

## The Function of Synesthesia in *Il Gattopardo*

Gian-Paolo Biasin, reviewing Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Racconti*, writes: "The inspiration has unity because it is centered on a Sicilian world that is recalled through a process of memory reminiscent more of Proust than of Stendhal."<sup>1</sup> In his article "The Prince and the Siren," Biasin alludes to the evocation of disgust, of death's image, of "the memories of the Prince" by sensory perception in *Il Gattopardo*.<sup>2</sup> Scholarship has recognized the presence of synesthesia in the novel without indicating its real importance. The interest of scholars has centered on the novel's ideology (e.g. Calaciura or Montanelli), on a comparison of Lampedusa with other novelists, especially with De Roberto (e.g. Enrico Falquil, Tom O'Neill, or Sarah Muscara) and on the relationship between symbol and structure (e.g. Jeffrey Meyers).

Early in *Il Gattopardo* its author refers to the sensuality of the father of the novel's main character, Prince Fabrizio.<sup>3</sup> The Prince's inherited sensuality is apparent throughout the novel. He is not the only character subject to sensual stimulus. For a time Angelica and her fiancé, Tancredi, the Prince's nephew, are the focal point of sensuality at Fabrizio's Villa Salina. Even the Prince's young daughters are in tune with this atmosphere (see p. 184).

This article would discuss the sensual responsiveness of the novel's characters and explore the synesthetic effect of the connection between the senses and memory in the work. There are two important uses of the senses in the novel; one concerns the time being depicted, the other impinges upon the past. We shall consider these in turn.

Angelica, although not in love with Tancredi, seeks to be introduced by him to new emotional experiences through the tactile sense (p. 171). The scuffling of rats and rustling of paper heard by these two exploring the Villa are pretexts for desired fears, for the reassuring approach of their limbs, while Tancredi's embrace protects Angelica from the morning cold (p. 187).

Taste enters the scene somewhat more often than touch. The flavor of food and drink to Fabrizio's palate is described as delicate, or too rich, or sugary, sticky, and revolting. Some dishes are cruel, colored delights, others are refined (p. 274). Moods and attitudes are described by Lampedusa in terms of taste: a suppressed mockery sweetens the Prince's mouth to the point of nausea (p. 159). The mouths of guests at a pre-dawn party are moist with bitter saliva (p. 278). The sense of taste enhances *Il Gattopardo's* frequent sexual implications. At a dinner Tancredi speculates on the taste of Angelica's kisses, likened to strawberries and cream (p. 100). Her fiancé's are delicately tasty (p. 172). Tancredi even savors blood he draws from Angelica's lips (p. 194).

The audio sense concerns carnal sensuality less than taste and touch. There is perhaps a hint of sensuality in the rustling of silk petticoats and skirts (pp. 52, 63) and more than a hint as Angelica and Tancredi rhyme kisses to a tune. Sound affects mood. Music and bells put the Prince into good humor (p. 77), but the clang of a ladle against a soup-tureen makes him angry. Feelings for Concetta are conveyed by reading poetry in a voice charged with emotion. Angelica's voice is "bella, bassa di tono" (p. 97).

Lampedusa's visual imagery is often seen through the Prince's eyes. Addicted to the mirror, he evaluates in detail the coloring of his clothes (pp. 148-149). Cutlery, china and paintings are painstakingly described by him with a brush sensitive to light (p. 82). The pervasive Sicilian sun favors colors outdoors, while the glow of a fireplace symbolizes smoldering desires within the Villa (p. 169). Through the Prince's eyes we see outdoor life: neglected roses looking like cabbages, a glimpse of bougainvillea, a view of Palermo by night and of mythologically adorned fountains. The ugliness of death is conveyed by the eyes of a dying rabbit or by a soldier's corpse (p. 23).

The olfactory sense influences Fabrizio's daily life. He savors good smells and suffers from the bad. He uses drops of bergamot on his handkerchief and joyfully inhales the aroma of rum at dessert. He presides at dinners that exude perfumed delights, (p. 99) and his bathroom smells of lacteous bran and almond soap. On the other hand the dying Prince is oppressed in a ship's cabin by the acrid smell and the odor of mustiness and fermenting cockroaches along with the tenacious "memories" of longstanding urine rising from the night table (p. 290).

