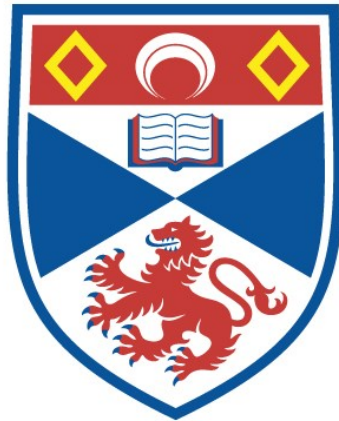


**A PHILOSOPHY AS OLD AS HOMER :
GIACOMO LEOPARDI AND GREEK POETIC PESSIMISM**

Maria Giulia Franzoni

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



2017

**Full metadata for this item is available in St Andrews Research
Repository**

at:

<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/11357>

This item is protected by original copyright

**A Philosophy as Old as Homer:
Giacomo Leopardi and Greek Poetic Pessimism**

Maria Giulia Franzoni



This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of
PhD in Classics at the University of St Andrews

22nd November 2016

This is what I said to myself, almost as if that painful philosophy
were of my own invention [...] But then, thinking it over,
I remembered that it was as new as Solomon and Homer
and the most ancient poets and philosophers we know [...]

Giacomo Leopardi, *Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico*

1. Candidate's declarations:

I Maria Giulia Franzoni, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80.000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2012 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in Classics in 20th June 2017 ; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2012 and 2016 .

Date signature of candidate

2. Supervisor's declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date signature of supervisor

3. Permission for publication: *(to be signed by both candidate and supervisor)*

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. I have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration, or have requested the appropriate embargo below.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the publication of this thesis:

PRINTED COPY

- a) No embargo on print copy
- b) Embargo on all or part of print copy for a period of ... years (maximum five) on the following ground(s):
 - Publication would be commercially damaging to the researcher, or to the supervisor, or the University
 - Publication would preclude future publication
 - Publication would be in breach of laws or ethics
- c) Permanent or longer term embargo on all or part of print copy for a period of ... years (the request will be referred to the Pro-Provost and permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances).

Supporting statement for printed embargo request if greater than 2 years:

ELECTRONIC COPY

- a) No embargo on electronic copy
- b) Embargo on all or part of electronic copy for a period of ... years (maximum five) on the following ground(s):
 - Publication would be commercially damaging to the researcher, or to the supervisor, or the University
 - Publication would preclude future publication
 - Publication would be in breach of law or ethics
- c) Permanent or longer term embargo on all or part of electronic copy for a period of ... years (the request will be referred to the Pro-Provost and permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances).

Supporting statement for electronic embargo request if greater than 2 years:

ABSTRACT AND TITLE EMBARGOES

An embargo on the full text copy of your thesis in the electronic and printed formats will be granted automatically in the first instance. This embargo includes the abstract and title except that the title will be used in the graduation booklet.

If you have selected an embargo option indicate below if you wish to allow the thesis abstract and/or title to be published. If you do not complete the section below the title and abstract will remain embargoed along with the text of the thesis.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| a) I agree to the title and abstract being published | YES/ NO |
| b) I require an embargo on abstract | YES /NO |
| c) I require an embargo on title | YES /NO |

Date signature of candidate

signature of supervisor

Please note initial embargos can be requested for a maximum of five years. An embargo on a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Science or Medicine is rarely granted for more than two years in the first instance, without good justification. The Library will not lift an embargo before confirming with the student and supervisor that they do not intend to request a continuation. In the absence of an agreed response from both student and supervisor, the Head of School will be consulted. Please note that the total period of an embargo, including any continuation, is not expected to exceed ten years.

Where part of a thesis is to be embargoed, please specify the part and the reason.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is twofold: it explores Giacomo Leopardi's (1798-1837) interpretation of, and engagement with, Greek pessimistic thought and, through him, it investigates the complex and elusive phenomenon of Greek pessimistic thought itself.

This thesis contends that Greek pessimistic thought – epitomised by but not limited to the famous wisdom of Silenus, the *μη φθναί topos* – is an important element of Greek thought, a fundamental part of some of Greece's greatest literary works, and a vital element in the understanding of Greek culture in general. Yet this aspect of ancient thought has not yet received the attention it deserves, and in the history of its interpretation it has often been forgotten, denied, or purposefully obliterated.

Furthermore, the pessimistic side of Greek thought plays a crucial role in both the modern history of the interpretation of antiquity and the intellectual history of Europe; I argue that this history is fundamentally incomplete without the appreciation of Leopardi's role in it. By his study of and engagement with ancient sources Leopardi contributed to the 19th century rediscovery of Greek pessimistic wisdom, alongside, though chronologically before, the likes of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jacob Burckhardt.

Having outlined some fundamental steps in the history of the reception of Greek pessimism, this thesis examines the cardinal components of Leopardi's reception of it: his use of Greek conceptions of humanity to undermine modernity's anthropocentric fallacy, his reinterpretation of the Homeric simile of the leaves and its pessimistic undertones, and his views on the idea that it would be best for man not to be born.

*A Silvia Munari,
grande maestra,
per il mio primo Leopardi.*

Acknowledgments

The most heartfelt thank you goes to my supervisor, Stephen Halliwell. I could not be more grateful for the chance of working on this topic and for the unwavering support, but I am most of all in awe of the matchless inspiration he has provided me with, fuelling so beautifully and continuously my passion for research.

I am indebted to more people than I can mention for support, advice, and presence during these four years, first and foremost my family and grandparents, for their love, help, and presence, which no words can do justice to.

I wish to thank in particular Nuria Scapin for the countless and fervent discussions on Greek thought and on the role of literature; Emanuele Dattilo and Anthony Ellis for their irreplaceable intellectual support; Elisabetta Grisendi, Giulia Sagliardi, and Raphaëla Dubreuil for their friendship, inspiration, and presence in these years. Many thanks also to my second supervisor Jon Hesk, for the generous help and availability throughout the PhD. A big thank you to the Classics crowds at the Universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh, to Davide Messina, Nicolò Maldina and Carlo Pirozzi at the Italian Department in Edinburgh, and to the marvellous people at 181 Bruntsfield Place.

I am greatly indebted to my MSc supervisor, Michael Lurie, for sparking my interest in, and passion for, Leopardi's connections with Greek pessimism. I also wish to thank Professor Glenn W. Most for his kind and extremely helpful advice during the initial stages of this thesis. Many thanks to Julia Smith, Nikoletta Maniotti, and Ben Naylor for their help in the final stages of revision.

My deepest gratitude goes to my partner Tom Mayo, whose continuous support cannot be put into words.

**A Philosophy as Old as Homer:
Giacomo Leopardi and Greek Poetic Pessimism**

INTRODUCTION

I. Leopardi and the Pessimistic Philosophy of Ancient Poetry	1
1. <i>Poetry and Philosophy</i>	
2. <i>The Philosophy of Ancient Poetry</i>	
3. <i>Ancient Poetic Pessimism</i>	
II. Literature, Methods, and Structure	8
1. <i>Research So Far, and Some Questions of Method</i>	
2. <i>Structure</i>	

CHAPTER 1

Τὸ μὲν δὴ πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον: *Modernity and Greek Pessimism*

I. An Old Question: The Greeks and Pessimism	16
1. <i>The Ancients on the Ancients: Towards a History of the μὴ φθῆναι</i>	
2. <i>Were the Greeks Pessimists?</i>	
II. A Modern History of Ancient Pessimism	27
1. <i>The Querelle Des Anciens et Des Modernes</i>	
2. <i>Jean-Jacques Barthélemy: Moralism and the Disguise of Philosophy</i>	
3. <i>A Different Tyranny: Pessimistic Greece in 19th Century Germany</i>	
4. <i>Conclusion: Leopardi's Role and the Destiny of Greek Pessimism</i>	

CHAPTER 2

Animals and Humans, Animals on Humans.....55

I. Leopardi and the Reception of Lucian	58
1. <i>Of Gods and Fish: Leopardi, Lucian, and Insightful Distance</i>	
2. <i>“À la manière de Lucien”, “Alla maniera di Luciano”</i>	
3. <i>Lucian and Leopardi, So Far</i>	
II. Μύρμακες ἀνάριθμοι: Anthropocentrism and The Place of Man	69
1. <i>Numberless and Insignificant</i>	
2. <i>View from Vesuvius: La ginestra and the Trope of the Ants</i>	
3. <i>Lucianic Mountains and Ancient Ants</i>	
4. <i>Giving Things Names: Man's Naming Obsession and What are Men?</i>	
5. <i>Il Copernico: Heliocentrism and the Scala Naturae</i>	

III. (Speaking) Animals and the Human Condition	91
1. <i>Life of Men, Life of Animals: Lucian's Gallus</i>	
2. <i>Homeric Comparatives and the "Preeminence of Unhappiness"</i>	

CHAPTER 3

<i>Οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή: Ancient Ideas of Ephemerality</i>	102
------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

I. Leopardi and the Trope of the Leaves: From the First Homeric Readings to the Simonidean Translations (1809-1824)	105
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

1. <i>Germinating from the Sources: XLI and Botanical Language</i>	
2. <i>Umana cosa picciol tempo dura: Brevity and Ephemerality</i>	
2.1. <i>A New Verse: Οὐδὲν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μένει χρῆμ' ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ</i>	
2.2. <i>Leaves and the Brevity of Human Life</i>	
2.3. <i>"Umana cosa picciol tempo dura": Leaves and the Precariousness of Human Life</i>	

II. Ephemerality, the Operette, and the Zibaldone (from 1823)	130
----------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

1. <i>Ἐφήμερος, Pindar and Simonides – 1823-1824</i>	
2. <i>Plants and Insects: The Zibaldone (1826-1827)</i>	

III. Schopenhauer, Greek Leaves, and Leopardi	143
------------------------------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 4

Human Questions, Divine Answers: Silenic Wisdom and the Worth of Existence

I. Leopardi and the μὴ φθῆναι: Brief Notes on an Encounter	154
-------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

1. <i>Biographical Data and Biblical Wisdom</i>	
2. <i>The μὴ φθῆναι: Existing Research, Barthélemy, and a Problem in Focus</i>	

II. Greek Stories of Non-Existence	161
-------------------------------------------------	-----

1. <i>Sappho, Existence, and Homeric Pessimism</i>	
2. <i>"Favole" or the Art of Facing the Truth: A Note on Interpreting Fiction</i>	
2.1. <i>Lucian's Chiron: Anything But Life</i>	
2.2. <i>Of Gods and Life: A Note on Divine Opinions</i>	
3. <i>Pessimism and "Greekness": a Thracian Anecdote</i>	
4. <i>A Homeric Topos: Epic Wishes and the Questioning of Existence</i>	

EPILOGUE	190
-----------------------	-----

APPENDIX	193
-----------------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	210
---------------------------	-----

INTRODUCTION

Sie hätte singen sollen, diese “neue Seele” - und nicht reden!
Wie schade, dass ich, was ich damals zu sagen hatte,
es nicht als Dichter zu sagen wagte: ich hätte es vielleicht gekonnt!

F. Nietzsche, *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* 3 (1886)¹

I

Leopardi and the Pessimistic Philosophy of Ancient Poetry

Let us observe how much imagination contributes to philosophy (which yet is its enemy), and how true it is that in different circumstances the great poet could have been a great philosopher, promoter of that reason which is lethal to the genre professed by him, and how, conversely, a philosopher could have been a great poet. The ability to mine a rich vein of similes is proper to the true poet (Homer ὁ ποιητής is the greatest and most fertile model). [...] Now this is the philosopher through and through: the faculty of discovering and recognizing relations, of binding particulars together, and of generalizing. (*Zib.* 1650)²

And in actual fact the first sages were the poets, or rather the first sages made use of poetry, and the first truths were announced in verses [...] (*Zib.* 2940)³

It could be said that this thesis takes its inspiration and impetus from these two passages of the *Zibaldone*, the book of notes of the Italian poet, thinker, and philologist Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837). Both passages indirectly engage with the millennial quarrel between poetry and philosophy and their relationship with truth.⁴ Both find an identity

¹ In Colli and Montinari (1972), 9.

² Throughout the thesis Leopardi's works are cited from Felici and Trevi (2013) as “*TPP* (2013)” with page numbers. The *Zibaldone* is referenced by pages of the manuscript and the *Canti* by verse numbers. English translations of the *Canti* are by Nichols (2008), of the *Operette* by Cecchetti (1983) and of the *Zibaldone* from Caesar and D'Intino (2013).

³ Cf. Giambattista Vico's *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* 9 for similar views, on which Berlin (2000), 10-11. This is not the place for a discussion of Leopardi and Vico, but the similarities between the two authors' ideas have been noted before, in particular, as Roić (1997), 137-138 describes, in their common interest for “il problema linguistico in un discorso filosofico sulle forme della conoscenza”.

⁴ On debates between poetry and philosophy, starting with Xenophanes, see Most (1999), 336-342; Most (2011) reevaluates the issues questioning the existence of a quarrel before Plato (alluded in *Rep.* 10.607b-c). On the quarrel and its history, cf. Asmis (1992); Levin (2001), 127-150; Halliwell (2002), 98-117 on Plato's notion of poetry; also Nussbaum (2001), 122-135; Barfield (2011), 10-31. Also

between the subject matter of poetry and philosophy and between the types of minds of those who partake in the two kinds of speculation.⁵ Leopardi's stance is clear from these two fragments alone, and it is a radical (albeit not unprecedented) one in the history of this quarrel: poetry – “poetry” in the sense he himself intends it in *Dialogo di Timandro ed Eleandro* “libri destinati a muovere la immaginazione; e intendo non meno di prose che di versi” – can convey truths, says Leopardi.⁶

1. Poetry and Philosophy

These two paths towards knowledge – the story of whose contrast is almost as old as the oldest remains of Western literature – coexist in Leopardi's notebook just as much as in his published work. The extent to which this contrasting tension fills Leopardi's thought – on the one side the imaginative and epiphanic modes of poetry, on the other the rigour and the ambitions of philosophy – is most visibly embodied in his *Operette Morali*. Twenty-four in number, the *Operette* are a protean collection of prose dialogues, short essays, and tales. Mostly written in prose, they are dotted with verse inserts that include original verse compositions, translations of existing poems and imitations of tragic choral odes. The language swiftly shifts from unembellished dialogues to the bombastic

useful is Granger (1974) examining Xenophanes' use of poetry as a vehicle for philosophy; Heath (2013) is a concise compendium of many of these themes, from truth and falsehood in poetry, to poetry's claims to philosophical veracity, to Plato's debates on poetry.

⁵ See Costazza (2000), especially 46-48; Fabio (1995), 76-77. Cf. Chapter 7 of *Il Parini*; *Zib.* 1383 (tightly connected to *Zib.* 1650) and *Zib.* 3245 – on which cf. Severino (1997), 519, 526-527 – on poet-philosophers throughout history; it is important that Leopardi sees Plato as one of them, cf. Nietzsche's idea of Socrates and Plato in Barfield (2011), 17 discussing Nietzsche's opinion that Plato attacked poetry only to channel it in his philosophy. Halliwell (2002), 105-106 suggests that *Leges* 7.817b1-8 conveys the “contrast between ‘tragic’ and ‘philosophical’ interpretations of life”; what is remarkable is that the passage clearly implies that both the poetic/tragical perspective and the philosophical one tackle in different ways the same material, i.e. the nature of life. For poetry as a means of “coming to terms” with the “burden” of human suffering and, consequently with life itself, see Halliwell (2011), esp. 60. Cf. Winckelmann's *Gedanken*: “Griechenland hatte Künstler und Weltweise in einer Person und mehr als einen Metrodor”, in Eiselein (1825), 32; cf. Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 35.135.

⁶ In *TPP* (2013), 582. Cecchetti (1983), 397: “books intended to move the imagination, in prose no less than in verse”. Leopardi's meaning of “poetry” and “poetic” as expressed here will be the one used throughout this introduction, otherwise differently specified. Leopardi's opinion was not always this, cf. Timpanaro (1965), 197. It is remarkable to recall that Leopardi thought of the *Dialogo di Timandro e di Eleandro* as “una specie di prefazione, ed un'apologia dell'opera contro i filosofi moderni”, in the letter from 16th June 1826 to Antonio Fortunato Stella, in *TPP* (2013), 1321.

language of religious canticles. The protagonists of each dialogue are mythical characters, fantasy creatures, famous men of the past and natural elements. Nothing could seem farther away from the dogmatic and monolithic philosophical treatise than this colourful array of literary motifs and genres. Yet Leopardi's own statements on the *Operette* reveal that he intended them as "cosa filosofica".⁷ In their very essence the *Operette* elude the labelling of either "poetic" or "philosophical": making sense of the formal choices of this complex collection, that continuously hangs in the balance between poetry and philosophy, has troubled generations of commentators.⁸

Two assessments of the *Operette* by Leopardi's contemporaries Lorenzo Collini, lawyer and writer, and Francesco Poggi, Florentine librarian and grammarian, are extremely telling of the general puzzlement induced by this work.⁹ Reviewing the *Operette* – which Leopardi had submitted for the 1830 prize of the Accademia della Crusca – Collini writes:

Io tengo per fermo essere profonda questa sua filosofia e frutto di lunga meditazione sui casi veri della vita. Non esito a creder dottissima e pregevolissima questa raccolta di Operette morali, da anteporsi a qualunque altra opera che in più grossi volumi e sotto più severe sembianze fosse dettata dal più accigliato Dottore. In questa raccolta il grave, il patetico giace sotto le vesti più gaie e la sostanza delude le apparenze.¹⁰

⁷ From the letter from the 6th of December 1826 to Antonio Fortunato Stella in *TPP* (2013), 1334: "un'opera che vorrebb'esser giudicata dall'insieme, e dal complesso sistematico, come accade di ogni cosa filosofica, benché scritta con leggerezza apparente"; cf. also *Zib.* 1393. On the *Operette*'s style and composition see Binni (1973), 97-108. Blasucci (1985), Fabio (1995), 9-77 and Cellerino (1995) are some of the most comprehensive treatments: Cellerino structures her chapter by "themes" that run through the *Operette*, yet seems unable to provide a convincing general outlook. Again, cf. Caesar (1989) who concentrates on the use of the dialogue and on the influence of Lucian; Manotta (1998) explores the influence of the ancients, yet mainly in the sense of imitation of classical style; cf. also Sangirardi (2000), 179-265.

⁸ Cf. Manotta (1998), 9 on the various levels of difficulty in the *Operette*'s interpretation.

⁹ Poggi's opinion of the *Storia* as in Bellucci (1996), 124-133 as quoted by Sangirardi (2000), 15 n. 2 and in Nencioni (2002), 1-8.

¹⁰ In Nencioni (2002), 6-7. My translation: "I hold it as certain that his philosophy is deep and (is) the result of true meditation on the real circumstances of life. I do not hesitate to believe that this collection of *Operette morali* is extremely learned and of great value, something to surpass any other work written by frowning Doctors in bulkier tomes and with more serious appearance. In this collection everything that is grave and moving has joyous semblance, and the substance deceives the appearance."

Poggi says:

A dir vero parmi un infelice lavoro, che racchiude una certa confusione, non seguendo né la mitologia, né la filosofia e mescolando l'una e l'altra senza deciso accorgimento.¹¹

In his favourable evaluation of the *Operette*, Collini understands Leopardi's use of fiction and imagination as subservient to the necessity of lightening "pathetic" subjects. Conversely, in Poggi's analysis Leopardi is guilty of having mixed myth with philosophy, truth with fiction, the language of scientific analysis with that of storytelling. Although different in focus and in their final verdict on the work, both reviews hit the same spot. It is clear to both that the author is trying to do *filosofia*, yet Leopardi's "presupposto favoloso" (in the words of another and less appreciative reviewer, Francesco Del Furia), i.e. the method he devised to do philosophy, is surprising if not actually problematic.¹²

2. *The Philosophy of Ancient Poetry*

This type of criticism brings us back to the earliest problematizations of the relationship between poetry and philosophy: it was precisely this pervasive and intrusive presence of the mythical and fantastic element that led Aristotle to distinguish between poets and philosophers.¹³ In the words of Glenn Most, it was by distancing themselves from the "the shackles of myth and religion" of the early Greek poets that the early Greek philosophers became the forerunners of philosophy in the (more traditionally) modern understanding of it.¹⁴ It is then the contamination between the two realms – myth, religion, and poetic language on the one hand, and reason on the other – that throws Leopardi's critics into confusion.¹⁵ Just as the *mythologoi*'s works were "philosophically

¹¹ In Nencioni (2002), 7-8. My translation: "This seems to me to be an unfortunate piece of work entailing some degree of confusion, insofar as it follows neither myth, nor philosophy, and it mixes one with the other."

¹² In Nencioni (2002), 7-8.

¹³ On Aristotle's distinction between poets and *physiologoi* cf. *Poetics* 1.1447b, 16-20 and Most (1999), 332-333, reminding us that the distinction was not formal (on the basis of metre). On the scientific worth of poetic and mythical enquiries cf. *Met.* 3.1000a but also 1.983b-984b.

¹⁴ Most (1999), 333. Although in *Poetics* 1451b the poets' approach is deemed φιλοσοφώτερον than that of the historians, since it is concerned with more general truths about the world.

¹⁵ On the objections of ancient historians and philosophers to τὸ μυθῶδες, cf. Vernant (1978), 193-194.

uninteresting” for Aristotle,¹⁶ so Leopardi’s work is neither philosophical enough to be taken seriously nor poetic enough to be deemed successful art.

The point of contact between *Zib.* 1650 and *Zib.* 2940 is Leopardi’s conviction that *the ancients* in particular were keenly aware of the potent percolation between the roles of poetry and philosophy. One example from a poem analysed later on in the thesis sheds light on this conviction: so strong is Leopardi’s belief in poetry’s ability to convey true wisdom – a belief especially stark in relation to the “philosophical” power of similes, as expressed in *Zib.* 1650 – that it shapes one of Leopardi’s boldest translation choices in a poem of the *Canti*, *XLI Dello stesso*, a translation of Simonides fr. 8 W.¹⁷ The word κάλλιστον (used by Simonides to define Homer’s simile of the leaves) in verse 1 is translated by Leopardi as “certissimo”. The significance of the Homeric simile, Leopardi says to his readers, goes well beyond the realm of beauty, or goodness; it is instead the generating power behind a truer understanding of human life, and as such it is symbolic of the philosophical force of poetry.¹⁸

It is thus the second passage, *Zib.* 2940, that supplies the other driving force of this thesis. Delving once more into the ideas of wisdom and truth, Leopardi makes this time an historical point. If, then, philosophy is the passion and the striving towards wisdom and truth, Leopardi is saying that not only in principle, but in the reality of human history, the first philosophers were the poets. Not only does this understanding of ancient poetry do more justice to the reality of historical facts: Homer and Hesiod were the “educators of Greece” and the providers of wisdom before the advent of philosophy, and some of the first “philosophers” themselves chose to express their wisdom in poetic forms.¹⁹ It is also key to Leopardi’s reading and interpretation of antiquity, clarifying

¹⁶ Most (1999), 332.

¹⁷ The power of similes is one aspect of the ability to grasp similarities and connections: for Leopardi’s notion that this ability is the root of poetry and philosophy, see Costazza (2000), 41-42.

¹⁸ Cf. Stasi (2010), 247 for a different interpretation of Leopardi’s choice of translation.

¹⁹ Fränkel’s (1975), 252 stance separating Hesiod’s mythology and the Pre-Socratics’ “pure philosophy” remained for years the standard one. On early poetry and philosophy cf. Detienne (1999); Vernant (1984); Gentili (1988), 40 began to challenge such strict separation. Most (1999) on the complex overlap between Hesiod and Homer and the early philosophers, both concerning content and style, cf. also Nussbaum (2001), 123-124; cf. also Vernant (1978), 193-197. Theophrastus (Theophr. *Phys.Op.* fr.2) read Anaximander fr. DKA9 (in Simplic. *Phys.* 24.13) as written ποιητικωτέροις οὐτως ὀνόμασιν, cf. Jaeger (1947), 209; Most (1999), 350. Barfield (2011), 11-14 on Plato’s *Republic* (*Resp.*

ancient poetry's role in his thought. Far from being the mere source of learned references, or an inanimate point of comparison, ancient thought is throughout Leopardi's life and work the dynamic and ineludible source of true wisdom.

3. *Ancient Poetic Pessimism*

This thesis focuses in particular on Leopardi's engagement with, and revival of, one aspect of ancient Greek poetic wisdom: Greek pessimistic thought.²⁰ With this formulation I broadly understand a type of thought that – whether or not fully systematised into a comprehensive worldview – reflects on the human condition and on the place of humans in the cosmos by challenging ideas of human pre-eminence and of divine providence, ultimately to question the value of human existence. Given the controversial nature of Greek pessimistic thought, *Chapter 1* of this thesis is entirely dedicated to its nature and to the history of its interpretation from ancient times to the present; I thus refer the reader there for a fuller and more careful definition. It is this side of Greek thought that seals the real convergence of Leopardian and ancient thought: in Greek poetic writings Leopardi recognises his philosophy and the very same understanding of the world and of the place of humans within it as his own.²¹ This meeting across millennia sparks Leopardi's own poetic philosophy, programmatically grounded on the wisdom of antiquity.

This thesis's purpose is, by exploring Leopardi's engagement with Greek pessimistic thought, to show how Leopardi's work, and in particular his *Operette Morali*, are both a revival and a study of Greek pessimistic wisdom. As such, Leopardi's work ought to be considered in historical and cultural relation with the other works that, in the course of

10.606e-607c) as revealing of the educational role played of poetry until Plato. Cf. also *Protagoras* 326a, 339a and *Lysis* 213e. Barfield (2011), 24 proposes that the similarities between poetry and philosophy (and thus the “danger” of poetry) are behind Socrates' attack on poetry. On Platonic critique of poetry cf. especially Halliwell (2002), 108-117; cf. Levin (2001), 127, n. 1-2 for further bibliography.

²⁰ It should be noted that Leopardi's acceptance of Greek pessimism is tightly connected to his full acceptance of the validity of philosophical ideas in poetic forms. The otherwise widespread refusal of scholars and interpreters across ages to acknowledge the existence of pessimistic currents of thought in ancient Greece comes primarily from the downright refusal to take into consideration non-strictly-philosophical sources.

²¹ My interpretation of “poetry” and “poetic” at note 6 applies to ancient sources too.

the 19th century, concurred to rediscover, explore, and investigate this long-forgotten side of Greek culture: chiefly, Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819), Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872) and Jacob Burckhardt's *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* (published in 1900 but composed more than three decades earlier). The crucial role of Leopardi in this process – not least insofar as it anticipates both Burckhardt and Nietzsche – has so far been neglected; one of the aims of this thesis is to bring it to light.

One of the reasons for the limited number of studies on Leopardi's role and on the history of the reception of Greek pessimism lies in the problematic essence of Greek pessimistic thought itself.²² As *Chapter 1* explores in larger detail, scholarly belief in the existence (let alone scholarly agreement on the features) of this aspect of Greek thought has a long and troubled history. This thesis, which is, admittedly, the work of a classicist, strives then towards one more ambitious target, which is to explore the essence and features of Greek pessimistic thought at the same time as it analyses its influence on Leopardi; indeed, to use Leopardi's readings and interpretations as a passageway towards the Greek sources.²³ Of course, the full exploration of Greek pessimistic thought is beyond the scope and especially the size of this dissertation. I nevertheless hope to shed some new light on the topic of Greek pessimistic thought itself, and, given the relative lack of attention to this topic in the past decades, as explained in *Chapter 1*, I hope to open the field for more discussion of this contentious and fascinating aspect of Greek culture.

²² In some cases Leopardian scholarship seems to deny the existence of Greek pessimism in the first place, cf. Binni (1973), 78; Dolfi (1986), 52.

²³ Of course, this implies awareness of Leopardi's own hand (and, inevitably, of my own) on these texts and their meaning, I am thinking of Gaisser's simile comparing works to "pliable and sticky artifacts that are gripped, molded [...]" in *id.* (2002), 387, on which Martindale (2007a), 4-5; cf. also Holub (2008), 322-324 for a summary of the history and meaning of the concept of *Erwartungshorizont*.

II

Literature, Methods, and Structure

1. *Research So Far, and Some Questions of Method*

Despite the vast number of scholarly studies on both Leopardi's relationship with classical antiquity and his pessimism, no study has ever engaged directly and thoroughly with Leopardi's revival of Greek pessimistic thought, possibly because such an enterprise requires equal interest in the ancient sources and issues as in Leopardi's work (whereas the greatest part of the research on Leopardi is carried out by non-classicists). A number of works have nonetheless variously touched upon the subject.

Three works have directly (although by no means exhaustively) tackled this topic. Giovanni Cesareo's 1893 "I precursori greci del pessimismo" in *Nuove ricerche su la vita e le opere di Giacomo Leopardi* is an early discussion of the relationship between the ancient pessimistic worldview and Leopardi's pessimism.²⁴ Yet, through a somewhat chaotic gathering of various pessimistic texts from antiquity, the author merely suggests that the ancients share on a general level Leopardi's idea of life, eventually to deny any major influence of the former on the latter.

Several decades later comes Sebastiano Timpanaro's insightful chapter on "Leopardi e i filosofi antichi" in his *Classicismo e illuminismo nell'ottocento italiano* (1965). Timpanaro's essay is, to this day, the much-praised point of reference on this topic. Yet the widely held opinion that Timpanaro's treatment of the subject is final – suggested by the omnipresence of this work in the footnotes of subsequent scholarship as the main reference for Leopardi and Greek pessimism – ought to be revised.²⁵ Despite remaining a milestone for its insight, and despite having the great merit of having authoritatively opened up this topic for the scholarly public, Timpanaro's essay only scrapes the surface of this engrossing story. Two shortcomings come to mind. The first is

²⁴ Cf. Sole (1990), 275 n. 37 who criticises Cesareo for the absence of philological methods, but admits that Cesareo's work "sottolinea in Leopardi l'intento di accertare che il proprio pessimismo era antico quanto l'uomo [...]". On the other hand though Sole believes that the ancients, unlike Leopardi, did not believe suffering to be a universal feature of life "senza dedurre da tale contemplazione un principio universale, senza elevare il male a teoria e il dolore a necessità irrimediabile."

²⁵ Truly ubiquitous, two recent examples in Miranda (2005), 42 and Brogi (2012), 16 n.10.

Timpanaro's tendency (in accordance with his chapter's title) to give preeminence to Leopardi's encounter with ancient *philosophical* pessimism, like that of Theophrastus.²⁶ The second is the excessive importance given by Timpanaro to Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* (1788), read by Leopardi in 1823, as the origin of Leopardi's awareness of pessimistic thought in Greek poetry, a notion that influenced generations of scholars,²⁷ and that this thesis aims to challenge.²⁸

The third and last work is a chapter of Gaspare Polizzi's *Giacomo Leopardi. La concezione dell'umano, tra utopia e disincanto* (2011). In its preoccupation with Leopardi's (negative) anthropology, the chapter concentrates by its own admission almost exclusively on the direct impact of the reading of Barthélemy on Leopardi's notes; even so, it neglects to address the influence of the primary sources conveyed by Barthélemy on the rest of Leopardi's work, and especially on the *Operette*.²⁹

Various essays and chapters on Leopardi and antiquity touch collaterally upon Leopardi's relationship with Greek pessimistic sources. Amongst these it is worth mentioning Guido Polato's exploration of Pindar's influence on Leopardi in *Il sogno di un'ombra: Leopardi e la verità delle illusioni* (2007), with special reference to the notion of man as the shadow of a dream contained in *Pythian* 8.³⁰ Gilberto Lonardi's *L'oro di Omero* (2005), although it restricts its focus to the *Canti*, is an open and intelligent analysis of the influence of antiquity on Leopardi's work, and in several places it touches upon pessimistic themes shared between Homer and the *Canti*.³¹ Alberto Grilli's article in the collective volume of *Leopardi e il mondo antico* (1982) is

²⁶ Cf. Timpanaro (1965), 199-202. Timpanaro uses the word "pensatori", which from the context seems to exclude poets."

²⁷ E.g. Pacella (1991), 242, or recently Polizzi (2011), 87 ("La lettura romana del *Voyage* e la nuova antropologia della Grecia antica") and Brogi (2012), 16 n. 10.

²⁸ The *Voyage* is an historical novel recounting the adventures of Anacharsis through 5th century Greece and his encounter with Greek customs, culture, and history. Two chapters in particular (number 26 and 28) offer the reader a vast array of pessimistic statements drawn from Greek poetry and philosophy. After reading the chapters in the French edition Leopardi copied parts of them *verbatim* in his *Zibaldone* (*Zib.* 2671ff). Most of the scholarship claims these chapters are the exclusive basis of his knowledge of Greek pessimism. More about the *Voyage* in *Chapter 1*, and on Leopardi's use of it in *Chapter 4*.

²⁹ Cf. also Presti (2016), 199-205 who briefly explores the influence of the *Voyage*.

³⁰ Polato (2007).

³¹ See note 29.

a penetrating and meticulous analysis of the role of Greek thought and philosophy in Leopardi's work, with special regard to the *Zibaldone*.³² In doing so Grilli analyses with particular flare some of the passages that are the subject of this thesis. Yet the article does not allow for a thorough treatment of the theme, and the Greek sources are only swiftly considered in their own right; what is more, as the title suggests ("Leopardi, Platone e la filosofia greca"), a good portion of it focuses on the influence of philosophical schools. The work of the late classical and Italian studies scholar Marcello Gigante (and especially the posthumously published *Leopardi e l'antico*) is an essential reference, for both the great philological care of the author and the openness of his interpretations; yet, only his article on Simonides and Leopardi lingers briefly on the relationship between the pessimistic notions present in Simonides' poems and Leopardi's use of them. This article, together with Vincenzo di Benedetto's *Leopardi e i filosofi antichi*, is a fundamental work for the relationship between Leopardi and his translations from Simonides, but does not focus specifically on Leopardi's engagement with Greek pessimistic thought.³³

This thesis originates not only from the desire to fill the gap created by existing scholarship's lack of direct engagement with the theme; it also draws strength from a number of methodical tenets that are not completely fulfilled, and sometimes even entirely ignored or rejected by such scholarship. My own research is instead grounded in, and grows from, the belief that these tenets are vital to a thorough comprehension of Leopardi's work and relationship with antiquity.

Two smaller points to begin with. It is a diffuse scholarly tendency to favour the *Canti* (and secondly the *Zibaldone*) when examining the presence and influence of ancient pessimistic wisdom in and on Leopardi's work.³⁴ Although it does not disregard the

³² Grilli (1982).

³³ Di Benedetto (1967); Gigante (2003). The same topic in Orlando (1973), whose title mentions "pessimismo antico", which is nevertheless only cursorily and hastily mentioned in the last paragraph of the piece; as a consequence the piece fails to really tackle any wider relationship between Leopardi and ancient pessimism. More philological precision, but even briefer attention to the pessimistic notions, is paid by Randino (2000).

³⁴ So does Cesareo (1893), cf. above. Di Benedetto (1967) and Gigante (2003) do the same. Another example is Lonardi (2005): many of his assumptions would be greatly beneficial if applied to the *Operette*, but, apart from very brief excursions, he restricts his research to the *Canti*.

Canti's lyrical reception of antiquity, this thesis gives larger space to discussion of passages from the *Zibaldone* and the *Operette*. Secondly, in accordance with what has been said so far and in the hope of doing justice to Leopardi's thought, this thesis treats the poetic ancient sources as having full philosophical significance and dignity: as such, it attempts to fill the gap left by those who (as Timpanaro himself partly did) look for the antecedents and inspirers of Leopardi's pessimism in ancient *philosophical* writings alone.³⁵

Let us come to the very core of this thesis's claims. I believe that the strict philological approach taken by a great part of modern scholarship in the analysis of Leopardi's relationship with classical sources, whilst allowing countless important considerations, nonetheless blinds us in a number of other essential respects, and that we thus ought to allow also for different perspectives on the topic of Leopardi's engagement with antiquity. The quest of modern scholarship seems to be aimed at an (unachievable) *Quellenforschung* of sorts, driven by the necessity to ascertain what Leopardi read for sure and what he did not, a quest for the direct sources, for the consulted editions, for the *verbatim* quotations.³⁶ Undoubtedly such a scientific philological stance is necessary in many cases, and entirely vital in others, such as Leopardi's translations of Semonides' and Simonides' poems at the end of his *Canti* (oddly enough, as we shall see in *Chapter 3*, the relevant scholarship is in this very instance guilty of a considerable number of inaccuracies and philological mistakes).

If this attitude does on the one hand pay respect to Leopardi's extensive and fecund philological work which is so conspicuous in many places of the *Zibaldone* – one can also think of the historian and philologist Barthold Georg von Niebuhr's admiration for Leopardi, or of Nietzsche's opinion of the Italian poet as “das moderne Ideal eines

³⁵ A good example is Stefano Brogi's recent *Nessuno vorrebbe rinascere: da Leopardi alla storia di un'idea tra antichi e moderni* (2012), which tackles both the ancients' and Leopardi's engagement with the idea of the *nolo renasci* (in Brogi's own words a variation on the general theme that life would best be avoided or, if that is not possible, swiftly ended). Yet the ancient sources considered by Brogi are almost exclusively philosophical, and ancient poetry is disregarded.

³⁶ Cf. Most (2016) for a good definition and a brief history of *Quellenforschung*, including its limitations.

Philologen” – it does on the other fall unquestionably short, in various ways.³⁷ First, it can prove both anachronistic and ill-suited to Leopardi’s specific case: although Leopardi does in several instances – and, one can be sure, in different ways depending on the kind of work he is writing – make his sources explicit, or add footnotes and elucidations, by no means does he do this *systematically*. The fact that he does, here and there, reference his sources explicitly should not convince us that those are the only sources worth considering. Doing this would mean not only overlooking the fact that 19th century literary practice was, even in scholarly contexts, worlds apart from that of today. It also means not appreciating both the breadth and depth of Leopardi’s readings and the imaginative and independent approach of his reception of them.³⁸

Most of all, this attitude can prevent us from looking at the influence of texts that Leopardi certainly knew, read, and perused – texts that had been so developmentally determinative, texts he knew so well, that the need to reference them openly is beyond the point. The impact of these texts – I am thinking first and foremost of Homer, but then also of Lucian and many others – is so profound, shaping, and dynamic that we simply cannot limit ourselves to looking for it in direct quotations, or in explicit allusions. My point echoes Gilberto Lonardi’s observations about Homeric influence on Leopardi’s work and thought, when discussing the (relative) decrease in references to Homer over the years.³⁹ Lonardi – whose argument can easily be applied to other authors and their influence on Leopardi – argues that this diminution of explicit references only vouches for the new role played by Homeric thought: rather than an individual author narrating about a number of characters, Homer has become “nature”,

³⁷ Nietzsche’s *Nachgelassene Fragmente* 3 [23] in Colli and Montinari (1967), 98. For the contemporary philological context in Europe, cf. Treves (1962), 471-538; also Emden (2004), 385-386. Cf. also Bellucci (1996), 353-521; cf. Timpanaro (2008), esp. 96-100 on Niebuhr and Leopardi; on this topic cf. the two letters to Pietro Giordani (10th March 1823) and to Carlo Leopardi (12th March 1823) where Leopardi reports Niebuhr’s words of praise for him, in *TPP* (2013), 1240-1241; Rennie (2005), esp. 271-273.

³⁸ See Lonardi (2005), 113 for the distinction between Leopardi as poet and Leopardi as philosopher, drawing on a previous point by Timpanaro and Blasucci.

³⁹ It should be also noted that Homer keeps being present in the *Zibaldone*, where the nature of the work facilitates the presence of explicit references.

i.e. a constant subterranean presence which does not need explicit mention, but that is at the same time the ineludible point of reference.⁴⁰

Lonardi's argument was to be discussed and praised by Marcello Gigante, who urges scholars not to restrict their gaze when looking at the impact of ancient sources on the works of the Italian poet: even a partial or an indirect contact with an ancient text – Gigante uses the example of Sophocles – can spark connections and ideas, and the text ought thus to be considered when exploring Leopardi's thought.⁴¹ Gigante questions – and I wish, through him, to challenge it even further – the idea indirectly implied in the strict forms of source criticism, according to which reception through mediation (i.e. through contact with something other than the idea's text of origin, if such a thing even exists) is a lesser form of reception. Charles Martindale – speaking of Velázquez's *The Spinners* – has energetically confronted such an assumption: whether the painter used Ovid's original text with the aid of experts, or translations of Ovid, or simply the medium of the “the Ovidian tradition in the visual arts” available to him at the time, the painting can have more to say about the reception of Ovid than many more direct and linear examples.⁴² Rather than hindering reception, mediation can foster it.

This thesis contends that this more open-ended kind of source criticism – alert, with Lonardi, to the subterranean and yet continuous influence of fundamental texts like the Homeric poems and, with Gigante, to the mediated stimuli that nourish Leopardi's

⁴⁰ Lonardi (1969), 42. In this sense I do not believe it fitting – in general, and with many exceptions – to speak of Leopardi's relationship with Greek pessimism with the terms “allusion” or “intertextuality”. The connections Leopardi establishes are always looser and more subterranean than both terms normally imply, and the attention is – at least in the restricted field of his reception of Greek pessimism – much less for the “text” (in its wording, but even in its isolated presentation of an idea) than it is for the resonance of ideas that the text projects. On intertextuality I think principally of Conte (1994), 814 and (1996), 29 and Kelly (2008), 165ff for definitions of intertextuality, and allusion; cf. the suggestion of Thomas (1999), 115 n. 8 to use the term “reference” to eliminate the frivolity inherent in “allusion” in Kelly (2008), 166; Fowler (1997) is an older and more schematic survey of intertextuality and allusion.

⁴¹ Gigante (2003), 52-55.

⁴² Martindale (2007b), 309. Similar observations on Titian's *Europa* *ibid.* 308. A (very selected) number of studies on reception theory, other than Jauss (1973, but originally 1967), used later in the thesis: cf. Martindale (1993) on the need for the introduction of reception theory in the study of the Classics; Martindale (2007a) and in general Martindale and Thomas (2007); Holub (2008 in the online version, but originally 1995) for a summary of the novelty of the School of Constance.

thought –⁴³ is crucial for the study of Leopardi’s work, and entirely imperative for our understanding of his study and interpretation of Greek pessimistic ideas. Closer investigation of the impact of both types of influences on Leopardi’s notion of Greek pessimism will also assist in challenging the assumption that Leopardi’s contact with it has to be ascribed for the greater part to his reading of Barthélemy’s novel, already mentioned.⁴⁴ From this assumption – a good example of the overly philological approach that has been discussed so far – stems the disregard for the influence of texts other than those mentioned by the French *abbé*. Yet, the presence of pessimistic ideas in – among others – the Homeric epics, read by Leopardi far earlier than his first contact with Barthélemy, cannot and should not be overlooked when trying to grasp the extent of Leopardi’s engagement with this strand of Greek thought.

What is more, the clear-cut separation of Leopardi’s thought ante and post contact with the most famous Greek pessimistic sources – those contained in Barthélemy – does great injustice to the flow of thoughts in the history of ideas. The full growth and maturity of the ideas so enduringly and gnominically expressed in the words of Sophocles or Mimnermus (or many of the other sources mentioned by Barthélemy) is deeply rooted in their relationship with even earlier literature. Far from being the sudden outburst of unprecedented ideas, these thoughts germinate from the relationship with previous formulations of, and meditations on, similar notions. We should then acknowledge that Leopardi’s contact with the texts of Homer is in itself a doorway into the future reinterpretations and developments of the ideas conveyed by the epics, ideas that will contribute to shaping the works of Simonides, Pindar, Sophocles, and many others. If we believe in this kind of movement of ideas, ascertaining Leopardi’s access

⁴³ Rephrasing Gigante (2003), 55.

⁴⁴ More details on his contacts with the *Voyage*: the family library in Recanati hosted an edition of the work in its Italian translation, *Viaggio d’Anacarsi il giovine nella Grecia verso la metà del IV secolo avanti l’era volgare*, printed in Venice in 1791. Leopardi could also read excerpts of the work in Noël and De La Place’s *Leçons de littérature et de morale* (1804). Leopardi consulted the monumental work – 12 volumes in the edition possessed by Monaldo – at different times in his life, but we cannot say whether he read Chapters 26 and 28 of Volume III before 1823, when he quotes from them using a 1789 French edition he had access to while in Rome. Leopardi must have read parts of Barthélemy’s work previous to 1823, if he references him as early as *Zib.* 68 and 222. The *Voyage* is referenced explicitly in its Italian edition in the bibliography Leopardi himself wrote for his *Storia dell’astronomia* (1813), in *TPP* (2013), 857. On Leopardi and the *Voyage*, cf. also Polizzi (2011), 61-128; Presti (2016), 199-205.

to one specific text becomes less crucial. This reasoning, just like the flow of ideas, works in two directions: the same argument is valid for texts later than the sources used by Barthélemy – like those of Lucian – texts that are in continuous and open dialogue with the Greek literature of preceding centuries.

In light of all these observations, this thesis is at the same time a piece of comparative analysis and a study in reception. It is *comparative*, insofar as it observes the presence of themes or ideas in two sets of texts, those of the Greeks on the one hand and Leopardi's on the other, and does not always aim at identifying specific allusions or even indirect references from the latter to the former. Yet, in consideration of the absolute certainty that Leopardi read and in fact perused many ancient works that in one way or another convey or presage pessimistic thoughts, this research aims to draw a direct link between him and them, and thus conceives of itself as a study in Leopardi's *reception* of Greek thought. The aim of my research is thus never to *prove* that Leopardi drew this or that word, phrasing, or idea from this or that ancient source. Rather than narrowing down Leopardi's sources of inspiration, this thesis intends to open the channels of interpretation in search of that spark of recognition that led to Leopardi's study and revival of Greek pessimistic wisdom.

2. Structure

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides a definition of Greek pessimistic thought, and explores some crucial steps in the long and complex history of its interpretation. *Chapter 2* looks at Leopardi's conception of the place of humans in the cosmos – and in particular at his use of the comparison between humans and animals as a tool to be employed against man's deluded anthropocentrism – by observing his use of ancient sources, chiefly Lucian and Homer, to strengthen his argument. *Chapter 3* explores Leopardi's interpretation and re-use of the famous Homeric trope of the leaves and of the Greek term ἐφήμερος to describe the human condition; the chapter ends with a brief analysis of Schopenhauer's reflections on the same themes. Finally, *Chapter 4* investigates the ways in which Leopardi's conception of the Greek notion of the μὴ φθῆναι is a revival of ancient sources, by focusing on a number of case studies in Leopardi's *œuvre*.

CHAPTER 1

Τὸ μὲν δὴ πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον: *Modernity and Greek Pessimism*

[...] immer noch nicht losgekommen von den Fragezeichen, die er zur vorgeblichen “Heiterkeit” der Griechen und der griechischen Kunst gesetzt hatte; [...]

F. Nietzsche, *Versuch einer Selbstkritik I*⁴⁵

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters [...]

W. H. Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*⁴⁶

I

An Old Question: The Greeks and Pessimism

1. *The Ancients on the Ancients: Towards a History of the μὴ φθῆναι*

The relationship of modernity with Greek pessimistic thought – its existence, its nature, its significance for antiquity and for modernity – has a long and troubled history, filled with denial, criticism, but also rediscovery and revival. This chapter is dedicated to this history, a history that is all the more engrossing if we consider that even today there is little consensus on this phenomenon, which continues all too often to be forgotten or ignored.⁴⁷ If one turns instead to what *antiquity* had to say on the subject of Greek pessimism – and more specifically, on the μὴ φθῆναι, taken as the very epitome of Greek pessimistic thought – the story is rather different. In striking contrast with the oblivion it long encountered in modern times, it is almost impossible to read about the notion that it would be best not to be born in ancient sources without encountering mention of its fame and wide diffusion, as if the two were hardly separable.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ In Colli and Montinari (1972), 5.

⁴⁶ In Mendelson (1976), 146.

⁴⁷ Forgotten, as in the case of Sim (2015), or denied and ignored, as in Dienstag (2006), discussed at the end of this chapter.

⁴⁸ Less complete versions of the list of sources I present here can be found elsewhere, e.g. in Curi (2008), 43-44.

This chapter's title incorporates a phrase from Euripides' *Bellerophon* fr. 285; in it the speaker presents the idea that it is best not to be born by saying that it is πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον,⁴⁹ "in everyone's mouth", or "common talk everywhere", and the gnomic tone of the passage seems to increase the statement's authority.⁵⁰

ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν δὴ πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον
κράτιστον εἶναι φημὶ μὴ φῶναι βροτῶ [...].⁵¹

But there is more. Our main source for the μὴ φῶναι (most famously and commonly known as the "wisdom of Silenus") is the story of King Midas and Silenus as preserved by pseudo-Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Apollonium*,⁵² which professes to transmit the tale directly from its text of origin, Aristotle's *Eudemus* (βέλτιον δ' αὐτὰς τὰς τοῦ φιλοσόφου λέξεις παραθέσθαι, *Cons. Ap.* 115b).⁵³ Hunted down and eventually captured by King Midas, Silenus is forced to tell the King what he believes to be the best thing for mankind. Silenus' answer is legendary:

ἀνθρώποις δὲ πάμπαν οὐκ ἔστι γενέσθαι τὸ πάντων ἄριστον οὐδὲ μετασχεῖν τῆς τοῦ βελτίστου φύσεως· ἄριστον γὰρ πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι. τὸ μέντοι μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ πρῶτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνυστῶν, δεῦτερον δέ, τὸ γενομένους ἀποθανεῖν ὡς τάχιστα. (*Cons. Ap.* 115 d-e)

⁴⁹ Cf. Van Groningen (1966), 170: "Euripide, qui a vécu à peine un siècle après Théognis et qui disposait d'une bibliothèque bien fournie, connaît le premier hexamètre comme un proverbe πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον". I disagree with Opstelten's (1952), 166-167 suggestion that (by saying πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον) Euripides "called the sentiment a trite one".

⁵⁰ See Collard, Cropp and Lee's (2009) commentary for some of the most famous instances of the *topos*: Theognis 425; Soph. *OC* 1225; Eur. fr. 908.1 (a fragment on better not to be born attributed to the *Cresphontes*, cf. e.g. Harder (1985), 277 and see *Chapter 4* II.3); Alexis fr. 145.14-15. The philosophising tone of the fragment seems to suggest the speaker is as a central character or one endowed with special wisdom; Curnis (2003), 124-129 suggests the speaker is Bellerophon himself.

⁵¹ In Collard, Cropp and Lee (2009), including critical edition, *testimonia*, and bibliography on the fragment; also Kannicht (2004), 352, with list of *testimonia*. See also the edition in Curnis (2003), 74-75 with comment at 104-129.

⁵² I reference the *Consolatio* from Paton et al. (1974). On the *Consolatio*, Hani (1972); Grilli (1992); Audano (2005), 1 for previous bibliography; Audano (2014a).

⁵³ Editions of the *Eudemus*' fragments: fr. 44 in Rose (1876), 48-49; fr. 7 (72) in Heitz (1973), 50-51; fr. 65 Gigon (1987), 294-295; cf. Zanatta's (2008) Italian edition. On the *Eudemus*, cf. Grilli (1992); Easterling (2013); Chroust (1966); Audano (2006).

In the text leading up to the presentation of Silenus' wisdom, the author of the *Consolatio* lingers twice on the circulation of the μὴ φῶναι. The first time is when he relates Crantor's opinion (115b) about the dangers and madness of persisting in grief (114f-115a) given the numberless evils that crowd the world, an opinion that is used as a prelude for the myth of Midas as Silenus.⁵⁴

Πολλοῖς γὰρ καὶ σοφοῖς ἀνδράσιν, ὥς φησι Κράντωρ, οὐ νῦν ἀλλὰ πάλαι κέκλαυσται
τὰνθρώπινα, τιμωρίαν ἡγουμένοις εἶναι τὸν βίον καὶ ἀρχὴν τὸ γενέσθαι ἄνθρωπον
συμφορὰν τὴν μεγίστην· (*Cons. Ap.* 115b)⁵⁵

The notion reappears again within the space of a few lines, as pseudo-Plutarch turns to quoting directly from Aristotle:

πρὸς δὲ δὴ τούτοις διὰ στόματος ὄν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὀρθῶς ὡς ἐκ πολλῶν ἐτῶν [παλαιοῦ
χρόνου] περιφέρεται θρυλούμενον [...] (*Cons. Ap.* 115c)⁵⁶

Even beyond a verbal similarity then (the same verb, θρυλέω, in the same form in both Euripides and Aristotle) the thoughts of Euripides' character, of Crantor, and of Aristotle (and, one could argue, of pseudo-Plutarch as well) seem to unanimously suggest the wide diffusion of the μὴ φῶναι, and to be interested in conveying the popular status of the notion.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Cons. Ap.* 115b is quoted among the *testimonia* for Crantor fr. 5b in Mette (1984), 19. Leopardi mentions Crantor in an early comment on the use of *consolationes* at *Zib.* 302; again at *Zib.* 2674 regarding precisely this passage in the *Consolatio*, and mentioning the Aristotelian fragment too. Cf. Audano (2014a), 24 on the fact that Silenus' myth is chosen to iconically exemplify the understanding of the world under discussion in the *Consolatio*.

⁵⁵ Cf. Curi (2008), 44 on how pseudo-Plutarch's vague mention of "multi e saggi uomini" increases the "alone sapienziale" of the myth.

⁵⁶ Cf. Audano (2014a), 25.

⁵⁷ As Audano (2005), esp. 32, reminds us, references to the diffusion of sayings are found also elsewhere in the *Consolatio* (cf. 109d, 120b and 108e), and are, partly, a feature of the *genre*; Audano (2014a), 18 further suggests that these references are part of a general rhetorical strategy that uses "indeterminazione" to provide *auctoritas*; a strategy based on the "richiamo a un tempo passato, vago e lontano, da cui deriva, per il tramite di poeti e filosofi [...] il retaggio di un'antica sapienza [...]."

One could go on, and recall among others also Cicero's *Tusc.* 1.113 as another example of this pattern.⁵⁸ But let us linger instead on one last case of "ancient reception" that traces the history of the μὴ φῦναι even further back, indeed to the very beginnings of Greek literature. The story of the poetic contest between the two great poets of archaic Greece tells us that, once both performances were over, Hesiod turned to test Homer on a series of questions (*Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 7),⁵⁹ starting with what is the best for mortals (τί φέρτατόν ἐστι βροτοῖσιν).⁶⁰ Homer's response plays an important part in the history of scholarship: it was a young Friedrich Nietzsche who noticed that Homer's reply, ἀρχὴν μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,/ φύντα δ' ὅπως ὄκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι ("Not to be born in the first place is best for men on earth, or if born, to pass through Hades' gates as fast as possible") was in fact to be found in Stobaeus' *Anthology* at 4.52.22 under the name of the 4th century sophist Alcidamas, a fact that led Nietzsche to suggest that Alcidamas' *Mouseion* was the source of the oldest nucleus of the *Certamen*.⁶¹

Here however, the point is neither the dating nor the original source(s) of the *Certamen*, but rather the very fact that the μὴ φῦναι is attributed to Homer. The Homeric poems in fact present the μὴ φῦναι in four passages, which I explore later in the thesis.⁶² But even if we choose not to consider these four instances (in light of the fact that they are not universal statements, but rather individual characters wishing the annulment of their own existence), the ascription to Homer remains extremely significant. On the one

⁵⁸ In Giusta (1984), 87: *Deorum immortalium iudicia solent in scholis proferre de morte, nec vero ea fingere ipsi, sed Herodoto auctore aliisque pluribus*. Again, as mentioned by Hunter and Russell (2011), 207, cf. Menander Rhetor 2.413-414 in Russell and Wilson (1981), 163, speaking of the fame of Euripides fr. 449. The case of Epicurus *Letter to Menoecus* (taking the author of the verse φύντα δ' ὅπως ὄκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι as epitome of an attitude towards life Epicurus himself is opposing) is significant but not entirely fitting with the group considered here; the letter is transmitted by Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.122 (and specifically at 126) in Dorandi (2013), 804ff.

⁵⁹ In West (2003), 326; *Certamen* 75 in Allen (1955), 228.

⁶⁰ For a different version of the story see Plut. *Septem Sap. Convivium* 153f2-154a, see Graziosi (2002), 107, n. 48.

⁶¹ Cf. Uden (2010), 121-122. Nietzsche dealt with the *Certamen* in a series of publications between 1870 and 1873, in Colli and Montinari (1982), 273-364; cf. Latacz (2014), 12-19. On the *Certamen* see the recent doctoral thesis of Bassino (2013), esp. 158-159. Also, West (1967), esp. 442 and n. 1; Richardson (1981); Uden (2010). One last example is, as recalled in the next section, Alexis fr. 145 which introduces the Silenic wisdom with οὐκοῦν, τὸ πολλοῖς τῶν σοφῶν εἰρημένον (14).

⁶² Cf. *Chapter 4*, the instances are *Il.* 3.39-40; 18.86-87; 22.481; *Od.* 8.311-313.

hand, this attribution tells us something about the reception of the Homeric worldview:⁶³ even if we do not want to believe that this saying was, at some point in time, actually thought to be Homeric in origin, it seems beyond contention that the *Certamen*'s author saw no contrast – and instead possible harmony – between the wisdom of the Homeric poems and the μὴ φῶναι.⁶⁴ But there is also another, more symbolic interpretation, according to which Homer stands as the emblem of archaic poetry, and archaic poetic wisdom, and his response to Hesiod's question is the response of an age, and of a type of poetry. In this sense just like Homer's second answer to Hesiod (itself a direct quote from *Od.* 9.6-11) – stating that the finest thing for mortals is the delights of the symposium – this one too must have sounded plausible in Homer's mouth to the *Certamen*'s audience.⁶⁵ Attributing such a saying and belief to Homer means attributing it to the text that was read, studied, and alluded to for centuries to come, shaping the minds of thinkers of all kinds. What better testimony to the significance, repercussions, and notoriety of an idea?

2. *Were the Greeks Pessimists?*

Let us then examine the question about the existence and definition of Greek pessimism broached in the *Introduction*: were the Greeks pessimists? For one thing, they certainly did not call themselves so, since the term “pessimism” was born some 2000 years later in Europe.⁶⁶ Given the anachronism inherent in the application of the term “pessimism” to the ancient Greeks, a remark on the terminology is in order. The term is employed throughout this thesis in light of the unyielding connection between ancient and modern

⁶³ Of course the dating of the *Certamen* influences which age's reception we are dealing with. See Uden (2010) for details on the *papyri*. Cf. Graziosi (2002) who analyses the place of the *Contest* in what she calls “the invention of Homer” locating the text specifically within a 4th century dialogue about the value of Homer's poetry in democratic Athens.

⁶⁴ One should nonetheless recall that there are puzzling moments in the *Certamen* in regards to what is typically Homeric, see Arrighetti's (1987), 168 and Graziosi's (2002), 174 discussion of the odd choices of Homer's best lines. Of course the line as we have it appears in Soph. *OC* 1224-1225; on this connection one should then recall other aspects of the relationships between Sophocles and Homer, on which cf. the article by Schein (2013).

⁶⁵ Notice that Hesiod raises the expectations about Homer's response by introducing the idea of Homer's connection with the divine (θεῶν ἄπο μύθεα εἰδώς); also, note the audience's response to Homer's answers at *Certamen* 8. Cf. Graziosi (2002), 175.

⁶⁶ On the birth of the term, originating from the debates on the pre-existing word “optimism”, see Stäglich (1951/1952) and the entry “Pessimismus” in Ritter and Gründer (2006).

pessimistic thought: the major founders of modern pessimism – Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but also Leopardi – had extensive familiarity with Greek culture and its texts, and in different degrees they all researched and engaged with the idea of Greek pessimism. Even if we do not want to posit causation, (and believe that modern pessimism was born from the discovery of ancient pessimism), the strong relationship between the two remains undeniable. It is in this sense – without by any means equating ancient and modern pessimism – that the use of the term can be justified.

Asking whether the Greeks were pessimists means, then, to a certain extent, asking whether we trust the evidence regarding the diffusion of the *μη φῶναι* from which the chapter began. It is a matter of fact that what is left to us of Greek literature supports the statements of Euripides, Aristotle, and the other *πολλοὶ σοφοί* mentioned earlier.⁶⁷ Let us take a moment to quickly review the sources we have.⁶⁸ Some of these sources – like Solon’s narration of the myth of Cleobis and Biton at Hdt. 1.31, and, within it, Hera’s statement declaring that it is better for humans to die than to live,⁶⁹ or Euripides’ *Cresphontes* fr. 449, voicing the same notion of *Bellerophon* fr. 285 – are more closely examined in *Chapter 4* of this thesis and are thus only listed here.⁷⁰

Of fundamental importance is Theognis’ four-verse *gnome* (425-428), the mould of seemingly every other appearance of the theme,⁷¹ presenting its reflection on the

⁶⁷ In fact both the variety of media (tragedy, philosophy, moral writings) and the chronological distance between these sources are in themselves a guarantee of its diffusion. Cf. Easterling (2013), 162-163.

⁶⁸ This quick rundown only includes the sources that convey the explicit formulation of the *μη φῶναι*. It is nevertheless essential to remember that the conception animating them is vividly active in many other works throughout Greek literature, despite the lack of explicit formulations; more about this throughout this thesis, and especially in *Chapter 4*. A list and brief discussion of most of these passages can be found in Curi (2008), 148.

⁶⁹ Hdt. 1.31.3: [...] διέδεξέ τε ἐν τούτοισι ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἄμεινον εἶη ἀνθρώπῳ τεθνάναι μᾶλλον ἢ ζῶειν, on which more in *Chapter 4*.

⁷⁰ Although the bibliography on the *Cresphontes* is referenced in *Chapter 4* II.3, it is worth mentioning here Opstelten’s (1952), 131-132 brief exploration of Euripidean pessimism (including *ibid.* 131 n. 4 a list of pessimistic passages in Euripides), which is aware of the “strong accumulation of pessimistic utterances in the lost *Bellerophon*”. *Ibid.* 132 n. 3: “Bellerophon was the first melancholic in literature”, quoting *Iliad* 6.200-202.

