

A Closer Look at Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa: A Biography Through Images

Natasha Lardera (February 21, 2014)



Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, Lampedusa's cousin and heir, has published a new illustrated biography, which includes unpublished pictures from The Leopard's author's private albums and documents from his family archive. The book is an essential tool to further understand Lampedusa's work and the back history of one of the most famous historical novels of all time.

"Gioacchino is always very shy and private, but we are happy he is opening up and telling us about his family history." With these words, journalist and professor Antonio Monda, captured the overall feeling of the audience of [Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimo](#) [2] who attended the book presentation of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *A Biography through Images* (Alma Books 2013). Its author, Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi shared with his readers, rare photographs and anecdotes from his family archive as well as his own memories of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, "the prince of Lampedusa, who was a gentleman scholar with a passion for English and French literature, a rare breed of Sicilian aristocrat with a rather international upbringing who led a very private life," Stefano Albertini, the Casa's director said.

Prince Lampedusa was also the author of *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*) a novel that chronicles the



changes in Sicilian life and society during the Risorgimento. After living through the upheaval of World War II, the author fell into a lengthy depression, and thus began to write as a way to fight it off.

“Lampedusa didn't see his novel published - it was refused by publishers, such as Vittorini who was a political editor and this was not a political novel - and his name became a staple of world literature only a few years after his death,” Albertini added.

The Leopard, which had been labeled as “unpublishable” became the top-selling novel in Italian history and is considered one of the most important novels in modern Italian literature. It was finally posthumously published in 1958 and it stirred a bunch of attacks, as the conservatives were against its portrayal of the decadence of both the nobility and clergy and the leftists elements saw the novel as a tool of harsh criticism of Italian unification and the destruction of the nobility. “Sciascia attacked its political point of view,” Monda explained, “while Caramella called it immoral.”

In 1959 the book won the Strega Prize, Italy's highest award for fiction and in 1963, it was turned into a film directed by Luchino Visconti, starring Burt Lancaster. In 2012, The Observer named it as one of “The 10 best historical novels of all time.”

More details, unpublished pictures from Lampedusa's private albums and documents from his family archive can be found in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, A Biography through Images.

Born in 1934, Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, is the cousin and adopted son of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, as well as the Italian editor of Lampedusa's works and executor of his estate. He is dear to New York City, as he has been the director of the Italian Cultural Institute. He is Professor of Music History at the University of Palermo and he has written several books on opera and major composers such as Rossini, Stravinsky, Berg and Mussorgsky. This new book explores all the people and places that were dear to the great Sicilian master and are essential to further understand his work.

“This is almost like a Power Point presentation,” Gioacchino Lanza joked as he was showing slides and commenting on ancestors who were sleeping with each other or trying to poison each other. As you leaf through the book's pages, even before the text starts you see a black and white picture of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa in the gardens of Villa Piccolo in the Autumn of 1956 followed by images of ancestors dating back to the 1600's and an oil on canvas reproduction of the the Tomasi palace that same palace that was bombed and pillaged by Allied forces in World War II.

The book contains invaluable critical as well as biographical material and is a must have for any admirer of The Leopard and its writer. The biography features a foreword by Lampedusa's renown biographer David Gilmour.

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