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The Making of a Myth: on Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's Siren

La parti di supra, fino al viddrico, è di fimmina
cu d'è beddri minne, la parti di sutta è a cuda di pisci.

Andrea Camilleri, *Maruzza Musumeci*

La Sirena, fittingly defined as “una favola moderna sub specie mythica” (Vitello 427), was composed between 1956 and 1957 and represents Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s final work. While the title of the English version of the novella has been translated as *The Professor and the Siren*, the novella is also known as *Lighea*, the name given to the work by Tomasi di Lampedusa’s wife, the Latvian Alexandra Wolf. *La Sirena* was only published posthumously, first appearing in the two publications *Paese Sera* and *L’ora* on April 17, 1960. It later appeared within Tomasi di Lampedusa’s collection of short works, *I Racconti* (1961), edited by Giorgio Bassani. A critical edition of all Tomasi di Lampedusa’s works, including *Il Gattopardo*, *I racconti* and *Letteratura inglese* and *Letteratura francese*, was published in 1988 by Mondadori as one of their Meridiani titles¹.

Although Tomasi di Lampedusa was not alive to oversee the publication of *La Sirena*, the final version of the work appears to align with his vision. It is possible to verify this by way of a typed manuscript of an earlier draft reviewed by Tomasi di Lampedusa during his stay in a hospital in Rome². This was typed by his wife and sister-in-law. A recording of a reading by the author himself also remains in part.

This study provides an interpretation of the Sicilian writer’s most remarkable novella, with a particular focus on the Greek mythology of sirens and their psychoanalytical and archetypal interpretations. Intertextual references to Tomasi di Lampedusa’s masterpiece *Il Gattopardo* and works by other Italian authors, including Cesare Pavese’s *Dialogues with Leucò*, Giovanni Mac-

¹ The Meridiani volume also includes an excerpt from the manuscript. In this paper Tomasi di Lampedusa’s works are referred to using the following initialisms: *La Sirena* is indicated with the letter *S* (its English translation, entitled *The Professor and the Siren*, is abbreviated to *PS*); *Il Gattopardo* and its English translation *The Leopard* are indicated by the letters *G* and *L* respectively; and *Ricordi d’infanzia* is indicated by the initials *RI* (*Places of My Infancy*, its English translation, takes the initialism *PMI*). I wish to thank Gabriella Page for her valuable assistance with the English language and the students who attended the History of Italian Literature course at Kyoto University, which is where the idea for this project took shape.

² See Tomasi di Lampedusa 325-326, and Vitello 298. Tomasi di Lampedusa died of lung cancer in July 1957.

chia's *Prince of Palagonia* and Leonardo Sciascia's *Cruciverba*, have also been analysed. It emerges that Tomasi di Lampedusa draws upon the archetypes of the Great Mother and the Anima as the deepest structures of imagination, as well as the mythology of sirens, to create his own myth of the fantastical appearance of the siren Lighea³. This harks back to the deepest essence of myth. Myth is a narrative construction which facilitates a connection with the human subconscious and, at the same time, represents the world as a subjective, emotional and psychic experience⁴. Tomasi di Lampedusa's act of narration in the novella *La Sirena* can therefore be interpreted as the conversion of death to life. Finally, it emerges that his own siren mythology is intimately connected with some symbolic traits of Sicily.

La Sirena recounts the story of the encounter between a mermaid and a young man, Rosario La Ciura, a student of classic literature who later becomes a renowned university professor of ancient Greek and a senator. The encounter, which takes place in the Eastern sea of Sicily, is framed by the meeting between a now elderly La Ciura and a young journalist, Paolo Corbera, in Turin in 1938. Both men are Sicilian. As Paolo Corbera gains La Ciura's confidence, the professor tells him the story of his wondrous encounter with a mermaid named Lighea fifty years earlier. Eventually, Professor La Ciura drowns, while Paolo Corbera inherits an ancient Greek Krater depicting the episode of Ulysses and the sirens, as well as a photograph of the Acropolis' Kōre. In the epilogue, readers learn that both the photograph and the vase were destroyed by the Allies during World War II.

An in-depth analysis of *La Sirena* would not be possible without first considering the notion of "catabasi", or the descent into the underworld, and its variety of semantic manifestations. This motif spans the entire novella and can be observed in several differing forms. One of the earliest references to this descent occurs when the two men meet for the first time. Their meeting place, Cafè di via Po in Turin, is depicted as a dark, mysterious and 'demoniac' netherworld⁵: entering the cafè is compared to descending into Limbo ("La sera discesi al Limbo", S 404)⁶, while the place

³ For archetypes, see Kaplan 165-166. Archetypes express unconscious elements not inferred from personal experience.

⁴ See Coco 5-8, 113-125.

⁵ See Zago 51.

⁶ "That evening I went down to Limbo" (PS 81). Further reference to the epithet 'Limbo' can be found on p. 401 of *La Sirena*: "un adattissimo Limbo" ("a most proper limbo", PS 78). Being the place where the spirits of the ancients reside, the term Limbo evokes the idea of suspension.

is referred to as “Ade popolato da esangui ombre” (401)⁷, “Inferi di via Po” (408)⁸, and “erebo pieno di ombre e [...] di catarri, [...] luogo geometrico di vite fallite” (410)⁹ on various occasions. Allusions to the symbolism of descending to the underworld can also be traced in the marine element that pervades the novella. In *La Sirena*, La Ciura states that the sea at once grants both death and immortality (“mare che dà la morte e l’immortalità”, 408)¹⁰, and that it is endowed with the traits of darkness and origination (“cieco muto palazzo di acque informi, eterne, senza sussurri, senza bagliori”, 426)¹¹. Additionally, Lighea is painted as a symbol of pre-individual life and a formless existence, and, as a result, embodies the features of the sea itself.

Sono tutto perchè sono corrente di vita priva di accidenti; sono immortale perchè tutte le morti confluiscono in me da quella del merluzzo di dianzi a quella di Zeus, e in me radunate ridiventano vita non più individuale e determinata ma panica e quindi libera. (425-426)¹²

In other words, as Lighea is assumed to be a vessel containing all life and death – and it is implied that all the deaths of beings merge into the immortality of Nature – she is described as being pure existence without form¹³ and reflects the elementary and undifferentiated aspects of the sea, which is commonly accepted as a ‘uroboric’ symbol¹⁴. The sea, in fact, symbolises death, rebirth and regeneration, *fons* and *origo*; “*Aqua est, quae occidit et vivificat*” is affirmed in *Rosarium Philosopho-*

⁷ “Hades peopled by bloodless shades” (PS 78). Also S 409: “Ade” (“Hades”, PS 86).

⁸ “The infernal regions of Via Po” (PS 86).

⁹ “ghost filled and [...] catarrh-ridden Erebus, this geometric site of failed lives” (PS 87).

¹⁰ “They’re <sea urchins> dangerous as all the gift from the sea, that grant death together with immortality” (PS 85). In the original the relative clause could be referred either to the sea or the sea urchins.

¹¹ “She said that those <bearded Tritons and translucent caverns> too were unreal visions and that the truth lay much deeper, in the blind mute palace of formless waters, eternal, without a gleam, without a whisper.” (PS 103).

¹² “I am everything because I am simply the current of life, with its details eliminated; I am immortal because in me every death meets, from that of fish just now to that of Zeus, and conjoined in me they turn again into a life that is no longer individual and determined but Pan’s and so free.” (PS 103).

¹³ Significantly, in *Il Gattopardo* death is perceived by Don Fabrizio as the crumbling of individuality and its reconstruction somewhere else in a different form: “continuo minutissimo sgretolamento della personalità congiunto però al presagio vago del riedificarsi altrove di una individualità [...] meno cosciente ma più larga: quei granellini di sabbia non andavano perduti, scomparivano sì ma si accumulavano chissà dove per cementare una mole più duratura”, G 223-224 (“this continuous whittling away of his personality seemed linked to a vague presage of the rebuilding elsewhere of his personality (thanks be to God) less conscious and yet broader. Those tiny grains of sand were not lost; they were vanishing, but accumulating elsewhere to cement some more lasting pile.”, L 248).

