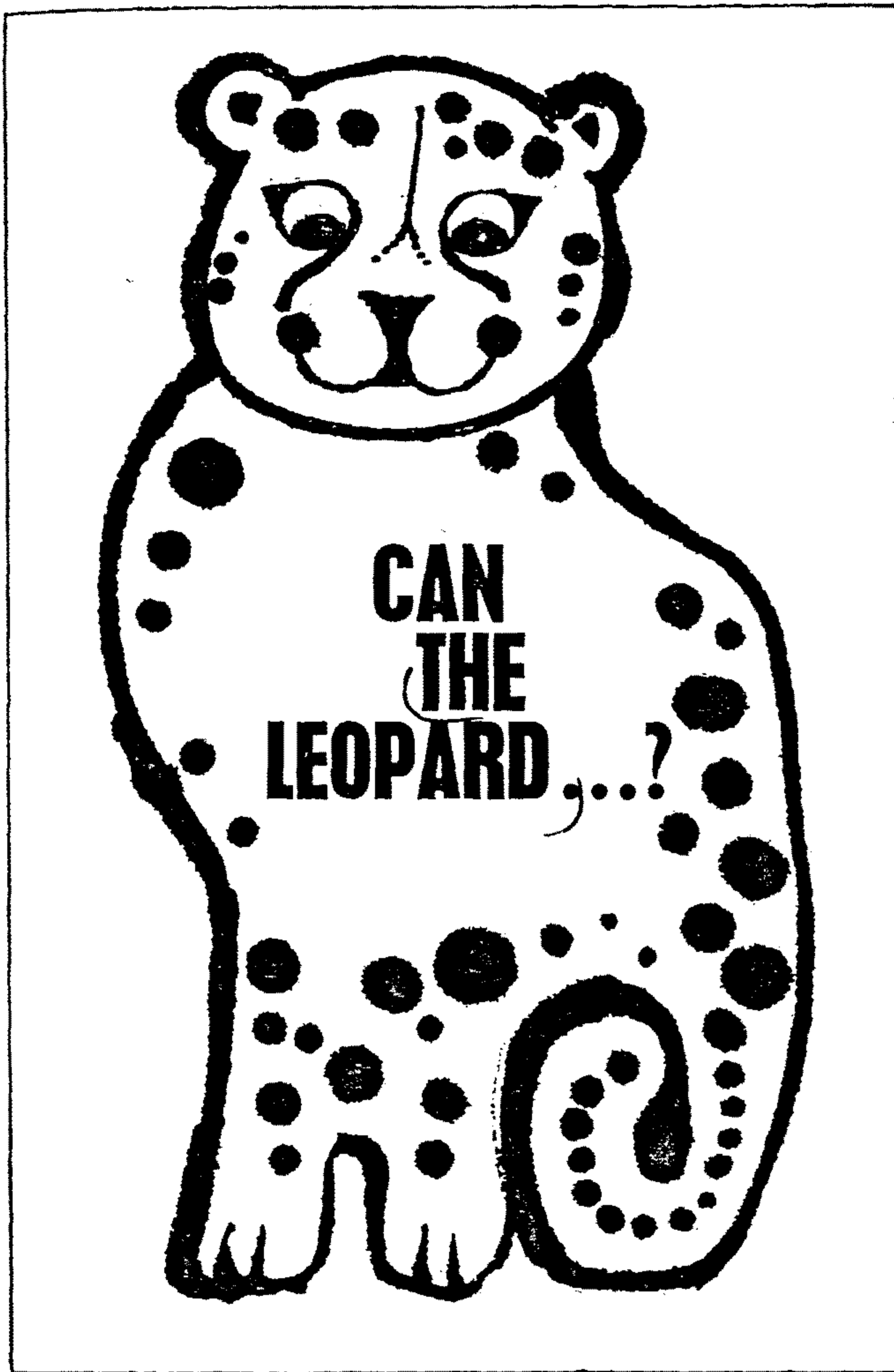


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BY BRENDA DAVIES

THERE IS NOTHING NEW ABOUT directors claiming that their work has been mangled. Von Stroheim, Welles, Antonioni, Losey, to quote only the names that come immediately to mind, have all complained bitterly and publicly in the past; and there must be more instances than we shall ever know about, where the people concerned have not chosen to speak out. Indeed, in an art that is also an industry and which relies on a series of mechanical processes to bring it to life, distortion of the original concept is likely to be the rule rather than the exception. All the more credit therefore to the few giants who have stamped their individuality on work which, by its very nature, is subject to the touch of so many hands.

