

Abstracts

From heraldry to zoology. Troping the decadence of Sicilian aristocracy in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*

Edoardo Costadura

Contrary to a popularised view, Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* (1958) does not nostalgically commemorate the glory of a now extinct world. It is much rather the story of an irreversible 'endgame'. Through the perspective of Prince Salina, the last 'Gattopardo', we witness from the inside the decadence of a noble Sicilian family within the context of the Italian *Risorgimento*: a gradual internal decay that the rise of a new class, a new aristocracy in the making, only accelerates. This process of which the Prince slowly becomes aware, is inscribed in the text's metaphorical network, in particular in its animal metaphors: the Gattopardo's decadence, therefore, is legible in the symbolic downfall of his heraldic emblem, a leopard which is no longer war-like, but a dancing, harmless animal. Depending on narrative perspective, the aristocrat, once a predatory feline, turns into a sheep or a monkey, now at the mercy of the new masters, represented by jackals, hyenas and wolves, but also by crows, cockroaches and ants. But the animal which symbolises this paradigmatic change and functions as a sort of transition between the old and the new ruling class, is the monkey: while the daughters of Palermo's aristocracy turn into little macacas, men-apes come into power.

Taste and distinction. The garden of a fictitious eighteenth-century Chinese noble family

Kees Kuiken

In the eighteenth-century Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* (a.k.a. *The Story of the Stone*), the Jia family are introduced as members of the hereditary titled Chinese nobility under the Qing. Their close ties to the imperial court are exposed in chapters 15-18, in which their two mansions in a suburb of the capital are merged into a splendid temporary residence for an imperial consort. While Ji Cheng (1582-1642) wrote the classical treatise on the theory of Chinese garden design, chapter 17 of the *Dream* is our best account of the practice of elite garden construction and its political, economic, religious, esthetic and sexual connotations. Jonathan Spence has described the lifestyle of this elite as 'a triumphant blending of taste and artifice'. This is exemplified by the debate on the composition of mottos and poems for the new garden in which naturalism, mysticism and erudite sophistication vie for approval by the visiting imperial consort. Oppositions of fiction and reality eventually dissolve into a discourse of professed simplicity, suggesting that the latter is indeed one of the esthetic and moral standards of Qing court culture. To the nobility, its appropriation provides a means to construct fictions of taste and distinction.

VIRTUS 17 (2010)

Aristocracy, *roman fleuve* and culture history. Louis Couperus' *The Books of the Small Souls* and Dutch high society around 1900

Yme Kuiper

This article deals with *The Books of the Small Souls*, a sequence of novels by the Dutch author Louis Couperus (1863-1923). The question is raised whether this *roman fleuve* can be of heuristic value in the light of discussions on attitudes, aspirations, and ideas of men and women in Dutch noble, patrician and bourgeois circles around 1900. The wider context of the article is the European fashion of the *romans fleuves* in Europe at the turn of the century. In Couperus' books, Kuiper recognises several oppositions in relation to these noble, patrician and bourgeois circles: family ties versus those with acquaintances; 'old money' as an expression of status versus the lack of new income opportunities; religious orthodoxy versus liberalism; male versus female attitudes. Recent historiography has shown that the decline of power of nobles did not decrease but even stimulated feelings of social and cultural exclusivity among many of them during the decades before the Great War. In conclusion, Kuiper argues that *The Books of the Small Souls*, despite their fictive character, are an inspiring source for research on the mentality and selfimage of Dutch upper classes in the *Belle Époque*.

The class of the highest taxpayers. A network of noble and patrician Dutch families and their political- administrative positions in the second half of the nineteenth century

Jan Rupp † and Huibert Schijf

Before the introduction of general suffrage in 1919, during the period of the census suffrage 1850-1917, a class of the highest taxpayers (*hoogstaangeslagenen*) was established to form the First Chamber as a counterweight of the Second Chamber. This class however, as is argued in this article, dominated in fact the political arena on every level. This is illustrated by a case study of the highest taxpayers of the city and province of Utrecht. During the entire period of time, half of the political positions on the local, provincial and national level were held by the highest taxpayers, despite constitutional changes that led to a steady rise of the number of people entitled to vote. A network of four Utrecht families, one patrician and three noble families, with a history of political-administrative posts, dominated the Utrecht political scene during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was partly so because of the absence of merchant patrician families, who were concentrated in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and partly because they managed their (inherited) landed property well, despite the agrarian crisis.

High society in The Hague. An empirical exploration of aristocratic representation around 1900

Jaap Moes

In this empirical exploration of the aristocratic décor of *The Books of the Small Souls* by Louis Marie Anne Couperus (1863-1923) the representation of aristocrats is compared to the lifestyle of non-aristocratic notables in The Hague at the turn of the nineteenth century. It became

abundantly clear that within the top stratum more or less subtle differences in the display of wealth existed between social status groups. Compared to the average expenditures of the notables in The Hague the representation of aristocrats seems to have been relatively expensive, diverse and subtle at the same time. Future research will have to answer the question whether this applies to aristocracy in other Dutch cities, or even in general, to aristocracy on a national level, as well.

Remaining at the top of the European aristocracy. The House of Arenberg from the French Revolution until World War I

Bertrand Goujon

One of the former sovereign families of the Holy Roman Empire, the House of Arenberg was characterised by its transnational identity: the dispersion of their estates, the genealogical networks, a European way of life. This transnational identity was challenged in nineteenth century Europe with the rise of nation states. The formation of national branches, however, proved the Arenbergs' ability to adapt. Not only was their patrimony preserved and modernised, also the transformation of these aristocrats into prominent regional notables proved a success and gave them the opportunity to maintain important political positions during the nineteenth century. Their pragmatic stance on a European, national and local level was the key to their endurance at the top of the social hierarchy until 1918.

Count Hendrik van den Bergh (1573-1638). An old fashioned nobleman between west, south and east

S. Groenveld

Count Hendrik van den Bergh, scion of the most powerful noble family of Guelders, made a spectacular career serving Spain during the Eighty Years' War. In 1629 he commanded a daring expedition against the Republic. In the long end however, the operation failed and the count was held responsible for the great defeats the regime in Brussels experienced in the same year. After completely having lost favour of archduchess Isabella, he initiated an unavailing revolt against the dominant Spanish position in the government of the Southern Netherlands. Only a successful escape to the Dutch Republic saved him from the death penalty enforced for treason. This contribution describes the career of count Hendrik van den Bergh and focuses on his notion of honour and the background of his treason. The count was, the author concludes, a nobleman of a type almost vanished, old fashioned in his own time.