⁷¹ Πάντων μὲν μὴ φῶναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον/μηδ’ ἐσιδεῖν ἀγῆρας ὀξέος ἠελίου,/φόντα δ’ ὅπως ὄκιστα πύλας Αἰδαο περῆσαι/καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον. Cf. West (1989), 194 and the commentary by Van Groningen (1966), 169-171, who interprets both Sophocles *OC* 1224ff and Euripides’ fr. 285 as direct references to Theognis’ verses; so does Curnis (2003), 118 for fr. 285;

benefits of non-existence in a bipartite structure, suggesting that, after utter non-existence, the best outcome is to die as soon as possible.⁷² In Bacchylides' *Ode* 5 (160-161) it is Heracles who delivers the *gnome*,⁷³ and commentators have long noticed how well the saying fits in with the ode's general pessimistic tone.⁷⁴ Bolstered by the connection with the suffering Oedipus (the very “παράδειγμα der Tragik und Nichtigkeit des menschlichen Lebens”)⁷⁵ the chorus' statements about the μὴ φῶναι in the third stasimon of Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* 1224-1227 voices in all its might the universal connection between human existence and unhappiness.⁷⁶ Similar testimony to the Herodotean Hera's divine conviction that it is best for mortals not to live comes from the already cited words of the daimon Silenus in Aristotle's *Eudemus* at pseudo-Plutarch *Cons. Ap.* 115b-e.⁷⁷ Alexis' fr. 145, vv. 15-16 reworks the *gnome* (or, more accurately, the content of the two hexameters, if we use Theognis as the paradigm) in

Cuny (2003) on the connection between Sophocles and Theognis (“Théognis inspirateur de Sophocle”); *ibidem* 49 believes that the two authors may well have been referring to a common source. On Theognis and Sophocles, cf. Opstelten (1952), 167, who sees a substantial difference between the two, with Theognis expressing a more personal sentiment, and Sophocles a more universal insight.

⁷² Cf. Cuny (2003), 54 (among others) noting that the second half of the *gnome* is not always repeated in other formulations of the μὴ φῶναι.

⁷³ Θνατοῖσι μὴ φῶναι φέριστον/μηδ' ἁελίου προσιδεῖν/φέγγος. In West and Maehler (1970), 21; Irigoien (1993), 132. Text and commentary in Maehler (2004), 44 and 125, who supports the idea – seconded by Van Groningen (1966) – that the original version of the *gnome* consisted only of the two hexameters, which were then expanded to form elegiacs. *Ibidem* 125, Maehler suggests how Bacchylides did not need to quote the second half of the elegiacs because “Meleager *did* die young”. Text and commentary in Cairns and Howie (2010), 166 and 241. On the ode see Steffen (1961); Stern (1967) on the way in which Bacchylides' language and style contribute to convey “this dark view of man's lot” (*ibid.* 37); Lefkowitz (1969), esp. 84-87; Svarlien (1995), esp. 42-43 arguing instead against a pessimistic reading of the ode, suggesting that the dark imagery of the ode is “turned into hope and affirmation for Hieron”, and that “the myth of *Ode* 5, for all its blackness, still affirms rather than denies the value of mortal existence”.

⁷⁴ Cf. Stern (1967), 36-37 quoting Steffen (1961), 19.

⁷⁵ Cf. Lurie (2004), 299, also referencing Halliwell (1996), 345 and in note 40 Dodds (1966), 77 on Oedipus as “every man”.

⁷⁶ μὴ φῶναι τὸν ἅπαντα νι-/κᾶ λόγον· τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῆ-/βῆναι κεύθε' ὄθεν περ ἧ-/κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα; in Dawe (1996), 63. Commentaries in Jebb (1889), 193-194; Ammendola (1953), Kamerbeek (1984), 168-172. On the verses cf. Carey (2009), 125 who calls it “the most limp presentation we have of the Greek commonplace that it is best for mortals not to be born”; Easterling (2013), in particular 164-170 and esp. 165 and 169 on the universality of the sentiment expressed by the chorus.

⁷⁷ On which Curi (2008), 27-72, insightfully exploring the double tradition of the story of Silenus' wisdom in Aristotle and in Theopompus as transmitted by Aelian *Varia Historia* 3.8, and highlighting Silenus' Dionysiac aspect. The story of Silenus seeps into Cicero *Tusc.* 1.114, on which Audano (2000) and (2006) again exploring the connection with the version conveyed by Theopompus.

trimeters, and remarkably introduces it by suggesting, like many of the sources seen so far, that the saying is “οὐκοῦν, τὸ πολλοῖς τῶν σοφῶν εἰρημένον” (v. 14).⁷⁸ The list of evils that inevitably afflict human life – a list the reader remembers from Simonides fr. 19 W² among others –⁷⁹ is presented with a slightly comic spin in Posidippus fr. *133 (AP 9.359); two things are left to choose from, says the poet, not to be born, or dying speedily at the moment of birth.⁸⁰

As this brief rundown shows, the “wisdom of Silenus” is a penetrating feature of many of the great works of Greek literature,⁸¹ and, as we said at the opening of this chapter, it can well be taken to epitomise Greek pessimistic thought. This wisdom, which directly confronts and displays the darkest of recognitions about human existence, is the progeny of the utterly ubiquitous Greek urge to question the value of life: although primarily posited as an irrefutable *answer* about life, the tale of Midas and Silenus is the story of a *question*. It is from this initial question that Achilles’ description of the divine granting of the human lot, Solon’s replies to Croesus with the tale of Cleobis and Biton, the comparison of humans and leaves, and all the other meditations on, and challenges to, the value of existence stem.⁸² For this reason, and with some literary licence, the μὴ φῶναι has been used so far in a synecdochic manner, to epitomise the existence and nature of Greek pessimism.

This brings us to a first and necessary *caveat* concerning the use of the formula “Greek pessimism”,⁸³ insofar as it may suggest that the object of this research is one distinct and unified worldview, clearly defined in time and space. This is indeed not the case:

⁷⁸ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι μὲν κράτιστόν ἐστ' αἰεί/ἐπὶν γένηται δ', ὡς τάχιστ' ἔχειν τέλος. In Kassel and Austin (1991), 102-103 and as fr. 141 in Kock (1934), 348. Commentary in Arnott (1996), 422-430 and esp. 429-430: “The popularity of such a maxim, with its message of total pessimism, doubtless owed something to its striking paradoxy”.

⁷⁹ More on fr. 8 W in *Chapter 3*.

⁸⁰ ἦν ἄρα τοῖν δοιοῖν ἐνὸς αἴρεσις, ἢ τὸ γενέσθαι/μηδέποτ' ἢ τὸ θανεῖν αὐτίκα τικτόμενον. In Austin and Bastianini (2002), 170-171, edition and Italian and English translations; Gutzwiller (2005), 47 with English translation. One further liminary case for this list is Aeschylus fr. 466, with testimonia in *TrGF* Radt (1985), 502; on fr. 466 cf. Opstelten (1952), 167 n. 5: “where however the addition of the words κακῶς πάσχοντα characteristically restricts the scope of the meaning”.

⁸¹ Cf. Easterling (2013), 194 and 198, calling it a *cliché*.

⁸² *Chapter 4* of this thesis explores this theme in greater detail.

⁸³ The label of “pessimism” is somewhat odd for Leopardi, who rarely uses it himself and does not apply it to his own philosophy.

throughout Greek history, pessimistic thought – this would be perhaps the fairest way to refer to it – never found itself a label, never founded a philosophical school or gained followers. And yet, as we have briefly shown and as Leopardi, Burckhardt and Nietzsche will contend, Greek literature brims with voices that in various ways, through various media, and with varying nuances, question the value of human existence, any teleological idea of destiny and justice, and the anthropocentric understanding of the *cosmos*. Despite lacking a name and the coherence of a proper current of thought this worldview was strong enough to cross centuries – arching from the archaic Homeric times to the Hellenistic age of Posidippus – and pervasive enough to imbue a large variety of literary and philosophical sources.⁸⁴ It is this vitality and ubiquity that led Jacob Burckhardt to say that the whole understanding of Greek culture before his time had been deeply and utterly amiss, a “falsification” of reality in stark contrast with the evidence offered by the texts themselves.⁸⁵ Rather than simply a current within Greek thought, for Burckhardt (and Leopardi) Greek pessimism *is* Greek thought, a force profound enough to shape the whole of Greek culture, ultimately to be essentially indistinguishable from Greek culture itself.

Beside the various moral judgements which, across history, have been held against the worldview depicted by Greek pessimism,⁸⁶ what more than anything caused the modern mind to resist the notion of the Greeks as pessimists is the long-perpetuated vision of Hellas as a place of perfect beauty, pondered serenity, and heroic idealism. This vision has an engrossingly complex history, and roots as deep as the Roman fascination with Greece and Virgil’s “creation” of Arcadia.⁸⁷ But most of all, this vision is born from Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s interpretation of ancient art (and more generally of ancient culture) and from the ensuing process of reinterpretation and re-imagination of

⁸⁴ Cf. Burckhardt in Burckhardt et al. (2005), 368: “Die Klage über das Elend der Menschen, wie sie sich aufdringlich und überall bei den Griechen hören läßt, ist ohne einige Wiederholungen nicht wohl zur Darstellung zu bringen; ein und derselbe Gedanke wird bald einfacher bald reicher, mit allerlei Beziehungen und Vorstellungen gemischt ausgesprochen.”

⁸⁵ See II.3 in this chapter.

⁸⁶ See II.1-2 in this chapter.

⁸⁷ Cf. Snell’s essay on Arcadia in Snell (1953); Rosenmeyer (1969); Jenkyns (1989); Iser (1989); Panofsky’s essay on *Et in Arcadia Ego* in Panofsky (2010).

antiquity that enveloped Europe through the age of Romanticism and beyond it.⁸⁸ Even more than from Winckelmann's conception of the Greeks' joyousness of disposition, their privileged contact with nature, or their enlightened government, the "Greek ideal" was born from Winckelmann's theoretical recognition of the principles of "unity" and "perfection" as the root not only of Greek art and beauty, but of Greek civilisation as a whole.⁸⁹ The ensuing idea of Hellas was, and indeed still is, hard to reconcile with a darker and gloomier notion of Greece. Winckelmann himself came across some of the literary evidence of this other side of Greek thought, and could feel the contrast between the "tragic muse" of Aeschylus and the limpid, rational literature of the Socratic age,⁹⁰ the only safe way out of this *impasse* was to attribute such divergence to an erring step in the path of a developing culture.

In truth the two things – serenity and striving for beauty on the one hand, and a pessimistic interpretation of the world on the other – are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As we shall see in this chapter, most of the people who proposed that modernity ought to acknowledge the existence and importance of ancient pessimism did not suggest that ancient pessimism had anything to do with sadness, resignation, or lack of enthusiasm for life.⁹¹ Rather, they saw in the Greeks a precocious, unclouded, and uncompromising cognisance of the condition of human life. The joy for life, the enthusiasm for missions and goals, and the appreciation of beauty are undeniably part of the Greek mode of life, as they exude from the poetry, the art, and the political achievements of ancient Greece.⁹² Could it perhaps be this feature of Greek life that has discouraged attempts at seeing what lay behind – or better, what lay at the roots – of the

⁸⁸ See Silk and Stern (1981), 6 on Winckelmann's enduring influence. Also Held (2004) on Winckelmann's and Nietzsche's views of Hellas. Emden (2004), 378 connects Winckelmann's idealistic conception of Greece and its wide reception with the historical circumstances of 18th and 19th century Europe.

⁸⁹ Cf. Emden (2004), 376: "This very specific understanding of beauty is dependent on the ideas of wholeness and perfection which he discovered in Greek sculpture and regarded as a main attribute of Greek antiquity as a whole." See also Silk and Stern (1981), 4-6.

⁹⁰ Silk and Stern (1981), 5-6 and note 5 referencing Forschepiepe (1943), 21ff. Cf. Butler (1935), 46.

⁹¹ Cf. Die Geburt der Tragödie 7 and 11.

⁹² See the *Vorrede* 4 to *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in Colli and Montinari (1973), 19: "Oh diese Griechen! Sie verstanden sich darauf, zu l e b e n : dazu thut Noth, tapfer bei der Oberfläche, der Falte, der Haut stehen zu bleiben, den Schein anzubeten, an Formen, an Töne, an Worte, an den ganzen Olymp des Scheins zu glauben! Diese Griechen waren oberflächlich — *a u s T i e f e !*", cf. Held (2004), 419.

shimmering beauty of the Greeks' existence? Nietzsche phrased it beautifully, as he was writing his self-criticism to *The Birth of Tragedy - Man erräth, an welche Stelle hiermit das grosse Fragezeichen vom Werth des Daseins gesetzt war*.⁹³ The Greeks' pessimism is the act of questioning – more fundamentally than the act of challenging – the value of existence. The way one may go and practically live life – which choices, which self-rewards, which entertainment, which aspirations – is not necessarily touched by such a question.

What are we to do then with the question regarding the Greeks' pessimism? One could dismiss the notion of Greek pessimism on the grounds that pessimistic thoughts are at some point found in every civilisation, as we do find them in Egyptian literature or in many Eastern traditions, and are merely a moment in the development of a culture.⁹⁴ According to this view all these statements and reflections are simply the commonplaces and proverbs that emanate from this general popular mood and deserve little attention.

Without pretending that the presence of such thoughts straightforwardly makes the Greeks into pessimists and nothing else, I instead contend that it is crucial to listen to this evidence and try to grasp the significance of this side of Greek wisdom (and theodicy), a side that – as the following parts of this chapter illustrate – has been long forgotten, purposely deleted, or simply unacknowledged. In order to do this, I suggest we embark on a journey through history, to see what the reaction of those who came across this controversial aspect of Greek thought was. This chapter aims at tracing a short account of the reception and understanding of Greek pessimism. A great and long history could be written, and would deserve to be written, on this topic; here, however, the limited space only allows us to sketch some of the most important steps of this path of denial, curiosity, and rediscovery.

⁹³ From his *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* 1, in Colli and Montinari (1972), 6.

⁹⁴ A selected bibliography on other traditions of pessimism: Guttmacher (1903) on optimism and pessimism in the Bible; Daiches (1928) on the Mesopotamian *Dialogue of Pessimism*; Brandon (1962) on a comparative analysis of ideas of destiny in various religious beliefs; Lambert (1963), again on the *Dialogue of Pessimism*; Bottéro (1992) on Mesopotamian religion and especially “*The Dialogue of Pessimism and Transcendence*”, pp. 251–267; Sneed (2012) on pessimism in the *Ecclesiastes*; Enmarch (2013). On this topic cf. Burckhardt et al. (2005), 350, 360–361 and Nietzsche in *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* 1 in Colli and Montinari (1972), 6.

II

A Modern History of Ancient Pessimism

1. *The Querelle Des Anciens et Des Modernes*

The second step in this brief history of the reception of Greek pessimism is distant in time from the writings of Aristotle or pseudo-Plutarch. We are now in 17th century Europe, with one of the most extraordinary, extensive, and long-lasting events in the history of the modern understanding of antiquity. The *Querelle* – whose “official start” is usually identified with Charles Perrault’s declaration of the *Modernes*’ superiority in his *Le siècle de Louis Le Grand* on January 27th 1687 at the court of Louis XIV – is the child of three centuries of incessant discoveries and cultural revolutions. On the one hand, the rediscovery of a multitude of ancient works, which cooperated in prompting a new (paralleling and) comparison between the achievements of antiquity – whose superiority had until then lived unchallenged –⁹⁵ and the possibilities of modernity; on the other hand, the renewed trust in man born with the Renaissance, resurrecting man’s faith in the possibility of surpassing the deeds of the past, the newly born idea of progress, and the scientific advancement professed by the Baconian method.⁹⁶

The whole *Querelle* burst out with tremendous gravity. More than just pervading the many years of skirmishes that involved the personal lives of the contestants,⁹⁷ the atmosphere of battle kept metaphorically informing the discourse on the *Querelle* through the language and iconography of war.⁹⁸ The reason for such gravity and controversy lies with the question at the root of the *Querelle*. Rather than simply a matter of mere superiority (who is to be deemed superior, antiquity or modernity?)⁹⁹ the

⁹⁵ Cf. Gillot (1914), 125-142 on the myth of antiquity as “mother of Sciences and Arts”.

⁹⁶ Cf. Baron (1959), 15. Cf. Tassoni (1620). Gillot (1914) suggests national pride and patriotism in France as other elements in the birth of the *Querelle*. Cf. Gilbert (2015), looking at aspects of the Renaissance as prelude to the *Querelle*. On the *Querelle*, cf. also Dejean (1997).

⁹⁷ Cf. Fumaroli (2001), 194-195 on the final make up between Perrault and Boileau with a public embrace in the Académie française in 1694.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Swift’s *Battle of the Books* (1704) is perhaps the most famous example; cf. also a drawing on the frontispiece to the 1714 English edition of François de Callières’s *Histoire poétique de la guerre nouvellement déclarée entre les Anciens et les Modernes*, as seen in Levine (1991), 130 showing the line up of the troops of *anciens* and *modernes* depicted as armies facing each other.

⁹⁹ Winckelmann’s own theory is in itself one monumental answer to the question posed by the *Querelle*: from the idea, brought forward early on in his *Gedanken*, that art is imitation of the ancients to the

real controversy runs much deeper, to involve the beating core of the relationship between antiquity and modernity: what can (and should) modernity do with the history, the fame, the inheritance of antiquity? Far from trivial, the *Querelle* tackled crucial questions about the future of literature, science, and, among other things, modern man.

As Marc Fumaroli reminds us, the main kernel of the *Querelle* fragmented to produce a multifarious series of “*mini-Querelles*” and a number of corollary battles (“de l'art avec les techniques, du génie avec la méthode, de la vision poétique avec l'univocité de la déduction logique” among others).¹⁰⁰ Insofar as the notion of superiority was concerned, the *Modernes* armed themselves to scrutinise each and every aspect of the (alleged) ancient superiority – the knowledge of the various sciences, their philosophical doctrines, the beauty of their verses, to name but a few – an enterprise well epitomised by Perrault's *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (1688-1697). Due to the limited scope of this section, I am forced to concentrate quite drastically on one specific point of contention between the two parties, i.e. the thorny subject of antiquity's religion, morals, and worldview.

The bickering, fickle, and supremely flawed gods of the Homeric pantheon, the recurring and undisguised absence of providence,¹⁰¹ the unfair punishment of the just in so many Greek tragedies, these and many other issues inevitably were a difficult item on the battlefield of the *Querelle*.¹⁰² The problem was akin to the one faced by Winckelmann, but all the more irksome insofar as the contestants of the *Querelle* were *directly* concerned not only with the aesthetic realm, but also, and openly, with those of morals and philosophy. The scattered and yet undeniable evidence of this aspect of Greek culture inevitably jarred with the modern (and what is more Christian) mind.¹⁰³ This feature – the intrinsic irreconcilability of ancient literature's worldview and religion with modern *mœurs* and theological convictions – is what makes this one subject unique in representing a problem for both *Modernes* and *Anciens*, both finding

explicit declaration of the superiority of antiquity, his work is a decisive defence of antiquity's superiority. Cf. Held (2004), 413. On the question, cf. Gillot (1914), 32.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Fumaroli (2001), 203-204.

¹⁰¹ This is, of course, a generalisation that does not mean to encompass the whole of Greek thought, which includes, above all, the Stoic theory of divine providence.

¹⁰² Cf. the “*demi-dieux [...] capricieux*” of Perrault's *Le siècle*.

¹⁰³ See Manuel (1959), 15-53; Vyverberg (1958), 86.

themselves inevitably at odds with it.¹⁰⁴ the former shrewdly and lavishly used it to undermine antiquity, forcing the *Anciens* – troubled themselves by the religious and moral implications of Greek literature – to justify it in a multitude of more or less convincing manners.¹⁰⁵

The assault of the *Modernes* was biting and, more than anything, utterly ubiquitous. One can hardly go far into any of the works that tackle the dispute without encountering mention of the blasphemous character of the ancient *mœurs*. A few examples should suffice. Decades before the official start of the *Querelle*, and in line with Charles Sorel's programme to attack "nonedifying forms of fiction", the *Berger extravagant's* (1627) characters criticise the ancients for their ridiculous and farcical depiction of the divine, and essentially for the ancients' attempt to pass off "fables" as theology.¹⁰⁶ The "demi-dieux [...] capricieux" in Perrault's *Le siècle* resurface in his *Parallèle* in the mention of the "mauvais exemples des dieux de L'*Iliade*": rather than giving the gods all the vices of men, Homer ought to have given men all the virtues of the gods.¹⁰⁷ Even somebody as moderate as François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon could regard ancient religion as "ridicule et monstrueuse" in his *Lettre à l'Académie* (1718).¹⁰⁸ Issues with the theological assumptions of antiquity in the light of their clash with Christian beliefs are at the core of the work of Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin.¹⁰⁹ All these various attacks bring forth a "radical reappraisal of Greek religion and theology as a mythic and

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Fumaroli (2001), 167-168 on the fact that some *Anciens* too were uncomfortable with the representation of human life drawn by the ancient poets. See Levine (1981), 78-79 for examples of other instances in which the two fronts agreed on their judgements of antiquity in general.

¹⁰⁵ Huet's reminder that poetry has to be educational and instructive gives us a sense of why the *Anciens* found ancient morals troublesome, cf. Huet's *Lettre de M. Huet à M. Perrault sur le parallèle des anciens et des modernes* in Fumaroli (2001), 398.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Tucker (2000), 347 and n. 3 and Sorel's (1627) *Le Berger Extravagant*, Livre III, 137.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Perrault's *Parallèle* Tome 3, in Fumaroli (2001), 372 on Horace's use of Homer and on the latter's "les mauvais exemples des dieux de L'*Iliade* que dans la vie et les écrits des philosophes, et il devait dire, comme Cicéron, qu'Homère eût mieux fait de donner aux hommes toutes les vertus des dieux que de donner aux dieux tous les vices des hommes."

¹⁰⁸ Fénelon (1911), 66-67.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Desmarets at Rigault (1856), 80-81, 86, 93 (on the gods of Homer), where Desmarets professes himself an enemy of the Homeric theology precisely in light of his being Christian. Insofar as Christianity was the point, the issue was not – or at least was not always – the ancients' polytheism and paganism *per se*, but rather and more deeply the clashing features of the gods of antiquity compared to the God of the Bible and to the other monotheistic religions.

superstitious mentality of a primitive people, on a level with American savages”, as one can see in Fontenelle.¹¹⁰

Everywhere (and especially as far as Homer is concerned) we find an abundance of arguments against the theology and the gods of antiquity. But perhaps the greatest testimony to the *Modernes*' feelings towards the ancients' pessimistic worldview can be found in their reaction to Greek tragedy.¹¹¹ As shown by Michael Lurie in his discussion of the reception of Sophocles, well into the 16th century and before the “Christianisation” of the interpretation of tragedy,¹¹² tragedy was conceived as “a warning representation of the mutability of unpredictable *fortuna*, and hence of the frailty of human happiness and the misery of human life”.¹¹³ With their descriptions of arbitrary fate and divine injustice, it was thus only natural for tragedy's worldviews to become one of the weapons turned against antiquity.¹¹⁴ For reasons well explained by Lurie, and connected to the difficulty inherent in any attempt to Christianise this tragedy's plot (and to the history of such attempts), Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* played a prominent role amongst the whole of Greek tragedy.¹¹⁵ In his *The Ancient and Modern Stages Survey'd* (1699) (once the *Querelle* had landed in England) James Drake plainly and unmistakably denounces the lack of virtue in the plot of the *Oedipus Rex*, accusing it of convincing man of the “lubricity of fortune” and the “instability of human greatness”.¹¹⁶ Drake's opinion was nothing new. Eight years earlier, in his *Réflexions sur la Poétique* (1691), Fontenelle had exposed the Sophoclean play as morally deficient insofar as it conveyed what we can now call a pessimistic interpretation of the human condition.¹¹⁷ At the beginning of the following century the Abbé Jean Terrasson in his *Dissertation critique sur l'Iliade d'Homère* (1715) identified in Greek tragedy the

¹¹⁰ Fontenelle (1691–9), 30–32. Quotation is from Lurie (2012), 448.

¹¹¹ It is not by chance that Philipp Melanchthon's exegetical lectures on Sophocles' plays – attempting to discern the action of divine justice and thus the theological correctness of each play – do not include the *Oedipus Rex*, cf. Lurie (2012), 444.

¹¹² Cf. Melanchthon's *Cohortatio* and Lurie (2012), 442–444.

¹¹³ Lurie (2012), 442.

¹¹⁴ Lurie (2012), 448.

¹¹⁵ See Lurie (2012) and Saint-Évremond (1692), 182 on which Lurie (2012), 448.

¹¹⁶ Drake (1699), 131–132.

¹¹⁷ “On ne remporte d'Œdipe, et des pièces qui lui ressemblent, qu'une désagréable et inutile conviction des misères de la condition humaine”, from Fontenelle (1818b), 19.

workings of an “*idée impie*” by which the innocent are unduly punished by fate and the gods.¹¹⁸

Terrasson’s discussion of Greek tragedy had been prompted by the attempt of *Ancien* André Dacier to reconcile in the plot of the *Oedipus Rex* a providential vision of divine justice – by which the guilty are punished – with the Aristotelian concept of *hamartia* – according to which the punishment comes in light of an error made unknowingly and unwillingly by the character. To make sense of the terrible turn of events in the play, Dacier had to prove Oedipus guilty, and thus righteously castigated: to do so he argued that “involuntary, yet nonetheless morally culpable” character flaws were the justification for the gods’ action.¹¹⁹ Dacier’s untenable interpretation quintessentially exemplifies the *Anciens*’ attitude in the face of the pagan beliefs of the Greeks: unable to thoroughly accept – let alone to embrace – the ancient worldview as it is, but nonetheless forced to defend their party, the *Anciens* resorted to a variety of means, which fall mostly into two categories. On the one hand they proposed to interpret and explain the unacceptable aspects of ancient theology and *Weltanschauung* by resorting to a *prisca theologia* and to a number of allegorical readings.¹²⁰ Such was the approach of Anne Dacier, wife of André and famous Homerist, who used Christianising interpretation to pursue the moralising endeavour of justifying the gods of Homer (attacked by Antoine Houdar de La Motte amongst others).¹²¹ A different approach was taken by all those who variously suggested that moral judgements should be waived entirely, and ancient literature enjoyed for the many other pleasures and teachings it can offer.¹²² Both attempts are a testimony to the *Anciens*’ essential inability and refusal to read, interpret, and accept in full the very works they were defending. The gap between the accepted moral systems of modernity and the beliefs of ancient Greece is, at this point, unbridgeable.

¹¹⁸ Terrasson (1715), 188.

¹¹⁹ Lurie (2012), 447.

¹²⁰ See Melanchthon’s moralising interpretations of Greek tragedy on which Lurie (2012), 443-444.

¹²¹ Cf. Perrault (1692), 55; Dacier (1714), 100-108; Hepp (1968), 410. Cf. Levine (1991), 141-145 for De La Motte’s and Terrasson’s criticism of Homer. Details of Dacier’s arguments in Dacier (1714), 101-102, 104, 106; Patey (2008), 54.

¹²² As did Brumoy, on which Lurie (2012), 450-452.

2. Jean-Jacques Barthélemy: Moralism and the Disguise of Philosophy

Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* was a publishing phenomenon: appearing for the first time in 1788, by the end of the next century it had been reprinted over forty times and in different languages.¹²³ The *Voyage* is simultaneously a novel – recounting the travels of the Scythian Anacharsis through 4th century Greece –¹²⁴ and an erudite scholarly enterprise, which aims at shaping both a liberal history *and* a social and cultural history of Greece. Through the looser and more narrative guises of fictional literature, the French scholar had the chance to include and discuss anything ranging from religious beliefs and customs, to culinary digressions, to the artistic and musical practices of the time. All this material is gathered from Barthélemy's extensive acquaintance with ancient sources, sources that are both referenced in the dense note apparatus and listed at the end of the last tome of the novel. But on top of this, the fictional form allows Barthélemy to make the Greeks speak for themselves, and to introduce direct dialogues with not only common people, but also with important witnesses in the history of Greek culture, Badolle's "grands hommes de l'histoire".¹²⁵ Clothed in alluring storytelling, the *Voyage* is formed by innumerable collections of ancient sources relating to each subject, a testimony to the author's mesmerising erudition. It is one of these collections that wins the *Voyage* a place in this history of Greek pessimism: albeit extremely briefly – and, as we shall see, in a peculiar manner – Chapter 28 of Barthélemy's work is one of the first modern collections of ancient Greek pessimistic statements. To the best of my knowledge no work has discussed this section of Barthélemy's *Voyage* or explored the role played by ancient pessimistic thought within it.¹²⁶

Chapter 28 of the *Voyage (Suite des mœurs des Athéniens)* begins with a hectic scene of city life, meant to give the reader a taste of the "vie civile" of the Athenians, subject

¹²³ Cf. Silver (1990), 145-148. The bibliography on the *Voyage* is sparse to say the least. After Maurice Badolle's (1927) book, the *Voyage* has been the subject of very little research, and mostly directed at observing this work's influence on other works or authors. One exception is Silver (1990). Someone even suggested the author owed his life to his work, cf. Silver (1990), 145.

¹²⁴ On Anacharsis as a "figura storica" cf. Polizzi (2011), 69-70.

¹²⁵ Badolle (1927).

¹²⁶ Polizzi (2011), 125-126 discusses briefly Chapter 78, reaching very different conclusions.

also of the prequel to this chapter, number 20, *Mœurs et vie civile des Athéniens*.¹²⁷ It is after some time spent among this not so pleasant crowd of pretentious characters, annoying chatterers, and slimy parasites, and after a brief encounter with Diogenes himself, that the protagonist begins to recount an altogether different type of meeting, taking place at the “portique de Jupiter” on a different day. The group of people gathered in the *porticus* is described as “quelques Athéniens qui agitoient des questions de philosophie”.¹²⁸ Immediately the reader is immersed *in medias res* in the on-going conversation, just like the passer-by Anacharsis. The central topics under discussion are the essence of the world and the role of man in it. Each character in turn gives a short speech outlining their opinions, and the reader learns that each of them is a disciple of a philosophical school: disciples of Heraclitus, Democritus, Plato. It is here that the chapter gathers and presents the reader with a choice of Greek beliefs, part of which overlaps with the much more extensive pseudo-Plutarchean collection mentioned above, the *Consolatio ad Apollonium*. The speakers utter these notions as part of their philosophical beliefs about the world’s essence: man is the dream of a shadow, the worst of evils is to be born, the best thing is to die.¹²⁹

The extent of Barthélemy’s engagement with these pessimistic thoughts is rather limited, as the brevity of the entire passage (only a few pages in the French edition used here) shows. But the real peculiarity of the *abbé*’s approach lies in the mechanism by which he inserts these textual references. The vast majority of the pessimistic notions conveyed by the speakers – and then punctiliously referenced by the author in the footnotes, in line with his erudite approach – come from non-philosophical works, and especially from poetic ones. Yet they are repositioned in what is a downright *philosophical* sketch; the character of the philosopher is used to utter statements that come for example from tragedy (Soph. *OC* 1224-27) and lyric (Pind. *Pyth.* 8.95-96). The non-judgmental inclusion of these pessimistic notions in Barthélemy’s work is a crucial step in the history of the modern engagement with ancient pessimistic ideas.

¹²⁷ I quote from Barthélemy (1789-1790), with tome and page numbers.

¹²⁸ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 3, 135.

¹²⁹ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 3, 135-139. A brief rundown of the ideas mentioned here and of the sources which Barthélemy supplies for each of idea can be found on the table in *Appendix 1*. In the “source” column I copy Barthélemy’s text and add in square brackets references to the *loci* in the modern notation. The speakers’ numbers in brackets indicate if one speaker appears more than once.

And yet, although the fact that they are quoted testifies (at least partially) to the author's acknowledgement of the existence of this dark worldview, Barthélemy's handling of his sources reveals that we are still far from a complete acceptance (let alone an embracing) of such worldview. By choosing philosophers as the spokespersons of poets – who first divulged these ideas, but are not mentioned in the body of the text – Barthélemy “disguises” poetry as philosophy, thus revealing that he fails to fully espouse the philosophical worth of poetic writings. Although the speakers (and the author via them) positively use concepts derived from ancient poetry, thus proving that the content of these poetic statements is considered sound and valuable, we are nonetheless assuredly albeit inexplicitly told that poetry needs the backing and sanctioning of philosophy in order to be considered serious and credible.

Yet this is not the only instance of a somewhat censorial attitude towards pessimistic poetic thought in the *Voyage*. Whereas Barthélemy's “disguise” of poetry is indirectly a statement about the author's opinions on the validity and authority of a literary form – and in a sense once more a stance in the age-old quarrel between poetry and philosophy – a later section of the *Voyage* informs us that Barthélemy had words of caution also for the subject matter of this pessimistic wisdom. Chapter 78 (*Sur le bonheur*) takes up where Chapter 76 had left off, i.e. with the continuation of Anacharsis' visit to Delos, guided (among others) by the native Philocles. The atmosphere that pervades these chapters is one and the same, a joyful mix of festive cheerfulness (the festival on the island, and a wedding celebration), exposure to quasi-divine beauty (that of Ismene, Philocles' daughter, and her groom) and an overall sense of partaking in an ideal life. One detail contradicts quite powerfully the fresco of uncontaminated happiness painted by the author as he describes the celebrations on Delos in Chapter 77. As the offerings are brought in, the bystanders present tales about the Hyperboreans and their legendary health, beauty, and happiness, all lived in a perpetual spring.¹³⁰ In the face of the unmissable feature of the Hyperborean country – its distance from known human abodes – the narrator has to comment that “c'est ainsi que les hommes n'ont jamais su placer le séjour du bonheur, que dans des lieux inaccessibles”.¹³¹ Barthélemy's treatment

¹³⁰ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 6, 428.

¹³¹ See Curi's (2008), 39-42 section “L'altrove della felicità” and *ibid.* 30-31; Curi explores the version of Silenus' story transmitted by Aelian, whereby Silenus speaks of the two cities that are on a continent

of the Hyperborean legend entails some degree of contradiction: this myth that envisions the land of perfect happiness *outside* the boundaries of the known world (or even in no physical and existing place, as Pindar's *Pythian* 10. 29-30 seems to say) is mentioned in the context of an idealised representation of Greek life. Although its premises are inherently at odds with much of chapters 76-78, Barthélemy acts almost as if he could not resist the temptation to insert this one more piece of erudition, but then supplies no explanation for it and the myth remains somewhat adrift in the narrative, testimony to a worldview that Barthélemy is about to criticise in Chapter 78.

It is in Chapter 78 that we learn more about Philocles, his wisdom, his philosophical education and his "système de conduite" aimed at the achievement of happiness, a target which Philocles seems to have successfully reached. Chapter 78 looks, accordingly, rather like a short treatise "on happiness". As we realise immediately Philocles' discourse is nothing else than an anti-pessimistic venture, an assault on pessimistic worldviews, purposefully meant to respond to (and attack) all those who see happiness as incompatible with human life. By trial and error Philocles has learned that men seek happiness in the wrong places, be it pleasures, excessively stern virtue, or the strictest reason; real happiness comes, this is Philocles' conclusion, from love.¹³² One could say that Philocles' stance is a *modus vivendi* and not a *Weltanschauung*, in that it does not deny *per se* any of the pessimistic notions on the human condition, but it merely suggests the best way to cope with existence. And yet the fact that Barthélemy directly opposes such pessimistic ideas is strikingly evident from the very start of Philocles' speech. Here the pessimistic conception of human existence is summarised and at the same time denounced in two powerful rhetorical questions: "Est-ce donc pour couvrir la terre de malheureux, que le genre humain a pris naissance? Et les dieux se feraient-ils un jeu cruel de persécuter des âmes aussi faibles que les nôtres?"¹³³ No, is the vigorous (albeit indirect) response of Philocles, whose entire speech is a negation of such conceptions of the world.

beyond this world. The inhabitants of the "pious" city live in happiness and die laughing (cf. the fragment by Theopompus cited by Aelian in Jacoby (1927), 551, fr. 75 c4.)

¹³² And especially selfless love. The last, love-centred part of Philocles' speech is prompted by the heartfelt request of young Lysis, who cries out "Ah! Philoclès, nous sommes faits pour le bonheur".

¹³³ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 6, 446.

It is in Philocles' response to these questions that we catch again repeated glimpses of Barthélemy's problematic relationship with Greek pessimistic ideas. Whether or not with this passage in mind, Philocles' discourse implicitly engages with the Homeric discourse on the human understanding of divine action, and in particular with the Odyssean Zeus' much-debated speech on the role of the gods in the causation of human suffering (*Od.* 1.32-41). Philocles' stark reply ("Je ne saurais me le persuader; c'est contre nous seuls que nous devons diriger nos reproches")¹³⁴ is in line with the most moralising readings of the speech,¹³⁵ according to which Zeus is stating that the gods have no part in the causation of mankind's sufferings, an interpretation which is untenable not only in the face of the very plot of the *Odyssey* itself, but also on a purely linguistic level.¹³⁶ Consciously or not, Philocles is siding with those who see in man's own doings the root of human trouble, thus implicitly disregarding the anti-teleological stance of so much of Greek literature, and its characters' cries against malevolent gods.

The following part of Philocles' speech confirms our thesis about the author's views on pessimistic interpretations of the world. Philocles engages with the idea (widespread in Greek literature) that man's lot is a mix of goods and evils, an idea that finds its earliest expression in Achilles' speech to Priam at *Iliad* 24.526-534. There is nevertheless a vast

¹³⁴ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 6, 446.

¹³⁵ See for example Dietrich (1965), 324. Although Kullman (1985), 5 acknowledges that "as frivolous as the gods may appear to us, their actions account for the whole of human suffering and weakness", he still believes the *Odyssey* to introduce ever since the council of the gods "another way of thinking".

¹³⁶ An interpretation I deem untenable. There are two textual reasons for which Zeus' clearcut denial of responsibility becomes highly implausible. Those who wish to rule out any divine role in human misery neglect to consider and translate the καὶ in verse 33 (as pointed out by Allan (2006), 16 n.73 and Tsagarakis (2000), 47 n.163. Fränkel (1975), 221, n. 6); the impossibility of reading in this passage merely the complete denial of involvement on the gods' part is restated by Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (1988), 77, clarifying that Zeus' speech is in no way a denial of divine interference in causing evil (κακά, ἄλγεα) to men. Furthermore the concept conveyed by the καὶ is in my opinion restated once again in the following line, as Zeus says that "(mortals) through their wickedness have sufferings ὑπὲρ μόρον", a phrase often overlooked in textual analyses or translated rather generically as "beyond that which was ordained" as by Murray (1919) and similarly by Lattimore (2007). Given that Μόρος is the part allotted to a man in the course of his life, "one's due share"(as in Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (1988), 78), to translate it as "that which was ordained" is to stress a vagueness which is not in the text, as μόρος refers to the share of humans. Thus "beyond one's share" implies that human action adds to a lot that is already decided (by external forces), thus reinforcing the notion that human wickedness and depravity merely add to divine action. By acting wickedly, man brings upon himself disgraces beyond what was allotted to him: but it is the gods and the superior forces who allot man his basic lot.

and striking difference between Philocles' conception of the distribution of goods and evils and that conveyed by Greek literature. According to Philocles, humans receive good mingled with evil ("Des lois constants mêlent sans interruption le bien avec le mal").¹³⁷ But describing the evil, Philocles suggests that some of it may well reveal to be real good, as opposed to pleasure (which is what humans understand as "good"), and that ultimately "pour la plupart des mortels, la somme des biens serait infiniment plus grande que celle des maux".¹³⁸ Nothing could be farther from the description of the jars given by Achilles, a description that only envisions two possible scenarios, and whose overall tone is certainly incompatible with the optimistic conclusion of Philocles. On the one hand, Achilles describes the possibility that a man would get a mixed lot (529-530), on the other hand the one according to which man receives only evil (ὃ δέ κε τῶν λυγρῶν δῶη, 531-532).¹³⁹ The description of the two jars and the practical explanation of their meaning for human life provides an efficacious seal to Achilles' dark and irrevocable statement at 525-526, stating that the gods have destined men to live in pain. Pindar's *Pythian* 3.82-83 (ἐν παρ' ἐσθλὸν πῆματα σύνδου δαίονται βροτοῖς ἀθάνατοι) similarly deals with the allotment of good and evil; David Young has suggested that, by stating that for each good man is given two evils, Pindar has correctly understood the Iliadic myth of the two jars, and channeled "the attitude of most Greeks toward life itself".¹⁴⁰ Although superficially reminiscent of the Greek outlook on the apportionment of the human lot, Philocles' discourse twists it to transform it into a tale of human happiness and even, ultimately, of divine benevolence ("Si vous demandiez des raisons d'un si funeste partage, d'autres vous répondraient peut-être que les dieux nous devaient des biens et non pas de plaisirs; qu'ils ne nous accordent les seconds que pour nous forcer à recevoir les premiers").¹⁴¹

Chapter 78 is thus to be read in conjunction with the observations on the state of the world that the Greek philosophers (and the poets through them) presented in Chapter 28. Philocles is then the one who – having had a philosophical education with "les plus célèbres philosophes de la Grèce" – goes beyond the teachings of philosophy,

¹³⁷ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 6, 447.

¹³⁸ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 6, 447.

¹³⁹ See Curi (2008), 145, quoting Magris (1984), 83ff.

¹⁴⁰ Young (1968), 50-51.

¹⁴¹ Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 6, 447.

surpassing them with his own empirical discoveries about life and happiness. Barthélemy's hand is unmistakably visible throughout the book in the recurring moralising tone; at times the distance and deprecation felt towards the things Anacharsis is witnessing is so stark that the author can explicitly condemn this or that custom (as he does, for example, with the ancients' handling of unwanted newborns in Chapter 26).¹⁴² With his ode to happiness, strikingly positioned towards the end of the whole *œuvre*, as a last word on many of the ethical and philosophical positions analysed in the book, Barthélemy makes his presence vividly felt. This – the idealised worldview of Philocles, in line with the joyful scenarios of Arcadian flavour with which Barthélemy surrounds his character – is what the author wants the reader to take away from this historical (but also moral) trip to antiquity. Any belief that contradicts this vision – such as the (poetic) pessimistic statements uttered by the philosophers in Chapter 28 – is only suited to remain an inconsequential erudite detail among hundreds, fatally open to criticism, but most of all chastised as the flawed perspective of people who fail to really understand the cosmos.

3. *A Different Tyranny: Pessimistic Greece in 19th Century Switzerland*

As the three stages sketched so far briefly and yet unmistakably show, the history of the reception and understanding of Greek pessimistic thought is long, vexed, and complex. Despite acknowledging the presence of pessimistic thoughts in Greek culture – and thus going far beyond the various reactions of the *Querelle's Anciens* – Barthélemy's work still betrays the author's unease towards some of their ethical and religious implications. One has to wait for the 19th century for things to change, and for a new era in the history of the interpretation of Greek thought to come about. Strikingly, this interpretative revolution has been, with the significant exception of Giacomo Leopardi, thoroughly German, taking place in the nation that had ever since Winckelmann shown an especially voracious interest in all classical (and especially Greek) things.¹⁴³ Partly

¹⁴² Cf. Burckhardt's very different treatment of the custom in Burckhardt et al. (2005), 378, which he connects specifically to the Greeks' pessimistic understanding of the cosmos. On this cf. Gossman (2000), 332.

¹⁴³ See Nietzsche's comment at *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 15, in Colli and Montinari (1972), 94: "[...] dass die Griechen unsere und jegliche Cultur als Wagenlenker in den Händen haben".

foreshadowed in the works of earlier generations (such as that of August Böckh),¹⁴⁴ this radical rethinking of Greek culture was chiefly brought about by Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) in his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) with his *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. The role of another (minor, but nevertheless essential) character in this rediscovery, Arthur Schopenhauer, and his treatment of Greek pessimistic thought will be at the centre of one section of this thesis,¹⁴⁵ for this reason he does not appear in the following pages.

Despite being published posthumously in 1900,¹⁴⁶ the *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* is the result of the research that Burckhardt carried out for a series of lectures on Greek culture that he delivered for the first time at the University of Basel in 1872, the very same year as the publication of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.¹⁴⁷ Albeit in drastically different manners, both Burckhardt's work (in the chapter *Zur Gesamtbilanz des griechischen Lebens*) and Nietzsche's book (which the author himself subtitled "oder Hellenismus und Pessimismus" when he republished it in 1886) potently state the burning necessity of considering the pessimistic side of Greek thought. Much is left for us to wonder about the relationship between the two works, very likely conceived in the years of Burckhardt's and Nietzsche's friendship in Basel. We can hardly believe that no spark or idea of what was to form these coeval works was shared between the two in the long chats we know about, and yet as Arnaldo Momigliano's short but enlightening essay tells us, we lack documentation to prove any such sharing, and we have, on the contrary, some proof that official collaboration never took place.¹⁴⁸

Reflecting the personality, the age, and the ultimate ambitions of their authors, the two works differ widely in both style and interpretation of this uncharted territory of Greek culture and thought. Although undoubtedly novel and *risqué* for its times in his intuitive

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Gossman (2000), 302. On the relationship between Böckh's and Nietzsche's conception of philology and the study of antiquity Porter (2000a) in various places, esp. 67 (contrasting Böckh's "historical and antiquarian" approach with Gottfried Hermann's) and 201-202.

¹⁴⁵ See *Chapter 3 III*.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Gossman (2000), 304-307 on the genesis of the lectures and on the posthumous process of publication by Jacob Oeri. On the *Kulturgeschichte*, Murray's *Introduction* to Murray and Stern (1998), 3-12.

¹⁴⁷ And then again for a number of times until 1885, when he decided to concentrate solely on art history, cf. Momigliano (1955); Gossman (2000), 304; Ghelardi (2002), 37 n. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Momigliano (1955), 290. On their relationship, Müller (2005), 55-74; *ibid.* 94-95.

and wide-sweeping interpretation of Greek culture,¹⁴⁹ Burckhardt's chapter on Greek pessimism in his *Kulturgeschichte* is still remarkably academic when compared to Nietzsche's "impossible" book.¹⁵⁰ *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is a visionary work that merges insightful intuitions – such as the comprehension of the Greeks' pessimistic nature – with blatant historical and philological errors, and combines them in a majestic and powerful fresco of the cultural history of ancient Greece that of modern Germany.¹⁵¹ In Aby Warburg's famous words, the prophetic force that is alive in both Burckhardt and Nietzsche manifests itself in two almost opposing ways: on the one hand the maenad-like Nietzsche, who showed with his own existence the need for his epiphanic intuitions to take body, inform reality, and change the future;¹⁵² on the other hand, Burckhardt, who is content with teaching the prophetic wisdom he has grasped without allowing it to shake the roots of his existence.

Yet what the two works really have in common is a core of profound tenets and beliefs that run significantly deeper than any difference ever may. First is the consciousness of the revolutionary character of their re-reading of the history of the understanding of antiquity. Both Burckhardt and Nietzsche, immersed as they were in the climate of German Hellenism, were fully aware of the magnitude of their break with tradition.¹⁵³ In

¹⁴⁹ On Burckhardt's awareness of the difference of his own work and of the future judgement of Basel's *virii eruditissimi* see Momigliano (1955), 290; Gossman (2000), 307.

¹⁵⁰ In *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* 2, in Colli and Montinari (1972), 7.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Henrichs (2004), 125-126 on the divergence between Nietzsche's academic writing and *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, which Henrichs suggests can be regarded also as work of fiction. On *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, see Von Reibnitz's (1992) commentary.

¹⁵² See Warburg's essay in Ghelardi (2002), 7-12. Cf. Johnson's (2012), 141-146 analysis of Warburg's views on Burckhardt and Nietzsche. It is worth being reminded here of Nietzsche's peculiar interpretation of the myth of Silenus, as revealing of his conception of pessimism at *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 3 (in Colli and Montinari (1972), 31): as Halliwell (2008), 339-340 describes, Nietzsche "makes Silenus break out into piercing laughter before uttering his irredeemably grim pronouncement", and Silenus' is undoubtedly an "existentially charged laughter". His conception of pessimism is tackled in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882; 1887) as he attacks "romantic" pessimism and his call for a "classical" or "Dionysian" pessimism, cf. *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* 370 in Colli and Montinari (1973), 301-304.

¹⁵³ Cf. Held (2004), 412, also quoting *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 20, Colli and Montinari (1972), 125: "Sollten wir, um nicht ganz an dem deutschen Geist verzweifeln zu müssen, nicht daraus den Schluss ziehen dürfen, dass in irgend welchem Hauptpunkte es auch jenen Kämpfern nicht gelungen sein möchte, in den Kern des hellenischen Wesens einzudringen und einen dauernden Liebesbund zwischen der deutschen und der griechischen Cultur herzustellen? [...] anderwärts tändelt eine gänzlich wirkungslose Schönrederei mit der 'griechischen Harmonie', der 'griechischen Schönheit', der 'griechischen Heiterkeit'"; Henrichs (2005), 456 names this radical shift rather mildly a

both authors this awareness is joined with the strong conviction that every other reading of Greek culture – all those “flirting with ‘Greek harmony’, ‘Greek beauty’, ‘Greek cheerfulness’”¹⁵⁴ and in short all those interpretations who denied the existence of Greek pessimistic thought – had been nothing but the mightiest historical falsification.¹⁵⁵ This idea is expressed by both scholars at different points, phrased in a language that wavers between explicit hostility, slight ridicule, and proud offence at the extent of such falsification.¹⁵⁶ Burckhardt’s is perhaps the most thorough and final presentation of the idea.¹⁵⁷

In Betreff der alten Griechen glaubte man seit der großen Erhebung des deutschen Humanismus im vorigen Jahrhundert im Klaren zu sein: im Widerschein ihres kriegerischen Heldenthums und Bürgerthums, ihrer Kunst und Poesie, ihres schönen Landes und Klima's *schätzte man sie glücklich* und Schiller's Gedicht “die Götter Griechenlands” faßte den ganzen vorausgesetzten Zustand in ein Bild zusammen, dessen Zauber noch heute seine Kraft nicht verloren hat. Allermindestens glaubte man, die Athener des perikleischen Zeitalters hätten Jahr aus Jahr ein im Entzücken leben müssen. *Eine der allergrößten Fälschungen des geschichtlichen Urtheils welche jemals vorgekommen, und um so unwiderstehlicher, je unschuldiger und überzeugter sie auftrat. Man überhörte den schreienden Protest der ganzen überlieferten Schriftwelt, welche vom Mythos an das Menschenleben überhaupt beklagt verschätzt, und in Betreff des besondern Lebens der griechischen Nation [...]*¹⁵⁸

Burckhardt’s discourse is passionate and yet composed, and resonates (without explicitly referencing them) with the ideas of those who had preceded him, such as

“differentiated view of Greek culture”. Cf. Robert Pöhlmann’s opinion on the *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* in Gossman (2000), 308: “an important testimony to the deep-rooted transformation of historical judgment of the Greeks in the second half of the nineteenth century”. Apropos of the two scholars’ awareness of earlier interpretation, cf. Albert Henrichs (2004), 121 who insightfully identifies a reference to Winckelmann in the way the Nietzsche of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* speaks about Greek life at the “recession” of the Olympian gods, using the terms “düster” and “ängstlich”, antonyms of the “buzzwords” of German classicism after Winckelmann.

¹⁵⁴ *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 20 in Colli and Montinari (1972), 126.

¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Gossman (2000), recalls Burckhardt’s refusal to “transfigure” or “prettify” antiquity.

¹⁵⁶ See Held (2004), 413: “Nietzsche himself in a notebook entry from 1888 underlines this, claiming that when the comedies of Winckelmann’s and Goethe’s Greeks, along with Victor Hugo’s Orientals and Scott’s thirteenth-century Englishmen, are uncovered, it will become evident that all are false historically, though in modern terms all true.” Of course, as Held himself suggests (and Henrichs, see above n. 151), Nietzsche’s work himself can often be considered little short of pure fiction.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Gossman (2000), 313-314.

¹⁵⁸ Burckhardt et al. (2005), 350.

Winckelmann himself. The brief enumeration of their misleading and embellishing interpretations eventually erupts in a potent statement that leaves no space for oppositions: the image of the happy Greeks that we have received and interiorised is “one of the most tremendous historical falsifications that have ever occurred”. Set in a somewhat unexpected and secluded spot halfway through the chapter he dedicates to Greek pessimism, this passage is indirectly and yet unmistakably a programmatic *manifesto* of what he is presenting as his own uncompromising interpretation of Greek culture. That Burckhardt is not only thinking of the political and social happiness granted by the much-praised (and much idealised) Greek democracy – a subject that he deals with at length in the *Kulturgeschichte* – is evident from his mention of literature and myth. Myth and literature are personified and depicted in the act of screamingly protesting against the falsified ideality that has been forced upon them.

It is precisely this complete acceptance of poetry in its widest (and Leopardian) sense that places Burckhardt and Nietzsche apart both from the preceding tradition and, as we shall see, from future attitudes. By embracing what the ancients’ literature tells us about their understanding of life, the two scholars finally bestow philosophical, ethical, and ultimately existential dignity onto poetic expression. Thus the artistic representation, the mimesis enacted by poetry is now the explicit source of evidence for the Greek worldview.¹⁵⁹ Burckhardt uses myth – such as the story of Philomela and Procne – to convey the horror that the Greeks felt as inherent in existence, just as Nietzsche brings forward tragedy as the example of how “Der Grieche kannte und empfand die Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins”.¹⁶⁰ Although the material used in the two treatments oftentimes converges – as it does for the focus on the figure of Prometheus –¹⁶¹ the way in which Burckhardt and Nietzsche use and resort to literature is different. On the one hand is Burckhardt’s more linear exposition, which employs examples from

¹⁵⁹ Burckhardt et al. (2005), 350. On the place of pessimism in poetic and literary form, and on the quality of the Greeks’ acceptance of the nature of existence, see Burckhardt et al. (2005), 365: “In weit überwiegendem Maße aber tritt uns in Poesie und Prosa der Griechen der Pessimismus als eine volkstümliche Thatsache entgegen, und zwar gar nicht als Resultat der Reflexion, und vollends lohne alle die vielseitige Begründung, welche er in unserm Jahrhundert erfahren hat, vielmehr wird er von Stimmung wegen insgesamt recht kurz und barsch in die Welt hinausgerufen.”

¹⁶⁰ *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 3 in Colli and Montinari (1972), 31. See also *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 17, *ibid.* 105 “wir werden gezwungen in die Schrecken der Individualexistenz hineinzublicken”.

¹⁶¹ Burckhardt et al. (2005), 353, 364, 368 and *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 9.

a variety of sources (with a high recurrence of the Homeric poems); on the other is Nietzsche's more opinionated writing, which often goes long stretches without any explicit reference to specific works or texts.

The embracing of poetic forms as the medium for philosophical notions goes hand in hand with the acceptance of the different morals espoused by the Greek mind. Everything that is un-Christian, immoral, and illogical to the modern mind – such as the causation behind the punishment of the innocent –¹⁶² is understood, explored, and recognised.¹⁶³ But there is more: the fear of previous generations – that the immorality of Greek beliefs could taint modernity – is turned around by Nietzsche, who suggests that the Greeks' insight into the essence of the world is precisely what modernity needs to live life at its fullest, having acknowledged the real state of the human condition. So Greek man – who, according to Burckhardt is not scared to consider the coming of death,¹⁶⁴ and can enjoy life having uncompromisingly accepted its real terms and who, according to Nietzsche, is the epitome of the “pessimism of strength” –¹⁶⁵ becomes the model for modern man to look up to. This complete overturn is made possible by the fact that both authors are able to observe one aspect of the Greek soul – the pessimistic understanding of human existence – without denying, and in fact explicitly stressing, the other side, i.e. the ability to make the most of life's delights, be it the joy of art, the excitement of political engagement, or the simple pleasure of wine. Burckhardt expresses it with his usual flair:

Die ganze Erscheinung des griechischen Pessimismus erhält nun ihre volle Merkwürdigkeit durch den entschiedenen Optimismus des griechischen Temperaments, welches vom tiefsten Grunde aus ein schaffendes, plastisches, der Welt zugewandtes ist und außerdem – an der Oberfläche – die Verwerthung und den Genuß des Augenblickes sehr zu schätzen weiß.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Cf. *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 14 in Colli and Montinari (1972), 88 and Burckhardt et al. (2005), 356: “Was am Schicksal vor Allem hervorgehoben wird, ist nicht die Gerechtigkeit sondern die Unvermeidlichkeit”.

¹⁶³ An example is Nietzsche's response to the traditional interpretations of tragedy, cf. *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 22.

¹⁶⁴ Burckhardt et al. (2005), 359, on Laertes' case.

¹⁶⁵ As in *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* 1, in Colli and Montinari (1972), 6.

¹⁶⁶ Burckhardt et al. (2005), 364.

One side does not forbid the other; on the contrary it is precisely the Greeks' thorough recognition of the nature of life that permits their full enjoying of what is allowed to men.¹⁶⁷ It is this remarkable clarity with respect to the somewhat paradoxical nature of Greek pessimism and its seeming clash with the Greeks' life that is peculiar to Burckhardt and Nietzsche.¹⁶⁸ Drawing a distinction between the understanding of life and the practical response to it, both works loudly spell out that pessimism is to be confused neither with a gloomy attitude nor with "resigned acceptance" of what one sees.¹⁶⁹

But there is one further and crucial similarity between these two works. In different ways both Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie* and Burckhardt's *Kulturgeschichte* respond to the peculiarly 18th and 19th century necessity to understand what to do with the classics, a question inherited from the post-Renaissance and *Querelle* era, and newly posed by so many German intellectuals. Both Nietzsche's and Burckhardt's efforts firmly deny that the answer could ever be mere specialist study or pure antiquarianism.¹⁷⁰ The study of the past has to be made relevant for the present because it intrinsically has the potential to impact and influence people's lives. Cardinal to both authors' works was thus the belief that their respective disciplines – philology for Nietzsche and history for Burckhardt – needed profound and radical changes in order to be significant for the current century and those to come.¹⁷¹

What philology had failed to do in Nietzsche's mind was to become an "interpretative discourse" (to use Christian Emden's words)¹⁷², i.e. a discipline able to penetrate the nature and thought of a people or a culture. The new mission of philology is an almost

¹⁶⁷ Nietzsche describes this complete acceptance in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 9, Colli and Montinari (1972), 67, through the Aeschylean Prometheus' attitude: "Alles Vorhandene ist gerecht und ungerecht und in beidem gleich berechtigt."

¹⁶⁸ Of course stressing this point – the double nature of Greek pessimism – was vital to Nietzsche's argument of the pessimism of strength. Cf. Invernizzi (1994), 502.

¹⁶⁹ See *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 6, Colli and Montinari (1972), 44 and Burckhardt et al. (2005), 361, 363-364 et al.

¹⁷⁰ On Nietzsche's philological career, see among others Most (2000); Latacz (2014); Babich (2014); Porter (2014).

¹⁷¹ Cf. Emden (2004), 380.

¹⁷² Cf. Emden (2004), 385.

obsessively recurrent topic throughout Nietzsche's early writing,¹⁷³ but they find special intensity and limpity of expression in some of the *Nachgelassene Fragmente* dating to a few years after the publication of the *Birth of Tragedy*, fragments that were originally notes for Nietzsche's *Wir Philologen*:

Die Philologie als Wissenschaft um das Alterthum hat natürlich keine ewige Dauer, ihr Stoff ist zu erschöpfen. Nicht zu erschöpfen ist die immer neue Accommodation jeder Zeit an das Alterthum, das sich daran Messen. Stellt man dem Philologen die Aufgabe, seine Zeit vermittelt des Alterthums besser zu verstehen, so ist seine Aufgabe eine ewige. — Dies ist die Antinomie der Philologie: man hat das Alterthum thatsächlich immer nur aus der Gegenwart verstanden — und soll nun die Gegenwart aus dem Alterthum verstehen? [...] (*Nachgelassene Fragmente* 3 (62), März 1875)¹⁷⁴

Whether or not the enterprise Nietzsche has in mind here has to be identified with the *Geburt* itself, the *Birth of Tragedy* is unquestionably an attempt to provide the world with the new insight into modernity that can be gained by looking at the past.¹⁷⁵ In Nietzsche's case this struggle to make philology a discipline for the future (to use the sneering phrase of his great detractor Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff)¹⁷⁶ coincided with his personal struggle as a professor of Classics in Basel, merging into a heightened "alienation" from both philology and the professional world where he practiced it.¹⁷⁷ What Nietzsche was doing for philology, Burckhardt was doing for history. Moving from a history in the manner of the *Annales* to a history of the *Antiquitates* (to borrow a famous Momigliano distinction) Burckhardt independently echoes a Nietzschean creed, maintaining that in the search for the particular historians

¹⁷³ Silk and Stern (1981), 17-18 collect a number of quotations from Nietzsche's letters on this topic. See also Porter (2000a), especially the *Introduction*, for a broad sketch of Nietzsche's relationship with philology over the years; cf. Porter (2014), esp. 27.

¹⁷⁴ In Colli and Montinari (1972), 107.

¹⁷⁵ See Lloyd-Jones (1976), 13; Most (2000), 163-166. Cf. Henrichs (1986), 379 on how the *Geburt* made of Nietzsche a "cultural critic" but ruined his reputation as a philologist.

¹⁷⁶ Wilamowitz' article in response to Nietzsche's work was indeed entitled *Zukunftsphilologie*. Wilamowitz was to criticise Burckhardt's project too, cf. Gossman (2000), 307.

¹⁷⁷ Henrichs (2005), 446 on Nietzsche's early (1871) foreboding to be more suited to philosophy than to philology, on which also Stroux (1925), 72-80. Silk and Stern (1981), 22-23. See Porter (2000a). Lloyd-Jones (1976), 3 on the complex interweaving between philology and philosophy in Nietzsche's history.

have lost sight of the essential:¹⁷⁸ for Burckhardt the essential is the “inner life of past humanity”, the very “large, bold brushstrokes” of Nietzsche’s words.¹⁷⁹ Burckhardt’s new cultural history is different from previous attempts, and – as the example of the discussion on infant exposure well shows –¹⁸⁰ it escapes the dangers of moralism that Barthélemy had conversely stumbled into. A new history and a new philology then, united by the desire to be more relevant to the present and the future, and by the wish not to lie about or embellish the past, thus portraying the entirety of the soul of a culture without censoring its darkness.

4. Conclusion: Leopardi’s Role and the Destiny of Greek Pessimism

This briefly sketched history is meant to give a taste of some of the reactions to Greek pessimistic thought in a number of key periods. Ultimately this background better equips us to understand the role that Leopardi played in this history, to understand the extent of the novelty of his contribution.

The debates during the *Querelle* had shown how Greek pessimistic thought – although of course not yet identified as such – represented at best an awkward aspect of ancient wisdom, at worst a real obstacle to the appreciation and embracement of ancient works. The *Querelle* continued much longer than the lives of those who first started it, and went on to inform subsequent discussions on antiquity and modernity (although those are not often considered in the light of the *Querelle* itself). In his *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* (1967), Hans Robert Jauss challenged the tendency of the standard interpretations of German classicism to starkly isolate it from its historical *milieu* and especially from the results of the French Enlightenment. Conversely, Jauss argues, works like Friedrich Schlegel’s *Über das Studium der*

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Momigliano (1955), 284-285; Gossman (2000), 309-310 on the programmatic introduction to the *Kulturgeschichte*. For Nietzsche’s opinion in a nutshell cf. Nietzsche’s letter to Carl von Gersdorff on the 6th of April 1867 in Colli and Montinari (1975), 208-212: “Denn wir wollen es nicht leugnen, jene erhebende Gesamttanschauung des Alterthums fehlt den meisten Philologen, weil sie sich zu nahe vor das Bild stellen und einen Oelfleck untersuchen anstatt die großen und kühnen Züge des ganzen Gemäldes zu bewundern und — was mehr ist — zu genießen. Wann, frage ich, haben wir doch einmal jenen reinen Genuß unsrer Alterthumsstudien, von dem wir leider oft genug reden.”

