Mapping Leopardi

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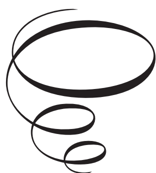
Poetic and Philosophical Intersections

Edited by

Emanuela Cervato, Mark Epstein, Giulia Santi and Simona Wright

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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INTRODUCTION

First things first: what do the editors of this collection of essays mean by “mapping”? Mapping is indeed an ambiguous verb, one where the uses and aspirations involved in performing this operation can differ markedly. Maps and mapping have a long history, and in today’s digital age of course aspirations to ‘completeness’ and ‘totality’ have increased enormously due to the power technology/-ies put at the disposal of the human species. GPS bridges the virtual and real worlds, it adjusts ‘mapping(s)’ to the person(s) travelling while they are in motion, and especially in its more sophisticated versions (used by ‘government agencies’) is capable of extremely high degrees of precision, down to a foot or less. As part of the technological ‘automatisms’ many of us now take for granted in our *Lebenswelt*, it fosters the illusion of complete control and complete knowledge, emphasized precisely by its almost ‘invisible’, ‘magical’, digital electronic modalities. But nothing could have been more alien to Leopardi than this kind of tacit, unconscious arrogance of the human species in its role in the world, more arrogant in its presumption of complete or total knowledge and control. An exploration of cultural, intellectual, literary, philosophical mappings is therefore also a way to counter these presumptions, this arrogance, and these self-delusions.

As many have pointed out, including Italo Calvino, a map that was complete in every detail would actually have to be a perfect replica of reality, in which case its function as map would disappear. In this sense, the paradox of the map is akin to that of referential activities enabled (and required) by the use of natural and formal languages. And one of the intentions the editors had in choosing this title was to underscore the ‘networked’, reticular nature of Leopardi’s thoughts and his conception of an open philosophical structure, one that was not closed and did not think of itself as absolute or permanent. This is an aspect that is particularly important and clear in his *Zibaldone di pensieri*; and this collection has been thought of in part as a homage to the work of Michael Caesar, Franco d’Intino, and their team of translators (Kathleen Baldwin, Richard Dixon, David Gibbons, Ann Goldstein, Gerard Slowey, Martin Thom and Pamela Williams) in completing their masterful translation of that work into English.

Maps, in addition to their principal instrumental function of aiding orientation, are, however, also the sedimentation and stratification of prior knowledge about our movements in the 'world', so they have both conservative and 'prospective' teleological functions. Typically, maps are accumulations and integrations of various forms of acquired knowledge to aid and assist our future movements, trips, and travels in the physical world. Maps for orientation in the material world, where both the medium we travel through/on, the means of locomotion used, the purposes to be accomplished, and even the beings/objects 'using' the maps vary (drones/satellites), differ very significantly from the metaphorical/analogical use of the terms "maps/mapping" for intellectual activities and works, communicated via natural languages. While the matter of the sensory and physiological inputs into thought and its formalization in language is still an area mostly in an exploratory phase of knowledge, thought and language are much more homogeneous material media, and hence 'poorer', than those we need to navigate in the physical/'macro' world. Alexander Luria, in a famous book, *The Mind of a Mnemonist*,[1] explored the case history of a man who used the path(s) of his movements in the real world as a foundation onto which to map his memories and mental experiences.

Critical and scholarly mappings of Leopardi's reticular *oeuvre* are therefore 'maps' that are several levels more abstract. 'Discovering' America or not is an event that does not leave much room for ambiguity. An allegedly new 'mapping' of Leopardi's work(s) and thought(s) on the other hand, is something whose existence and/or acknowledgment by fellow researchers is a much more ambiguous and contentious matter. This also implies that the borders between the 'real', the 'imaginary', and the 'possible/potential' are much more fluid in these cases, as are the purposes guiding these explorations or forms of intellectual 'travel'. Scholarly and critical maps devoted to Leopardi's works written at the time of Francesco De Sanctis, Benedetto Croce, Adriano Tilgher, Cesare Luporini, Italo Calvino, and Umberto Eco, or in this volume by Luigi Blasucci and Antonio Prete, or whose main critical paradigms are psychoanalytic, structuralist, semiotic or deconstructionist capture different aspects of Leopardi's production. Other artists, such as Mario Martone in *Il giovane favoloso*, attempt to reproduce Leopardi, his life and works, in other media, thus presenting altogether different possibilities of imaginative mapping. The essays by Johnny Bertolio (based on critical paradigms provided by Northrop Frye, a critic whose greatest influence was several decades ago)

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[1] Alexander R. Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

and Silvia Stoyanova (which shows influences from both psychoanalytic and reader-reception theory) are good examples of this diversity.

Many scholars have explored the possibility of unpacking Leopardi's *Zibaldone* in ways that are compatible and easily accessible to today's readers. As such, the text has attracted contemporary scholars who aimed to explore the variety and complexity of Leopardi's thought, its multifaceted elements, layers, and thematic levels, through the notion of the hypertext, as Emanuela Cervato has successfully done in her recent work,[2] or Silvia Stoyanova by means of her digital platform project.[3] In this volume, we would like to borrow a hypothesis that Emilio Speciale, our late colleague and friend, had employed in an unfinished essay, that of an open and unfinished work, with distinct encyclopaedic properties, the beginnings of a map where readers/users can search, find, and elaborate information from the large deposit of knowledge that is both contained in *Zibaldone* and radiates from it.

Thus, the contributions collected in this volume span all of Leopardi's writerly production, from the *Puerilia* (essay by Bellomo) to his critical *Discourse on Romantic Poetry*, from the essays and compendia on natural history to the *Canti* (*Poems*), from his forgeries (essay by Piperno) to the political satire of *The War of the Mice and the Crabs* (essay by Penso), to formerly unpublished essays from his early scientific education (essay by Sordoni).

