



Wine

Through the grapevine - Archive

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In The Lands Of The Leopard

by: Giancarlo Gariglio



The Leopard (1958), Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's only novel, is a beautifully poetical account of the end of an epoch, the Bourbon period, and the start of another, that of the Kingdom of Italy and the arrival of the Piedmontese in Sicily.

Transposing the fascination of a novel to the big screen is a mammoth task; one of the few who has managed to do it well was Luchino Visconti, who directed the film adaptation of *The Leopard* in 1963. And if we close our eyes for a moment and think over that masterpiece, one scene in particular is bound to come to mind: that of the ball at the Panteleone palace in Palermo, where the Prince of Salina dances with Angelica Sedàra, fiancée of Tancredi, Don Fabrizio's nephew. If you re-read the book having seen the film, the face of Angelica can be none other than that of Claudia Cardinale.

The 'Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa' literary award is organized by the Belice valley villages in collaboration with the Donnafugata winery, to pay tribute to this great Sicilian

writer. The first prizewinner, in 2003, was the Israeli Abraham Yehoshua. This year the award ceremony took place on August 5, in Palazzo Filangeri di Cutò in Santa Margherita Belice.

The winner was the Franco-Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun, for his collection of tales entitled *Bewitched Loves*. Presenting this much sought-after prize was none other Claudia Cardinale, back for the first time in 40 years in the places where *The Leopard* was set, the glorious countryside of Donnafugata and the palace where Tommasi di Lampedusa lived.

"It's a dream come true", said Tahar Ben Jelloun from the stage, "I was 20 years old when I read *The Leopard* and I fell in love with Claudia when I saw Visconti's film. This evening my prize comes directly from the arms of Angelica: Alain Delon will be really jealous!" The fact is that Claudia Cardinale really did appear to take on the personality of Angelica once more as she was applauded and admired by the numerous officials, journalists, lovers of literature and onlookers at the event.

But the evening didn't end there. At around 11 pm we moved on to the superb Donnafugata winery for a press conference and a picking of the chardonnay from their beautifully kept vineyards. This year, the traditional night time harvest, which usually takes place at the beginning of August, had been delayed to the middle of the month due to the hot but (at least for Sicily) unusually rainy summer (rainfall between September 2003 and July 2004) had increased by over 40%. This was not, though, a problem for grape quality.

"Dry weather isn't necessarily good for our wines," José Rallo, the estate's owner, reassured us. "We are confident that 2004 will give more elegant wines and we'll be able to make the most of their aromas, which will have been enhanced by the considerable day-night temperature fluctuations."

Claudia Cardinale and Tahar Ben Jelloun came to the vineyards too, the latter, given his firm but extremely moderate stance, bombarded by questions from journalists on relations between Islam and the West..

But is night harvesting just a publicity stunt or is it really useful? "We carry out criomaceration to retain the wine's aromas," explained José Rallo. "In Sicily the average daytime temperature is 35 degrees centigrade in August and to bring down the temperature of the grapes uses vast amounts of electricity, which is certainly not good for the environment. By harvesting at night, grape temperature is no higher than 18 degrees so we can reduce energy consumption by 70% and thus provide a benefit for environment."

Giancarlo Gariglio is editor of the www.slowfood.it site and contributes to the Italian Wines and Guida al Vino Quotidiano guides.

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