¹⁴ The adjective ‘uroboric’ refers to Uroboros, a snake eating its own tail, the image of a perpetual and indistinct being, see Neumann.

rum (Vitello 425). This aspect has been exemplified by an array of scholars. For instance, in Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology of imagination, which is based on the practice of *rêverie*, water contains a feminine and motherly quality as it is a nourishing principle¹⁵, and it can be interpreted as a 'reverie' of Mother Nature's milk¹⁶. Similarly, according to the Romanian mythologist Mircea Eliade, water is the source of all the possibilities of existence. As a consequence, the act of immersion symbolises a regression to the indistinct pre-existence¹⁷. Thus, as some scholars of Tomasi di Lampedusa sustain¹⁸, La Ciura's encounter with the siren symbolically stands for this 'marine regression'. Allusions to the underworld, as well as the protagonist's eventual death at sea, symbolise the professor's longing to return either to the unconscious state or to the origin of life as it responds to the internal need of pre-natal integration and the dissolution of individuality into the Whole.

Just as the siren exhibits duality in its merging of animal and human qualities¹⁹, the body of the siren also displays the signs of both the primeval confusion of life forms and a greater proximity to the primordial elements of life, such as instincts and drives which can be assimilated into the unconscious. The latter of these is generally characterised by female symbolism and deals with the archetypes of the Great Mother and the Anima in Jungian terms²⁰. In La Ciura's account, Lighea is hailed as "Madre saggissima" (*S* 427)²¹, and as a part of the primordial source of all culture, wisdom and morals: "essa faceva parte, tuttavia, della sorgiva di ogni coltura, di ogni sapienza, di ogni etica e sapeva esprimere questa sua primigenia superiorità in termini di scabra bellezza." (425)²². The epithet used by La Ciura is to be ascribed to the archetype of the Great Mother, expressing the

¹⁵ See Bachelard 98-111. For an overview of Gaston Bachelard's theories on imagination, especially for a definition of *rêverie*, see Kaplan 184: "Reverie is the state of consciousness which works in various forms of imaginations of matter, where unconscious forces confront perceptions and colour them with emotions".

¹⁶ See Bachelard 109.

¹⁷ See Eliade 135-136.

¹⁸ Zago 1987, p. 54; Reale 1986, pp. 31, 77-78 n. 1; Vitello 1987, p. 420.

¹⁹ Lighea is said to be both animal and immortal at the same time; see *S* 425 "era una bestia ma nel medesimo istante era anche una Immortale" ("she was a beast but at the same instant also an Immortal", *PS* 103).

²⁰ See Reale 36. To paraphrase Neumann (79), 'early men were close to animals in the psychological sense because the determining role of instincts and drives signifies that they exist essentially as part of the species wholly dominated by the Great Mother'.

²¹ "Wise Mother" (*PS* 105).

²² "she belonged, even so, to the fountainhead of the all culture, unaware of all wisdom, of all ethics, and could express this primigenial superiority of hers in terms of rugged beauty." (*PS* 103). Also in the Late Antiquity's and Medieval mythology of sirens, they were considered bearers of wisdom, see Pasquini 472.

forces of Nature as well as the primordial wisdom that precedes all categories of rational thought. As underlined by Erich Neumann in his analysis of the Great Mother, connections between the Great Mother archetype and sirens can be traced through various archeological and anthropological sources²³. Like Nature, the Great Mother is ambivalent: she can be either nourishing and protective or hostile and devouring, taking “everything that is born back of it into its womb of origination and death” (Neumann 30). In other words, the Great Mother ties psyche down to the undifferentiated. Coming back to Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novella, Lighea’s invitation to follow her into the sea ultimately indicates the return to the pre-logic realm of the undifferentiated and into the Great Mother’s arms. Additionally, as some scholars have suggested, Lighea can also be interpreted as the Anima²⁴. Belonging to the Archetypical Feminine²⁵, the Anima is also closely related to the archetype of the Great Mother. By Neumann’s definition, the Anima is the element of male psyche through which a male experiences his own femininity, which is to say that the Anima represents the unconscious feminine qualities that a male possesses²⁶. According to Jung, the Anima acts as a mediator between the ego and the unconscious inner world. She is both man’s guide and muse, leading him back to his inner world. In Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novella, in fact, Lighea grants La Ciura a deeper wisdom which allows him to have a vivid and sensual feeling for classical literature. His work is compared to poetry and his knowledge said to border on necromantic:

Ciò che lo aveva sempre distinto dagli altri pur eruditissimi colleghi era il senso vivace, quasi carnale, dell’antichità classica e ciò si era manifestato in una raccolta di saggi italiani *Uomini e dei* che era stimata opera non soltanto di alta erudizione ma di viva poesia. [...] più alto rappresentante di questa sapienza delicata, quasi necromantica (S 404).²⁷

²³ With regards to the legendary figure of the Sea-Lady, it should be mentioned that the connection between the archetype of the Great Mother and sirens is explained in the German language through the link between the word “mother” and the word “ocean” (see Neumann 260); with relation to the representation of sirens as half-human and half-bird creatures, sirens were conceived as death-dealing female figures and images of the devouring aspect of the Great Mother. This latter aspect connects sirens with gorgons, another image of the Great Mother. Neumann gives the example of an Etruscan Lamp from the V century B.C. showing a Gorgon’s head surrounded by a wreath of figures, including sirens with birds’ wings and human faces (Neumann 239 and plate 100). The connection between sirens and Gorgons is also mentioned in Reale 34; on Gorgons as a symbol of the Great Mother, see Neumann 168-170.

²⁴ See Reale 36-39, 45-46, Vitello 420.

²⁵ Anima expresses the transformative and dynamic elements of femininity.

²⁶ See Neumann 32. Anima is formed in part by the male’s personal as well as archetypal experience of the Feminine (33); on Anima, see also Jacobi 131-142.

²⁷ “What had always distinguished him from colleagues, however erudite, was his lively, almost carnal sense of classical antiquity; and this was shown in a collection of essays in Italian, *Men and God*, which was considered a work not only of high erudition but of true poetry. [...] the major representative of this subtle, almost magical and unremunerative branch of knowledge” (PS 81).

In addition, La Ciura underlines that he has chosen the young Corbera as the custodian of his story because, unlike the erudite scholars, his knowledge of the Ancient Greek world is instinctual and he attains a synthesis between reason and the senses²⁸. All of this gives importance to a transmission of knowledge that is related to the senses, intuition and inclination.

A detailed examination of Lighea's identity requires consideration of the mythology of sirens. According to literary sources, such as Licophron's *Alexandra* and an *Odyssey's* scholiast (Scholium V), Lighea is one of the names of the Sirens in Greek mythology²⁹. The word Lighea means a 'pure, acute, clear, piercing sound'³⁰, and it is no coincidence that Lighea has a melodic voice in Tomasi di Lampedusa's novella³¹. Also of great significance is the fact that Lighea's voice is assimilated into the marine soundscape, a notion which strongly ties in with her mixed and ambivalent traits.

Parlava e così fui sommerso, dopo quello del sorriso e dell'odore, dal terzo, maggiore sortilegio, quello della voce. Essa era un po' gutturale, velata, risonante di armonici innumerevoli; come sfondo alle parole in essa si avvertivano le risacche impigrite dei mari estivi, il fruscio delle ultime spume sulle spiagge, il passaggio dei venti sulle onde lunari. Il canto delle Sirene, Corberà, non esiste: la musica cui non si sfugge è quella sola della loro voce. (S 422)³²

Furthermore, the circumstances in which Lighea and Professor La Ciura meet play a significant role in the understanding of Lighea's identity. In La Ciura's and Corbera's reminiscence of their island from the cold and distant Turin, Sicily is described by both men as a land inhabited by Gods during the seemingly endless month of August: "Gli Dei vi hanno soggiornato, forse negli

²⁸ See S 417: "Forse della realtà greca sei forse più conscio di loro; non per coltura, certo, ma per istinto animalesco. [...] sei riuscito a compiere la sintesi di sensi e ragione." ("Though maybe you are more conscious of Greek reality than they; not by culture, of course, but by animal instinct. [...] achieving a synthesis between your senses and your reason.", PS 95).

²⁹ See Bettini-Spina 98-105.

