



LUCHINO VISCONTI: DECADENCE & DECAY

# The Leopard (Il gattopardo)

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Director: Luchino Visconti

Production Companies: Titanus,

Société Nouvelle Pathé-Cinéma (Paris),

Société Générale Cinématographique

Executive Producer: Pietro Notarianni

Producer: Goffredo Lombardo

Production Supervisors: Roberto Cocco,

Riccardo Caneva, Gilberto Scarpellini,

Gaetano Amata, Bruno Sassaroli

Production Managers: Enzo Provenzale,

Giorgio Adriani

Production Secretaries:

Umberto Sambuco, Lamberto Pippia

Assistant Directors: Rinaldo Ricci,

Albino Cocco, Francesco Massaro,

Brad Fuller

Script Supervisor: Stephan Iscovescu

Screenplay and Adaptation by:

Suso Cecchi D'Amico,

Pasquale Festa Campanile, Enrico Medioni,

Massimo Franciosa, Luchino Visconti

Based on the novel by:

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

Director of Photography:

Giuseppe Rotunno

Camera Operators: Nino Cristiani,

Enrico Cignitti, Giuseppe Maccari

Stills Photography: G.B. Poletto

Editor: Mario Serandrei

Art Director: Mario Garbuglia

Assistant Art Director:

Ferdinando Giovannoni

Set Decorators: Giorgio Pes,

Laudomia Hercolani

Assistant Set Decorator: Emilio D'Andria

Costumes: Piero Tosi

Costume Assistants: Vera Marzot,

Bice Brichetto

Make-up: Alberto De Rossi

Make-up for Mr Lancaster:

Robert J. Schiffer \*

Hairstyles: Maria Angelini, Amalia Paoletti

Music: Nino Rota

Unpublished Waltz Extract:

Giuseppe Verdi

Music performed by:

Orchestra Sinfonica di Santa Cecilia

Music Director: Franco Ferrara

Sound Engineer: Mario Messina

Uniforms Consultant:

Alessandro Gasparinetti

Dialogue Director: Archibald Colquhoun

Cast:

Burt Lancaster

(Don Fabrizio, Prince of Salina)

Claudia Cardinale (Angelica Sedara)

Alain Delon (Tancredi)

Paolo Stoppa

(Don Calogero Sedara, the mayor)

Rina Morelli (Princess Maria Stella)

Romolo Valli (Father Pirrone)

Mario Girotti (Count Caviaghi)

Pierre Clémenti (Francesco Paolo)

Lucilla Morlacchi (Concetta)

Giuliano Gemma (the Garibaldino general)

Ida Galli (Carolina)

Ottavia Piccolo (Caterina)

Carlo Valenzano (Paolo)

Brook Fuller (little prince)

Anna Maria Bottini

(Mademoiselle Dombreuil)

Lola Braccini (Donna Margherita)

+ intro by Adrian Wootton, Chief Executive, Film London and British Film Commission (Friday 10 January only)

The casting of Burt Lancaster in the title role threatened to poison the production from the very beginning, since Goffredo Lombardo, head of the production company Titanus, had made the decision to give Lancaster the lead without consulting Visconti. The practice of enlisting major American stars for leading roles in Italian films (such as Farley Granger in *Senso*) was common at the time. The strategy was adopted to ensure profitable box-office receipts because the Hollywood studio that 'owned' the star, in this case 20th Century-Fox, would underwrite a portion of the production costs. Visconti's preference for the lead was, first, Nikolay Cherkasov, star of Sergei Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevski* (1938), then Marlon Brando, and finally Lawrence Olivier, none of whom were available. But the deal Lombardo made meant that Fox had a say in which actors were available for loan to Titanus, which turned out to be Gregory Peck, Anthony Quinn, Spencer Tracy or Lancaster. Visconti wanted to interview each of the actors, but Lombardo went ahead and hired Lancaster and informed the director after the fact. From Lombardo's perspective, the American star must have seemed like a sure thing, since Lancaster was at the height of his considerable celebrity in the early 1960s, having received a Best Actor Academy Award for *Elmer Gantry* (1960) and another nomination for *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962).