Few would deny Visconti's claim to be one of these giants, and the arrival in London of the American release version of his *The Leopard* touched off the kind of publicity usually reserved for Elizabeth Taylor's matrimonial adventures. "Leopard Man Sues Fox," shouted the headlines in the evening papers, conjuring up a truly newsworthy zoological event. The more sober papers, whose critics had already deplored the difference between the London Leopard and the much more magnificent animal they had seen at Cannes, published letters from Visconti and some of his collaborators. Since this is a matter of great interest to all of us who pay money at the box-office, it might be worth trying to sort out the facts of the *Leopard* case. Visconti's allegations were summarised in his *Sunday Times* article of October 27th, 1963. The American version, he says, was prepared without his

supervision: "It was in my view badly cut and dubbed with ill-chosen, unsuitable voices . . . When I saw the film in New York I had difficulty in following the plot . . . Moreover the film has been processed as if it were a bright piece of Hollywoodiana . . . It is now a work for which I acknowledge no paternity at all."

The original running time of *The Leopard* was 205 minutes. The version shown in Britain and America is 44 minutes shorter. A scrutiny of the French text (published in *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma*, No. 32/33) reveals that a number of small but important linking scenes have been cut (see box on page 100). Obviously an effort has been made not to disrupt whole sequences, but the cutters have failed to appreciate that they were dislocating the rhythm of the original, so that the first half of the film now seems to progress by a series of jerks. Thus the "picnic" sequence has been shortened in such a way that all explanation of where the family are going, and why, has disappeared. They seem to be merely setting out on an elaborate joy-ride. But the most insensitive cut is in the long hunting duologue between the Prince and Don Ciccio, where there is a sudden jump from Don Fabrizio gazing out over the hills, to the bedroom quarrel with his wife. Here the missing link is a long revelation by Don Ciccio of Angelica's curious family background. The original dissolve came as he crossed himself at the end of his rather sordid story. The effect on the sense and feeling of the quarrel scene which follows, and the ironic force it lends to the Princess's protests, must be obvious.

The dubbing of the English-speaking version has also come in for criticism, and before going into the rights and wrongs of this one ought perhaps to clear the ground a little. It is always misleading in the case of continental co-productions, with their polyglot casts, to speak of "original versions". Shooting on *The Leopard* was done mainly in English, but most of the players had reverted to their native tongues before the end. For the Italian version the entire cast, including the Italian stars, were dubbed into Italian. For the French version only Delon, Cardinale, Reggiani and Pierre Clementi (Fernando Paolo) dubbed their own voices. The English version had Burt Lancaster and Leslie French (Chevalley) speaking their own parts, the rest being dubbed by American actors. Dubbing is itself a controversial process, and the arguments on both sides are well known, but there is little doubt that in international productions of this kind it is here to stay. In the present case Lancaster's mid-Atlantic accent, the strong American twang of most of the supporting cast, and Leslie French's plummy Shaftesbury Avenue tones, certainly make a discordant mixture. Light is shed on the making of the English version by Archibald Colquhoun in a letter to the *Sunday Times* (December 15th, 1963). Mr. Colquhoun was employed as English dialogue adviser and translator to Visconti.

"This spring," he says, "an emissary of Twentieth Century-Fox appeared in Rome and took the version to be made for the English-speaking market entirely out of Visconti's control . . . The only part of the original English sound track which remains intact is the dialogue between Don Fabrizio and the Piedmontese Chevalley, added to the original script by Lancaster and myself with Visconti's blessing. Though most of the English dialogue was taken over by the dubbers they sprinkled it with their own discordant phrases."