³⁰ Bettini-Spina 104 ("acuta, sonora, melodiosa"); see also Mancini 2005 80.

³¹ See Magli 178. La Ciura's voice is also described as melodic when he addresses Corbera, see S 404: «si voltò verso di me e con la voce stranamente musicale» («he turned towards me and in strangely musical tones said», PS 82).

³² "She spoke: and so after her smile and her smell I was submerged by the third and greatest of charms, that of voice. It was slightly guttural, veiled, reverberating with innumerable harmonies; behind the words could be sensed the lazy surf of summer seas, last spray rustling on a beach, winds passing on lunar waves. The song of the Sirens does not exist, Corbera: the music from which there is not escaping is that of their voices.", (PS 100).

Agosti inesauribili vi soggiornano ancora.” (407)³³. At night, while the soul is lost within the vortex of the sky, the body is alert, fearing the epiphany of demons, as the narrator specifies.

l’incanto di certe notti estive in vista del golfo di Castellammare, quando le stelle si specchiano nel mare che dorme e lo spirito di chi è coricato riverso fra i lentischi si perde nel vortice del cielo mentre mentre il corpo teso e all’erta, teme l’avvicinarsi dei demoni (407)³⁴.

Through both flashbacks and prolepsis³⁵, techniques that the author used liberally throughout *Il Gattopardo*, La Ciura recounts that his spellbinding surroundings prepared him for Lighea’s coming:

il sole, la solitudine, le notti passate sotto il roteare delle stelle, il silenzio, lo scarso nutrimento, lo studio di argomenti remoti, tessevano attorno a me come una incantazione che mi predisponava al prodigio (421)³⁶

It is significant that Lighea’s appearance occurs at the peak of summer, when an eruption at Mount Etna worsened an already unbearable heat wave³⁷. The summer heat produces a kind of quiet exhilaration in La Ciura, and the sun is lyrically described as a shining but brutal donor of energy:

Il caldo era violento anche ad Augusta ma, non più riverberato da mura, produceva una prostrazione bestiale ma una sorta di sommessa euforia, ed il sole, smessa la grinta sua di carnefice, si accontentava di essere un ridente se

³³ “The gods have sojourned there, may do still in inexorable Augusts.”, (PS 84).

³⁴ “the enchantment of certain summer nights within sight of Castellammare bay, when stars are mirrored in the sleeping sea and the spirit of anyone laying back amid the lentisks is lost in a vortex of sky, while the body is tense and alert, fearing the approach of demons.”, (PS 85).

³⁵ On this problem, see De Seta; Magli speaks about anaphora and cataphora (Magli 2016 170)

³⁶ “sun, solitude, nights spent beneath rotating stars, silence, sparse feeding, study of remote subjects, did wave a kind of spell around me which predisposed a mood for prodigy.”, (PS 99).

³⁷ See S 419 “la castrofe di quell’estate del 1887 che fu una di quelle proprio infernali come ogni tanto se ne passano laggiù. L’Etna la notte rivomitava l’ardore del sole immagazzinato durante le quindici ore del giorno; se a mezzogiorno si toccava una ringhiera di balcone si doveva correre al Pronto soccorso; i selciati di lava sembravano sul punto di ritornare allo stato fluido; e quasi ogni giorno lo scirocco ti sbatteva in faccia le ali di pipistrello vischioso.” (“Then to crown it all came that appalling summer of 1887, which was one of the truly hellish ones that happen down there now and again. At night Etna would vomit the sun’s fire that it had stored during fifteen hours of daylight; touching a balcony-rail at midday meant a rush of First Aid post; the lava Paving-stones seen on the point of returning to their fluid state; and almost every day the scirocco flapped its slimy bats’ wings in one’s face.”, PS 97).

pur brutale donatore di energie, ed anche un mago che incastonava diamanti mobili in ogni più lieve increspatura del mare.(429)³⁸

The appearance of the siren at summer's peak in *Lighea* is part of a traditional description of the encounter between humans and sirens³⁹, which can be observed in a number of writers, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Roger Caillois's *I demoni meridiani* (1937)⁴⁰. Interestingly, this tradition is also supported by the probable etymology of the word "siren" from *séirios*, "Sirius", the Dog Star, which indicates the summer peak and was often employed to signify the sun, as it belongs to the semantic field of "burning"⁴¹. With this in mind, it is fitting that sirens were traditionally depicted as creatures that dried up human will and energy, inviting men to sleep and sloth, to a *cupio dissolvi*⁴². These attributes lead to the inclusion of sirens among the group of meridian demons, a category of spirits to which nymphs, incubi and succubi also belong⁴³. Meridian demons seduce and eventually have erotic encounters with humans, resulting in madness, paralysis and aphonia⁴⁴. They are symbolic of the state of lifelessness and the abandonment of life to death⁴⁵. In Tomasi di Lampedusa's novella, in fact, Lighea invites La Ciura to satisfy his desire for rest by reaching her in the sea⁴⁶.

³⁸ "The heat was violent at Augusta too, but it no longer reverberated from every wall, no longer produced utter prostration but a kind of suppressed euphoria; the sun put off his executioner's scowl and contented itself with the role of splendid if brutal donor of energy, as well as of a magic jeweller who set mobile diamonds in every faintest ripple of sea.", (PS 98).

³⁹ Nevertheless, I should specify that the encounter between La Ciura and Lighea happens in the early morning.

⁴⁰ Additionally, in *Odyssey*, the encounter between Ulysses and the siren occurs at the absolute calm of the winds and sea, see *Odyssey*, XII, 168-169.

⁴¹ See Bettini-Spina 96; Caillois 27.

⁴² Horace, in fact, associated the idea of *acedia* (a mixture of sloth and melancholy) with the expression *triste sirena* (*Saturae* II, III, 14).

⁴³ Compelling evidence for the inclusion of sirens among the group of meridian demons is found in a Hellenistic relief representing a siren as an incubus, as the half-bird and half-human creature is riding a dreaming man, see Neumann 146 and plate 63. Succubus were believed to be creatures who sexually assaulted men, taking advantage of their midday sleep. Notably, succubus were feminine daemons who assaulted men, while incubus were male daemons who assaulted women.

⁴⁴ See Caillois 44-53. For the captivating power of nymphs, which is defined as "possession", see Calasso 11-44. On Meridian daemons in Medieval times, see Agamben 5-14.

⁴⁵ Midday is the "time of death" because the destructive violence of sun seems to stem the flow of life (Caillois 26). Also Pluto and Persephone appeared in midday.

⁴⁶ For instance, S 425 "Io ti ho amato e, ricordalo, quando sarai stanco, quando non ne potrai proprio più, non avrai che sporgerti sul mare e chiamarmi: io sarò lì, perchè sono ovunque, e il tuo sogno di sonno sarà realizzato" ("I have loved you; and remember that when you are tired, when you can drag on no longer, you have only to lean over the sea and call me; I will always be there because I am everywhere, and your thirst for sleep will be assuaged.", PS 104)

In *Il Gattopardo*, longing for sleep or death is identified as a leitmotif and connected with the sorrowful traits of summer. Hailed as the true king of Sicily, the sun has an intoxicating power that dissolves the individual's desires⁴⁷:

Il sole [...] si rivelava come l'autentico sovrano della Sicilia: il sole violento e sfacciato, il sole narcotizzante anche, che annullava la volontà del singolo e manteneva ogni cosa in una immobilità servile, cullata in sogni violenti, in violenze che partecipavano dell'arbitrarietà dei sogni. (G 48)⁴⁸

This longing for sleep is repeatedly ascribed to Sicilians and intertwined with an intimate desire for dissolution and immobility, as exemplified in the notorious dialogue between Don Fabrizio and Chevalley, a delegate from the arising government of Italy:

Il sonno, caro Chevalley, il sonno è ciò che i Siciliani vogliono [...] Tutte le manifestazioni siciliane sono manifestazioni oniriche, anche le più violente: la nostra sensualità è desiderio d'oblio, le schioppettate e le coltellate nostre, desiderio di morte; desiderio di immobilità voluttuosa, cioè ancora di morte, la nostra pigrizia (171)⁴⁹

Yet in *Il Gattopardo*, yearning for death is represented by Don Fabrizio's passion for astronomy, which condenses an inner desire for eternity and ataraxia, and in particular with his 'wooing' of the morning star Venus⁵⁰. Notably, Don Fabrizio relays his death through the erotic metaphor of a beautiful woman approaching him, a woman, that is to say, more beautiful than when she appeared to him as a star:

una giovane signora [...] Era lei, la creatura bramata da sempre che veniva a prenderselo: strano che così giovane com'era si fosse arresa a lui; l'ora della partenza del treno doveva esser vicina. Giunta a faccia a faccia con lui

⁴⁷ See G 76 "gran lutto dell'estate siciliana" ("the deep gloom of Sicilian summer", L 78)

⁴⁸ "The sun [...] showed itself to be the true ruler of Sicily; the crude brash sun, the drugging sun, which annulled every will, kept all things in servile immobility, cradled in violence as arbitrary dreams." (L 45).

