopardo, i racconti, Lampedusa (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1974), pp. 357-426.