¹⁷⁹ Cf. the passage in note 178 and Gossman (2000), 309.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. above *Chapter 1 II.2*.

griechischen Poesie and Friedrich Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* ought not only to be read more attentively in their historical context, but they benefit from being understood as "responses" to the *Querelle*.¹⁸¹

I propose that it is equally fundamental to see Leopardi's reception of antiquity as a direct response to the (question of the) *Querelle*, something that, to the best of my knowledge, has so far been entirely neglected by scholarship. Whether direct or indirect, the comparison of ancients and moderns is ubiquitous in Leopardi's works, the *Operette Morali* being possibly the most striking example of his engagement with the various aspects of the relationship between antiquity and modernity.¹⁸² One might think for instance of the *Dialogo di un fisico e di un metafisico*, where the two debate on whether a long existence (granted by the "miracles" of modern science) is *per se* preferable; it is the wisdom of antiquity that Leopardi chooses to counter this argument, a wisdom distilled from the myth and literature of ancient Greece.¹⁸³ Again, it is the ancients' knowledge and use of dreams as a means of relieving one's existence that Leopardi praises in his *Dialogo di Torquato Tasso e del suo genio familiare*. Throughout, modernity stands for everything that is an erroneous and damaging illusion (such as the ignorant wish for eternal life) or misplaced and blind faith (such as that in progress). Antiquity, on the contrary, represents the fuller ability to enjoy and live life (*OM* 259-260), the courageous strength to admit life is not good *per se*, and at the same time the mastery of those skills that can make existence more bearable. But what the ancients are hailed for over and over (and even outside the explicit comparison with the moderns) is their unyielding, uncompromising, and truthful understanding of life. The moderns' lack of insight into the real nature of human existence is the direct opposite of this remarkable and brave ancient attitude. Here lies Leopardi's revolutionary riposte to the *Querelle*'s enigmas. Unlike both *Anciens* and *Modernes* of the 17th and 18th century debates, Leopardi can appreciate and accept this part of Greek culture. But most of all, as a defender of antiquity himself, he can do what the *Anciens* had entirely failed to do,

¹⁸¹ Jauss (1973), 67-106.

¹⁸² See among others the passages on the ancients at *TPP* (2013), 501, 527-528, 536-537, 543, 603. Dolfi (1997), discusses some of the passages mentioned here, but without the connection to the *Querelle*.

¹⁸³ The *exemplum* of the centaur Chiron, who chose to renounce his immortality and the double (Herodotean) story of Cleobis and Biton and Agamedes and Trophonios, both displaying how for man it is best not to be born, or to die soon; for this cf. *Chapter 4*, II.2.1).

that is to defend and support the ancients *precisely* for their dolorous and brave worldview. This – their pessimistic *Weltanschauung* – is the reason antiquity beats modernity, and the reason modernity ought to look back and up to the past’s insights.

Ever since Sebastiano Timpanaro’s ground-breaking chapter “Il Leopardi e i filosofi antichi” (first published in 1965),¹⁸⁴ scholarship on Leopardi has – so to speak, and as we explained in the *Introduction* – rested on Timpanaro’s laurels as far as research into Leopardi and Greek pessimism is concerned. One claim in particular, reasonable though it is in its original context, has been taken too far. Timpanaro was, to the best of my knowledge, the first to notice and comment on the role played by Leopardi’s reading of Barthélemy’s aforementioned chapters, which undoubtedly supplied the Italian poet with a number of sources he was not familiar with. Yet this link and the importance of Barthélemy’s impact have been overstated by later scholarship, or, more simply, overly relied on as if they represented full resolution to the question about Leopardi’s interpretation and use of ancient pessimistic thought. Thus for decades now countless footnotes refer to Timpanaro and Barthélemy, failing to question or to further Timpanaro’s discovery and thus avoiding a direct discussion of Leopardi’s life-long and complex relationship with Greek pessimistic thought.¹⁸⁵

What Barthélemy’s chapter is undoubtedly responsible for is providing Leopardi with a *collection*, presenting his reader in one place and at one time with several Greek pessimistic notions. In the same months in which Leopardi was reading the *Voyage*, two other collections listed in Leopardi’s *Elenchi di letture* (Stobaeus’ chapter 34 from book 4 of the *Anthology* and Marcello Adriani’s vulgarisation of pseudo-Plutarch’s *Consolatio ad Apollonium*) were playing similar roles for the Italian author.¹⁸⁶ The role of these collections (and chiefly of Barthélemy’s, insofar as it may have been the first which Leopardi accessed, according to the available information) is important primarily

¹⁸⁴ Timpanaro (1965), esp. 202-208.

¹⁸⁵ Recently Brogi (2012), 16 confines the topic to a note (n. 10) despite the very subject of his book is, as the title clarifies, *Nessuno vorrebbe rinascere: Da Leopardi alla storia di un’idea tra antichi e moderni*. Binni (1973), 78 argues that Leopardi “brought his pessimism to Antiquity” (“Pessimismo portato entro il mondo antico”) as to imply that antiquity knew no such a thing; similarly Dolfi (1986), 52. Polizzi (2011), 108 speaks of “pessimismo greco” in inverted commas.

¹⁸⁶ On the work of Adriani cf. Polizzi (2011), 98-111.

in light of their very nature, which sketches a theme by collating various evidence. Yet, there are at least two reasons why this importance should not be overplayed. First, Leopardi might not have known some of the sources mentioned in Chapter 28 of the *Voyage*, but he most certainly had thorough knowledge of some others among them; one should in this respect bear in mind that in many instances the fact that we cannot be sure Leopardi read something does not straightforwardly mean he never did. As the chapters of this thesis explain in greater detail, many of the notions expressed by Barthélemy's characters are already *in nuce* or even very openly present in works that Leopardi had great familiarity with, such as the Homeric poems.

But the second and more crucial reason is that Leopardi's presentation and interpretation of Greek pessimistic thought is so entirely different from Barthélemy's that we are forced to face the novelty of Leopardi's outlook on the subject. On the one hand stands Barthélemy's rather sparse collection of sources, spanning only a few short pages in a chapter and therein contained; the themes briefly resurface at the end of Barthélemy's *œuvre* only to be refuted and morally chastised. On the other hand we have Leopardi's continuous engagement with Greek pessimistic thought, which is researched and explored, and ultimately interiorised to provide a springboard for Leopardi's own worldview. What is one among hundreds of themes in Barthélemy's work, is instead a crucial and essential point of reference for Leopardi, whose interest in Greek pessimism is catalysed by the belief that this ancient understanding of life ought to be paradigmatic for the modern world.

Bolstered by the daring efforts of Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Burckhardt, and Nietzsche, one would expect the road for modernity to fully embrace Greek pessimism to be paved successfully once and for all.¹⁸⁷ Things instead did not go so smoothly. Briefly (if at all)

¹⁸⁷ It is worth reminding that both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were familiar with Leopardi's work. Cf. Schopenhauer's conclusion to Chapter 46, discussed in *Chapter 3* III. Leopardi (although still guilty, according to Nietzsche, of being a "pessimist") is for Nietzsche one of the highest examples of the poet-philologist (cf. *Nachgelassene Fragmente* 5 [17] in Colli and Montinari (1967), 120 and the letter to Marie Baumgartner from the 29th of December 1878 in Colli and Montinari (1980), 375), and one of the most profound voices to describe the human condition. Cf. Dahlkvist (2007), 216 on how "Nietzsche does not describe himself as a pessimist. On the contrary: pessimism is true, but we need something that saves us from this truth". Cf. Levy (1921), 272 for Hans von Bülow's letter to Nietzsche from the 1st of November 1874, whereby Bülow refers to Leopardi as "Schopenhauers

mentioned in the many “histories of pessimism” that flourished in the 70’s and 80’s of the 19th century – histories inspired by the increasing role played by modern philosophical pessimism in 19th century Europe – Greek pessimism is still poorly acknowledged and its connection with modern pessimism is most of the time not drawn.¹⁸⁸ James Sully, whose 1877 monograph on pessimism post-dates Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, finds for example that it is Buddhism that should be seen as the “direct progenitor of the modern German systems”.¹⁸⁹ Sully is not blind to the existence of pessimistic notions in Greek culture and spends some words discussing the Greeks’ concept of decadence and decline as it emerges from their mythology, and the way in which it opposes the modern idea of progress.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless his conclusion is that in “Greek thought, we find, on the whole, ideas conducive to optimism rather than pessimism”. Somewhat similar is the view of Elme Marie Caro in his *Le pessimisme au XIXe siècle* (1878): Caro acknowledges that antiquity developed “sentiments analogue” to those of modern pessimism.¹⁹¹ Yet those are rather explained away as “des traits de profonde mélancolie” and Caro too fails to see the more profound nature of Greek pessimistic thought.¹⁹²

The 20th century, alongside the appearance of Burckhardt’s *Kulturgeschichte*, saw some development with the publication of two academic articles focusing on Greek pessimism, both in 1921: Hermann Diels’ “Der Antike Pessimismus” and “Der Pessimismus und seine Überwindung bei den Griechen” by Wilhelm Nestle.¹⁹³ Other

großer romanischer Bruder”, inviting Nietzsche to translate Leopardi into German, in Colli and Montinari (1978a), 600-601. On Nietzsche and Leopardi, cf. Negri (1994), commenting on previous bibliography at 39-60.

¹⁸⁸ Amongst the many, one can mention the works of Agnes Taubert, Eduard von Hartmann, Elme Marie Caro, James Sully. Some of these figures are analysed in Dahlkvist (2007), 62-112.

¹⁸⁹ Sully (1877), 37, agreeing with his contemporary Max Müller.

¹⁹⁰ Sully (1877), 39: “The contrast between this idea of decline and the modern idea of progress is a remarkable one, and serves very materially to lessen the balance of pessimism which would otherwise mark off modern thought from that of antiquity.” Views on the existence of progress in antiquity vary: Bury (1920) began the debate denying its existence, on the grounds of the fact that the ancients thought the world to be in constant decline. Later scholarship challenged Bury’s interpretation, cf. especially particularly Edelstein (1967); Dodds (1973), 1-25; Blundell (1986), 103-108, 165-202; cf. also Nisbet (1994); Burkert (1997).

¹⁹¹ Caro (1878), 4.

¹⁹² Caro (1878), 4.

¹⁹³ These articles are good overviews of the presence of pessimistic thought in Greek literature, but not much more (both for their relative brevity and for their lack of in-depth analysis). Cf. also Marquard

works of scholarship (albeit mostly briefly) dedicate some space to Greek pessimistic thought, such as Nestle's article "Odysee-Interpretationen II" (1942) or William Chase Greene's *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (1944). Nevertheless in 1985 an Italian article addressing the question of the pessimistic character of early Greek lyric can still lament the lack of thorough research on "il complesso fenomeno del pessimismo greco".¹⁹⁴ Two works have in more recent years addressed the topic more satisfactorily. Umberto Curi's recent *Meglio non essere nati* (2008) is perhaps the single work to extensively address the topic; Curi's analysis is mostly organised by theme, moving freely through a variety of sources following the philosophical threads that connect them, with balanced attention to philosophical and poetic sources alike (with great relevance given to tragedy, among the latter). Possibly because of its special focus on the idea of the μή φθῆναι, Curi's monograph does not exhaust the scope for research on Greek pessimism; many sources that are inextricably connected to the historical and literary *milieu* of the μή φθῆναι remain out of Curi's gaze, or are simply touched upon (the relevant example being the comparison of men and leaves, observed in *Chapter 3* of this thesis). Ultimately, despite being too brief to provide a complete assessment of the vast phenomenon of Greek pessimistic thought, this monograph is an example of what studious and at the same time creative research can produce in this field.

The final work worth mentioning here – Henk Versnel's "The Gods: Divine Justice or Divine Arbitrariness" in his *Coping with the Gods* (2001) – is not directly concerned with Greek pessimism, but rather with the overlapping subject of Greek notion(s) of the gods' role in, and power over, human existence and the world.¹⁹⁵ Despite the difference in focus and the relative brevity (for the vastness of the topic) of the chapter, Versnel's analysis has a number of very valuable merits. First, it brings together many of the passages that, throughout Greek literature (and especially Greek poetry), convey pessimistic worldviews; although Versnel spends only a few lines on each passage, he manages to convey with remarkable clarity the role it plays in the wider network of Greek thought. Most of all, Versnel speaks openly of "pessimism", and succeeds in

(1905). Other brief treatments of the theme are Max Pohlenz's review of Diels, Pohlenz (1922) and Opstelten's work focusing on Sophocles, Opstelten (1952).

¹⁹⁴ Laurenti (1985), 51.

¹⁹⁵ Versnel (2011), 151-234.

painting a summarised but well-balanced portrait of the nuanced and sometimes contradictory aspects of the Greek view(s) of the world and the divine.¹⁹⁶

The scarcity of research into Greek pessimistic thought in modern classical scholarship is perhaps one of the causes for the disregard of ancient pessimism in the broader field of the studies of the history of ideas, a lamentable gap indeed, especially if one considers the 19th century path of the rediscovery of Greek pessimism and its inseparable connection with cultural history. Joshua Foa Dienstag's *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* is recent proof that there is no wide acknowledgment of, and consensus on, the existence and significance of ancient Greek pessimism. Dienstag presents an innovative and insightful analysis into the history of the idea of pessimism, setting out to undertake the complex task of proving that pessimism was and is not a personal tendency to discontent and spleen, but instead a worldview with philosophical dignity.¹⁹⁷ As such, pessimism plays a role in the history of ideas and Dienstag analyses several steps in this history, even including a chapter on Leopardi's pessimism. Yet, throughout the book the author readily dismisses the existence of pessimism in antiquity without further discussion: pessimism is irrefutably established by Dienstag to be a "conceptual child of Modernity".¹⁹⁸ It is thus no surprise that the essential connection between ancient and modern pessimism, and between those who formulated modern pessimism and the ancient pessimistic worldviews is entirely missed; Dienstag can mention with condescension "Nietzsche's *characterization* of the pre-Socratic Greeks as pessimists" or "Nietzsche's *characterization* of the Greeks as pessimists".¹⁹⁹

Attitudes similar to Dienstag's can be found elsewhere. In his analysis of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche George Simmel maintains that the idea of suffering as an *a priori* in life appears for the first time with Schopenhauer, and that before him pessimism was merely the *malheureux* outlook of some individuals on life.²⁰⁰ Curiously enough, the connection

¹⁹⁶ E.g. his words on Hesiod at Versnel (2011), 151-156. Something similar had convincingly been done for the *Odyssey* by Clay (1983) in the chapter "The Double Theodicy of the *Odyssey*".

¹⁹⁷ Similar attempts at clarifying the nature of philosophical pessimism had been made long before, for example by Sully (1877), 1, 4, a testimony to the difficult reception of the idea of pessimism.

¹⁹⁸ Twice on one page, Dienstag (2006), 16.

¹⁹⁹ Dienstag (2006), 166, 168 n.16. My italics.

²⁰⁰ Simmel (1991), 53.

between ancient and modern pessimism is implicitly made by a book that does not aim to cover intellectual history or history of reception. Despite not being concerned with the history of the idea itself, David Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been Born* (2006) – which treats as an ethical challenge the idea that existence is harmful to man – includes in its bibliography both the ancient works that convey the notions of Greek pessimism and those by modern pessimists. Despite suggesting he will investigate the history of pessimism as a philosophy, Stuart Sim's *A Philosophy of Pessimism* entirely forgets the Greeks.²⁰¹ Coming back to Dienstag, it is not by chance then that one more crucial connection gets lost, that is the tie between poetic expression and pessimistic philosophical content.²⁰² Like Barthélemy, Dienstag seems to struggle with the idea of a pessimism not expressed in philosophical form(s). As he approaches Nietzsche's identification of the Greeks as pessimists, he rather avoids drawing into the discussion any of the ancient evidence that lacks philosophical character: he speaks of “pre-Socratics” in a way that seems to encompass only the philosophical schools before Socrates and mentions Heraclitus as the only one whose thought could have borne vague resemblance to Nietzsche's idea of Greek thought.²⁰³

It goes without saying that Dienstag's chapter on Leopardi's pessimism entirely ignores antiquity. This mistake had not been made by the already mentioned Caro, who, more than a century before Dienstag, had not missed the prominent part played by ancient thought in Leopardi's pessimistic philosophy.²⁰⁴ And yet, his interpretation had undermined, just like Dienstag's, the real extent of the importance of Greek pessimism and, in so doing, had denied Leopardi's interpretation of antiquity and understanding of the history of ideas any philosophical or academic value:

Quoi qu'il en soit de ces symptômes philosophiques, le genre de sentiments qu'ils expriment est rare chez les anciens, et c'est un grave tort au poète du pessimisme, à Leopardi, d'avoir imaginé pour les besoins de sa cause une antiquité de fantaisie, et voulu nous persuader que le pessimisme était dans le génie des grand écrivains d'Athènes et de

²⁰¹ Sim (2015).

²⁰² Sully (1877), 31 deals (in passing) with the idea that optimism and pessimism are traditionally expressed in the form of “reasoned truths”, as affirmations or *gnomai*.

²⁰³ Dienstag (2006), 168.

²⁰⁴ The subtitle of Caro's work is “Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartmann”.

Rome. Système ou erreur, ce point de vue gâte en lui le sens si pénétrant et si fin qu'il a de l'antiquité.²⁰⁵

Despite fully appreciating how much Leopardi incorporated ancient sources and their mythology and literature into his own pessimistic worldview, Caro suggests that Leopardi's use of antiquity and Leopardi's claim about the existence of ancient pessimism are nothing but the making of a "fantasy antiquity" that never existed in reality. The aim of this thesis is to challenge both Dienstag's silence regarding ancient pessimism and Caro's accusation against Leopardi. In fact, this thesis proposes to use Leopardi's studious exploration and revival of Greek pessimistic thought to prove both the crucial importance of such a worldview in ancient Greece and its absolute centrality in shaping the thought and philosophy of one of 19th century Europe's greatest intellectuals.

²⁰⁵ Caro (1878), 13.

CHAPTER 2

Animals and Humans, Animals on Humans

Les Hommes veulent bien que les Dieux soient aussi foux qu'eux;
mais ils ne veulent pas que les Bêtes soient aussi sages.

Fontenelle, *Dialogues des Morts 5: Homère, Esope*.²⁰⁶

I have always felt we speak too much about human beings. This world is crowded with humans, but also with animals, birds, fish, and insects. They were here before we were and they will still be here should the day come when there are no more human beings.

Günter Grass²⁰⁷

The Earth, somewhere, some time. The human race has gone and a Sprite and a Gnome are discussing the matter. This is the scene presented by Leopardi's *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo*, through whose eyes we look at a world without man.²⁰⁸ It is here that a subtly spoken yet arresting truth confronts the (human) reader: nothing has happened. Man has disappeared and so has every sign of his presence on earth, from the measuring of time to the naming of things. Humanity is no longer imposing its organisational frame on the universe, and yet the universe and its inhabitants go on as they always have. One final and amused smile sparks from the memory of man, as the Sprite and the Gnome imagine what man's pretension and egotism would have to say faced with a world that has perfectly outlived their race.²⁰⁹

The unrealistic setting of this dialogue (to which I will return later in the chapter) and the presence of fabulous creatures are not a *unicum* in the *Operette*. Primarily a work on man, in order to capture the essence of human life and spirit the *Operette Morali* exploit the unreal to supply a variety of perspectives on man. It is not just men, then, who are

²⁰⁶ Fontenelle (1683), 62.

²⁰⁷ Grass (1991).

²⁰⁸ On the idea of the end of the human race, cf. Galimberti (1998a), 123. On the motif of "il mondo senza gente", cf. Sangirardi (1998), 319-321; Blasucci (2003), 87-88 referring to Fubini (1977), 623 Polizzi (2008), 55-102. *Ibid.* 61 examines Noël-Antoine Pluche's *Le Spectacle de la Nature* (1732), which Leopardi knew, as epitomizing the vision according to which "lo spettacolo offerto dalla natura è stato allestito da Dio in funzione di un unico privilegiato spettatore, l'uomo dotato di sensi e di ragione"; of course, the reversal of such belief is one of the cardinal points of many of the *Operette*.

²⁰⁹ *TPP* (2013), 509.

called to discuss the features of the human condition, but a manifold array of gods, divine or legendary beings, and natural entities and creatures. In doing so Leopardi is postulating that, given man's ineptness at understanding his own life, external outlooks and voices are needed to explore the depths of the place of humans in the world.²¹⁰

The idea of using an outside character to comment on or satirise a given subject is at the core of an enduring set of traditions which is hard to label univocally.²¹¹ These traditions variously merge satire with philosophical enquiry, observation of, and reflection upon (contemporary or a-temporal) reality with the use of fantasy; they have most commonly been called Menippean satire,²¹² or satirical dialogue.²¹³ Leopardi himself, as we shall see, was well aware of the existence of these traditions, and of the fact that his work would engage with them. His main point of reference in this respect was the work of Lucian of Samosata,²¹⁴ one of whose most representative characters was that very Menippus of Gadara to which Menippean satire owes its name.²¹⁵

This chapter starts, then, from Leopardi's and Lucian's use of distance and perspective as tropes of enquiry, a similarity that has been noticed before, chiefly by Giuseppe Sangirardi in his *Il libro dell'esperienza e il libro della sventura*, to which we shall refer

²¹⁰ Speaking specifically of the *Dialogo tra due bestie* (on which below), Blasucci (2003), 87 calls this process "straniamento" (but fails to describe it further); similarly Bellucci (2005), 232-233 briefly on the Sprite's perspective "dall'alto", which the Gnome lacks. Cf. Bazzocchi (1991), 55 on the "totale eliminazione del punto di vista umano dalle cose del mondo". Sangirardi (1998), 360 sees the protagonists of Leopardi's Lucianic *Operette* as "testimoni soprannaturali, e quindi al tempo stesso obiettivi e dotati di una visuale amplissima, della miseria (cioè dell'imperfezione fisica, ma soprattutto morale e intellettuale) del genere umano"; Sangirardi forgets how these characters are observers of something much wider, the human condition.

²¹¹ Cf. Weinbrot's (2005), xi definition of "the oxymoron of rigorous fluidity or borderless border", referring also to Samuel Johnson's idea of "regular literary enclosures regularly burst by the unruly imagination".

²¹² Weinbrot (2005), 110 defines Menippean satire as mingling "at least two genres, voices, or even historical periods to resist a dangerously threatening false orthodoxy". Two cardinal studies in the past century are in Bakhtin (1984) (but originally 1929) and Frye (2000) (originally 1957).

²¹³ Cf. Relihan (1993), 21-25, on the cataloguing of fantastic settings: "posthumous judgements, dialogues of the dead, divine assemblies, heavenly symposia, sojourns in heaven or Hades." *Ibid.* 22, n. 41 for bibliography on "the fantastic elements imputed to Menippus's writings".

²¹⁴ Cf. Sangirardi (2000), 60. On the adherence of Lucian's writing to the label of Menippean and on his claim to have invented the comic dialogue (as part of the broader issue of defining the form and content of Lucianic style) cf. Duncan (1979), 10-11; Whitmarsh (2001), 249.

²¹⁵ Cf. Geri (2011), 18 on the staple features of Menippus as a character. On the historical Menippus cf. for example Branham (1989), 14-15; Weinbrot (2005), 23-31; Navia (1996), 156-159.

again.²¹⁶ More specifically, it focuses on their shared attention to, and use of, animals as part of this enquiry into the human condition. Both Lucian and Leopardi employ animals – or, similarly, animal-like creatures or other living beings – as ἐπισκοποῦντες, distanced and privileged observers of humankind. The rooster of Lucian’s *Gallus* – discussed later in section III 1 – is a revealing example; so are Leopardi’s Sprite and Gnome who, although not animals in the proper sense, are part of the living cosmos and, just like animals, are ignored or considered inferior by humans. But there is more. In both authors animals feature not only in this capacity, but also, and prominently, as a *comparandum* for man: the likening of humans and animals restores man’s correct place among all other creatures, dissolving a deep-rooted belief in human primacy. The service offered by animals to the two satirists is invaluable: at once they supply externally located objectivity *and* a means of attack against the nonsensical and hubristic constructs of anthropocentrism. These are, for Leopardi, the unavoidable starting-point of a realistic understanding of the cosmos, and the very root of his pessimistic depiction of the human condition.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the way in which the use of external observers, the distancing craft of a removed perspective, and the collation of humans and animals are blended by Leopardi to create his personal *pessimistic* satire of the human condition. Simultaneously, we shall observe how ancient sources – chiefly, Lucian, and through him, earlier works, like the Homeric poems – cooperate in providing Leopardi with ideas, structures, and tropes, ultimately to form the core of his anti-anthropocentric fight. Highlighting the role played by ancient sources in Leopardi’s anti-anthropocentrism does not by any means deny the important influence played by many other chronologically intervening works – such as, for example, Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, expertly analysed by Guido Polizzi²¹⁷ – on this aspect of Leopardi’s thought. Our aim is to explore some of antiquity’s impact on this specific feature of Leopardi’s critique of anthropocentrism, and thus to fill at least partly a void in the scholarship.

²¹⁶ Sangirardi (2000), 105-107. *Ibid.* 103 on *Zib.* 1085-86 on “guardare dall’alto” as philosophical activity.

²¹⁷ Polizzi (2008), 55-102.

This chapter begins (section I) with a brief excursus on Leopardi's place in the history of the reception of Lucianic satire, observed also in the light of Leopardi's own statements about his interpretation of Lucian and about the role he wished to play among the vast crowd of Lucian's imitators, commentators, and interpreters throughout the centuries. Section II explores Leopardi's interpretation and reappropriation of Lucian's distancing craft especially insofar as it prompts the comparison between humans and animals, and, consequently, as it serves to attack man's anthropocentric fallacy. Section III brings together a *Zibaldone* passage, a Lucianic piece, and two passages from the Homeric epics for their underlying use of animals as a means of revealing and describing the (sorrowful) peculiarity of the human condition.

I

Leopardi and the Reception of Lucian

1. *Of Gods and Fish: Leopardi, Lucian, and Insightful Distance*

In the famous 1819 note that foreshadows the composition of the *Operette*, Leopardi refers to his future project as:

Dialoghi Satirici alla maniera di Luciano, ma tolti i personaggi e il ridicolo dai costumi presenti o moderni, e non tanto tra morti, giacchè di Dialoghi de' morti c'è molta abbondanza, quanto tra personaggi che si fingano vivi, ed anche volendo, fra animali; (come sento che n'abbia fatto il Monti imitatore di Luciano anche nel Dialogo della Bibl. Italiana,²¹⁸ e in quelli, che inserisce nella sua opera della lingua), insomma piccole commedie, o Scene di Commedie.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ See Monti (1838) for the dialogues published in the *Proposta di alcune correzioni ed aggiunte al vocabolario della Crusca* (1817-26) and Monti (1841) for three more dialogues (including the one alluded to by Leopardi as published in the *Biblioteca Italiana*).

²¹⁹ From his *Disegni letterari* 4, in *TPP* (2013), 1109. My translation (with changes in punctuation): "Satirical dialogues in the manner of Lucian, but without the characters and the ridicule of present or modern customs, and not [set] among the dead, since there is great abundance of Dialogues of the dead. Rather, but rather [set] among characters pretending to be alive, and even among animals (as I hear that Monti, imitator of Lucian, has done also in the Dialogue of the Biblioteca Italiana, and in the dialogues that he included in his work on language). In short, small comedies, or scenes from comedies". It is appealing to remember here Photius' description of Lucian as author of "comedies in prose on the life of the Greeks", in *Bibliotheca* 128.30 in Henry (1960), 102, cf. Geri (2011), 21.

Not only does Leopardi mention Lucian, but he also shows awareness of a long tradition that, throughout modernity, followed in Lucian's footsteps.²²⁰ When he writes "there is great abundance of dialogues of the dead", the reader thinks immediately of the vogue of "Dialogues des morts" in 17th and 18th century France, including especially the works of Fontenelle, Fénelon, or Boileau's *Les Héros de Roman*, which the author himself calls "à la manière de Lucien".²²¹ Leopardi's own notes and references, the lists of his readings (edited by Giuseppe Pacella), and the catalogue of Leopardi's library in Recanati show that Leopardi knew and read several of these works.²²² Leopardi's acquaintance with the tradition of the "dialogo satirico" shines through again years after the 1819 note and well into the composition of the *Operette*. In the notes for a dialogue that will not be part of the *Operette* (*Dialogo tra due bestie, p. e. un cavallo e un toro*) Leopardi makes clear that he knows *what* role he wants to play in such a tradition:

Si avverta di conservare l'impressione che deve produrre il discorrersi dell'uomo come razza già perduta e sparita dal mondo, e come di una rimembranza, dove consiste tutta l'originalità di questo dialogo, per non confonderlo con *tanti altri componimenti satirici di questo genere* dove si fa discorrere delle cose nostre o da forestieri, selvaggi ecc. o da bestie, in somma da esseri posti fuori della nostra sfera.²²³

Centuries before Leopardi's external onlookers, Lucian had peered at the Earth from far away on the wings of his Menippus or gazed at it through the reed globe of his Nigrinus, and had observed man from the detached divine perspective of – amongst

²²⁰ Cf. Scheel (1998), 29 on mentions of Lucian in Leopardi's work, e.g. *Zib.* 1394, also referencing Blasucci (1989), 197-211.

²²¹ Cf. Polizzi (2008), 69-81 analysing the (remarkable) influence of Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) on Leopardi's *Operette*; on this also Fabio (1995), 100ff; Galimberti (1964).

²²² Pacella (1966) and de las Nieves Muñoz Muñoz's (2013) additions to Pacella; Campana and Pasquini (2011). A passage from Leopardi's 1812 *Dialogo filosofico sopra un moderno libro intitolato "Analisi delle idee ad uso della gioventù"* in *TPP* (2013), 734 explains further Leopardi's idea of the use of the dialogue and provides valuable information on his sources and readings (among which, of course, is Lucian). On the use of the dialogue form and on the complex interweaving in Lucian's work between the heritage of philosophical dialogue form and his new comic type, see Lucian's own reflection in *Bis Accusatus*, on which Halliwell (2008), 432-433.

²²³ *TPP* (2013), 611. My italics. My translation (with changes in punctuation): "One needs to make sure to preserve the impression produced by the discussion of man as a race already lost and disappeared from the world, and as a memory. Here lies all the originality of this dialogue, not to confuse it with many other satirical compositions of this kind where it is foreigners, savages etc. or beasts (in short beings placed outside of our sphere) who discuss our business."

many – his Prometheus or from the point of view of the dead in his *Dialogi mortuorum*.²²⁴ Seamlessly at ease with his distancing craft, Lucian plays with it freely, and the distance he employs to deepen the insights of his characters is at times entirely physical (as is the case in the *Hermotimus* and the *Nigrinus*), at times purely (but nonetheless equally intensely) mental or philosophical, as in the *Icaromenippus* or in the *Charon*.²²⁵

Just like the gods of archaic Greek literature, the creatures and characters employed by Lucian – and, centuries later, by Leopardi – observe, comment on, and ultimately judge humankind. Here lies one of the paradoxes of the genre, endowing animals or non-existent creatures with the same claim to perspective and profound insight that belongs to the gods, making them equally capable of functioning as critical commentators on humanity. As Giuseppe Sangirardi noted, this connection between animals and gods in light of their distance from, and perceptiveness about, the real nature of humans crops up in the aforementioned 1819 *disegno letterario* that foreshadows the *Operette*. Here Leopardi mentions, as a possible setting, a world seen from the perspective of fish:

Argomento di alcuni Dialoghi potrebbero essere alcuni fatti che si fingessero accaduti in mare sott'acqua, ponendo per interlocutori i pesci, e fingendo che abbiano in mare i loro regni e governi, e possessioni d'acqua ec., e facendo uso de' naufragi e delle tante cose che

²²⁴ Cf. Duncan (1979), esp. 13-16 thoughtfully (albeit briefly) examining Lucian's penchant for the figure of the *episkopos* or *kataskopos* and the idea's connection with Cynicism (on which also Bompaigne (1958), 327). Cf. esp. 16: "All of his writings reflect in some way the search for a detached point of vantage, a rejection of prior commitments, a compulsion to get out in order to look in." *Ibid.* 15 n. 7 quotes Bompaigne's (1958), 327 definition of the term and history of its meaning. Two significant examples of ἐπισκοπέω in Lucian are *Somnium* 15 and *Nigrinus* 18. Halliwell (2008), 443-446 discusses the *Charon* (whose complete title is Χάρων ἢ Ἐπισκοποῦντες), whose protagonist is yet another – and this time in-between men and gods – observer of human life from outside. *Ibid.* 441 on death as another possible perspective on life: "It is a remarkable fact about Lucian's comic-cum-satirical repertoire that the perspective on life 'from death' is almost an obsession of his. For him, death is the very reverse of a taboo subject: it is, in a peculiar way, both a mediator and an object of laughter." Cf. Anderson (1976), 23-25 on Lucian's debt to Aristophanes' *Aves* and *Pax* for the idea of "celestial journeys". Cf. Geri (2011), 206-209 on Erasmus and the Lucianic *topos* of "La vita umana vista dall'alto".

²²⁵ In *Nigrinus* 35 we observe the connection between metaphorical and physical travel being made by Lucian himself. Having listened to Nigrinus – who guides him on a "philosophical tour" of Rome (and the world) – Lucian feels "like the Phaeacians", who, not by chance, had listened to and metaphorically travelled through the words of Odysseus.

sono nel fondo dei mare, o ci nascono, come il corallo ec., [...] trovando in ciò materia da satireggiare.²²⁶

Sangirardi perceptively connects this passage with a note found in *Zib.* 41-42 (dating from the same period), which analyses the difference between the “comedic sense” (“il ridicolo”) of ancients and moderns.²²⁷ In it Leopardi recalls the simile found in Lucian’s *Zeὺς ἐλεγχόμενος* (*J.Conf.* 4) that “compares the Gods [in fact, just Zeus] hanging from the Parcae’s spindle to the small fish hanging from the fisherman’s rod”. It is impossible for us to securely ascertain whether Lucian’s image could be directly responsible for the idea sketched in the *disegno*;²²⁸ nevertheless, the idea of exploiting a distant and overturned perspective to say something about the human world has undeniable connections with the way the Lucianic gods – if not in the *Zeὺς ἐλεγχόμενος*, in many of Lucian’s works – look at the world of men. The idea of the *disegno* will not be carried out as it is, and there is no fish world in the *Operette*, yet the satirical potential of Lucian’s notion must have struck Leopardi and prompted him to improvise on the theme. And if Lucian had already postulated that gods are like fish, then for Leopardi-follower-of-Lucian a world of gods speaking about humans can satirically become a world of fish speaking about humans. The end is one and the same: an inverted and external viewpoint from which to gaze at human life.²²⁹

²²⁶ *TPP* (2013), 1109. My translation (with changes in punctuation): “Subject of some dialogues could be facts one could pretend have happened at sea, underwater, taking fish as speakers, and pretending that they had at sea their reigns, and governments, and water goods etc. and exploiting shipwrecks and all the things which are at the bottom of the sea, or that are born there (like corals etc) [...] finding in this material for satire”.

²²⁷ Sangirardi (2000), 34.

²²⁸ Of course the *Zibaldone* note is later than the *disegno*, but, as Pacella (1966), 559 shows, by 1819 Leopardi had already read the *Zeὺς ἐλεγχόμενος*.

²²⁹ Cf. Duncan’s (1979), 21 idea of “compulsive detachment” as an explanation for many of Lucian’s choices, among which the predilection for the dialogic form: “Lucian’s speakers tend to be far removed from the battle. His mythological characters talk like men but belong to a timeless world. His Gods comment on life from above, his Dead from below, and even his Courtesans gossip off-duty. Perspective is variously achieved.”

2. “À la manière de Lucien”, “Alla maniera di Luciano”²³⁰

Witty interpreter of contemporary life and society, pious moraliser or irreverent detractor of religion²³¹ – in the history of his modern reception, translators, commentators, and imitators have created for Lucian an arrestingly varied array of literary personae. Similarly, everything and anything was made of Lucianic forms, manners, themes, and ideas throughout the modern history of his reception, the only constant being perhaps the enduring vivacity with which he was translated, read, debated upon, and reused.²³² Such a complex and rich history could not be summarised in this context, and many works have thoroughly addressed it in recent years.

Yet one main pattern in this history catches the eye and proves useful in this context to compare and contrast with Leopardi’s own use of Lucianic manners and designs. Lucian’s outlook of contempt for, and dissatisfaction with, the world as a whole, including religion and its constructs and man and his beliefs – an outlook often carried out by mocking the vice without pointing at the virtue – posed a problem for the vast majority of his followers across the centuries.²³³ This ungodly and destabilising aspect did not prevent Lucian from being loved and imitated, but rather caused him to be adapted and softened in light of Christian principles and notions sometimes openly at odds with the more controversial aspects of Lucian’s own thought.²³⁴ In Henry

²³⁰ *TPP* (2013), 1109.

²³¹ Cf. Geri (2011), 29: “[...] si nota una duplice interpretazione di Luciano: da una parte come un autore “morale”, dall’altro come uno scrittore irridente e irrispettoso”.

²³² On the reception of Lucian in modern Europe see Robinson (1979); Cox (1992); Weinbrot (2005); Ligota and Panizza (2007); Geri (2011), 9-29. Ligota and Panizza’s (2007) introduction, 1-16, offers a concise summary of Lucian’s reception up to Byzantine times. *Ibid.* 12, n. 72 for bibliography on the history of Lucian’s reception, including Mattioli (1980); Marsh (1999); Mayer (1984).

²³³ Cf. *Icaromenippus* 4, where, even before he decides to embark in his trip to truly know the world, Menippus is convinced of the evilness of the human world. Weinbrot (2005) 63-64 provides examples of authors who blamed Lucian for his lack of *pars construens*.

²³⁴ This tendency interested many of the translators, commentators, and imitators of Lucian’s *Dialogues of the dead* in particular, a genre bourgeoning especially in 17th and 18th century France, cf. especially Weinbrot (2005), 40-85. On the need for redeeming touch-ups, Weinbrot (2005), xi, 69. See also *ibid.* 63-66 for a summary of the accusation laid against Lucian for his supposed impiety; *ibid.* 72 on Fontenelle’s Christianising rejection of suicide apropos of Menippus. For different ages’ ideas of Lucian’s impiety see also Baldwin (1973), 7-20; 97. Hughes (1730), xvii credits Fontenelle with a general betterment of Lucian, who is judged as one who “laughs too loud, is often licentious, and

Fielding's Lucianic trip to the underworld (his 1749 *Journey from This World to the Next*) the character of the biting Menippus himself disappears, abolished in favour of a more forgiving and moralising atmosphere.²³⁵ Matteo Maria Boiardo's 1490-91 *Timone* substitutes the very bleak ending of Lucian's *Timon* with "uno ottimistico e allegro, in linea con il tanto amato ideale tardoquattrocentesco di una vita semplice e priva di preoccupazioni".²³⁶ At other times Lucian is (more or less lovingly and more or less directly) reproached for his unseemly views. Fénelon's Herodotus accuses Lucian of impiety ("Impie, tu ne croyais pas la religion!");²³⁷ John Hughes, responsible for the 1708 translation of Fontenelle's *Dialogues des morts*, can burst into an incredulous "Whether this be decent, or like a banquet of the gods?" when faced with one of Lucian's many invectives.²³⁸ Respected, loved, and imitated, Lucian is nevertheless a thorny author for his ungodly mockeries and disrespectful handling of human and divine matters.

On the other hand the harshness of Lucianic satire, aimed with (often dark) seriousness against – to use Weinbrot's words – an "orthodoxy" that is often as wide as man's pretension or the nonsensicality of human religion, was too weighty a matter for other followers or imitators, who preferred to direct their versions of Lucian's cutting irony and reproachful tones towards more specific, more temporal, and often more personal targets. The note of the printer to the late 16th century *Satyre Ménippée*, a large and collective political satire stimulated by the contemporary religious wars, well explains

sometimes course in his raillery. He has not thought it sufficient to make his dead reason, but they scold too, and are ready to fight in the presence of Jupiter himself".

²³⁵ Cf. Weinbrot (2005), 81-82 who illustrates it well with the case study of chapter 7 of Fielding's work compared to Lucian's *Necyomantia*, cf. Fielding (1798), 25-30.

²³⁶ Tomassi (2011), 107. Interestingly, Baruffaldi (1809), 182 commentator and editor of the *Timone*, suggests that the first lines of the last scene (atto V, scena ultima) "mai più non usciran: non gli aspettate" are to be related to Zaccaria Vallaresso's 1724 tragedy *Rutzvanscad*, the same referenced by Leopardi's *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo* (*Folletto*. Voi gli aspettate invan: son tutti morti, diceva la chiusa di una tragedia dove morivano tutti i personaggi); cf. also Bellucci (2005), 227.

²³⁷ Fénelon (1917), 202.

²³⁸ Hughes (1730), xviii. As we have seen in *Chapter I's* section on the *Querelle* this difficulty is consistent with the problematic relationship of both *Anciens* and *Modernes* with the pessimist, ungodly and anti-providential side of the classics. Weinbrot (2005), 63 reminds of the Christianising readings of Lucian during the 17th century, making him a champion against paganism. Fontenelle's *prefatio* to his *Dialogues des morts* (1683) is a letter to Lucian in which the author himself declares he will forgo some of Lucian's harshest features, e.g. the setting in hell, cf. *ibid.* ii.

such a tendency.²³⁹ The note, related by Weinbrot from its English translation, explains the work's title and the type of satire as one that contains "evil speech in it, for the reproof, either of public vices, or of particular faults of some certain persons".²⁴⁰ At the same time it unwittingly but effectively summarises one of the most striking differences between Lucian's and this understanding of satire which, intrinsically tied to the contemporary circumstances of its composition, often fails to be as universal as Lucian's concerns with humans, gods, and the world.²⁴¹

Of course there are exceptions in authors who could face the dark heterodoxy and unapologetically piercing modes of many of Lucian's works, and who fully engaged with their philosophical, theological, and intellectual aspects. Leon Battista Alberti can use Lucianic modes and themes to tackle the trouble of his own times without losing the ability to critique atemporal and universal aspects of human nature: his Charon is positioned up close (rather than high above) but what he sees are still human *ineptia* and *improbitas*, prompting him to prefer hell to earth in order to escape the *belua homines* (*Mom.* 4.70).²⁴² Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) fully inherits Lucian's grimly farcical view of human achievements, reenacting it in a fight with contemporary Leibnizian optimism. Again, Wieland could read, translate, and interpret Lucian with remarkable clarity and full intellectual appreciation, grounded as he was both in the philological study of Lucian's work and in his lucid and anti-idealistic interpretation of ancient Greece.²⁴³

²³⁹ Weinbrot (2005), 88-89.

²⁴⁰ Weinbrot (2005), 89.

²⁴¹ Robinson (1979), 110-115 on the example of Hutten's *Phalarismus*. For many of these works – as Robinson (1979), 114 states – "it is difficult to disentangle any Lucianic influence from that of Juvenal and the whole tradition of the anti-court satire." Branham (1989), 15 compares Aristophanes' heroes' "concrete topical complaints arising from actual events" and Menippus who "appears in a timeless 'classical Athens'", and his motive is accordingly more universal and less dependent on the concerns of a particular audience or occasion."

²⁴² Cf. the comment of Garin (1975), 224-226; also Acocella (2007); Geri (2011). *Ibid.* 117 apropos of Alberti's *Momus* "un Alberti che si compiace di mostrarsi più disincantato e pessimista dello stesso Luciano."

²⁴³ Cf. Wieland's (1820), x-xi description of the character, merits, and small flaws of Lucian's work in his preface to his translation of Lucian, which I reference from the English edition. A few lines later Wieland says: "After a lapse of seventeen hundred years [...] his satire [is] still applicable". *Ibid.* xvii Wieland describes Lucian as a lover of truth, whose satire aims at unmasking delusions and falsehoods of all kinds and *Ibid.* xviii Wieland defends him against the (many) accusations of

Joining these ranks, Leopardi's interpretation is not only entirely free of Christianising concerns, but utterly accepting of Lucian's sceptical and questioning attitude towards religion and, more generally, human belief and dogma. What others found awkward or troublesome, Leopardi embraced, or even amplified: the case – examined in *Chapter 4* of this thesis – of the centaur Chiron is emblematic: turned into a character full of optimistic faith in the gods in Fénelon's remake,²⁴⁴ he is for Leopardi one of the cardinal symbols of the universal validity of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$.²⁴⁵ As a consequence, Leopardi appreciates and inherits Lucian's unforgiving and crude (but realistic) view of humanity and its shortcomings, not tainted by ideas of forgiveness and charity. The dark, destabilising character of Lucian's understanding of the world is precisely what Leopardi needs to observe his target in its naked truth.

To a certain extent Leopardi himself was aware of the distance that separates his from some of his predecessors' use(s) of Lucian. In the letter to Piero Giordani (dated 6th August 1821)²⁴⁶ in which he briefly discusses his future *Operette*, Leopardi takes great care to especially distance his project from Vincenzo Monti's interpretation of Lucian, culpable, for Leopardi, of adopting Lucianic modes to jest on unimportant matters; Monti had in fact written a number of Lucianising dialogues as part of his wider attack on the linguistic bigotry of the Accademia della Crusca. The *Operette*, writes Leopardi, "will be dedicated to much graver subjects than the grammatical trifles to which Monti adapts him (Lucian)".²⁴⁷ Thus, for example, the Lucianic idea of Menippus flying over the Earth and "seeing only the world's horrors" (to use Weinbrot's words again)²⁴⁸ is reused by Leopardi in the strongest possible way: in Leopardi's *La scommessa di Prometeo* the spokesman of the utter disappointment and horror at the (aerial) view of mankind is no other than Prometheus, the very creator and supporter of the human race.

ridiculing the gods. See Steinberger (1902); Deitz (2007). Others could be added to the list, among whom Erasmus.

²⁴⁴ In *Le Centaure Chiron et Achille*, in Fénelon (1917), 150.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *Chapter 4* II.2.1.

²⁴⁶ *TPP* (2013), 1218.

²⁴⁷ My translation. The original: "[...] rivolto a soggetti molto più gravi che non sono le bazzecole grammaticali a cui lo adatta il Monti". Sangirardi (2000), 39 discusses the passage within a neat analysis of the "prehistory" of the *Operette*.

²⁴⁸ Weinbrot (2005), 65.

The significance of Menippus' dismay and consternation over the world is magnified by Leopardi's reworking of the Lucianic material, taunting one of modernity's dearest achievements: human progress.

Indifferent to the shortcomings of different categories of men through the ages, Leopardi adopts the staples of the Lucianic satirical dialogue, which often sets the discourse outside reality, to speak of man across time, against the background of all other living creatures, and against the spectrum of the metaphysical beings within the universe. In short, Leopardi's satire wants to speak of the human condition.²⁴⁹ Their mutual target brings Lucian and Leopardi closer than ever, united in a quest against man's false conceit, his twisted understanding of the world, of religion, and of his rightful due. It is suggestive to recall that the very namesake of the Menippea, Menippus of Gadara, was said by Marcus Aurelius to have mocked the perishable and ephemeral nature of human life (cf. 6.47.1. αὐτῆς τῆς ἐπικήρου καὶ ἐφημέρου τῶν ἀνθρώπων ζωῆς χλευασταί, οἷον Μένιππος καὶ ὅσοι τοιοῦτοι).²⁵⁰ The aim of this thesis is, in a way, to show just how similar Leopardi is to this Menippus.

3. *Lucian and Leopardi, So Far*

Although much has been written over the years about Lucian's influence on Leopardi, the relationship between the two authors and the real significance of the Lucianic influence on the Italian poet still remain to a certain extent controversial.²⁵¹ On the one hand, Leopardi has been little if at all considered by scholarship on the modern reception of Lucian: in his *Lucian and his Influence in Europe*, for example, Christopher Robinson is content with mentioning Leopardi in the epilogue as an example of the presence of "traces of Lucian's influence in the works of major

²⁴⁹ Cf. Halliwell's understanding of Lucian's satire in Halliwell (2008), 431; as Halliwell recalls, not many among Lucian's critics and not all among Lucian's imitators perceived the extent to which Lucian's laughter is "attached" to "life and death".

²⁵⁰ From Dalfen (1979), 56-57.

²⁵¹ Much less has been written on Leopardi and the wider tradition of satirical dialogue; most authors merely mention the *Operette's* possible characterisation as satires or Menippean satires, for example Prete (1998), 20; Piscopo (1999), 42.

writers”.²⁵² Leopardi scholars, on the other hand, have (especially in the past) considered Lucian to have a merely formal impact on the *Operette*, or even to be the “ispiratore [...] delle meno felici delle *Operette*” in Sebastiano Timpanaro’s words.²⁵³ Although in the last couple of decades the importance of Lucian for Leopardi has been positively reconsidered and many works have reassessed his role in Leopardi’s works,²⁵⁴ several issues remain unexamined.

One issue in particular interests us here. A great part of recent scholarship on Leopardi and Lucian only approaches the topic as part of the wider study of the role of laughter and irony in Leopardi’s work, thus ruling out any other influence that Lucian could have exerted on Leopardi; the idea that Lucian is not much more than a formal source for a generic comic tone seems extremely widespread. In his otherwise brilliant *Libro dell’esperienza, libro della sventura* Giuseppe Sangirardi affirms that there is no connection between the content of the *Operette* and Lucian’s work.²⁵⁵ Frazzled by the forms and the humour of Lucianic works, or in search of specific references, Leopardi scholars have been often drawn to disregard the ways in which Lucian’s content and substance have influenced Leopardi. It is not only Lucian’s humour, or his brilliant use of the dialogue that inform Leopardi’s *Operette*, but also, and importantly, Lucian’s critique of human pretension, his unveiling of human delusions, and his satire of religion, among others.

²⁵² Robinson (1979), 237.

²⁵³ Scheel (1998), 27-28 admits to having underestimated the importance of Lucian for Leopardi in his previous work, Scheel (1959); *ibid.* 28-29 for a short history of Lucian’s “mis-fortune” among Leopardi’s critics and in particular the general disdain for the satirical and Lucianic works of Leopardi during the last century, for example Vossler (1923), 391.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Mattioli (1982), neatly records the presence of Lucian in Leopardi’s corpus and also explores Lucian’s impact on the *Operette*; Mariani (1991), 47-53, who ends his short chapter on Leopardi’s use of irony in the *Operette* with bibliography on the same theme; Scheel (1998). Cf. also the essays on the “Lucianizing” Leopardi in *Il riso leopardiano* (1998). See also Di Benedetto (1967); Timpanaro (2008), 110, 112 n. 40; also Fabio (1995), 36-49 and 177-196 who presents analyses of the linguistic influence of Lucian in the *Operette*. Especially remarkable is the work by Sangirardi (2000), 25-86, who presents a very insightful analysis of the history of the composition of the *Operette* with specific and thoughtful attention to the role of Lucian in this process. Ditadi (2011) is a somewhat odd collection of Leopardian works (or pieces of works) on the theme of animals, published by *Agire ora edizioni*, a publishing house dedicated to animal rights.

²⁵⁵ Sangirardi (2000), 39.

One point follows closely. Dignifying Lucian's content, and believing him to be not only a "satiric artist", but also a "thinker" – to use and revert Duncan's distinction –²⁵⁶ means to appreciate his intellectual inspection and judgement of earlier and contemporary thought, religion, philosophy, and poetry. Graham Anderson expresses it clearly, saying that "we can never strictly speaking talk of 'Lucianic' themes, but we should learn to recognise typical 'Lucianic' blends of Plato, Aristophanes and the rest."²⁵⁷ Both these aspects – the impact of Lucianic thought and the influence of Lucian's engagement with earlier intellectual and religious views – must be taken into account when observing the Lucianising Leopardi. Lucian is, for Leopardi, also a lucid and enlightened eye through which to look at, and to reflect upon, the works of archaic and classical Greece.

²⁵⁶ Duncan (1979), 17.

²⁵⁷ Anderson (1976), 21.

II

Μύρμακες ἀνάριθμοι: Anthropocentrism and The Place of Man

In summa, si mortalium innumerabiles tumultus, e Luna, quemadmodum Menippus olim, despicias, putes te muscarum, aut culicum videre turbam inter se rixantium, bellantium, insidiantium, rapiantium, ludantium, lascivientium, nascentium, cadentium, morientium.

Erasmus, *Stultitiae Laus* 48²⁵⁸

Vide anche le formiche e le api intente ad un'opera più intelligente, ma vana del pari. In preda alle passioni della vita, gli uomini non potevano giudicare la inutilità dei loro atti; ma chi, come lui, era uscito fuori alla riva del pelago dopo esservi stato immerse sino ai capelli, riconosceva nel consorzio umano un formicaio più grande, un alveare più complicato, dove tutto si riduceva, come nei piccoli e semplici, a nascere, a crescere, a procreare ed a morire.

Federico de Roberto, *L'imperio* (1894-)²⁵⁹

1. *Numberless and Insignificant*

When, in the bucolic collection *par excellence*, Theocritus decides to give his readers a taste of urban life, he does so with the utmost vividness. After the customary chatter, Gorgo and Praxinoa, the two garrulous protagonists of Theocritus' *Idyll* 15, get ready to go out and attend the festival of Adonis that is taking place in town.²⁶⁰ As we accompany them along the streets of a festive Alexandria, busy with the celebrations of the festival, we feel all the pressure of a city literally filled with humans. We are dragged through a constant crowd that pushes, crushes, and obstructs the way in every direction: men, women, and animals fill up the living space of the city and the ὄχλος is everywhere in the poem as it is in Alexandria itself (44, 59, 73). Ultimately the excitement of joining the public festivity is shadowed by the many annoyances and dangers that the overpopulated Alexandria presents to the two friends. The fear of the royal horses that run recklessly through the streets, the memory of recent criminality Αἰγυπτιστί (48), 'à l'égyptienne', the rudeness – and bland racism – of a man in the crowd, these things somewhat offset the couple's amazement at the luxurious ceremony.

²⁵⁸ In Schmidt-Dengler (1975), 116.

²⁵⁹ De Roberto (2009), 401. Federico De Roberto is also author of a work on Leopardi, from 1898.

²⁶⁰ Edition and commentary in Gow (1965).

Yet the problem is not the city, endowed with beautiful architecture and better government (46ff) by the new king, but the people. When she is first faced with the crowd at 44-45, Praxinoa is overwhelmed by the fear, anxiety, and oppression caused by the ὄχλος and immediately bursts out: μύρμακες ἀνάριθμοι καὶ ἄμετροι!²⁶¹ *Humans* are the real problem: the festival, as the progression of the idyll shows, only exposes the uncountable flaws of men and multiplies them for the numberless people that cram Alexandria on that specific day. The sudden perception of this sometimes hostile and certainly faceless crowd triggers Praxinoa's metaphor of the people at the Adonia as innumerable ants. Praxinoa, coming from the quietness of a house ἐπ' ἔσχατα γᾶς (8), perceives all the alterity of this unknown mass; to her external eyes the multiracial inhabitants of Alexandria become one large heap of minuscule, indistinguishable insects.²⁶²

Theocritus' Praxinoa already experiences a significant degree of detachment from the hectic crowd that she calls "ants", and yet her analogy remains restricted to the people in Alexandria, on that very day. Let us take a leap of more than 2000 years to see a different take on the metaphor of the ants. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden or Life in the Woods* (1854) enacts a "battle of the ants" which is most certainly a powerful metaphor for human warfare, very likely inspired by the struggles of contemporary America.²⁶³ The battlefield of red and black ants is one day casually discovered by the narrator next to his woodpile. The sudden realisation of this violent and bloody war – "the ground

²⁶¹ Cf. Gow (1965), 280 on the two adjectives as signifying that "the crowd can neither be counted as individuals nor estimated as a mass." *Ibid.* on instances of μύρμακες to describe "a busy multitude".

²⁶² Cf. Davies and Kathirithamby (1986), 44 listing Theocritus *Id.* 15.45 for the use of ants to represent "vast numbers". *Ibid.* on ants as symbol of "great wealth" in Theocritus *Id.* 17.107. In this second instance the mention of ants is not neutral: Hunter (2003), 179 n. 107 remarks that "The acquisitive and apparently tireless activities of ants may be regarded negatively as miserly hoarding, as here and at Crates, *SH* 359.6–7, or positively as sensible forethought, as at Hes. *WD* 778, Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.32–40, and Virg. *Georg.* 1.186"; Hunter connects this passage with the "rejection of hoarding" in various ancient sources. Theocritus' mention of ants in *Id.* 17 serves thus the purpose of drawing a second (and negative) connection between men and ants (or at least between some human habits and a certain interpretation of the insects' behaviour). Davies and Kathirithamby (1986), 44 seem to find no special connection between these instances of the use of ants and the idea of impersonality or insignificance, which they instead find in some Greek proverbs listed on the same page, e.g. "No path even for an ant". Beavis (1988), 204 notes how "in a number of places great crowds on the roads or elsewhere are compared to ants" and lists a number of occurrences including Theocritus 15.45.

²⁶³ In Harding (1995), 223-224; cf. Ross (1965).

was already strewn with the dead and dying, both red and black” – is accompanied by surprise at the incredible silence that engulfs the fight; the meaningfulness of the ants' mortal combat is miniaturised by the – relatively – gigantic human perspective and turned into utter meaninglessness. It is quite remarkable that Thoreau's first explicit signpost to signal the link between animal and human warfare is a reference to the *Iliad*, as he calls the fighting insects “these Myrmidons”.²⁶⁴ Throughout the *Iliad* men's hectic and heroic activity inside and outside the Trojan walls is paralleled by the many moments in which the gods realise the inherent unimportance of this frenetic human war, insofar as all men's destiny is ultimately death.²⁶⁵ The *Iliad*'s ability to bestow extreme dignity on human military deeds and at the same time downplay them by shifting attention to the immortal level of the gods is likely to have been in the mind of the classically-trained Thoreau as he compared his ants to the ant-men that form Achilles' contingent.²⁶⁶

There is no explicit sense in Praxinoa's metaphor that *all* men (let alone the essence of humanity) are like ants, as perhaps the text of Thoreau might lead us to infer. Yet such an implication is far from absent in Greek literature, as this chapter will show, and Thoreau's own reference to the Homeric poems is itself extremely telling. The notion that men observed at a distance or from an external point of view resemble a numberless, faceless, and sometimes animalised crowd has a lively history in Greek and

²⁶⁴ The reference is followed by a further mention of Iliadic characters a few lines below, where Achilles and Patroclus are drawn in as comparison for some of the ants' behaviour in the battle.

²⁶⁵ Albeit punctuated with proofs of the gods' involvement with mankind – from gods intervening in battle, to gods fighting or even deceiving each other for the sake of particular individuals or sides – the *Iliad* offers powerful testimony to the opposite behaviour, as the gods choose to distance themselves from the world of men. In four instances the notion that there is a definite limit to the trouble worth taking for the sake of humans is conveyed by the formulaic phrase βροτῶν ἔνεκα (1.573-576, here ἔνεκα θνητῶν; 8.427-431; 21.379-380; 21.462-467), which significantly appears at times in which the gods are brought to *explicitly* reflect on the merit and desirability of excessive involvement with men, e.g. the quarrel of Zeus and Hera soothed by Hephaestus at 1.573-576 – on which Halliwell (2008), 59-64 – or Zeus' threat to Hera and Athena at 8.427-431. In the sudden recollection of the real pointlessness of battling for mortals and as they realise how much more important they themselves and their activities are (Greene (1944), 192), the gods forget the favoured heroes or the preferred side of the fight, to make (and speak) of mankind as an undifferentiated, unimportant mass. Cf. Greene (1944), 197-198 on the metamorphosis of the “God the All-Knowing Watcher” into the “god who is *not* watching”.

²⁶⁶ According to a scholium to Pindar *Nem.* 3.21 Hesiod – in his *Catalogue of Women* fr. 205 Merkelbach and West (1967), 105 – said that the Myrmidons originated from ants that Zeus transformed into men to keep company to his son Aeacus.

Roman literature. Praxinoa's miniaturised vision of Alexandrian men as a blurred mass of insects is a splendid and animated variation on this analogy.

Leopardi's *La ginestra* (*The Broom* or *The Flower of the Desert*) (1836), written only a few years before Thoreau's *Walden* and explored in the next section, presents the very same simile linking men and ants. But what is more remarkable about this comparison – possibly the most lyrical moment in Leopardi's discourse about man's foolish anthropocentric vanity – is that it is built on Leopardi's long-lasting questioning of humanity's place in the cosmos. More specifically, it originates from one specific strand of this questioning, that we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Before, during and, as *La ginestra* shows, after the *Operette*, Leopardi makes a point of exploring the real place of man in the universe by comparing him (often to man's disadvantage) to animals. This process is carried out in a variety of ways throughout the years, but it ultimately grows to maturity in Leopardi's insistent “animalisation” of mankind in his *Operette*, to become one of the constitutive pillars of Leopardi's pessimistic worldview.

Both in the ideas it brings forward and in the forms it takes, Leopardi's animalisation of mankind – aimed at undercutting human self-conceit and at gathering a more truthful view of man's role, destiny, and function in the universe – resonates with what antiquity had to say about men, animals, and the cosmos. Greek literature's idea of miniaturising man and his importance – found also in two very striking instances of the trope from Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and *Hermotimus*, which will be discussed later, and connected to the (very Homeric) propensity for comparing men and animals – effectively provide a grand counter to anthropocentrism, which Leopardi intends as the first essential step to the understanding of the world as it really is.