Though not as frequently conceived of from this perspective, maps are also the expression/formalization of the state of knowledge of a particular individual or community, about a specific domain of the knowable, at a specific point in time/history. Our hope is that this volume will to some degree represent a mapping of the questions posed, and the aspirations and temporary realizations of some of the scholarship at this point in time, as well as some more lasting achievements at the level of 'orientation'.

In our volume we have approached the *Zibaldone* as a map, or better, a complex interconnecting network of maps, that Leopardi used to reflect on the extensive list of readings he was recording, the works he was proposing to write, and the philosophical, philological, and aesthetic positions he provisionally made his own. His maps (the 1827 Index, the card-indexes known as *polizzine* [separate slips]) therefore assume both a conservative

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[2] Emanuela Cervato, *A System That Excludes All Systems* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017).

[3] Silvia Stoyanova and Ben Johnston, *Giacomo Leopardi's* Zibaldone di pensieri: *A Digital Research Platform*, http://digitalzibaldone.net (last accessed 19 September 2018). The digital research platform project was funded by Princeton University in association with the University of Macerata and the University of Göttingen.

and prospective function. They were aids to return to paths of reflection he had begun but sometimes never completed, or from which he wanted to explore different turns. Aids to memory and orientation in past work and reflection, but also, and far from rarely, records of an intent focused on future explorations, future directions, projects of future work and re-direction. This particular function appears to be fundamental for many of the authors who contributed to this volume, for whom the *Zibaldone* constitutes a repository of original ideas, the laboratory where established philosophies were debated, tested, rejected, or embraced (Sims, Wright), new aesthetic paths were explored (Carrera), reflections on genre relating to but prior to the 'fantastic' were noted (Bombara), and reflections on the role of teleological positing in living organisms, its role in the materialist distinctions in the stratification of the existent, and the dilemmas of *noia* and *piacere* were made apparent (Epstein, Stoyanova), or tentative hypotheses about a mapping of a linguistic typology of poetic forms (Versace). The many possible paths and maps that connect humans to nature, other living organisms, the world(s) we inhabit, and their connection(s) to ecocriticism and (post)humanism are also among the important, future-oriented mappings in this collection of essays (Di Rosa).

In Leopardi's case, 'maps' also evolve, and the *Zibaldone*, as is obvious given its nature and intended purpose, is often a repository of more general or sketched maps, and more formally curated and circumspect (given the pressures of censorship) versions will replace them once they are published in the *Operette morali* (*Moral Tales*) or the *Canti*. In some instances Leopardi traces paths through internal references scattered across the text ("see page 4450, paragraph 6;" "as I have said elsewhere"), in others he revisits his published works, as for instance in *Zibaldone* 4079 (*Dialogo della Natura e di un'Anima*) (*Dialogue of Nature and a Soul*); *Zibaldone* 4099 (*Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese*) (*Dialogue Between Nature and an Icelander*); and *Zibaldone* 4248 (*Frammento apocrifo di Stratone da Lampsaco*) (*Apocryphal Fragment of Strato of Lampsacus*). In *Zibaldone* (4130-31) he compares animal and human lives and their forms of teleological positing, and in this context he revisits *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese*, *Cantico del Gallo silvestre* (*The Canticle of the Wild Cock*), as well as *Dialogo di un Fisico e un Metafisico* (*Dialogue Between a Physicist and a Metaphysician*). In the latter case he is actually creating new links to other reflections, so in some ways creating hybrid maps, or redrawing and shifting mapping priorities and coordinates. In *Dialogo di Cristoforo Colombo e di Pietro Gutierrez* (*The Dialogue of Christopher Columbus and Pedro Gutierrez*) Leopardi indirectly addresses some of the issues raised by exploration and mapping. The dialogue is temporally

situated at a time when both men are wondering if they will actually reach their destination, since previous signs they had read as promising turned out not to be so. They have not yet reached their goal/destination and are in a state of 'teleological suspense'. Columbus admits that many of his forecasts and interpretations of signs have not turned out as hoped for, and that maybe even their ultimate goal of finding new land could be illusory. He then proceeds with a barrage of questions that demonstrate how presumptuous it is to assume that the 'unknown' will be like the 'known'. In other words, it is Leopardi himself, via Columbus, who suspends belief in the certainties of mapping en route to probably the most canonized and magnified geographic 'discovery' in human history, especially within the Italian canon. It is therefore both an affirmation of materialist premises, but also a sceptical admission of one's own relative ignorance, and the provisional and local nature of knowledge. In other words mapping is very far from being equivalent to certain, let alone complete, or total, knowledge. What this implies at the level of reference, of genesis of ideas, of temporality considered in the encompassing network of Leopardi's entire production, is something that would have to be examined in much greater detail, but it opens up to the relation between two conceptual models that have become much more influential in recent criticism, especially of Leopardi: that of the hypertext, which is actually a variant of the conceptual map, modelled on the idea of a network or, on the other hand, that of semantic fields, to which numerous scholars have contributed, from Harald Weinrich[4] to George Lakoff[5] (Vincenzo Allegrini's essay on memory is a fairly good example, if one only based implicitly on this model). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have proposed a third model, the rhizome, as a network that creates connections and links between points normally kept separate by 'traditional' thought. The fifth rhizomatic principle elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari ('cartography') stipulates that the rhizome "is a map and not a tracing" and is based on their conviction that maps are open systems: "the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification." The rhizome thus lends itself to cartography, which is the method of creating maps in order to orient oneself

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[4] Harald Weinrich, *Tempus: Besprochene und Erzählte Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971).

