

**LUCINO VISCONTI** (Count Don Lucino Visconti di Modrone, 2 November 1906, Milan—17 March 1976, Rome) wrote or co-wrote and directed all or part of 19 other films, the best known of which are *L'Innocente* 1976, *Morte a Venezia/Death in Venice* 1971, *La Caduta degli dei/The Damned* 1969, *Lo Straniero/The Stranger* 1967, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* 1960, *Le Notti bianche/White Nights* 1957, and *Ossessione* 1942.

**SUSO CECCHI D'AMICO** (Giovanna Cecchi, 21 July 1914, Rome) daughter of screenwriter Emilio Cecchi, wrote or co-wrote nearly 90 films, the first of which was the classic *Roma città libera/Rome, Open City* 1946. Some of the others: *Panni sporchi/Dirty Linen* 1999, *Il Male oscuro/Obscure Illness* 1990, *L'Innocente* 1976, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* 1973, *Lo Straniero/The Stranger* 1967, *Spara forte, pi forte, non capisco/Shoot Louder, I Don't Understand* 1966, *I Soliti ignoti/Big Deal on Madonna Street* 1958, *Le Notti bianche/White Nights* 1957, and *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thieves* 1948.

**PASQUALE FESTA CAMPANILE** (28 July 1927, Melfi, Basilicata, Italy—25 February 1986, Rome) directed 45 films which we mention here primarily because the American and British release titles are so cockamamie, i.e., *How to Lose a Wife and Find a Lover* 1978, *Sex Machine* 1975, *When Women Played Ding Dong* 1971, *When Women Lost Their Tails* 1971, *When Women Had Tails* 1970, *Where Are You Going All Naked?* 1969, *The Chastity Belt/On My Way to the Crusades, I Met a Girl Who...* 1969, and *Drop Dead My Love* 1966. He wrote or co-wrote most of those, as well as *Rocco and his Brothers* and several other films.

**BURT LANCASTER** (2 November 1913, New York, New York—20 October 1994, Century City, California) was so over the top so often it's perhaps easy to miss how good an actor he really was. He is the only star ever to appear in back-to-back presentations of the Buffalo Film Seminars (Alexander Mackendrick's *Sweet Smell of Success* 1957 and *Il gattopardo*, both in our Fall 2001 series). His first screen role was riveting: "Swede" in *The Killers* 1946, based on Hemingway's famous short story. His fourth film, *Brute Force* 1947, is still one of the best prison movies and was one of the reasons Bruce loathed the otherwise loveable Hume Cronyn, who played the evil warden, for decades. He was in nearly a hundred theatrical and made-for-tv films in all, and he played the lead in at least half of Hollywood's great war movies. Some of his memorable performances: *Field of Dreams* 1989, *Local Hero* 1983, *Atlantic City* 1980, *Go Tell the Spartans* 1978, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* 1977, *Twilight's Last Gleaming* 1977, *1900* 1976, *Ulzana's Raid* 1972, *Airport* 1970, *The Gypsy Moths* 1969, *Castle Keep*, 1969, *The Swimmer* 1968, *The Professionals* 1966, *Seven Days in May* 1964, *Birdman of Alcatraz* 1962, *Judgment at Nuremberg* 1961, *Elmer Gantry* 1960, *The Unforgiven* 1960, *Sweet Smell of Success* 1957 *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* 1957, *The Rainmaker* 1956, *The Rose Tattoo* 1955, *From Here to Eternity* 1953, *Come Back, Little Sheba* 1952, *Jim Thorpe - All American* 1951, *All My Sons* 1948, and *Sorry, Wrong Number* 1948. Lancaster won one best actor Oscar (*Elmer Gantry*) and was nominated for three others (*Atlantic City*, *Birdman of Alcatraz*, and *From Here to Eternity*)

**CLAUDIA CARDINALE** (15 April 1938, Tunis, Tunisia) bracketed her performance in this film with roles in Fellini's 8 1/2 1963 and Blake Edwards' *The Pink Panther* 1963. Whatta year! She appeared in 100 other films, beginning with *Big Deal On Madonna Street* 1953. Some of the others: *Un homme amoureux/A Man in Love* 1987, *Princess Daisy* 1983, *Burden of Dreams* 1982, *Fitzcarraldo* 1982, *La Pelle/The Skin* 1981, *Krasnaya palatka/The Red Tent* 1971, *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* 1969, *The Professionals* 1966, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* 1960, *I Soliti ignoti/Big Deal on Madonna Street* 1958..

**ALAIN DELON** (8 November 1935, Sceaux, Hauts-de-Seine, France), once called "the French James Dean," came to stardom in Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers* 1960 (his seventh screen role) and starred in Visconti's stage production of *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore* in Paris the following year. He appeared in more than 80 films, among them *Un amour de Swann/Swann in Love* 1984, *The Concorde: Airport '79* 1979, *Monsieur Klein* 1976, *Zorro* 1974, *Borsalino* 1970, *Is Paris Burning?* 1966, *Texas Across the River* 1966, *Once a Thief* 1965, *The Yellow Rolls-Royce* 1965, *L'Eclisse/The Eclipse* 1962, and. He also produced 10 and wrote 17 films. Delon was a parachutist with the French army in Indochina in the early 1950s, and in 1968 was implicated in a murder, drug and sex scandal that involved several French politicians and show business personalities; unlike most of the others, he was exonerated. In the past several years he has done a great deal of work on French tv.