⁴⁹ "Sleep, my dear Chevalley, sleep, that is what Sicilians want [...] All Sicilian expression, even the most violent, is really wish-fulfillment: our sensuality is a hankering for oblivion, our shooting and knifing a hankering for death; our laziness, our spiced and drugged sherbets, a hankering for voluptuous immobility, that it is for death again" (L 183).

⁵⁰ See, G 222: "Venere stava lì, avvolta nel suo turbante di vapori autunnali. Essa era sempre fedele, aspettava sempre Don Fabrizio alle sue uscite mattutine [...] Don Fabrizio sospirò. Quando si sarebbe decisa a dargli un appuntamento meno effimero, lontano dai torsi e dal sangue, nella propria regione di perenne certezza?" ("There was Venus, wrapped in her turban of autumn mist. She was always faithful, always awaiting Don Fabrizio on his early morning outings [...] Don Fabrizio sighed. When would she decide to give him an appointment less ephemeral, far from carcasses and blood, in her own region of perennial certitude?", L 244).

sollevò il velo e così, pudica ma pronta ad esser posseduta, gli apparve più bella di come mai l'avesse intravista negli spazi stellari. (234-235)⁵¹

The correlation between Venus and death observed in *Il Gattopardo* can also be found in the novella by adding the element of the siren. This reveals another aspect of the semantic mythology of sirens adopted by Tomasi di Lampedusa. Although the connection between sirens and stars resembles Platonic mythology⁵², it should be remarked that sirens are linked to the underworld. In the words of Károly Kerényi, ‘sirens served human mortals in that they carried men as well as men’s desire to the Heavens’⁵³. To further clarify the topic, the siren myth displays affinities with the cult of the dead and the mythological figures of Demeter and Korē-Persephone, who reappears from hell every spring⁵⁴. We can find testimony of this aspect in the pictures of fifth century B.C. Greek *askoi* (funeral vases), *pinakes* (votive tablets), the *loutrophoros* of Magna Graecia (vases used to carry water for the brides’ ritual pre-nuptial bath and in funeral rituals), and siren-shaped statuettes on the tombs in Attican⁵⁵. In these pictures, sirens brought about the death of men through their singing and were related to the nuptial eschatology as an allegory of salvation and rebirth. The relationship between sirens and the mythology of the underworld is also seen in a variety of literary pieces, such as Euripides’ *Helen*⁵⁶, Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica IV*⁵⁷, Hygin’s *Fabulae*⁵⁸,

⁵¹ “a young woman [...] It was she, the creature forever yearned for, coming to fetch him; strange that one so young should yield to him; the time for the train’s departure must be very close. When she was face to face with him she raised her veil, and there, chaste, but ready for possession, she looked lovelier than she ever had when glimpsed in stellar space.” (L 260).

⁵² Sirens were understood to produce harmony amongst the celestial spheres, see particularly Plato, *Republic* 617B-617C; also see Reale 55-56, and Coco 20-30.

⁵³ Kerényi 1951 60. See also Neumann 206: “The birdlike character of woman points primarily to her correlation with the heavens. But this archetypal symbol possesses a positive life-giving and a negative death-dealing aspect.”.

⁵⁴ See Bettini-Spina 57-61; Mancini 2005 123; Moretti 17.

⁵⁵ Bettini-Spina 189, n. 37; Mancini 2017 87-103.

⁵⁶ See Bettini Spina 45-47.

⁵⁷ *Argonautica* IV, vv. 896-898: “and once they tended Demeter’s noble daughter still unwed, and sang to her in chorus”.

⁵⁸ *Fabulae* CXLI [Sirenes]: “Sirenes Acheloi fluminis et Melpomenes Musae filiae Proserpinae raptu aberrantes ad Apollinis petram venerunt ibique Cereris voluntate, quod Proserpinae auxilium non tulerant, volaticae sunt factae.”.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁵⁹, and Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*⁶⁰. According to the myth transmitted through these texts, sirens were the young companions of Korē-Persephone and their metamorphosis into birds was linked to the goddess's abduction by Hades. Additionally, in Euripides' *Helen*, Helen appealed to the sirens as well as Persephone in her dirge. It should be noted that both sirens and Korē-Persephone were identified as girls of blooming meadows⁶¹. In the *Odyssey*, for instance, Circe advises Ulysses to stay away from not only the voices of sirens but also meadows⁶². Moreover, according to the traditional myth, Korē-Persephone was abducted while picking flowers. Fittingly, Korē-Persephone and the sirens' association with flowers and vegetation symbolised the variety of the forces of Nature and the cycle of death and rebirth⁶³. This aspect is similarly related to the symbology of Aphrodite, who is represented as a young maiden accompanied by Eros and Himeros⁶⁴. It should be noted that devotion to Aphrodite and Persephone coexisted in the cult practice bound to the feminine sphere of nuptials and women's transition from unmarried to married life⁶⁵. Inside this cult, sirens are identified with *parthenoi* since they embody the boundary between the spheres of infancy and womanhood, as represented by their hybrid bodies. At this point, it is worth recalling that in *La Sirena* Lighea is represented as an adolescent⁶⁶, her face being as smooth as that of a sixteen-year-old woman⁶⁷. In addition, Lighea's superhuman smile, which is described as ex-

⁵⁹ *Metamorphoses* V, vv. 551-563: “Hic tamen indicio poenam linguaque videri / commeruisse potest; vobis, Acheloides, unde / pluma pedesque avium, cum virginis ora geratis? / an quia, com legeret vernos Proserpina flores, / in comitum numero, doctae Sirenes, eratis? / quam postquam toto frustra quaestitis in orbe, / protinus, ut vestram sentirent aequora curam, / posse super fluctus alarum insistere remis / optastis facilesque deos habuistis et artus / vidistis vestros subitis flavescere pennis. / ne tamen ille canor mulcendas natus ad aures / tantaque dos oris linguae deperteret usum, / virginei vultus et vox humana remansit.”

⁶⁰ *De Raptu Proserpinae* III, vv. 254-258: “rapidis Acheloides alis / sublatae Siculi latus obsedere Pelori / accensaequae malo iam non impune canoras / in pestem vertere Lyras: vox blanda carinas / adligat; audito frenantur carmine remi.”

⁶¹ See Mancini 2017 115.

⁶² See *Odyssey*, XII, vv. 44-45 “But the Sirens enchant him with their clear-toned song, / Seated in a meadow.”, and vv. 158-159 “She ordered us first to avoid the voice of the marvellous / Sirens, and also their meadow full of flowers.”. According to Hesiod, sirens live in the island rich of flowers, *antheoessa*, see Kerényi 1951 60.

⁶³ In a psychoanalytic account, sirens and Kore-Persephone belong to the archetype of the Feminine and they stand as a paradigm of the Anima. See Neumann 305-309; Reale 46.

⁶⁴ See Mancini 2017 94. Sirens also arouse Himeros, provoking desire through their voices.

⁶⁵ The proximity between the cult of Aphrodite and the one of Korē-Persephone is also attested to in *pinakes* from Locris, see Mancini 2017 123-129. For a more detailed look at sirens as symbols of marginality, see Mancini 2010.

⁶⁶ See *S* 421: “quell'adolescente” (“The girl”, *PS* 99).