Visconti was not pleased. He thought of Lancaster as a 'cowboy' or a 'gangster', despite the actor's recent turn away from roles that might have justified such epithets. But Lancaster immersed himself in the part of the Prince, reading and rereading the Lampedusa novel; researching the history of the Risorgimento; spending time with Lampedusa's widow and his adopted son Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi (who also advised Visconti); and cultivating relationships with Sicilian nobility in order to better understand how to play an old-world aristocrat who knows his class is in decline. He soon realised, however, that the model for the character he was asked to play was right in front of him – Visconti. Lancaster arrived in Sicily in mid-May 1962 and quickly won over his fellow actors, partly by suggesting that all of them act in their own language instead of English, as Lancaster's contract stipulated. By contrast, it was not until August that Visconti finally accepted the American, but only after Lancaster exploded in anger over the director's disdainful treatment of him. Following the outburst, Visconti's long-time screenwriter Suso Cecchi d'Amico says that the two became friends, almost like brothers: 'Real, deep affection, esteem, respect, solidarity – but not closeness.' By 2 November, their mutual birthday (Lancaster turned forty-nine, Visconti fifty-six), they had developed such rapport and become so familiar with one another's tastes that they unknowingly gave each other the same gift – paintings by the politician-cum-artist Renato Guttuso.

During the shoot Lancaster told a reporter that Visconti was 'far and away the best director I've ever worked with', adding, 'I've never seen a director rehearse so thoroughly. No detail escapes him.' The example he gives is of Visconti personally stuffing the mattress the Prince and Princess lie on in the scene where the two argue over Tancredi's choice of Angelica over Concetta: 'The mattress isn't even on camera, but that didn't stop Luchino. Its lumpiness would help the scene.' Another example: for the opening scene of the family saying the rosary together, Visconti directed Lancaster to go to a dresser and take a handkerchief from a drawer (evidently the one the Prince kneels on during prayers). When he did so, he found that the dresser was 'fully stocked with a fine array of princely regalia – 20 custom made shirts, 15 pairs of handwoven socks, 30 cravats and more than a dozen handkerchiefs', none of which appear on camera. These types of anecdotes – and there are many – reveal the method in Visconti's madness for authenticity. Whether that method has its roots in Konstantin Stanislavsky's is complicated by Visconti's ambiguous attitude towards the Russian dramaturge, but the two methods have in common an effort to get the actor to experience rather than simply perform a role.

Tina Lattanzi  
 Marino Masè (*tutor*)  
 Marcella Rovena  
 Howard N. Rubien (*Don Diego*)  
 Rina de Liguoro (*Princess of Presicce*)  
 Valerio Ruggeri  
 Olimpia Cavalli (*Mariannina*)  
 Giovanni Mesendi (*Father Onofrio Rotolo*)  
 Anna Maria Surdo  
 Carlo Lolli  
 Alina Zalewska  
 Franco Gulà  
 Winni Riva  
 Vittorio Duse  
 Stelvio Rosi  
 Vanni Materassi  
 Carlo Palmucci  
 Giuseppe Stagnitti  
 Dante Posani  
 Carmelo Artale  
 Rosolino Bua  
 Ivo Garrani (*Colonel Pallavicino*)  
 Leslie French (*Chevalley*)  
 Serge Reggiani (*Don Ciccio Tumeo*)  
 Sandra Chistolini (*youngest daughter*) \*  
 Lou Castel \*  
 Italy/France 1963  
 183 mins  
 Digital 4K

\* Uncredited

## LUCHINO VISCONTI: DECADENCE & DECAY

**Osessione** Wed 1 Jan 12:00; Thu 9 Jan 20:15

**Bellissima** Wed 1 Jan 18:30; Mon 27 Jan 20:45

**The Leopard Il gattopardo** Sat 4 Jan 12:30; Fri 10 Jan 18:50 + intro by Adrian Wootton, Chief Executive, Film London and British Film Commission; Sun 26 Jan 17:30

**La terra trema** Sat 4 Jan 16:20; Thu 16 Jan 17:50

**Senso** Tue 7 Jan 18:00; Wed 15 Jan 20:20 + intro by season curator and film critic Christina Newland

**White Nights** Le notti bianche  
 Tue 7 Jan 20:40; Sat 25 Jan 12:00

**Visconti and his Cinema: Decadence & Decay Season Launch** Thu 9 Jan 18:10

**25&Under: Introduction to Luchino Visconti** Sat 11 Jan 13:00

**Death in Venice** Morte a Venezia  
 Sat 11 Jan 14:30; Sat 25 Jan 17:25; Tue 28 Jan 20:30; Wed 29 Jan 20:20

**The Damned** La caduta degli dei  
 Sun 12 Jan 15:45; Sat 25 Jan 20:05

**Ludwig** Sun 12 Jan 16:10; Tue 21 Jan 18:10

**Conversation Piece** Gruppo di famiglia in un interno Mon 13 Jan 18:00; Wed 22 Jan 20:30 + intro by film critic Phuong Le