[5] George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), and *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

from one point within the whole.[6] The rhizome, a paradigm of the structure of knowledge and its organization, is also a suitable model for the *Zibaldone* and its links with Leopardi's published works.[7]

The editors of this collection of essays think of mapping not in the sense of aspirations to completeness or totality, but instead as representing the interconnected diversity of shared exploration(s), which, at the very least, both look at past traces and mappings, explore their sedimentation, stratification, and accumulations, but also suggest or point to paths for further mapping and exploration, as well as celebrate the richness, complexity, and diversity of knowledge(s) in the present. As readers will see, this diversity is fairly well represented in this collection, with essays that cover a wide spectrum of positions from the post-(post-post-)Romantic (the varied forms of post-modern post-rationalism) to the more materialistically oriented, a spectrum that therefore differs fairly markedly on a number of issues, not least of which the status of the 'humanities' themselves, the possible (or not) forms of dialogue and exchange with the natural sciences, and the evaluation of the function and position of those very natural sciences themselves, as well as philosophy's position and role in the wider debate.

The mappings contained in this volume intend to remain aware of the diversity and partiality of individual goals and aspirations, but celebrate our collective movements in an interconnected world, above all a world that does not belong to humans, but is shared by an enormously large, and unfortunately very rapidly diminishing, number of other forms of life, which have their own movements, 'maps', and goals. Our hope is that this volume will therefore contribute both to the depth and openness of an inclusive perspective, which does keep the complex goals of the unity of knowledge in its sights, but never at the cost of suppressing diversity in the process.

The volume is divided in six parts, each one highlighting different components of Leopardi's multidimensional intellectual and poetic development. In the first part, *On the Romantic-Classic Debate*, Simona Wright, Gabrielle Sims, and Martina Piperno offer critical perspectives that further illuminate the aesthetic debate raging at the turn of the nineteenth century among the European *intellighentsia*.

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[6] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 12; cf. also Umberto Eco, From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3-94.

[7] Cervato, *A System*, 84-90.

With her contribution, "Leopardi's *Discorso di un Italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*: Prolegomena to a Poetics of Hyperreality," Simona Wright proposes an analysis of Leopardi's earliest reflections on Romantic poetry, as he penned them in his unpublished *Discorso intorno alla poesia romantica* (*Discourse on Romantic Poetry*). Inspired by his reading of Ludovico Di Breme's controversial *Osservazioni del Cavalier Ludovico di Breme sulla poesia moderna* (*Observations by Cavalier Ludovico di Breme on Romantic Poetry*) and by the debate on the new literary movement raging among the Milanese literati, Leopardi engages in a systematic critique of the 'Romantics', simultaneously formulating his own poetic philosophy. Leopardi's piece tested his knowledge and philological competence by situating it in the larger context of Europe's aesthetic debate. In proposing a challenge to the Romantic movement, which involved the poet in an inspired re-thinking of the principles inherited from the classical tradition, Leopardi was also attempting to move beyond the *querelle* to articulate his own lyrical paradigm. Using a dialectic structure that alternates rhetorical moments with a stringent network of comparisons, contrasts, and oppositions, Leopardi elicits a dialogue enriched by impassioned confutations and compelling argumentations, signalling his eagerness to participate, somewhat subversively, in the ongoing debate. Wright's study highlights particular moments of the *Discorso*, and links Leopardi's poetic formulations to his famed *idillio*, *L'Infinito* (*The Infinite*), identifying specific thematic elements and rhetorical artifices that the poet revisited, drawing them from both the classical repertoire as well as that of his contemporaries. Eager to present his personal poetic vision to a larger, more authoritative, audience, when the *Discorso* failed to be published, Leopardi responded with the *idilli* (1819-1821), of which, Wright argues, *L'Infinito* appears to be the most effective lyrical elaboration. If in the *Discorso* he had demarcated the realm of the poetic, in his verses he integrates the suggestions coming from the new sensitivity of the period, shaping them into a lyrical subjectivity that is both 'classical' and modern. In particular, Wright's analysis points to the *Discorso* as inaugurating the development of a systematic poetic self-examination which, through the critical annotations in *Zibaldone*, his correspondence with friends and publishers, and his verses, arrives at the formulation of *oggetti doppi* (double objects) as well as enabling the poet to see a reality beyond the surface of materiality ("arido vero"). Wright defines this point of arrival as "hyperreality," a poetic space where nature is alive, evocative, and meaningful. In contrast to the *arido vero* (the arid truth), and the *solido nulla* (solid void), hyperreality is the dimension where Leopardi can reach a synthesis, in the manner of a truly modern poet, between nature and reason, between poetic inspiration and philosophical understanding.

Gabrielle Sims's essay, "Sublimity Without Recompense: The Natural Philosophy of Pessimism in Giacomo Leopardi's *L'Infinito,*" explores the connection between Giacomo Leopardi's late 'cosmic' pessimism and the natural order of his early *Canti* through a reading of the sublime process elaborated in the 1819 idyll, *L'Infinito*. Through a systematic review of the aesthetic debate that surrounded the young Leopardi, Sims argues that the division of nature in the poem, which pre-dates scientific distinctions between inorganic and organic by almost a decade, signals a momentous impasse in his poetic development. Sims observes how in the poem, Leopardi doubts his own convictions from a year earlier, the notion that, through poetry, the mind could know a nature beyond its own. Reading *L'Infinito* as the first of Leopardi's lifelong poetic challenges to contemporary optimism, Sims call into question ongoing scholarly attempts to align Leopardi with either Romantic or Enlightenment materialists (and commonly both) to offer, instead, the possibility of reading the poems in the *Canti* as the laboratory in which the poet developed his radical pessimistic philosophy of nature and cognition as well as an example of *L'Infinito* read in this new way.