**NINO ROTA** (3 December 1911—Milan, 10 April 1979) composed scores for all three *Godfather* films 1972, 1974, 1990, for Fellini's *Amarcord* 1974, *Roma* 1972, *I Clowns* 1971, *Satyricon* 1969, *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* 1965, *8½* 1963, *La Dolce Vita* 1960, *Le Notti di Cabiria* 1957, and *La Strada* 1954. He also scored *Rocco and His Brothers*, *I Vitelloni* 1953, and about 150 other films.

**GIUSEPPE ROTUNNO** [19 March 1923] Rome photographed the sweet 1997 biopic of Marcello Mastroianni that still plays on A&E from time to time, *Marcello Mastroianni: mi ricordo s , io mi ricordo/Marcello Mastroianni: I remember* 1997. He also shot more than 70 other films, among them *Wolf* 1994, *Regarding Henry* 1991, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* 1988, *All That Jazz* 1979, *La Fine del mondo nel nostro solito letto in una notte piena di pioggia/The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain* 1978, *Casanova* 1976, *Amarcord* 1974, *Roma* 1972, *Man of La Mancha* 1972, *Carnal Knowledge* 1971, *Satyricon* 1969, *Candy* 1968, *Lo Straniero/The Stranger* 1967, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* 1960, *On the Beach* 1959, and *Le Notti bianche* 1957.

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THE LEOPARD/IL GATTOPARDO (1963)  
Original 205min, UK 195, US 165, restored ?

Burt Lancaster.... Prince Don Fabrizio Salina  
Claudia Cardinale.... Angelica Sedara/Bertiana  
Alain Delon.... Tancredi  
Paolo Stoppa.... Don Calogero Sedara  
Rina Morelli.... Maria Stella  
Romolo Valli.... Father Pirrone  
Terence Hill.... Count Cavriaghi (as Mario Girotti)  
Lucilla Morlacchi.... Concetta  
Giuliano Gemma.... Garibaldino General  
Ida Galli.... Carolina  
Ottavia Piccolo.... Caterina

Directed by Luchino Visconti  
Written by Pasquale Festa Campanile, Massimo Franciosa,  
Enrico Medioli, Luchino Visconti, and Suso Cecchi d'Amico,  
based on the novel by Giuseppe Tomasi Di Lampedusa  
Produced by Goffredo Lombardo  
Original music by Nino Rota  
Non-original music by Vincenzo Bellini, Giuseppe Verdi  
Cinematography by Giuseppe Rotunno  
Film Editing by Mario Serandrei  
Production Design by Mario Garbuglia and Giorgio Rotunno  
Costume Design by Piero Tosi  
Fabrics Filippo Haas and Sons

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### **Luchino Visconti 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. BFI Publishing London 2003**

Visconti's interest in the central theme of Lampedusa's novel—the gradual submergence and transformation of an aristocratic Sicilian family at the time of the Risorgimento—was in a sense predictable. But that he should be prepared to make the film, in association with 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, as a multi-million-dollar spectacle was disquieting, both to the proprietorial lovers of the original novel and to the nostalgia of neo-realism. Their fears were not entirely baseless, but not quite for the reasons they put forward. If *The Leopard*, as finally realised, is not altogether a satisfactory film it is not because it crudifies, in translation on to the large screen, the intimate novelistic concerns of Lampedusa. Visconti was not fool enough to attempt such a translation. He re-created the story in his own terms, taking full advantage of all the possibilities of modern techniques. He made no attempt to render certain subtleties which were peculiar to Lampedusa's narrative style, but this does not mean that his own conception was crude. He rejected intimacy as both technically and ideologically inappropriate but used the large Technirama screen and the latest Technicolor process to give a profusion and richness of detail which the small screen and black and white could never achieve.

Unfortunately, despite his many previous chastening experiences with Italian producers. Visconti did not reckon with the extraordinary philistinism of 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox. They, for reasons entirely of their own, decided to distribute *The Leopard* in Britain and America only in a mangled and pathetic version. It was scaled down from 70mm to 35mm, [*The Leopard* was in fact shot in Technirama, not 70mm] printed on inferior colour stock, and shorn of some of the most important scenes. As if this were not enough, it was then post-synchronized with an insensitivity which is often hard to credit, particularly if one bears in mind the relative skill with which low-budget spectacles by Freda and Cottafavi are dubbed for the English market. Visconti himself had no control whatever over the dubbing, which was supervised by Burt Lancaster. Possibly, however, listening to Lancaster speaking his lines in English on the set, he may have had some vague premonition of what the English version was going to be like. In that version Lancaster dubs himself, sounding for all the world more like a gruff Western patriarch than a Sicilian prince. ...The dialogues too have suffered from translation. In the finale in particular they have acquired an utterly inapposite vulgarity and

flatness which, if nothing else, is in blatant contradiction with the suggestivity and carefully created period atmosphere of the original script and of the sets. It is small wonder therefore that Visconti has repudiated the English version of *The Leopard* and accepts no responsibility for it at all...

Lampedusa's novel was an almost mystical account of the unchanging essence of Sicily and what was for him its most representative class, the landowning aristocracy. It was a story of lethargy and inertia, seen as natural products of the sun and the earth, mysteriously preventing change. At the same time it was an elegy for human mortality....