2. *View from Vesuvius: La ginestra and the Trope of the Ants*

La ginestra is one of Leopardi's last poems, composed in Naples where he spent the final years of his life and published posthumously. The poem opens with a powerful close-up of the humanised “back” of mount Vesuvius, the “slayer mountain” where the broomflower grows. The barren landscape of Vesuvius, where no other plant manages to grow and where the looming threat of possible eruptions scares natural life away, is for Leopardi the perfect metaphor for humanity’s destined abode. Just as it did with the resilient broom, Nature has placed man in a precarious universe, where the slightest event can prove fatal and human life is constantly at stake.²⁶⁷ Leopardi means both to depict veraciously the condition of men on earth and to ridicule the wishful thinking of those who believe they live in the best of all possible worlds: in *La ginestra* the proud humans, inflated by a modern faith in progress – “dell’umana gente/le magnifiche sorti e progressive” (50-51) – are just like little yellow flowers on the slope of an active volcano.²⁶⁸ The text of *La ginestra* can be found at *Appendix 2*. The first strophe closes on the idea of humanity’s vain faith in betterment and prompts the following two strophes to concentrate on modern man’s foolishness, on his brainless rejection of past wisdom, and on his senseless backward walk which he insists on calling “progress”. The first three strophes thus explore and dismantle man’s own conception of the cosmos he inhabits, a cosmos that is figuratively collated with the parched volcanic landscape. As if in preparation for what is to come, at v. 98 the narrator addresses man with the term “animal”. The term is far from fortuitous: by specifying (99) that man is not *any* animal, but a foolish one (“stolto”), Leopardi clarifies that the difference between men and other creatures is human foolishness, clearly exemplified by man’s ludicrous optimism (“quel che nato a perir, nutrito in pene, / dice, a goder son fatto”, 100-101) and pride (102).

²⁶⁷ On the theme of violent, destructive nature – connected to the idea of “natura matrigna”, see Biral (1974), 30-58; Solmi (1987), 99-110; Timpanaro (1965), 379-407.

²⁶⁸ The critique of man’s optimistic vision of progress is omnipresent in Leopardi’s work; two other significant instances among many are the *Proposta di premi fatta dall’Accademia dei Sillografi*, on which *Chapter 3 II.1; Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico*, on which cf. the conclusion to this thesis.

In the fourth strophe, after walking up the slope of Vesuvius gazing at the infertile scenery, Leopardi – and the reader with him – turns around to sit down (158-161) and look at the view *from* the mountain. The distance gained by the narrator-spectator is not only the most obvious one, allowing him to gaze at the spectacle below from a point of vantage. Rather, Leopardi plays expertly with multiple distances. The relatively closer and undisturbed view of the sky provokes a realisation of the incredible smallness of even the largest items in the human landscape – the land and the ocean – when compared to the size of stars. At the same time, the sullen and deserted landscape visible from Vesuvius prompts the memory of the fertile fields, luxuriant scenery, and famous cities that were once visible from the same spot, before the volcano destroyed them.²⁶⁹ The two types of physical distance – the view from above and the view *to* the above – merge with the imagined distance afforded by the recollection of historical facts, to trigger an even deeper epiphany about mankind. “Questo / globo ove l’uomo è nulla” (172-173): man lives on a globe – the earth, the unwelcoming space comparable to the volcano – where he himself is nothing. Since the earth is a “granel di sabbia” (191), how much more infinitesimal, then, is man?

A release of tension eventually arrives with the fifth strophe, where the two themes – the threatening *cosmos* and the nothingness of man – converge in the long metaphor that likens men to ants (this strophe is in italics in the *Appendix*). In *La ginestra* it is the narrator himself who, hiking up the slopes of Vesuvius and gaining the necessary distance from humanity, becomes the external observer that can name humanity for what it is: ants. The image of an apple falling on and destroying an anthill mirrors the natural calamities that can endanger human existence. The list of disasters continues through the following strophe, ending on a renewed mention of men's foolish claim to eternity (296). Like Thoreau, Leopardi emphasises the immense and organised effort that underlies the actions of the ants: “con gran lavoro”, with great toil the little creatures have managed to build their dwellings. All this toil is doomed to be in vain

²⁶⁹ Cf. *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo*: “non si trova più regni né imperi che vadano gonfiando e scoppiando come le bolle, perché sono tutti sfumati”, *TPP* (2013), 508; Sangirardi (2000), 271 traces the image of the bursting bubbles to Lucian *Ch.* 19, suggesting that the Lucianic influence is stronger than that of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* 34.76; a similar image appears also in the very Lucianic *Somnium* by L. B. Alberti (*Intercenales* 4.1).

and to have no bearing on the outer world: such, Leopardi suggests, are man's hectic efforts in a world that is not meant for him.

3. *Lucianic Mountains and Ancient Ants*

The moment in which the narrator of Leopardi's poem climbs up the height of the volcano is in itself profoundly Lucianic. As I have mentioned already, Lucian's ἐπισκοποῦντες famously and frequently rise to points of vantage from which they can look at the world.²⁷⁰ Although, as I briefly noted, the height is very often metaphorical, in many cases the ascension is properly physical, as is clearly exemplified by Hermes' organisation of Charon's visit to the land of the living in Lucian's *Charon*.²⁷¹ Once Hermes has taken up the role of guide – parallel to Charon's position in the land of the dead – the god has to see to the details of Charon's trip and, in particular, has to find a suitable viewpoint (τὴν ἰκανὴν σκοπήν, *Ch.* 3) from which Charon will be finally able to observe men to his heart's content. The care that Hermes puts into this part of the plan and the length of the passage mark the importance of perspective needed to obtain thorough judgement of the object of one's interests. Hermes will not only resolve to choose a mountain as his viewpoint, but even to pile several famous mountains one upon the other in a parody of a Homeric motif: first Ossa, followed by Pelion, Oeta, and Parnassus.²⁷²

But even more than the climb that grants the narrator of *La ginestra* the vantage point for his observations on human life, it is the spectacle that lies below that proves authentically Lucianic. The visualisation of humanity as ants features repeatedly in Lucian's works and prominently in combination with the motif of the view from above.

²⁷⁰ The text of Lucian is from Macleod (1972-1987). On Lucian's use of distance and perspective, cf. the dense pages of Duncan (1979), 13-21; Anderson (1976), 12. Bompaire (1958), 327 sees in the role of the *kataskopos* who examines humans from removed view points ("du haut d'une montagne ou d'un astre") and despises them the influence of Cynic modes.

²⁷¹ Significantly this is one of the first Lucianic dialogues read by Leopardi, in February 1819, cf. *TPP* (2013), 1113.

²⁷² See Duncan (1979), 18. Note the reverse perspective in the *Prometheus*, where the Titan has to be on the mountain but not quite too high as to be invisible from the perspective of men on earth (*Prom.* 1). The image of the height – and in this case specifically of the height from a figurative mountain – appears also in *Rhetorum Praeceptor* 5-7. Cf. *Od.* 11.315-316.

In the *Icaromenippus* Lucian narrates the story of Menippus' quest for the truth about the world; failed by each and every philosopher on earth Menippus resolves to fly above it in person and learn the truth for himself.²⁷³ The dialogue skilfully merges metaphorical and physical distance, and the notion that distance and perspective equal (a higher degree of) understanding is essentially embodied by Menippus' path of knowledge.²⁷⁴ And although in many other Lucianic passages even a metaphorical distance is presented as sufficient to the pursuit of knowledge, the *Icaromenippus* scorns the mental distance from the world paraded by the philosophers and replaces it with an entirely physical one.²⁷⁵

As he recounts his expedition to a friend, Menippus recalls his surprise at the realisation of the smallness of entire regions (*Icar.* 18), a realisation, as we have seen, very similar to the one that the narrator of *La ginestra* will experience. The smallness of relatively vast natural areas prompts Menippus' friend to inquire about the look of man-made areas – cities – and of men themselves. Instead of directly answering, Menippus bluntly and quite abruptly turns to describing a community of ants:

Οἶμαί σε πολλάκις ἤδη μυρμῆκων ἀγορὰν ἑωρακέναι, τοὺς μὲν εἰλουμένους περὶ τὸ στόμα τοῦ φωλεοῦ κὰν τῷ μέσῳ πολιτευομένους, ἐνίους δ' ἐξιόντας, ἑτέρους δὲ ἐπανιόντας αὐθις εἰς τὴν πόλιν· καὶ ὁ μὲν τις τὴν κόπρον ἐκφέρει, ὁ δὲ ἀρπάσας ποθὲν ἢ κυάμου λέπος ἢ πυροῦ ἡμίτομον θεῖ φέρων. εἰκὸς δὲ ἦν παρ' αὐτοῖς κατὰ λόγον τοῦ μυρμῆκων βίου καὶ οἰκοδόμους τινας καὶ δημαγωγούς καὶ πρυτάνεις καὶ μουσικοὺς καὶ φιλοσόφους. πλὴν αἱ γὰρ πόλεις αὐτοῖς ἀνδράσι ταῖς μυρμηκικαῖς μάλιστα ἐώκεσαν. (*Icar.* 19)

The only apt response to his friend's enquiry is a simile that compares the view of men from the sky to the human perspective on an anthill.²⁷⁶ But there is more to Menippus'

²⁷³ Text with commentary of the *Icaromenippus* in Camerotto (2009). Leopardi read the dialogue in August 1824.

²⁷⁴ It is worth remembering that Menippus' narration of the aerial view of the Earth contains an embedded reference (τὰ μέντοι κεφάλαια τῶν πραγμάτων τοιαῦτα ἐφαίνετο οἷά φησιν Ὅμηρος τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀσπίδος· *Icar.* 16) to another vision of the world from outside, the *ekphrasis* of the shield of Achilles at *Il.* 18.468-607.

²⁷⁵ See Duncan (1979), 18.

²⁷⁶ Duncan (1979), 19 sees the comparison of the ants as peculiarly Lucianic, part of his “large, simplifying metaphors of human life”, but fails to explore it. Menippus' flight has been compared to

description than meets the eye. The comparison with ants, it turns out, is appropriate not only in light of how small humans look from a removed perspective but, more remarkably, for how similar the ants seem to human society when looked at more closely. Lucian's Menippus is thoroughly aware of both sides of the comparison: he concentrates on the one hand on the smallness of humans, but he also focuses on the design of the ants' society that, just like man's, has its own "architects and politicians, magistrates and composers and philosophers". What Menippus describes is thus not merely his newly gained idea of the objective dimension of men, but his realisation of the fallacy and bias that spring from man's un-distanced observation of his own kind. Men are blind to the high level of organisation of the myrmecic society, blind to the similarity between that society and their own, and thus oblivious to the conclusions one can derive from such similarity. Man's lack of awareness is, quite literally, a flaw of his vision: only because of the (physically *and* metaphorically) biased viewpoint from which humans observe themselves can they dismiss the undeniable similarity with, among others, the ants' society.

That which is possible to the flying Menippus – a trip above the clouds to examine the world and man's place in it – is nothing but a dream for the protagonist of Lucian's *Hermotimus*. The dialogue recounts, as he chats with Lycinus, Hermotimus' year-long pursuit of happiness through philosophy, a search that, from the very start, is described through images alluding to the act of travelling and mountaineering (*Herm.* 2-4);²⁷⁷ the path is a long, tiring, and most importantly ascensional hike at whose summit stand virtue and happiness. What lies on the top is the fullness of understanding granted by the high and remote position that the most enduring hikers have so exhaustingly gained:

Trygaeus' in Aristophanes *Pax*, cf. Halliwell (2008), 430; Camerotto (2009), 21. Camerotto suggests that the Lucianic idea of ants is also to some extent inspired by Trygaeus' outlook on the world from above; at *Pax* 819-822, describing the view from above Trygaeus stresses the smallness of humans (μικροὶ δ' ὄρᾶν ἄνωθεν ἦστ'. v. 821). But it looks here as though a bigger distance is not straightforwardly conducive to clearer understanding, and the men who seem κακοήθεις from afar appear as πολὺ τι κακοθέστεροι at a closer glance. More than a direct inspiration, Camerotto sees in the Aristophanic passage a similar "ethical reading" of humans from a distance. On Lucian and Aristophanes, and in general on Lucian's use of his sources see Anderson (1976), 21.

²⁷⁷ See for example ἔστιν ὁ οἶμος ἐπ' αὐτὴν μακρὸς τε καὶ ὄρθιος καὶ τρηχὺς; ἐπὶ τῷ ἄκρῳ γενόμενον, *Herm.* 2; ἐν τῇ ὑπωρείᾳ κάτω ἔτι, *Herm.* 3.

ὄσοι δ' ἂν εἰς τέλος διακαρτερήσωσιν οὗτοι πρὸς τὸ ἄκρον ἀφικνοῦνται καὶ τὸ ἀπ' ἐκείνου εὐδαιμονοῦσιν θαυμάσιόν τινα βίον τὸν λοιπὸν βιοῦντες, οἷον μύρμηκας ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕψους ἐπισκοποῦντές τινας τοὺς ἄλλους. (*Herm.* 5)

The *Hermotimus* takes the discourse on human insignificance to a different – and this time openly metaphorical and theoretical – level. It is not only the physical mileage between the flying Menippus and the soil of the earth that makes men look like ants, but men appear to be the very same also from the abstract distance which one reaches through ceaseless philosophical inquiry. Thus men are in two ways minuscule, both in a strictly physical sense against the background of the wider natural universe and in a theoretical sense, insofar as their importance is questioned by the more alert among humans. As if Lucian was keen to seal the crucial insight granted by the comparison of men and ants from the dual perspective of physical and metaphorical distance, what the *Icaromenippus* ascertains by physical travel, the *Hermotimus* confirms through the piercing gaze of philosophy. The physical and the metaphysical intertwine to make of this trope an adamant and unassailable descriptor of the truth about humans in the cosmos.

Menippus consciously employs his intuition about the similarity of men and ants in light of the structure and high level of organisation of their respective societies to make a point about human life, the ultimate target of Lucianic inquiry. But the same similarity between the features that humans are keen to consider distinctively and uniquely theirs and those of other animal species (and, prominently, of ants) is observed by many ancient sources before and after Lucian, sources that variously praise the efficiency of the ants' organised society.²⁷⁸ Going one step further, Aelian draws a direct link between ants' and men's behaviour and life-style, interpreting the ants' choices and habits according to specifically human needs and reading in the pattern of the ants' society the

²⁷⁸ On insects in the ancient world Keller (1909-1913), esp 416-421 on ants; two books from the 80's are entirely dedicated to the subject, Davies and Kathirithamby (1986) and Beavis (1988); see also Hunter (2003), 179 n. 107; a short section on ants is in Kenneth and Kitchell (2014), 3-4. See a good summary of praises of the ants' society in Davies and Kathirithamby (1986), 38-40; and in Kenneth and Kitchell (2014), 3. Davies and Kathirithamby (1986), 42 contains their only mention of Lucian's use of ants (*Icaromenippus* 19).

very patterns that regulate the communal life of humans.²⁷⁹ Although not concerned with questioning or challenging man's view of the cosmos, ancient sources nevertheless highlight the same unwelcome similarity noticed by Lucian in the *Icaromenippus* and in the *Hermotimus*.

Observation and praise of ants' behaviour can be found in several places throughout Leopardi's work, and especially in his notes. He mentions ants for their innate organisational abilities (*Zib.* 210), for the way they form groups for the common good (*Zib.* 287), or for specific aspects of their societies (*Zib.* 370). What is more, he praises ants for skills that humans often lack, such as the attitude to forming resilient bonds between groups and individuals (*Zib.* 587).²⁸⁰ In line with the tendency mentioned above, Leopardi's marked interest in the life of ants as well as in that of bees and other animals revolves around the similarities between the life and behaviour of ants and those of men. And here, as in Lucian's case, lies the principal reason for Leopardi's use of ants: they closely resemble human society in organisation, lifestyle, and life choices; they are even – as every animal is – endowed with the “principle τοῦ λογισμοῦ” (*Zib.* 370). But it is precisely here that the similarities end, as man, unlike ants, chooses to employ λογισμός differently, to rise above his station, and to demand a higher status above all other beings.²⁸¹

But let us go back to the comparison of ants and men within Leopardi's programme of human animalisation. Despite the absence of such a striking trope as the ant simile of *La ginestra*, the *Operette* too perform a complex interweaving of the ideas of human

²⁷⁹ Cf. the argument regarding the ants' organisation of their dwelling, which Aelian *NA* 6.43 interprets according to the need to have different quarters for different genders, cf. Keller (1909-1913), 418. Aside from Aelian, Davies and Kathirithamby (1986), 42 lists other authors who “compare and contrast the societies of man and the ant”. One can recall Strabo 8.6.16 for the habit of comparing laborious groups of people to ants, as in McCartney (1954), 234.

²⁸⁰ Often animal societies (and chiefly ants and bees) are indicated by Leopardi as examples of natural societies, such as even the human one must have been in some distant past. If men have not completely and always lacked those abilities, they certainly do not have them in the present, but might have had them in antiquity; see for example *Zib.* 587-590.

²⁸¹ Newmyer (1999), 99 begins his article on the notion of animal and human reason in the ancient world saying that “Since antiquity, a sharp dichotomy between animalkind and humankind has been posited by those who, for one reason or another, are eager to claim a unique and privileged position for humanity in the spectrum of creation”.

animality and human smallness. Animalisation and miniaturisation are constant – and often intertwined – means of getting at the foundation of man’s deluded understanding of life, i.e. his misconception of the place of humans in the universe. As in *La ginestra*, distance is an essential element in prompting clear-minded opinions of the human condition and generally the bigger the distance, the deeper the acuity of the cogitations about man’s existence. Yet unlike *La ginestra*, the *Operette* employ most of the time a metaphorical rather than a physical distance, and often achieve it by resorting to non-humans as their ἐπισκοποῦντες; the gods of *Storia del genere umano* observe the newly created human race from their immortal abodes; the mummies of *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie* look at human life from the realms of death; the Earth and its inhabitants are watched by Hercules and Atlas as they juggle with the Earth like a ball (*Dialogo di Ercole e di Atlante*), and then by the Earth and the Moon themselves in *Dialogo della terra e della luna*. But what is the image of man that this varied array of characters contributes to sketch?

4. *Giving Things Names: Man’s Naming Obsession and What are Men?*

This chapter opened with the Sprite and the Gnome’s discussion about the end of mankind.²⁸² The first reaction of the Gnome, who is at first unaware of mankind’s disappearance, is, paradoxically, to suggest that the news that men are gone is so striking that it ought to hit the newspapers: “Oh cotesto è caso da gazette”. The first implication of the vanishing of humans is that the human obsession with giving things a name has died out with them. For the human mindset, when a thing is not defined, not named, and not announced, this thing lacks solidity, reality, and even existence; newspapers are the symbol of this attitude, and the Gnome’s point – biased by human perspective – is that, if something does not appear in print, one cannot be sure that it has actually happened.²⁸³ It is not until the Sprite mocks him that he realises the sheer absurdity of his statement, and it takes quite a while for the Gnome to understand that the disappearance of names and labels (for example the days of the week, of the months, and of the years) does not impact in any way on the natural course of time on all other

²⁸² On this dialogue, see Celli (1992); Blasucci (2003), 85-102; Bellucci (2005); Polizzi (2008).

²⁸³ On Leopardi’s satirical attitude towards the role of newspapers, see *Palinodia* 19-21, 151-153, 206; see also Tristano’s comment in *Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico*; Galimberti (1998a), 123 n. 11.

natural things (*Sprite*. “What do you think? That if you don’t call them by their names they’re not going to come?”).²⁸⁴

The depiction of man’s obsession with names and the swiftness with which names have disappeared once man himself has gone, combine to depict humans as a bunch of vainglorious creatures entirely deluded about the significance of their own existence.²⁸⁵ But as we keep reading the dialogue, we see that this fixation plays also a more specific role. Initially in a subtle way and then with increasing frequency and emphasis, the two creatures stress one specific aspect of human life, i.e. its sameness with other animal races. The significance of the theme is underscored throughout by the recurring presence of the language of natural sciences that made a first prominent appearance in the notes to a short piece – the *Dialogo di un cavallo e un bue* – which anticipates this dialogue. In it Leopardi had listed a long series of references to ideas of evolution, anthropology, and zoology extracted from a variety of ancient and modern sources, to confirm that he saw in this idea of human zoology the roots of this work.²⁸⁶

Leopardi begins by introducing the idea with remarkable subtlety as the *Sprite* reveals to the *Gnome* that humanity has vanished:

Folletto. Voi gli aspettate invan: son tutti morti, diceva la chiusa di una tragedia dove morivano tutti i personaggi.

Gnomo. Che vuoi tu inferire?

Folletto. Voglio inferire che gli uomini son tutti morti, e la *razza* è perduta.

²⁸⁴ *TPP* (2013), 508. Cecchetti (1983), 89. In several works Leopardi stresses the vanity of human works, activities, and inventions on earth, see Galimberti (1998a), 124 n. 13 for a list of other instances and for a brief history of the motif.

²⁸⁵ On the vanity of names (as opposed to the reality of things), see *Zib.* 2487; see also Galimberti (1998a), 125 n. 15: “si conclude la disputa tra il personaggio che guarda alla *realtà* delle cose e quello che tiene conto dei loro *nomi*, meri *flatus vocis*, e nemmeno innocui se, definendo, mettono a nudo la miseria della condizione umana.”

²⁸⁶ Cf. the notes at *TPP* (2013), 612-613. On these notes see Fabio (1995), 51 who sees in this long set of footnotes an encyclopedic tendency that, still present in Leopardi’s earlier works, will progressively disappear; also, Polizzi (2008), 88-91 on the scientific works that inspired Leopardi’s scientific knowledge and curiosity.

Gnomo. Oh cotesto è caso da gazzette. Ma pure fin qui non s'è veduto che ne ragionino. (*OM* 5, 123)²⁸⁷

What at this point could seem little more than a mere coincidence or a slight allusion – since the term “race” (*razza*) is a common enough word to define humans – is stressed over and over again to become an inescapable *fil rouge* in the two characters’ discourse. The adumbration in the Sprite’s speech is taken up again by the Gnome, as he accepts that the end of mankind is reality, and made utterly explicit twice, to leave the reader with no doubts regarding the implications of the term “razza”:

Gnomo. A ogni modo, io non mi so dare ad intendere che tutta una *specie di animali* si possa perdere di pianta, come tu dici. (*OM* 5, 126)

Folletto. Tu che sei maestro in geologia, dovresti sapere che il caso non è nuovo, e che *varie qualità di bestie* si trovarono anticamente che oggi non si trovano, salvo pochi ossami impietriti.²⁸⁸

Humans are a “race”, a “species of animals”, “beasts”, etc. And most importantly, as one gathers from the Sprite’s remark about geology, man is just one amongst the thousands of animal races that existed and then disappeared in the history of the universe.²⁸⁹ We find even greater confirmation of Leopardi’s keenness on this point in the couple of sketched dialogues (dating to 1820-21 and not included in the *Operette*’s final edition) whose themes he will reemploy in the *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno*

²⁸⁷ My italics. *TPP* (2013), 508. Cecchetti (1983), 87. “*Sprite*. You look for them in vain. They are all dead, you could hear at the end of a tragedy in which all the characters died. / *Gnome*. What do you mean? / *Sprite*. I mean to say that men are all dead, and their race is lost. / *Gnome*. Oh this is a scoop for newspapers! But so far we haven't read it anywhere.”

²⁸⁸ My italics. *TPP* (2013), 508.-509 Cecchetti (1983), 91. “*Gnome*. In any case, I can't understand how a *whole species of animals* can be completely lost, as you say.” / “*Sprite*. A master geologist like yourself should know that it's not such a novelty and that in ancient times there were on earth *many kinds of animals* that aren't there any more – except for a few petrified bones.” My italics.

²⁸⁹ Of course the fact has been noted before, e.g. Blasucci (2003), 87, but, in my opinion, not sufficiently explored, especially in connection with the Greek sources. On the satirical generalisation of mankind cf. *Dialogo di un Galantuomo e del mondo*, as the World compares men to eggs: “A questo non devi pensare. Non ci dev'essere un uomo diverso da un altro, ma tutti devono essere come tante uova”, a comparison which Fabio (1995), 41 interprets as a “metafora comico-riduttiva”. Fabio then goes on to present some other comical metaphors such as the one that compares men and horses on the grounds of their similar need for shouts and spurs.

gnomo.²⁹⁰ The two dialogues – the *Dialogo tra due bestie, p.e. un cavallo e un toro* and in particular the *Dialogo di un cavallo e un bue*, which I mentioned earlier for its abundance of scientific language and evidence – reinforce with utmost clarity the equivalence between humans and animals. Perhaps due to the rougher state of these sketches – still containing Leopardi’s notes to himself about his objectives and arguments – the fact that Leopardi wants his reader to understand humans as another animal species is spelled out here repeatedly.²⁹¹

It becomes clear then that the human compulsion to name things is just another aspect of this wider portrayal of men as animals. Just like any other animal, man has distinctive customs and habits, here epitomised by the necessity to give things a name. Yet the problem with human habits – as opposed to those of other species – is that they are entirely disconnected from (a realistic understanding of) their habitat and their role in it. As the obsession with name-giving clearly elucidates, man’s customs attempt to bind the human species to earth in a unique and privileged manner, but in fact do nothing but display the complete and unnatural detachment between this particular animal and his habitat.²⁹²

The two sketches for dialogues mentioned above – the *Dialogo tra due bestie, p.e. un cavallo e un toro* and the *Dialogo di un cavallo e un bue* – deserve further note. Cesare Galimberti has briefly but insightfully traced a path that, starting from the reference in the *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica* (1818)²⁹³ and two *Zibaldone*

²⁹⁰ On these two sketches and the *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo*, Fabio (1995), 52; Blasucci (1989); Sangirardi (1998) and Blasucci (2003), 85-102; Bellucci (2005.)

²⁹¹ From the *Dialogo di un cavallo e un bue*: “B. Che sorta di animale era? C. Mia nonna mi disse ch’era una scimia. Per me aveva creduto che fosse un uomo e questo m’avea messo una gran paura. B. Un uomo? che vale a dire un uomo? C. Una razza d’animali”, *TPP* (2013), 611 and *ibid.* “[L’uomo] Era una sorta di bestie da quattro zampe come siamo noi altri, ma stavano ritti e camminavano con due sole come fanno gli uccelli, e coll’altre due s’aiutavano a strapazzare la gente”.

²⁹² Compare the Bull’s speech in the *Dialogo tra due bestie, p.e. un cavallo e un toro*: “Non viveva già naturalmente, e come tutti gli altri, ma in mille modi loro propri”, *TPP* (2013), 611. On *Il.* 6.146 and the comparison of men and leaves (subject of *Chapter 3*) cf. Redfield (1975), 102: “For a moment Glaucus moves back and sees men as the gods see them – creatures as ephemeral and insignificant as all the other creatures of nature.”

²⁹³ *TPP* (2013), 993.

notes (19 and 1469),²⁹⁴ describes Leopardi's relationship with the ideas expressed by Xenophanes of Colophon in his elegiac poetry (B15).²⁹⁵ After the references in the *Discorso* and in the two *Zibaldone* pages, Galimberti sees the *Dialogo tra due bestie* as a further, although non-explicit allusion to the Xenophanic fragment. Fr. 15 ridicules and criticises the anthropomorphic tendencies of human religion, by suggesting that every species would imagine and draw their gods in its own image. The idea is explained first by postulating that animals – exemplified by horses, oxen, and lions – would draw theriomorphic divinities, and, in B16, by suggesting that different populations would imagine gods ethnomorphically as bearing their physical traits.²⁹⁶

Both titles of the two versions of the “dialogue between two beasts” include a horse, and, while the former uses a bull (“toro”), the latter refers precisely to an ox (“bue”). Leopardi's interpretation of Xenophanes' critique of religious anthropomorphism shifts the original focus ever so slightly from the way in which we imagine the gods to the way in which we relate to our cosmos and its inhabitants. Of course the two concepts are closely interconnected, and it is precisely man's pretension that triggers both his anthropomorphic imagination of the divine and his conviction of diversity from animal-kind. The mockery of human conceptions – of themselves, of the divine, of other creatures – animates both Xenophanes' fragment and Leopardi's dialogues.²⁹⁷ Although Xenophanes focuses primarily on the relativisation of man's ability to understand the divine, his fragment B15 nonetheless straightforwardly pairs humans and animals by likening their inability to grasp the nature of the gods.²⁹⁸ Leopardi's choice of the horse

²⁹⁴ *Zib.* 9 seems to be tightly connected with the *Discorso*, and thus possibly coeval; *Zib.* 1469 dates to August 1821, thus either in the same time frame of the two sketches or immediately after it. See Sangirardi (1998) for interpretation of the connection between these passages and the *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo*.

²⁹⁵ Galimberti (1998a), 121-122. On B15 (and the connected B16) see Diels and Kranz (1951-52), 132-133 and Leshner's (2001) edition and commentary at 89-95.

²⁹⁶ B15 from Diels and Kranz (1951-52): ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ'> ἠὲ λέοντες/ ἢ γράμμαι χεῖρεςσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες, / ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δὲ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας/ καὶ <κε> θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν/τοιαῦθ' οἷόν περ καὶτοὶ δέμας εἶχον <ἕκαστοι>. B16: Αἰθιοπὲς τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε / Θρηῆκὲς τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς <φασὶ πέλεσθαι>.

²⁹⁷ On Leopardi, Xenophanes and in general man's tendency to interpret the universe according to himself, see Negri (1998), 68-75.

²⁹⁸ Warren (2014), 44: “just as it would be ridiculous to think that horses, say, are right about what the gods are like when they draw equine gods, so too it would be ridiculous to assert that any of the human conceptions are correct”. Cf. Halliwell (2008), 269 n. 13 on Babut (1974), 116-117.

and the ox as representatives of animal-kind channels all the relativising force of Xenophanes' comparison to transport it into a world which, finally freed of humans, can once and for all prove the utter meaninglessness of man's self-conceit. To use Deborah Levine Gera's words, written in relation to Xenophanes but equally apt for Lucian and Leopardi too: "These imaginary animals are good to think with, for they teach us about ourselves, humans."²⁹⁹

5. Il Copernico: *Heliocentrism and the Scala Naturae*

Perched on the slopes of the volcano, the narrator of *La ginestra* owes his insights not only to the view from above, granting him perspective onto the world below, but also and especially to the celestial scene above him. The consideration of the true immensity of the stars in contrast with the human perception of their size (little more than dots, says Leopardi) had prompted a spinning *mise en abyme* reversing man's fallacious viewpoint and leading to the ultimate and inevitable conclusion that our earth is a *punctum*, and man is nothing (170-173). The dialogue *Il Copernico*,³⁰⁰ composed in 1827, tackles the same theme, playing more closely with the history of man's ideas and knowledge of the earth and space, and toying with modern man's unyielding anthropocentrism, seemingly unshaken by the Copernican discoveries about the universe.³⁰¹ The scientific premise is enacted in a lively theatrical piece that centres around the Sun's refusal to labour any longer for the benefit of man, and consequently around Copernicus's visit to the Sun, aimed at subverting the order of things and at getting the lazy Earth to move around the sun instead.

²⁹⁹ Levine Gera (2000), 41.

³⁰⁰ On *Il Copernico*, Galimberti (1998b); Giachery (1999); Galluzzi (2001); Di Meo (2001); Bonito (2008).

³⁰¹ Earlier in the *Operette*, the theme had been touched upon in *Dialogo d'Ercole e di Atlante*, cf. Melosi (2015), 513-514 for a quick overview of the development in Leopardi's use of astronomical knowledge for philosophical enquiry on man; cf. Giachery (1999), 73 on how the theme appears also in the *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia*. Leopardi's interest in astronomy is long lived, as shown by his precocious and dense *Storia dell'astronomia* (1813). Cf. Lucian's (and the *Icaromenippus*' in particular) influence on Kepler's *Somnium seu opus...de astronomia lunari* in Romm (1989); Pantin (2007), 115-128; Ligota and Panizza (2007), 14-15. From Sabnis' (2008) *BMCR* review of the latter: "Kepler's citations of Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and *Veræ Historiae* indicate his interest in the scientific underpinnings of fiction; far from misunderstanding the nature of Lucian's satire, as some have argued, Kepler saw in Lucian a fruitful combination of fictional play and philosophical labor."

The interplay between the physically elevated point of view offered by the Sun's abode and the metaphorical detachment that grants Copernicus a clearheaded understanding of the limits of humanity (which is, surely, going to reject the Sun's plan) creates an ideal background for a lucid observation of mankind's role in the cosmos. As one would expect, this dialogue weaves together the themes of human animality and human smallness especially tightly. First appearing in the words of the Sun himself – connoted by a diminutive “quattro animaluzzi” and with the miniaturisation of the Earth (“un pugno di fango, tanto piccino, che io, che ho buona vista, non lo arrivo a vedere”),³⁰² – the notion arises once again in the speech by the First Hour, who calls humans “quei poveri animali”.³⁰³

Besides being a theme common to both the *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo* and *Il Copernico*, human animality connects the two works in one specific way. Let us look at two moments in the two dialogues, starting from the *Copernico*. Copernicus is, as we were saying, called to the rescue and asked to promote the change in the universe, convincing the Earth that she has to take up what the Sun is now refusing to do. The dialogue plays smilingly and acutely with this subtle confusion between physical and metaphysical, and merges the practical difficulties of lifting and moving the lazy Earth, with the mental challenge involved in revolutionising humans' self-conception, which is used to thinking of the universe as revolving around the Earth's throne (“trono”).³⁰⁴ It is in this setting that the relationship between animals and humans and the insights it offers into human existence come yet again into play, as Copernicus realises what the consequences of the revolutionary transformation that the Sun demands are:

Copernico. [...] Ma voglio dire in sostanza, che il fatto nostro non sarà così semplicemente materiale, come pare a prima vista che debba essere; e che gli effetti suoi non appariranno alla fisica solamente: perché esso sconvolgerà i *gradi della dignità delle cose, e l'ordine*

³⁰² TPP (2013), 586.

³⁰³ TPP (2013), 587. Cecchetti (1983), 419. *Ibid.* the Sun calls the Earth “a small grain of sand”; compare *La ginestra* vv. 190-191 “in questo oscuro / granel di sabbia, il qual di terra ha nome”.

³⁰⁴ TPP (2013), 590. Cecchetti (1983), 435. Monti's *I poeti dei primi secoli della lingua italiana: Dialogo in cinque pause* in his *Proposta di alcune correzioni ed aggiunte al vocabolario della Crusca* (1817-26) interestingly presents a similar comical take on the physical change in the universe followed to the scientific discovery of heliocentrism, cf. Monti (1838), 2.

*degli enti; scambierà i fini delle creature; e per tanto farà un grandissimo rivolgimento anche nella metafisica, anzi in tutto quello che tocca alla parte speculativa del sapere. E ne risulterà che gli uomini, se pur sapranno o vorranno discorrere sanamente, si troveranno essere tutt'altra roba da quello che sono stati fin qui, o che si hanno immaginato di essere.*³⁰⁵

Let us pause and turn to the Sprite and the Gnome, which we had left as they were busy criticising humanity's narrow and deluded perspective: men understood and called "their own events world revolutions and the histories of their own peoples world histories", and believed that "there was no other reason for everything in the world to exist, except for their own personal use", says the Gnome.³⁰⁶ Within the space of a few words the discourse returns to animals, epitome of the world's perfect capability to survive without humans – "those animals, however, that had been created only for their benefit never realised that such world revolutions existed".³⁰⁷ The Gnome's definition of animals is incidental (quite literally squeezed, in the Italian original, in between two commas), yet essential in leading the discourse towards Leopardi's next point:

*Folletto. Ma i porci, secondo Crisippo erano pezzi di carne apparecchiati dalla natura a posta per le cucine e le dispense degli uomini, e, acciocché non imputridissero, conditi colle anime in vece di sale.*³⁰⁸

The change requested by the Sun will turn upside down the order of beings and the "ladder of the dignity of things", and will "switch the purposes of creatures". The Sprite's reference to Chrysippus (fragment *SVF* 2.1154, which Leopardi obtained from Cicero *De Natura Deorum* 2.160) comments ironically on man's belief that pigs –

³⁰⁵ *TPP* (2013), 590. Cecchetti (1983), 435. "*Copernicus*. But I mean to say that this business of ours is not going to be simply material, as it appears at first sight, and that its effects are not going to be restricted to physics, for it will upset all the steps in the ladder of the dignity of things and the order of beings; it will switch the purposes of creatures; and therefore it will cause an extremely great revolution in metaphysics as well – in fact, in everything that touches the speculative side of knowledge. And as a result, if men can or want to reason well, they'll discover that they are something completely different from what they have been until now or from what they have imagined themselves to be."

³⁰⁶ In *TPP* (2013), 509; Cecchetti (1983), 93. Cf. the *Dialogo di un cavallo e un bue* at *TPP* (2013), 611 for an earlier version of the passage.

³⁰⁷ *TPP* (2013), 509. Cecchetti (1983), 93.

³⁰⁸ *TPP* (2013), 509. Cecchetti (1983), 93. "*Sprite*. But pigs, as Chrysippus believed, were pieces of meat especially prepared by nature for the kitchens and the pantries of men, and to keep them from rotting, they had been dressed with souls rather than with salt."

symbolising all animals useful to men – are created solely for man’s use.³⁰⁹ The allusion, subtle and nevertheless glaring in the *Copernico*, is clarified by the Sprite’s remark: Leopardi is thinking of the notion of the *scala naturae*.³¹⁰ Remarkably, neither the presence of this idea nor the fact that it acts as a fundamental link between the two dialogues are noted by some of the latest commentaries on the *Operette*.³¹¹ Similarly Alberto Grilli reduces the Sprite’s mention of Chrysippus’ opinion to a mere humorous note (“un ‘bon mot’”), without further comment.³¹²

Yet the idea implied in the reference to Chrysippus’ belief about pigs plays an essential part in the critique of anthropocentrism that is so crucial to these two dialogues. It is useful then to mention that we know that Leopardi was familiar with the notion long before both dialogues: the *scala naturae* appears in *Zib.* 2899-2900, dating to 1823 (one year prior to the Sprite and Gnome’s dialogue and four years before the *Copernico*),³¹³ where Leopardi challenges its traditional order, dethroning man from his spot at the peak of the ladder. The challenge to the Stoic belief advanced by Chrysippus and supported at length by Cicero plays a similar overturning role. One of the most striking features of Cicero’s depiction of the universe – aimed at proving that “omnia quae sint in hoc mundo quibus utantur homines hominum causa facta esse et parata”³¹⁴ – is the almost complete annihilation of every other inhabitant of the earth, where the sole meaningful dwellers are humans and divine beings (*ND* 2.154-155). The blindness of the vision of the Stoics as exposed by Cicero lies precisely in the complete omission of

³⁰⁹ Chrysippus in Arnim (1903), 333, on which Jedan (2009), 27; Cicero *ND* in Ax and Plasberg (1961), 114-115. The entomologist Giorgio Celli has concentrated on the theme from a scientific perspective in his introduction to Leopardi’s *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo* in Celli (1992), 5-17.

³¹⁰ Cf. the initial chapter of Arthur O. Lovejoy’s *The great chain of being: a study of the history of an idea* (1960) for the development of the notion from Plato to Aristotle.

³¹¹ Galimberti (1998a); Melosi (2015).

³¹² Grilli (1982), 61 n. 34.

³¹³ Cf. Caesar and D’Intino’s (2013) commentary to *Zib.* 2900.

³¹⁴ On the Stoics’ faith in the gods’ “special concern for man”, Dragona-Monachou (1976), 154-156 for a discussion of *N.D.* 153ff and 156 on divine providence for humans. Dragona-Monachou (1976), 157 discusses the alternatives objectives for the aim of the creation of the world and lists the fragments that support “the anthropocentric character of providence” (*SVF* 2.1118; 1149; 1152; 1154; 1156; 1157; 1161; 1162; 1163; 1165; etc.). On *SVF* 2.1152-1154, Gould (1970), 156-157. On the ten arguments that Dragona-Monachou (1976) ascribes to Chrysippus (including the one contained in *SVF* 2.1154), Jedan (2009), 21-23. For the link between Chrysippus’ argument and Cleanthes’, see Meijer (2007), 81 n. 446 and 82.

animals, with the one exception, i.e. only to the extent to which they serve man.³¹⁵ One can think that the Xenophanic relativism that Leopardi so profoundly adopts in his *Dialogo tra due bestie* – and later in the dialogue of the Sprite and the Gnome – would have something to say about the straightforward connection that men draw between themselves and the gods.

The themes we have been discussing – human pretension and the significance of humans in the universe – are so crucial in Leopardi's thought as to inform virtually all of his work. Yet, as we have seen, the *Copernico* and the *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo* are especially connected by their use of the idea of human animality as a distinctive and fundamental means of enquiry into such themes. It is in this light and by engaging with and challenging ancient sources that Leopardi ties these two dialogues further together.

The studious and almost scientific attitude by which the Sprite and the Gnome break down the patterns of specifically human behaviours, describe them, and finally contextualise them in the mechanisms of the wider universe characterises the two characters as for-the-time zoologists. Just as a botanist or a zoologist would comment on the disappearance of this or that animal or plant, so the two creatures converse about the utter annihilation of human life. The distance necessary to the external observers in order to perceive the truth about humankind is created by a quasi-scientific detachment that transforms men into the objects, as it were, of a wildlife documentary and the Sprite and the Gnome into the reporters.

Here lies one striking paradox, as the two characters simultaneously have their own specific place in the world (and are as such equal to humans and all animals) and are the external judges of human behaviour. Insofar as they are equal to all other species they should not be allowed such a judgemental say, and even less should they proceed to the conclusion that “the world is made for the gnomes” (*TPP* 509) or for the sprites – or,

³¹⁵ Compare Voltaire's *Sixième Discours* of his *Discours en vers sur l'homme* for animals uttering the idea that the world is made for them, cf. Della Giovanna (1899), 44-45 and Polizzi (2008), 87. On the influence of Voltaire on the *Operette*, see among others Cellerino (1995), 312-318.

again, and even more explicitly, for horses or bulls, as in the *Dialogo tra due bestie*.³¹⁶ Against this background the distance between humans and the little creatures created by Leopardi's fantasy fades and invites the reader to question the architecture of the operetta.³¹⁷

One answer – which is not intended to be either conclusive or exclusive – could be that the underlying moral is that every time someone puts himself in the position of humans (that of judging and establishing a hierarchy) he falls into the same detrimental lack of objectivity that men famously display. Thinking like men leads astray, and the paradoxical notion provided by the Sprite and the Gnome means to question more than to solve, thus encapsulating and symbolising the bias and precariousness of man's outlook on the world.³¹⁸ Of course, even this reading is at last obliterated (or, perhaps, reinforced?) by humour, since the ultimate voice, Leopardi, is a man himself. Many of Lucian's dialogues end on similarly inconclusive paradoxes: in one case in particular it is the very notion of man's ability to look at the world from an (enlightening and laughter-provoking) distance which is presented and yet destroyed within the space of a piece, the *Icaromenippus*. The flying Menippus is granted a removed view of the earth, but this prerogative is to last but briefly: soon Zeus is to strip him of his wings and send him back down to earth. As Stephen Halliwell suggests, “As the mythologically loaded title of Lucian's work, *Icaromenippus* ('Icarus-Menippus'), implicitly makes clear (with its evocation of a fateful fall back to earth), the person who tries to laugh at the whole of life cannot really transcend the human viewpoint for long.”³¹⁹

³¹⁶ *TPP* (2013), 611.

³¹⁷ Cf. Sangirardi (2000), 63-65 on the paradox of having childish and unauthoritative judges to speak of the human folly and delusion in the *Operette*, as part of the “carattere sottilmente autoironico dell'invenzione mitologica”.

³¹⁸ Cf. Blasucci (2003), 89 for another explanation, suggesting that Leopardi believed that all animal species thought of themselves as the target of creations. I deem such an explanation untenable: although some evidence (like *Zib.* 390, from 1820, quoted by Blasucci) seems to support it, it is obvious from the whole of Leopardi's following production that he thought of man as the only creature to hold such hubristic views of the world. Blasucci also interprets Xenophanes B15 as supporting this theory, offering an awkward reading of the fragment that makes it into a statement about animals rather than about humans.

³¹⁹ Halliwell (2008), 430.

III

(Speaking) Animals and the Human Condition

Denn der Mensch ist kränker, unsicherer, wechselnder, unfestgestellter als irgend ein Thier sonst, daran ist kein Zweifel, — er ist das kranke Thier: woher kommt das?

F. Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 3.13³²⁰

1. *Life of Men, Life of Animals: Lucian's Gallus*

The very Schopenhauerian note that extends from page 2411 to 2414 of the *Zibaldone* outlines, according to Leopardi's own theory of pleasure, the proportionality between a being's self-love (described also as the being's inner life, and the activity of his mind) and the unhappiness of such a creature. It follows that since man is the creature that has the greatest intensity of life and self-love, he is also the one that is born the unhappiest of all other living creatures. Such belief is crystallised by Leopardi in a gnomic statement:

Quindi l'uomo per essenza propria e inseparabile, è, e nasce più infelice, o meno capace di felicità che verun altro genere di viventi, o di esseri.³²¹ (*Zib.* 2412)

The sentence starkly separates from an ontological point of view (“per essenza propria e inseparabile”) man and every other living being on the grounds of their different chances of happiness. The exploration of the various aspects adumbrated here – Leopardi's theory of pleasure, his evolving conception of the condition of humans within nature, and again his understanding of the differences between men's and other creatures' approach to emotion, reason, and life – would require far more space than is allowed here. My focus for this last section of this chapter is thus more confined, being concerned once again with the ways in which animals can variously offer insight into humans. So far, we have seen animals acting as (direct or indirect) detectors and indicators of the real place of humans in the cosmos. In this section, we wish to look at

³²⁰ Colli and Montinari (1968), 385.

³²¹ “Hence man by his own inseparable essence is, and is born, more unhappy, or less capable of happiness, than any other type of living creature or being.”

animals insofar as they (directly or indirectly) tell us something about the *nature* of human life, and the human condition.

Two texts will act as our guides through this brief probe into the statement of Leopardi quoted above, in the belief that they can help us grasp more of its subtle subtext. The first is Lucian's *Gallus*. Awoken halfway through a beautiful dream by his rooster, the cobbler Mycillus realises that the animal is chatting to him with the voice and propriety of a human being.³²² The main plot of the dialogue is simple, rotating on the one hand around Mycillus' yearning for the life of the rich, and on the other hand around the Rooster's personal story, involving multiple reincarnations, from Pythagoras, Euphorbus, and Aspasia, to a variety of animals. The two stories intersect as the characters discuss the best type of life, and the Rooster attempts to convince the cobbler – both through arguments and via incognito trips to the houses of a number of rich individuals – that the life of the wealthy is not enviable after all.

The dialogue is certainly remarkable for our purposes by virtue of the fact that it features an animal in the educational role of the giver of wisdom. The Rooster is the ἐπίσκοπος, and an enhanced version of it at that: his multiple lives – crossing genders and even kinds – offer him an extraordinary detached perspective, and, consequently, more profound insights, that he variously employs to instruct Mycillus. Undoubtedly, a lot of wisdom comes to the Rooster from some of the human lives he has lived, which have supplied him with the direct experience to back up some of his arguments. But we would be mistaken if we thought that this is all, and that the body of a rooster is merely a rhetorical device to contain pieces of human knowledge. Instead, Lucian's stress on the animal side of things is paramount throughout the dialogue.

Not only has the Rooster lived several lives as animal, but he has now been a rooster multiple times (*Gall.* 20). Eventually, we discover, it is precisely his experience of life

³²² The Rooster (like the Homeric horses that he uses as a reference to Mycillus for the fact that speaking animals are nothing new, *Gall.* 2) speaks like a human (ἀνθρωπίνως ἐλάλησεν). Cf. Heath (2005), 40;49 for discussion of *Il.* 19.407 (also referencing Chrysippus *SVF* 2.144 for a description of the Homeric horses as speaking in human fashion); *ibid.* 49 on the fact that “Achilles' horses are granted a human voice (*auden*) but we hear nothing of *noos*.”

as an animal that grants him the ability to judge other kinds of existence. To this judgement and explanation the Rooster turns once he has introduced himself fully: the life of the poor, knows the Rooster, is better than that of the rich (*Gall.* 21), as the latter are constantly preoccupied with not losing their wealth.³²³ Even the epitome of the enviable life, that of the king, is demystified and demythologised by the Rooster, who has tried it for himself. Rather than *πανευδαίμων* (*Gall.* 24) as Mycillus imagines it, the life of the king is a bundle of anxiety, duties, and worries. It becomes increasingly clear that the Rooster has one major parameter for judging types of existence, which is the degree of preoccupation or freedom from it that they entail. The root and origin of this μέτρον becomes strikingly apparent at *Gall.* 27, as the Cobbler asks the Rooster – who has at this point compared the lives of the poor, the rich, and the king – how life as an animal compares to life as a human:

οὐδείς ὅστις οὐκ ἀπραγμονέστερος τῶν βίων ἔδοξέ μοι τοῦ ἀνθρωπέιου.

The question, says the Rooster, should be answered in greater detail, but in short every one of the animals he has embodied has an easier existence than man. The life of animals (presented last, not by chance, after those of the poor, of the rich, and of the king) is the μέτρον from which the Rooster-ἐπίσκοπος can look at and judge human life. Something more can be said if one considers the Rooster's definition and conception of life as one of the dialogue's allusions to Herodotus.

Herodotean seems to be, for example, the Rooster's allusion to Mycillus' previous life as a gold-digging ant (*Gall.* 16).³²⁴ But most Herodotean of all is the question arching over the entire dialogue – what is the best life? – reminding us of the dialogue between Croesus (a rich man and a king, no less) with Solon (a philosopher, one of the lives of the Rooster).³²⁵ And although in Herodotus the question is differently posed (who is the

³²³ Cf. Lucian's *Timon* for the same theme.

³²⁴ In Lucian also at *Sat.* 24. Hdt. 3.102-105 on which McCartney (1954); Karttunen (1989), 171ff with previous bibliography; Pigoñ (2008), 19-22.

³²⁵ The episode (and its significance for Herodotus' conception of the divine) has been vastly debated, and the passage has been variously connected to other places in the *Histories* (esp. the speech of Artabanus at 7.10e.1). Of the vast bibliography, cf. the commentary of Asheri (2007), 93-104; Lloyd (1987); Cairns (1996); Griffin (2006); Versnel (2011), 179-187; *ibid.* 182 n.73 for earlier

ὀλβιώτατος man? 1.30.2) and the criteria for Solon’s various responses are more subtle and controversial, we still find in their conversation a comparison between the immensely wealthy Croesus and the average man Tellus, which ends in favour of the latter to the utmost surprise and outrage of the former. Indeed, Lucian has his Mycillus inquire about the life of the king, which he imagines to be πανευδαίμων (*Gall.* 24), while in Herodotus Croesus’ (impressive) εὐδαιμονίη (1.32.1-2) had not been enough to grant him a place in Solon’s list.

Puzzling choices as they may be,³²⁶ Solon’s ὀλβιώτατοι are all humans. Lucian introduces one further element, animals, going smilingly one step beyond Herodotus, and uses one of them to illustrate the misery common (albeit to different degrees) to all possible nuances of the human condition: the best life, one deduces, is anything but human life, which, even at its best, is ridden with preoccupation and anxiety.³²⁷ The formulation’s litotes emphasises a concept that could have been conveyed more plainly (“every animal...” or “the life of every animal...”). Within it Lucian nestles the term ἀπραγμονέστερος, in itself the negation of what follows the initial alpha privativum: ἀπράγμων encapsulates the opposite of what man is, making human life all about things, necessity of action, and, eventually, trouble. Leopardi read the *Gallus* in July 1824, too late for it to bear a direct influence on *Zib.* 2412, but early enough to impact on many of the *Operette*: and although the Talmudic sources for Leopardi’s *Cantico del gallo silvestre* (dating to November 1824) have been thoroughly identified and discussed, it would seem odd that Leopardi’s wild rooster – prophetically announcing at dawn the unhappiness of life to mortals – was not at least partially a recollection of the Lucianic animal who had so clearly illustrated the hardship of the greater part of human existence.³²⁸

bibliography; the doctoral and post-doctoral work of Anthony B. Ellis – in Ellis (2013) and *id.* (2015) – to whom I am greatly indebted for a clearer understanding of the *logos* of Croesus and its implication for Herodotean theology.

³²⁶ *Chapter 4* discusses Cleobis and Biton, the two precociously deceased youths picked by Solon at 1.31.1.

³²⁷ On the *Gallus*, cf. Herchenroeder (2008), 370, who considers it an example of works on “animals with superior intelligence and the ability to speak” used “as satiric foils for deficiencies in human behavior”.

³²⁸ In agreement with me, Bonanno (2006), 60-70 who convincingly comments on the many similarities (among them the sweet dream at the beginning of each work, and the philosophical *penchant* of both roosters). Briefly also Ronzitti (2012), 58. Mattioli (1982), 93 reckons differently: “L’unico punto di

2. Homeric Comparatives and the “Preeminence of Unhappiness”

The comparative with which the Rooster describes human life is ἀπραγμονέστερος. To conclude this chapter, and as a further commentary to the *Zibaldone* passage with which I began this section, I pause for a moment on two other comparatives, that, albeit of diametrically different connotations from the Rooster’s, are equally informative of the differences between the human and animal condition. The passages are famous: the first comes from the speech of Zeus as he looks at the mourning horses of Achilles at *Iliad* 17.442-447; the second from that of Odysseus at *Od.* 18.130-137. Significantly, the horses of Achilles – and more specifically the moment at which one of them, Xanthos, becomes a “speaking animal” at *Il.* 19.408-417 – appear at the very onset of the *Gallus* (2), as the Rooster explains to his bewildered master that speaking animals are not something extraordinary, and that Homer himself described Xanthos’ speech.³²⁹

Away from the battlefield, Achilles’ horses learn of the death of Patroclus (17.426-428).³³⁰ The narrative slows down to dwell at considerable length (17.426-440) on the reaction of the pair: the horses in fact start crying (κλαῖον at 427 and δάκρυα θερμὰ κατὰ βλεφάρων at 437-438). One striking detail about this rather surprising scene is that the reader is given a dual perspective on what is happening. On the one hand there is the narrator’s description of the horses’ reaction; on the other hand there is Zeus’ speech to the pair that serves as a commentary on the scene we have just witnessed. Zeus is touched with pity for the two horses and addresses them (17.443-447):

ἄ δειλῷ, τί σφῶϊ δόμεν Πηλεΐϊ ἄνακτι
θνητῷ, ὑμεῖς δ’ ἐστὸν ἀγήρω τ’ ἀθανάτω τε;

contatto fra i due testi è che in tutti e due i casi si ha un gallo provvisto di parola”. On the Hebraic sources cf. Melosi’s (2015) commentary and, among others, Felici (2005). Perfetti (2013), 33: “the philosophical reader cannot but think that this Cock endowed with reason, placed between heaven and earth, is the post-human replacement of the former role of the centrality of man so widespread in philosophical literature”; *ibid.* 42 on the similarities between the views of the *Gallo silvestre* and the *Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo*.

³²⁹ Throughout, in splendidly absurd Lucianic fashion, the dialogue is fraught with literary references, channelled both by the wise (and ex-philosopher!) Rooster and by the supposedly ignorant Mycillus (cf. *Gall.* 2).

³³⁰ On the horses of Achilles, Harrison (1991) albeit only on the horses as symbol of Homer’s allegiance in the war; Heath (1992) on the horses in connection with other divine gifts.

ἢ ἵνα δυστήνοισι μετ' ἀνδράσιν ἄλγε' ἔχητον; 445
οὐ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν οἰζυρώτερος ἀνδρὸς
πάντων, ὅσά τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνέει τε καὶ ἔρπει.

The passage makes synergic use of multiple elements in order to define human nature and the human condition. Partaking in the same scene we have the divine, immortal and all-knowing; the human, both in the person of dead Patroclus and of the human throng that crowds the battlefield; ultimately we have the animals, who are in this case endowed with a special status that makes them closer to the divine, and yet still representing by contrast the idea of non-sentient creatures.³³¹ In the face of death these animals are able to have profound insight into the despair of the human condition, to the point of awakening Zeus' pity with their tears.³³² Zeus is thus prompted to cry out about the peculiar – and miserable – nature of man's existence. Such is the degree of man's misery that Zeus feels sorry to have sent another creature to witness it and mingle with some of that sorrow (443-445).³³³ Man is οἰζυρώτερος, more woeful, more miserable than every single one of them.³³⁴ It is interesting to notice that the adjective οἰζυρός appears very early on in both epics to describe the respective protagonists. It is used for Achilles at *Il.* 1.417 and for Odysseus at *Od.* 3.95: in both cases there is great emphasis on the hero's bond with sorrow (Achilles is οἰζυρὸς περὶ πάντων and Telemachus says of Odysseus that περὶ γάρ μιν οἰζυρὸν τέκε μήτηρ), making the two epics the tales of two exceptional sufferings among the ubiquitous suffering of mankind.³³⁵ Going back to our passage, of course at this point in the *Iliad* Xanthos has not yet been granted the gift

³³¹ Heath (2005), 40 and n. 5 for horses' association with "death and fate" and bibliography on the subject.

³³² Patroclus' death is *par excellence* the symbol of the human mind's failure at grasping the bigger picture of life; Achilles fooled himself into believing that his twofold wish would have been granted by Zeus (*Il.* 18.74-77) and the thwarting of part of it teaches him about the unpredictability (and short-sightedness) inherent in human life, a theme expressed elsewhere in the *Iliad* (cf. 17.201- 208 and 18.361-367.)

³³³ Edwards (1991), 107: "We may compare the happy life of Poseidon's horses, whose master is immortal (12.23-38)". Heath (1992), 389-390 "the painful juxtaposition of an immortal gift of the gods (Thetis) and the tragedy of mortality (both Peleus' natural but deserted senescence and Achilles' precipitate race towards death) [...]".

³³⁴ In both cases the exceptionality of the hero's sorrow is connected with his coming into existence (and more specifically with the act of being given birth by his mother).

³³⁵ Cf. Halliwell (2011), 3 on the fact that Telemachus' remark to Penelope at 1.354-355 that it was not just Odysseus who encountered a sorrowful destiny in the *nostoi* "suggests that the truth in question is more a matter of the "human condition" than of any individual life".

of speech, and it is Zeus, and not the horse, who gnominically describes the human condition. And yet, can we not think of the horses' tears as being themselves a statement about the human condition, powerful enough to prompt Zeus' pity and reflection?

At the beginning of *Odyssey* 18, Odysseus gets in a fight with the beggar Irus. The suitors stand and watch the fight, loudly cheering and mocking. Odysseus wins and is congratulated by some of the suitors, among them Amphinomus, who wishes Odysseus good fortune for his future (χαῖρε, πάτερ ὦ ξεῖνε· γένοιτό τοι ἔς περ ὀπίσσω / ὄλβος· ἀτὰρ μὲν νῦν γε κακοῖσ' ἔχειαι πολέεσσι, 122-123). Amphinomus' wish centres on the opposing ideas of ὄλβος and κακά and expresses the positive side of the notion of the instability of human fortune: in the same way in which Odysseus has obtained his present state of suffering, he may well gain happiness in the future.³³⁶

Odysseus' response tackles a twofold objective. On the one hand, he very practically wants to encourage Amphinomus to leave, so as to save him from the forthcoming slaughter.³³⁷ On the other hand, however, Odysseus feels he has to engage with the theoretical premise of the suitor's wish, and the two aims are skilfully merged in one speech.³³⁸ As he responds, Odysseus shifts the focus ever so slightly: it is not the alternation in itself, nor the divine causation behind it, but rather the way the human mind interprets man's rotating destiny.

οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον γαῖα τρέφει ἀνθρώποιο
[πάντων, ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνεῖει τε καὶ ἔρπει.]
οὐ μὲν γάρ ποτέ φησι κακὸν πείσεσθαι ὀπίσσω,
ἄφρ' ἀρετὴν παρέχουσι θεοὶ καὶ γούνατ' ὀρώρη·

³³⁶ It should be noted that this expression of faith in the optimistic possibilities of the future does not straightforwardly entail the belief in some form of justice in the way human affairs are brought about: as Jenny Clay's insightful chapter on the double theodicy of the *Odyssey* has shown, the idea of divine justice normally finds expression, as here, in the abstract context of wishes and prayers. Note how the wish for good fortune only refers to the future, as the present is full of woes. Apropos of the *Odyssey's* faith in the gods' good will towards men see Clay (1983), 221ff, as she suggests that this wishful attitude is only ever visible in wishes or prayers (expressed in the optative) and never in factual statements (expressed in the indicative).

³³⁷ Clay (1983), 228.

³³⁸ Brilliantly analysed by Clay, *ibid.*

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ λυγρὰ θεοὶ μάκαρες τελέωσι,
 καὶ τὰ φέρει ἀεκαζόμενος τετληότι θυμῷ. 135
 τοῖος γὰρ νόος ἐστὶν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων,
 οἷον ἐπ' ἡμᾶρ ἄγησι πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε.³³⁹

The fact that the gods bestow both good and evil upon men is stated matter-of-factly at 133-134; such divine power and freedom have been often spoken about in the course of the Homeric poems, in some cases with more specific reference to the amount of good and evil that befall humans.³⁴⁰ What Odysseus cares to concentrate on here, however, is man's inability to appreciate both the actual internal workings of such alternation of fortunes and the very fact that such rotation is a key component of his existence.³⁴¹ The nature of man's intellect (described in vv. 136-137)³⁴² prompts him to disregard all possible future woes at the time at which he is given good things from the gods (132-133), woes that he will inevitably be forced to face once the wheel turns.³⁴³

In the passage from *Iliad* book 17 the presence and the attitude of the horses brings animals into the limelight, as it is their grief that triggers Zeus' consideration. In both cases animals are the *comparandum* for man's condition: man is ὀϊζυρότερον (more miserable) and ἀκιδνότερον (feeblar) than all other creatures.³⁴⁴ Each of the two passages – and the two comparatives – says something slightly different about the

³³⁹ Leopardi could read the passage also at *Cons. Ap.* 104d-e.

³⁴⁰ We briefly discussed this in *Chapter 1 II.2* and will tackle it again at *Chapter 4 II.1*.

³⁴¹ On the concept behind ἐπ' ἡμᾶρ ἄγησι, Russo et al. (1992), 56 and *Chapter 3* in this thesis.

³⁴² See the discussion apropos of the term *ephemeros* in *Chapter 3*.

³⁴³ Fénelon's dialogue *Ulysses et Gryllus* tackles the very theme of the difference between life as humans and life as beasts, with Gryllus promoting the advantages of animal life, while Odysseus sides with human reason. Just as in Lucian's *Gallus*, Fénelon presents a being who, once a human, prefers life as an animal; the grounds for such choice are again similar to the Rooster's characterisation of animal life as ἀπράγμων compared to that of man. The hog-Gryllus goes a little further: his life as an animal has given him insight on something that not even the cunning Odysseus perceives, which is that the entirety of man's claims to happiness and privilege is an illusion and nothing but a shade: "Ne me parlez plus de l'humanité ; sa noblesse n'est qu'imaginaire; tous ses maux sont réels, et ses biens ne sont qu'en idée", says Gryllus (at Fénelon (1917), 138). Of course Fénelon's dialogue is a close reinterpretation of Plutarch's *Gryllus*, on which Herchenroeder (2008), who provides bibliography on the dialogue. Yet whereas Plutarch seems concerned with the features that make beasts better than humans (for example courage, *Mor. Bruta* 987f.; see Herchenroeder (2008), 360 and 364; and 369 for his idea that Gryllus' argument is basically a "typical expression of the Golden Age theme"), Fénelon, like the *Gallus*, focuses especially on which life is to be considered best.