The production of false pieces of poetry or prose disguised as ancient texts was a long-term habit, from the Renaissance on, of humanists and scholars working on antiquity. However, this practice acquired a peculiar meaning between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. As Martina Piperno argues, in "Forgery as a Form of Leopardi's Authorship," with the rise of a historicist approach to ancient literature and the progressive perception of the gradual distancing of modern and ancient cultures, the creation of ancient forgeries became a way to deal with the gradual cultural disconnect from antiquity. The most famous examples of eighteenth-century forgery are probably the poems of Ossian, composed by the Scottish philologist James Macpherson. However, Ugo Foscolo, in his 1803 commentary to Callimachus's *Berenice's Lock* (*Chioma di Berenice*, 1803), also inserted four fragments of an anonymous Greek hymn to the Graces that he declared to have translated from the Greek for the first time. These were in fact a forgery and represent the first fragments of Foscolo's poem *Le Grazie* (*The Graces*) (completed in 1812). Leopardi also participated in this peculiar phenomenon, mingling erudite research and creativity by composing his *Inno a Nettuno* (*Hymn to Neptune*) in 1816, at age eighteen. This text was published as a translation of a (fictional) Greek poem by an anonymous ancient poet; instead, it is an original creation by Leopardi, who also wrote a long introduction to it. Piperno's article explores Leopardi's *Inno a Nettuno* within the broader frame of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century production of forgeries. By focusing on forgery of

ancient works as a compensation for the loss of a direct relationship with ancient literature, a topic which directly deals with the notion of nostalgia, Piperno reflects on the issue of authorship, on the importance of this practice for the discipline of philology while also questioning how much forgery infringes on the space of creativity. In addition, the analysis highlights the central role played by irony in the self-representation of the author as a translator

In the second part of the volume, *On Literary Forms*, Daniela Bombara and Johnny Bertolio respectively explore Leopardi's philosophical prose and poetic style, which Leopardi had elected as privileged ways of expression to articulate his thoughts and worldviews. If Calvino identified the "seed" of the modern in the Italian fantastic, originating in Leopardi's philosophical dialogues, which were characterized by incisive analysis and ironic detachment, the critics that followed tended especially to highlight its supernatural component, as in the *Dialogue of Federico Ruysch and his Mummies*.

On the side of poetic production, critics have pointed to Leopardi's insistence on the image of the moon and its mysterious and symbolic manifestations. Daniela Bombara's contribution, "The Invention of a Rational Fantastic in Leopardi's Writings, from *Zibaldone* to *Operette Morali*," concentrates her analysis on the world of the *Moral Essays*, in order to further investigate the fictive universe of sub- and super-human characters that populate the pages of the dialogues, with the purpose of revealing, with their emotional detachment and 'otherworldliness', the possibility of a world of hidden truths and mysterious elements. Wise sprites and cunning gnomes, powerful wizards and Faustian imps, characters for the most part derived from the classical tradition and folk-lore, are re-elaborated in the modern fantastic to expose the chaotic reality of the world, to lucidly examine its superficiality and denounce its lack of logic, but also its inescapable suffering. Bombara argues that it is in the supernatural landscape that the dramatic vocation of the *Operette* emerges. Dominated by the destructive manifestations of Death, represented again and again under different guises, be it the giant and contemptuous figure of Nature, Fashion, or Ruysch's mummies, the *Operette* privilege a rational approach and an abstract characterization of its protagonists, embodiments, according to Bombara, of Leopardi's extraordinary figurative and expressive genius, but also emblems of an unforgiving assessment of the century's culture, of its groundless optimism and hope in a civilizing progress. Through the analysis of the *Operette* and their extensive ventures into the space of the fantastic, Leopardi's prose is confirmed as being as wryly modern as it is far removed from the visionary vapours of Leopardi's Romantic contemporaries.

As Bombara concludes, Romantic production aimed at comforting the audience with reassuring, albeit gothic, fantasies, while Leopardi's urged an unapologetic scrutiny of human existence that tested the limits of our understanding of objective reality.

Last of the series of the idylls, *La vita solitaria* (*The Solitary Life*) occupies a 'liminal' place in Leopardi's poetry since the edition of his *Versi* (1826). In its strophes the poet delineates a new pattern of "historical adventures of *his* soul" in the context of a continuous day: from morning to night. The second strophe, in particular, portrays a state of nirvanic immersion in nature which only apparently replicates the one described in the last lines of *L'Infinito*. Literary tradition, myth, and Leopardi's original thought intertwine with each other in the poem and, for this reason, *La vita solitaria* appears suited to varied critical approaches. The succession of daily moments and the very strong presence of a poetic self allow one to read the text with the tools forged by Northrop Frye in his critical works, in particular *Anatomy of Criticism* and *Fables of Identity*. In "*La vita solitaria*: A Fryean Idyll?" Johnny Bertolio primarily aims to demonstrate the ways in which *La vita solitaria* fits the idyllic phase in Frye's scheme through a close comparison with other literary texts of the same genre: Theocritus, Moschus, translated by Leopardi himself, and, quite surprisingly, Giovan Battista Marino. The analysis of the poetic text also aims to illuminate the manner in which the poem can be viewed as a perfect synthesis of all four Fryean phases, as it revolves around the figure of the 'dying' poet-hero. By approaching the idyll from this original perspective, Bertolio presents every aspect of its poetical itinerary in a new light.