As *La terra trema* showed. Visconti's attitude is far less indulgent than that of the literary tradition towards the 'poetry' of the island. While Lawrence could use Sicily as a staging-post on his spiritual pilgrimage towards the deeper mysteries of Mexico, Visconti (like Eisenstein in Mexico) is only partly responsive to the mysterious character of Sicilian history and life. Where Visconti keeps most closely to the picture created by Lampedusa is in his reliance on the sensual evocation and his interest in the central theme of the novel, the self-interrogation of an aristocrat

obsessed with the need to account for his own survival. But the film differs from the novel in the explanations it puts forward of why the Sicilian aristocracy (of which Lampedusa was a member) survived. Visconti's explanations are to be found in history, which appears not, as in the novel, in the form of rumblings of a distant storm, but as a protagonist. The House of Salina, in the film, is directly involved in the process of transformation. It is political and economic cunning which enables it to survive, not a magic spell cast on the island to protect it from change.

The final ballroom sequences, which seemed to the American financiers of no narrative significance and therefore open to drastic reduction and mutilation, bring together the mind and memory of the Prince. The importance of this subjective aspect appears to have been lost on the producers and their technical henchmen, and the scene, in the English version, has lost all its internal coherence. Visconti's intention was to reproduce cinematically and pictorially the content of what in the novel was a long interior monologue by the Prince, his reflections on change and recurrence, and on life and death. The Prince wanders from room to room, watching the scene, and participating in it fully at one moment only, when he is prevailed upon to dance a waltz with Angelica. As he walks round he sees things which reminded him of his past life and of the fact that he is now old. Women who have been his mistresses are now aged and stately dowagers. A new generation has succeeded his, that of Tancredi and Angelica on the one hand and his own daughters on the other. When he accepts to dance with Angelica there is a double poignancy in his response to her request. Her naive flattery serves as yet another reminder of the difference in age between them. But at the same time there is something provocative about her insistence which makes him realise that he is still young enough to desire her, even acutely.

This episode follows directly, and by subtle contrast, a morbid scene in which his eye is caught by a monstrous academic painting of a death scene, and he shocks Tancredi by the vivid realism of his observation about the cleanness of the sheets. There is no interior monologue, and the dialogues are brief, sardonic, and allusive. The meaning is conveyed, not just by the words but by a permanent relationship which is set up between the Prince and what he sees around him. The misty colour effects, the choice of detail, the cutting and camera movement gradually and unobtrusively build up a kind of dialogue between man and his surroundings. There is no visual or rhetorical expressionism. Every thing is real, but seen in a particular way, refracted through the consciousness of the Prince. Stylistically, it is the perfect cinematic equivalent of Flaubert's *style indirect libre*....Where the film had previously taken a critical attitude to the events described, it now slides gently into sharing the point of view of one of the protagonists. Given the manner in which the Prince had been idealised as a figure right from the beginning, the move into *indirect libre* can be interpreted only in one way, as identification by Visconti with the central figure.

The closing images of the film, however, are ambiguous. The Prince takes leave of the company to walk home alone. The streets are very quiet in the clear autumnal dawn. The silence is broken by a clattering of bells as a priest walks past with two young acolytes on his way to early Mass [*He is actually on his way to administer last rites. D.C.*] An organ-grinder strikes up. The Prince walks away and in the restored silence stops to mutter a semi-religious invocation to the morning star. Then the silence is broken again, abruptly, by a brief volley of gunfire. Some rebels are being shot. The sound of the guns re-echoes through the

streets, as the rest of the family return to their coach. The Prince goes on walking towards the sea.

To a certain extent the ending retrieves the film from the aura of uncritical nostalgia into which it had been immersed. It takes it out of the close atmosphere of the *palazzo*, away from the splendour and solidarity of the gathering of aristocratic clans. Death is a solitary thing, whether for the Prince or for the rebels. The Prince does not articulate his feelings when he hears the shots, and the juxtaposition has to speak for itself. But besides the general reflection on mortality there is also present a harsher, more critical comment—on the price of survival. The Prince can afford to choose the moment when he feels he wants to die. Not so the rebels. The transformation of the house of Salina is the rebels' defeat.

But even attributing this significance to the closing moments of *The Leopard* does not resolve the ambiguities with which the film is beset. In the two Risorgimento films and in *La terra trema*, Visconti has given three accounts in all of the failure of attempted revolution and the continued dominance of the old order. In the first, *La terra trema*, he takes the point of view of the exploited fishermen, and his explanations are straightforwardly economic and political. The fishermen neither have the political organisation and economic power to overthrow their oppressors; nor, being attached to private property as a means of advancement, do they understand the need for collective action and organisation. They fail, and Visconti's heart is with them in their defeat.

In *Senso*, however, the division of the world into oppressors and oppressed is less clearly marked. The categories are political and ideological rather than economic, and the action takes place between groups and individuals whose functions are not determined exclusively by economic factors. The way the forces are aligned and the way in which individuals become representative not only of groups but of ideas shows clear traces of the influence of the sophisticated theories of Gramsci on Visconti's previous rather crude conception of the class struggle. The artistic structure of the film removes it still further from the level of a historiographical textbook. The forces in play are basically those of progress (Ussoni), Decadence (Franz), and conformity and *transformismo* (Serpieri), and the motor of the action on both individual and social planes is betrayal. Visconti's own position is detached. The film is seen through the eyes of Livia, who chooses, betrays her choice, and is herself betrayed, but it does not identify itself with her.

In *The Leopard*, finally, the causes of failure are seen as absorption and adaptation. As an explanation this is as valid as the others, but the way it is put forward is distinctly ambiguous. Whereas in *Senso* Visconti retains a position of detachment above a central character who is directly involved in the action, in *The Leopard* Visconti's position is apparently one of identification with a central character who is himself as detached as is humanly possible from the events that are taking place. The Prince's great passion is astronomy, and his view of life is accordingly distant and macrocosmic. At no point does he participate directly in the action, except briefly when he accepts to dance with Angelica. Everything is seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. Even the dance is only an enactment on human scale of the eternal gyration of the stars. Identification with such a superhuman viewpoint effectively denies any involvement at all.