³⁴⁴ Russo et al. (1992), 55 on ἀκιδνότερον, the rarity of the term and the other occurrences within the *Odyssey*.

human condition, but both aspects are the two faces of the same coin. Man is weak and foolish enough to hope for the best, as Odysseus describes, and not to see the worst that will inevitably come, as the situation faced by Achilles' horses well displays. Man's feebleness is increased by his sensitivity, and when the worst strikes the blow can be made harsher by the recollection of previous hope, as in the case of Achilles' shock at realising that part of his wish to Zeus had been thwarted, and that Patroclus would not come back alive.³⁴⁵

The idea that unhappiness is inherent in, and inextricable from, human existence is at the core of both Leopardi's note and the two Homeric passages. Leopardi's "per essenza propria e inseparabile" marks this peculiarity just as the comparatives (ἀκιδνότερον, ὄϊζυρότερον) do in the Homeric Greek. Odysseus and Leopardi arrive, from different perspectives, to the same distinction: humans and the rest of living beings are irremediably apart when it comes to their condition in the world and the attainability of happiness. For Odysseus the cause of the gulf that separates men and other creatures is the limits of human knowledge (especially regarding one's own destiny), a notion otherwise very dear to Leopardi, who used it profusely, not least in his translation of Semonides, as we shall see in *Chapter 3*. For Leopardi it is instead the tendency inherent in man's self-love to hold wishes (or one could say hopes) for his own existence, provoked and galvanised by the greater sensitivity of the human species. Yet the conclusion is similar: man is born with consciousness and intellect surpassing all other creatures, but such intellect stimulates man to pursue destiny beyond the capabilities of his mind, and to sorely feel the restrictions placed on his will to live and on his striving towards happiness. Not limited enough to lack the need to inspect his own existence, as animals do, and yet too far from attaining to the level of the divine, this is the specificity of the human condition.

I have brought together these passages in the belief that they can help us to grasp the deepest nuances not only of the note at *Zib.* 2412, but also of the entirety of Leopardi's conception of the human condition within the cosmos. A passage from a later work –

³⁴⁵ Edwards (1991), 107: "It is man's [...] awareness of his mortality which makes him more wretched than they."

the *Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio*, written five years after the 1822 note – corroborates the possibility that at least one of these Homeric passages is directly at the origin of *Zib.* 2412. Centred around Plotinus’ discovery that Porphyry has been contemplating suicide and his decision to confront his friend about it, the dialogue has its emotional peak in Porphyry’s attack on Plato, triggered by Plotinus’ mention of Plato’s thoughts about suicide.³⁴⁶ Porphyry’s passionate attack is rooted in the belief that, having persuaded man that the afterlife may contain punishment and suffering – possibly according to one’s behaviour during life – Plato has led man to “fear the port more than the tempest”, i.e. to fear death rather than life. Life, instead, is the tempest, and Porphyry is keen to describe in full the nature of this life he has thought about renouncing, and the inescapable unhappiness inherent in it. In Leopardi’s hands, Porphyry the philosopher not only resorts to a poet to find adequate description of the misery of existence, but turns more precisely to that *antichissimo* Homer, whose role as the educator of Greece Platonic thought had long tried to attain.³⁴⁷

“ [...] tu vedi, Platone, quanto o la natura o il fato o la necessità, o qual si sia potenza autrice e signora dell’universo, è stata ed è perpetuamente inimica alla nostra specie. Alla quale molte, anzi innumerabili ragioni potranno contendere quella maggioranza che noi, per altri titoli, ci arroghiamo di avere tra gli animali; ma nessuna ragione si troverà che le tolga quel principato che l’antichissimo Omero le attribuiva; dico il principato della infelicità.”³⁴⁸

The passage is bitterly sarcastic: the only superiority of which man can boast over other creatures is the distinctive misery inbred in his existence. This time Homer is *explicitly* chosen directly as the authoritative spokesman of man’s uniqueness, a uniqueness that Leopardi has by this point in time explored multifariously in both the *Canti* and

³⁴⁶ On Leopardi’s “manipulation” of the ideas of the protagonists see Galimberti (1998b), 455-456. Galimberti nonetheless recalls how some of these notions can be authentically traced back to the characters (the case in point is Plotinus *Enn.* 2.9, 18, where the philosopher invites to “rimanere nella casa del corpo finché giunga il termine della partenza”).

³⁴⁷ Cf. *Rep.* 10.606e, Most (1999) on Homer and Hesiod as educators and “early philosophers”; also, Granger (1974), 426; Vernant (1978), 193-197.

³⁴⁸ *TPP* (2013), 593. Cecchetti (1983), 449: “You see, Plato, how much Nature, Fate, necessity, or whatever the power that is the author and the ruler of the universe has been and is a perpetual enemy of our species. Many, indeed, innumerable reasons, may dispute that supremacy, which, by other titles, we claim for ourselves over all animals; but no reason will be found to strip us of that preeminence which most ancient Homer attributed to us: the preeminence of unhappiness.” On Leopardi and Platone, among others, cf. Trabattoni (1999).

Operette. It is a path that goes from (at least) as early as 1820, the year of the *Dialogo tra due bestie*, to 1827 with the *Copernico*, and beyond. Over the course of time and experience the comparatives of *Zib.* 2412 (“più infelice, o meno capace di felicità”) which described the distance between humans and animals become Porphyry’s enraged and spiteful “pre-eminence”, the only superlative man is entitled to, and, at the very same time, the core of his own ineluctable sorrow.

CHAPTER 3

Oἵη περ φύλλων γενεή: Ancient Ideas of Ephemerality

Das Leben und die Träume sind Blätter eines und des nämlichen Buches.
Das Lesen im Zusammenhang heißt wirkliches Leben. [...]
Nimmt man nun den Standpunkt der Beurtheilung außerhalb Beider an,
so findet sich in ihrem Wesen kein bestimmter Unterschied,
und man ist genöthigt, den Dichtern zuzugeben, daß das Leben ein langer Traum sei.

Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*³⁴⁹

Quando questa musica suona, noi sappiamo che i compagni,
fuori nella nebbia, partono in marcia come automi;
le loro anime sono morte e la musica li sospinge,
come il vento le foglie secche, e si sostituisce alla loro volontà.

Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*³⁵⁰

“Si sta come d’autunno sugli alberi le foglie”.³⁵¹ Giuseppe Ungaretti’s *Soldati*, written from the front-line of the First World War, laconically yet powerfully captures the precarious character of the lives of the soldiers by comparing them to autumnal leaves. Composed in July 1918, it is only one in a large constellation of literary works that employ this comparison; resurfacing at different times in a variety of literary, geographical, and cultural contexts, the simile that compares humans and leaves crosses the history of Western literature. To the leaves of the forest Percy Bysshe Shelley compares both his own life and his thoughts in *Ode to the West Wind* (1819), and in a similar manner leaves are both Nashtenka’s present dreams and her earthly existence in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *White Nights* (1848).³⁵² The sight of the shedding autumnal trees triggers Rainer Maria Rilke’s realisation that, just like the leaves, we humans fall too (*Herbst*, 1902).³⁵³ The comparison with the falling leaves of Autumn offers Baron Taittinger (the somewhat oblivious character of Joseph Roth’s 1939 *Die Geschichte von*

³⁴⁹ In von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 1, 50. Nussbaum (2006), 346 comments on the passage.

³⁵⁰ Levi (2014), 44.

³⁵¹ In Piccioni (1970), 87.

³⁵² Shelley in Buxton Forman (1882), 290-293. Dostoevsky in Heinemann (1918), 22-23.

³⁵³ In Zinn and Sieber-Rilke (1955), 400. Cf. Schier (1967) on Rilke’s poem and Hölderlin’s *Die Eichbäume*.

der 1002. Nacht) one of the very few epiphanic moments of understanding of his story and condition.³⁵⁴

But far from being a creation of modernity, this trope has a lively history in the literary works of ancient Greece (and Rome). The life of the simile begins with the *Iliad*, where the trope comes up twice, first in the words of the warrior Glaucus at *Il.* 6.146-149 and then in the god Apollo's speech to Poseidon at *Il.* 21.462-467.³⁵⁵ A fragment preserved by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 6.5) attributes the same comparison to the mythical poet Musaeus.³⁵⁶ Lyric poetry variously elaborates on the idea, from the direct reference to the Homeric passage contained in Simonides fr. 8 W² to Mimnermus' comparison of men and leaves in fr. 2.³⁵⁷ The simile appears again in Bacchylides *Ep.* 5.63-67, where it is used for men who are already dead:³⁵⁸ it is their souls which resemble the leaves moved by the wind on Mount Ida.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁴ Roth (1956), 700: "Ach, er neigte keineswegs zu poetischen Empfindungen. Jetzt in dieser Sekunde aber begann er, irgendeine merkwürdige, lächerliche Zärtlichkeit für das armselige Blättchen zu empfinden. Es kündete den Herbst, gewiß! Wie oft hatte er schon welche Blätter den Herbst künden gesehen! Dieses Blatt aber, dieses besondere, kündigte ihm, speziell ihm, dem Taittinger, seinen speziellen Herbst an. Ihn fröstelte."

³⁵⁵ Other comparisons of (groups of) men with leaves are *Il.* 2.467-468; *Il.* 2.800-801.

³⁵⁶ Cf. fr. 5DK in Diels and Kranz (1951-2), 23: Πάλιν τοῦ Μουσαίου ποιήσαντος· ὡς δ' αὐτως καὶ φύλλα φύει ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα· ἄλλα μὲν ἐν μελίησιν ἀποφθίνει, ἄλλα δὲ φύει· ὡς δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπων γενεὴν καὶ φύλον ἐλίσσει; on it, cf. Piccaluga (1980), 248 and n. 27, elaborating on the pre-existing theme of the "comune origine, dagli alberi, degli uomini e delle foglie, soggetti perciò, sia gli uni che le altre, ad un medesimo destino di morte" and Burgess (2001), 125.

³⁵⁷ Mimnermus' long comparison starting with ἡμεῖς δ', οἷά τε φύλλα in West (1992), 85-86.

³⁵⁸ Bacchylides, *Ep.* 5.63-67: ἔνθα δυστάνων βροτῶν/ ψυχὰς ἐδάη παρὰ Κωκυτοῦ ῥεέθροισι,/ οἷά τε φύλλ' ἄνεμος/ Ἴδαοσ ἀνὰ μηλοβότους/ πρῶνας ἀργηστὰς δονεῖ. In Maehler (2004), 41 and in Cairns and Howie (2010), 160; also in Irigoin (1993) 129; on the simile in Bacchylides cf. Lefkowitz (1969), 65-66.

³⁵⁹ These are not the only sources to employ the trope. For a list of occurrences in the works of Homer and Hesiod cf. Burgess (2001), 190-192. Cf. Babut (1971), who compares Simonides 8 W, Semonides 1 W², and Mimnermus 2 W²; Shannon (1975), 47ff.; Redfield (1975), whose focus on the insignificance of the species will be dealt with in the epilogue to this chapter; Lowry (1995), who lists the various scholarly interpretations of the trope in *Iliad* 6 up to his days; Sider (1996). Another interesting appearance of the simile is Aristophanes *Aves* 685: φύλλων γενεᾷ προσόμοιοι, on which Dunbar (1995), 429 commenting that the passage describes "the weakness and transience of human life in contrast to that of the gods"; note also σκιοειδέα at 686 and ἐφημέριοι at 687, terms to which I come back later in the chapter. An interesting passage is Lucian *Charon* 19, referencing Homer's simile: Οὐδὲν χεῖρον σὺ τοῦ Ὀμήρου εἴκασας, ὦ Χάρων, ὅς φύλλοις τὸ γένος αὐτῶν ὅμοιοι.

But going back to *Soldati*, rather than simply representing one late-blooming example of the use of the simile, Ungaretti's poem exemplifies well two possible attitudes towards the origin of this trope. Did the simile resurface from memories of Ungaretti's school and university years, or did it emerge independently in the mind of the young soldier – who was in fact fighting in the trenches of the wood of Courton in those very months? Is it a reminiscence of the many literary works that employed it, or is it triggered by the soldier's observation of the human condition and the existence of the leaves surrounding him? The question is, in short, whether we are dealing with the spontaneous generation of an idea or instead with cases of literary reception or allusion. The presence of this trope as early as the first text of Western civilization (Homer's *Iliad*) has often led interpreters to read occurrences of the trope as examples of literary reception.³⁶⁰ The opposite has been argued as well: focusing exclusively on ancient Greek literature, which contains already many different takes on the simile, Jonathan S. Burgess suggests that the repeated recurrence of the motif is not a case of literary allusion or reception, but instead an example of the liveliness of a “commonplace”.³⁶¹

In many cases, such as the ones listed above, it is hard if not impossible to establish the source of the trope, and most of all to grasp whether the author intended the reader to be aware of a source. Giacomo Leopardi's use of it, however, is a completely different story. The image of the leaves as a comparison for humankind is strongly present and has a complex history in his works and thought, but what is especially striking about Leopardi's use of this trope is that throughout his work he makes sure the reader knows that his use of the simile originates from ancient literature. This chapter explores Leopardi's study, interpretation, and re-use of this motif in the turn of years between 1823 and 1827, a period that sees Leopardi returning over and over again to the Greek conception of human life as embodied both in the simile of the leaves, and, similarly, by the Greek term ἐφήμερος. Although some publications have tackled aspects of, or moments in, this long process, no work has explored this theme thoroughly; in particular, as this chapter clarifies repeatedly, scholars have for the most part failed to engage properly or at all with the Greek texts involved in their own rights: this has

³⁶⁰ Cf. Burgess (2001), 119 n. 252 for a list of scholars who believe in Mimnermus' debt to Homer (and in the idea of reception of the trope). Also, Laurenti (1964), 91; Privitera (1970), 70.

³⁶¹ Burgess (2001), 121.

resulted in a lack of exploration in the best cases, and in real inaccuracies in others.³⁶² This chapter aims thus both at correcting past imprecisions and, most of all, at tackling the yet unexplored connections between the Greek texts and their poetic descriptions of human life and Leopardi's work. Through Leopardi, I hope to shed some light on the meanings and implications of these motifs in their ancient context.

I

Leopardi and the Trope of the Leaves: from the First Homeric Readings to the Simonidean Translations (1809-1824)

That Leopardi read and re-read the Homeric poems as a child is no secret.³⁶³ Even before he started to learn ancient Greek around 1813, he had pored over the two epics: his first attempt at poetry is the 1809 sonnet *La morte di Ettore*, in which an Iliadic theme serves the purpose of challenging the young poet's imagination.³⁶⁴ Written between 1815 and 1816, his translations of the pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia* and the first book of the *Odyssey* are some of his earliest from Greek.³⁶⁵ More detailed evidence about Leopardi's acquaintance with the Homeric epics is available starting from the following year, as he begins his *Zibaldone*, between July and August 1817: some of its very first pages, tackling the aim of the "belle arti", compare Achilles and Aeneas and their role within the respective epics.³⁶⁶ From several details in this note (*Zib.* 2) one can perceive the degree of ease and familiarity between the 19 year-old Giacomo and the subject matter – and interpretation – of the *Iliad*. The page is written in the nonchalant tone of someone who deals with familiar topics: the present Leopardi writing the note to the future Leopardi possesses an already advanced degree of reflection on the two poems that can only come from intense reading and perusing.

³⁶² The works of Gigante (1998) and Randino (2000) are the remarkable exceptions, engaging soundly with the Greek material in its own right.

³⁶³ Cf. Timpanaro (2008), 16.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Leopardi's *Indici delle opere composte da Giacomo Leopardi compilati da lui stesso*, in *TPP* (2013), 317 and cf. *ibid.* 1036.

³⁶⁵ Cf. Timpanaro (2008), 19; 101. That Leopardi chose to translate the *Odyssey* ought not to lead one to believe he was less acquainted with the *Iliad*. By the time Leopardi was writing, Vincenzo Monti's famous translation of the *Iliad* had already been published, but Italy lacked a translation of the *Odyssey*. The introductory lines to his translation are testimony to the fine philological and linguistic skills of the young Leopardi, in *TPP* (2013), 422-423.

³⁶⁶ *Zib.* 2.

That Leopardi read and knew the Homeric simile that links men and leaves, a simile twice present in the *Iliad* (6.146-149 and 21.462-467), is confirmed – if ever proof was needed – by a note (*Zib.* 3276) dating to August 1823, where he comments on the very Iliadic passage that contains the first trope of the leaves. The note does not directly comment on the trope, and in fact uses the Iliadic episode only as an *exemplum* of the “blindness” with which young people freely and selflessly offer their generosity and empathy: similar blindness must have taken Glaucus when he decided to exchange his golden armour for Diomedes’ copper one. Yet, it is precisely this year that opens to a period of intense engagement with the complex and fascinating set of ideas behind the Iliadic simile of the leaves.

Around the same period in which this *Zibaldone* note was written, Leopardi was working on the translations of a number of Greek works which he labels *Volgarizzamenti di alcuni versi morali dal greco*.³⁶⁷ He himself places these translations between the end of 1823 and the beginning of 1824, somewhat overlapping with the beginning of the composition of the *Operette*, which will start in January 1824.³⁶⁸ The *Volgarizzamenti* are the poetic translations of a handful of Greek verses by scopic or comic poets: Archilochus, Alexis, Amphis, Euboulus, and Eupolis. Originally part of this group were two poems by (so Leopardi thought) the same Simonides of Ceos who inspired his *Canzone all’Italia*.³⁶⁹ We now know that whereas number *XLI Dello stesso* is in fact a translation of the version of Simonides of Ceos fr. 8 W which Leopardi read in the version preserved by Stobaeus,³⁷⁰ number *XL Dal greco di Simonide* is instead

³⁶⁷ *TPP* (2013), 1040.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Orlando (1973), 927.

³⁶⁹ On these two translations see Di Benedetto (1967); Orlando (1973), 926-937; De Robertis (1978), 512; Pasquini (1984); Gigante (1998); Randino (2000) on *XL*; Sole (2001); Lonardi (2005), 205ff. Carella (2010), 176-196 whose work on the two Simonidean translations is highly derivative from Gigante (1998); Stasi (2010); the short and not in depth section by Presti (2016), 205-210 on *XL*.

³⁷⁰ Stobaeus is mentioned in the *Zibaldone* as early as *Zib.* 501 (1821) and then again in the passages listed in *TPP* (2013), 2635 s.v. “Stobaeo”, cf. Polizzi (2011), 90 n. 34. Cf. Di Benedetto (1967); a very detailed account of Leopardi's familiarity with the text of Stobaeus is in Gigante (1998), 164-166 and Randino (2000); also Carella (2010), 178-179, n. 114.

Leopardi's version of fr 1 W² by Semonides of Amorgos, a poet whose existence Leopardi ignored.³⁷¹

The special status of the two pieces is in many ways evident, not least in light of the fact that the two translations were chosen to conclude Leopardi's *Canti*, otherwise only comprising the poet's original work. Leopardi laboured on the two translations very intensely and with fine philological care, as is shown by some of his choices and by the originals of the various versions he wrote for each poem.³⁷² That this labour was intense and, in a way, never conclusive, is also evident from the fact that an alternative version of (part of) *XL* appears in one of the *Operette, Il Parini, ovvero della gloria*, which Leopardi composed later in 1824.³⁷³ Despite – or perhaps because of – the strenuous philological toiling, *XL* and *XLI* somewhat fail to be merely translations, but become painstakingly well-researched reinterpretations of the original poems.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Fr. 8 W in West (1972), 114-115 appears as fr. 19 W² in West (1992), 123 followed by 20 W², the text discovered in *P.Oxy* 3965. I refer to the fragment as 8 W (from West's first edition) since this edition presents the texts (broadly speaking) as it is preserved by Stobaeus, and before the changes brought about by the discovery of the papyrus. On the debates about the authorship of 19 and 20 W² and on their connection cf. especially Hubbard (1994) and (1996), Sider (1996). Hubbard (1996), 259-260 lists positive arguments in favour of a Semonidean authorship for fr. 19 (despite the evidence provided by *P.Oxy* 3965: interestingly one of the grounds is its close thematic similarity to Semonides fr. 1 W², the same similarity which undoubtedly lead Leopardi to treat the two poems as a couple, see later in the chapter). Babut (1971) argues for Semonidean authorship for fr. 8 W (before the discovery of *P.Oxy* 3965); cf. Sider (1996), 267 n. 6 for a list of scholars who argued for a Semonidean authorship, while Sider himself suggests the author is Simonides. On Leopardi and Simonides (and his ignorance of Semonides) see Timpanaro (2008), 108-109 and Pasquini (1984), 605-607.

³⁷² Pasquini (1984), 608 stresses how Simonides' poetry is not only the only instance of translation in the *Canti*, but also in the *Operette*, in which the fragment of the Stobean Simonides is one of only two poetic fragments, the other one being Leopardi's *Coro dei morti* in *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie*; cf. *ibid.* for a useful link between the *Coro* and the two Simonidean translations.

³⁷³ *TPP* (2013), 549.

³⁷⁴ On the status of the two pieces, as translations or reworkings, see Sole (2001); Orlando (1973), 928, on Leopardi's search for a "morale" in the texts he translates. On Leopardi's translations from ancient texts cf. Bigi (1967); De Robertis (1978); Pasquini (1984), 603 n. 1 for a summary of the scholarship on the subject; Fasano (1985), 51ff in the chapter "Come gli antichi greci". Gigante (1998), 191 usefully suggests to bear in mind Leopardi's own words about the process of translation of a work from ancient Greek contained in his *Discorso sopra la Batracomiomachia*; also Carella (2010), 185. On the philological labour behind the two translations, cf. Gigante (1998), 166, 172-191; Carella (2010), 191-192 on the two manuscripts of *XLI*, both contain copious corrections and the first one is rich in *marginalia*.

A few paragraphs previously we mentioned how Leopardi used one detail from the Homeric scene which includes the simile of the leaves in August 1823. It must have been around the same time that he set about the task of translating Simonides' poem. Leopardi could read it in the version preserved by Joannes Stobaeus, who includes the Simonidean elegy in chapter 34 of the fourth book of his *Anthologion*.³⁷⁵ Chapter 34, entitled *περὶ τοῦ βίου, ὅτι βραχὺς καὶ εὐτελής καὶ φροντίδων ἀνάμεστος*, is a collection of 75 texts and excerpts of texts ranging from elegy, to fragments from tragedy, comedy, and philosophy among others. The 28th entry of the chapter is the text that Leopardi will transform in his *XLI*. The Stobean text of Simonides and Leopardi's *XLI Dello Stesso* can be found at *Appendix 3a* and *3b*.³⁷⁶

In the Stobean Simonides Leopardi found the Homeric simile of the leaves introduced by the double *auctoritas* of the Cean poet and the “man from Chios”, as verse 2 of Simonides' fragment quotes in full *Il.* 6.146: οἴη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν. The poem as Leopardi read it can be subdivided into 3 main parts.³⁷⁷ First comes the *gnome*, the Homeric Glaucus' opinion about the generations of men (1-2). Second comes men's general failure to understand its meaning (3-9). Last is Simonides' own view about the truth behind the Homeric statement (10-12), which appears joined to his own practical suggestion about how to act upon the real understanding of the quotation (12-13). Although to today's reader, familiar with the problematic nature of the fragments' authorship and original structure, the matter seems more complicated, one can see how the fragment as Leopardi would have seen it gravitates heavily around the Homeric quotation. The Stobean Simonides places great emphasis on the Iliadic

³⁷⁵ Cf. Hense's (1958) edition, 834-835. As Randino (2000) suggests, Leopardi could read Stobaeus in two 16th century editions, that of C. Gessner (first edition 1543, Leopardi certainly saw the 1559 edition, cf. the author's note 6 to *Il Parini, ovvero della Gloria* in Melosi (2015), 342) and that of Henry Estienne (1560). Leopardi had access over time to various editions of the text of Stobaeus, both in the original and in Latin translations; for a summary of the editions he consulted, see Gigante (1998), 164-166.

³⁷⁶ Text from West (1972), 114-115. For both Simonides 8 W and Semonides 1 W² I use the text of West (the first edition for Simonides and the 1992 edition for Semonides), although I am aware that this is not exactly what Leopardi could consult. However, the textual differences relevant to this study are tackled in the course of the chapter. *XLI* in *TPP* (2013), 216.

³⁷⁷ It does not quite matter that the two poems as we have been talking about them may not be in their original form: this (with small changes according to the editions) is the shape Leopardi had access to, and the one that formed his understanding of these works and their worldview.

reference: if *one* saying can be singled out as τὸ κάλλιστον within the large and awe-inspiring Homeric production, the reader ought to pay attention. The fame of the Homeric saying is again established by verse 3: the notion that “few mortal men welcome it in their ears and store it in their hearts” indirectly testifies to the vast circulation of the Iliadic verse. But verse 3 also serves the purpose of making Simonides’ fragment into a piece of Homeric exegesis: vast as its diffusion may be, there are few men who grasp the real meaning of the Homeric *gnome*, and Simonides prepares his audience to understand *his* reading of the trope as the correct one and the one to be internalised.

I argue that Leopardi’s *XLI* ought to be seen not only as a charged – albeit respectful – interpretation of Simonides’ poem, but consequently also as another attempt at an exegesis of the Homeric trope thereby contained. That *XLI* is not merely a translation, but also a vehicle for some of Leopardi’s own sentiments about the theme of the Stobaeian Simonides is evident in the many more or less free interventions that the Italian poet makes in the Greek text. Although several of these choices can be ascribed to his desire to be philologically true to the original text or to linguistic necessities, many others testify more clearly to the presence of Leopardi’s own voice in the text.³⁷⁸ As such, they let the reader have a glimpse of Leopardi’s stance on various aspects of Simonides’ fragment, and, consequently, of Leopardi’s understanding of the Homeric saying.

The following sections focus first on Leopardi’s use of botanical language in his translation of Simonides in *XLI* (section 1) as a case study in the former’s reception of the trope of the leaves. I shall then concentrate (section 2) on the first line of *XLI*, which I believe to be a privileged place which offers deeper insight into Leopardi’s interpretation of the fragment as a whole and its take on the Homeric *gnome*.

³⁷⁸ These choices – both on the poetic and on the philological level – have been the subject of a number of publications, see Lonardi (1969); Orlando (1973); Randino (2000); Sole (2001). The scholarship on the subject has variously explained them by Leopardi’s desire to create a work of independent poetic beauty. Although a few more remarks could be made on the topic, this is not the place for another detailed comparison of the Greek and Italian versions.

1. *Germinating from the Sources: XLI and Botanical Language*

Let us first observe how Leopardi tackles the translation of the Homeric quotation contained in Simonides' text.

οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δὲ θ' ὕλη
τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὄρη·
ὥς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἢ μὲν φύει ἢ δ' ἀπολήγει. (*Il.* 6.146-149)

The gnomic first line of the Iliadic comparison – which in *Iliad* 6 develops over three more lines – is spread over two lines in the Italian translation (4-5): “conforme ebber natura le foglie e l’uman seme”. In the original Greek the simile revolves around the two parallel parts introduced by οἷη and τοίη. Leopardi chooses instead to discard the two correlative pronouns in favour of a more explicit phrasing: rather than being like each other, men and leaves share a common “nature”. What happens to the Greek word γενεή?³⁷⁹

The major editions in the principal European languages around Leopardi's time are unanimous in translating the word γενεή as “race” or “generation”: in the English-speaking world Alexander Pope's edition (1715-1720) translates γενεή as “race”, as will William Cowper's (1791) and William Sotheby's (1831).³⁸⁰ In France Anne Dacier (1699) chooses to liken directly the two parts of the simile (men and leaves) without translating γενεή (“Telles que sont les feuilles dans les forests, tels sont les hommes sur la surface de la terre”); half a century later Leconte de Lisle (1866) will render γενεή with “génération”.³⁸¹ Again in Germany both Johann Heinrich Voss (1793) and Friedrich Leopold Stolberg (1843) choose “Geschlecht”.³⁸² Leopardi knew the Italian

³⁷⁹ The word, ionic version of γενεά, is used with various meanings in Homer, cf. Liddell Scott s.v. γενεά: with the meaning of “living family”, *Il.* 20.306 ; “birth” (*Il.* 11. 786) or “birthright”, *Od.* 1.387); of “stock” or “breed” for animals, in particular horses, *Il.* 5.265; “race” or “generation”, as in the passage examined. On its meaning as referring both to the moment of birth and to the place of such birth in a succession of births and generations cf. Redfield (1975), 102 n. 4.

³⁸⁰ Pope (1806), 147; Cowper in Southey (1837), 152; Sotheby (1833), 192.

³⁸¹ Dacier (1819), 269, 271. Leconte de Lisle (1867), 106.

³⁸² Voss (1839), 150; Stolberg (1823), 204.

translation of the *Iliad* by Vincenzo Monti (1810), who translates the Greek term with “stirpe”.³⁸³

Just as he had abandoned the Homeric parallelism of οἴη and τοίη, Leopardi chooses not to use one term (γενεή) to refer to the two types of races (φύλλων and ἀνδρῶν). Instead, the subjects of the comparison are straightforwardly the leaves and the “uman seme”. The term γενεή is not directly reemployed by Leopardi; neither “natura” nor “uman seme” take up the function that γενεή had performed in the Greek clause. Yet both words recirculate and diffuse some of the ideas it conveys, as if the conglomeration of meanings implied in it had found two different points to discharge in Leopardi’s poetry. Albeit stripped of the formal roles of sole subject and “glue” for the two components of the simile, the word γενεή resurfaces in the word “natura” and in the expression “uman seme” only to bind the two parts of the simile even more tightly together. The human seed – which does of course symbolise the human race – indirectly connects men and leaves on account of their common origin, however metaphorically one wants to understand the root of human life.

The effect of these choices – both the introduction of the concept of “natura” in line 4, and the translation of γενεή with “natura” and “uman seme” – is that Leopardi’s translation of the Homeric *gnome* orbits heavily around the idea of vegetation which, in the original verse, is only present in the mention of the leaves. But the image of vegetation must have struck a chord for Leopardi: in addition to the two points just observed (“natura” and “seme”) *XLI* is dotted with the language of flora. Line 10 contains “vermiglio” (which substituted the earlier drafts’ “verdeggia” and “verzica”) and “fiore”, line 11 calls youth “etade acerba” (unripe age), and line 13 the verb “educa”.³⁸⁴ This dense presence is all the more striking if one considers that, just as it was only once mentioned in the Homeric verse, the flourishing of botanical terms in Leopardi’s adaptation is nowhere to be found in the text of Simonides, which contains one sole reference to flowers (ἄνθος) in verse 6. In *XLI* the image and the idea of ἄνθος

³⁸³ Monti (1815), 139.

³⁸⁴ For “educare”’s semantic connection with the botanical world cf. Sole (2001), 339 and *ibid.* n. 40. See also Nicolò Tommaseo’s and Bernardo Bellini’s (1977), *Dizionario della lingua italiana* s.v. *Educare*, 470. The version of the translation contained in *Carte Leopardi X 1 2.b*, reads “verdeggia” (and before “verzica”) instead of the final “vermiglio” (line 10), cf. Peruzzi (2009), 658.

is expanded and elaborated. What is simply “the flower” in the Stobean Simonides, becomes for Leopardi the periphrasis “when the flower of our unripe age is still crimson”. The semantic area of flora is present not only in the literal translation of ἄνθος with “fiore”, but also in the vivid visual note of the colour of the young and new flower and in the adjective chosen to accompany the word “etade”: although “unripe” is certainly a slight shift from the image of the flower to that of the fruit, the semantic area remains the one of vegetation, and of vegetation upon a tree.

What could have prompted Leopardi to do so? Without aspiring to be conclusive, I propose two possible explanations: the former concerning the text of Homer quoted by Simonides, the latter instead focusing on the context in which Leopardi found the Simonidean text. Although it is true that *Il.* 6.146 only contains one term pertaining to the semantic area of botanics (φύλλον), this is not the case for the remaining part of the simile, which occupies three more verses until verse 149. Having compared men and leaves, Glaucus goes on to describe the life cycle of the leaves, from the moment of their end – as the wind scatters them on the ground – to the birth of new ones with the arrival of spring.³⁸⁵ This description is filled with the vocabulary of natural life in general (the wind and the ground at 147, to the season of spring at 148) and of vegetation (the forest at 147, the participle of τηλεθάω describing the blooming of the trees and the verb φύω at 148). The parallel between the leaves and humans is reiterated by the repetition of φύω for both parties, highlighting the similarity in their paths of existence.

It is true that the two texts – Leopardi’s *XLI* and Homer *Iliad* 6 – make different use of the semantic area of botanics. The botanical language of *Il.* 6.147-148 is only metaphorical insofar as it can indirectly apply to men within the comparison of men and leaves – men’s death is, in a sense, being scattered to the ground; the idea of φύειν instead can be more obviously related to both humans and leaves, as the text itself reminds us – and it otherwise describes in a realistic manner the physical states of the

³⁸⁵ On the encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes cf. Redfield (1975), 102; Piccaluga (1980), concentrating on the general meaning of the episode in the wider context of the *Iliad*, more specifically on 6.146ff from page 247; Lowry (1995) on the details of the heroes’ interaction; Burgess (2001), 118-123.

life of the leaves. Leopardi's use of botanically-related terms instead pours out from the space of the simile, spreading freely over the Simonidean text. It exports the language of vegetation to describe by analogy moments or features of the existence of humans. And yet the strong vibrant presence of botanical language in *XLI* could be Leopardi's way of reminding the reader (the reader of his poem as well as that of Simonides') of the original context of the trope, and of the fact that, whereas Simonides only reports one verse (*Il.* 6.146), the original simile was much longer, and delved in more detail into the similarities between the life of men and that of natural elements such as the leaves.³⁸⁶ Giulia Piccaluga has furthermore suggested that the role of vegetation in the Glaucus-Diomedes episode ought to be seen not only in the space of the simile of verses 146-149, but also in the "dietary requirement" that forces βροτοί to cultivate and eat cereals to survive.³⁸⁷ But although the direct influence of the Homeric passage in shaping the language of *XLI* cannot be proven, the abundance of botanical terms certainly testifies to the fact that the Homeric trope of the leaves is for Leopardi the very core of the Simonidean fragment, key to the understanding of Simonides' thought and crucial to Leopardi's expression of his own worldview.

There is yet another explanation, which takes into account the context in which Leopardi found the text of Simonides. In book 4.34, only a few pages away from the Simonidean fragments, Stobaeus quotes a fragment by Mimnermus (Mimnermus 2 W²) that shares with Simonides' text not only the focus on the brevity and suffering of life mentioned by the title of Stobaeus' chapter, but also the use of the trope of the leaves. The two fragments are so remarkably similar in focus that it has been suggested repeatedly that they are connected and that one was written in response to the other.³⁸⁸ Just like Simonides' fragments, Mimnermus 2 explores the link between the life of man and that of the leaves. Similar to Simonides' fragment it tackles the brevity of existence, and it even expands on the age of youth as the only possible moment of happiness in a life that is otherwise short and miserable. More than Simonides', fr. 2 elaborates on the language of vegetal growth (φύλλα, πολυάνθεμος, ἔαρος, and ἄνθεσιν, all in the first

³⁸⁶ Cf. Bierl and Latacz's (2008), 59 commentary: "Blätter, Blüten oder Gras sind ein verbreitetes Bild für die Vergänglichkeit der Menschen."

³⁸⁷ Piccaluga (1980), 240 and 252-253.

³⁸⁸ Cf. Babut (1971) and Hubbard (1994) and (1996). Burgess (2001) suggests that Mimnermus is entirely independent from Homer.

three verses). The flourishing of this semantic area brings Leopardi's interpretation of Simonides one step closer to Mimnermus' fragment, and so do two other details in Leopardi's translation. First is the notion of unripeness and thus the presence of the fruit, a different stage in the growth of the plant: this is absent in Simonides, but appears in Mimnermus at verse 9 (καρπός). Second comes Leopardi's decision to turn the third person of Simonides' narration into a first person plural: the choice – which can be also justified by the desire to increase the emotional intensity of the poem – seems all the more striking if one compares it to the powerful Ἡμεῖς that opens fr. 2.³⁸⁹

2. *Umana cosa picciol tempo dura: Brevity and Ephemerality*

XLI's first line – “Umana cosa picciol tempo dura” – is Leopardi's adaptation of a verse composed by Joachim Camerarius (1551). Faced with a 13-verse poem (which we had up until the discovery of *POxy* 3965) starting with a pentameter, Camerarius fashioned a hexameter, in the attempt to fill in the gap and to complete the poem, which would have otherwise been limping on a pentametric beginning.³⁹⁰

οὐδὲν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μένει χρῆμα' ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ³⁹¹

The scholarship which has dealt with Leopardi's translation of Simonides in *XLI* has achieved diverse results in tackling the nature of its first line. While Saverio Orlando's analysis of the two Simonidean translations entirely ignores the issue, both Antonino Sole and Claudia Carella seem to maintain that the line is in fact Leopardi's own creation. Sole states that the line is “interamente leopardiano”,³⁹² and similarly does Carella in her 2010 book crediting the whole verse to Leopardi (although, oddly enough, she does not seem to be familiar with Sole's 2001 article).³⁹³ And yet Marcello Gigante's “Leopardi e Simonide” (published in *La parola del passato* in 1998 and again

³⁸⁹ For Leopardi's knowledge of Mimnermus, cf. *Zib.* 2589; Carella (2010), 178 (Carella does not seem to be acquainted with Sole's (2001) work).

³⁹⁰ See Sider (1996), 266 n. 5 for a brief history of the conjecture; Gigante (1998), 166-167. Note that Camerarius thought that only one verse must have been missing from the original.

³⁹¹ As Sider (1996), 266 n. 5 has correctly pointed out, Camerarius' suggestion finds some validation in the text of the new papyrus, which reads *παρμεν** in line 4 of fr. 20 W².

³⁹² Sole (2001), 337.

³⁹³ Sole (2001), 337; Carella (2010), 193.

in 2003 in the collection *Leopardi e l'antico*) clearly makes the point that Leopardi did not invent the line, but instead accepted it as part of the original poem.³⁹⁴

But beyond acknowledging that the line is not Leopardi's, one ought to confront the interpretative issues behind both Camerarius' original and Leopardi's translation. Sharing not only the mistake of attribution, Sole and Carella reach similar conclusions as to the verse's meaning, having paid little more than cursory attention to it. Having (correctly) stressed the line's gnomic character, Sole suggests that its role is that of a "conceptual compendium" for the entire fragment;³⁹⁵ similarly Carella states that the line is "una sentenza, che riassume il tema centrale".³⁹⁶ Marcello Gigante, whose main aim is not to tackle the interpretation of the line (a fact justified, perhaps, by the fact that he knows well that the line is not Leopardian) does not delve deeper into Leopardi's relationship with this line, being content with stating that Camerarius' verse "non suscitò né repugnanza né diffidenza nel Leopardi".³⁹⁷

In this section I wish to argue against the idea that Leopardi saw in *XLI*'s first line merely a summary of the themes of the poem. I instead propose that by translating the verse as he does, he is programmatically creating a conceptual bridge between his translations of the Stobean Simonides and Semonides 1, thus asking his reader to connect the two original poems. In particular, I believe that Leopardi is especially keen to link his understanding of two aspects of the poems, i.e. the trope of the leaves in the Stobean Simonides and the idea of ephemerality in Semonides 1.

³⁹⁴ Gigante (1998), 166 recalls how Hense deemed the verse "worthy of Simonides", and included it in his edition of Stobaeus. Gigante's seminal piece is oddly not referenced by Sole (2001) on the very same topic, resulting in Sole's mistaken interpretation. Carella's error is all the more surprising if one considers that her section on the Leopardi's Simonidean translations draws heavily (and sometimes word by word) on Gigante's article.

³⁹⁵ Sole (2001), 337.

³⁹⁶ Carella (2010), 193.

³⁹⁷ Gigante (1998), 167.

2.1. *A New Verse: Οὐδὲν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μένει χρῆμ' ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ*

Let us first tackle the content and form of Camerarius' Greek verse, and its possible meanings. When fashioning his conjectural verse, Camerarius must have turned to the corpus of Greek hexametric poetry he knew. This line is in fact carefully crafted from existing phrases and expressions. The very end of Camerarius' hexameter ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ is found many times across Greek literature and with a tendency to recur in the position at the end of a hexameter.³⁹⁸ Two of the occurrences listed in note 398 come from Theognis' collection (1.316; 318) – which Camerarius commented and annotated – where ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ is placed at the end of a hexameter.

The expression ἐν ἀνθρώποισι is a very common noun phrase, often used idiomatically in clauses with an adjective in the superlative to indicate the extension of the superlative itself.³⁹⁹ In some cases, such as Hesiod *Op.* 719-720 (γλώσσης τοι θησαυρὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἄριστος φειδωλῆς) the combination ἐν ἀνθρώποισι + superlative can be interpreted in the more literal sense: for men (but not for animals, or other beings) the best treasure is a sparing tongue. However in many other instances (and not exclusively when in combination with a superlative) ἐν ἀνθρώποισι acquires a meaning similar to “on earth”, “in the whole world”, or “under the sun”.⁴⁰⁰ The phrase is remarkably well-attested in the corpus of the *Theognidea*, with seven occurrences;⁴⁰¹ even more strikingly *Th.* 131 begins with the very combination of οὐδὲν and ἐν ἀνθρώποισι which Camerarius chose for Simonides' fragment, which leads us to imagine that the scholar might have used the corpus of Theognis as a study springboard for the fashioning of the

³⁹⁸ Using the text of Stobaeus as a sample field ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ is found 3 times: once in Book 1.3.53.8; and twice in two quotations from Theognis' elegiacs at 3.1.8.4 and 3.37.3.2. A few other instances in which the phrase occurs at the end of hexametric verse: Apollonius Rhodius 1.1076; Theogn. 1.316, 318; Hes. fr. 294 (Schol. Eur. Phoen. 1116 in Schwartz (1887), 366) in Merkelbach and West (1967), 152; *Argonautica Orphica* 347 in Vian (1987), 99.

³⁹⁹ See for example Franco Montanari's (1996), *Vocabolario della lingua greca* s.v. ἄνθρωπος, 211.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Sophocles *Trachiniae* 421, where the phrase is used in the context of an exclamation, to mean “To whom *on earth* (did I say it)?” (ποιόις ἐν ἀνθρώποισι;) or in Hdt 1.53.2 (Κροῖσος ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μούνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι) where arguably the μαντήια are on the earth or in the world, rather than among men. This process of generalisation (that brings the formula to be less about men than about the general condition of things) can lead to instances where ἐν ἀνθρώποισι is doing little more than reinforcing the superlative itself. When this is the case, translators may be even completely forgo the formula in their translation.

⁴⁰¹ *Th.* 131; 623; 637; 647; 1003; 1135; 1139.

missing verse. Two possible translations thus can be imagined for the line. One, more literal, reads “nothing lasts forever amongst men”. The other, which takes into account the idiomatic meaning of ἐν ἀνθρώποισι, translates along the lines of “nothing lasts forever on earth”. However one chooses to intend Camerarius’ take at a Simonidean hexameter, the verse concentrates on the impossibility of duration; in what sense we ought to think about duration remains to be seen.

One could argue that there is little if any difference in meaning between the two translations. And yet for someone as preoccupied as Leopardi was with the sorrowfully *unique* status of mankind – that pre-eminence of unhappiness we have observed in *Chapter 2* – and as keen as he was to investigate it, the difference is paramount. It is reasonable to argue that Leopardi, who by 1823 had read a vast amount of Greek literature, was aware of the two possibilities. “On earth” or “in the world” would not entail the necessary focus on humanity, which is after all at the very core of the Homeric and Simonidean texts as well. Significantly then Leopardi opts not only for the non-idiomatic version (“among humans”), but his translations emphasises further the presence and role of humans. Leopardi’s first line begins with the adjective “umana”, which – strictly speaking nowhere to be found in Camerarius – translates precisely ἐν ἀνθρώποισι, as if it were an adjective relating to χρῆμα (“umana cosa”). Leopardi sees in ἐν ἀνθρώποισι a sure reference to humankind, and only to humankind. The decision to bring it to the very opening of the verse – and thus to the very opening of the entire poem – emphasises Leopardi’s interpretation of the poem as a poem about human nature, and man as the focus of the enquiry of Simonides-commentator-of-Homer (and consequently of Homer).

Leopardi’s second step is to tackle the idea of duration conveyed by Camerarius’ ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ (which of course has to be read with the negation of the initial οὐδέν). First of all Leopardi chooses to discard the negation which is the very start of Camerarius’ concept. Whereas for Camerarius no-thing (οὐδέν χρῆμα) lasts forever (ἔμπεδον αἰεὶ), in *XLI* human thing(s) last but a “small” time. Leopardi suppresses the idea of a negative infinitum, opting instead for the notion of a small span of time. In this sense Leopardi’s version is more prosaically pessimistic than the 16th century Greek text:

human things not only do not last forever, but really they last only a “small time”. But what is crucial is that Leopardi’s translation brings the first verse one step closer to the rest of the text, both Homer’s and Simonides’, and thus closer to their own pessimism. The (objectively) brief life of the Homeric leaves is surely much more truthfully depicted by Leopardi’s “picciol tempo” than by the idea of the lack of eternity. What is more, “picciol tempo” is in fact the literal translation of the Simonidean χρόνος ὀλίγος (11).⁴⁰²

These are, arguably, Leopardi’s main actions in translating Camerarius’ verse. But what did Leopardi see in verse 1 and how are we supposed to understand the idea that “umana cosa picciol tempo dura”? I believe that Leopardi’s translation of verse 1 points us towards two different ways of reading the trope of the leaves. The first one is to see in *XLI*’s line 1 the first proposition of that idea of brevity which is to play such a crucial role in the poem: section 2.2. thus explores the ways in which the original Homeric passage, Simonides’ poem, and, as a consequence, Leopardi’s *XLI* can be seen as perspectives on the brevity of human existence. Section 2.3. then proposes that Leopardi’s translation of Camerarius’ verse 1 is meant to lead the reader towards a further and different meaning of the simile of the leaves.

2.2. *Leaves and the Brevity of Human Life*

One obvious interpretation is to say that the line – “human things last but a small time” – refers quite simply to the briefness of human existence. That this motif could be read in the Iliadic episode from which Simonides is quoting does not surprise, as the shortness of human life is in many ways present in the Homeric scene.⁴⁰³ First, the idea that life is brief is obvious in the context of the encounter between two warriors of opposites sides, the Trojan Glaucus and the Greek Diomedes. Everything in the text – from Diomedes’ unsuppressible bravery in his *aristeia* in book 5, to Helenus’ speech to Hector and Aeneas’ warning about the seriousness of the threat that Diomedes still represents for the Trojan army in book 6.96-101 – suggests that one of the two lives is

⁴⁰² Already a Homeric combination, cf. *Il.* 19.157; 23.418.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Kirk’s (1990), 176 commentary reading in the simile the idea that “life is transient”.

at stake.⁴⁰⁴ And although to the audience's surprise the meeting will not result in battle and death, but in civilised conversation and ultimately in the exchange of armour, the notion of the fast approach of death, and of the possibility of premature departure from the world of the living remains hanging in the air. But aside from the context, it is the actual conversation between the two warriors – and in particular Glaucus' use of the trope of the leaves – that sheds more light on the role of the notion of brevity in the episode.

As the two warriors meet on the battlefield, Diomedes addresses Glaucus by asking him who he is among mortal men (τίς δὲ σὺ ἐσσι φέριστε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, v. 123), adding through the *exemplum* of Lycurgus his reason for asking: he wants to make sure he is not going to fight a god, and, since gods have been mingling in the battle indistinguishable from humans, it is vital to ascertain Glaucus' identity.⁴⁰⁵ It is to this question that the Greek warrior replies with the simile that compares men and leaves (*Il.* 6.146-149): men are like leaves which the wind scatters to the ground, but the forest grows back once spring has come.

The entire simile is grounded on ideas of time and duration. This is evident first and foremost in the mention of the seasons of nature: spring (ἔαρος) is explicitly mentioned at 148, and the wind (ἄνεμος) of verse 147 can be seen as symbolising the cold seasons. The idea of time is once again present in the incessant and cyclical movement of regrowth and death, death and regrowth, which is visually represented by the mention of the two alternate moments: death and life for the leaves (147-148), and life and death for men (149), in a never-ending cycle. The alarming proximity of the two moments is further conveyed by the handful of months that separate the leaves' birth from their falling, and by the physical closeness of φύω and ἀπολήγω, curtly listed in verse 149: the simile cannot but leave the human reader with a sense of the shortness of his existence. Together with the sense of the swiftness of life, the trope also instills in man

⁴⁰⁴ And possibly Glaucus' life. Also, book 6 opens on the tense atmosphere of a long list of mortal combats (*Il.* 6.5-36) and the one encounter which we observe in close-up – the one between Adrastus and Menelaus – ends with Menelaus' rejection of the Trojan's appeal for salvation.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Gaisser (1969), 166-167 on Diomedes' awareness of the limitations of his mortal status (with textual examples). Piccaluga (1980), 238-243 on Diomedes' insistence on avoiding a fight with an immortal.

the feeling of the necessity of his mortality. Only two moments connect the existence of the leaves to that of men: the moment of birth and growth (φύω in both cases) and that of dying (χέω and ἀπολήγω respectively). If all else is subject to change, these two moments are unavoidable and necessary.

On the basis of the simile, men and leaves share two cardinal moments of existence, birth and death. In both cases – the briefness of existence and the necessity of death – the likening of men and leaves seems to hint at another term of comparison. In comparison with whose life is the life-span of humans as short as that of the leaves? And again, which being is exempt from mortality, which seems to be the very staple of existence? The response is, in both cases, the gods. The difference in duration between the life of men and gods is virtually unmeasurable; set against the existence of the immortals the life of humans is all too similar to the seasonal life-span of the leaves, and the comparison gains credibility. And it is again the gods who, alone, are immune to the binary rhythm of human and natural life.⁴⁰⁶ There is some irony in this: the being which man believes he resembles the most, the one that men imagine and portray as better versions of themselves, and the being which Diomedes is so scared to meet in battle, indistinguishable from other humans, is in fact the one being which is eventually less similar to man than the leaves are. The gods are the necessary counterpart to the two halves of the simile, men and leaves.⁴⁰⁷ Not only is their implicit presence entirely understandable in the context of a response to the enquiry of Diomedes, aimed at verifying Glaucus' nature, but it is also vital in highlighting and underscoring further the briefness inherent in human existence.⁴⁰⁸ It is worth remembering that the trope reappears in the words of a god, Apollo, at *Il.* 462-466, as he tells Poseidon that he will

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Piccaluga (1980), 247 who sees the episode as “tramato sulla falsariga dell’opposizione immortalità/morte”.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Nagy (1999), 179-210 who, discussing Hesiod *Works and Days*, contrasts the “artificial continuum of immortality” and “the natural cycle of life and death as symbolized by the flourishing and wilting of leaves on trees”. The lack of winter in the Golden Age (*Op.* 117-118) as on the Isles of the Blessed (*Op.* 172-173) is contrasted with the inevitability of the passing of time on earth.

⁴⁰⁸ It is precisely the comparison between the duration of the life of man in the sight of the immortality of God that triggers in *Psalms* 89 (4-6) the connection between men and another natural element, grass, cf. Fränkel (1946), 132, using this passage in his analysis of *ephemeros*.

not join the human fight; the nature of humans – their brevity and their unbridgeable difference with the gods – is the reason the fight is not worth it.⁴⁰⁹

The shortness of human existence figures prominently also in Simonides' fragment as Leopardi would have read it.⁴¹⁰ It seems certain that Simonides understood the Homeric simile to convey the sense of the brevity of human life: verses 4-12 of the Stoabean Simonides delve into the vain hopes of the man who is not aware of his mortality, and verses 10-12 in particular remind the reader of how brief (ὀλίγος) life is. But Simonides goes further: not only does he remark and comment upon the notion of the shortness of life, but he further suggests that the trope of the leaves is also warning man about the shortness of youth. In Simonides' interpretation then the comparison with the leaves provides a parallel not only for the overall brevity of human existence – from life to death – but also for the swift nature of the bloom of young age. Youth is *par excellence* the time for those hopes and illusions (5) which are destined to be proved false by the arrival of old age, illness, and in the end, death (6-9). What this blinding hope ultimately does is to prevent man from seeing the brevity of life *and* youth (ἥβης καὶ βίτου ὀλίγος, 11-12).

XLI shows without a doubt that Leopardi too thought of brevity as being one of the crucial notions conveyed by the trope of the leaves. Not only does he translate the references to brevity already contained in Simonides' fragment (lines 17-19), but once again he intensifies the presence of this theme in his own rendition of the Greek poem. The two portions of Simonides' statement that χρόνος ἔσθ' ἥβης καὶ βίτου ὀλίγος θνητοῖς (where both βίτος and ἥβη depend on χρόνος) are now made independent and turned into two separate clauses (lines 16-18 in *XLI*). The first one depicts the velocity of youth – described metaphorically as winged – and the latter develops the idea of the brief span of life (χρόνος βίτου ὀλίγος) by suggesting that in the metaphorical path of

⁴⁰⁹ Nagy (1999), 178 on φθινόθουσιν as portraying the “natural aspect of death” common to humans and leaves.

⁴¹⁰ Babut (1971), 24 seems to agree that brevity is at the core of fr. 8 W, as he briefly suggests that the fragment is not about “l'instabilité, l'inconsistance de la nature humaine” but rather about the modern idea of ephemerality. Yet he seems to interpret the mention of human ephemerality – together with the invitation to enjoy the present pleasure at the close of the poem – as a sign of the poet's hedonistic superficiality, and as a minor *carpe diem* (contrasting this hedonism with the “more profound” work of Mimnermus).

life, the cradle is (almost physically) very close (but literally “poco lontano”) to the pyre (“rogo”). Brevity is also, very clearly, in the final line of *XLI* (“La breve età commetti”). This time however the term chosen by Leopardi (“breve”)⁴¹¹ does not translate any specific Greek word, but rather echoes the idea expressed by βίτου ποτὶ τέρμα (12): the man who is close to death is invited to trust the brief time he has left (“breve età”) to the present enjoyments.

2.3. “*Umana cosa picciol tempo dura*”: *Leaves and the Precariousness of Human Life*

The first line of *XLI* could thus easily be taken simply as a statement on the short span of all human things: from the objective brevity of human existence to the even shorter life of its seasons. As we have seen, this statement is on its own – as Camerarius wrote it – and in Leopardi’s translation a declaration of the brevity of human things; furthermore, both the importance of the notion of brevity in the original Homeric episode and in the Stobaen Simonides, and Leopardi’s peculiar attention to this concept in his rendition, vouch for the centrality of the theme. And yet I wish to suggest that Leopardi’s translation of Camerarius’ verse points the reader (also) in another direction.

The choice of rendering the Greek μένει with the Italian “durare” is possibly the least striking part of Leopardi’s translation of Camerarius’ verse: the overlap of meaning in the two languages is almost complete. Yet the same Italian verb is also found somewhere else in Leopardi’s Simonidean translations in a much less obvious place. “Durare” appears – in the same person and number as in *XLI* – in line 9 of Leopardi’s *XL Dal greco di Simonide*, the translation of Semonides 1 W², which Leopardi could again read in Stobaeus 4.34. Here are the first verses of both texts, which are discussed more closely in this section. The complete texts can be found at *Appendix 4a* and *4b*.⁴¹²

ὦ παῖ, τέλος μὲν Ζεὺς ἔχει βαρύκτοπος

⁴¹¹ The previous version read “dubbia” instead of “breve”, showing how the final choice is the result of a complex process, cf. Gigante (1998), 187. *Ibid.* 189 recalls how critics have suggested that even the choice of the metre is the result of a wish to render “il breve rapido scorrere della vita”.

⁴¹² Semonides’ text is from West (1992), 99-100. Cf. Gerber’s (1984) commentary. *XL* in *TPP* (2013), 215.

πάντων ὅσ' ἐστὶ καὶ τίθησ' ὅκηι θέλει,
νοῦς δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν, ἀλλ' ἐπήμεροι
ἄ δὴ βοτὰ ζόουσιν, οὐδὲν εἰδότες
ὅκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός. 5

Ogni mondano evento
è di Giove in poter, di Giove, o figlio,
che giusta suo talento
ogni cosa dispone.
Ma di lunga stagione 5
nostro cieco pensier s'affanna e cura,
benchè l'umana etate,
come destina il ciel nostra ventura,
di giorno in giorno dura.⁴¹³

Semonides' poem begins with a discussion of the role of god in the world, combined with the declaration of man's utter incapacity to understand not only the unfolding of such action, but even the factuality of the absolute freedom and power inherent in god's role (1-5).⁴¹⁴ In the following verse man's inability is further explained with the human tendency to hope for an optimistic future (6-10). Verses 11-19 unveil the truth about the vain nature of human hope, thus piecing together the first two sections of the poem. If man knew more about the real operation of the world's mechanisms, he would not entertain vain illusions, but instead look at reality for what it is: the arrival of grim old age, the diseases, the chances to be slain at war or on the sea, or even to die by one's own hand. The poem closes on two notes. On the one hand, the conclusion about the myriad of evils that surround man, of which one grows aware once he has removed the veil of false hopes (20-22); on the other hand the poet's recommendation not to wallow in sorrows, tormenting our heart more than it already is tormented (22-24).

⁴¹³ "Whatever happens here/ Is in the power of Jove, O son of man,/ And he decides it all/ According to his will./ But blindly we take thought/ And struggle after things of distant date,/ Although it is our fate,/ As Heaven determined was to be the way,/ To live from day to day."

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Gerber (1984), 126 on ὅκηι θέλει for other instances within Greek literature of "the [common] idea that Zeus (or the gods) disposes according to his wishes". Cf. Versnel (2011), 153-154 and 157-158 for a collection of other lyric sources expressing similar worldviews.

Let us concentrate on Leopardi's translation of Semonides' 3-5, which become lines 5-9 of *XL*. As one can see at a first glance, Leopardi's translation of these verses is far from literal.⁴¹⁵ The two texts are in fact so remarkably different that it can seem problematic to follow Leopardi's reasoning in translating the passage. Semonides' text as we have it is quite linear. It begins with a blunt statement about man's lack of *voũç*: from what man is not – or rather has not – the fragment goes on to describe man's state: men are *ephemeroi* and they live like cattle.⁴¹⁶ The second half of the passage seems to disclose the reason behind the similarity: humans are like animals insofar as they ignore the mechanisms of divine action. These very mechanisms are the ones that the fragment is going to explore in verses 11-19, and to ultimately declare irrevocably at 20-22. Leopardi's line of reasoning is significantly different. After having stated the overarching power of Zeus in lines 1-5 – and, in doing so, having remained substantially faithful to the Semonidean text – Leopardi needs to tackle Semonides' declaration of the limits of human understanding. In his version, the blind human intellect worries and distresses about a long span of time (presumably in the future), *despite the fact* that in reality human life “lasts from day to day”, and that the sky (the divine) decides our destiny (lines 5-9).

The marked difference between the two texts is first of all explained by the textual differences between our text and the one preserved in the editions available to Leopardi.⁴¹⁷ The 16th century editions presented a number of different readings for verse 3 and 4, originating from the corrupted text possessed by Gessner.⁴¹⁸ As Simonetta Randino has convincingly suggested, the vain and agitated wanderings of *XLI*'s “Ma di lunga stagione / Nostro cieco pensier s'affanna e cura” are explained by the Stephanus' *lectio* νόος δ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν οὐκ ἐφημέροις ἔστ', ἀλλ' ἐφήμεροι βροτοὶ δὴ ζῶομεν.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Sole's (2001), 328-329 analysis of this passage which presents very different conclusions, mostly summarised in the idea that the translation has a “spiccato animus leopardiano”. Noteworthy is the mention of the position of “di giorno in giorno dura”, placed at the end of line 9, which according to Sole mirrors “la collocazione in clausola, ossia, in posizione evidente, di ἐπήμεροι”.

⁴¹⁶ See Gerber (1969) on the interpretation of Semonides 1.4. See also Gerber's commentary (1984) on ἐπήμεροι, summarising the various positions of interpreters.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Gessner (1559), 529.

⁴¹⁸ See Randino (2000), 247-248 for details of the (obviously) incorrect text of Gessner's edition preceding his conjectures.

⁴¹⁹ This version resembles Gessner's conjecture, see Randino (2000), 248.

Henry Estienne’s text is certainly one of the reasons for Leopardi’s choice to drop the reference to animals: although he read βροτοί in Estienne’s edition, he could find βοτᾶ in Gessner’s, as part of the damaged text which Gessner will amend, substituting βοτᾶ with βροτοί.⁴²⁰ One further reason for Leopardi to avoid the reference to cattle is that he simply could not agree with Semonides’ understanding of other living creatures as a *comparandum* for man; as I have shown in *Chapter 2*, Leopardi rather believed that the type of νοῦς possessed by animals allows them to be superior to men in the art of living.⁴²¹ For Leopardi, it is rather that the human type of νοῦς is incorrectly directed, or even blind.⁴²² Leopardi substitutes for the absence of thought, one of the attributes that he deems most distinctive of the human intellect, and at the same time one of the most harmful to humankind: the tendency to look at the future. It could also be argued that Leopardi is in such a way rendering the future tense – that future at which humans gaze without understanding – of Semonides’ verse 5 (ἐκτελευτήσει). Aside from being triggered by the variants in the two editions, this notion draws on the wider content of Semonides 1 and on its discussion of man’s hope.

Leopardi thus designs an opposition between the human tendency to gaze into the future and man’s congenital inability to see (“cieco pensier”), let alone understand, the operation behind such future events (a lack of knowledge already expressed by Semonides: νοῦς δ’ οὐκ ἐπ’ ἀνθρώποισιν; οὐδὲν εἰδότες). But more than contrasting man’s leaning towards the future and the state of man’s mind (the lack of consciousness), *XL* contrasts this peculiar human propensity and the state of man’s *life*. The real condition of man’s existence is, as Leopardi understands it, ephemerality. What did Leopardi make of Semonides’ notion of ephemerality in the context of *XL*? Whereas Semonides used ἐπήμερος as an adjective referring to ἀνθρώποισιν, Leopardi on the one hand modifies the reference to humans: Semonides’ ἄνθρωποι become “l’umana etate”. On the other hand he employs one whole line (line 9) for the purpose of translating ἐπήμερος, which he translates as “di giorno in giorno dura”. Leopardi’s translation

⁴²⁰ Gerber (1969) on βοτᾶ in Semonides 1.4

⁴²¹ Cf. Babut (1971), 20-21 proposing that the fact that Semonides sees intelligence as the distinctive trait of humans – rather than the more Homeric “faiblesse” – may suggest that for Semonides it is precisely man’s reason which “le rend le plus misérable des êtres ‘qui respirent et qui marchent sur la terre’ ”.