⁶⁷ See *S* 421: “il volto liscio di una sedicenne” (“a smooth sixteen years old face”, *PS* 99); see also “lineamenti d'infantile purezza”, *S* 421 (“features of a childlike purity”, *PS* 99). Lighea is also called “ragazzina”, *S* 427 (“girl”, *PS*, 105). The use of diminutives when referring to Lighea indicates her young age.

pressing an almost beastly joy of existence and an almost godlike bliss⁶⁸, is suggestive of the ecstatic and ironic smiles of the archaic Greek sculptures whose photographs were hung on the walls of the professor's studio⁶⁹. Among these photographs is the one of the smiling figure of *korē* from the Acropolis⁷⁰. The similarity between the smiles of Lighea and the mysterious figure of the maiden depicted in the statue suggests a level of identification between the two.

Given that mythology is ultimately an exploration of the world of origins as well as a state of the individual's spirituality, it is important to mention some thematic and mythological affinities displayed between Cesare Pavese's *Schiuma d'onda* [*Sea Foam*] and *La Sirena*. Independent of the writer's personal interpretation of the myth⁷¹, *Schiuma d'onda* draws on a cultural background similar to that of Tomasi di Lampedusa and supports an interpretation of *La Sirena* based on archetypes and myths. *Schiuma d'onda* is a short piece contained within *Dialoghi con Leucò* [*Dialogues with Leucò*] (1947), a collection of enigmatic and lyrical dialogues between mythological figures, heroes and gods. In *Schiuma d'onda*, a conversation is staged between Sappho, the ancient poetess who committed suicide by falling from a white rock (*Leukas petrē*) into the sea, and Britomartis, a nymph who leapt into the sea while fleeing from Minos. Similarly to *La Sirena*, in *Schiuma d'onda* the sea is described as an entity in which everything dies and then lives again ("Tutto muore nel mare, e rivive" Pavese 47)⁷², and as a symbol of the maternal, the unknown, death and otherness. The representation of Venus, Britomartis and Sappho is commensurable with the characters in Tomasi di

⁶⁸ See S 421: "sorrìdeva [...] Non era però uno di quei sorrisi come se ne vedono fra voi altri, sempre imbastarditi da un'espressione accessoria, di benevolenza o d'ironia, di pietà, crudeltà o quel che sia; esso esprimeva soltanto se stesso, cioè una bestiale gioia di esistere una quasi divina letizia. Questo sorriso fu il primo dei sortilegi che agisse su di me rivelandomi paradisi di dimenticate serenità." ("The girl smiled [...] But it was not in the least like one of those smiles you people give, which are always debased by an accessory expression, of benevolence or irony, pity, cruelty or the like; this expressed nothing but itself, that is an almost animal joy, an almost divine delight in existence. This smile was the first of the spells cast upon me, revealing paradises of forgotten serenity.", PS 99)

⁶⁹ See S 413: "La stanza balenava dei loro sorrisi estatici ed insieme ironici, si esaltava nella risposata alterigia del loro portamento." ("The room was alight with their ecstatic yet ironic smiles, exalted by the relaxed arrogance of their bearing.", PS 91)

⁷⁰ See S 413: "alle pareti vi erano enormi fotografie, a grandezza naturale, di statue greche arcaiche; e non le solite fotografie che tutti noi possiamo procurarci ma esemplari stupendi evidentemente richiesti con autorità ed inviati con devozione dai musei di tutto il mondo. Vi erano tutte, quelle magnifiche creature: [...] la Korè dell'Acropoli" ("the walls were hung with huge photographs, life-size, of archaic Greek statues; and not the usual photographs we can all lay hands on, but superb specimens, obviously demanded with authority and dispatched with devotion from museums all over the world. There they all were, these magnificent creatures, [...] the "Korè" of Acropolis", PS 90). It is also meaningful that the picture of the statue of *korē* is mentioned a second time at the end of the novella.

⁷¹ Despite the fact that Tomasi di Lampedusa's interest in myth is not currently documented and it does not seem to be erudite, the psychoanalytic activities of his wife could have been key in his knowledge and understanding of Jung and Jungian scholars.

⁷² "Everything dies in the sea, and comes to life again." (41).

Lampedusa's novella. Britomartis and Sappho embody the notion of *katapontismòs*, or leaping into the ocean, which conveys the idea of a passage from life to death and subsequent regeneration⁷³. This leap is pertinent to sirens in terms of their relationship with the underworld, their placement at the end of the world also being identified with the gates of Hades (*pylai*), and the myth of their suicide⁷⁴. All of these parallels converge in the symbolic system of sirens drawn more or less intentionally by both Pavese and Tomasi di Lampedusa in their respective works.

This similarity also suggests the specific chthonic traits of Venus's representation. In *Schiuma d'onda*, Venus, whose character never appears and whose name is never explicitly pronounced, is described as the goddess whose essence and breath are made by everything which belongs to the sea: "E tutto quello che si macera e dibatte nel mare, è sua sostanza, suo respiro" (Pavese 50)⁷⁵. While she is depicted as the figure presiding over the whole domain of Nature, resembling the Mother Goddess in her ambivalent components, Pavese's representation of Venus also attests to the influence of Károly Kerényi's *Goddess of Sun and Moon*⁷⁶. According to the myth of her marine birth, the goddess Venus carries a primigenial unity within her figure. Additionally, she possesses sepulchral traits and is connected with the Goddess of the Underworld Persephone⁷⁷, symbolising *reductio ad unum*. To paraphrase Kerényi's words, 'Venus reveals the possibility of a solution of contrasts to all creatures and, at the same time, the condition of one-ness which in ancient Greek terms was compared to the calm surface of the sea'⁷⁸.

At this stage, it is worth taking a slight deviation from *La Sirena* and *Schiuma d'onda* to recall Macchia's *Il principe di Palagonia. Mostri, sogni, prodigi nelle metamorfosi di un personaggio* (1978) [The Prince of Palagonia. Monsters, Dreams, Prodigies in the Metamorphosis of a Cha-

⁷³ See Mancini 2010 9-12. The symbolism of the diver in *Schiuma d'onda* is mentioned in Cavallini 2013 77. The leap into the sea draws on the myth of Ino-Leucothea, which inspired Leucò's character in Pavese's work.

⁷⁴ For the *katapontismòs of sirens*, see Mancini 2010 11-12. The gates of Hades were thought to be next to a white rock, see *Odyssey* XXII, 11-14. The leap into the sea pictured in the famous frescos inside the *Tomb of the Diver* in Paestum has been connected with a Corinthian *aryballos* representing a scene with Ulysses and the sirens (Boston Museum of Fine Arts), see D'Agostino and Cerchiai.

⁷⁵ "And everything that is torn and tortured in the sea is her substance and her breath." (45).

⁷⁶ See Corsini 210, and Bernabò 1975 313-316. In Uberto Pestalozza's *Pagine di religione mediterranea*, Paula Philippson's *Tessalische Mythologie*, Walter Otto's *Gli dei della Grecia*, Mario Untersteiner's *Fisiologia del mito*, Karl Kerényi's work and in the collaborative work between Carl Jung and Karl Kerényi's, Bernabò also indicates Pavese's readings regarding archaic Mediterranean mythology (see also Bernabò 2009 273, 289). Bernabò identifies in Britomartis the figure of *potnia*, the mistress of animals. Further information on *Dialoghi con Leucò* can be found in Comparini.

⁷⁷ See Kerényi 2017 90-92.

⁷⁸ See Kerényi 2017 90.

racter]. *Il principe di Palagonia* details the life of the seventh Prince of Palagonia, Ferdinando Francesco II Gravina Cruylas e Alliata, who filled his villa in Bagheria, a small city close to Palermo, with monstrous sandstone statues during the eighteenth century. Rich with imagined details, Macchia's work is by no means a simple recreation of the life of the Prince of Palagonia, neither a description nor a narration, but rather a survey full of conjecture and hypothesis. *Il principe di Palagonia* can be divided into two main parts. The first of these provides a gradual approach to the figure of the Prince and his Villa, taking the form of a trip to Sicily and a recollection of travellers' records, stories and novels related to the villa and its creator; the second is an imaginary dialogue between the Prince and a Venetian visitor to the villa⁷⁹.