The problem with the Prince is that although he is subjectively above the action and is symbolically represented as having that role, he remains a member of a particular class: his consciousness is classbound consciousness, and his actions form part of the class action of the aristocracy to which he belongs.

'We are the Leopards,' he says at one point, 'and the others will always envy us.' This remark, like others in which this patriarchal figure comments on things related to his family, is particularly ambiguous, because it poses the problem of detachment and identification at so many different levels.

We can perhaps resolve these difficulties most simply in this way. The position which Visconti takes up in *The Leopard* in the face of historical change is equivocal. He rejects both the simple 'leftist' solution of seeing it from the point of view of the Garibaldini and their successors, and the liberal compromise of balancing abstractly two points of view. At the same time he stops short of complete identification with the old order. He is telling the history of the aristocracy from the inside through one of its representatives, but he dissociates himself from the story in two ways. In the first place the character who concretely personifies the historical movement is himself detached, and Visconti identifies with him in his detachment. But because he is also classbound, through his involvement with his family, a further act of withdrawal is necessary at the very end. The shooting of the rebels, heard not only by the Prince but by his family, gives the film a political perspective it seemed to have lost. But it is a summary gesture, a homage to the revolutionary causes in which Visconti believes but is not involved.

**From Italian Cinema From Neorealism to the Present Peter Bondanella. Continuum. NY 1999**

Visconti's fascination with the dramatic potential of the family finds greater artistic expression in *The Leopard* and *The Damned* which integrate family histories into the broad panoramic accounts of the Italian Risorgimento, in the first case, and the rise of National Socialism, in the second. Both films display Visconti's increasing interest in recreating lavish, carefully designed costumes and period sets, props intended to evoke the spirit of eras which have forever vanished. *The Leopard* opens as Garibaldi's red-shirted volunteers have invaded Sicily in an attempt to annex the island to the kingdom of Italy. The landed aristocrats, remnants of a feudal era, must now honor their obligations to the Bourbons or come to an accommodation with the victorious middle class. Don Fabrizio, Prince of Salina (the "leopard" of the title, played brilliantly by Burt Lancaster) represents the cream of the old aristocracy: culture, learning, grace, and style. He nevertheless allows his nephew Tancredi (Alain Delon) an impulsive and calculating but likable young man, to join the revolutionaries, a decision which eventually associates the house of Salina with the victors and ensures their survival in the new order. While the older aristocratic families struggle to survive, manipulating whenever possible the course of events, an equally self-serving group of middle-class merchants and liberal politicians emerges to divide the spoils from the political upheaval they have engineered/ This class is personified in the film by Don Calogero Sedara (Paolo Stoppa), a comic figure whose power derives from the ecclesiastical properties he purchased after their confiscation, and whose manners provide the house of Salina with a constant source of amusement. Yet, Don Fabrizio amazes his retainers and allows the inevitable marriage of new wealth and ancient title: Tancredi marries Don Calogero's beautiful daughter Angelica (Claudia Cardinale), thus ensuring the family a place in the future. This sordid picture of a classic instance of Italian *transformismo* concludes with a magnificent ballroom sequence in which the prince contemplates his own demise, his nephew's future, and overhears the sound of an execution at dawn signaling the final destruction of any revolutionary threat to the now established bourgeois regime.

*The Leopard* thus continues *Senso's* view of the Risorgimento as a flawed and betrayed revolution. But it is more than an extremely meticulous and lavish recreation of an excellent historical novel. It is also a meditation on death, historical change, and the demise of a social class to which the director also belongs. Visconti's point of view is almost completely identified with that of Don Fabrizio, the Leopard. A passionate astronomer, the Sicilian Prince gazes upon the course of history swirling about him with an air of bemused detachment and slight contempt for the vulgarity of it all, just as Visconti's slow camera movements and long takes caress his subject matter in an elegiac fashion. Unlike his nephew Tancredi, Don Fabrizio takes no delight in the hypocrisy required for survival. Tancredi's credo is expressed in a remark to his uncle when he joins the Garibaldini that "things have to change in order to remain the same." The Prince is more concerned with the passing of an era and his own inevitable death, and Visconti's camera reflects his preoccupation in the beautiful sequence which describes the family's arrival at Donnafugata, their summer palace: as the band plays "Noi siamo le zingarelle" from Verdi's *La Traviata* and the family's faithful organist, Don Ciccio, plays "Amami Alfredo" from the same work, the family takes its traditional place at the front of the cathedral. Visconti's camera slowly tilts down from the Baroque ceilings and the sumptuous stuary to the priests and the omnipresent smoke of incense, which it then follows to pan slowly and tenderly over the entire family. The actors have been made up with a bluish colored mascara and are covered with inordinate amounts of travel dust, sitting motionless, as if they were statues. It is a beautiful image of an era about to pass away, and it evokes the thought of death and decay. The Prince's obsession with death appears again when he is visited by a representative of the House of Savoy, Cavalier Chevalley, who asks him to take part in the new government. Don Fabrizio refuses and proceeds to explain his reasoning in an argument taken almost verbatim from the novel. No government has ever succeeded in changing Sicily, because the island's physical squalor and misery reflect Sicily's obsession with death, as does the desire for voluptuous immobility, sleep, sensuality, and violence typical of the Sicilians; Sicilians do not desire improvement, for they feel themselves to be perfect, and their vanity is stronger than their misery. The Prince declares that eventually all will only change for the worst, no real progress will be made; whereas the older ruling classes were leopards and lions, the era of jackals and sheep has begun.