⁴²² For the characterisation of man’s limitations of understanding as a physical impairment, and, specifically blindness, cf. Parmenides 6 DK 6-9 in Diels and Kranz (1951-2), 232-233.

preserves the etymological origin of the adjective and makes it explicit by directly referencing the day (ἡμέρα) as the core of the concept. Line 9 – read jointly with its subject in line 7, “umana etate” – suggests that human life lasts “from day to day”.⁴²³

One could be tempted to read in this yet another declaration of the brevity of human existence. And yet, although this notion is here indirectly implied, the point is different. Rather than focusing on the duration of human life, Leopardi concentrates on the reasons behind its possible brevity. Human life *can* be brief, but indeed it can also be long and lead to a painful old age, or it can be full of woes and illnesses. The point is rather that man is not in control. From day to day man is at the complete disposal of the god who τέλος ἔχει [...] πάντων ὅσ’ ἐστὶ καὶ τίθησ’ ὅκηι θέλει (fr. 1.1-2) and who ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει (5).⁴²⁴ In interpreting ἐπήμερος in such a way, Leopardi is using Semonides’ own conception of the condition of humans as found in fr. 1: *XL*’s line 8 (“Come destina il ciel nostra ventura”) is the translation of Semonides’ verse 5 (ὅκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός), which Leopardi joins with his interpretation of the Semonidean notion of ἐπήμερος. What Leopardi reads in ἐπήμερος is chiefly the fluctuation and precariousness inherent in the position of humans in the universe. The role of humans is that of passive recipients at the mercy of external forces, a portrayal of man that strongly resonates with Achilles’ description of the condition of humans and of the role of the gods in *Iliad* 24 –⁴²⁵ humans *to whom* the gods assign the thread of destiny (ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι, *Il.* 24.525) and who live awaiting the lot contained in the two jars to which only Zeus has access.

But there is more: with his translation of ἐπήμερος Leopardi is constructing a parallel between *XLI*’s first verse “umana cosa picciol tempo dura” and lines 7 and 9 of *XL*, “l’umana etate [...] di giorno in giorno dura”. This parallel, far from being merely formal and verbal, is crucial to Leopardi’s interpretation of the wisdom of Simonides,

⁴²³ The meaning does not change if one translates “etate” with the more obvious “age”.

⁴²⁴ Cf. Laurenti (1964), 86-87 understands man’s attitude in Semonides as “rinunciatorio” and “indifferente”, although at the same time admitting that man could not fairly claim what is not in his power. *Ibid.* 87 for a list of other lyric sources expressing a similar message about the role of the divine. See Babut (1971), 20 on fr. 1: “un tableau fortement contrasté, opposant la puissance divine, qui paraît ici sans limite, à l’impuissance de l’homme”.

⁴²⁵ And with a number of other passages in Greek literature, cf. *Chapter 4*.

and essential to the formulation of Leopardi's own worldview and conception of human existence as a reception of Greek thought. The comparison of humans and leaves – and hence the notion of the brief duration of human existence – is now tightly interlocked with the idea that whatever happens to human affairs is out of man's control.⁴²⁶ The idea of duration (“dura” in both texts) is now imbued with the idea of the complete fluctuation of man's destiny: man's brevity is but one aspect of the wider nature of the human condition. The simile of the leaves acquires thus another layer of meaning: just as the leaves are subject to the winds and to all sort of external elements, so men are at the mercy of the will – or even simply of the behaviour – of the divine. I thus wish to argue that we ought to see Leopardi's two poems also as a purposeful study about the Greek conception of human existence. As he works and reworks the Greek texts, Leopardi explores, scrutinises, and ultimately internalises the portrait of human existence painted by the comparison with the leaves and by the idea of ephemerality. Each helps explain the other, and they both cooperate in resurrecting the Greek notion of human life, and in creating Leopardi's own.⁴²⁷

Finally, I wish to look at Leopardi's interpretation of ἐφήμερος in the context of the 20th century debate about the meaning of the Greek term, centred around Hermann Fränkel's 1946 article “Man's 'Ephemeris' Nature According to Pindar and Others” and Matthew Dickie's “On the Meaning of ἐφήμερος” (1976). The disagreement between the two scholars is certainly grounded in a different interpretation of the Greek term, and yet the difference between the respective arguments is not unbreachable; in fact, to a certain extent and regarding specific points, Fränkel and Dickie are in agreement. Yet, partially because Fränkel is very keen to stress one particular side of his interpretation, and partially because Dickie fails at times to do justice to the nuances of Fränkel's reading, the two are often read in opposition. Let us first look at the basic assumptions of the opposing sides of the debate.

⁴²⁶ That the two ideas could indeed be understood as closely relating is apparent in Theocritus *Id.* 30.31-32 (ἔμε μάν, φύλλον ἐπάμερον σμίκρας δεύμενον αὔρας, ὀνέλων ὄκα φόρει πνόα); Gow (1950), 517-519 connects the passage with *Il.* 6.146 and comments that Theocritus' “point is not the brevity of human life but the levity of human affections and emotions, which are the sport of every wind”, but does not go further and does not connect the passage with passages containing ἐφήμερος.

⁴²⁷ Leopardi's belief that the two poems had shared authorship contributed to the creation of this connection.

In his article Fränkel proposed that the Greek term “does not mean ‘creature of one day, shortlived’, but ‘subject to the (changing) day, variable’”.⁴²⁸ Fränkel’s argument does in truth heavily insist on the idea that ἐφήμερος refers to the changeability of the human nature and of the human mind; as in Pindar’s *Nemean* 6.3-6 or in *Odyssey* 18.130-140 the instability of the human mind conveyed by ἐφήμερος coincides with our ignorance about our destiny, a point very similar to that made by Semonides fr. 1 about man’s lack of νοῦς.⁴²⁹ Yet, nowhere does Fränkel claim that this is the only meaning of ἐφήμερος, but suggests that ἐπήμερος can present the human condition from an external point of view, as the collection of events – both fortunes and misfortunes – that will affect man during his life span (Fränkel thinks of the Herodotean Solon πᾶν ἐστὶ ἄνθρωπος συμφορῆ at Hdt. 1.32 or of ἐφήμερος as corresponding to the Latin *in potestate fortunae*).⁴³⁰ Dickie, who is not convinced that ἐφήμερος conveys the meaning of internal changeability or of human lack of understanding, acknowledges almost exclusively Fränkel’s contention that ἐφήμερος signifies internal mutability, or that “the human spirit is subject to abrupt shifts – it is sometimes confident and sometimes despondent”.⁴³¹

Dickie proposes that ἐφήμερος means “short-lived”, and should be read as a description not only of the duration of human existence, but also of the “inconstancy of human fortune and the brevity of human felicity”.⁴³² Both Fränkel and Dickie analyse Semonides 1 in search of the meaning of ἐφήμερος. Whereas Fränkel understands the term as if it were meant to be explained by the following clause (ἄ δὴ βοτὰ ζούουσιν, οὐδὲν εἰδότες ὅκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός) and thus as conveying man’s lack of understanding, Dickie interprets it as instead another term to describe the ἄνθρωποι of verse 3.⁴³³

⁴²⁸ Fränkel (1946), 131.

⁴²⁹ Fränkel (1946), 135,137.

⁴³⁰ Fränkel (1946), 134-135. Although it is true that Dickie’s critique of Fränkel applies to Fränkel’s interpretation of *Pythian* 8.95f, in which the latter reads the “mutability of the human spirit” rather than the “inconsistency of human fortune”, cf. Fränkel (1946), 134; Dickie (1976), 8.

⁴³¹ Dickie (1976), 8.

⁴³² In doing so Dickie’s analysis actually encompasses some of the meanings that Fränkel too considers.

⁴³³ Cf. Fränkel (1946), 137; Dickie (1976), 10-11. On ἐφήμερος cf. also Babut (1971), 21, according to whom Semonides 1 employs the term to define human nature “instable et sans consistence”;

Leopardi's reading of ἐφήμερος in Semonides 1 anticipates and responds to the future debate in several ways. If Fränkel's insistence on the new meaning of ἐφήμερος – not “short-lived” but “changeable” – is to be taken as a sign that the privileged interpretation among his contemporaries was indeed “short-lived” (i.e. having a brief life) then Leopardi's nuanced understanding of the term is one step ahead of the game. With his translation of ἐφήμερος in *XLI* – and with the connection he draws between it and the exegesis of Homer *Il.* 6.146 in *XL* – Leopardi is, many years before Fränkel, opening up the discussion about the meaning of the term and at the same time providing a nuanced range of possible interpretations. Leopardi is also, in a way, anticipating Dickie's point: just as Dickie will suggest, in *XLI* ἐφήμερος is read and understood in the context of Semonides' wider text (and in particular in the context of verses 1-5, stating the passive condition of man in the universe) thus allowing for the three meanings – brevity, submission, and fluctuation – to tightly coexist in the two Simonidean renditions.

Vermeule (1979), 24 concentrates on the fact that it is man's lack of intelligence that renders us *ephemeroi*, and unable to understand our destiny. Gerber (1984), 127 on ἐφήμερος at verse 3 “there may be nothing in the context [...] to suggest a reference to the brevity of human life, but why should the rest of the context determine the meaning of this particular adjective”; in doing so Babut is reading Dickie's “short-lived” in the most literal sense. Babut believes Dickie to have “thrown much doubt” on Fränkel's idea.

II

Ephemerality, the *Operette*, and the *Zibaldone* (from 1823)

1. Ἐφήμερος, *Pindar and Simonides* – 1823-1824

That the Greek notion of the human condition conveyed in the trope of the leaves and in the word Ἐφήμερος had a strong impact on Leopardi's own conception of man's nature and existence is shown not only by the extraordinary care that he dedicates to the two ideas in his Simonidean translations, but also by the recurrence of such motifs at critical points in his later work. I wish now briefly to discuss the presence of this idea in one of the *Operette Morali*, the *Proposta di premi fatta dall'accademia dei sillografi*, with the aid of a constellation of passages from other works as well. The *Proposta* delves into the idea of human ephemerality chiefly by skillfully playing with an image drawn from Pindar's *Pythian* 8, an image that likens men to dreams of shadows (*Pyth.* 8.95) and that becomes for Leopardi the centre of reflections on the peculiarities of human existence. Such reflection is profoundly woven into the fabric of Leopardi's contemporary interests: composed in 1824, the *Proposta*'s rethinking of the Pindaric *gnome* takes place shortly after – or perhaps even at the same time as – the translation of the two Simonidean fragments. In tackling the Pindaric *gnome* and the conception of human existence offered by the two Simonidean texts Leopardi is exploring common territory: the similarity between the two is underscored by the fact that the very same verse of the Pindaric ode (*Pyth.* 8.95) employed in the *Proposta* begins with the terms Ἐφήμερος.⁴³⁴ This makes Pindar's *Pythian* – and consequently its interpretation in the *Proposta* – another text fundamental to Leopardi's reading of Ἐφήμερος, and thus one worth considering alongside the two Simonidean translations.⁴³⁵

The *Proposta di premi fatta dall'Accademia dei Sillografi* is a heavily satirical piece whose main target is modern man's deluded faith in progress, and the vanity and

⁴³⁴ In the *Pythian* the characterisation which Leopardi employs – man as the dream of a shadow – appears as the response to the double question τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; But this definition comes in fact after the one given at the very beginning of verse 95, where βροτοί are called ἐπάμεροι. Cf. Gentili (1995), 585: “‘effimeri’, nel senso di ‘creature che mutano condizione in un giorno’”. The notion of man's nature as Ἐφήμερος is thus set in between the expression of the brevity (ἐν δ' ὀλίγῳ) of human joy (τὸ τερπνόν) and the aforementioned reference to human life as the dream of a shadow.

⁴³⁵ Polato (2007), 65-114 on Leopardi and Pindar is one of the best works on Leopardi and antiquity, and, despite some difference in interpretations, a fundamental work on the subject of this section.

ultimate insubstantiality of progress itself. Set in an ever-evolving age of the machine (in which man's material needs are accommodated by a variety of devices) the *Proposta* foreshadows a future in which man's spiritual needs too will be fulfilled by machines. This new state of human evolution sees men further and further removed from active participation in the affairs of human life, which is now almost entirely in the hands of the machines. Such a situation is the ultimate and intrinsic defeat of the idea of progress and is shaped by the conviction that no real internal progress is possible for mankind, whose unhappiness and flaws are so deeply rooted and so profoundly inherent in the human condition that the only way to improve it is to have the machines take over human activity whenever possible.

In the *Proposta* Leopardi describes the institution of the Accademia dei Sillografi and its newly launched contest for the creation of three revolutionary machines.⁴³⁶ Having illustrated the features that the first device ought to have – those of a true friend, loyal and trustworthy in every respect – Leopardi goes on to present the Accademia's thoughts on the creation of such an appliance. Surely, thinks the Accademia, building the machine will be neither impossible nor very hard: the mechanical skills that have already allowed man to build marvellous and ingenious devices, such as those able to draw, write, or even play chess are proof.⁴³⁷ It is at this point that the author introduces two more arguments to prove the ease of production of the machine.⁴³⁸

Ora a giudizio di molti savi, la vita umana è un giuoco, ed alcuni affermano che ella è cosa ancora più lieve, e che tra le altre, la forma del giuoco degli scacchi è più secondo ragione, e i casi più prudentemente ordinati che non sono quelli di essa vita. La quale oltre a ciò, per detto di Pindaro, non essendo cosa di più sostanza che un sogno di un'ombra, ben debbe esserne capace la veglia di un automato.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶ *TPP* (2013), 506-507. On the Accademia and the *silloi*, see Galimberti (1998a), 110 n. 1, who connects it to *Zib.* 4035.

⁴³⁷ See Melosi (2015), 70 notes 38-41.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Simonides 646 *PMG* for the idea of *παίζειν ἐν τῷ βίῳ*.

⁴³⁹ *TPP* (2013), 507. Cecchetti (1983), 81: "Now, in the judgment of many wise men, human life is only a game; and some even declare that it is more frivolous and that, among other things, the game of chess is more rationally constructed and its moves more wisely organized than those of human life – which, according to Pindar, is no more substantial than the dream of a shadow, and thus a robot should easily be able to discharge its function".

Two different comparisons are put forward for the purpose of describing the lack of difficulty of the task. The first one draws on the aforementioned example of the chess-playing machines, suggesting that life is a game. The second comparison follows immediately, somewhat wedged inside the idea of the similarity between human life and a game of chess. The trivial character of human existence is validated by the fact that – besides being a game – human life does not have more substance than a “dream of a shadow”. The two ideas – the game and the dream of a shadow – are tightly interconnected: if human life is nothing but the dream of a shadow – a double layer of dormant insubstantiality – then a “waking automaton” (as Leopardi calls it) can certainly parallel, and possibly surpass, the performance of any man.⁴⁴⁰

As Leopardi himself makes sure to acknowledge, the second comparison is not his own, but Pindar’s.⁴⁴¹ This simile is, in fact, a direct quotation of *Pythian* 8.95-96 – with the one difference, that in Pindar’s poem man is the dream of a shadow, whereas Leopardi makes “human life” the subject of the definition.⁴⁴² The “mistake” appears not only in the *Proposta*, but also in the *Zibaldone* entry that precedes it, *Zib.* 2672, dated to February 1823:

Le plus grand des malheurs est de naître, le plus grand des bonheurs, de mourir. (Sophocl. Oedip. Colon. v. 1289. Bacchyl. et alii ap. Stob. serm. 96. p. 530. 531. Cic. tusc. l. i. c. 48. t. 2. p. 273.) La vie, disoit Pindare, n’est que le rêve d’une ombre (Pyth. 8. v. 136.); image sublime, et qui d’un seul trait peint tout le néant de l’homme. Même ouvrage. ch. 28. p. 137. t. 3. (10. Feb. 1823.).

⁴⁴⁰ Cecchetti (1983) fails to translate the Italian “veglia” (wakefulness), which is opposed to the idea of “dream” in the original.

⁴⁴¹ Just as it had been for his use of the notion of ephemerality in his revival of Simonides, the *Proposta* shows Leopardi’s willingness to declare the source of the idea. Although the *Proposta* is rather unclear about the provenance of the two comparisons within the piece – whether they ought to be ascribed to the narrator or to the members of the Accademia – Leopardi is instead very careful in displaying their sources, which perform the role of *auctoritates*. The former is announced as matter of agreement amongst those who have wisdom “a giudizio di molti savi” (in the judgement of many wise men). Whereas this attribution remains rather vague, the latter idea is instead preceded by a specific reference to Pindar. Rather than weakening the argument, the pre-existence of the idea is for Leopardi an invaluable validation of its soundness. Polato (2007), 78 recalls how Leopardi could read in Barthélemy’s chapter the idea that Pindar was held as *auctoritas* by not only ancient poets but also philosophers.

⁴⁴² Polato (2007), 65-66. Cf. also Polizzi (2011), 92-93.

As Guido Polato has correctly spotted, the difference in the quotation is a clear indication of the source of Leopardi's reference to Pindar, the "même ouvrage" mentioned by Leopardi himself, who had been consulting the work of the Barthélemy for some time: the *Zibaldone* quotation comes in fact from the chapter "Suite des moeurs des Athéniens" of the *Voyage*.⁴⁴³

Pythian 8 is written for the occasion of Aristomenes of Aegina's victory in the wrestling competition of 446 BC.⁴⁴⁴ The poem, besides being a celebration of Aristomenes' success, is a reflection on the nature of victory that opens out to become a reflection on the contingencies of human life, a theme that finds explicit articulation towards the end of the poem.⁴⁴⁵ Just as the poet recollects the champion's past victories (78-87) he goes back once and for all to the theme he has hinted at several times earlier in the poem: the instability of human fortunes.⁴⁴⁶ The theme is brought to full light from verse 88 onwards, and in particular in verses 92-96, where the idea is expressed in general terms that suggest the universal validity of the notion conveyed. Here occurs the passage referenced in the *Proposta*.

ἐν δ' ὀλίγῳ βροτῶν
τὸ τερπνὸν αὔξεταί· οὔτω δὲ καὶ πίνει χαμαί,

⁴⁴³ The fact that Leopardi chose to reference Pindar's idea in the form in which he had read it in the *Voyage* does not in any way mean that Leopardi never had access to the original work of Pindar, see instead Polato (2007), 67-68 and 73 on the editions available in Leopardi's library.

⁴⁴⁴ On *Pythian* 8, cf. Fränkel (1946), 131-133, who starts with it his analysis of ἐφήμερος; he believes the *Pythian* to have "nothing whatever to do with the brevity of human life" and everything to do with the notion of "exposed and subject to every actuality as it arises", i.e. our personality is shifting with the changing day. See also Pippin Burnett (2005), 220-238, more specifically 236-237 on the verses discussed here. Giannini (1982) is entirely concerned with verses 95ff and especially with the meaning of the phrase τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὔ τις .

⁴⁴⁵ See Stern (1967), 41 on this theme in Bacchylides 5, variously related to Pindar, suggesting that this aspect of Bacchylides' thought is in accordance with the general pessimism of the ode; it is to be noted that he sees Bacchylides' repeated comparison and linking of men and plants as another aspect of such pessimism, a notion confirmed by Bacchylides' wish to Hieron that he may have εὐδ]αιμονίας πέταλον (186). On the theme in Herodotus, Lloyd (1987), 23; Pelling (2006), 147-148.

⁴⁴⁶ Gentili (1995), 585 on vv. 95-97: "Il passo condensa le riflessioni fin qui fatte sulla mutevolezza della sorte umana"; *ibid.* on τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὔ τις; "essere 'qualuno' (cioè famoso) o essere 'nessuno' (cioè ignoto) non ha valore definitivo perché l'uomo può essere sia l'uno che l'altro per volontà degli dei". Pippin Burnett (2005), 226-227 on the historical circumstances of Aegina leading up to 446, also providing (n. 10, 227) a summary of the various scholarly positions regarding the extent to which we should read in the cautiousness of Pindar's invitation to Aristomenes a reference to such circumstances.

ἀποτρόπῳ γνώμα σεσεισμένον.

ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ 95

ἄνθρωπος. ἀλλ' ὅταν αἴγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθῃ,

λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰών. (*Pyth.* 8.92-97)⁴⁴⁷

The central idea in the image of man as the dream of a shadow is, unquestionably, one of insubstantiality: what can be more immaterial and tenuous than a shadow that does not even belong to the world of reality, but to the realm of dreams?⁴⁴⁸ But what does Pindar mean by insubstantiality, and how does he characterise such lack of substance?

Although scholars have differed (sometimes surprisingly, as in the case of Nagy's reading mentioned in note 448) in their opinion, the answer seems to come naturally from the context of the phrase. Man is insubstantial insofar as he, and his own happiness, are subject to a cyclical reversal of fortunes. The phrase in question is in fact formally encased between two statements about the fluctuating nature of human affairs. First, the alternation inherent in the destiny of humans is encapsulated in the bipartite structure of verses 92-93 (ἐν δ' ὀλίγῳ βροτῶν τὸ τερπνὸν αὔξεται: οὕτω δὲ καὶ πίπτει χαμαί): in a short span of time human happiness can increase (αὐξάνω) or fall to the ground.⁴⁴⁹ This alternation between the presence and absence of joy is bound to be cyclical in the existence of the individual just as in the life of the species, and we can thus imagine these two states repeating themselves unceasingly throughout history. The passage is strongly reminiscent of the Homeric simile of the leaves, and this connection contributes to increase the sense of human precariousness channelled by the ode. It is

⁴⁴⁷ In Maehler (1984), 105 after Snell (1964).

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Pippin Burnett (2005), 236-237. Giannini (1982), 69 agrees that the general meaning of the passage is an “affermazione della labilità e della mutevolezza della condizione umana”; in general his reading of verse 95ff suggests that the whole passage is grounded on the “opposizioni polari” and “movimento pendolare a cui la vita umana è continuamente sottoposta per il volere del dio” (cf. page 74). Gentili (1995), 585 on σκιᾶς ὄναρ: “locuzione che denota il *non plus ultra* della vanità delle vicende umane”, quoting Theodore Metochites in the apparatus of his edition, *ibid.* 228 and in Müller (1966), 392. The idea of shadow hints also to lack of glory (as opposite of αἴγλα, v. 96). Nagy (1990), 195-196 proposes a radically different interpretation, according to this passage refers to us living (and in the moment of victory) as “the realization of the dreams dreamt by our dead ancestors”.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Sotiriou (1998), 114 on vv. 96-97: “Pindar will aber nicht, dass ein lobendes Gedicht, das den grossen ahletischen Erfolg des Aristomenes im Ringkampf feiert, pessimistisch endet, und deshalb macht er zum Schluss eine freudige Feststellung”. I disagree with Polato (2007), 91 who believes the pessimism conveyed by the idea of “dream of a shadow” (especially as quoted by Barthélemy) “si fonda sulla rimozione dei versi che seguono”.

not only the binary organisation of the thought that reminds us of the two (recurring) states in the life of the leaves as described by Glaucus at 6.147-148 and Apollo at 21.464-466. What reminds the reader further of the Iliadic episodes – and in particular of the trope as employed by Glaucus – is the language used by Pindar to depict the crushing of human *τερπνόν*, which falls to the ground (*χαμαί*) just like the leaves of the Homeric simile had fallen on the ground (*χαμάδις*).⁴⁵⁰ But of course *αὔξάνω* (93) is not only “to increase”, but also, and remarkably “to grow”, and in this new botanical image we have another allusion to the Homeric vegetation: without quoting Homer, like Simonides had done, Pindar achieves to resurrect the memory of the Iliadic passage.

The alternating quality of human affairs is then restated in vv. 96-97, as the poet – providing perhaps a parallel for verse 94 – reminds his audience that, just as an *ἀπότροπος γνώμη* can destroy man’s happiness, so can heaven-sent light (*αἴγλα δῖοςδοτος*) bestow serenity on humans. Yet ultimately man’s flimsiness is additionally reinforced by the sense of intrinsic subjection that underscores the final part of *Pythian* 8. Man is not the one in charge of his own destiny, which is instead allotted by divine sources, who in turn augment or decrease human happiness. Man’s utter lack of control over his own existence is also remarked by the mention of the fleetingness with which the affairs of human life can change course (*ἐν δ’ ὀλίγῳ*, 92), the same adjective used to characterise both the sole happy time of man (youth) and in general human life in the Stobean Simonides (11). It is not in man’s own hands to choose when to be happy, and neither is the power to decide for how long he can hold onto such pleasure once he has received it.

Both sides of this idea – the notion of the mutability of human fortunes and that of human subjection to external forces – play a significant role in the *Proposta*. They are both implied in the idea that human existence is a game, a game more disorderly than chess (and thus far more variable and unpredictable). Inherent in the functioning of a game like chess (and of many others too) is the fact that the game pieces are not the ones to actively play the match, but it is instead some external entity that has the power

⁴⁵⁰ Following Fränkel, Burton (1962), 190-191 and Sotiriou (1998), 113-114 connect *ἐπάμεροι* of *Pyth.* 8 to *Od.* 18.137 and 21.85.

to manoeuvre them. The *topos* of life as a game must have been especially significant for Leopardi, who used it at different times throughout his work,⁴⁵¹ and in particular profusely in the *Canti*: a game is the comparison for the “opre de’ mortali” in *A un vincitore nel pallone* 32-33 (1821); in *La vita solitaria*, from the same year, the naïve and enthusiastic attitude of the youth towards life is compared to a dance or a game (51), but the poet makes it immediately clear that such an approach is the one taken by “wretched mortals”, thus establishing a connection between the misery of existence and its game-like quality; again, the image of life as a game resurfaces in Leopardi’s production of the 30’s, both in *Il pensiero dominante* (47) and in the *Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi* (166).⁴⁵² In several of these instances we perceive clearly that the game is not an enjoyable one, or, even, that it is intrinsically evil: for an explicit linguistic point, one can think for example of the adjective “reo” which Leopardi chooses to define “gioco” in the *Palinodia*. Similarly, life had been called “tristo gioco” much earlier in Leopardi’s writings, in the 1816 *Appressamento della morte* (Canto Secondo, 61).⁴⁵³

Aside from the ideas of passivity and negativity, there is one further meaning which – adumbrated in some of the above quotations – powerfully shines out in a fragment of the early and unfinished pastoral tragedy *Telesilla* (1816), centred on the forbidden love of Telesilla, wife of Danaino, and Girone, Danaino’s best friend. Here it is not life which is likened to a game, but instead the speaker’s (likely to be Girone) present understanding of the extent of his past sufferings compared to the ones he is now experiencing:

E in mio poter fu posto ch’or ne fosse immune oh quanto oh quanto fui pazzo
che fora or quel dolore ch’io proverei? e che fu quello che ho provato per
l’addietro? Un’ombra un gioco. Questo sì ch’è fieriss. travaglio. Oh se mai

⁴⁵¹ Cf. Melosi (2015), 71 n. 42 suggesting that the motif “è centrale nella psicologia leopardiana, fin dalle *Memorie del primo amore* del 1817, dove l’approccio con Gertrude Cassi Lazzari avviene giocando una partita a scacchi tutt’altro che metaforica”, linking to Verdenelli (2004), 185-215; yet Melosi fails to explore the presence of the theme in Leopardi’s work further, limiting herself to the *Memorie*’s purely functional reference to the game of chess.

⁴⁵² *A un vincitore nel Pallone* 32-33; *La vita solitaria* 50-52; *Il pensiero dominante* 44-52; *Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi* 165-169.

⁴⁵³ *TPP* (2013), 293.

fatto io non l'avessi! oh come or sarei fortunato. Adunque io punto Non m'inganno? io peccai! Giron, peccasti? Mi pare un *sogno*. Ahi, ahi, chi l'avria detto? Ch'io dovessi peccar quasi innocente Non fossi stato infin da quando io nacqui? Più ch'io ci penso parmi essere un altro. Oh virtù mia come sei gita. [...]⁴⁵⁴

This passage, part of the draft of a section of the tragedy which Leopardi never completed, is interesting to us because of the close connection it invokes between the image of the game and that of the shadow. Both are very clearly employed to convey the sense of how utterly insubstantial past misery is compared to present. To render the nothingness of previous torments in the face of those now endured, Leopardi chooses to use and combine the two images, as if one alone could not depict the full extent of the disparity: the idea of the shadow fully portrays the notion of flimsiness and lack of concreteness, and the image of the game supplies the description of the past sufferings with a sense of triviality. The juxtaposition of the two ideas helps the reader understand how he is supposed to interpret the mention of the game: beyond the obvious elements of triviality and frivolity, Leopardi wants the reader to grasp the ultimate inconsequentiality and unimportance inherent in games. This passage, despite being nothing more than the draft of an early work, is thus paramount for the interpretation of the two comparisons in the *Proposta*: it informs us indirectly and yet clearly about Leopardi's understanding of the meaning of games. But there is more: a few lines below the reference to shadows and games, Leopardi draws in dreams too. It seems significant that Leopardi would have gathered the three ideas (“ombra”, “gioco”, “sogno”) which were going to appear so clearly connected in the *Proposta* in one passage, and a passage altogether concerned with describing various states and degrees of unreality and insubstantiality.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ *TPP* (2013), 468. My translation, with uncertainties due to the fragmentary nature of the draft: “And I had the power to avoid this oh how crazy how crazy I was, what would now be the pain I would feel [if I had avoided it]? And what was that which I felt in the past? A shadow, a game. This [the present one] is indeed a most fierce distress. Oh, if only I had not done it. Oh how fortunate I would be! Certainly I am not fooling myself? I sinned. Giron, have you sinned? It feels like a dream. Ah, ah, who could have said? That I would sin as if I had not been innocent since my birth? The more I think about it the more I feel like I am another person. Oh my virtue, you have gone away! [...]”

⁴⁵⁵ This conception of games is elaborated – and this time within the comparison with human life – in *A un vincitore nel pallone*, where human existence is *nothing more* than a game, thus underscoring its inherent insignificance.

The fact that Leopardi's interpretation of the image – so closely connected in the Pindaric text to the definition of humans as ἐπάμεροι – revolves so heavily around the idea of the externally-commanded instability of human fortunes, suggests that he thought of the adjective ἐφήμερος as pertinent to this wider representation of reality. Just as the blind human intellect of Semonides 1 W² (“nostro cieco pensiero”) fails to understand the real circumstances of its own existence – circumstances which are instead not only understood but actively brought about by the divine – so in the *Proposta* humans are the unwilling game pieces being played in a game whose rules they cannot make sense of – and that appears to them as irreparably chaotic and disorganised.

The two Simonidean translations and the *Proposta* are crucial evidence of Leopardi's increasing captivation with the Greek conception of human existence around the end of 1823 and the beginning of 1824, and in particular of his preoccupation with the various shades of meaning revolving around the term ἐφήμερος. Both the translations and the use of Pindar in the *Operette* point to a deep consideration of the possible meanings of the term in the ancient texts; at the same time, the scholarly approach is eventually channelled – by means of a profound personal engagement – into a revival of the wisdom of the ancients, which, as the *Proposta* proves, is not only significant for the present, but also for a distant and possibly dystopian future.

2. *Plants and Insects: The Zibaldone (1826-1827)*

Before turning to the final part of this chapter, I wish to point the reader towards one last instance of Leopardi's engagement with the Greek notion of human existence conveyed by the trope of the leaves and by the notion of ephemerality, embodied in two passages of the *Zibaldone* (*Zib.* 4175 and 4270), which date to the years 1826 and 1827 respectively.

Zib. 4174 is perhaps one of Leopardi's darkest attacks on existence.⁴⁵⁶ Every euphemism is dropped: beginning with the caustic and laconic "tutto è male" (everything is evil), the passage lists with relentless tenacity the full extent and the full details of the inbred evils of existence. Existence is evil, and so are the goal, the order, the condition, the laws and the natural course of the universe. The attack ultimately spirals into one all-encompassing conclusion: there is only one good, which is the lack of existence. It is this thought – the idea of the evil inherent in any kind of life – that is expanded and developed in the following page of the *Zibaldone*. *Zib.* 4175 is on the whole one consistent attempt at showing that existence is evil not just for the individual and not just for humans, but instead for every single component of the universe. The entire passage can be found at *Appendix 5*.

Overturning the classical image of the *locus amoenus* Leopardi chooses the image of a – seemingly idyllic – garden to represent the omnipresent pain of existence. The garden is pretty and well kept and we are observing it during a benevolent season, and yet it is a collection of brutal sufferings. In reading the note the reader is decidedly (albeit indirectly) reminded of the likening of men and leaves with which, by 1826, Leopardi had several times engaged. Although no direct comparison of humans and leaves occurs in the passage, the connection between the natural elements of the garden (which include leaves) and humankind is implicit in two ways. First, the demonstration of the common unhappiness of universal existence at the beginning of *Zib.* 4175 had taken its start from men ("Non il genere umano solamente ma..."), and from there it had progressively opened up to encompass larger and larger entities such as systems and worlds. The link between the garden, chosen as an example of a multitude of natural beings, and humans themselves, is in this sense straightforwardly part of the path which Leopardi clearly delineates. But what is more, the comparison is reinforced throughout the passage by the continuous anthropomorphisation of the elements of the garden: the tree is wounded ("ferito"), the grass trampled by the passer-by spills blood ("sangue"), the gardener chops off limbs ("membra") from the plants he is pruning, culminating in the portrayal of the garden as a large hospital ("largo ospitale"). The individual beings

⁴⁵⁶ Interestingly the note ends on a (paradoxical) denial of strict pessimism: this is not the worst of all possible worlds, says Leopardi, because "Chi può conoscere i limiti della possibilità?".

of the garden feel the violence of life with the same sensations and reactions that man experiences towards the horrors of being.

One more feature invites comparison with one of the crucial moments of Leopardi's engagement with the relationship between humans and leaves. The structure underlying the *Zibaldone* note and Leopardi's rendition of Semonides' poem present one remarkable similarity. Just as in *XL* the various evils that can befall man were introduced by the anaphora of (mostly demonstrative) pronouns (translating the Greek articles τούς and οί with pronominal value, also in anaphora), so in *Zib.* 4175 the list of the various suffering creatures that animate the garden is introduced by a long anaphora of demonstrative adjectives ("quella rosa", "quel giglio", quell'albero", etc....). Like Semonides 1 W² and Leopardi's *XL* (which, however, had focused more narrowly on humankind), *Zib.* 4175 explores the various declinations of the evil of existence. Plants, humanised and individualised, serve as a mirror for the torments which man is sometimes unable to see in his own life, to lead to the necessary conclusion – a theme central to Leopardi's philosophy and to his revival of a Greek worldview – that it would be better for every being never to have been born.⁴⁵⁷

Zib. 4270, a note from the following year, 1827, is in various ways connected to many – if not all – the steps we have analysed as part of the history of Leopardi's interpretation of the trope of the leaves and of the Greek notion of human ephemerality. The note is part of a number of pages that reflect on two intertwining yet clashing facts: on the one hand the decadence of the writing style from antiquity to modernity, on the other the increase in the publications of new books, resulting in the impossibly steep path to fame for the modern writer. Achieving the immortality granted to the great works of the past is, in Leopardi's opinion, impossible in today's world.⁴⁵⁸

La sorte dei libri oggi, è come quella degl'insetti chiamati efimeri (éphémères): alcune specie vivono poche ore, alcune una notte, altre 3 o 4 giorni; ma sempre si tratta di giorni. Noi siamo veramente oggidì passeggeri e pellegrini sulla terra: veramente caduchi: esseri di un giorno: la mattina in fiore, la sera appassiti, o secchi: soggetti anche a sopravvivere alla

⁴⁵⁷ This notion is examined in *Chapter 5*.

⁴⁵⁸ The theme is prominent in *Il Parini, ovvero Della Gloria*.

propria fama, e piú longevi che la memoria di noi. Oggi si può dire con verità maggiore che mai: Οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοιῆδε καὶ ἀνδρῶν (*Iliade*, VI, v.146).⁴⁵⁹

The problem lies in the new status and role of books in the modern world, for which the only apt description is comparison with a type of insects called “ephemeral” in light of the extraordinary brevity of their existence.⁴⁶⁰ But the conclusion about books becomes a verdict about human existence, as Leopardi shifts abruptly from books to men: the modern ephemerality of books contributes to the inbred ephemerality of men, making sure that even fame – which once upon a time outlived the earthly existence of an individual – is now outlasted by our very life span, in itself so undeniably brief. Even literary glory – the one feature to challenge the ephemeral status of humans – is forever lost in the modern world, only to bring man’s condition down to a further level of decadence. The reflection prompts a new definition of the human condition, which conveys the shortness of human existence by once again resorting to the world of flora (“the morning in flower, the evening faded, or dried up”). What is more, to seal the reference to vegetation, Leopardi ends the passage with the explicit quotation of verse 146 of *Iliad* 6.

There is yet one more link with Leopardi’s interpretation and understanding of the ties that connect men and leaves (and all other natural beings). The definition of men used in *Zib.* 4270 (“Noi siamo veramente oggidí passeggeri e pellegrini sulla terra: veramente caduchi”) echoes closely a passage of the *Frammento apocrifo di Stratone da Lampsaco*, number thirteen in the *Operette*, written towards the end of 1825. The *Frammento* – which Leopardi presents as the translation of a recovered fragment from the Greek philosopher Strato – is a deeply materialistic account of the genesis and the end of the world. As he tackles the former topic, Strato contrasts the immortal nature of

⁴⁵⁹ “The destiny of books today is like that of those insects called ephemerals (éphémères): certain species live a few hours, some one night, others 3 or 4 days; but it is always only a matter of days. In truth, we of today are travellers and pilgrims on the earth: our time is truly short: we are here for one day: the morning in flower, the evening faded, or dried up: destined also to outlive our own fame, and living longer than we are remembered. Today it can be said more truly than ever before: “Οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοιῆδε καὶ ἀνδρῶν” (*Iliad*, VI, v.146).” The grave accent on γενεή (with comma) is in Leopardi’s note.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Aristotle *Historia Animalium* 5.19, Cicero *Tusc.* 1.94 and pseudo-Plutarch *Cons. Ap.* 111c, on which Audano (2014a), 19; cf. also Polizzi (2011), 114 suggesting Leopardi’s note may in fact be drawn from *Cons. Ap.* 111c.

matter – which never increases or decreases – with that of the “various modes of the existence of matter, as they can be in those we call material creatures”:

Per tanto i diversi modi di essere della materia, i quali si veggono in quelle che noi chiamiamo creature materiali, sono *caduchi e passeggeri*; ma niun segno di caducità né di mortalità si scuopre nella materia universalmente, e però niun segno che ella sia cominciata, né che ad essere le bisognasse o pur le bisogni alcuna causa o forza fuori di se. Il mondo, cioè l'essere della materia in un cotal modo, è cosa incominciata e caduca.⁴⁶¹

The antithesis between matter and its modes of expression is as stark as it could be: whereas matter is ever unchanging, material creatures are “*caduchi e passeggeri*”. It may or it may not be coincidence that Giovanni Cecchetti, translator of the *Operette* into English, chose to render this couple of adjectives as “*ephemeral and transient*”, thus referencing the very adjective that had been so strong a part of Leopardi’s reflection on human nature. The word-by-word correspondence with *Zib.* 4270 (“Noi siamo veramente oggidì *passeggeri* e pellegrini sulla terra: veramente *caduchi*”) can hardly be a coincidence.⁴⁶² Rather this echo, just like the two passages’ common concern about the fleeting character of human and worldly existence, should prompt us to consider the years between 1823 and 1827 as the core of Leopardi’s long meditation on the quality and significance of the human condition. From the repeated readings of the *Iliad* to the intense labouring over the texts of Simonides (and Semonides), from the interpretation of Pindar’s *gnome* to the invention of a Greek philosopher’s system parading the ephemerality of all beings,⁴⁶³ these years bear witness to Leopardi’s rediscovery of ancient Greek notions of existence, and of their conscious and programmatic revival throughout his works.

⁴⁶¹ My italics. *TPP* (2013), 578. Cecchetti (1983), 383: “Thus, the various modes of the existence of matter, as they can be seen in those we call material creatures, are ephemeral and transient; but no sign of decay and morality can be uncovered in matter generally, and therefore there is no sign that it had a beginning and that to exist it needed, or needs, any power outside of itself. The world, or rather the existence of matter in that particular form, is something transient that was begun.”

⁴⁶² My italics.

⁴⁶³ Galimberti (1998a), 403-404 on the influence of D’Holbach’s *Système de la nature* on Strato’s philosophical system in the *Frammento*, and (convincingly) on Leopardi’s choice of Strato as the example of the materialistic philosopher.

III

Schopenhauer, Greek Leaves, and Leopardi

The Greeks, their thought, their literature and attitude to beauty appear consistently throughout Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, but perhaps nowhere is their presence so extensive and acute as in the *Supplements to the Fourth Book*.⁴⁶⁴ Two chapters of the *Supplements* – Chapter 41 “Ueber den Tod und sein Verhältniß zur Unzerstörbarkeit unsers Wesens an sich” and Chapter 46 “Von der Nichtigkeit und dem Leiden des Lebens” – delve with particular intensity into ancient Greek thought. Among other references, Chapter 41 offers Schopenhauer's interpretation of the Iliadic trope of the leaves and Chapter 46 provides – in the setting of examples of “großer Geister aller Zeiten” who shared Schopenhauer's worldview – a brief and yet effective account of the ancient Greek pessimistic worldview.⁴⁶⁵ The last words of Chapter 46 are, remarkably, about Leopardi's role in this history of pessimistic thoughts, but we shall come back to this passage at the end of this section. I wish here to discuss Schopenhauer's engagement with Greek thought in these two chapters, and especially to observe how his interpretation of the simile of the leaves in many ways complements Leopardi's.

In Chapter 41 Schopenhauer discusses the role of death in the life of the human species, especially insofar as consciousness of it prompts humans to metaphysical enquiry and to the formulation of religious and philosophical theories. With the aid of empirical data (such as the experiences of people experiencing death-like situations such as fainting, or the direct observation of dead bodies), and with the backup of famous thinkers (ranging from Socrates to Voltaire) or major religions such as Buddhism, Schopenhauer sets out to show what death really signifies for conscious living beings. The chapter is crammed with references to ancient Greek thought, from ideas from Socrates and Plato to the

⁴⁶⁴ Some notion of Schopenhauer's relationship with Greek thought (although with almost exclusive focus on Euripides' *Bacchae*) can be found in Nussbaum (2006), and various articles on Nietzsche and the Greeks discuss Schopenhauer in passing. Yet as of today, and to the best of my knowledge, no work has yet solely and thoroughly explored Schopenhauer's relationship with the Greeks. Cf. Cartwright (2010), 117, 133 on Schopenhauer's study of Greek.

⁴⁶⁵ All quotations from Schopenhauer come from the German edition by von Löhneysen (1960-1965). The English translations consulted are Payne (1966); Norman et al. (2010), although the second volume, more relevant to this chapter, is yet to be published.

teachings of Epicurus.⁴⁶⁶ It is thus undeniable that the work of the *philosophical* schools of Greece permeates the discussion of death. And yet, on a different level, there is another sense in which Greek thought is fundamental to this chapter. In a less striking manner the reader is made aware that also the *poetic* wisdom of ancient Greece plays a crucial role in shaping Schopenhauer's conception of death – just as it will do with his conception of life's suffering in Chapter 46. Some of these poetic references lie on the outer shell of Schopenhauer's relationship with Greek thought; so for example the mention of Odysseus' strength in bending the bow – a reference to *Odyssey* 22 – is possibly more of a learned note than anything else.⁴⁶⁷

Yet there is more. Shortly before the mention of Odysseus' force – used as an example for the disappearance or perpetuation of energies or non-corporeal forces – Schopenhauer had been dealing with the similarity between the time of non-existence after death and that before birth. Reflecting on the fact that we do not fear the time before existence, but we dread that which comes after existence, Schopenhauer seems to invite the reader to use the little he knows about the first period of non-existence to shun terror about the second period, i.e. death. This is possible on the grounds of the quasi-total identity between these two parts of eternity, which, as Schopenhauer puts it, “are not distinguished by anything except by the intervention of an *ephemeral dream of life*”.⁴⁶⁸ In the midst of an attempt at a definition of death stands, in fact, a definition of life, which is the part we positively know. The juxtaposition of the image of the dream with the idea of ephemerality leads me to suggest that behind this one characterisation of human life stands Pindar's definition of human existence in *Pythian* 8 (vv. 92-97), which Schopenhauer had already quoted from the Greek in his Book 1.5.⁴⁶⁹ At this point in the *Supplements* Schopenhauer is not concerned with defining life as much as he is

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Nussbaum (2006), 351 n. 7 on how the paragraph discussed shows “how deeply Schopenhauer was steeped in both Platonic and Hellenistic, as well as Eastern, thought”, saying that “Schopenhauer refers frequently to the Hellenistic philosophers, both Epicurean and Stoic, citing the texts in both Greek and Latin.”

⁴⁶⁷ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 601.

⁴⁶⁸ My italics. Translation from Payne (1966), 467 with small modifications, cf. von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 629.

⁴⁶⁹ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 1, 49. Payne (1966), 17. The idea of ephemerality comes up repeatedly in Chapter 41.

with exploring death, but the analysis of the defining features of existence lies only a few pages away, in Chapter 46. As we shall see, the piercing characterisation of the brief span of existence as an ephemeral dream acquires a different flavour when seen in the light of the reflections on Greek conceptions of human life in Chapter 46, and so does Schopenhauer's engagement with Greek thought in Chapter 41.

But there is something more that connects the two chapters and their outlook on Greek existential ideas – aside from the presence of Greek characters such as Odysseus or the allusion to Pindar. Chapter 41 had opened with the discussion of the meaning of death for mankind, after which follows the study of the significance of death for the wider system of nature. Schopenhauer's analysis means firstly to highlight the patterns and the mechanisms that guide the functioning of natural life, whose symbol he identifies in the circle: nature does not conceive of the individuality of the single insect or dog, but only cares about their race or species, which is unhindered by the individual birth or death of each particular insect or dog. The death of individual beings does nothing to the system itself, since for the one creature that dies many others are generated and the overall balance of the system is preserved. It is at this point that Schopenhauer brings the focus back to humanity: the discussion of the role of death within the wider natural system is supposed to have supplied the data needed for the understanding of the role of death in human existence, and Schopenhauer seems to imply that man is in fact fully ready to accept this mechanism insofar as it concerns the animal and vegetal beings. Yet when it comes to the understanding of his own death, man clings to the belief in his own individual importance, and remains oblivious of the similarity between himself and the rest of nature.

Schopenhauer's previous examples taken from natural life included a dog, a bird, a frog, and an insect. But this time, as he attempts to tackle the full extent of human delusion and to explain how man should instead look at his own existence and death, Schopenhauer chooses to talk about leaves.⁴⁷⁰ The man who thinks of future generations and fails to see the link between himself and them, between his own disappearance and the perpetuation of the species which is possible through future humans, is like a leaf

⁴⁷⁰ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 609-610.

that, about to wither and fall, complains and cannot see the use of its death and of the life of the new green leaves. Schopenhauer's language makes ample use of examples, comparisons, and metaphors; the trope of the leaves – to which he gives the voice of a deluded human – is thus entirely consistent with his usual style. But whereas the reader is not always given a chance to learn about the provenance of his examples, this time Schopenhauer explicitly references the source for the leaves trope.

Verse 146 from book 6 of the *Iliad* is quoted in full to conclude the section about leaves.⁴⁷¹ We have already discussed the Homeric passage, but let us remind ourselves of one feature that makes it so important for Schopenhauer in this context. The circular motion that pervades the simile – the death of the leaves at 147, their rebirth at 148, and the new start of the circle brought about by 149's reworking of 146 by inverting the position of ἀνδρῶν in the line – hints at the circularity of nature's mechanisms. The simile gives us the sense that in the eternal cycle of births and deaths the (different and individual) leaves that are born and die form one continuum which propagates the species and makes up for the disappearance of the individual.⁴⁷² It is this circularity inherent in the Homeric passage that Schopenhauer now reworks and concentrates on. The comparison with the leaves reminds men that although as individuals we are born, wither, and die, our race survives in the multitude of generations that precede and succeed us on the earth.⁴⁷³ And whereas the implicit comparison with the immortal gods – who are not subject to any of the described mechanisms – fosters a sense of gloomy necessity, the idea of rebirth in the new entities of the species opens to a new understanding of the mechanisms of the cosmos.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷¹ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 610.

⁴⁷² Cf. Lowry (1995), 198 on how leaves signify “large or indeterminate quantities”, cf. the process of generalisation described for ants in *Chapter 2*.

⁴⁷³ Cf. Vox (1979) analysing this aspect of the Homeric simile by drawing a comparison with Hesiod's generations of men at *Op.* 109ff. The generations are different one from the other and yet they share their destiny, death: “le stirpi degli uomini, in quanto umane, si succedono effimere”. Yet Vox sees a major difference between the Homeric and the Hesiodic passage: the Iliadic genealogy traced by Glaucus is, as a whole, “unilateral” (insofar as it avoids envisioning the end of Glaucus' γενεή for encomiastic reasons). Hesiod instead is “tracing the non-encomiastic history of humankind”, and is more keen to mention the two “physiological complementary moments”, i.e. births and deaths (which, in Glaucus' speech, are only present in the simile of the leaves).

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Kirk (1990), 176 who sees instead in the passage “no suggestion of rebirth”.

In the context of the encounter between the two warriors it is precisely the incessant turnover of generations that can guarantee the safety of both warriors. Glaucus' introduction, consisting of his description of his lineage and ancestors, rather than ensuing combat prompts instead the discovery of mutual bonds of hospitality dating back to the far past of their ancestors (*Il.* 6.215-218) and triggers the pair's decision not to fight.⁴⁷⁵ It is the ancestors – those leaves that have already fallen to the ground – that secure present survival for the new generations. There is a positive side to the short-lived measure of human existence, and it lies in the bonds that genetically tie each generation to the following.⁴⁷⁶

These features of the Homeric passage must have informed – if not in fact contributed to shaping – Schopenhauer's notion of the cycle of natural existence. In the attempt to convince man of the vanity of his fear of death as loss of individuality, Schopenhauer *seems* to ultimately emphasise the moment of rebirth over that of death. The text of Schopenhauer leading up to the Iliadic quotation stresses the ideas of regeneration and growth inherent to – but not exclusive in – the Homeric simile:⁴⁷⁷ that which is the end for the individual is nothing but the progression of the species. Yet, this realisation cannot but be a confirmation of pessimistic interpretations of the destiny of man on earth: the acceptance of death as a common, natural, and unavoidable part of existence strikes the very core of the will to live which animates humans. Thus Schopenhauer's exuberant testimony to the regenerative power of natural life is also, implicitly, proof of

⁴⁷⁵ Although inherent to Glaucus' story is also the fact that he has divine ancestry, as Piccaluga (1980), 249-251 detailedly shows; Piccaluga's analysis of Glaucus' genealogy also suggests that although many of Glaucus' ancestors try to reach the divine status, many "tuttavia ricadono nonostante tutto nell'ineluttabile sorte degli uomini, quella di essere soggetti alla morte".

⁴⁷⁶ Taking a slightly different perspective and yet supporting my point Piccaluga (1980), 248 suggests that the positive aspect implied by the passage (in the context of the comparison between mortals and immortals) is humans' ability to procreate: "Ci si riferisce, in concreto, all'eventualità di scorgere, sullo sfondo di questo inesorabile proclama della finitezza del genere umano, la rivendicazione di quella specie di "surrogato di immortalità" concesso a questo, implicito nella facoltà di riprodursi, per cui, pur essendo effimeri come le foglie, appunto come queste gli uomini continueranno ad avvicinarsi sulla terra".

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 607-609.

the vanity of man's will to individual existence and validation of the fact that "So weit Alles nur einen Augenblick und eilt dem Tode zu."⁴⁷⁸

Interestingly, the aspect of the trope explored by Schopenhauer is never explicitly tackled by Leopardi in connection with the trope itself. Nonetheless, the ideas underlying Schopenhauer's interpretation of the comparison of men and leaves are central to Leopardi's worldview: man's unjustified conviction about his own superiority (and that of his own race) was expressed, amongst others in the *Operette*, by the dialogue of Sprite and Gnome just as by Schopenhauer's talking leaf. More than anything however, there is no clearer expression of the belief in the survival of the species against that of the individual than the words that Leopardi attributes to Strato just a few lines after the passage previously analysed:⁴⁷⁹

Ma imperciocché la detta forza non resta mai di operare edì modificar la materia, però quelle creature che essa continuamente forma, essa altresì le distrugge, formando della materia loro nuove creature. Insino a tanto che distruggendosi le creature individue, i generi nondimeno e le specie delle medesime si mantengono, o tutte o le più, e che gli ordini e le relazioni naturali delle cose non si cangiano o in tutto o nella più parte, si dice durare ancora quel cotal mondo.⁴⁸⁰

Both Schopenhauer's understanding of Greek thought and Leopardi's role in this analysis of the history of the pessimistic worldview becomes more apparent in Chapter 46, which explores the theme of the "vanity and suffering of life" ("Von der Nichtigkeit und dem Leiden des Lebens"). The chapter, which is as much a vindication of pessimism as it is a rebuttal of optimistic theories, eventually aims at demonstrating that

⁴⁷⁸ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 611. Redfield (1975), 102 analyses insightfully both sides of the Iliadic episode: on the one hand he sees it (and Glaucus' speech in particular) as a praise of kinship; on the other hand he shows clearly the pessimistic notion underlying the episode's ultimate reflection: "only within the order of culture do men have proper names and individual identities; as creatures of nature they are perfectly ephemeral. Nature cares nothing for the life of the individual and everything for the life of the species. To speak of the generations of men as like the growing of leaves is to see oneself as, after all, insignificant".

⁴⁷⁹ Another central passage is *Zib.* 4169, cf. Di Meo (2001), 82-83.

⁴⁸⁰ *TPP* (2013), 579; Cecchetti (1983), 385: "But since that power never ceases to act upon and to change matter, it destroys those very creatures that it continuously forms, and from their matter it forms new creatures. Thus, although individual creatures are destroyed, as long as their genera and species are mostly preserved and as long as laws and the natural relations of things remain wholly or mostly unchanged, we can say that the world still exists."

this is the worst of all possible worlds, that life consists mainly of evils, and that, as a consequence, it would be better for mankind not to be born and for this world not to exist.⁴⁸¹ The demonstration of such assumptions takes place on various levels.⁴⁸² Schopenhauer's first argument is the impossibility for humans to experience real happiness, happiness which is conceivable only at different points in time – the past or the future, and never in the present – and never by itself, but only in relation to the absence of suffering and pain. Then (sorely intertwined with the absence of real happiness) comes the explanation of the violent dominion of evils, anguish, and pains that rules the world of men, sufferings which are both inflicted upon men by external forces and events and exacerbated by the destructive behaviour of men towards other men. Seen in this light, concludes Schopenhauer, life is nothing but the paying off of a debt contracted with birth, a debt that pains the borrower only to ultimately end with death.⁴⁸³ As the reasoning progresses, Schopenhauer shifts his attention from time to time to the existence of man and to that of the world.

By the end of the chapter Schopenhauer feels he has sufficiently proven his points, either through the example of real life situations, the authoritative words of famous thinkers (ranging from Diogenes, to Hume, to Voltaire), or by confutation of specific optimistic theories. But it is at this point that, to further support his argument and to show the reader that such an understanding of the world predates his own theories, Schopenhauer provides evidence of “great men of all ages” who expressed similar concerns about the state of the world.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Note how this chapter opens with another definition of life as “dream”, cf. Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 733.

⁴⁸² At this point the image of the leaves has not yet left Schopenhauer's mind: a poem by Byron (number 126 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in Dearbon (1835), 37) is quoted in full by Schopenhauer as vivid expression of these truths about the world in the poem men are rained upon with sorrows and diseases “like dew”, thus feeding into the image of the tree, its branches and leaves of a few verses above.

⁴⁸³ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 742-741. On the idea of life as a debt see *Cons. Ap.* 10. It is difficult to say whether the *Consolatio ad Apollonium* could be a direct source for the idea; Schopenhauer certainly knew Plutarch's *Moralia*, from which he quotes often in the *Supplements*. Janaway (2006b), 318 and n. 2 sees this tendency “to speak more often in the vocabulary of value” as typical of Schopenhauer.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Dahlkvist (2007), 95: “most of the pessimists go to some length to show that most of the great minds in the history of mankind have been proto-pessimists”, quoting Agnes Taubert's statement that “Der Pessimismus ist so alt wie die Reflexion der Menschen über sich und sein Leben”. One should recall that Leopardi himself wrote something similar in his *Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico*, TPP

Wollte ich nun schließlich, zur Bekräftigung meiner Ansicht, die Aussprüche großer Geister aller Zeiten in diesem, dem Optimismus entgegengesetzten Sinne, hersetzen; so würde der Anführungen kein Ende seyn; da fast jeder derselben seine Erkenntniß des Jammers dieser Welt in starken Worten ausgesprochen hat.⁴⁸⁵

What follows is in fact a series of quotations of various lengths, which, by Schopenhauer's programmatic declaration, start with the Greeks, who "although [...] they decidedly stood at the point of view of the assertion of the will, were yet deeply affected by the wretchedness of existence".⁴⁸⁶ The quotations follow one another without any strict chronological order. Herodotus' statement about the Thracian custom of mourning the new-borns (Hdt. 5.4.2) is followed by a poem transmitted by Plutarch and then topped up with a Mexican tradition much resembling the aforementioned Thracian custom; to this again Schopenhauer connects Swift's "custom of keeping his birthday not as a moment of joy but of sadness" and his habit of reading on that day a Biblical passage related to the theme (Job 3).⁴⁸⁷ The first few lines following Schopenhauer's remark about the great men of all ages start in fact with the Greeks, but then wander off into a complex *mise en abyme* of references on the idea of the necessity of mourning birthdays; the references reduplicate, intersect, and craftily fit one inside the other like Russian dolls. The choice of referencing thinkers across the ages serves a double and somewhat contrasting purpose: on the one hand the antiquity of some of the quotations provides validation to Schopenhauer's point. On the other hand the multitude of quotations coming from all corners of human history dissolves the significance of linear time: from the beginning of recorded history great minds have agreed about Schopenhauer's assumptions and the freedom with which he skips from quotation to quotation highlights the unity and a-temporality of such an understanding of the world. But it is the Greeks who resurface once more after Swift's anecdote. After Plato's

(2013), 603, cf. the *Epilogue* to this thesis. Cf. Dahlkvist (2007), 29 n. 37 on "the Aristotelian account of all great men as melancholics" (Aristoteles, *Pr.* 30.1), see Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl (1979), 17 and 18-29.

⁴⁸⁵ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 750.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. Miranda (2005), 36: "Ancor prima di Nietzsche, e contestando l'interpretazione classicista che, in nome del mito della serenità olimpica, identificava mondo greco e ottimismo, Schopenhauer aveva riconosciuto lo sfondo pessimistico della cultura greca."

⁴⁸⁷ In Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 751. Leopardi worked on the vulgarization of a fragment of the *Book of Job*, see *TPP* (2013), 446.

Apology 40c-e and Heraclitus B48 DK⁴⁸⁸ comes a series of poetic quotations: Theognis 425-428 and Sophocles' *Oedipus Colonus* 1225 (both on the idea of μὴ φῦναι), Euripides' *Hippolytus* 189 on the painful nature of human life, and finally Homer with the verses on the miserable condition of human beings among other creatures from *Odyssey* 18.⁴⁸⁹

Overall, the balance of quotations tilts heavily towards the Greek texts: they are for the greatest part explicitly quoted rather than merely referenced, as most of the other texts are, and they outnumber any other literary or philosophical tradition recalled by Schopenhauer. The prominence given to the Greek quotations is probably owed to the extreme clarity and directness of the Greeks' sentiment towards non-existence and to the diffusion of such sentiment in their writing, facts that Schopenhauer had clearly noticed. More than merely suggesting that death is preferable to the vanity and suffering inherent in life, the Greeks repeatedly and lucidly stated that never to exist would be the very best for man. It becomes now apparent that some of the core principles of this worldview (which now Schopenhauer clearly traces back to the Greeks) featured throughout Chapter 46 well before Schopenhauer admits their connection to the Greek conception of human existence. The connection between the end of Chapter 41 and the very end of Chapter 46 lies not only in the crucial presence of Greek thought, but also in the aspects of Greek thought that Schopenhauer chooses to lay emphasis on. Schopenhauer's pessimistic reading of the Homeric trope of the leaves fits perfectly with the worldview conveyed by Chapter 46's quotations. It seems then no coincidence that the Iliadic passage is treated or quoted in conjunction with many of the other pessimistic statements – such as the ones regarding the idea of better not to be born – in both Barthélemy's chapter and in Burckhardt's account of Greek pessimistic thought.⁴⁹⁰

As the chapter now approaches its conclusion Schopenhauer provides a few further references to "großer Geister": Pliny, Shakespeare, Byron, and Gracian. But the very last paragraph of the chapter is devoted to a sole author, Leopardi:

⁴⁸⁸ Number 48 in Kirk (1954), 116; Schopenhauer has βίω instead of τόξω.

⁴⁸⁹ Schopenhauer quotes Theognis 425 with the variant ἀρχὴν μὲν at the beginning of the verse, cf. the apparatus in West (1989), 194.

⁴⁹⁰ Burckhardt et al. (2005), 358.

Keiner jedoch hat diesen Gegenstand so gründlich und erschöpfend behandelt, wie, in unsern Tagen, Leopardi. Er ist von demselben ganz erfüllt und durchdrungen: überall ist der Spott und Jammer dieser Existenz sein Thema, auf jeder Seite seiner Werke stellt er ihn dar, jedoch in einer solchen Mannigfaltigkeit von Formen und Wendungen, mit solchem Reichthum an Bildern, daß er nie Ueberdruß erweckt, vielmehr durchweg unterhaltend und erregend wirkt.⁴⁹¹

No individual quotation is singled out from the works of the Italian thinker, and Schopenhauer's own words justify the impression that he is thinking of the entirety of Leopardi's work and thought as he knew it.⁴⁹² Schopenhauer's admiration for Leopardi shines through in other places in the works of the German philosopher, where it is repeatedly addressed as a "similarity of spirit". In the letter sent to Schopenhauer urging him to read the works of the Italian thinker in February 1858 – the same year in which Schopenhauer added the final paragraph on Leopardi to Chapter 46 – Adam von Doß called Leopardi "this southern doppelganger in pessimism", a definition echoed in Schopenhauer's letter to David Asher (3 January 1859), where the German philosopher calls Leopardi "meinen Geistesverwandten".⁴⁹³ The two authors' interests in Greek thought, its heritage, and its relevance for modernity meet at several points, not least in their common attention to the meaning and significance of the trope of the leaves.⁴⁹⁴ But Schopenhauer's fondness for Leopardi relates not only to the themes explored by the Italian thinker, but also to the imaginative and multifaceted manner in which Leopardi explores such themes. As we have seen, the way Leopardi so variously tackled the Greek idea of human ephemerality seems like the perfect illustration of such an attitude;

⁴⁹¹ Von Löhneysen (1960-1965), vol. 2, 754. The passage is discussed by Dahlkvist (2007), 97-98, who specifies that this entire paragraph is "an addition included in the third edition of the book, from 1858" and who links Schopenhauer's interest in Leopardi to letter of 20 February 1858 from Adam von Doß which he cites from Hübscher (1978), 154 (which I unfortunately could not get access to).

