

# Il gattopardo: the throes of modernization



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The Nineteenth century was a time of major changes and a critical moment in the history of Italy. It was the time of the Risorgimento, the campaign for the unification of Italy and it was a long and complicated process.

Lampedusa's "The Leopard" gives a spacious perspective into this revolution and gives us insight of the state of marriage, religion and politics within the Sicilian society. Lampedusa exposes the life of The Leopard and how he and his people reacted to the Risorgimento. He states that many of the institutions in Italy have become empty vessels, used as a form of power and as a means of gaining wealth and social status. Though The Leopard did not want change, it had to come; Italy would not survive without it. The Leopard's reaction at the time of Italy's Risorgimento and his reaction to the changes he sees in his society was mainly that it was inevitable, indeed necessary, but still in some ways an unwelcome displacement of the aristocracy from their established position. The Leopard's nephew had a different reaction, "Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they'll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." He knew that they must accept the movement in order for the monarchy to survive and for the aristocracy to keep power in Italy. The Leopard's authoritarian temperament, a certain rigidity of morals, and a propensity for abstract ideas; had changed respectively into capricious arrogance, recurring moral scruples and contempt for his own relatives and friends, during this time of rebellion. Although The Leopard realizes that nothing will be the same for him or his family, he is serene throughout Lampedusa's novel. Though many of his family members and friends support, even temporarily, the revolution, The Prince never bickers with them. He accepts that change will happen and he keeps his discontent with

the rebellion to himself. As we can see, The Leopard was interested in the affairs of the state, but not many of the other characters were concerned with the movement. " Actually she (Angelica) did not care at all about Tancredi's political future... and she could not even imagine that a speech by Cavour might in time, ..., influence her own life and change it" There were, however, several characters, other than The Leopard, that did have a political awareness. The sixteen year old son of The Leopard and Father Pirrone were concerned with the invasion of Garibaldi. The characters who were concerned with the politics of Northern Italy advised The Leopard for change, so that Italy's monarchy would not be turned into a Republic. Though his pride did not allow him to show it, The Prince accepted that there would be change. He knew that Italy had to work together against a republic and in order for himself and his family to keep their power in the country there would have to be a monarchy. Not only did The Leopard feel the effects of the movement; the whole country felt that change was coming and that they would have to do anything possible to get rid of their foreign invaders. Because of the influence of the unification movement many of the Italian institutions were beginning to change during the nineteenth century. During the time of The Leopard religion was only followed by many for acceptance within society. The Leopard's Pagan views clash with the Christian values of the time of the Italian Unification, which is first shown during the family prayer. The " divinities frescoed on the ceiling" during the family prayer conflict with the Christian beliefs and symbolize the major influence of the Pagan views on the Prince. Politics became a weapon for manipulation and a source of power and influence during the time of the Risorgimento. It was viewed as a weapon used for personal benefit and

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acquisition of wealth even marriage became an outlet for sensuality and was used to acquire wealth and status. The Prince and Don Calogero view the marriage between Tancredi and Angelica as politics and they exploit it for their own social benefits. The Prince's class is degenerating while Don Calogero's is rising but requires an introduction into Noble class. Therefore from Tancredi and Angelica's marriage, they both benefit socially and politically. By comparing The Leopard and Don Calogero to ants " nothing could stop the ants...along they rushed in close order, morale high at the chance of annexing this bit of garbage" , Lampedusa makes them seem insignificant and irrelevant in context to the politics occurring in Italy. Through this comparison it seems that, like religion, politics and marriage have also become empty vessels, which have no other value other than self gain and profit. " The Leopard" illustrates emptiness by showing the state of marriage, religion and politics within the Sicilian society. The marriage between the Prince and Princess was one filled with unfaithfulness and was used as an outlet for the young couples sensuality. Religion was seen as an excess baggage and is illustrated through the Prince's Pagan beliefs. While politics was viewed as a source of power, a weapon of manipulation and as a means of gaining social advancement. Lampedusa exposes these flaws using irony and satirical humor to mock the characters in " The Leopard" and further confirm the emptiness within the society. They had all become empty vessels, without a meaning, during the unification movement, but still contained plenty of benefits. Games played for their personal rewards, gateways of love used as an outlet for ones sensual desires and views and values paid respect for approval within a society during the time of rebellion

in Italy. Works Cited Lampedusa, Giuseppe Di. trans. Archibald Colquhoun.  
The Leopard. New York: Patheon Books, 1960; 1988.