Such a pessimistic view of the Italian Risorgimento is quite typical of a Marxist intellectual such as Visconti. Certainly he sympathizes with the Prince's sense of sorrow when, during the sumptuously re-created ballroom scene (mutilated by severe cutting in foreign distribution), he wanders from room to room and eventually examines a painting by Greuse ("The Death of a Just Man") in the palace library. The painting moves him to imagine his own death, and this morbidity is juxtaposed to the vitality of the beautiful Angelica, who dances with the Prince and arouses in him a sense of passion and desire: the burden of nostalgia for the past causes him to shed one single tear. Meanwhile, Tancredi observes that the "new administration requires order, legality, and order," and is pleased that those who deserted from the regular army to the Garibaldian forces trying to effect a true revolution—a short-lived attempt that ended with Garibaldi's defeat at the battle of Aspromonte—will be executed at dawn. As the Prince walks slowly home at dawn, he encounters a priest going to administer the last rites to a dying man and wonders wearily when death will come to him. While the firing squad's volleys marking the end of the rebellion are heard on the sound track, we see a yawning Don Calogero who remarks, "No

more to worry about!" The concluding sequence of *The Leopard* is a damning indictment of the political compromises underlying Italian unification. Visconti, the critical Marxist, provides the viewer with a historical context from which to judge the events he presents, yet the nostalgia he feels for the past, and the identification he feels with the main character, almost overwhelm the political message of the film, just as they had done in Tomasi di Lampedusa's original novel. And the epic sweep of the film's sets and costumes threatens at every moment to overshadow his historical message.

**FROM THE ST. JAMES FILM DIRECTOR'S ENCYCLOPEDIA, ED. ANDREW SARRIS, VISIBLE INK PRESS, 1998**

The films of Luchino Visconti are among the most stylistically and intellectually influential of postwar Italian cinema. Born a scion of ancient nobility, Visconti integrated the most heterogeneous elements of aristocratic sensibility and taste with a committed Marxist political consciousness, backed by a firm knowledge of Italian class structure. Stylistically, his career follows a trajectory from a uniquely cinematic realism to an operatic theatricalism, from the simple quotidian eloquence of modeled actuality to the heightened effect of lavishly appointed historical melodramas. His career fuses these interests into a mode of expression uniquely Viscontian, prescribing a potent, double-headed realism. Visconti turned out films steadily but rather slowly from 1942 to 1976. His obsessive care with narrative and filmic materials is apparent in the majority of his films.

...Like Gramsci, who often returned to the contradictions of the Risorgimento as a key to the social problems of the modern Italian state, Visconti explores that period once more in *Il gottopardo*, from the Lampedusa novel. An aristocratic Sicilian family undergoes transformation as a result of intermarriage with the middle class at the same time that the Mezzogiorno is undergoing reunification with the North. The bourgeoisie, now ready and able to take over from the dying aristocracy, usurps Garibaldi's revolution; in this period of *transformismo*, the revolutionary process will be assimilated into the dominant political structure and defused.

**FROM WORLD FILM DIRECTORS V. 1, ED JOHN WAKEMAN, H.W. WILSON CO. 1987**

Count don Luchino Visconti di Modrone was born in Milan, Italy, the third son of Giuseppe Visconti and the former Carla Erba. His mother was the daughter of a millionaire industrialist and his father was the son of the Duke of Modrone. His father's family, wealthy landowners, had received their dukedom from Napoleon. They trace their ancestry to the Visconti who ruled Milan from 1277 to 1447, and on back to Desiderius, father-in-law of Charlemagne.

He was nearly thirty when in 1936 he left Italy with the intention of working for the cinema in England or France. The same year, having been introduced by Coco Chanel to Jean Renoir at a racetrack, he found himself on the great French director's production team.

At first in charge of costumes, Visconti then served as Renoir's third assistant director on *Une Partie de Campagne* (1936) and *Les Bas Fonds* (1937). Escaping in this way from the claustrophobia of Italy, home, and Fascism, and finding himself accepted by a group of dedicated and talented artists in the heady atmosphere of the Popular Front, permanently changed Visconti's life. Of Renoir himself he said: "His was a human influence, not a

professional one. To be with Renoir, to listen to him, that opened my mind."

After a brief, disillusioning visit to Hollywood in 1937, Visconti went home.

...Often accused of "voting Left and living Right," he remained a communist all his life, though he would not join the party. He was also a Christian, though often anticlerical. As a young man, he said: "I was impelled toward the cinema, by, above all, the need to tell stories of people who were alive, of people living amid things and not of the things themselves. The cinema that interests me is an anthropomorphic cinema. The most humble gestures of man, his bearing, his feelings and instincts, are enough to make the things that surround him poetic and alive. . . .And [his] momentary absence from the luminous rectangle gives to everything an appearance of still life [*nature morta*]."

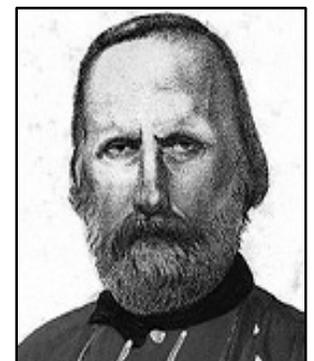


**FROM THE LEOPARD GIUSEPPE DE LAMPEDUSA, TRANS. ARCHIBALD COLOUHOUN. (PANTHEON, 1960), "HISTORICAL NOTE BY ARCHIBALD COLOUHOUN"**

This book opens when the Bourbon state of Naples and Sicily, called the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, was about to end. King Ferdinand II ("Bomba") had just died; and the whole Italian peninsula would soon be one state for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire.