Both Leonardo Bellomo's and Stefano Versace's essays in this section dedicated to *Poetics and Linguistics* examine formal and technical aspects of Leopardi's works: Bellomo's is focused on technical aspects relating to metre, versification, and internal structural characteristics of some of the poet's *juvenilia*, while Versace proposes the existence of a coherent, albeit never fully explicitly formulated, perspective on poetic form(s) in the *Zibaldone*.

Leonardo Bellomo's principal objective, in "Metre and Style in Leopardi's *Puerilia*," is to link Leopardi's youthful production with the *Canti*, particularly in light of the similarity of some of their stylistic features, thus illuminating how the techniques adopted by the precocious author shaped and governed all of his future poetic production. Bellomo's analysis considers the *Puerilia* from a formal point of view, describing their stylistic features and metric choices, especially in regards to their connections to syntactic strategies. The aim is to identify the cultural coordinates within which Leopardi's first creative efforts developed, and, at the same time, to

recognise links and divergences between the poet's juvenile and mature language, i.e. that of the *Canti*. The majority of the texts under examination were penned between 1809 and 1810, when Leopardi was just eleven and twelve years old, with most of them published only in 1972 by Maria Corti. They, along with some letters, are the first documents related to Leopardi's intellectual development and as such contain important information about his education and cultural influences (first readings and literary models) beside providing evidence of his early forays into writing. Remarking that these texts are extremely significant, Bellomo also notes that they have not been thoroughly investigated and proposes to overcome this critical omission with his essay. In the *Canti,* Leopardi had used mostly open metrical forms by subverting the Petrarchan model in his *canzoni*, which gradually became "libere." He also employed free hendecasyllables in a very innovative way. Bellomo finds the same metre in the first compositions of the *Puerilia* (*Sansone* [Samson], *L'Amicizia* [Friendship], among others), which he usefully compares to the famous *Idilli*. Significantly, it is in the *Puerilia* that the poet exploits traditional closed structures, like sonnets and songs. Bellomo examines how the young author interprets the metrical schema he will later refuse and how much his syntactic strategy changes in a different metrical context. A study of the translations, which Bellomo conducts in this essay, indicates that specific work in this direction could reveal more about the influence of Latin exercises on the young Leopardi's poetic diction.

In his essay on *Leopardi's Linguistic Typology of Poetic Forms*, Stefano Versace pursues a somewhat unusual line of questioning and research, namely one concerning Leopardi's reflections on poetic forms and natural languages. Ultimately, Versace dwells significantly more on poetic forms than languages, and explores what he argues is Leopardi's coherent theoretical line of inquiry regarding the patterns of variation and (universal) constancy in these poetic forms. While Versace emphasizes the fact that Leopardi never explicitly formulated or committed himself to an explicit overarching hypothesis, his examination of Leopardi's reflections in *Zibaldone* does seem to point to a fairly cohesive framework, one that originates in Leopardi's reading of Montesquieu's *Essay on Taste*. These are examined by Leopardi both in their geographical- and historical-cultural diversity. Ultimately, Versace's analysis of Leopardi's reflections on these topics in *Zibaldone* is also a plea/proposal for the drafting/establishment of some sort of framework, or frame of reference, for some provisional foundation of 'poetic typology' seen from a linguistic point of view and informed by model(s) drawn from linguistic typology.

In this section of *Readings of Leopardi*, Luigi Blasucci, Antonio Prete, and Andrea Penso offer their personal readings of a number of themes, symbols, and elements in Leopardi's oeuvre. Blasucci's reading continues reflections initiated in earlier works, Prete's cross over into his own poetic formulations and reveries, while Andrea Penso's focus on a fairly detailed exegesis of some of the more philosophical stanzas in the *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia* [*The War of the Mice and the Crabs*].

Luigi Blasucci is a very well-known Leopardi scholar, especially within his native Italy. This brief essay, "Once Again on Leopardi and the Space of Poetry," draws on some of his previous work and his prior reflections, most especially *Leopardi e lo spazio della poesia*. Blasucci expressly states that in this essay his approach is more typological than chronological. He also argues that Leopardi is making essentially three claims: that "the Leopardian subject is (expressing) the nostalgic yearning for a happiness that is no longer achievable in the present, but which did actually exist, both in the history of humanity and that of individuals;" the second type of claim made by this subject concerns the "pleasures of the imagination," and therefore those afforded by the illusions created by the imagination, which at some level the subject knows are illusory, but which still afford him some pleasure/respite; and finally a third 'claim', namely the satisfaction the individual finds in formulating a direct denunciation of the negatives of existence. In concluding his essay, Blasucci seems to suggest that even when following the third claim, the very expression of these feelings to a degree provides comfort even when 'illusion' is suspended.

Antonio Prete is another one of Italy's best known and respected Leopardi scholars. In his essay, he explores the paths leading to the poet personal cosmology as an experiential and epistemological space that allows for both a scientific, rational reading of the world, as well as for its poetic representation. It is in this realm that Leopardi posits the most significant and pained questions about the human condition. In particular, Prete observes that the presence of the poet's favourite celestial body, the moon, highlights the verses' psychological dimension. In this dimension, the poet embraces both the limitlessness and the infinity of time and space. Already in *L'Infinito*, Leopardi's famed *idillio*, Prete observes the felicitous encounter between the physical, material corporeality of the human experience and the inexpressible boundlessness of the cosmos. As a consequence, we find the many instances of the use of "me" inside the text mark matter as it perceives and attempts to conceive/imagine the unlimited, that which is naturally and historically beyond human understanding. It is at the confluence of perception and conception that the poet "is shipwrecked" as, in Prete's reading, both language and intellect discover their limits. In

the second part of his reading, Prete follows the syncretistic relationship between the observation of the sky and poetic interrogation, which, he argues, constitutes a crucial undercurrent of Leopardi's entire poetic work. From the youthful forays into the discipline of astronomy to the *grandi idilli* of his mature years, the mysterious space of the heavens continues to intrigue the authorial voice, guiding its subjectivity across the spectrum from the external world to the realm of interiority. For Prete, the moon remains the custodian of the celestial vault, a presence that is both ethereal and all-knowing yet firmly located in the familiar geography of Leopardi's childhood. Prete concludes by eliciting a reading of Leopardi's work that continues to highlight his cosmology, a space/'place' where Leopardi places the possibility of a corpo-real comprehension of human existence.