**The Innocent** L'innocente  
 Tue 14 Jan 20:35; Sun 26 Jan 12:00

Course: **City Lit at the BFI: Luchino Visconti – Noble Realist**

Tue 14 Jan – Thu 6 Feb 18:30-20:25

The difference, perhaps, resides more in means than ends. Whereas the Stanislavsky disciple Lee Strasberg relied on psychological means ('emotional memory', or some such) to help the actor experience genuine feelings, Visconti entrusted the effect he wanted to more materialistic devices by making the physical *mise en scène* critical to the actor's capacity for experience. The key to Visconti's direction, in other words, is production.

*The Leopard* is, in many ways, the apotheosis of traditional filmmaking, involving high production values, big-name stars, a bestselling novel as the basis for the script, and, of course, a celebrity director. But it appeared before the public at a time when the elements of traditional filmmaking were coming into question. Indeed, Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963) achieved critical acclaim (and commercial success) partly because it raised doubts about the very nature of traditional filmmaking. That said, the reception of *The Leopard* was no prediction of its legacy. Critics and audiences may have delighted more in Fellini's absurdist send-up of the movies in 1963, but in the years to come ever fewer films would look and feel like *8 1/2*, while more and more would come to resemble *The Leopard*.

The reason for this tendency lies in the relationship of the two films to the cinematic context of the early 1960s, a period of enormous transformations in both the industry itself and the artistic choices of individual directors. Fellini's *8 1/2* harmonises with such developments as the French New Wave and might be understood as an entry in the Italian New Wave if such existed (thanks to the continuing heritage of Neorealism in Italy in the 1960s, the notion of a *nuova ondata* did not really take hold). *8 1/2* tells the visually fractured and narratively fractious story of the auteur director Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) and his struggle to make a film when he claims he has 'nothing to say'. This sort of self-conscious experimentation is nowhere to be found in *The Leopard*, the paradoxical result of which – in terms of a broader history of cinematic tastes – is that a film like *8 1/2* belongs more to its own time than does *The Leopard*, which means that the impact of Fellini's film was more immediate, whereas that of *The Leopard* has been more lasting. However much *8 1/2* continues to be venerated by cinephiles, its avant-gardism now seems a bit belated: today, it is much easier to imagine a contemporary *Leopard* than a contemporary *8 1/2*.

But it would still take some time for Visconti's film to find its legacy. *The Leopard* was part of the story of the early 1960s that saw movie audiences gravitating away from big-budget fiascos like the notorious *Cleopatra*. But the near-collapse of the old studio system had the beneficial effect of opening up the cultural field to a new generation of directors. For a while, the success of independent filmmaking made it seem that films like *The Leopard* would continue to recede in cinema history, relegated to a bygone era of blockbusters and superspectacular productions. But the major studios, now transformed into media conglomerates, adapted to the new environment and figured out a way to cash in on the fresh independent talent, a signal example being Francis Ford Coppola. Coppola and other directors whom we now understand in historical terms as part of the New Hollywood had either gone to film school or schooled themselves in cinema history, so when Paramount tapped Coppola to direct *The Godfather* (1972), that history was activated as an important dimension of the film. The most obvious homage to Visconti in *The Godfather* is the long wedding segment that opens the film; though not as long (a mere 25 minutes or so), it is comparable to the ballroom section of *The Leopard* in the lush *mise en scène* and attention to period detail (albeit a very different period).

Visconti's influence on New Hollywood is even more apparent in the career of Coppola's fellow star director, Martin Scorsese. Regarding *The Leopard*, Scorsese has made several public comments about the importance of that film to his career.

As founder and chair of The Film Foundation, he oversaw the 4K restoration of the film, which screened at Cannes in 2010. On that occasion, Scorsese introduced the film by remarking, 'I live with this movie every day of my life.'

Extracted from *The Leopard* by David Weir (BFI Film Classics, 2024) Reproduced by kind permission of Bloomsbury Publishing. (c) David Weir