⁴⁹² On the relationship between Schopenhauer and Leopardi see De Sanctis' (2007), 52: "Leopardi e Schopenhauer sono una cosa. Quasi nello stesso tempo l'uno creava la metafisica e l'altro la poesia del dolore. Leopardi vedeva il mondo così, e non sapeva il perché. [...] Il perché l'ha trovato Schopenhauer con la scoperta del Wille". On De Sanctis' dialogue, Dahlkvist (2007), 100-101. *Ibid.* 95-102 is possibly the most detailed account of the relationship between the two authors.

⁴⁹³ Again citing from Hübscher (1978), 440 in Dahlkvist (2007), 99; cf. *ibid.* 99-102 on Schopenhauer's conviction of his similarity with Leopardi on account of the shared pessimism, providing anecdotes reported by contemporaries of Schopenhauer.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 98-99, Schopenhauer owned the first two volumes of Leopardi's *Opere*, containing the *Canti*, the *Operette*, the *Pensieri*, and some of Leopardi's translations from Greek and Latin.

the same themes are toured and probed from multiple perspectives and in a mesmerising number of settings. The scholarly approach is harmonised with the inventive (and in a way unscholarly) act of (mis)attributing ideas to ancient philosophers; poetry – both in the act of translation and in that of creative reinterpretation – and prose are equally valid exploratory tools. Leopardi's relationship with the intellectual history of pessimism, and in particular with the part that the Greeks played in this history, is another tile in the mosaic of pessimistic inventiveness which Schopenhauer praised so wholeheartedly: the continuous exchange between the words of the ancients and the needs and understanding of modernity triggers the fact that Leopardi's "system" of pessimism contains not only nominally, but in fact structurally and essentially the wisdom of the ancients.

CHAPTER 4

Human Questions, Divine Answers: Silenic Wisdom and the Worth of Existence

“And that is the very thing that alarms me,” returned Dantes.
“Man does not appear to me to be intended to enjoy felicity so unmixed; happiness is like the enchanted palaces we read of in our childhood, where fierce, fiery dragons defend the entrance and approach; and monsters of all shapes and kinds, requiring to be overcome ere victory is ours.

A. Dumas (1844) *The Count of Monte-Cristo*⁴⁹⁵

I

Leopardi and the μή φθῆναι: Brief Notes on an Encounter

Non siamo dunque nati fuorchè per sentire, qual felicità sarebbe stata se non fossimo nati? Striking in its composed violence, the note is dated February 18th 1821; no further comments or reference are added, and the question echoes unanswered on page 676 of the *Zibaldone*. In a manner nearly absurd given its laconic brevity, the note grapples with issues – life and its value, existence and non-existence, and, last but not least, the complex web that forms human ideas about the nature of happiness and its attainability – the gravity of which is also almost completely at odds with the various annotations that crowd the very same page.⁴⁹⁶ The question as Leopardi formulates it is not strictly rhetorical; the reader gets glimpses of both the (ever so slight) struggle of the author in embracing the affirmative answer and its tragic implications, and the author’s pained disbelief at the full vanity in which human life is cast by such insight. It is precisely the affirmative answer and the belief at its core that represent the note’s paradoxical centre of attraction, the monstrous and yet fatally hypnotic possibility that it would in fact be better for man not to have been born.

⁴⁹⁵ In Chapman and Hall (1846), 27-28.

⁴⁹⁶ A variety of annotations on entirely unrelated subjects, ranging from the saying *Quot homines, tot sententiae* to M.me de Lambert’s reflections on womanly love.

And despite its seeming loneliness in the context of *Zibaldone* 676, this theme – the paradox embedded in the happiness that comes with non-existence and its ties with ideas about the human condition – is in fact a magnetic pole throughout Leopardi’s work, and an utterly crucial element in his thought. The reader of the *Operette*, of the *Canti*, and of the *Zibaldone* will remember it cropping up at multiple points. Even just a look at one of the last passages observed in *Chapter 3* of this thesis (the Leopardian description of the suffering garden) provides an apt example of the wide-ranging presence of this idea. The raging (and yet profoundly lucid) attack on existence that fills three pages (*Zib.* 4174-4176) of the *Zibaldone*’s manuscript – starting with the outcry “everything is evil” and then blooming into the extensive symbolic depiction of the suffering garden – had closed on the comparison between the garden itself and a hospital, whose inhabitants ought to feel that non-existence would have been preferable to existence (“certo è che il non essere sarebbe per loro assai meglio che l’essere”).

The vividly pictorial way by which Leopardi describes the garden and wraps up the significance of its existence does full justice to the importance of this idea in his wider work: hand in hand with the denunciation of the harm inherent in existence – so central in the garden passage – the notion that it would be better not to be born is in fact both pivotal and ubiquitous in Leopardi’s thought. Just as in the present case, it invariably represents the resting point of any argument about the value of life; very few other ideas in the whole of Leopardi’s works are scrutinised as intensely, and reworked so often and so passionately, as the case for non-existence.

1. *Biographical Data and Biblical Wisdom*

Salomon et Job ont le mieux connu et le mieux parlé de la misère de l'homme,
l'un le plus heureux et l'autre le plus malheureux; l'un connaissant
la vanité des plaisirs par expérience, l'autre la vérité des maux.

B. Pascal, *Pensées* 221⁴⁹⁷

Both the *Zibaldone* and Leopardi's letters bear witness to the fact that our theme had become precociously central to the poet's mind. As early as 1819 a 21 year-old Leopardi – who had just failed in his attempt to escape the paternal home in Recanati – was writing to his younger brother Carlo that “It would have been better (humanly speaking) for them and for me, if I had not been born, or that I had died a long time ago”.⁴⁹⁸ What is especially striking in his personal history is the fact that Leopardi was directly and precociously exposed not only to facts and events that may have triggered such a pessimistic worldview, but really to the *notion*, to the pondered idea that it is preferable not to exist. An especially significant medium was the (religious) education imparted to Leopardi by his mother. From Leopardi's writings the reader learns how Adelaide Antici steadily inculcated into her children the idea that existence is in itself sin, evil, and danger, and that departure from life (especially a premature one, such as that of infants) must be rejoiced over. Both Adelaide's words and behaviours, described in a variety of settings by Leopardi, testify to one essential belief, though she seems to always have stopped short of this extreme formulation: it would be better for humans not to be born.⁴⁹⁹

Even though space only allows us to note this point briefly, it is worth remembering that

⁴⁹⁷ In the edition by Kaplan (1982), 190.

⁴⁹⁸ My translation. In *TPP* (2013), 1185. Cf. Grilli (1982), 58.

⁴⁹⁹ Two *Zibaldone* passages are especially telling in this respect. One is *Zib.* 353-355, describing the rejoicing attitude of a very religious mother towards the loss of her children (or risk thereof). In Leopardi's insightful words, the mother's behaviour is a testimony to the almost perfect equation between sin and existence: life equals numberless chances of temptation and sin; Giacomo deduces from such conduct the unequivocal belief that, by dying, the children not only have lost nothing, but really have gained much. Whether we want to believe or not that the mother depicted in the page is in fact his own, it remains unquestionable that Leopardi was not only precociously drawn to ponder over the matter of bereavement, but also exposed to behaviours that questioned the natural reaction to (especially untimely) death.

Biblical wisdom played an important role in triggering Leopardi's obsession with the theme.⁵⁰⁰ The notion so actively believed by Leopardi's mother appears with articulate limpidity in the *Ecclesiastes* itself (4.2-3) – which Leopardi repeatedly cites in his notes.⁵⁰¹ Likewise the figure of Job,⁵⁰² a pious man struck by countless banes, is chosen in *Zib.* 504 to exemplify the reaction of strength of the ancients (who searched for reasons and faults outside themselves, in the adverse gods and fate), is remembered for his defiant cursing of his birth, and reappears (more or less overtly) elsewhere throughout Leopardi's work.⁵⁰³ Not least, the *Book of Job* appears (albeit quite covertly) in Leopardi's *Detti memorabili di Filippo Ottonieri*, an 1824 piece in the style of *memorabilia* displaying the life philosophy of Ottonieri. Ottonieri is a modern Job on a smaller scale, who, shortly after alluding to the Biblical book in his description of life as a night spent sleeplessly on an uncomfortable bed,⁵⁰⁴ turns to reinterpret the *Zibaldone*

⁵⁰⁰ Brief selection of general literature on the subject: Casoli (1990); Negri (1997); Niccoli and Salvarani (1998); Rota (1998).

⁵⁰¹ Cf. *Ecclesiastes* 4.2-3 on which Presti (2016), 174; In general on Leopardi and Job and Leopardi and the *Ecclesiastes* Marcon (2007a), drawing a parallel between Solomon and Leopardi; Presti (2016), especially 170-177, who strongly disagrees with Marcon's religious reading of Leopardi's relationship with the *Ecclesiastes*. It must be mentioned that we find little help for the present research in Marcon's works, that seem for the most part based on rather loose text comparisons and analogies, for which they have been criticised by Biscuso in his 2010 review. The impact of his mother's teachings interweave in his writings with his reflections on religion: by February 1822, 23 year-old Leopardi (*Zib.* 2381-2383) can see the practical application of what he has distilled from his mother's acts and words in other aspects of Christianity, and in particular in the renunciation of existence operated by Christian monasticism. For Leopardi on Solomon and Homer see the *Epilogue* to this thesis.

⁵⁰² Cf. Marcon (2007a), 1 noting how “fin dal finire dell' ‘800 Leopardi venne chiamato ‘Giobbe di Recanati’”, quoting Carducci's “Introduzione a G. Leopardi”, in AA. VV. (1898), xiii.

⁵⁰³ Cf. Presti (2016), 145. Compare the letter Leopardi sent to Pietro Giordani on April 24th 1820: “Se noi fossimo antichi, tu avresti spavento di me, vedendomi così perpetuamente maledetto dalla fortuna, e mi crederesti il più scellerato uomo del mondo. Io mi getto e mi avvolgo per terra, domandando quanto mi resta ancora da vivere. La mia disgrazia è assicurata per sempre: quanto mi resterà da portarla? quanto? Poco manca *ch'io non bestemmi il cielo e la natura che par che m'abbiano messo in questa vita a bella posta perch'io soffrissi*”. My italics. Text in *TPP* (2013), 1199, on which cf. Presti (2016), 178. Cf. *Zib.* 507 again on Job.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Galimberti (1998), 322 n. 36 who reports Della Giovanna's (1899) suggestion of the *Book of Job* as a reference for this passage, but seems more inclined to think that “il comune spunto si spiega, oltre che con ascendenze letterarie [...], con la spontanea forza icastica del paragone.” Recently, Presti (2016) analyses the allusion to the *Book of Job* and links the passage with *Zib.* 4104. The *Book of Job*, which had been so relevant in the composition of the note Leopardi wrote one month earlier (*Zib.* 504), supplies here another layer of comparison, engaging with the Socratic image. The image of tormented and sleepless nights is twice present in chapter 7 of the *Book of Job*: first, it is a restless night which longs for the wake of dawn (3-4), second comes the night plagued by terrible dreams and visions. It is significant that in the *Book of Job* too the sleepless nights are a metaphor for the nature of existence: chapter 7 is introduced by “Does not man have hard service on earth?” to which follows a

note on which this chapter started, *Zib.* 676. This time, rather than leaving the (rhetorical) question open as he had done in the *Zibaldone* note, Leopardi casts it as Ottonieri's assertive and witty response to "to what purpose are men born?"⁵⁰⁵ Ottonieri responds: "To find out how much better it is not to be born".⁵⁰⁶

2. *The μὴ φθῆναι: Existing Research, Barthélemy, and a Problem in Focus*

A third and potent role in the formation of Leopardi's ideas of the evaluation of existence and non-existence is played by his wide-ranging readings, which exposed him to various and diverse interpretations of this notion. Amongst the various literary and philosophical traditions, just as Schopenhauer will later note,⁵⁰⁷ the ancient Greeks figure prominently for both the space they dedicate to the exploration of this notion and for the precocious entry of such meditations into the landscape of Western literature. Because of the undeniable relevance of this theme in Leopardi's work, and perhaps due to the provocative nature of the *μὴ φθῆναι* itself, two works of scholarship have directly tackled the theme of this chapter, i.e. the connection between Leopardi's view of existence, non-existence, and birth, and the ancient sources that proclaim that it is best for man not to be born.⁵⁰⁸

The first is Alberto Grilli's "Leopardi, Platone, e la filosofia greca", from the proceedings of the 5th *Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani*. The second is

grim comparison between life and slavery. The image is also reminiscent of the Socratic description of death as comparable to the dreamless night, a night anybody – even the Great King – would consider better than any other (*Apol.* 40C-e). Thus Socrates' example and Job's comparison of life and slavery – where parts of such life are precisely those unbearable restless nights – offer the reader ancient proof of the discomforts of existence.

⁵⁰⁵ *TPP* (2013), 559. The two sentences differ in one respect. Whereas the *Zibaldone* note openly speaks of happiness (that happiness which is certainly impossible once one is born, but of which one paradoxically imagines non-existence to be made of), Ottonieri employs the word "spediente", which pertains rather to the semantic field of the idea of "usefulness". One could imagine Ottonieri to be voicing an even darker notion than the one drafted by Leopardi three years before: happiness is so out of the question that the criteria of usefulness is the one now used to define the gap between existence and non-existence.

⁵⁰⁶ *TPP* (2013), 559. Cecchetti (1983), 303.

⁵⁰⁷ And we have seen in *Chapter 3 III*.

⁵⁰⁸ This is especially unusual given the general lack of research on the subject of Greek pessimistic thought in Leopardi's work.

Guido Polizzi's "La scoperta del 'meglio non essere mai nati'", presented at the 12th *Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani* and strongly connected to the research that was to result in his 2011 *Giacomo Leopardi: la concezione dell'umano, tra utopia e disincanto*, a work I mentioned in the *Introduction* to this thesis. Both articles concentrate heavily (if not exclusively) on one moment in the history of Leopardi's contact with the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$, i.e. on his reading of Chapter 26 and 28 of Barthélemy's *Voyage* in 1823, in the conviction (shared by a great part of the scholarship)⁵⁰⁹ that this is *the* moment of Leopardi's encounter with this notion in Greek thought.⁵¹⁰ The main focus of their analysis is a series of pages in the *Zibaldone* (2671ff), written in Rome in December 1823, which document with annotations and word-by-word transcriptions Leopardi's reading of these chapters in the *Voyage*.⁵¹¹ The passages copied or referred to by Leopardi contain references to some of the central occurrences of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ in ancient literature.

Despite the importance of this material for any study on this subject, in taking this stance the two articles fall short of the task in two respects. First, they neglect a great deal of crucial evidence, failing to consider the elements in Leopardi's work and thought which address this idea *before* 1823 and the reading of Barthélemy,⁵¹² and how those elements connect with ancient sources. The second shortcoming is a side product of the two articles' rigorous philological approach, aimed at assessing whether or not Leopardi ever came into direct contact with the sources mentioned by Barthélemy (especially Grilli) and at scrutinising the details of Leopardi's contact with Barthélemy's text itself (especially Polizzi). Obsessed with the *Zibaldone* pages and the relevant sections of Barthélemy, these scholars fail to acknowledge, but most importantly to discuss, the role that the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ plays in the *Canti* and in the *Operette*

⁵⁰⁹ Stefano Brogi (2012) briefly tackles Leopardi's interaction with the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ in the context of his focus on the idea of the *nolo renasci*, indeed present in Leopardi's work. Given the strong connection between the notion of the *nolo renasci* and that of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota$ one could have hoped Brogi would treat the theme himself; yet, he merely refers back to Timpanaro's work and to Barthélemy's *Voyage*, in Brogi (2012), 15-16 and note 10.

⁵¹⁰ The reading took place during Leopardi's trip to Rome at the end of 1823; the edition he consulted, printed in Paris, is referenced at *Zib.* 2670.

⁵¹¹ Cf. note 44 in *Chapter 1*. For bibliography on Leopardi's time in Rome, cf. Polizzi (2001), 61 n. 1.

⁵¹² Cf. Grilli (1982), 58 who spends only a brief paragraph mentioning the aforementioned letter to Carlo and *Zib.* 353-354.

in a series of passages that testify to the enormous (albeit less literal) impact that the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$ had on Leopardi. Failure to observe these passages (otherwise highly commented upon) through the lens of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$ results in a restricted view of Leopardi's interpretation of Greek pessimistic thought (and of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$ in particular) and a lack of appreciation of the nuances of such interpretation. This chapter aims at remedying such shortcomings by focusing on a selection of passages where Leopardi uses the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$, in one way or another to connect his insights with those of antiquity. The chapter is organised in short sections, which do not aim to fully explore each issue. Rather, they centre on a number of original observations, hoping to enrich the standard interpretations of these passages, and ultimately to bring to light some of the flickers that testify to the continual link between Leopardi and ancient pessimistic thought.

II

Greek Stories of Non-Existence

1. Sappho, Existence, and Homeric Pessimism

The path of fascination with both the poetry and the (real and mythical) persona of Sappho that was to lead Leopardi to the composition of his *Ultimo canto di Saffo* (1822) started at least as early as 1814, the year of his first translation from the Lesbian poetess.⁵¹³ As we read in the unpublished foreword to it, the *Ultimo canto* – the very peak of this path – is meant to sing of the unspeakable misfortune inherent in ugliness.⁵¹⁴ In it Sappho is in fact a splendid and suffering soul in an ugly body, depicted by Leopardi as she speaks (to herself, to us, to the gods, fate, and nature) about her unhappiness at the dawn of the day that will see her suicide.⁵¹⁵ This is not the place for a detailed treatment of Leopardi's complex relationship with Sappho's work and life, a subject that has intrigued generations of scholars and that continues to spark new research, nor do we have room for a thorough analysis of the *Ultimo canto* itself.⁵¹⁶ Rather, the nature of this poem gives us the chance to make a few brief observations regarding the way in which insights into the meaning of existence and its connection with suffering are, for Leopardi, always rooted in the wisdom of antiquity.

Two interconnected movements of thought mark Sappho's last song and her insights into existence. First is the pained and yet lucid connection Sappho draws between her unhappiness and her own existence, a connection that has already been made by the time she is singing in front of us. One thing is now limpidly clear to Sappho: her own suffering – which sprung from the unbridgeable gap between the beauty of her soul and the unseemliness of her body, and consequently her tragic and unreciprocated love – is

⁵¹³ On the poem *L'impazienza*, translating *PMG* 58 in Page (1962), cf. especially Gigante (2003), 64-67.

⁵¹⁴ *TPP* (2013), 471-472.

⁵¹⁵ As Leopardi himself declares, his main source is Ovid's *Heroides* 15.

⁵¹⁶ A selected bibliography on the poem (excluding the commentaries on the *Canti*): Dell'Aquila (1979); Blasucci (1987); Lonardi (1992); Gigante (2003); Felici (2002) reprinted in Felici (2005); Lonardi (2005); Raboni (2012); Presti (2016), 27-31.

one and the same as her life.⁵¹⁷ Her grief and misery commenced with her very existence, and are inextricable from it.

This insight resonates throughout the *Canto*, manifesting itself insistently in the form of the emphatic appearance of the theme of birth, which recurs with almost rhythmical insistence throughout the poem, as obsessive in the head of the reader as it is in Sappho's. We see it first in verses 37-39, expressing the notion that not only birth, but the moment such birth was decreed to happen and the individual's life was set into existence, are at the core of one's unhappiness ("What monstrous fault, what impious transgression/ Stained me before my *birth* [*natale*], making the Heavens/ So ill-disposed and fortune turn her face?").⁵¹⁸ It appears once more at vv. 47-49: "We are neglected/ *Children* [*prole*], and *born* [*nascemmo*] to weep, whose *raison d'être*/ Rests with the gods."⁵¹⁹ The theme crops up not only at different points throughout the poem, but also at different stages in its drafting, as we can see in a previous version of the aforementioned verses 37-39, where verse 37 appears as "Which fault, before I opened my eyes to the *day*".⁵²⁰ The recurrent reference to the moment of birth is an indirect and yet revealing testimony to the importance of this moment as symbolic of Sappho's acquired insight.

But there is a second, wider movement of thought sweeping through the *Ultimo canto*. The clue is – among others – in that first person plural that Sappho repeatedly adopts, and on which interpreters have long dwelled.⁵²¹ "We are neglected/ Children, and born

⁵¹⁷ Cf. Raboni (2012), 119 on the connection between the *Ultimo canto* and the *Inno ai Patriarchi*, both discussions of man's unhappiness as the result of something that predates birth (in the *Inno* it is, in a Christian perspective, the original sin).

⁵¹⁸ My italics.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. (my italics) *Il sogno* (1820-1821), v. 55: "*Nascemmo al pianto/ Disse, ambedue; felicità non rise/ Al viver nostro; e diletto il cielo/ De' nostri affanni*" and the *Inno ai patriarchi*, v. 7, composed a few months after the *Ultimo canto*: "*Immedicati affanni/ Al misero mortal, nascere al pianto,/ E dell'etereo lume assai più dolci/ Sortir l'opaca tomba e il fato estremo,/ Non la pietà, non la diritta impose/Legge del cielo.*"

⁵²⁰ My translation. In the original: "Qual fallo mai, qual sí nefando eccesso/Macchiammi anzi il natale, onde sí torvo/ Il ciel mi fosse e di fortuna il volto?"

⁵²¹ Cf. among others Dell'Aquila (1979), who also explores the relationship between the use of plural and autobiographism; Lonardi (1992), 180-181: "Il riferimento si muove con ambiguità 'ricca' tra l'io singolo, il duale (io Saffo parlo a te Saffo) e tutti noi, tutti nati al pianto"; Felici (2002), 348 "ora un

to weep, whose *raison d'être*/ Rests with the gods"; we, and not I, is what Sappho sings.⁵²² Sappho's realisation is that not only is she not alone in her fate, but her unhappiness is ontologically the very substance of life, affecting every person from the dawn of existence.⁵²³ The universal nature of Sappho's definition of life as expressed in vv. 37-39 is reiterated again at 61-62, as she addresses the one who has rejected her: "Live happily, if ever on this earth/ A happy mortal lived". Her wish of happiness for Phaon is poisonously entangled with an idea that, despite being formulated as hypothetical, does not lose its menacing and gnomic tone: "no mortal man can be happy" is the subtext of Sappho's words. The fact that Phaon shares none of Sappho's personal grounds for unhappiness – as far as we know he is neither ugly nor suffering from unrequited love – is not a guarantee of his future happiness, because no mortal is exempt from the misery inherent in birth and human life.⁵²⁴ The continuous intertwining of these two insights – the connection between pain and existence on the one hand, and the universal nature of such an axiom on the other – makes the *Ultimo canto* a perfect specimen of Leopardi's deep and complex relationship with the idea of the identity between life and unhappiness, and thus an ideal springboard for this chapter's observation of Leopardi's thoughts on the preferability of non-existence.

noi che si estende all'intera umanità"; cf. Raboni (2012), 121 for a summary of the scholarship on the various functions of Sappho's plural at different points in the *Ultimo canto*; Presti (2016), 28, 30.

⁵²² The fact that Sappho is not singing merely of herself is accepted by scholarship. Two especially enlightening discussions are Blasucci (1987), esp. 844-845 and Raboni (2012), 117 who suggest the universal value at the core of the *Ultimo canto* as the reason for the poem's place in the final edition of the *Canti*. Raboni (2012), 120 suggests that the change (with the removal of the first person singular possessive pronoun) to verse 37 from "Qual de la mente *mia* nefando errore" to the final "Qual fallo mai, qual sì nefando eccesso" is motivated by the same intent.

⁵²³ Cf. Dell'Aquila (1979), 19: "pessimistica visione di una condizione umana destinata al dolore"; Lonardi (1992), 181: "Saffo giunge a questa uscita dall'io verso tutti nell svolgersi stesso del suo canto-riflessione. Dapprima può pensarem come è appunto degli antichi secondo Leopardi, che la sventura sia solo sua." (It must be noted that this thesis profoundly disagrees with Lonardi's suggestion that, for Leopardi, the ancients only realised the individual's suffering. As this whole thesis shows, although he began by supposing the ancients happier than the moderns, Leopardi saw in antiquity the first conscious realisation of the universal character of human misery: one example among all, the "principato dell' infelicità" identified by Homer, at the very onset of ancient literature, cf. *TPP* (2013), 593 and at *Chapter 2 III.2* in this thesis.)

⁵²⁴ In the original: "Vivi felice, se felice in terra/ Visse nato mortal." In a note to the verse, Leopardi explains – once again resorting to the theme of birth – that the addition of "nato" to "mortal" was necessary to distinguish humans and gods. My translation of the note (capitalisations by Leopardi): "The Gods, according to the ancients, were BORN, and not MORTAL; and many of these had lived for some time ON EARTH; and many were earthly and always lived there, such as the nymphs of the woods, rivers, sea, etc. Pan, the sylvan gods, etc. etc."

To reach any certainty about the fact that Sappho's plural – appearing as early as verse 8 – is not merely an idly used “royal we”, but rather a deep marker of comprehension of human life, the reader needs to listen to the Greek wisdom which softly but clearly murmurs in between Leopardi's – and Sappho's – words. But this wisdom is not (Leopardi's) Sappho's (or rather, not only Sappho's, at least for what Leopardi could have known about her): rather it is the cumulative and deeply assimilated force of Greek poetry – and of one poet in particular, Homer – that speaks to us through Sappho's voice, conveyed more or less consciously by Leopardi to strengthen the poetess's claim. The presence of this ancient wisdom is the other reason for starting this chapter with this poem: Sappho's insights cannot be fully understood if one fails to perceive that they are grounded in Leopardi's wider reception of ancient ideas about the worth of existence, thus making the *Ultimo canto* an exemplary case of Leopardi's relationship with and use of his sources. The wide impact of ancient sources on the *Ultimo canto* – chiefly Ovid and Virgil – has been explored extensively, and we shall thus limit ourselves to sketching some of the connections that link the *Ultimo canto*'s insights with ancient thought.

One of the clearest signs of the presence of ancient ideas is the mention of the jars of Zeus at 63-64, an allusion to the speech of Achilles to Priam in *Iliad* 24.527ff: two jars lie at Zeus' feet, one of evil and one of good, and from them comes the lot of mankind. The voice is that of Achilles, but it is an Achilles who is speaking not just for himself, but for Priam, Hector, for his own father and for the whole of humanity; an Achilles who in the course of the epic has learned and changed, to the point of being chosen as the one to utter one of the most sweeping, strong, and controversial ideas about humanity in the whole of the Homeric poems. But the point here is that this (quite overt) reference helps explain another, tying Sappho's conception of life very tightly with that of Achilles. In Achilles' speech the tale of Zeus' urns comes as an explanation for his previous, harsh statement at 24.525-526 (ὥς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν/ ζῶειν ἀχνομένοις), an aetiology for man's necessary and inescapable unhappiness. Similarly, Sappho's recourse to the myth of the two jars expands what the poetess has slowly been building from the start of the poem, from the idea that man is

born to weep (47-48) to the certainty that no man, not even those superficially blessed with more abundant gifts, can ever be happy (61-62). It is not by chance then that one section of verses 47-49 is glossed in a note by Leopardi with an explicit reference to Homer and to the formulaic verse (θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κεῖται) that acted as a direct source for Leopardi's 48-49.⁵²⁵

Both this realisation *and* Sappho's wish for Phaon with its underlying definition of the human condition, are Leopardi's reinterpretation of *Iliad* 24.525-526; Sappho feels things differently from Achilles, and their situations are not similar, but nevertheless her grasp of life echoes directly that of the Greek hero. Perceiving Achilles' voice – and, with it, the entirety of Achilles' deep insights into the human condition at this point in book 24 – is thus vital to appreciating both the universalism at the core of Sappho's lament and the ageless significance that Leopardi attributes to it.

Something more can be said concerning Sappho's use of the myth of the two jars of Zeus and its significance for Leopardi's reception of Homer. Here is what Sappho says at 62-65: "Jove has not sprinkled/ Me with the liquor meaning happiness/ From his ungenerous jar, from when illusions/ Died with my dreaming youth." The *Iliad* tells of Zeus' two jars (δοιοὶ πίθοι); yet Leopardi's Sappho alludes to the myth in a specific way, i.e. by only mentioning the one jar – that of good, from which she has received so little – and by conspicuously refusing to name the other. The absence of the second jar – all the more glaring if we bear in mind how famous a passage Achilles' speech in *Iliad* 24 is – has the effect of bringing the reader's attention to the jar which is not mentioned. The effect is further emphasised if we think that in one of the versions preceding the final publication Leopardi chose the word "ampolla" to describe the jar of good things;⁵²⁶ the fact that good comes from a phial – a container that cannot hold more than a few drops – can only make us wonder (again, by contrast) about how large the other

⁵²⁵ E.g. *Il.*17.514, *Od.*1.267.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Leopardi's own note on why Sappho calls Zeus' jar a "phial": "Homer says a cask, Sappho a phial, which is, as you see, far less: (to know) the reason she wishes to call it so, ask those who know about life" (my translation). See Felici (2002), 326; Lonardi (2005), 129 on the role played by Vincenzo Monti's translation of the *Iliad* (1810 and following) on Leopardi's language choices, among which "doglio".

receptacle must be.⁵²⁷ The choice of giving the jar of evils indirect and yet powerful prominence is obviously programmatic, aimed at making its absence a statement, a silent but irresistible apophysis of the real substance of the lot given to humanity.

A similar glaring absence features in Achilles' explanation of the tale of the two jars, which describes two possible outcomes for humans: man can either receive a mixed lot, meeting now evil, now good, or he can be given only evils. Nowhere is the possibility that someone could be given only good things ever hinted at in Achilles' speech; it is precisely this absence that acts as the best possible elucidation of Achilles' bleak maxim at v. 525 (ὥς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι/ ζῶειν ἀχθυμένοις). In this case too it is an absence that exposes in all its cruelty the ordeal intrinsic to human life. And it is this belief and understanding of the human condition that is the vital interpretative key to the connection between Sappho's statement about the human possibility of happiness and her reuse of the story of Zeus' jars.⁵²⁸ Leopardi's Sappho testifies to her author's complete and dauntless appreciation of the bleak philosophy propounded by Homer's Achilles. This belief is the one underlying Sappho's words and Leopardi's thought, and it is distinctly Homeric. The comprehension of the fact that real happiness is utterly outside the grasp of humanity and that it is, in fact, the very antonym of the human condition comes to Leopardi – at least at this point in time and in this context –

⁵²⁷ The fact that Leopardi eventually settled for “doglio” does not weaken our argument. In fact, the fact that very little good comes from a larger container only speaks of the stinginess of he who is in charge of it. Besides, the fact that Leopardi began by thinking of the jar as a “phial” only supports the view that from the very beginning Leopardi thought of Sappho's conclusions as universal: the size of the jar is the same for everybody, not just for Sappho. The second version of the *Ultimo canto* thus seems to me to stress the negative role played by external and superior forces in the life of humans. In the *Canto* itself the external giver is a poignantly mixed crowd that ranges from “nature” to “Jove”, to “fate”, as if to encompass every external force man as ever thought of, and to signify their cohesive and relentless disregard for human happiness; on these external forces' relationship with Leopardi's concept of “Natura”, cf. Felici (2002), 357.

⁵²⁸ Cf. Pindar *Pyth.* 3.82-83: ἐν παρ' ἐσλὸν πῆματα σύνδυο δαίονται βροτοῖς ἀθάνατοι, on which see Young (1968), 50-51 arguing that in describing three jars (one of good and two of evil things) – Pindar interprets accurately *Il.* 24.527 and that such understanding corresponds to “the attitude of most Greeks toward life itself”. Cf. Fränkel (1975), 118 n. 11 on the fact the jars of the *Iliad* become one jar of evil things in Hesiod's myth of Pandora at *Op.* 82, 94; cf. also Hesiod *Op.* 179 saying that ἀλλ' ἔμης καὶ τοῖσι μεμείξεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν, although at 175 it described a time of sorrow in which χαλεπὰς δὲ θεοὶ δώσουσι μερίμνας.

through Homer.⁵²⁹ Achilles' deep insights into the human condition are the substratum of the pessimistic philosophy of *Ultimo canto*. So deeply has Leopardi listened to the profoundly pessimistic message voiced by the Homeric hero that he can now seamlessly improvise on it with his Sappho.⁵³⁰

2. "Favole" or the Art of Facing the Truth: A Note on Interpreting Fiction

The issue at the core of the *Dialogo di un fisico e di un metafisico* is one that runs through much of Leopardi's production,⁵³¹ and one that we have observed at work in the *Ultimo canto di Saffo* in the previous section: whether life is *per se* worth living or whether existence is only desirable when gifted with happiness (a possibility that, as the reader already knows, Leopardi denies *a priori*).⁵³² The trigger to the piece is, once again, a *Zibaldone* note (*Zib.* 352, that eventually finds space in the *Dialogo* itself in the author's note 2) describing both a Mr Hufeland's lessons on "the art of prolonging life" and Leopardi's opinions on such an idea.⁵³³ The dialogue is a complex re-enactment of this note, where one party, the Scientist, argues for Hufeland's theory. His counterpart, the Philosopher, decidedly conveys Leopardi's own belief, as one can gather from the *Zibaldone*'s clearly stated conviction that "life in itself has no importance whatever" (*Zib.* 351): existence is (or rather would be) worth it only when happy, and until this is possible, one ought rather to find a way to shorten life.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁹ Leopardi mentions the encounter between Priam and Achilles multiple times, e.g. *Zib.* 99; 261; 1083; 2767ff; 3162.

⁵³⁰ Cf. Gigante (2003), 55 n. 24 commenting on Lonardi (1969) and on the role of Homer for Leopardi's thought.

⁵³¹ In Cecchetti's translation the two characters are "scientist" and "philosopher". We shall keep to this translation while bearing in mind the implications of the original names.

⁵³² On the dialogue cf. Almansi (1997); Biscuso (2006). Small's (2007) *The Long Life* tackles the philosophical history of issues at the core of the *Dialogo di un fisico e di un metafisico*, in particular the connections (or oppositions) between a long life and a good life.

⁵³³ On Hufeland, German doctor and author of *Die Kunst das menschliche Leben zu verlängern*, published in Jena in 1797 cf. Biscuso (2006); Marcon (2007b) proposing that Hufeland "embodies a trait-d'union between the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the poet-philosopher Giacomo Leopardi"; Biscuso (2003).

⁵³⁴ On the topic of suicide in the dialogue cf. Biscuso (2006), 12-13, linking the present dialogue with the *Dialogo di Plotino e Porfirio*, also suggesting that suicide is for Leopardi foreign "al sentire umano" and that (n. 44) "non a caso nel *Dialogo di un Fisico e di un Metafisico* chi si suicida sono dèi, come Chirone, o esseri mitici come gli Iperborei, privi di effettive caratteristiche umane (sono immortali ed esenti da infermità o altri mali"; cf. Marcon (2007b), 61 who quotes Leopardi's *Disegni letterari*:

Since their fundamental disagreement cannot be solved by the initial confrontation, the Scientist tries to shake his opponent's convictions by posing the possibility of eternal life for man ("If man could and did live forever – I mean to say, without dying, and not after death – don't you think that he would like it?"). The Philosopher's reply to the Scientist's challenge is a turning point in the dialogue: "To a fictitious premise, I'll reply with fiction", says the Philosopher.⁵³⁵ From here on, the Philosopher's response is grounded on *exempla*, which are drawn, as he himself admits, from what he calls "favole"; since nobody has lived forever, only the fabulous characters of literature can offer insight into such an unrealistic premise. The Philosopher lists, in order, the stories of the 18th century alchemist Cagliostro, of the centaur Chiron, of the Hyperboreans, of Cleobis and Biton,⁵³⁶ of Agamedes and Trophonius,⁵³⁷ and finally of a number of populations said to live a maximum of forty years.

The significance of Leopardi's seamless introduction of the idea of "favole" – and the choice of *which* fictions to introduce – has been overlooked by critics. In her recent commentary to the *Operette*, Laura Melosi quickly disposes of the issue by explaining "favole" in a footnote as "in popular culture 'false tales', stories without real foundation [...]".⁵³⁸ Yet what is here once again at stake is the relationship between poetry and philosophy, which fuse in this dialogue like no other to make a united front against the fatuous idiocy of the Scientist's view of life, dumbly blinded by τὰ φυσικά.⁵³⁹

"Qui si auspica l'avvento di qualcuno atto ad insegnare «l'arte della felicità», anche se, anni dopo, Leopardi progetterà un «arte di essere infelice» poiché «quella di essere felice, è cosa rancida; insegnata da mille, conosciuta da tutti, praticata da pochissimi, e da nessuno poi con effetto», in *TPP* (2013), 1112.

⁵³⁵ "A un presupposto favoloso risponderò con qualche favola" in *TPP* (2013), 526. Cecchetti (1983), 155.

⁵³⁶ Interestingly Chiasson (2005), 42-43 suggests that Herodotus alerted "his audience at the outset to the legendary nature of the story to follow"; cf. Fowler (1996), 78 and Hdt. 1.31.2.

⁵³⁷ On this myth, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1979);

⁵³⁸ Melosi (2015), n. 21 page 238: "popolarmente 'fole', storie senza fondamento, di genere diverso da quelle 'antiche' che popolano le *Canzoni*".

⁵³⁹ Cf. Biscuso (2006), 3: "Il Fisico impersona invece quel tipo di scienziato moderno che opera ingenuamente [...] in quanto [...] crede che [...] un maggior sapere accresca necessariamente la felicità."

How are we supposed to interpret the Philosopher's notion of "favole", and consequently, what are we supposed to make of the ones he uses? I suggest that two interconnected passages from the *Zibaldone* can help us answer such questions. The first passage (*Zib.* 637) is an early (1821) reflection on the meaning of the myth of Eros and Psyche, that Leopardi interprets as symbolising the harm inherent in the knowledge of man's fate on earth. This myth, that he sees as a "progeny of the most ancient wisdom and knowledge of the nature of man and of this world", Leopardi calls "favola".⁵⁴⁰ Further confirmation that "favola" can be for Leopardi an explicit token signifying depth of philosophical perception, and that *Zib.* 637 is not an isolated thought, comes from one of the notes adduced at the outset of this thesis.

One of Leopardi's most profound reflections on ancient poetics, *Zib.* 2940 observed the inextricable bond existing in antiquity between poetry and philosophy, and more particularly between poetic forms and philosophical ideas and enquiries. The note originated from Leopardi's discussion (2939) of the many myths, tales, and stories that in antiquity (both in Biblical and in Greek and Latin texts) spoke of the connection between man's knowledge and use of reason on the one hand and man's unhappiness on the other. According to Leopardi, the harm inherent in a lucid understanding of the fate of man in the world is at the root of the ancients' tendency to disguise the truth with poetry. One of the examples of these "truths [...] announced in verses" is – two years after the 1821 note – once again the myth of Eros and Psyche, and, more importantly, a myth which is still referred to with the word "favola".

The Philosopher's remarkable insistence on the word "favola" – a term that he first introduces into the dialogue and which crops up five times in the first section of his reply alone – should alert the reader to the fact that Leopardi means to make a point with it. Far from signifying mere triviality and fantasy, "favola" is in this context a token of wisdom and a warranty of philosophical veracity. The metaphysical dignity that Leopardi's reflections grant to the poetic and fictional world described by the

⁵⁴⁰ "[...] appena posso discredere che quella favola non sia un parto della più profonda sapienza, e cognizione della natura dell'uomo e di questo mondo". For reasons I fail to comprehend, the 2013 *Zibaldone* translation has "part" for "parto".

Philosopher empowers the substance of the “favole” themselves, informing the reader of how he is supposed to receive them.

There is something to be said about which “favole” the Philosopher chooses. In his *Zibaldone* reflections, Leopardi had seen in antiquity (again both classical and biblical) a special genius in fostering the spark that derives from the connection between poetry and philosophy.⁵⁴¹ This conception of ancient poetics is reiterated in the *Dialogo di un fisico e di un metafisico* through the Philosopher’s selection of *exempla*, consisting for the main part (five out of six instances) of ancient material, testifying to Leopardi’s understanding of ancient wisdom as the perfect incarnation of ancient poetics. In turn, it explains the Philosopher’s – as well as Leopardi’s – appeal to antiquity: it is not for lack of other options, but rather in light of the uniqueness of antiquity’s grasp of both the human condition and the way to convey it.

2.1. *Lucian’s Chiron: Anything But Life*

The second *exemplum* provided by the Philosopher is that of the centaur Chiron, a story that Leopardi gathers from one of Lucian’s *Dialogi Mortuorum* (as he himself specifies in a note to the dialogue):⁵⁴² “[...] the great sage, Chiron, who was a god, with the passing of time grew tired of life, secured Jove’s permission to die, and died.”⁵⁴³ The Philosopher’s account summarises (at the same time as it elaborates) on the Lucianic dialogue, a discussion of Chiron’s choice to renounce immortality and to die, taking place in Hades between him and Menippus. The dialogue is built on a subtle and continuous paradox, which is rooted at the core of the idea of *Dialogues of the Dead*: although they are dead, Menippus and Chiron are in a *locus*, and can interact, and even discuss. More than any other in the *Dialogi Mortuorum*, the one between Menippus and

⁵⁴¹ Leopardi could read an interpretation of this very point – utterly pivotal throughout his own work – in Plutarch’s *De audiendis poetis* 36d-f, which he was reading in the very same days in which he was consulting Barthelemy’s French edition in Rome. It is a tempting idea to see in Plutarch’s definition of the use of poetry as a validation for philosophy a trigger also for Schopenhauer’s recourse to poetic sources in his list of pessimistic *große Geiste aller Zeiten*; Plutarch’s work figures in fact as one of his sources.

⁵⁴² The note: “Vedi Luciano, *Dial. Menip. et Chiron.* opp. tom. 1, p. 514.” as we know from his *Elenchi di letture* in *TPP* (2013), 1113ff, Leopardi had been reading Lucian with some constance from 1819.

⁵⁴³ *TPP* (2013), 527.

Chiron fully and consciously exploits the premise of the whole work – the idea that death is a type of existence, at least insofar as it grants the characters the possibility to discuss – as an integral part of the dialogue’s topic, i.e. the differences in nature and worth between life and death.

Thus Menippus’ questioning and challenging of Chiron’s choice hinges precisely on the similarity between the life Chiron has abandoned and the one he is currently “living”, a similarity which the centaur does not seem aware of and that provokes Menippus’ repeated nudges. The lack of ποικιλία – a lack which is the ancient precursor of Leopardi’s *noia* and Schopenhauer’s *Langeweile* – has pushed Chiron to give up immortality, but, as Menippus insinuates, is at risk of presenting itself again in this other life which Chiron is leading in Hades. The idea that something in Chiron’s bargain has gone wrong becomes all the more explicit towards the end of the dialogue, as Menippus suggests that Chiron could find himself in the position of having to look for ἄλλον βίον.

On the one hand then, Lucian seems to question (and possibly deride) Chiron’s decision, which has only led the centaur from one life into another. And yet, as usual, Lucian’s irony aims at multiple (and almost conflicting) targets. Just as we can read in the dialogue a mockery of Chiron’s short-sightedness, we can also get a hint of the slight⁵⁴⁴ caricature of a passage from one of Lucian’s favoured satirical victims, Homer. The Homeric *nekylia* of *Odyssey* 11 is obviously an immediate precedent of a work like the *Dialogi Mortuorum*. But besides being in general a piece of reception of Odysseus’ encounter with the Underworld, the dialogue of Menippus and Chiron seems to play especially with the vision conveyed by many of the ghosts of *Odyssey* 11. One of Menippus’ questions interrogates Chiron on whether he does not miss seeing the light of day (οὐχ ἡδὺν ἦν ζῶντα ὄρᾶν τὸ φῶς; 1). The mention of the light of day resonates heavily with one of the sorest points for the spirits encountered in the Homeric *nekylia*. First Teiresias at 11.93, followed by Odysseus’ mother at 11.223, and finally by Achilles at 11.498, the ghosts of Hades hold φῶς/ φάος – the light of day, but also, one

⁵⁴⁴ Lefkowitz (1969), 84 makes a similar point about Bacchylides 5. 161-162 “ἡελίου [...] φέγγος”, suggesting that “Heracles’ pity for Meleager and the formulaic phrase “light of the sun” again recall the scene where Odysseus and Heracles meet in Hades (*Odyssey* 11.617-626)”.

should bear in mind, a synecdoche for life itself —⁵⁴⁵ as one of the most dearly missed features of life on earth.⁵⁴⁶ It is not by chance that Lucian’s own *nekyia* (the *Necyomantia*, explicit parody of the Odyssean episode) begins with Menippus’ mention of light (ἐς φάος, *Nec.* 1). The Homeric characters’ insistence on the precious nature of light/life seems to be joked about by Lucian; Chiron answers Menippus’ question with a brief and perfunctory οὐκ, and then proceeds unscathed with his own explanation for hating life. One could thus read in the Lucianic dialogue *also* an ironic reversal of the Homeric characters’ *nostalgia* for the world of the living, an irony and a reversal that would have certainly appealed to Leopardi.

Leopardi’s alertness to Lucian’s sharp and multifaceted irony and to the various levels of interpretation of the dialogue seeps through in the Philosopher’s characterisation of Chiron as “saggio”. In the Lucianic dialogue, Chiron is not only never labelled as sage; rather, the centaur is the victim of Menippus’ cutting irony, who, inviting Chiron to be συνετός, is indirectly suggesting that the centaur might not have been all that smart in the first place, renouncing life for another (possibly equally monotonous) existence.⁵⁴⁷ Just as with Lucian, we are left wondering about Leopardi’s exact interpretation of Chiron’s choice. Whether he is suggesting that Chiron is in fact smart (because any existence is better than this existence), satirising on the god’s spoiled perception of existence,⁵⁴⁸ or simply smilingly winking at Menippus’ clever rebuttal of the centaur’s choice, Leopardi has chosen Chiron for the dense tangle of poetic ideas on the worth of existence. Perhaps, this multiplicity is what Leopardi (and Lucian) might have preferred: there is no simple answer to the questioning of existence.

⁵⁴⁵ Especially in archaic poetry, cf. Homer *Od.* 10.498; Hesiod’s λείπειν φάος ἡελίοιο in *Op.* 155; Thgn. 569.

⁵⁴⁶ One could be reminded of Anaxagoras’ response to the question τίνος ἔνεκ’ ἄν τις ἔλοιτο γενέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ μὴ γενέσθαι in Aristotle *Eud. Eth.* 1.1216b, indicating the contemplation of the sky and the cosmos as sufficient reasons for choosing existence. Anaxagoras’ opinion is referenced one section after Aristotle’s discussion of the reasons why men might prefer non-existence: πολλὰ γάρ ἐστι τοιαῦτα τῶν ἀποβαινόντων, <δι’ αἱ> προΐενται τὸ ζῆν, οἷον νόσους περιωδυνίας χειμῶνας· ὥστε δῆλον ὅτι κἂν ἐξ ἀρχῆς αἰρετὸν ἦν, εἴ τις αἴρεσιν ἐδίδου, διὰ γε ταῦτα τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι. (1.1215b) on which Laurenti (1985), 53.

⁵⁴⁷ Menippus answers indirectly to Chiron’s own remark in section 1, Ἐρῶ πρὸς σὲ οὐκ ἀσύνητον ὄντα.

⁵⁴⁸ Compare with Fénelon’s pious and optimistic Chiron in his *Dialogues des morts* 3, on which Weinbrot (2005), 76-77.

The idea that even gods could be drawn – for a variety of reasons – to renounce existence, makes one striking appearance in the *Odyssey*. Yet it is not boredom but suffering – the suffering inherent in his existence – that pushes the god Hephaestus to wish he had not been born.⁵⁴⁹ While there is no proof that this episode was on Lucian’s mind as he composed the dialogue of Menippus and Chiron, or indeed in Leopardi’s mind as he retold the centaur god’s mishap with existence, it is beyond reasonable doubt that both authors shared a profound familiarity with the Homeric epic;⁵⁵⁰ it is thus worth briefly reminding ourselves of this episode, which grapples with themes extremely relevant to both authors’ reflections.

Demodocus’ song, performed at the Phaeacian court in the presence of Odysseus, recounts the affair between Ares and Aphrodite, and of Hephaestus’ discovery and punishment of the cheating couple.⁵⁵¹ But when the success of his trick faces him with the bare and unforgiving reality of his wife’s infidelity, Hephaestus cries out to the assembled gods (8.311-313):

ἀτὰρ οὐ τί μοι αἴτιος ἄλλος,
ἀλλὰ τοκῆε δύω, τὼ μὴ γείνασθαι ὄφελλον.
ἀλλ’ ὄψεσθ’, ἵνα τὼ γε καθεύδεται ἐν φιλότῃτι.

Conscious that Aphrodite’s unfaithfulness is primarily caused by his own physical lameness and monstrosity (8.307-311), Hephaestus’ lament is grounded on the recognition that the very cause of his suffering is his own essence and that the only ones to blame are those who begot him.⁵⁵² Thus the lament over an unfaithful wife becomes a reflection on the persistence of one’s existential marks. Hephaestus’ wish is of course

⁵⁴⁹ I am here reassessing some of the material discussed by Yoav Rinon’s article on “Tragic Hephaestus”, Rinon (2006), although Rinon fails to discuss the god’s wish not to have been born. Rinon (2008) also fails to mention the part of Hephaestus’ speech in *Od.* 8 which concerns his wish never to have been born.

⁵⁵⁰ Leopardi mentions Demodocus at *Zib.* 130 and 4328.

⁵⁵¹ For interpretations of the connection of the second song of Demodocus to the context of book 8 and to the *Odyssey* in general see Burkert (1960); Braswell (1982); Newton (1987); Brown (1989); Rinon (2008), 114-126.

⁵⁵² See Halliwell (2008), 83 n. 78.

prompted by the god's unique status,⁵⁵³ alone among the gods he shares two of mankind's prerogatives, i.e. physical limitation and the fatigue of work. It is this extreme and unparalleled proximity to human life that prompts his peculiar exposure to suffering.⁵⁵⁴ The god's terrible – and quasi-human – wish not to have been born can only be explained in this light. This divine recognition is thus extremely informative of (some of the) Homeric ideas on human life: if even a god is led to wish never to have been born, how powerful and ineludible must be the suffering intrinsic to human life?

2.2. *Of Gods and Life: A Note on Divine Opinions*

Commentators agree unanimously about the fact that Leopardi did not derive the story of Cleobis and Biton directly from Herodotus' *Histories*, but rather from pseudo-Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Apollonium*.⁵⁵⁵ The fact that the myth came to Leopardi from the *Consolatio* and not from Herodotus can be confirmed – more than by the simple impossibility of proving he ever read Herodotus, on which Timpanaro and others seem to rely – by the verbal similarities between the *Operette*'s and the *Consolatio*'s versions. The oxen (βόες) of Herodotus 1.31.2 become mules (ὄρεϊς) in the pseudo-Plutarchean text and consequently in the translation consulted by Leopardi.⁵⁵⁶ The idea behind the Greek ὑποδύομαι – which describes the brothers' action of going underneath the carriage to carry it on their shoulders – is translated by Leopardi with the very same verb “sottentrare” chosen by Adriani.

⁵⁵³ Which is discussed by Rinon (2006) and (2008), 127-144. Rinon speaks explicitly of Hephaestus as “tragic” and his 2006 article is targeted to show how the tragic character of Hephaestus is based on his experience of “irretrievable loss as well as constant pain”.

⁵⁵⁴ It is certainly true that the other gods too can experience suffering through closer contact with humanity: Zeus can be distressed for the death of his son Sarpedon (*Il.* 16.458-461) and Aphrodite can sense physical pain if injured in battle (*Il.* 5.343). Any contact with mankind is likely to bring to the gods a brief taste of the very consistency of human life, suffering. Yet whereas for the rest of the gods this taste is impermanent and ephemeral, Hephaestus is condemned to essentially and eternally share something human within himself.

⁵⁵⁵ On the myth of the two brothers, see especially Regenbogen (1930); Lloyd (1987); Sansone (1991), stressing the ritualistic character of the story; Shapiro (1996) on the consonance between the beliefs upheld by Solon and by Herodotus; Stahl (1975), despite briefly tackling the myth; Chiasson (2005); Pelling (2006) although not directly tackling the myth, provides a useful springboard for the analysis of Solon's wider speech.

⁵⁵⁶ Adriani (1825), 315: “i muli che tiravano il carro”.

I wish to add one brief but significant point to this discussion. It seems to me that the best proof that (at least at the time of the composition of this dialogue) Leopardi had not read the story of Cleobis and Biton in the Herodotean original is the fact that Leopardi's version fails to include a detail that not only would have suited the narrative of the Leopardian *dialogo* extremely well, but that is in itself strikingly fitting with Leopardi's wider thought. Having described the two youths' efforts in carrying their mother to the temple, Herodotus (1.31.3) says that *τελευτή τοῦ βίου ἀρίστη ἐπεγένετο, διέδεξε τε ἐν τούτοισι ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἄμεινον εἶη ἀνθρώπῳ τεθνάναι μᾶλλον ἢ ζῶειν*. Cleobis' and Biton's death is in Solon's words the proof that *the god* (here Hera) believes that it is best for men to die rather than to live.⁵⁵⁷

This detail – the fact that the divine itself (with all the necessary implications) is the one to admit and decree that man would be better off outside existence – is nowhere in Leopardi's retelling of the myth of Cleobis and Biton.⁵⁵⁸ And yet the connection between divine status (signifying both entitlement to immortality and superior insights) and the worth of life clearly features in the dialogue, since one of the Philosopher's first *exempla* is the *god* Chiron. The emphasis on Chiron's divinity is marked: "Now think; if gods repine at immortality, how would men like it?" asks the Philosopher.⁵⁵⁹ But even more telling of Leopardi's keen interest in the role of the divine with respect to the value of life is what we read in the *Dialogo della natura e di un'anima*,⁵⁶⁰ written only one month previously, and tackling the direct correspondence between excellence and unhappiness. Nature – a god-like figure in Leopardi's thought, as we have already observed in the *Ultimo canto* – is forced to break the news to the Soul about to enter existence that she is doomed to be miserable. But this fate does not await just this soul –

⁵⁵⁷ Lloyd (1987), 25: "The function of this detail in the story is to show that there was nothing in the lives of Cleobis and Biton that would make death a blessing for them in particular [...] The point is that death is best for everyone, even for those with an adequate livelihood." Cf. Lloyd's comparison of Hdt. 1.86.3 with Aristotle *Nic. Eth.* 1100a 10-17.

⁵⁵⁸ The detail is absent from the *Consolatio*. The retelling of the story in the *Voyage* mentions it indirectly saying that the two youths are made to sleep and die "comme si les dieux n'avoient pas de plus grand bien à nous accorder, que d'abrèger nos jours". The detail as told in the *Voyage* is significantly different, because it omits the divinity's own opinion, on which the strength of the Herodotean passage is based.

⁵⁵⁹ *TPP* (2013), 526. Cecchetti (1983), 157.

⁵⁶⁰ Melosi (2015) indicates how Nature's initial invitation "Vivi, e sii grande e infelice" comes from D'Alembert's "Soyez grand et malheureux" in his *Éloge de de Sacy*, quoted by Leopardi at *Zib.* 2414.

who is nevertheless destined to a deeper unhappiness in light of her excellence – but really any soul that comes to life. Twice Nature utters with gnomic certainty the fate of men: “And of necessity all men are born and live unhappy”, at the beginning of the dialogue, and again at the end of it “All souls of men are given prey to unhappiness through no fault of my own”.⁵⁶¹

Just as Herodotus’ Hera (who, like Leopardi’s Nature, is divine and yet not directly responsible for the quality of the human condition) had stated that death was better than existence for humans, Nature incontrovertibly affirms that life and unhappiness are inseparably tied. This type of external validation of man’s painful insight about the harmful nature of existence lies at the core of both stories. One could hardly believe that, had Leopardi read the Herodotean version (strikingly similar to the one of the *Consolatio*, except for the lack of this specific part), he would not have been struck by how well the divine statement would fit the narrative of the dialogue. Ultimately, to “prove” Leopardi’s lack of contact with the details of Herodotus’ passage helps to highlight Leopardi’s intellectual proximity to the thought portrayed by Herodotus, a thought which Leopardi independently portrays in the *Dialogo della natura e di un’anima*.

3. Pessimism and “Greekness”: a Thracian Anecdote

The *Storia del genere umano*, the first of Leopardi’s *Operette*, narrates the various ages in the prehistory of humankind, from a childish and happy golden age to man’s progressive discovery of the world’s physical and theoretical limitations, which pull humanity down into despair. From then on, the *Storia* recounts the numerous attempts of the gods at modifying the state of man’s life, these attempts’ constant and inevitable failure, and the increasing misery of man’s condition. To fully render the boredom and the hatred for life that engulfs humanity, Leopardi tells the reader that it is during one of these attempts that the custom originated of mourning the day of birth of an infant, and of celebrating the deaths of humans:

⁵⁶¹ TPP (2013), 513, 514. Cecchetti (1983), 105, 113.

[...] nacque allora, come si crede, il costume riferito nelle storie come praticato da alcuni popoli antichi che lo serbarono, che nascendo alcuno, si congregavano i parenti e loro amici a piangerlo; e morendo, era celebrato quel giorno con feste e ragionamenti che si facevano congratulandosi coll'estinto.⁵⁶²

Leopardi himself provides a note to the *Storia* supplying a number of sources for his anecdote – whose historical accuracy serves him well in the setting:

Erodoto, lib. 5, cap. 4. Strabone, lib. 11, edit. Casaub. p. 519. Mela, lib. 2, cap. 2. *Antologia greca*, ed. H. Steph, p. 16. Coricio sofista, *Orat. fun. in Procop. gaz.* cap. 35, ap. Fabric. *Bibl. Graec.* ed. vet. vol. 8, p. 859.⁵⁶³

But, aside from the sources he provides in the note, and as is often the case with Leopardi's published works, the roots of this passage can be traced back also to two pages in the *Zibaldone*. The first, dating to 1822, is *Zib.* 2607, a note treading once again the fine line between the reception of personal experience, of Biblical sapience, and of ancient wisdom.⁵⁶⁴ Like the other *Zibaldone* passages mentioned earlier in this chapter, it conceives of the entrance into life as the beginning of all sufferings (as seen in the text, with “burden”, “sorrows, and ills, and passions”, “suffering”, “damage”). Like *Zib.* 676 – and as if no other reaction was possible in this matter but an incredulous questioning – the note does not close on a statement, but on a series of questions. Not one but three questions are stacked one upon the other to convey the essential absurdity of human existence, an absurdity that no answer or statement can account for.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶² In *TPP* (2013), 494. Cecchetti (1983), 29, 31. “It was then that among some ancient peoples the custom began whereby, when a child was born, relatives and friends would gather together to mourn him; and when someone died, the day was celebrated with festivities and speeches and congratulating the deceased.”

⁵⁶³ Cf. Grilli (1982) for full analysis of the note.

⁵⁶⁴ In the later (1829) *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia* Leopardi will tackle once again both the idea that birth is the beginning of all suffering (and that man ought to be consoled for coming into life) at esp. 39-54. and the notion that a life full of misery is not worth living (at the core of the *Dialogo di un fisico e di un metafisico*): “Nasce l'uomo a fatica,/ Ed è rischio di morte il nascimento./ Prova pena e tormento/ Per prima cosa; e in sul principio stesso/ La madre e il genitore/ *Il prende a consolar dell'esser nato.* [...]Ma perchè dare al sole,/ Perchè reggere in vita/ Chi poi di quella consolar convenga?! *Se la vita è sventura,/ Perchè da noi si dura?!* at 39-56 and at 143 “[...]E' funesto a chi nasce il dì natale.” My italics.

⁵⁶⁵ *Zib.* 2607: “Per Dio! perchè dunque nasce l'uomo? e perchè genera? per poi racconsolar quelli che ha generati del medesimo essere stati generati?”. “Good God! Why then is man born? And why does he procreate? To console those he has given birth to for having been born?”

The other source is *Zib.* 2671, part of the series of annotations from the reading of Barthélemy's chapters 26 and 28 that Leopardi made in Rome in February 1823, a note that in turn incorporates a number of ancient sources:

Parmi plusieurs de ces nations que les Grecs appellent barbares, le jour de la naissance d'un enfant est un jour de deuil pour sa famille (Herodot. I. V, c. 4; Strab. XI, p. 519. *Anthol.*, p. 16).⁵⁶⁶ Assemblée autour de lui, elle le plaint d'avoir reçu le funeste présent de la vie. Ces plaintes effrayantes ne sont que trop conformes aux maximes des sages de la Grèce. Quand on songe, disent ils, à la destinée qui attend l'homme sur la terre, il faudroit arroser de pleurs son berceau: (Eurip. *fragm. Ctesiph.*, p. 476; Axioch., *ap. Plat.*, l. III, p. 368; Cicero, *Tuscul.*, l. I, c. 48, t. II, p. 273). Même ouvrage, ch. 26, t. III, p. 3 (8 febbraio 1823).

This first excerpt comes from Chapter 26 (*De l'éducation des Athéniens*) of the *Voyage*. The chapter describes Athens' (and occasionally other cities') system of education, from the very birth of an infant onwards. The narrative interweaves general information about the standard treatment of children, sourced from a variety of ancient writings on the subject, with the account of the birth of his friend Apollodorus' son as witnessed by Anacharsis himself. In this setting – where it is not unusual to hear of customs of other peoples as a comparison for those of the Athenians – Barthélemy inserts the passage quoted by Leopardi.

The way the anecdote in the *Storia* is formulated reflects very clearly the fact that Leopardi must have drawn directly from one (or more) of the primary sources; differently from Barthélemy in fact, the *Storia* passage is bipartite in structure, highlighting not only the behaviour at the birth of a child – which is the focus of the French author, as his Anacharsis is presently witnessing the birth of a child in his guest's house – but also the ritualistic traditions that occur at the death of an individual. This binary arrangement dates back to the original source of the Thracian anecdote, Herodotus 5.4.2, and is carried through much of its reception, to include the text of

⁵⁶⁶ The passage from Strabo is 11.11.8, quoting Euripides fr. 449, cf. Lasserre's (1975) commentary in vol. 8.