Overall, the Prince of Palagonia is represented as the guardian of the enigmas of Nature and its cycle of life and death, and he is deeply critical of the triumph of science and rationality. Much like Professor La Ciura, the Prince is cut off from society, isolated and alone, foolish or pretending to be a fool, much like Pirandello's Henry IV in the homonymous work⁸⁰. Additionally, the Prince of Palagonia shares the dual and metamorphic nature of being both beast and human with his stone monsters, being a descendant of the sirens himself. In order to clarify the Prince's lineage, the narrator recalls a tale included in Achim von Arnim's novel *Povertà, ricchezza, colpa ed espiazione della contessa Dolores* (1810) [*Armut, Reichthum, Schuld und Buße der Gräfin Dolores*]. The story is about a mermaid's lover, and it represents an adaptation of the nordic legend of undine within a Mediterranean setting⁸¹. The narrator subsequently compares the characters of the Prince of Palagonia and Professor La Ciura. Both are indeed teetering on the edge of sanity and haunted by the past:

E non si sa davvero se sia un pazzo, un visionario, che ha la mente sconvolta da un eccesso di cultura, per essersi immedesimato con i fantasmi, di cui ha vissuto e da cui non è riuscito a liberarsi e che non lo hanno lasciato più vivere, un altro personaggio siciliano moderno: il grande, illustre professore di greco, anch'egli celibe e solitario, del più bel racconto di Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa *Lighea* (Macchia 1133)⁸².

⁷⁹ This approach makes readers identify with the Prince and directly involves them in the investigation of the inner reasons that drove the Prince of Palagonia to build his Villa dei mostri.

⁸⁰ See Macchia 1133.

⁸¹ See Macchia 1997 1121-1136. Not surprisingly, this section of Macchia's work is entitled *L'amante della sirena* [The Siren's Lover].

⁸² "One cannot really know whether he is a fool, a visionary, one whose mind has been disturbed by an excess of knowledge, or by identifying with the ghosts he has lived with and not been able to rid himself of and will no longer allow him to live, or another modern Sicilian character: this is the great, illustrious professor of Greek, unmarried and solitary, from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's most beautiful story, *Lighea*." (my translation).

The legend of undine is only referenced very briefly in *La Sirena* through the titles of books in the professor's library: *Ondine* by Giraudoux, *Undine* by La Motte-Fouqué, and a work by G. H. Wells, presumably *The Sea Lady*, which La Ciura abhors⁸³. However, according to the narrator of *Il principe di Palagonia*, the Romantic Nordic tradition represented by Giraudoux and La Motte-Fouqué suggests that Lampedusa's perspective of Sicily is similar to that of the Romantic German writers:

si riconosce ancora una volta che la Sicilia vista in questo straordinario racconto di Tomasi di Lampedusa è la Sicilia dei romantici tedeschi: è la Sicilia, la Grecia che fermenta nella fantasia di quei poeti visionari, da Hölderlin ad Arnim. (1136)⁸⁴

In *Il Principe di Palagonia*, monstrosity is depicted as the everlasting metamorphosis of Nature. According to the Eighteenth century French painter and engraver Jean Houel, whose diary of his four-year journey around Sicily is evoked in the initial part of Macchia's work⁸⁵, the monsters of Villa Palagonia represent all creatures existing in Nature, living in the sea, earth and sky, or existing in mythology and poetry:

Tutto quanto, la terra, il mare, l'aria, possono produrre, uomini, quadrupedi, uccelli, pesci, piante, tutto quanto cresce, nei climi più diversi, si trovava lì, avvicinato e mescolato, senza criterio di scelta, senza gusto. Tutte le creazioni della mitologia e della poesia, il centauro, la sfinge, il drago, la chimera, non reggevano il confronto con quelle figure che, anche in gruppi, decoravano il viale. (1098) ⁸⁶.

The Monsters of Villa Palagonia are described as the result of the confusion of forms. According to Huel, human bodies are merged with the wings of birds, fish tails, the limbs of quadrupeds, ele-

⁸³ See S 413-414. Among these books are also the plays of Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina; one of the main characters of his romantic comedy *Los Celos con los celos se curan* is a siren.

⁸⁴ "Once again, we recognise that the Sicily of Tomasi di Lampedusa's extraordinary short story is that of the German Romantics: it is the Sicily, the Greece that lives in the imagination of those visionary poets, from Hölderlin to Arnim.", (my translation).

⁸⁵ See Macchia 1082-1091. Macchia refers to Jean-Pierre Houel, *Voyage pittoresque des Iles de Sicile, de Malte et de Lipari où l'on traite ds Antiquités qui s'y trouvent encore; des principaux phénomènes que la Nature y offre; des costumes des habitants et de quelques usages* (1782-1787). On Houel's book see also Sciascia 1041-1046.

⁸⁶ "Everything that the ground, the sea, the air can produce, such as human beings, quadrupeds, birds, fish, plants, everything that grows in the most different climates, was there; everything was thrown together without taste or reason. No mythological or poetic creation – the centaur, the sphinx, the dragon, the chimera – could compete with those figures, which, even in groups, decorated the path.», (my translation).

phants' trunks, the claws of wild boar, vultures' talons, monkey and fox tails, and are also dressed in unusual clothes, masks, armour and instruments used both in war and music⁸⁷.

Given their hybridity, sirens enrich this list of monstrosities, as well as representing a symbol of metamorphosis. These aspects are also evident in Tomasi di Lampedusa's novella. In *La Sirena* Lighea's animalesque features are frequently pointed out. Lighea has small, sharp teeth similar to those of dogs⁸⁸, and she eats raw fish with childlike pleasure⁸⁹. Moreover, Lighea expresses a synthesis of the characteristics of both beast and goddess. Professor La Ciura reveals that Lighea's hybrid nature is most evident in her smile, during sexual intercourse and in the powerful immediacy with which she talks:

Era una bestia ma nel medesimo istante era anche una Immortale ed è peccato che parlando non si possa continuamente esprimere questa sintesi come, con assoluta semplicità, essa la esprimeva nel proprio corpo. Non soltanto nell'atto carnale essa manifestava una giocondità e una delicatezza opposte alla tetra foia animale ma il suo parlare era di una immediatezza potente che ho ritrovato in pochi grandi poeti. (S 425)⁹⁰

Tomasi di Lampedusa's description of Lighea leads us to consider the place where the encounter between the siren and Professor La Ciura occurs: Sicily. Monstrosity, as will be hereinafter illustrated, is a mark of Sicily. It is not by coincidence that an array of ancient writers locate the

⁸⁷ See Macchia 1098: "In una stessa statua la forma umana si univa alle ali degli uccelli, alla coda dei pesci, alle membra dei quadrupedi, alla proboscide dell'elefante, alle unghie del cinghiale, agli artigli dell'avvoltoio, alla coda della scimmia e della volpe, e, per rendere più stravagante questo guazzabuglio, vi erano stati aggiunti abiti singolari, maschere, armature, strumenti di guerra, di musica, di caccia." ("In a single statue, the human body was combined with the wings of birds, fish tails, the limbs of quadrupeds, elephants' trunks, the claws of wild boar, vultures' talons, monkey and fox tails. And to make this mishmash all the more bizarre, unusual clothes, masks, armour and instruments used in war, music and hunting were added.", my translation).

⁸⁸ See S 421: "dentini aguzzi e bianchi, come quelli dei cani" ("sharp little white teeth like a dog's", PS 99).

⁸⁹ See S 424: "Essa non mangiava che roba viva: spesso la vedevo emergere dal mare, il torso delicato luccicante al sole, mentre straziava coi denti un pesce argentato che fremeva ancora; il sangue le rigava il mento e dopo qualche morso il merluzzo o l'orata maciullata venivano ributtate dietro le sue spalle e, maculandola di rosso, affondavano nell'acqua mentre essa infantilmente gridava nettendosi i denti con la lingua." ("She ate only what was alive: often I saw her emerge from the sea, her delicate torso gleaming in the sun, tearing in her teeth a silvery fish that was still quivering; the blood flowed in lines in her chin, and after few bites the mangled cold fish or dory would be flung over her shoulder and sink into water, tainting it with red, while she let out childish cries as she cleaned her teeth with her tongue.", PS 102-103). This detail is also considered by Marguerite Yourcenar, see Nigro 2017 349.