The Risorgimento, as this movement for unification came to be known, had been gathering strength since the occupation of the North by the Austrians after the Napoleonic Wars. And had already come to a head once, in 1848. Leadership had now fallen mainly to Piedmont, the so-called Kingdom of Sardinia, ruled from Turin by Victor Emmanuel of Savoy, with Cavour as his Prime Minister.

Early in May, 1860, the popular hero Garibaldi, acting against Cavour's wishes, sailed from near Genoa with a thousand volunteers for Sicily, to win the island from the Bourbons. The Redshirts, or "Garibaldini," landed at Marsala, defeated the Bourbon troops at Calatafimi, and within three weeks had occupied the capital, Palermo. Garibaldi, hailed as "Dictator" of Sicily, gathered more volunteers, crossed to the



Garibaldi

mainland, swept up the coast, and entered Naples in triumph. That autumn the Bourbon armies were defeated on the Volturno, the Piedmontese besieged the last Bourbon King, Francis II, in Gaeta, and Garibaldi handed over southern Italy to King Victor Emmanuel; he then withdrew to private life.

Plebiscites were held; every state in the peninsula agreed to join the new united Kingdom, except the Papal States, which were occupied, for reasons of internal French politics, by troops of Napoleon III. In 1862 Garibaldi tried to force this issue and marched on Rome. But on the slopes of Aspromonte in Calabria his men were routed and he himself was wounded by Piedmontese troops.

This action by Italian government forces ended the revolutionary phase of the Risorgimento, which culminated officially in the declaration of Rome as capital of Italy in 1870.

### **Leiden University Historical Institute reference page on Unification of Italy:**

**<http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/rtg/emu/ItalianConfederation.html>**

#### **FROM THE NOVEL BY GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA :**

The Prince was depressed: "All this shouldn't last; but it will, always; the human 'always,' of course, a century, two centuries... and after that it will be different but worse. We were the Leopards, the Lions; those who'll 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."

As he crossed the two rooms preceding the study he tried to imagine himself as an imposing leopard with smooth scented skin preparing to tear a timid jackal to pieces; but by one of those involuntary associations of ideas which are the scourge of natures like his, he found flicking into his memory one of those French historical pictures in which Austrian marshals and generals, covered with plumes and decorations, are filing in surrender past an ironical Napoleon; they are more elegant, undoubtedly, but it is the squat little man in the grey topcoat who is the victor; and so, put out by these inopportune memories of Mantua and Ulm, it was an irritated leopard who entered the study.

He opened one of the windows of the little tower. The countryside spread below in all its beauty. Under the leaven of the strong sun everything seemed weightless: the sea in the background was a dash of pure color, the mountains which had seemed so alarmingly full of hidden men during the night now looked like masses of vapor on the point of dissolving, and grim Palermo itself lay crouching quietly around its convents like a flock of sheep around their shepherds. Even the foreign warships anchored in the harbor in case of trouble spread no sense of fear in the majestic calm. The sun, which was still far from its blazing zenith on that morning of the thirteenth of May, showed itself to be the true ruler of Sicily; the crude brash sun, the drugging sun, which annulled every will, kept all things in servile immobility, cradled in violence as arbitrary as dreams.

"It'll take any number of Victor Emmanuels to change this magic potion forever being poured out for us."

*[The Prince, Don Fabrizio, to the Jesuit, Father Pirrone]*

"We're not blind, my dear Father, we're just human. We live in a changing reality to which we try to adapt ourselves like seaweed bending under the pressure of water. Holy Church has been granted an explicit promise of immortality; we, as a social class, have not. Any palliative which may give us another hundred

years of life is like eternity to us. We may worry about our children and perhaps our grandchildren; but beyond what we can hope to stroke with these hands of ours we have no obligations. I cannot worry myself about what will happen to any possible descendants in the year 1960. The Church, yes, she must worry for she is not destined to die. Solace is implicit in her desperation. Don't you think that if now or in the future she could save herself by sacrificing us she wouldn't do so? Of course she would, and she would do right!"

*[ on the rough trip to Donnafugata the third night is at Bisacquino]*

... a strong smell of excrement wafted in from the street and the privy next door, and all this had caused him most unpleasant dreams; waking at very early dawn amid all that sweat and stink, he had found himself comparing this ghastly journey with his own life, which had first moved over smiling level ground, then clambered up rocky mountains, slid over threatening passes, to emerge eventually into a landscape of interminable undulations, all of the same color, all bare as despair. These early morning fantasies were the very worst that could happen to a man of middle age; and although the Prince knew that they would vanish with the day's activities, he suffered acutely all the same, as he was used enough to them by now to realize that deep inside him they left a sediment of grief which, accumulating day by day, would in the end be the real cause of his death.

The Prince, although rapt in the contemplation of Angelica sitting opposite him, was the only one able to note that the *demi-glace* was too rich, and made a mental note to tell the cook so the next day; the others ate without thinking of anything, and without realizing that the food seemed so delicious because a whiff of sensuality had wafted into the house.