It is the synesthetic effect of Lampedusa's use of the senses that gives his style, in part characteristically nineteenth-century realist, a Baudelairian modernism. It is in treating the relationship between the senses and memory that Lampedusa emerges also as a twentieth-century writer.

His novel is sad with nostalgia for the defunct past of Sicily and of a family. The widow Angelica wears black ribbons nostalgically (p. 314). Fabrizio sees no hope for Sicily in the modern world (p. 210), speaking of a past, attractive only because it is dead (p. 211).<sup>4</sup>

The senses are attendant upon the continual passage between past and present in the novel. Sometimes the memory of instincts operative in the past, buried with Sicily, seems forced to surface from the depths of the subconscious by a sort of Proustian experience. A Proustian awakening of memories and the evocation of times past may be observed in an account of Tancredi and Angelica arriving at Villa Salina, containing the verbs "ridesto" and "evocavano" (p. 183). Fabrizio's hands picking up cutlery remind his wife of their caressing and manipulative powers (pp. 19-20). She caresses the hand, a gesture unleashing a series of sensations, an awakened sensuality. The verbs "ricordava," "scatenò" and "aveva ridestata," suggest the release of buried memories as in Proust's madeleine episode.

Sounds may be evocatory. Thus Fabrizio is reminded by the strains of a waltz of the winds sweeping through the plane trees and cedars of Sicily, which has lived for him through nature's symphony, a cicada's lament resounding like a death-rattle or an elfin hoot of owls shrieking in the night. Smells also play a role. The perfume of a garden antithetically recalls the putrefaction of a soldier's corpse. Fabrizio almost resists visiting a woman of the town as the scent of his wife's skin conjures tender memories (p. 32). Painful reveries are occasioned by the odor of excrement (p. 75).

In the countryside Fabrizio's nostrils respond to the "nuptial aroma" of orange blossoms that eradicates the odor of sweating horses, or carriage upholstery and of humans: ". . . Tutto era cancellato da quel profumo islamico che evocava uri e carnali oltretomba" (p. 36). Present scents yield to the Islamic perfume that evokes Sicilian history.<sup>5</sup> The Prince goes shooting

in an "archaic" and "aromatic" countryside (p. 125). The symbolism of the olfactory experience, linking past to present, is illustrated when Angelica's scent as she is dancing with Fabrizio reminds him of a line he once read: "Le sue lenzuola debbono avere l'odore del paradiso" (p. 270). Less pleasant is the memory of crows soaring in search of rotting prey, triggered in Fabrizio by the sight of dancers in black tights. "Alla ricerca di prede putride" (p. 265) shows how strikingly one sense may evoke another.

*Il Gattopardo* contains a vast accumulation of sensory images with many examples of the correspondence of the senses. What Father Pirrone sees and smells in his old home releases a host of distant memories (p. 225). Hearing a fountain's water, Fabrizio wants to see the fountain again (p. 91). "Don Fabrizio si fermó, guardó, ricordó, rimpianse" implies the release of memories through the senses' complicity. The order of events strongly suggests the Proustian involuntary memory.

Giorgio Bassani, pointing out parallels between *Il Gattopardo* and F. de Roberto's *I Viceré*, emphasizes the disdain for nineteenth-century methods and compares Lampedusa to writers like Brancati and Forster.<sup>6</sup> We would add Balzac to nineteenth-century writers with whom others have found Lampedusa to have affinities.<sup>7</sup> Both writers familiarize the reader with the surroundings in which their characters function. Whereas human reactions are stated largely indirectly in nineteenth-century objectivism, in Lampedusa constant resort to the senses contributes to a subjective, lyrical work. It is not in family archives that he could have found the detailed intimacy of characterization and environment that concern this article.<sup>8</sup>

The role of the senses, often connected with memory, is in a way summed up by Concetta reviewing her life: "Gli spettri del passato . . . nascosti in tutto . . ." The blending of past and present, the Proustian release of past memories, hidden, perhaps buried in the subconscious make for Lampedusa's twentieth-century modernism.<sup>9</sup> The function of synesthesia in Lampedusa's novel is central. Without the evocation of memories to which it lends the immediate sensory perceptions indicated the novel would portray the main characters in the superficial colors of traits like selfishness, conceit, gluttony, materialistic gratification, and concupiscence. Synesthesia gives the characters, particularly the Prince, depth. Especially through synesthesia is his subconscious world exposed, not bursting forth in joyous and effulgent triumph as in Proust, but surfacing nonetheless.