⁹⁰ "She was a beast but at the same instant also an Immortal, and it is a pity that no speech can express this synthesis continually, with such utter simplicity, as she expressed it in her own body. Not only did she show a joyousness and delicacy in the carnal act quite the opposite of dreary animal lust, but her talk had a potent immediacy which I have found since only in few great poets." (PS 102).

myth of sirens in Sicily⁹¹. For instance, in *Metamorphosis*, Ovid sets the myth of sirens and Proserpina in the central countryside of Sicily, while Claudian in *De Raptu Proserpinae* recounts that the sirens flew to Cape Peloro, a promontory situated in the Northeast part of Messina, after Proserpina's rape. Moreover, sirens were placed in Sicily by the anonymous author of *Argonautica Orphica*, Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*⁹², and Edile in a fragment of the short poem *Scilla* as mentioned in Ateneo's *Deipnosofisti*.

Returning to *Il Principe di Palagonia*, during his colloquium with the Venetian patrician, the prince depicts the whole of Sicily as a land of monsters⁹³. To paraphrase the Prince's words, nobody has ever been able to eradicate the monsters from the bottom of their caves or the marine abysses⁹⁴. Furthermore, the Prince of Palagonia suggests that Sicilians inhabit an island of monsters by alluding to Trinacria, the winged female head with snakes for hair surrounded by three running legs that has become a symbol for the island: "Gli antichi avevano rappresentato, come saprà, la Sicilia con tre zampe e la testa alata. Noi viviamo su un mostro." (Macchia 1180)⁹⁵. Hence, Sicily appears as a land of marvels and surprises similar to the one illustrated in *Sicilia ricercata nelle cose più memorabili* (1742-1743), a memoir written by Antonino Mongitore, better known as Canonico Mongitore⁹⁶. The Prince of Palagonia adopts Canonico Mongitore's view of Sicily, considering it a scattered island surrounded by strange and monstrous marine creatures:

⁹¹ See Bettini Spina 113-115, Mancini 2005 80-82, in particular note n. 5. According to Alexandrine poet Lycophron's *Alexandra*, after the passage of Ulysses, the tree sirens *Ligeia*, *Parthenope* and *Leukosia* committed suicide by falling into the sea and they were swept by the tides to three different shores. *Ligeia* was carried to the shores of Terina, on the Calabrian coast. See Lycophron, *Alexandra*, vv. 712-731. In this regard, see Gizzi 219-220.

⁹² See Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* XIII, vv. 309-315.

⁹³ Part of the conversation (*Colloquio con i mostri*) [Conversation with monsters] is entitled *L'isola dei prodigi* [Island of Wonders], see Macchia 1177-1186.

⁹⁴ See Macchia 1173: "io vivo in una terra dove i mostri esistono, sono sempre esistiti, e nessuno potrà estirparli dalle profonde caverne, dagli abissi marini ove sono nascosti." ("I live in a land where monsters exist, they have always existed, and nobody will eradicate them either from their deep caves or the ocean depths where they hide.", my translation).

⁹⁵ "As you might know, the ancients represented Sicily with three legs and a winged head. We live on a monster." (my translation). Medusa was one of the most notorious gorgons and she was a uroboric symbol of the primordial power of the Archetypal Feminine in its devouring and chthonic aspects (see Neumann 166).

⁹⁶ See Macchia 1178: "un libro che a mio padre aveva donato un canonico della Chiesa metropolitana di Palermo. Era anche giudice sinodale e consultore e qualificatore del nostro tribunale del Sant'Uffizio. [...] Egli aveva osservato ciò che c'era di più raro nei viventi razionali, negli animali e nel cielo siciliano" ("a book given to my father by an ecclesiastic from the metropolitan church of Palermo. He was a synodal judge, consulter and qualifier of our Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Palermo. [...] He had observed that which was rarest in rational living beings, in animals and in the Sicilian sky", my translation).

Per me il vero, il grande libro delle meraviglie era quello che lessi allora, meraviglie che non si trovano nelle Indie, nel Catai, ma accanto a noi, a due passi da noi. Era la Sicilia la vera terra delle meraviglie, il grande baraccone delle meraviglie [...] Credevo in quel che leggevo, e, se non volevo credere, quelle storie miracolose, respinte dalla ragione, ritornavano come immagini famigliari antichissime, entrate in così stretta consuetudine con la nostra vita, che era difficile, come accade con le vecchie abitudini, disfarcene. E così tutta la Sicilia, in tutte le sue parti, quelle che conoscevo e ancora di più quelle che non conoscevo, mi appariva come un'isola sperduta nelle acque, circondata da pesci strani, da mostri marini, come ne vedevano i marinai, quelli, ad esempio, più grossi di un tonno, macchiati di vari colori, a forma di serpenti deformi... (Macchia 1178-1179)⁹⁷

A reference to Canonico Mongitore's memoir and its connection with the Villa dei mostri can also be found within Leonardo Sciascia's *Villa Palagonia* [Villa Palagonia], included in the essay collection of *Cruciverba* [Crossword Puzzle]. In *Villa Palagonia*, Leonardo Sciascia describes Sicilian culture as being prone to prodigies and monsters, stressing the aspects of irrationality that reside in all human beings⁹⁸. According to Sciascia, Mongitore's memoir is a kind of dictionary of Sicilian monsters, superstitions, mystical depravations, and of the topsy-turvy world we live in, written when irrational thoughts take over: "Tra il dizionario di Bayle e quello di Voltaire, nel sonno della ragione, la Sicilia produceva il suo: di mostri, di superstizioni, di mistiche depravazioni, di *mondo alla rovescia*." (Sciascia 1039)⁹⁹.

To conclude this analysis of Sicily, it should be highlighted that in some passages included in the opening chapter of Macchia's *Il Principe di Palagonia, Quasi un'introduzione. Nella terra del Fuoco* [Almost an Introduction. Inside the Land of Fire]¹⁰⁰, the description of Mount Etna, as

⁹⁷ "To me the real, the great book of marvels was the one I read then, marvels which aren't found in the Indies, or in the Cathay, but near us, a stone's throw away. Sicily was the real land of marvels, the great circus of marvels [...] I believed in what I read, and even if I didn't, those miraculous stories, rejected by intellect, returned like ancient familiar images and became so entwined with our life that it was difficult, as it is with old habits, to do away with them. Therefore, all of Sicily, in all its parts, those parts I knew but those I didn't even more so, appeared to me an isolated island in the ocean surrounded by strange fish and marine monsters like the ones seen by sailors. These were bigger than tuna fish, with spots of varying colours and shaped like deformed snakes..." (my translation).

⁹⁸ See Sciascia 1040. In *Villa Palagonia*, Sciascia provides readers with a rational explanation of the existence of the Villa dei mostri in Bagheria, affirming that Villa Palagonia is the result of the feudal anarchy in the 18th century in Sicily. Similarly to Macchia's work, in *Villa Palagonia*, like in the rest of the essays included in *Cruciverba*, Sciascia takes advantage of the descriptions of Villa Palagonia in the works of several writers, such as Antonino Mongitore, Giovanni Meli and the Marquis of Villabianca.

⁹⁹ "Between Bayle's dictionary and that of Voltaire, with rational thoughts at rest, Sicily produced its own: a dictionary of monsters, superstitions, mystic deprivations, of a world turned upside-down." (my translation). Sciascia goes on to list some marvels and, unsurprisingly, he includes the fragrance emanating from the breast of sister Maria Crocifissa, who appeared as Beata Corbera in *The Leopard*; see Sciascia 1039: "La venerabile suor Maria Crocifissa (la Beata Corbera del *Gattopardo*) esalava dal petto, dove portava scolpiti, in color fosco e oro, croce e cuore, soavissimo odore" ("Venerable Sister Maria Crocifissa (the Blessed Corbera in the *Leopard*) exhaled the most pleasant scent, from her breast, where she carried a carved cross and heart of a dusky gold colour", my translation).