All were calm and contented. All except Concetta. She had of course embraced and kissed Angelica, told her not to use the formal third person and insisted on the familiar "tu" of their infancy, but under her blue bodice her heart was being torn to shreds; the violent Salina blood came surging up in her, and under a smooth forehead she found herself brooding over daydreams of poisoning. Tancredi was sitting between her and Angelica and distributing, with the slightly forced air of one who feels in the wrong, his glances, compliments, and jokes equally between both neighbors; but Concetta had an intuition, an animal intuition, of the current of desire flowing from her cousin toward the intruder, and the little frown between her nose and forehead deepened; she wanted to kill as much as she wanted to die. But being a woman she snatched at details: Angelica's little finger in the air when her hand held her glass; a reddish mole on the skin of her neck; an attempt, half-repressed, to remove with a finger a bit of food stuck in her very white teeth. She noticed even more sharply a certain coarseness of spirit; and to these details, which were really quite insignificant as they were cauterized by sensual fascination, she clung as trustingly and desperately as a falling carpenter's apprentice snatches at a leaden gutter; she hoped that Tancredi would notice too and be revolted by these obvious traces of ill breeding. But Tancredi had already noticed them, and alas! with no result. He was letting himself be drawn along by the physical stimulus that a beautiful woman was to his



fiery youth, and also by the (as it were) measurable excitement aroused by a rich girl in the mind of a man both ambitious and poor.

**AND THIS IS FROM "LUCHINO VISCONTI: THE LEOPARD: THE ARISTOCRAT'S TALE," THURSDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2000 THE GUARDIAN**

Luchino Visconti was the aristocrat of Italian cinema, and also an avowed Marxist. That fact alone makes his films intriguing, none more so than *The Leopard*, one of the grandest widescreen historical epics. It stars Burt Lancaster as Prince Salina, the Sicilian leopard of the title, an ageing patrician whose declining fortunes under Garibaldi and the Risorgimento of the 1860s lead him to arrange a financially advantageous marriage between his nephew Tancredi (Alain Delon) and Angelica, the daughter of a rich merchant (Claudia Cardinale). Lancaster, at first sight an



eccentric choice for the part, carries all before him. He often said he based the character on Visconti himself - a man who acknowledged the need for change but increasingly began to regret the vulgarity of the present compared

with the past. Oddly, vulgarity is what Visconti's critics accuse him of, because of the operatic conception of many of his movies, their opulence and their obsessive attention to decor.

Visconti came to the fore in the 40s with *Ossessione*, adopting the precepts of the neo-realist movement but adding a melodramatic, formalised structure. Later he was to reject neo-realism in favour of a more classical tradition which seemed to defend the humanist literary tradition. *The Leopard*, for instance, was taken from the novel by Giuseppe di Lampedusa which sought to ruminate on the old versus the new, and to suggest that the best values of the past were at least the equal of and sometimes superior to those of the pseudo-revolutionary present. Fixing this conception with a gimlet eye, Visconti ends his film with a stunning ball scene, in which all his visual powers, his philosophical doubts and ruminations are in evidence. *The Leopard* must accept that the old order is finished and power has passed to the nouveaux riches. This is a set piece that has rarely been equalled, and the film won the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

Unfortunately it was financed by 20th Century Fox who, despite its European acclaim, butchered it comprehensively, releasing a much shorter version that was dubbed and reprocessed. It took 20 years before a fully restored version was released.

Visconti was fortunate to receive fine expressive support both from his cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno and the music of Nino Rota. But the triumph is mostly his own because his talents suit the subject so well. There is a sensuousness about the direction that perfectly matched the ideas behind the film, the most sophisticated of which was that, even when the old order was able to reach an accommodation to the new, it brought a kind of corrupting decadence with it. Only the prince escapes this charge because he eventually recognises this bitter truth.

All this was very different from the orthodox Marxism of films like *La Terra Trema*. But then Visconti was as full of ambiguities as many of his films. He viewed the world as a kind

of melodrama in which passion and destiny predominated. And frequently the radical nature of what he was trying to say was almost obliterated by the way he said it. In *The Leopard* the two came together superbly. Now that we can see it in its full glory, it is probably his greatest film.

**FROM MOMA FILM NOTES, 1997**

Throughout his career, Visconti's theme was often the moral decay and tragic disintegration of families or great figures. His stage and opera work informed the sweep and intensity of his filmed dramas, and few directors have matched the historical breadth or magnificent visual sensibility of his films.

**STANLEY KAUFFMANN, "FILMS IN OUR HEADS," NEW REPUBLIC, 08.21.00**

Lately I had a shock that I have had before. I went to see a film that I had seen decades ago and discovered that my opinion of it had changed greatly. It was Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard*, which was released in 1963 and which I reviewed that year, a large-scale drama of the Sicilian nobility in the time of the Garibaldi invasion. Seeing it again, I was overwhelmed. I looked up my review and blushed. Yes, I had praised the film's visual splendor, but I wriggled now at the rest. A few hours before, I had been greatly stirred by this film, which in 1963 I had indicted for shortcomings in acting and directing. Most of the performances now seemed more integral and true than they had once seemed, and Visconti's virtuosity in directing, which I had once scorned for ostentation, now seemed much more at the service of the work. ...I had really been swept along by this second encounter, and my first review seemed almost to have been written by someone else.