Andrea Penso's essay, "'Quella forma di ragionar diritta e sana': An Exegesis of Some Philosophical Stanzas in Leopardi's *Paralipomeni*," focuses on a work by Leopardi that is, relatively speaking, given somewhat less critical attention, the *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia*. Penso's is a very careful exegesis that examines the sophisticated forms of irony, dissimulation, and delegitimization that Leopardi engages in to undermine the arguments of proponents of French religious conservative thought such as Louis De Bonald, Robert de Lamennais and, Leopardi's principal target, Joseph De Maistre. Penso shows how many of these believers in providentialism ultimately philosophically resort to forms of apriorism, and also shows how they opposed Rousseau's writings on the state of nature, therefore becoming targets of Leopardi's satire for a fairly wide variety of reasons. Leopardi's anti-spiritualism is partially founded on this belief in a stronger and less corrupted relation to nature being available to "savages," in a fairly Rousseauian vein, and these foundations also inform his satirical construct. One of the most effective and original strategies, in terms of its function and use, deployed by Leopardi, is the use of comparisons and analogies to the animal world (Penso talks about the mock-epic and the *zooepic*), which, given Leopardi's original disanthropomorphizing perspective, is particularly successful in laying bare the logical flaws and fallacies inherent in many human presumptions of superiority and entitlement, used as justifications to 'run' nature for humanity's 'benefit' (in fact they basically take the philosophical point deployed by using "savages" as examples a further step in a radically materialist direction). Leopardi's sophisticated 'double' irony targeting Catholic and religious doctrines of the soul (and its/their absence in animals) is particularly effective. Penso concludes by emphasizing how some of these themes carry over into *La ginestra* (*The Broom*).

In the section dedicated to *Faculties of the Mind and the Body*, one in which all three authors indirectly confirm the originality of Leopardi's perspectives on the relations between 'mind' and 'body', or what could quite plausibly be seen as anticipations of current reflections and debates on the 'embodied mind', Alessandro Carrera explores the border areas between desire, happiness and pleasure in Leopardi, Silvia Stoyanova examines the many facets of the interconnections between reading, purposive activity, boredom/ennui and our relationship to 'Being', while Vincenzo Allegrini explores the complex territories situated between memory, remembrance, and habituation.

Alessandro Carrera's essay, "'I Can't Get No Satisfaction': Giacomo Leopardi's Theory of Pleasure," is dedicated to what the author describes as Leopardi's 'theory of pleasure'. After a succinct introduction, which reviews some of the poet's adolescent essays, youthful and early influences from the French *idéologues*, and assorted and very varied philosophical comparisons, Carrera gets to the hub of his arguments, which centre mostly on French postmodern theory and psychoanalysis, so there is a marked shift from "happiness" to desire, satisfaction, and of course, given the title, and Leopardi's formulations, pleasure. France, in addition to having a pronounced influence on the world of fashion as *couture*, has for many decades had an almost equivalent influence, most especially in the humanities, on the world of intellectual *couture* (which of course in French rhymes with *culture*), and academia seems to have been very loath to introduce too many restrictions based on plausibility, logic or the natural sciences, hence there has been very little *coupure*, but plenty of *allure*/allure of all kinds. And in this hothouse/greenhouse atmosphere, it is not so surprising they have produced countless theories of desire, Deleuze and Guattari's being just some of the more widely known. And it is in this general framework that Carrera's essay shifts from the Leopardian keyword(s), "happiness/pleasure," to the more French preoccupations of desire, satisfaction, and pleasure. So we move in the later sections of the essay to Sade, Freud, Lacan, and of course to *désir*, *plaisir*, and *bonheur,* and, in Carrera's view, a Leopardian anticipation of *jouissance*. A very brief brush with Goethe, then leads to more Freud and the 'death-drive', and to Leopardian reflections on "noia" (boredom/ennui), which, according to Carrera, in some sense, constitute a prosecution of the theory of desire/pleasure by other means. We end on notes that are close to themes such as the *Liebestod*, but though Nietzsche has of course put in an appearance, Wagner never quite makes it. Death is ultimately also the conclusion of Carrera's essay, but not a death due to material(ist) finiteness/finitude, but death that seems to also need its own impulses,

pulsations, and drives (given Carrera's title taken from popular culture, one would be tempted to say a 'zombie' death). As is clear from his references and the arguments he emphasizes, Carrera's critical perspective is strongly indebted to contemporary French theory and its Italian derivatives (ca. in line with what someone like Roberto Esposito argues is 'Italian Thought'). In contemporary France, *coupure* would rarely evoke any connection to the textual/textile references of classical mythology and death, but would instead be precariously poised on the titillating top of the fence of an intellectual aspiration to seduction, leading to many verbose 'little deaths', in fact dressing up Depardieuan fears for a certain kind of 'male' with more rarefied, and less obviously bodily, theoretical vestments. A theoretical strip-tease if you will... In this sense Carrera's title is, indeed, on point.