Close to death Fabrizio wonders whether his life of seventy-three years has not consisted merely of two or three. The Prince seems to confirm Proust's idea that customary, daily routine may smother forever life's reality. However Fabrizio's synesthetic experiences certainly bring to life for the reader a reality which without them would indeed be smothered for all concerned.

Synesthesia affects also the novel's style and structure. It enhances the stylistic power of antithesis, which, although apparent in the episodes of the present, becomes more vital in the realm of things remembered. Synesthesia acts also as a structural catalyst joining past to present. Without it the junction would be less impressive, the novel less unified. Hence synesthesia's function is to strengthen characterization, style, and structure in *Il Gattopardo*.

John Van Eerde  
*Lehigh University*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gian-Paolo Biasin, rev. of Tomasi di Lampedusa, *I Racconti* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1962), I Q, V, no. 20 (1961), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Gian-Paolo Biasin, "The Prince and the Siren," *MLN*, 78, No. 1 (Jan. 1963), 31-50.

<sup>3</sup>For our references to the novel see Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano, Feltrinelli, 1961). Subsequent references will be indicated in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Simonetta Salvestroni's article, "La Struttura e lo Stile del *Gattopardo*," *Filologia e Lettere*, 17 (1971), pp. 209-237 emphasizes Lampedusa's use of antithesis.

<sup>5</sup>We may recall the Arab occupation of Sicily from the ninth to the eleventh century. See Denis M. Smith, *Medieval Sicily* (New York, Viking Press, 1968), II.

<sup>6</sup>Preface to *Il Gattopardo*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>We would mention Lampedusa's unpublished essays on Stendhal, Mérimée, and Flaubert. Both F. S. Orlando in *Ricordo di Lampedusa* (Milano, Scheiwiller, 1963), and the Salvestroni article stress Lampedusa's familiarity with Stendhal.

<sup>8</sup>In *Spectator* (May 13, 1960), p. 702, E. M. Forster writes "The Prince lives on his own account." In *20th Century*, 166 (Oct. 1959), p. 311, Bernard Wall states that "The history is assimilated and seems almost contemporary." The Salvestroni article shows how Lampedusa's use of such adverbs as "oggi" and "adesso" in connection with events occurring a hundred years previously indicate perhaps the author's unconscious participation (pp. 230-231).

<sup>9</sup>The thematic lyricism which is the product of this kind of interiorization of reality is well analyzed by J. F. Le Cercle in *Rousseau et L'Art du roman* (Paris, Colin, 1969), p. 268. In Salvestroni we find a reference to the "dolorosi monologhi interiori del protagonista" (p. 218).

## Role Playing and Motherhood in *La familia de Pascual Duarte*

Camilo José Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte* is a bizarrely violent account of a man who slaughters his hunting dog and his horse, stabs a friend, perhaps murders his first wife, kicks a rival to death, and, most horrifying of all, thrusts a dagger into his mother's neck. Criticism of the novel is almost unanimous in viewing the novel as the "history of a human being trapped by his inescapable circumstances and forced by them into acts of atrocity."<sup>1</sup> Pascual Duarte is trapped by "inescapable circumstances," circumstances I define within this essay as self-conceptual and social concerns until now only mentioned by scholars: *hombradía*, *machismo*, and *poderío*.<sup>2</sup> Pascual Duarte expects and demands that everyone comport himself according to completely inflexible rules of conduct. Everyone, male or female, must play Pascual's Game of Roles. To understand this fanaticism of role playing, the greatest of Pascual's flaws and the cause of his ruin, we must look to his greatest crime, the murder of his mother. Why does he creep into a darkened room and mercilessly slaughter an old woman? How can he justify this cowardly act, and what is the meaning of the solace he finds in his savagery?

The fact of the murder itself raises few scholarly eyebrows. Is it not to be expected, since the woman is a "malicious,"<sup>3</sup> "filthy harpy,"<sup>4</sup> whose shallowness is matched only by her brutality?<sup>5</sup> That is what Pascual would have us believe. He denigrates his mother, introducing her with such verbs as *disgustar*, *blasfemar*,