I tried to understand what had changed. With the acting, the explanation was simple. Originally the distributors had feared to release this Italian film in the United States with subtitles. *The Leopard* had an American star, and they thought that audiences here would not want to hear him speaking Italian—or someone else speaking his Italian lines for him. So in the 1963 version the star, Burt Lancaster, spoke his own lines in English, and all the other actors were dubbed—quite unskillfully.—into English. Most of those performances had been jarred askew by American voices. Now, when I heard these actors with their own voices, they seemed more rounded, three-dimensional, alive. The chief improvement, contradictory though it sounds, was in Lancaster, who plays a Sicilian prince. In 1963, with his own voice, he had seemed hollow. Now, dubbed in Italian, he was much more believable and commanding. (A few years ago I learned that Lancaster had been dubbed by a famous Sicilian actor, Turi Ferro.) He even looked more princely. Though that earlier English soundtrack had hurt the rest of the cast, the replacement of Lancaster's somewhat gassy voice with one of ring and authority seemed to arch his back.

As for Visconti's directing, my altered response might well have been because in recent years I, like many others, have been starved for imaginative, individualistic filmmaking style—a treasure that was showered on us in the 1960s. Now, hungry for the feeling that a unique artist—not a corporation—had made a film, I was suffused with gratitude as I watched Visconti's hand figuratively caressing every measure of sumptuousness, of cultural texture, in scene after scene. Such a moment as the spreading of an immense tablecloth on the grass when the prince's family stops to picnic during the journey from Palermo to their summer palace, with the grooms walking the horses in the background to cool them down—I longed for it to linger. The very last moment of the picture, in a small Palermo square at

midnight, where the prince kneels and crosses himself when a priest and acolytes hurry past to someone's bedside, now seems a peak in film art.

Explanations or not, I still felt somewhat miserable about my four-decades-old review, and in my misery I sought company. I remembered that Eliot in 1947 had publicly recanted the low opinion of Milton that he had once published. (Ten years earlier he had written that Milton was a poet whose sensual capacities "had been withered early by book learning.") I remembered, too, how Shaw, in his persona as music critic, had recanted in old age his much earlier dismissal of Brahms's Requiem as music that could be "patiently borne only by the corpse." These lofty examples consoled me a bit; but they did more than that. They confirmed my belief that criticism is always in some degree diaristic, a journal of experiences rather than a series of cast-iron pronouncements. This is one more proof of the mercurial nature of truth. Every serious critic speaks the truth of his opinions, but that truth comes from the person he is at that moment, not the person of his past or his future.

When we respond to a critic, we can keep in mind that both he and we are communicating at exactly that moment. Certainly a very great deal of criticism that I have been reading through the years has benefited me through those years, has stood firm. It is the exceptions that are worrisome.

Charles Rosen, one of the most rewarding critics writing today, magisterial in the fields of music and literature and painting and aesthetics, has faced this dilemma, in himself and in his writing. In the introduction to his collection, *Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen*, Rosen says:

In collecting these essays, I have left them without correction.... I do not want to read any fictitious foresight into these essays, or to inject any observations on the most interesting of modern trends. It seemed more honest to try to bring them up to date by

adding a postscript when an apology or second thoughts seemed advisable, or when subsequent developments needed to be remarked. Where some of the discussion has dated, I hope that the reader will be pleased to remark a certain period flavor.

Those comments could helpfully preface any collection of criticism. (I may say that I have often used the postscript device in my own collections.) But, though the postscript is useful to critics, it doesn't solve the problem, which besets everyone, critic or not. Our minds are freighted with beliefs that we may no longer believe.

That is the most important aspect. All these reservations are true for everyone, not just for critics. The plain, discomfiting fact is that every one of us who has watched plays and films or read books or listened to music or looked at painting and architecture is, in some measure, self-deceived. Filed away in the recesses of our minds are thousands of opinions that we have accumulated through our lives, and they make us think that we know what we think on all those subjects. We do not. All we know is what we once thought, and any earlier view of a work, if tested, might be hugely different from what we would think now.

What can we do about it? Other than realize that this condition exists, very little. We cannot spend our lives reexamining past experiences to keep our opinions up to date. We have to operate with a certain degree of trust. If someone asks my opinion of Laurence Olivier's *Oedipus*, which I saw three times in 1946, all I can do is summon up as best I can what I felt and thought in 1946 and hope that I would react the same now. If the question is about *War and Peace*, I can either sit down and re-read it before answering or dig out my memory file of what I thought when I last re-read it thirty years ago. All of us rely on what our former selves, sometimes quite different selves, once thought. It's a scary realization--that we are all carrying around in our heads a lot of opinions with which we might now disagree.

## SPRING 2006 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

- Jan 17 Abel Gance **Napoleon** 1927  
Jan 24 Wu Yonggang **The Goddess** 1934  
Jan 31 Wolfgang Staudte **The Murderers are Among Us** 1946  
Feb 7 Akira Kurosawa **The Seven Samurai** 1954  
Feb 14 Stanley Kramer **Inherit the Wind** 1960  
Feb 21 Gillo Pontecorvo **The Battle of Algiers** 1965  
Feb 28 John Boorman **Point Blank** 1967  
Mar 7 Fred Zinneman **A Man for All Seasons** 1966  
Mar 21 Robert Bresson **Au Hazard Balthazar** 1966  
Mar 28 Richard Brooks **In Cold Blood** 1967  
Apr 4 Ousmana Sembene **Xala** 1974  
Apr 11 Wim Wenders **Wings of Desire** 1987  
Apr 18 Andre Konchalovsky **Runaway Train** 1985  
Apr 25 Karel Reisz **The French Lieutenant's Woman** 1981

...email Diane Christian: [engdc@buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@buffalo.edu).

....email Bruce Jackson [bjackson@bu.ffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@bu.ffalo.edu)

...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us

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