Silvia Stoyanova's essay, *Giacomo Leopardi on the Act of Reading*, focuses on Leopardi's reflections on (the act of) reading. Based on a careful reading of Leopardi's thoughts on the subject collected in *Zibaldone*, Stoyanova distinguishes between three kinds of readers, and their associated motivations/purposes, when engaging in the act of reading: the pastime reader whose primary goal is attaining pleasure (and whose end-result is usually boredom); the scholarly reader who reads with ulterior purposes in mind (and who can either achieve vicarious pleasure, or be confronted by a cognitive block); and finally the "release" from "instrumental intentionality" that potentially any reader could achieve, but seems from Stoyanova's essay to be more closely associated with pastime/leisure readers. In other words, Stoyanova's essay, based on Leopardi's reflections, combines a typology of readers (pastime vs. scholarly) as well as a spectrum of goals they seek and do or do not achieve. When dealing with the first two typologies of readers in the initial sections of her essay, Stoyanova relies on studies by psychologists, phenomenological psychologists and phenomenologists. In her final section, which deals with this "release" from "instrumental intentionality," she instead relies philosophically on the reflections of Martin Heidegger on "boredom" as a way to achieve this release. Heidegger distinguishes between three 'levels' of boredom, and the third, last and highest, is the one that releases us from ca. the 'preconceived' goals of specific activities or lines of thought and is a/the path to 'openness' for "Being." In concluding, Stoyanova draws parallels between these Heideggerian reflections and Leopardi's reflections on "noia," and argues particularly that Leopardi's more 'carefree' periods in his youth were those when he was closest to this 'openness' to "Being," i.e. not enmeshed in the preoccupations of pre-conceived goals of both daily existence and more specifically focused activities and forms of agency.

Vincenzo Allegrini's essay, "'Memory', 'Remembrance', and 'Oblivion' in Leopardi's Theory of Knowledge and Poetry," deals with Leopardi's reflections on memory. Allegrini discusses them in connection with the drafting of the *Zibaldone*, the evolving print industry, and its effects on the quantity of written material in circulation which, consequently, also had an impact on the possible recognition and notoriety of individual authors. Of even greater interest is Allegrini's review of Leopardi's materialist reflections on the role of spoken and written language for memory, but indirectly, one could argue, also for thought. Allegrini examines the ties memory has to habit (*abitudine*) and habituation (*assuefazione*), exploring some of the philosophical foundations and references of Leopardi's reflections (mainly John Locke, though known indirectly in translation) to point to the relationship between *memoria* (memory, which performs conservative and reproductive functions) and *rimembranza* (remembrance, which instead fosters creative and imaginative ones). Finally, he relates these reflections to a number of Leopardi's works, indicating in which ways, for instance, remembrance can be associated with very idiosyncratic forms of 'pleasure', which Leopardi explored in his later and more pessimistic period, where he relied less or hardly at all on the possible 'redeeming' function of illusions.

In the concluding section, dedicated to *Philosophy and the Sciences*, Mark Epstein examines the interconnections between teleology and materialism in Leopardi, and his development of a materialist theory of the imagination, which lays the foundation for Leopardi's extremely original dialogue between poetry, philosophy, and science; Rossella Di Rosa explores the many and complex ways Leopardi's reflections on nature and matter can be seen as anticipations of ecocriticism, post-humanism, and a proto-ecological sensibility; and finally, Valentina Sordoni introduces the English speaking world to some heretofore untranslated texts from Leopardi's early education and exposure to the science of his day.

Mark Epstein's essay, "The End(s): Teleology and Materialism in Leopardi," places teleology in a broad and encompassing framework. He shows how it can be used as one of the distinguishing characteristics for at least some initial steps in demarcating natural, human and formal sciences, as well as the problem-areas they attempt to research and investigate. Epstein argues that one of the advantages of this approach, which is based on a materialist foundation in philosophy that believes in the superposition of the inorganic, organic, and human/social levels, rather than in either/or or hierarchizing/exclusivist approaches, is that it is more flexible in dealing with the enormous complexity of the problems to be examined. He argues that this ontological superposition is related to the Marxian 'recession of

natural barriers' and that, in his own way, Leopardi recognized a similar development, though mostly seen from an, evaluatively speaking, contrarian perspective. This helps in explaining certain aspects of Leopardi's relational philosophy, which is situated between materialist/scientific interests, philosophical exploration, curiosity and dialogical interaction, and a materialist poetic imagination. Epstein analyses the interconnections between Leopardi's reflections on the finite vs. infinite opposition seen in a materialist context, and how it is closely tied to Leopardi's reflections on teleological issues themselves. Just as for Leopardi there is an "infinite leap" between matter and nothingness, there is also a very significant contrast between inorganic nature (very often associated with astronomical dimensions and bodies), frequently related to infinite/non-finite dimensional extension, and organic nature (where the interplay of vegetable, animal, and human is significantly more complex), whose finite limits are usually associated with teleological positing and projections. The complexity and flexibility of Leopardi's relational philosophy allows for the development of an original form of materialism, one which Epstein argues is equivalent to an *infraphilosophy* (i.e. ca. the materialist presuppositions of philosophy), which is not in the mechanist tradition of French materialism. It instead allows for limited, organism-specific forms of teleology. Epstein then finishes by showing how in some of Leopardi's late works, such as the *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia* (*Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd in Asia*), or in *Il tramonto della luna* (*The Setting of the Moon*), he intentionally concludes by merging the two meanings of end, with or without meaning (the sense of an ending), in death.