Visconti's third line of complaint concerned colour. The film was shot on Eastman Colour stock in Technirama, and the Italian and French prints were processed by Technicolor, whose release prints are produced from matrices made direct from the original negative. But the prints released by Fox are in their own wide-screen system, CinemaScope, and were processed by the Fox subsidiary, De Luxe Laboratories Inc. This involved the use of a "dupe" negative, with some consequent loss of colour fidelity and definition. Those who

have seen *The Leopard* in both systems are in no doubt about the superiority of the Technicolor version, but even without seeing the original it is quite easy to discern the weaknesses of the De Luxe prints. Most of the interiors suffer from a bluish haze, the definition is sometimes poor and the colour composition, especially in the ballroom scenes, is often crude.

Visconti's case, then, is undoubtedly a strong one from the aesthetic point of view. But has he any hope of legal redress? Have his reported threats to sue the distributors any real force? It seems from his own letter to *The Times* of December 17th, 1963, that he does not really think so.

"... But other than express my regret, it seems that there is nothing I can do to prevent the circulation of a version that I have neither seen nor approved in the least before its presentation to the public; indeed it seems that the author of a film work, unlike what happens for any other artistic manifestation, is obliged to guarantee himself in advance with appropriately stipulated clauses against alterations of his work, otherwise he will have to stand alterations of any kind..."

* * *

But who is the "author of a film work"? Here is the nub of a problem that has never really been satisfactorily solved. In Britain the Copyright Committee, upon whose recommendations the Copyright Act, 1956, is largely based, decided that the time had come to recognise that: "A film together with its sound-track, if it has one, should be regarded as a distinct type of work in which a distinct copyright may subsist, and that such copyright should subsist in the film as a whole, and should relate both to the copying of the film and to its performance in public. If there should be any other copyrights subsisting in any parts of that film, e.g. in any individual photograph, in the story on which it is based, in its own particular script or in its music, these should be independent of the film copyright." This form of words was an attempt to avoid the complications caused by the several copyrights already existing in the component parts of a film. The new "film copyright" was to be vested in the person, whether a company or an individual, responsible for making the film; and the new Act adopted the definition of the maker already used in the Cinematograph Films Acts: "The person by whom the arrangements necessary for the making of the film are undertaken." No attempt seems to have been made to go any further in defining the functions of the producer or director in this context, but there can be little doubt that the Act leaves the producer or production company in possession, and that unless he is his own producer or working for his own company the director has fewer rights than the authors of the script or the music, who are at least nominally protected by their "independent" copyrights.

In France, where they like to have everything cut and dried, the rights of the producer as author were established as early as 1935, and the whole matter of the rights of the various participants has been gone into in great detail and tested in the courts. The "producer as author" theory was abandoned in 1947, and was eventually replaced in 1957 by legislation which recognised that a film was the work of many collaborators, among whom it acknowledged as co-authors those concerned with its "intellectual creation". These included the authors of the scenario, adaptation and dialogue, the composer and the director. Like our own law, this one defined the producer as the person who takes the initiative and responsibility for making the film; but it also defined the completed film as "a standard copy" agreed between director or co-authors and the producer. As the "moral rights" of the various co-authors can be exercised only on this agreed standard copy, their rights would seem to be more formal than practical. But at least the director's share in the proceedings is recognised in principle.

Curiously enough a French director, Jean-Luc Godard, has just run into trouble over the Italian release print of his film *Le Mépris* which almost exactly duplicates, as it were in

THE LEOPARD

CUTS FROM ORIGINAL VERSION: CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER.

Small scene of prostitutes and a soldier as Don Fabrizio is on his way to visit Mariannina.

Tancredi and sentries en route to Donnafugata.

Tancredi, Father Pirrone and coachmen at an inn en route to Donnafugata.