¹⁰⁰ See Macchia 1080-1091.

well as of the whole of Sicily, is undertaken through the opposing notions of construction and deconstruction, chaos and order, mortality and immortality, form and formlessness, life and death:

La visione di un vulcano ci immerge in un dualismo entro cui l'uomo è sbattuto, nel dissidio degli elementi che lottano per sopravvivere e la neve lotta col fuoco, la morte lotta con la vita, e quella stessa morte è vita e fecondità (Macchia 1082)¹⁰¹.

To summarise, Mount Etna is considered a metonymy for the whole Sicily, which is also perceived as the land of antithesis and as an antithesis itself. Sicily, in fact, is imbued with both paradisiacal and infernal traits while representing the mysterious powers of Nature:

la Sicilia, terra di disastri perpetua, morta, involta nella ruina, nella sua confusione, nel suo disordine, immagine del caos eppure una terra splendida di vita, fertilissima, feconda, tra lussureggianti giardini di limoni e aranci (1083)¹⁰².

This illustration of Mount Etna ultimately alludes to the eternal death and re-birth of both animate and inanimate creatures: deformity, chaos, uncertainty, fragmentation, disharmony, multiplicity, disintegration and metamorphosis all constitute the immutable aspects of Nature. All of these characteristics pertain to both sirens and the island on which their myth is set, and lead us back to Tomasi di Lampedusa's novella and a few final considerations.

In *La Sirena* the concept of chaos is translated into the image of specks of dust twirling inside a sunbeam. This image recurs throughout Tomasi di Lampedusa's works, appearing in *Il Gattopardo* as well as in *Ricordi di infanzia* [*Places of My Infancy*], his recollection of childhood memories. While in *Ricordi d'infanzia* specks of dust are connected to the description of the sun's power to enchant and rouse the writer's soul and imagination¹⁰³, in both *La Sirena* and *Il Gattopardo*

¹⁰¹ "The sight of a volcano immerses us in duality" (my translation). See also Macchia 1090: "il fascio di pietre che, innalzandosi violentemente, sbatteva contro le pareti interne del vulcano. Nascita o distruzione del mondo?" ("the stacks of rocks that, violently rising, crashed against the inner walls of the volcano. Was it the birth or destruction of the world?", my translation).

¹⁰² "Sicily, land of perpetual disaster, dead, wrapped in its own ruin, in its confusion, in its disarray, an image of chaos and yet a land brimming with life, fertile, fruitful, among lush gardens of lemons and oranges." (my translation).

¹⁰³ See *RI* 354: "talora, specialmente in estate, i saloni erano oscuri ma dalle persiane chiuse filtrava la sensazione della potenza luminosa che era fuori, talaltra, a seconda dell'ora, un solo raggio penetrava diritto e ben delineato come quelli del Sinai, popolato da miriadi di granellini di polvere [...]. Un vero sortilegio di illuminazioni e di colori che mi ha incatenato l'anima per sempre." ("sometimes, particularly in summer, these rooms were dark, yet through the closed blinds filtered a sense of the luminous power that was outside; or sometimes at certain hours a single ray would penetrate straight and clear as that of Sinai, populated with myriads of dust particles [...]: a real sorcery of illumination and color which entranced my mind forever.", *PMI* 59).

the motif has a negative connotation, as it resembles feelings of confusion, derangement, nonsense and pettiness. In *La Sirena* the image is evoked by Paolo Corbera to describe La Ciura's distance from him and the young journalist's feeling of inferiority when around the famous professor. Paolo Corbera compares himself to the small dust motes that float about aimlessly within a sunbeam: "una specie di quelle bricioluzze di pulviscolo che roteano senza costrutto nei raggi del sole" (*S* 405)¹⁰⁴. This image is used in *Il Gattopardo* to illustrate the same sense of chaos and impatience: "Un raggio di sole carico di pulviscolo illuminò le bertucce maligne" (*G* 56)¹⁰⁵. Vicious macaques are painted alongside parrots on the walls of a room in Salina's palace, and these act as symbols for the perpetual worry that grips Don Fabrizio. Not only can this motif be found within Tomasi di Lampedusa's works, including *Ricordi d'infanzia*, but its use in other literary works of fiction provides evidence of a hidden and internal discourse between Tomasi di Lampedusa and other writers. In addition to the renowned passage of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* concerning the perpetual, fortuitous movements of primordial elements in the vacuum¹⁰⁶, imagery related to dust motes can be traced back to the representation of the world in Leopardi's *Operette Morali [Essays and Dialogues]*. In *Dialogo tra Ercole e Atlante [Dialogue between Hercules and Atlas]*, for instance, the world is compared to a poor little sphere which is so light that it can be caught by the wind¹⁰⁷, and in *Copernico [Copernicus]* it is said to be an almost invisible small ball of clay and a small grain of sand¹⁰⁸. This motif also appears in Pirandello's short novel *Pallottoline [Small Balls]*, in which men are described as infinitesimal specks of dust and the Earth a mere chickpea¹⁰⁹, as well as a passage in *Il fu Mattia Pascal [The Late Mattia Pascal]*: "siamo o non siamo su un'invisibile trottolina, cui fa da ferza un fil di sole, su un granellino di sabbia impazzito che gira e gira e gira, senza saper perché,

¹⁰⁴ "more like one of those specks of dust that rotate unconstructively in sunbeams" (*PS* 82).

¹⁰⁵ "A ray of sunshine full of dust specks lit up the malicious monkeys." (*L* 54).

¹⁰⁶ See *De rerum natura* II, vv. 114-122: «Contemplator enim, cum solis lunima cumque / inserti fundunt radii per opaca domorum: / multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis / corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso / et velut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas / erdere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam, / conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris; / cornicere ut possis ex hoc, primordia rerum / quale sit in magno iactari semper inani.»

¹⁰⁷ See Leopardi 51, 53-54: "pallottola", "sferuzza", "e la palla piglia vento, perch'è leggera" ("ball", "poor little sphere", "The south-west wind catches it, because of its lightness.", 15-16, 18).

¹⁰⁸ See Leopardi 224, 226: "un pugno di fango, tanto piccino, che io, che ho una buona vista, non lo arrivo a vedere", "un granellino di sabbia" ("a ball of clay, so small that I, who have good sight, cannot see it", "a grain of sand", 168, 170)

¹⁰⁹ See Pirandello 1992 188, 190-191: "polviscoli infinitesimali", "cece, alias il signor pianettino terra", "cece Terra" ("infinitesimal dust", "chickpea, also known as Little Mr. Planet Earth", "earth chickpea", my translation). On the connections with Eugenio Montale's *Notizie dall'Amiata* concerning this motive, see Ricci.

senza pervenir mai a destino” (Pirandello 1993 7)¹¹⁰. Taking into account the aforementioned passages, *Il Gattopardo*’s excerpt appears to be a reflection on impermanence, chaos and the absurdity of the human condition.

The motive of chaos, as discussed in the preceding paragraph, has much to contribute to our understanding of the final pages of both Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel and novella. In one, readers are presented with the image of the stuffed dog Bendicò being tossed out of the window of Villa Salina and falling into a heap of dust¹¹¹, while in the other the professor’s picture of Kōre and his Krater are rent to pieces. Both endings focus on the fleeting nature of all things, human and otherwise, and suggest a sense of disillusionment and resignation to death. In the novella, it should be noted that the shattered keepsakes previously belonging to La Ciura on the one hand suggest that chaos and absurdity ultimately rule over the lives of men, reflecting the symbolism of sirens and the island of Sicily, and on the other they suggest that everything belongs to the cycle of death and rebirth of Nature. In conclusion, the siren in Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novella is a symbol of the eternal flow of Nature, while Sicily can be identified as the mythological land of the sirens: “Così parliamo della Sicilia eterna, quella delle cose di natura” (*S* 103)¹¹².

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¹¹⁰ “Are we are or are we not a kind of invisible top, spun by a ray of sunshine, on a little madden grain of sand, which spins and spins and spins, without knowing why, never reaching an end” (3).

¹¹¹ The scene is placed at the end of the novel, when Don Fabrizio’s daughters learn during a cardinal inspection that the religious relics they own are mere forgeries devoid of meaning.

¹¹² “So we spoke about eternal Sicily, nature’s Sicily” (*PS* 84).

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