Rossella Di Rosa's essay, "From Nature to Matter: Leopardi's Anti-Anthropocentrism and Inchoate Proto-Ecological Thinking," looks at Leopardi's reflections as precursors of topics that contemporary 'ecocritical' trends attempt to deal with in various branches of the humanities. Di Rosa's essay explores the tensions inherent in concepts such as "nature" and "matter," and reviews a plethora of thinkers and critics from Kate Soper to Sergio Solmi, Deleuze and Guattari to Gaspare Polizzi and Serenella Iovino. She shows how Leopardi questions mechanistic forms of materialism and understanding of nature; then discusses some of the implications of his anti-anthropomorphic reflections; and then proceeds to show how his reflections on nature as "system," while not yet interconnecting its elements as later theories of "ecosystems" would, is proceeding in this general direction. After a section dedicated to the implications of the "myth of the state of nature," and proceeding to mention prior materialist examinations of Leopardi's thought, such as Timpanaro's, which emphasize the shared materiality of human and non-human existence, she then proceeds to

thinkers in a "new materialist" vein, such as Jane Bennett and finally passes to Animal Studies and Literary Ecology. Ultimately, she concludes that Leopardi's reflections in several ways anticipate the concerns of post-humanism, and use a materialist foundation to explore the relations between humans and 'nature' in ways that are not predicated on human beings as the entitled sovereigns of the Great Chain of Being.

Valentina Sordoni's essay, "Chemistry and Natural History in the Young Leopardi: A Comparison Between the *Saggio di chimica naturale* and the *Compendio di storia naturale,*" (Essay in Chemistry and Natural History) focuses on a comparison between these two youthful productions by Leopardi, in the context of his early education and exposure to some of the scientific thought of his day. Sordoni just published the volume *Il giovane Leopardi, la chimica e la storia naturale*, which includes the previously unpublished Italian text of the *Saggio di chimica e di storia naturale*.[8] The *Saggio* is really a product of Giacomo's early education, meant as a form of public display of the young Leopardi siblings' accomplishments, and is presented here for the first time in English translation, along with the Italian original: it is a valuable source for scholars not only of Leopardi and the evolution of his thought, but more generally of education, the relationship between philosophy and the sciences, and the changing status of the claims to truth of scientific authorities over time. Sordoni discusses the work in the context of the science and education of the day, demonstrating how the *saggio* relied greatly on Noël-Antoine Pluche's *Spectacle of Nature*, and concludes by identifying these early forays as the foundation for much later, and greatly modified, works, like the *Elogio degli uccelli* (*In praise of Birds*) and the *Paralipomeni della batracomiomachia*. There, Leopardi confirmed his persistent fascination with the scientific examination of the unexpected forms the natural world takes, one informed by the original conception of a materialist imagination.

This volume should also have included an essay by Emilio Speciale, whose premature passing has prevented him from completing his contribution and, more importantly, his ambitious project of an on-line encyclopedia entirely devoted to Leopardi. Conceived as 'a single receptacle' modelled on the rhizomatic, unlimited, copylefted, non-hierarchical and censorship-free Wikipedia, it would enlist the contribution of Leopardi scholars/specialists and bring together 'students, scholars, readers, aficionados'. This would result in a layered reference work, a critical companion, an open and multi-directional collective compendium focused on all aspects of the author's

[8] Valentina Sordoni, *Il giovane Leopardi, la chimica e la storia naturale* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018).

work, philosophy, and aesthetics.

With *Mapping Leopardi: Poetic and Philosophical Investigations*, we hope to have made a significant contribution to Leopardi studies and to have been instrumental in initiating what Emilio Speciale had hoped his planned Leopardi encyclopedia would become: a "monument to an author recognized as a classic and a national emblem and, simultaneously, a universal figure."

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Part I

On the Romantic-Classic Debate

CHAPTER ONE

LEOPARDI'S *DISCORSO DI UN ITALIANO INTORNO ALLA POESIA ROMANTICA*: PROLEGOMENA TO A POETICS OF HYPERREALITY

SIMONA WRIGHT

In August 1818 Leopardi completed an essay occasioned by an article written by Ludovico di Breme that had appeared in Milan in January of the same year. The *Osservazioni del Cavalier Ludovico di Breme sulla poesia moderna* (*Observations by Cavalier Ludovico di Breme on Romantic Poetry*)[1] followed an equally controversial piece Di Breme had published in 1816,[2] *Intorno all'ingiustizia di alcuni giudizi letterari* (*On the Unfairness of Certain Literary Judgments*). In this much debated text the Cavaliere had supported Mme De Staël's position on the situation of Italian letters,[3] which

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[1] The article, which appeared in issues 11 and 12 of the Milanese *Spettatore italiano* (1-15 January 1818) prompted Leopardi to a critical response that was first formulated in the early pages of the *Zibaldone* (15-21) and later systematized in his *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*, in *Poesie e Prose*, Vol. 2, I Meridiani, eds. Rolando Damiani and Mario Andrea Rigoni (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 347-426. Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. Giuseppe Pacella (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), and *Zibaldone*, eds. Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino, trans. Kathleen Baldwin et al., rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

[2] The 62-page essay appeared in early June 1816 in Milan, care of Giovanni Pietro Giegler, Bookseller in Corsia de' Servi, N. 603, Carlo Calcaterra, ed., *I manifesti romantici del 1816 e gli scritti principali del "Conciliatore" sul Romanticismo* (Turin: UTET, 1951), 81-124.

[3] In particular, Mme De Staël had pointed to the inability of Italian literature to renew itself, as it remained excessively anchored to an erudite but stale classical tradition. Bemoaning the excessive use of mythology, the lack of familiarity with foreign authors, and the absence of Italian intellects from the larger literary debate occurring