Don Fabrizio and a farmer en route to Donnafugata; explanation of how a sympathetic general helped the family to get passes.

Flashback, Tancredi and Concetta, following the General's viewing of the frescoes at Donnafugata.

Flashback, the General's song, immediately following previous flashback.

Various cuts in conversation at dinner party.

Don Calogero and peasants, before the plebiscite.

Don Ciccio's speech about Angelica's mother, at end of first hunting duologue between Don Fabrizio and Don Ciccio.

Angelica's mother at mass—visualised by Don Fabrizio after conversation with Don Calogero about the marriage.

Teasing of Chevalley by Fernando Paolo on Chevalley's arrival at Donnafugata.

Various minor cuts in ballroom sequence.

reverse, Visconti's experience with *The Leopard*. Godard claims that the Italian version was cut by 900 feet, the dialogue and music re-written and the colour changed. His objections do not apply to the English language version. Here is an interesting change from the process of continental films being severely cut for the British and American markets.

As a matter of fact, it has lately become almost as common here for American films to suffer distributor cuts as for continental ones. Non-American films are still more likely to be shortened by censorship, but the specialised distributors in this country do not as a rule make cuts of their own, particularly when they take a film in its original language version. Dubbed versions are another matter, and Autant-Lara's *Story of the Count of Monte Cristo*, shown here at precisely half its original three-hour running time, must have set up something of a record. American films which have recently undergone cuts here include Huston's *Freud* (20 minutes), *Gypsy* (6 mins.), *Susan Slade* (15 mins.), *The Outsider* (15 mins.), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (7 mins.), *Studs Lonigan* (8 mins.), *4 for Texas* (9 mins.), *The Notorious Landlady* (10 mins.), and *It Started in Tokyo* (28 minutes, involving total disappearance of the characters played by Agnes Moorehead and William Demarest). In at least two of these films the cuts made a very real difference to actual comprehension of the plot; and in the case of *The Outsider* in effect falsified it by supplying a completely different ending.

The reason for cuts of this kind is often quite simply a pre-determined programme pattern into which the film must fit. To argue this would raise all the old hares about second features, the use of shorts and so on. But films like *The Leopard* really are special cases, and it is perhaps only fair to look at them also from the point of view of the producer and distributor, who are after all usually the people involved in finding the financial backing in the first place. *The Leopard* cost £2,500,000. The producers could not hope to recover its cost in Italy and France alone. They had to seek world-wide distribution, and this involved the use of an internationally known star and the resources of a company with world-

wide organisation. The world distribution deal with Fox automatically involved the use of prints in CinemaScope and De Luxe Color. It also apparently involved supervision of the English language version by Burt Lancaster. The view of the distributors themselves is not hard to see. They had taken on what was to them a ticklish "art-house" proposition with only Burt Lancaster's name as a major selling angle in their principal mass market, the United States. The cuts and changes they made were a genuine attempt to adapt the product for the consumer. The fact that they seem to have underestimated the consumer's taste is an indication of their failure to understand that a film is not just so many yards of celluloid, and that the only man likely to be able to change and adapt it successfully is the artist who made it. Still and all, as the Americans say, I would rather see Fox's mutilated *Leopard* than be unable to see it at all.

Perhaps the last word should go to another director whose work has suffered much mutilation even though his budgets

have never been in the blockbuster class. In a letter to the *Sunday Telegraph* (December 29th, 1963) Joseph Losey said:

"As film audiences become more sophisticated and knowledgeable, a director's signature on a film has properly become a hallmark of personal identity and particular worth. Yet under existing contracts, producers and distributors are generally free (and all too often take advantage of this freedom) grossly to distort or change the finished work of a director, still retaining his name on the film in spite of any protest he may make. . . . Official censorship can be fought and publicised. But unbounded mutilation of rhythm, text, score, colour, quality of print, even actors' voices, can and does take place without any redress or publicity."

Not without publicity in the case of *The Leopard* anyway. Let us hope that the attention this case has received may help to make a repetition less likely.