Pomponius Mela that Leopardi references in the *Storia*.⁵⁶⁷ The passage is part of Herodotus' description of the Thracians during Megabazus' march into their territory; in particular, Herodotus focuses on the customs of the different Thracian tribes, among which are the Trausi. Here is the excerpt from Herodotus 5.4.2:

τὸν μὲν γενόμενον περιζόμενοι οἱ προσήκοντες ὀλοφύρονται, ὅσα μιν δεῖ ἐπεῖτε ἐγένετο ἀναπλῆσαι κακά, ἀνηγεόμενοι τὰ ἀνθρωπία πάντα πάθεα· τὸν δ' ἀπογενόμενον παίζοντές τε καὶ ἡδόμενοι γῆ κρύπτουσι, ἐπιλέγοντες ὅσων κακῶν ἐξαπαλλαχθεὶς ἐστὶ ἐν πάσῃ εὐδαιμονίῃ.

The very same binary structure is visible also in a fragment of Euripides' *Cresphontes*, another of the sources mentioned by Leopardi as he copies the text of Barthélemy's *Voyage*. According to our sources, the *Cresphontes* told the story of the protagonist's return to his homeland to regain the throne usurped by his father's slayer, Polyphontes. Fragment 449 (I read from Collard's edition) consists of four verses, whose contextual interpretation is particularly difficult given that we lack the rest of the speech that, judging from the papyrus, encircled the short *gnome*.⁵⁶⁸

ἐχρῆν γὰρ ἡμᾶς σύλλογον ποιουμένους
τὸν φύντα θρηνεῖν εἰς ὅσ' ἔρχεται κακά,
τὸν δ' αὖθ' θανόντα καὶ πόνων πεπαυμένον
χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων.

The way in which relevant scholarship has viewed the relationship between Leopardi and this passage calls for some observations. In his aforementioned article, where he meticulously analyses the impact of the various ancient sources behind this anecdote in the *Storia*, Grilli, among others, notices how Leopardi copied the reference to the *Cresphontes* so exactly from the *Voyage* that he replicated a mistake contained in the

⁵⁶⁷ Pomponius Mela *De situ orbis libri III* 2.2. Cf. Timpanaro (2008), 16 and n. 37 on how Leopardi “Lesse per esempio qualcosa di Erodoto, ma assai meno di quanto si sia supposto”; *ibidem*, 60 n. 25 on Leopardi's project of translating Herodotus. *Ibidem*, 158 n. 39 Timpanaro explains in detail why he disagrees with Setti (1906)'s idea that Leopardi read all of Herodotus

⁵⁶⁸ See *TrGF* Kannicht (2004), 486-487 for *testimonia*. On the fragment see Harder (1985), 92-98 who also lists other *loci* that discuss the tradition of mourning births; Collard, Cropp and Lee (2009), 142-143. On the use of passages such as this in consolatory literature, cf. Kassel (1958), 75-76, Lattimore (1962), 205-210.

edition itself, which read “Ctesiph.” as opposed to “Cresph.”⁵⁶⁹ Grilli’s reading is somewhat confused: on the one hand he deduces that Leopardi never worked out what the correct reference was, and that direct contact with the text of Euripides must be excluded. Yet, Grilli himself reveals that Leopardi attentively read the fragment of the *Cresphontes* (in the Latin version) in Cicero’s *Tusculanae* 1.115, and that he was in fact strongly influenced by it when writing up his *Storia* anecdote. Leopardi does not reference the *Tusculanae* (possibly, and tellingly, because he knew the source so well and had used it so profusely in the past)⁵⁷⁰ but Grilli convincingly highlights the textual similarities between Cicero’s version of Euripides and Leopardi’s texts.⁵⁷¹ I wish to add, since it has not been pointed out before, that Leopardi had *at least* two more opportunities to read the original text of Euripides: first, in the (many times quoted) edition of Stobaeus’ *Anthologium*, which preserves the second verse of the Euripidean fragment at Stob. 4.34.75 (a chapter especially favoured by Leopardi who references it multiple times) in the context of Plato’s *Axiochus* 368a and (the full fragment) at 4.52b.42.⁵⁷² Leopardi could also read it (although devoid of its first line) in Plutarch’s *De audiendis poetis* 36e-f.⁵⁷³ Neither of these authors mentions the source as Euripides’ *Cresphontes* (4.34.75 and Plutarch’s text lack any reference, and 4.52b.42 in the Gessner edition reads “Sophoclis, al. Euripidis in Themistocle”). Ascertaining with absolute conclusiveness whether Leopardi did, or did not, read the Greek original of the Euripidean fragment *while at the same time* being conscious that the text he was reading was in fact the *Cresphontes* is ultimately trivial. What remains is the fact that, besides reading the idea as Euripides phrased it in Cicero’s translation, Leopardi had repeated chances to come across it elsewhere.⁵⁷⁴ The perspective on existence expressed by the *Cresphontes*’ passage – whether read only in Latin, or only read partially, or even read

⁵⁶⁹ Grilli (1982), 63 calls it “grossa ‘bevue’”.

⁵⁷⁰ This does indeed tell us something about Leopardi’s *modus citandi*.

⁵⁷¹ Grilli (1982), 63 on “si congregavano” (taken from Cicero’s *coetus celebrantes* and “congratulandosi con l’estinto” derived from *hunc omni...laude et laetitia exsequi*).

⁵⁷² Cf. the text and translation of the *Axiochus* in Hershbell (1981).

⁵⁷³ From which he quotes at *Zib.* 2673-2674 in *Opuscoli morali di Plutarco volgarizzati da Marcello Adriani il giovane* (1819). Mere lines before quoting fr. 449, the *Axiochus* cites *Il.* 24.525-526 and *Od.* 18.130-131 (*Axioch.* 367d). See Giannattasio Andria (2006), 118. On *De audiendis poetis* cf. the commentary by Hunter and Russell (2011), esp. 206-207.

⁵⁷⁴ The fact that Leopardi never commented upon the *Cresphontes* elsewhere or never fixed the incorrect reference to the “*Ctesiph.*” does not, in my opinion, alter the fact that he used the text and knew what he was using (Cicero does explicitly reference both Euripides and the name of the play).

in the ignorance of its authorship – must be considered when looking at Leopardi’s idea of the custom or necessity of mourning birth and celebrating death.

Let us go back to where we left off. Barthélemy is not the only one to perceive the similarity between the Herodotean tale and the tragic excerpt. In the very same section of his *Supplements* which we discussed in *Chapter 3*, when composing his catalogue of pessimistic *große Geiste aller Zeiten*, Arthur Schopenhauer had started it with the Greeks and more particularly with selected quotations on the necessity to mourn existence.⁵⁷⁵ On this topic Schopenhauer weaves together two modern sources (a Mexican custom and an anecdote from the life of Jonathan Swift) and two ancient ones: Herodotus’ anecdotes about the ritual of the Trausi tribe at Hdt. 5.4.2 and *TrGF* fr. 449 from Euripides’ *Cresphontes* as related by Plutarch in his *De audiendis poetis* 36e-f.⁵⁷⁶

The two passages are indeed remarkably similar. Both centre on the notion that existence is a bane, whose beginning ought to be mourned and whose end celebrated. The striking similarity between the two passages – highlighted by Barthélemy’s choice to present them together – has been observed before.⁵⁷⁷ As Annette Harder pointed out, such similarity goes beyond the topic to include the formal structure and details of the phrasing.⁵⁷⁸ Scholars like Harder thus believe that the two passages are directly related, and in particular that Herodotus’ anthropological anecdote influenced Euripides’ verses.

But the similarity between the tragic text and the presumably pre-existing Thracian custom sparks an obvious question, already addressed by various scholars: what is the connection between the ritual described by Herodotus and Greek customs and

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. *Chapter 3* III. Schopenhauer then goes on to a series of references on the μη φθναί.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. Hunter and Russell (2011), 206-207 connecting the passage to other *loci* of Greek literature, and referencing the *testimonia* in *TrGF* Kannicht (2004), 486-487.

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. Harder (1985); Browning (1961). Notice that Barthélemy’s paraphrase of Hdt. 5.4.2 only includes the first half of the notion; the presence of the second half augments the resemblance. The commentary in the 2000 *Belles Lettres* edition of Euripides’ fragments points too at the similarity with Herodotus and suggests the latter as a source for the tragic fragment.

⁵⁷⁸ Harder (1985) suggests so on the grounds that “Herodotus tells a ‘historical fact’, which is then adapted by Euripides to fit a statement on the sadness of life”.

culture?⁵⁷⁹ Speaking exclusively of the Herodotean passage, Elizabeth Irwin has similarly highlighted its “capacity [...] to evoke two contrary responses, difference from and identity with the Greeks”.⁵⁸⁰ What is the connection between these barbarians’ custom and “Greekness” *lato sensu*?

As well as being validated by modern commentators –⁵⁸¹ who agree that the pessimistic view of life expressed by the Thracian rituals is in accord “with one side of Hellenic sentiment” –⁵⁸² the consonance between the belief upheld by such rituals and Greek thought is explicitly stressed by Barthélemy himself in the aforementioned passage. Judging from the happiness of Apollodorus’ family, the reader could be drawn to believe that Barthélemy believed the practice to be fully alien to the Greeks’ understanding of life. And yet, as he references the Thracian custom, Barthélemy does not neglect to remark that such belief is in fact entirely consistent with the thought and wisdom of ancient Greece.⁵⁸³ It is to support this point that Barthélemy adds a number of references to Greek works, among which is Euripides’ *Cresphontes*.

Did Leopardi see the custom (or the idea at its core) as Greek in any sense? Two details in the *Storia* prompt us to think he probably did. Having developed the custom of mourning birth and celebrating death – and having thus theorised the link between

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Bianchi, Horewitz and Girardot (1971), 233 n. 10: “The ancient authors also remember the curious Thracian custom (not necessarily anticosmic, perhaps simply apotropaic) of crying at the birth of children and of rejoicing at funerals. But Herodotus (5. 4) applies that as the distinctive fashion of the Trausoi in contrast to other Thracians.”

⁵⁸⁰ Irwin and Greenwood (2007), 62.

⁵⁸¹ Irwin and Greenwood (2007), 62 usefully summarises commentators’ opinions on the matter.

⁵⁸² Irwin and Greenwood (2007), 62. *Ibid.* see also the quote from How’s and Wells’ commentary (1912): “This Trausic custom, like Suttee (chap. 5), evidently rests on the faith in a better life beyond the grave, held also by the Getae (iv. 95), and embodied in the Thracian cult of Dionysus (Rohde, *Psyche*, ii. 1). This belief is primitive and widespread (H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, chaps. 13, 14; Tylor, *P.C.* chaps. 12, 13), while the pessimistic view of the present life (cf. Soph. *O.C.* 1225; Theogn. 425) is in accord with one side of Hellenic sentiment (Butcher, *Gr. G.* 154f.), and with H.’s own oft-repeated opinion (cf. introd. § 36). Euripides turns this custom to account, whether he learned it from the work of H. (Stein) or at the Macedonian court (Blakesley).” Hornblower’s (2013) commentary: “The general gloomy idea that not to be born is best is found elsewhere in Greek literature (e.g. Thgn. 425-428, Bacchyl. 5.155-62); the parallel between Hdt. and Eur. consists in similar elaboration of detail.”

⁵⁸³ In Chapter 26 Barthélemy (1789-1790), tome 3, 3: “Ces plaintes effrayantes ne sont que trop conformes aux maximes des sages de la Grèce”.

existence and unhappiness – this generation of men turn “to impiety”.⁵⁸⁴ The author of the *Storia* inserts here a brief reflection on the origins of unhappiness and of impiety, judging that “wrong are those who believe that human unhappiness was originally born of iniquity and of the offenses committed against the gods; but on the contrary, the wickedness of men originated from their calamities and not from any other source.” Human unhappiness has not originated – says the narrator – from man’s wickedness against the gods; on the contrary, it is the result of the calamities (in itself a word that highlights man’s passive status and the presence of external forces at work in human existence) befalling man. It does not seem farfetched to see in this debate about the first origin of human misery an echo of the speech of Zeus at *Od.* 1.32ff, and of its discussion of the source of human unhappiness.⁵⁸⁵ Just as Zeus had not denied that man’s own doing plays only a part in man’s unhappiness – thus admitting the role of divine forces in the making of human misery – the *Storia*’s narrator draws an unbreakable link between the divinely decreed condition of men and suffering.

But there is a second and more compelling link between the *Storia*’s use of the Thracian custom and Greek myth and thought. The wickedness of this very generation of men is punished by the gods with a flood, which Leopardi characterises as “Deucalion’s flood”, specifying that the only two survivors of the human race were Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha. Leopardi’s main source for the myth of Deucalion and the flood – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* book 1 –⁵⁸⁶ openly specifies that, among other things, the location of the couple’s survival is in Greece (Mount Parnassus, *Met.* 1.316-317), that Deucalion is no less than Prometheus’ progeny,⁵⁸⁷ and thus that both the myth and the setting are Greek.⁵⁸⁸ But more than knowing and accepting that the myth he is reworking is Greek, Leopardi twists the Ovidian tale in a manner that is nothing but Greek. Whereas Ovid’s Deucalion (*Met.* 1.363-364) had prayed to play an *active* part in the recreation of humanity (*O utinam possim populos reparare paternis/ Artibus atque animas formatae*

⁵⁸⁴ *TPP* (2013), 494. Cf. Aristophanes’ speech in Plato *Sym.* 190c-191b, on the ἀνδρόγυνος’ impiety being punished and leading (as a result) to unhappiness.

⁵⁸⁵ We mentioned this passage already in *Chapter I* II.2 regarding the speech of Philocles in the *Voyage*.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. Anderson (1997), 181 on the older sources of the myth in Apollodorus 1.7.2 and Hyginus 152.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. Anderson (1997), 181 on Apollodorus’ emphasis on the fact that Deucalion is the son of Prometheus.

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. Anderson (1997), 181 on how “in the more Roman account of Hyginus, the landfall is Mount Etna in Sicily”.

infundere terrae!), Leopardi's couple wish they had perished along with the rest of mankind, call aloud for death to come and take them, but, more importantly, declare "to themselves that nothing could be more beneficial to the human race than its total extinction".⁵⁸⁹ The fact itself that the son of Prometheus – the god symbolising human advancement – is chosen to loudly claim the benefits of the annulment of mankind is highly revealing of Leopardi's aims.⁵⁹⁰ The reversal of the Ovidian myth is complete and revolutionary. Greek wisdom – the wisdom Leopardi had also observed distilled in Barthélemy's list of Greek sources on the μὴ φθῖναι – takes the place of the forward-looking and optimistic attitude of the Ovidian character.

The portrayal of the generation of men who, in the *Storia*, are made to devise the "Thracian" custom resonates with various elements of Greek mythology, literature, and thought, leading us to believe that Leopardi fully shared Barthélemy's opinion about the harmony between this custom and a Greek worldview. It becomes in this sense important to note that at least two of Leopardi's potential sources for Euripides fr. 449 (Cicero's *Tusculanae* and Stobaeus 4.52b.42) mention Euripides as the author of the fragment. Could Leopardi derive from this the idea that there was a link between such attitudes towards life and death and the Greek mind?

The possible direct link between the Herodotean passage and the fragment of the Euripidean play reinforces both Barthélemy's and the modern scholars' point: although the custom portrayed by the historian is that of a non-Greek people, the very Greek Euripides can conceive of presenting it to a Greek audience within the story of the Heraclid Cresphontes, rightful king of Messenia. Whatever one may believe with regard to the original placement of the passage,⁵⁹¹ the undeniably philosophising tone of the fragment has led interpreters to attribute it to major characters or to minor characters

⁵⁸⁹ They also "sat on the top of a cliff and called death with vehement desire", in Cecchetti (1983), 31. *TPP* (2013), 495: "[...] affermando seco medesimi niuna cosa potere maggiormente giovare alla stirpe umana che di essere al tutto spenta, sedevano in cima a una rupe chiamando la morte con efficacissimo desiderio [...]".

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Blundell (1986), 168-170 on Prometheus as "mythological representation of progress", and suggesting that the combined myths of Prometheus and Pandora myths represent progress' intrinsic "ambiguity". Cf. also Awad (1963), 43-44 on the fact that modern retellings of Prometheus' myth see the liberation of the Titan as the beginning of a Golden Age.

⁵⁹¹ Harder (1985), 95 usefully lists all the various scholarly opinions on the matter.

endowed with special wisdom, and often at key times in the architecture of the play. The presence of this kind of “philosophising” in such a setting testifies to the fact that the Greek audience had at least the ability to relate to this idea. This point, and the fact that Euripides was not only very well acquainted with the idea, but also ready to present it (albeit through the words of a character) to an Athenian audience, is shown by the idea’s recurrence in a fragment of his *Bellerophon* (fr. 285), which I mentioned at the outset of *Chapter 1*.⁵⁹²

As Euripides’ example testifies, there is then an unspoken but enduring connection between the Thracian custom and the worldview it conveys and Greek thought and culture, a connection that is reinforced by the repeated association of the two in their reception by future interpreters. To those who, like Barthélemy, Schopenhauer, and Leopardi, are lucidly alert (although in different ways) to the darkly pessimistic side of Greek culture, there is something exquisitely Greek in the idea of mourning birth and celebrating death.⁵⁹³

4. *A Homeric Topos: Epic Wishes and the Questioning of Existence*

This chapter ends with an open suggestion, an idea that is necessarily speculative. The Homeric epics – whose influence on Leopardi’s work has been discussed at length throughout this thesis – have so far been entirely neglected when looking at the possible influences behind Leopardi’s conception of existence and non-existence. This failure is easily explained by the state of research in the field of Classics itself, where to this day, and to the best of my knowledge, no work has ever tackled the role of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$ in the Homeric epics, or even admitted that such a role is there to be tackled. The reason for this is, perhaps, that the epics only present a nuanced and subtle reflection on the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$: nowhere in the epics do we find such an indisputable, adamant *gnome* as the one uttered by Silenus or Oedipus, a maxim valid for the whole of mankind. Yet both epics are punctuated with individual characters questioning the value of their own existence and both powerfully tackle the consequences of existence for man. Perhaps because of

⁵⁹² Which Leopardi could read in Stobaeus 4.33.16 and 4.34.38

⁵⁹³ One other instance, which is not analysed here, is Leopardi’s translation of Alexis fr. 145, *TPP* (2013), 448.

the fact that their use of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$ is (at least formally) restricted to individuals, and because none of these individuals ever directly suggests that this would be the best for *all* men, these passages have often been interpreted as merely formulaic and rhetorical, and the two epics have not been considered when looking at the history of this *topos*.⁵⁹⁴ Yet in many cases either the speaker chosen to convey such truth about himself, the context in which the idea is inserted, or the special relationship of such statements with other passages in the epics, make of that personal epiphany something much deeper, and extend its importance way beyond the life of a single individual, ultimately to say something about human life itself.

The cry of a character questioning existence resonates fourteen times in the epics (nine in the *Iliad*, five in the *Odyssey*). In all of these instances, the moment of reflection and insight finds its outlet in the making of a *wish*. One can distinguish two groups. The first group is made of four proper examples of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$, with characters wishing they themselves or somebody else had never been born.⁵⁹⁵ The second group (made of ten instances) presents instead characters questioning the value of their existence by wishing they themselves or somebody else had *died* already or could die at present. Although this second group would ideally be worth exploring too as deeply revealing of the Homeric conceptions of the individual's existence and of the universal relationship between existence and suffering, in this context we need to concentrate concisely on the first group only.⁵⁹⁶

As he wishes he had never been born at *Od.* 8.311-313, the god Hephaestus is mirroring and imitating the humans he so painfully resembles; the same wish as his appears three times in the *Iliad*. At 3.39 Hector – the one who not only shares a familiar bond of birth, but who will feel the practical burden of Paris' behaviour soonest and hardest – wishes

⁵⁹⁴ The very fact that the linguistic formulation changes tells us that each of these passages has authority and relevance of its own.

⁵⁹⁵ *Il.* 3.39; 18.86-87; 22.481; *Od.* 8.311-313.

⁵⁹⁶ *Il.* 3.172-175; 3.428-429; 6.280-285; 6.345-348; 21.279-283; 24.764. *Od.* 1.59-60; 5.306-312; 18.202-205; 20.61-63. Other passages in the epics share some of these passages' features, but do not fit the group as neatly; I have chosen not to include them here.

his brother had never been born.⁵⁹⁷ The wish, voicing a desire shared by many, is echoed again in a different form – wishing for Paris’ *death* – by Hector himself at 6.285 and by Helen at 3.428-429, and highlights the fact that Paris’ lack of courage and forethought are matched by his failure to realise the extent of the negative impact of his own self. At *Il.* 22.481 it is Andromache who utters the wish for herself, as she discerns the doomed link between her husband and herself, making Hector the next in the line of people close to her to be slain by Achilles. Andromache holds no responsibility for the current situation: if she had not been born Achilles would have probably still killed her father and her siblings, and he would still be chasing Hector on the plain. Free from any direct regret or responsibility, Andromache’s wish voices simply the purest correspondence between (her) existence and suffering. It should be noted that although she never expresses the wish not to have been born, Helen is the single Homeric character who explicitly reflects on the possibility of non-existence versus existence most frequently (four times).⁵⁹⁸

We are left with what is perhaps the most remarkable instance, that of Achilles. More so than in any other case, the tale of Achilles’ wish never to have been born is inextricably entangled with the story of his self-development in the course of the epic. Much happens between the offended and self-concerned hero of book 1 and the profound

⁵⁹⁷ Unable to wish for his brother to have been ἄγαμος, given Paris’ nature as γυναιμανής, Hector wishes Paris had never been begotten. Kirk’s commentary insists on the fact that the emphasis is placed by Hector on ἄγαμος rather than on ἄγονος, that the idea of ἄγαμος is not consistent with Hector’s speech as a whole, and that the whole idea is very likely to be merely a rhetorical formulation. Yet the wish that Paris had been ἄγαμος is almost an *adynaton* given his very nature of γυναιμανής: that he had not been born seems thus the only way of preventing future sorrowful events. Hector’s speech to his mother Hecabe as he walks into Troy again in book 6 clarifies further the reasons behind Hector’s wish at 3.39-40: at 6.280-285 he wishes Paris could die eaten up by a gape in the earth below him, as Paris is a πῆμα (calamity, bane) to the Trojans.

⁵⁹⁸ Aside from the case mentioned above, 3.172-174; 6.345-348; 24.764. This is, of course, not by chance. Helen’s tragic causative role in the events of the *Iliad* allows her an extraordinarily marked understanding not only of her existence, but also of the deeper meaning of the events of the war at Troy, a level of insight perhaps only shared by Achilles. Helen’s deeper insight is also manifest in the repeated connections she draws between suffering and the role of songs, see Clader (1976); Griffin (1980), 96-97, 102; Macleod (1982), 1-8; Pantelia (2002), 25-26; Halliwell (2011), 72, 76, 89-91. See also Garvie’s (1994) commentary on *Od.* 8.580, which lists other instances in which Helen shows peculiar wisdom about the essence of the world. Compare also Helen’s actions and speech during the banquet at Menelaus’ court at *Od.* 4.221ff. On “Helen and blame for war” see Taplin (1992), 96-100. See also further below in section 6.

interpreter of human life of book 24.⁵⁹⁹ The trigger behind Achilles' dramatic metamorphosis is the realisation – dawning on him only with the death of Patroclus – that he belongs to mankind and is, as such, subject to the lack of control and to the unpredictability inherent in the human condition, whereby humans do not get to decide their destiny. As he speaks to Thetis in book 18, Achilles is faced with the truth of his responsibility for his companion's death – a death that followed from Achilles' own request to Thetis in *Iliad* 1 (*Il.* 18.74-77). He is thus confronted with the extent of his delusion about his own condition and with a newly-gained cognizance of the vanity of what he has obtained (18.86-87): just when one believes oneself to be in control of life's mechanisms, life proves that cannot happen. Faced with this inescapable truth, the only thing to do is to wish life itself could be erased right from its very roots: Achilles wishes the marriage between his parents had never taken place and that, consequently, he had not been born: αἴθ' ὄφελος σὺ μὲν αὔθι μετ' ἀθανάτης ἀλίησι / ναίειν, Πηλεὺς δὲ θνητὴν ἀγαγέσθαι ἄκοιτιν (*Il.* 18.86-87).⁶⁰⁰ Life is not what Achilles believed it to be, a thing to be moulded and shaped to one's (semi-divine) liking. As he himself says as he laments once more the death of Patroclus at 18.328, ἀλλ' οὐ Ζεὺς ἄνδρεςσι νοήματα πάντα τελευτᾷ. Human desires – here symbolised by Menoetius' thwarted wish to have Patroclus back and by Achilles' own desire to see himself avenged – can (and often will) be frustrated.

Achilles' μὴ φῶναι is thus the embodiment of the hero's awareness of his irretrievably human status, causing him to share the condition of all other mortals, whose aims and desires can be effortlessly thwarted. As such, the hero's wish is central to his developing

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Most (2003), 66-67 maintaining that the change in Achilles' attitude is prompted by his acknowledgment of, and pity for, the sufferings of his fellow human beings, beginning with Patroclus and extending then to the Greek army. Rinon (2008), 13-14 instead individuates the reason of Achilles' change in the hero's progressive recognition of his own repeated ill-synchronisation with the *kairos*, i.e. his repeated refusal to relinquish his anger and accept compensation. Cf. also Kim (2000) on Achilles' development in the epic, with a focus on the role of pity and the connection between the embassy of book 9 and his final insights.

⁶⁰⁰ Edwards (1991), 157 believes that the stress in Achilles' speech is on the "sympathy" for his mother's sufferings because, had Peleus married a mortal wife, Thetis "would not have to grieve for him (Achilles) forever, as Thetis will". This interpretation underestimates the literal meaning of Achilles' wish, a failure that is also due to the fact that Edwards does not compare this instance of the will not to have lived with the other examples in the *Iliad*, thus making of this an isolated and unimportant remark.

conception of human existence and of the gods' attitude towards men, and an essential step for the deep insights he will display in the speech to Priam in *Iliad* 24.⁶⁰¹ This wish contains *in nuce* and yet unmistakably the roots of that Homeric pessimism that Leopardi repeatedly shows himself to have detected and assimilated. Once we grasp the extent to which the Homeric poems *do* tackle the idea of non-existence and its benefits for humankind, we can suddenly make better sense of the *Certamen*'s episode from which *Chapter 1* of this thesis took its start. Far from being incongruous with his work and thought, Homer's response to Hesiod synthesises – in a language and in a form enriched by the literature intervening between Homer and the *Certamen* itself – the composite multitude of reflections on existence and non-existence that punctuate the Homeric epics.⁶⁰² Such reflections are essential for the development of the idea of the μή φῶναι within Greek and Latin literature *and* for the unparalleled role they played in Leopardi's thought.

⁶⁰¹ Achilles' "freshly learned lesson" in Taplin (1992), 272. On the speech of Achilles, cf. Macleod (1982); Richardson (1993), 330-333; Adkins (1960), 64; Deichgräber (1972), 66-69; Edwards (1987), 309- 311; Lynn-George (1988), 244-248; Taplin (1992), 270-272; Zanker (1994), 121-122; Heath (2005), 144-147; Rinon (2008), 40-43.

⁶⁰² It is remarkable that Greene (1935), 31 n. 2 (a note listing the occurrences of the μή φῶναι in Greek Literature) does not connect Homer's maxim in the *Certamen* with any of the passages discussed in this chapter, but merely with *Il.* 23.71.

EPILOGUE

Although, as we have seen, Leopardi never explicitly suggests that his interpretation of the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$ comes from the text of Homer, one passage in the *Operette* draws a powerful connection between the Greek poet, the $\mu\eta\ \phi\tilde{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$, and, more widely, the Greek pessimistic worldview. This passage is part of the *Dialogo di Tristano e di un amico* (1832), last of the *Operette*. Separated by a few years from the other *Operette*, Tristano's dialogue is an ardent declaration of fervour towards the beliefs that the whole *Operette* so varyingly display, a testament to their enduring validity, and a most compelling reiteration of their fundamental arguments.

The piece enacts a conversation between Tristano – author, as we gather, of a melancholic book conveying his despairing view of life and powerful alter-ego of Leopardi himself – and a friend, vehement believer in progress and in the superiority of the present century, and obstinately intent on deflecting Tristano from his pessimistic view of the world. For a good part of the dialogue Tristano acts as if he had been convinced, as if he had eschewed his dark worldview and embraced his friend's faith in the achievement of the 19th century. Ultimately, though, the veil is dropped and Tristano's real stance is made visible. The reader thus hears Tristano's pessimistic creed twice, once as he forsakes it, and then again when it is revealed that he has never stopped living by it. Throughout, and even during the pretended act of renunciation, Tristano's words flicker with a passion all too clearly directed to the pessimistic philosophy he is supposedly forsaking.

Se questi miei sentimenti nascono da malattia, non so: so che, malato o sano, calpesto la vigliaccheria degli uomini, rifiuto ogni consolazione e ogn'inganno puerile, ed ho il coraggio di sostenere la privazione di ogni speranza, mirare intrepidamente il deserto della vita, non dissimularmi nessuna parte dell'infelicità umana, ed accettare tutte le conseguenze di una filosofia dolorosa, ma vera. [...] Io diceva queste cose fra me, quasi come se quella filosofia dolorosa fosse d'invenzione mia; vedendola così rifiutata da tutti, come si rifiutano le cose nuove e non più sentite. *Ma poi, ripensando, mi ricordai ch'ella era tanto nuova, quanto Salomone e quanto Omero, e i poeti e i filosofi più antichi che si conoscano; i quali tutti sono pieni pienissimi di figure, di favole, di sentenze significanti l'estrema infelicità umana; e chi di loro dice che l'uomo è il più miserabile degli animali;*

chi dice che il meglio è non nascere, e per chi è nato, morire in cuna; altri, che uno che sia caro agli Dei, muore in giovinezza, ed altri altre cose infinite su questo andare. E anche mi ricordai che da quei tempi insino a ieri o all'altr'ieri, tutti i poeti e tutti i filosofi e gli scrittori grandi e piccoli, in un modo o in un altro, avevano ripetute o confermate le stesse dottrine.⁶⁰³

Amidst the memories of his (seemingly past) pessimism, Tristano remembers the discovery (or, as he calls it, the *recollection*) of the fact that his worldview had preceded him. At this crucial point in the *Operette*, Leopardi blends in his Tristano both his long-lived conviction in the combined powers of poetry and philosophy, and his debt to antiquity for its grasp of the human condition.

It is here that Homer appears, together with Solomon, to introduce Leopardi's own version of Schopenhauer's list of the pessimists of all ages: Tristano speaks of his worldview as "filosofia", just as Leopardi had called his *Operette* "cosa filosofica", and yet the two *auctoritates* called to epitomise Tristano's worldview are the writer of religious wisdom Solomon, and ὁ ποιητής, Homer. The choice of Homer is the ultimate embodiment of Leopardi's reflection on the genetic similarity between the role of the poet and that of the philosopher, as he expressed it (among others) in *Zib.* 1650, from which this thesis began.

But beyond personifying (as he had in *Zib.* 1650) the fusion of the forces and roles of poetry and philosophy, Homer is chosen to portray the entirety of ancient pessimistic

⁶⁰³ My italics. *TPP* (2013), 603. Cecchetti (1983), 489: "Whether these feelings of mine are the result of illness, I don't know; what I do know is that whether ill or healthy, I despise the cowardice of men; I reject all the consolations and all the childish deceptions and have the courage to endure the deprivation of all hope, to look intrepidly at the desert of life, not to dissimulate to myself any part of human unhappiness, and to accept all the consequences of a philosophy that is painful but true. [...] This is what I said to myself, almost as if that painful philosophy were of my own invention – when I saw it rejected by everyone, just as novel and unheard of things are rejected. But then, thinking it over, I remembered that it was as new as Solomon and Homer and the most ancient poets and philosophers we know, all of whom teem with figures, with fables, with sayings, pointing out the extreme unhappiness of man. One of them says that man is the most miserable of animals; another that it is better not to be born or, if born, to die in the cradle; still another that whoever is dear to the gods dies young; and finally others say innumerable other things of the same nature. I also remembered that from those times until yesterday or the day before, all poets and all philosophers and all writers, great and small, one way or another, had repeated and confirmed those doctrines."

thought, and to be the name and the face for the quotations that Tristano presents as ancient examples of his worldview. The three quotations can be traced back respectively to Homer himself, to one of the many voices of the *μη φῶναι* within Greek literature, and to Menander.⁶⁰⁴ The concepts expressed in two of these passages exist in cognate forms in the Biblical tradition, and, most importantly, in two works traditionally ascribed to Solomon himself, the *Ecclesiastes* – containing, as we have mentioned already, a version of the *μη φῶναι* – and the *Book of Wisdom*, which elaborates on the idea that those dearest to God join him sooner.⁶⁰⁵ And yet both Leopardi’s phrasing of these ideas and the fact that he used some of these passages elsewhere in his work – providing, in those instances, clearer allusions or references to the Greek sources –⁶⁰⁶ tell us that his Tristano was thinking of these ideas first and foremost as Greek.

Just as it will be for Schopenhauer’s *große Geister aller Zeiten*, for Leopardi too the Greeks – and Greek poetry in particular – are the real epicentre of pessimistic thinking throughout the ages. Within the Greeks, Homer stands tall, not only as the symbol *par excellence* of the thought, wisdom, and culture of ancient Greece. Crucially, and by representing Leopardi’s whole work, Tristano recognises and attests to the magnitude and profundity of the Homeric epics’ influence in the history of pessimistic thought.

⁶⁰⁴ Homer *Il.* 17.446-447 and *Od.* 18.130-131, expressing a notion which, as we have seen, is at the core of Porphyry’s admiration of Homer in the *Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio*; Menander *Dis. Ex.* 4 in Sandbach (1972), 41-42 (ὄν οἱ θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν ἀποθνήσκει νέος), which Leopardi used also as epigraph to his *Amore e Morte* (1832) and which he could read in Stobaeus 4.52b and at *Cons. ad Ap.* 119e. Cf. Audano (2014b).

⁶⁰⁵ *Ecclesiastes* 4.2-3 and *Book of Wisdom* 4.7-15.

⁶⁰⁶ I am thinking of the *Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio* for the Homeric passages in *TPP* (2013), 593 and of the epigraph to *Amore e Morte* for Menander’s fragment.

APPENDIX

1. Sources in the section of J. J. Barthélemy's *Voyage* Chapter 28.

Speaker	Idea	Source Provided
(1) Disciple of Heraclitus	All living beings are in a constant state of war or ruin. All living beings perpetuate a state of mutual persecution and destruction.	
(2) Disciple of Democritus	The death of the individual – observed in the flow and succession of the generations – does not matter and should not afflict us more than the succession of the ocean's waves or the fall of the leaves.	Mimnerm. ap. Stob. serm. 96, p. 528. Simonid. ap. eund. p. 530. [Mimnermus fr. 2 W; Simonides fr. 8 W.]
(2) Disciple of Democritus	Each being lives again once his atoms unite again in a different form.	Plin. hist. nat. lib. 7, cap. 55, t. 1, p. 411. Bruck. hist. philos. t. 1, p. 1195. [<i>Nat. Hist.</i> 7.55]
(3) Another speaker	We interpret the world according to our feelings (hatred, love, joy, sadness).	Aristot. de. Rhet. lib. 1. c. 2. tom. ii, p. 515. [Aristotle <i>Rh.</i> 1.2.]
(4) Another speaker	The only motives behind existence are destruction and reproduction.	Aesop. ap. Stob. serm. 103, p. 564. [Stobaeus 4.41.61]
(1)	a) Have the gods created us for their amusement or with a serious design? b) To be born is the greatest misfortune, to die is the greatest happiness. c) Life is the dream of a shadow. d) Life is nothing but meditation on death. e) Life begins with tears and cries, youth is ruled by masters and then by duties. f) Man is subject to his vices and virtues.	a) Plat. de. leg. lib. 1, t. 2, p. 644. [Plato <i>Laws</i> 1.644d] b) Sophocl. In Oedip. Colon. v. 1289. Bacchyl. et. alii ap. Stob. serm. 96, p. 530 et 531. Cicer. Tuscul. lib. 1, cap. 48, t. 2, p. 273. [Soph. <i>OC</i> 1224-27; Bacchyl. <i>Ep.</i> 5.160-161; Cicero <i>Tusc.</i> 1.114] c) Pind. pythic. 8, v. 136. [Pindar <i>Pythian</i> 8.95-96] d) Plat. in Phaedon t. 1, p. 64 et 67. id. ap. Clem. Alex.

Questi campi cosparsi
 di ceneri infeconde, e ricoperti
 dell'impietrata lava,
 che sotto i passi al peregrin risona; 20
 dove s'annida e si contorce al sole
 la serpe, e dove al noto
 cavernoso covil torna il coniglio;
 fur liete ville e colti,
 e biondeggiar di spiche, e risonaro 25
 di muggito d'armenti;
 fur giardini e palagi,
 agli ozi de' potenti
 gradito ospizio; e fur città famose
 che coi torrenti suoi l'altero monte 30
 dall'igneia bocca fulminando oppresse
 con gli abitanti insieme. Or tutto intorno
 una ruina involve,
 dove tu siedì, o fior gentile, e quasi
 i danni altrui commiserando, al cielo 35
 di dolcissimo odor mandi un profumo,
 che il deserto consola. A queste piagge
 venga colui che d'esaltar con lode
 il nostro stato ha in uso, e vegga quanto
 è il gener nostro in cura 40
 all'amante natura. E la possanza
 qui con giusta misura
 anco estimar potrà dell'uman seme,
 cui la dura nutrice, ov'ei men teme,
 con lieve moto in un momento annulla 45
 in parte, e può con moti
 poco men lievi ancor subitamente
 annichilare in tutto.
 Dipinte in queste rive
 son dell'umana gente 50
le magnifiche sorti e progressive.

Qui mira e qui ti specchia,
 secol superbo e sciocco,
 che il calle insino allora
 dal risorto pensier segnato innanti 55
 abbandonasti, e volti addietro i passi,
 del ritornar ti vanti,

e procedere il chiami.
 Al tuo pargoleggiar gl'ingegni tutti,
 di cui lor sorte rea padre ti fece, 60
 vanno adulando, ancora
 ch'a ludibrio talora
 t'abbian fra sè. Non io
 con tal vergogna scenderò sotterra;
 ma il disprezzo piuttosto che si serra 65
 di te nel petto mio,
 mostrato avrò quanto si possa aperto:
 ben ch'io sappia che obbligo
 preme chi troppo all'età propria increbbe.
 Di questo mal, che teco 70
 mi fia comune, assai finor mi rido.
 libertà vai sognando, e servo a un tempo
 vuoi di novo il pensiero,
 sol per cui risorgemmo
 della barbarie in parte, e per cui solo 75
 si cresce in civiltà, che sola in meglio
 guida i pubblici fati.
 Così ti spiacque il vero
 dell'aspra sorte e del depresso loco
 che natura ci diè. Per questo il tergo 80
 vigliaccamente rivolgesti al lume
 che il fe palese: e, fuggitivo, appelli
 vil chi lui segue, e solo
 magnanimo colui
 che se schernendo o gli altri, astuto o folle, 85
 fin sopra gli astri il mortal grado estolle.

Uom di povero stato e membra inferme
 che sia dell'alma generoso ed alto,
 non chiama sè nè stima
 ricco d'or nè gagliardo, 90
 e di splendida vita o di valente
 persona infra la gente
 non fa risibil mostra;
 ma se di forza e di tesor mendico
 lascia parer senza vergogna, e noma 95
 parlando, apertamente, e di sue cose
 fa stima al vero uguale.
 Magnanimo animale

non credo io già, ma stolto,
 quel che nato a perir, nutrito in pene, 100
 dice, a goder son fatto,
 e di fetido orgoglio
 empie le carte, eccelsi fati e nove
 felicità, quali il ciel tutto ignora,
 non pur quest'orbe, promettendo in terra 105
 a popoli che un'onda
 di mar commosso, un fiato
 d'aura maligna, un sotterraneo crollo
 distrugge sì, che avanza
 a gran pena di lor la rimembranza. 110
 Nobil natura è quella
 che a sollevar s'ardisce
 gli occhi mortali incontra
 al comun fato, e che con franca lingua,
 nulla al ver detraendo, 115
 confessa il mal che ci fu dato in sorte,
 e il basso stato e frale;
 quella che grande e forte
 mostra sè nel soffrir, nè gli odii e l'ire
 fraterne, ancor più gravi 120
 d'ogni altro danno, accresce
 alle miserie sue, l'uomo incolpando
 del suo dolor, ma dà la colpa a quella
 che veramente è rea, che de' mortali
 madre è di parto e di voler matrigna. 125
 Costei chiama inimica; e incontro a questa
 congiunta esser pensando,
 siccome è il vero, ed ordinata in pria
 l'umana compagnia,
 tutti fra sè confederati estima 130
 gli uomini, e tutti abbraccia
 con vero amor, porgendo
 valida e pronta ed aspettando aita
 negli alterni perigli e nelle angosce
 della guerra comune. Ed alle offese 135
 dell'uomo armar la destra, e laccio porre
 al vicino ed inciampo,
 stolto crede così qual fora in campo
 cinto d'oste contraria, in sul più vivo
 incalzar degli assalti, 140

gl'inimici obbliando, acerbe gare
 imprendere con gli amici,
 e sparger fuga e fulminar col brando
 infra i propri guerrieri.
 Così fatti pensieri 145
 quando fien, come fur, palesi al volgo,
 e quell'orror che primo
 contra l'empia natura
 strinse i mortali in social catena,
 fia ricondotto in parte 150
 da verace saper, l'onesto e il retto
 conversar cittadino,
 e giustizia e pietade, altra radice
 avranno allor che non superbe fole,
 ove fondata probità del volgo 155
 così star suole in piede
 quale star può quel ch'ha in error la sede.

Sovente in queste rive,
 che, desolate, a bruno
 veste il flutto indurato, e par che ondeggi, 160
 seggo la notte; e su la mesta landa
 in purissimo azzurro
 veggo dall'alto fiammeggiar le stelle,
 cui di lontan fa specchio
 il mare, e tutto di scintille in giro 165
 per lo vòto seren brillare il mondo.
 E poi che gli occhi a quelle luci appunto,
 ch'a lor sembrano un punto,
 e sono immense, in guisa
 che un punto a petto a lor son terra e mare 170
 veracemente; a cui
 l'uomo non pur, ma questo
 globo ove l'uomo è nulla,
 sconosciuto è del tutto; e quando miro
 quegli ancor più senz'alcun fin remote 175
 nodi quasi di stelle,
 ch'a noi paion qual nebbia, a cui non l'uomo
 e non la terra sol, ma tutte in uno,
 del numero infinite e della mole,
 con l'aureo sole insiem, le nostre stelle 180
 o sono ignote, o così paion come

essi alla terra, un punto
 di luce nebulosa; al pensier mio
 che sembri allora, o prole
 dell'uomo? E rimembrando 185
 il tuo stato quaggiù, di cui fa segno
 il suol ch'io premo; e poi dall'altra parte,
 che te signora e fine
 credi tu data al Tutto, e quante volte
 favoleggiar ti piacque, in questo oscuro 190
 granel di sabbia, il qual di terra ha nome,
 per tua cagion, dell'universe cose
 scender gli autori, e conversar sovente
 co' tuoi piacevolmente, e che i derisi
 sogni rinnovellando, ai saggi insulta 195
 fin la presente età, che in conoscenza
 ed in civil costume
 sembra tutte avanzar; qual moto allora,
 mortal prole infelice, o qual pensiero
 verso te finalmente il cor m'assale? 200
 Non so se il riso o la pietà prevale.

*Come d'arbor cadendo un picciol pomo,
 cui là nel tardo autunno
 maturità senz'altra forza atterra,
 d'un popol di formiche i dolci alberghi, 205
 cavati in molle gleba
 con gran lavoro, e l'opre
 e le ricchezze che adunate a prova
 con lungo affaticar l'assidua gente
 avea provvidamente al tempo estivo, 210
 schiaccia, diserta e copre
 in un punto; così d'alto piombando,
 dall'utero tonante
 scagliata al ciel profondo,
 di ceneri e di pomici e di sassi 215
 notte e ruina, infusa
 di bollenti ruscelli
 o pel montano fianco
 furiosa tra l'erba
 di liquefatti massi 220
 e di metalli e d'infocata arena
 scendendo immensa piena,*

le cittadi che il mar là su l'estremo
lido aspergea, confuse
e infranse e ricoperse 225
in pochi istanti: onde su quelle or pasce
la capra, e città nove
sorgon dall'altra banda, a cui sgabello
son le sepolte, e le prostrate mura
l'arduo monte al suo piè quasi calpesta. 230
Non ha natura al seme
dell'uom più stima o cura
che alla formica: e se più rara in quello
che nell'altra è la strage,
non avvien ciò d'altronde 235
fuor che l'uom sue prosapie ha men feconde.⁶⁰⁷

Ben mille ed ottocento
 anni varcàr poi che sparìro, oppressi
 dall'igneà forza, i popolati seggi,
 e il villanello intento 240
 ai vigneti, che a stento in questi campi
 nutre la morta zolla e incenerita,
 ancor leva lo sguardo
 sospettoso alla vetta
 fatal, che nulla mai fatta più mite 245
 ancor siede tremenda, ancor minaccia
 a lui strage ed ai figli ed agli averi
 lor poverelli. E spesso
 il meschino in sul tetto
 dell'ostel villereccio, alla vagante 250
 aura giacendo tutta notte insonne,
 e balzando più volte, esplora il corso
 dal temuto bollor, che si riversa
 dall'inesausto grembo
 sull'arenoso dorso, a cui riluce 255
 di Capri la marina
 e di Napoli il porto e Mergellina.
 E se appressar lo vede, o se nel cupo
 del domestico pozzo ode mai l'acqua
 fervendo gorgogliar, desta i figliuoli, 260
 desta la moglie in fretta, e via, con quanto

⁶⁰⁷ My italics.

di lor cose rapir posson, fuggendo,
vede lontan l'usato
suo nido, e il picciol campo,
che gli fu dalla fame unico schermo, 265
preda al flutto rovente,
che crepitando giunge, e inesorato
durabilmente sovra quei si spiega.
Torna al celeste raggio
dopo l'antica obblivion l'estinta 270
Pompei, come sepolto
scheletro, cui di terra
avarizia o pietà rende all'aperto;
e dal deserto foro
diritto infra le file 275
dei mozzi colonnati il peregrino
lunge contempla il bipartito giogo
e la cresta fumante,
che alla sparsa ruina ancor minaccia.
E nell'orror della secreta notte 280
per li vacui teatri,
per li templi deformi e per le rotte
case, ove i parti il pipistrello asconde,
come sinistra face
che per vòti palagi atra s'aggiri, 285
corre il baglior della funerea lava,
che di lontan per l'ombre
rosseggia e i lochi intorno intorno tinge.
Così, dell'uomo ignara e dell'etadi
ch'ei chiama antiche, e del seguir che fanno 290
dopo gli avi i nepoti,
sta natura ognor verde, anzi procede
per sì lungo cammino
che sembra star. Caggiono i regni intanto,
passan genti e linguaggi: ella nol vede: 295
e l'uom d'eternità s'arroga il vanto.

E tu, lenta ginestra,
che di selve odorate
queste campagne dispogliate adorni,
anche tu presto alla crudel possanza 300
soccomberai del sotterraneo foco,
che ritornando al loco

già noto, stenderà l'avarò lembo
 su tue molli foreste. E piegherai
 sotto il fascio mortal non renitente 305
 il tuo capo innocente:
 ma non piegato insino allora indarno
 codardamente supplicando innanzi
 al futuro oppressor; ma non eretto
 con forsennato orgoglio inver le stelle, 310
 nè sul deserto, dove
 e la sede e i natali
 non per voler ma per fortuna avesti;
 ma più saggia, ma tanto
 meno inferma dell'uom, quanto le frali 315
 tue stirpi non credesti
 o dal fato o da te fatte immortali.

Translation of Strophe 5

*Just as a tiny apple in late autumn
 (Ripeness is now enough
 To make it fall, without more help, to earth)
 Drops where a tribe of ants have made their home,
 Hollowed – their work was huge –
 In the soft soil; and drops
 On stored-up riches which those careful creatures
 Amassed so rapidly and with such effort
 And with such prudence in the summertime, 210
 To lay their labour waste
 At one blow; so, plummeting from above
 Thrown from the thundering womb
 Into the depths of sky,
 Ashes and pumice and stones – in avalanching
 Ruinous nighr, involved
 With boiling rivulets,
 While, down the mountainside
 And raging over grass,
 Molten boulders en masse, 220
 Melting metal, and sand that was alight
 Swept like a river in spate –
 Smashed those cities upon whose farthest shore
 The moving ocean washed,
 Confounded and covered them*

*In a few seconds; so that now the goat
 Browses above, and new
 Cities arise which have their very base
 On those long buried whose demolished walls
 The rugged mountain crushes underfoot. 230
 Nature has no more care
 For man, and no more love
 Than for the ant: and if she massacres
 Men and women less often,
 That is because our race
 Is simply not so very numerous.*

3 a. Simonides 8 W

ἐν δὲ τὸ κάλλιστον Χῖος ἔειπεν ἀνὴρ·
 “οἴη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν”·
 παῦροί μιν θνητῶν οὔασι δεξάμενοι
 στέρνοις ἐγκατέθεντο· πάρεστι γὰρ ἐλπίς ἐκάστωι
 ἀνδρῶν, ἧ τε νέων στήθεσιν ἐμφύεται. 5
 θνητῶν δ’ ὄφρα τις ἄνθος ἔχη πολυήρατον ἥβης,
 κοῦφον ἔχων θυμὸν πόλλ’ ἀτέλεστα νοεῖ·
 οὔτε γὰρ ἐλπίδ’ ἔχει γηρασέμεν οὔτε θανεῖσθαι,
 οὐδ’, ὑγιῆς ὅταν ᾗ, φροντίδ’ ἔχει καμάτου.
 νήπιοι, οἷς ταύτη κεῖται νόος, οὐδὲ ἴσασι 10
 ὡς χρόνος ἔσθ’ ἥβης καὶ βιότου ὀλίγος
 θνητοῖς. ἀλλὰ σὺ ταῦτα μαθὼν βιότου ποτὶ τέρμα
 ψυχῆι τῶν ἀγαθῶν τλῆθι χαριζόμενος.

3 b. Leopardi, *XLI Dello stesso*

Umana cosa picciol tempo dura,
 e certissimo detto
 disse il veglio di Chio,
 conforme ebber natura
 le foglie e l’uman seme. 5
 Ma questa voce in petto
 raccolgon pochi. All’inquieta speme,
 figlia di giovin core,
 tutti prestiam ricetta.
 Mentre è vermiglio il fiore
 di nostra etade acerba, 10
 l’alma vota e superba
 Cento dolci pensieri educa invano,

nè morte aspetta nè vecchiezza; e nulla
 cura di morbi ha l'uom gagliardo e sano.
 Ma stolto è chi non vede 15
 la giovanezza come ha ratte l'ale,
 e siccome alla culla
 poco il rogo è lontano.
 Tu presso a porre il piede
 in sul varco fatale 20
 della plutonia sede,
 ai presenti diletta
 la breve età commetti.

*All human things last only a short time;
 The old blind man of Chios
 Spoke but the simple truth:
 As are the lives of leaves,
 So are the lives of men. 5
 But few there are who take
 Those words to heart; while everyone receives
 Unruly hope, the child
 Of youth, to live with him.
 As long as our first age 10
 Is fresh and blooming still,
 The vacant headstrong soul
 Will nourish many pleasant dreams, all vain,
 Careless of death and age; the healthy man
 Has no regards for illness or disease. 15
 But he must be a fool
 Who cannot see how rapidly youth flies,
 How close the cradle lies
 To the funereal fire.
 So you who are about 20
 To step into the land
 Where Pluto holds his court,
 Enjoy, since life is short,
 The pleasure hard at hand.*

4 a. Semonides 1 W²

ὦ παῖ, τέλος μὲν Ζεὺς ἔχει βαρύκτυπος
 πάντων ὅσ' ἐστὶ καὶ τίθησ' ὄκη θέλει,
 νοῦς δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν, ἀλλ' ἐπήμεροι
 ἄδη βοτὰ ζόουσιν, οὐδὲν εἰδότες

ὄκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός. 5
 ἐλπίς δὲ πάντας κάπιπειθείη τρέφει
 ἄπρηκτον ὀρμαίνοντας· οἱ μὲν ἡμέρην
 μένουσιν ἐλθεῖν, οἱ δ' ἐτέων περιτροπᾶς·
 νέωτα δ' οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐ δοκεῖ βροτῶν
 Πλούτῳ τε κάγαθοῖσιν ἴζεσθαι φίλος. 10
 φθάνει δὲ τὸν μὲν γῆρας ἄζηλον λαβὸν
 πρὶν τέρμ' ἵκηται, τοὺς δὲ δύστηνοι βροτῶν
 φθείρουσι νοῦσοι, τοὺς δ' Ἄρει δεδμημένους
 πέμπει μελαίνης Αἴδης ὑπὸ χθονός·
 οἱ δ' ἐν θαλάσσῃ λαίλαπι κλονεόμενοι 15
 καὶ κύμασιν πολλοῖσι πορφυρῆς ἀλός
 θνήσκουσιν, εἴτ' ἂν μὴ δυνήσωνται ζοεῖν·
 οἱ δ' ἀγχόνην ἄψαντο δυστήνῳ μόρῳ
 καυτάγρετοι λείπουσιν ἡλίου φάος.
 οὕτω κακῶν ἅπ' οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ μυρίαί 20
 βροτοῖσι κῆρες κἀνεπίφραστοι δῦαι
 καὶ πῆματ' ἐστίν. εἰ δ' ἐμοὶ πιθοίατο,
 οὐκ ἂν κακῶν ἐρῶμεν, οὐδ' ἐπ' ἄλγεσιν
 κακοῖς ἔχοντες θυμὸν αἰκιζοίμεθα.

4 b. Leopardi, *XL Dal greco di Simonide*

Ogni mondano evento
 è di Giove in poter, di Giove, o figlio,
 che giusta suo talento
 ogni cosa dispone. 5
 Ma di lunga stagione
 nostro cieco pensier s'affanna e cura,
 benchè l'umana etate,
 come destina il ciel nostra ventura,
 di giorno in giorno dura.
 La bella speme tutti ci nutrica 10
 di sembianze beate,
 onde ciascuno indarno s'affatica:
 altri l'aurora amica,
 altri l'etade aspetta;
 e nullo in terra vive 15
 cui nell'anno avvenir facili e pii
 con Pluto gli altri iddii
 la mente non prometta.
 Ecco pria che la speme in porto arrive,

qual da vecchiezza è giunto 20
 e qual da morbi al bruno Lete addutto;
 Questo il rigido Marte, e quello il flutto
 del pelago rapisce; altri consunto
 da negre cure, o tristo nodo al collo
 circondando, sotterra si rifugge. 25
 Così di mille mali
 i miseri mortali
 volgo fiero e diverso agita e strugge.
 Ma per sentenza mia,
 uom saggio e sciolto dal comune errore 30
 patir non sosterrà,
 nè porrebbe al dolore
 ed al mal proprio suo cotanto amore.

*Whatever happens here
 Is in the power of Jove, O son of man,
 And he decides it all
 According to his will.
 But blindly we take thought 5
 And struggle after things of distant date,
 Although it is our fate,
 As Heaven determined was to be the way,
 To live from day to day.
 Hope is attractive, and she suckles us 10
 On fine appearances;
 So all of us live striving, and in vain:
 One waits a better dawn,
 And one a better age;
 And no one lives on earth 15
 Who for the future does not have in mind
 A generous god of wealth
 And other gods as kind.
 But one, before these hopes have been fulfilled,
 Is overcome by age, 20
 And one is led to Lethe by disease;
 One man is snatched by cruel Mars, and one
 By the tempestuous sea; another, worn
 By gloomy care, or twisting round his neck
 A dreadful knot, seeks refuge underground. 30
 A savage, various band
 Of mortal miseries*

*Harries our wretched race and hunts it down.
And so, in my opinion,
A wise man, rescued from the common error, 35
Would not agree to suffer,
Nor give to his affliction
And to his own distress so much affection.*

5. Zibaldone 4175-4177

Non gli uomini solamente, ma il genere umano fu e sarà sempre infelice di necessità. Non il genere umano solamente ma tutti gli animali. Non gli animali soltanto ma tutti gli altri esseri al loro modo. Non gl'individui, ma le specie, i generi, i regni, i globi, i sistemi, i mondi.

Entrate in un giardino di piante, d'erbe, di fiori. Sia pur quanto volete ridente. Sia nella più mite stagione dell'anno. Voi non potete volger lo sguardo in nessuna parte che voi non vi troviate del patimento. Tutta quella famiglia di vegetali è in istato di *souffrance*, qual individuo più, qual meno. Là quella rosa è offesa dal sole, che gli ha dato la vita; si corruga, langue, appassisce. Là quel giglio è succhiato crudelmente da un'ape, nelle sue parti più sensibili, più vitali. Il dolce mele non si fabbrica dalle industriose, pazienti, buone, virtuose api senza indicibili tormenti di quelle fibre delicatissime, senza strage spietata di teneri fiorellini. Quell'albero è infestato da un formicaio, quell'altro da bruchi, da mosche, da lumache, da zanzare; questo è ferito nella scorza e cruciato dall'aria o dal sole che penetra nella piaga; quello è offeso nel tronco, o nelle radici; quell'altro ha più foglie secche; quest'altro è roso, morsicato nei fiori; quello trafitto, punzecchiato nei frutti. Quella pianta ha troppo caldo, questa troppo fresco; troppa luce, troppa ombra; troppo umido, troppo secco. L'una patisce incomodo e trova ostacolo e ingombro nel crescere, nello stendersi; l'altra non trova dove appoggiarsi, o si affatica e stenta per arrivarvi. In tutto il giardino tu non trovi una pianticella sola in istato di sanità perfetta. Qua un ramicello è rotto o dal vento o dal suo proprio peso; là un zeffiretto va stracciando un fiore, vola con un brano, un filamento, una foglia, una parte viva di questa o quella pianta, staccata e strappata via. Intanto tu strazi le erbe co' tuoi passi; le stritoli, le ammacchi, ne spremi il sangue, le rompi, le uccidi. Quella donzelletta sensibile e gentile, va dolcemente sterpando e infrangendo steli. Il giardiniere va saggiamente troncando, tagliando membra sensibili, colle unghie, col ferro. (Bologna. 19. Aprile. 1826.). Certamente queste piante vivono; alcune perchè le loro infermità non sono mortali, altre perchè ancora con malattie mortali, le piante, e gli animali altresì, possono durare a vivere qualche poco di tempo. Lo spettacolo di tanta copia di vita all'entrare in questo giardino ci rallegra l'anima, e di qui è

che questo ci pare essere un soggiorno di gioia. Ma in verità questa vita è trista e infelice, ogni giardino è quasi un vasto ospedale (luogo ben più deplorabile che un cimitero), e se questi esseri sentono, o vogliamo dire, sentissero, certo è che il non essere sarebbe per loro assai meglio che l'essere. (Bologna. 22. Apr. 1826.).

Not only individual men, but the whole human race was and always will be necessarily unhappy. Not only the human race but the whole animal world. Not only animals but all other beings in their way. Not only individuals, but species, genera, realms, spheres, systems, worlds.

Go into a garden of plants, grass, flowers. No matter how lovely it seems. Even in the mildest season of the year. You will not be able to look anywhere and not find suffering. That whole family of vegetation is in a state of souffrance, each in its own way to some degree. Here a rose is attacked by the sun, which has given it life; it withers, languishes, wilts. There a lily is sucked cruelly by a bee, in its most sensitive, most life-giving parts. [4176] Sweet honey is not produced by industrious, patient, good, virtuous bees without unspeakable torment for those most delicate fibers, without the pitiless massacre of flowerets. That tree is infested by an ant colony, that other one by caterpillars, flies, snails, mosquitoes; this one is injured in its bark and afflicted by the air or by the sun penetrating the wound; that other one has a damaged trunk, or roots; that other has many dry leaves; that other one has its flowers gnawed at, nibbled; that other one has its fruits pierced, eaten away. That plant is too warm, this one too cold; too much light, too much shade; too wet, too dry. One cannot grow or spread easily because there are obstacles and obstructions; another finds nowhere to lean, or has trouble and struggles to reach any support. In the whole garden you will not find a single plant in a state of perfect health. Here a branch is broken by the wind or by its own weight; there a gentle breeze is tearing a flower apart, and carries away a piece, a filament, a leaf, a living part of this or that plant, which has broken or been torn off. Meanwhile you torture the grass by stepping on it; you grind it down, crush it, squeeze out its blood, break it, kill it. A sensitive and gentle young maiden goes sweetly cutting and breaking off stems. A gardener expertly chops down trunks, breaking off sensitive limbs, with his nails, with his tools. (Bologna, 19 April 1826.) Certainly these plants live on; some because their infirmities are not fatal, others because even with fatal diseases, plants, and animals as well, can manage to live on a little while. The spectacle of such abundance of life when you first go into this garden lifts your spirits, and that is why you think it is a joyful place. But in truth this life is wretched and unhappy, every garden is like a vast hospital (a place much more deplorable than a

cemetery), and if these beings [4177] feel, or rather, were to feel, surely not being would be better for them than being. (Bologna, 22 April 1826.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AA.VV. (1898), *Pensieri di varia filosofia e di bella letteratura 1*, Florence.
- AA. VV. (1964), *Leopardi e il Settecento, atti del I convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani (Recanati, 13-16 settembre 1962)*, Florence.
- AA.VV. (1982), *Leopardi e il mondo antico, atti del V convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani*, Florence.
- AA.VV. (1989), *Leopardi e la cultura europea, atti del convegno internazionale dell'Università di Lovanio*, Leuven.
- AA.VV. (1998), *Il riso leopardiano: comico, satira, parodia, atti del IX convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani (Recanati, 18-22 settembre 1995)*, Florence.
- AA.VV. (2010), *La prospettiva antropologica nel pensiero e nella poesia di Giacomo Leopardi, atti del XII convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani (Recanati, 23-26 settembre 2008)*, Florence.
- Acocella, M. A. (2007), *Appunti sulla presenza di Luciano nelle Intercenales*, Florence.
- Adkins, A. W. H. (1960), *Merit and responsibility: a study in Greek values*, Oxford.
- Adriani, M. (1819), ed., *Opuscoli di Plutarco volgarizzati da Marcello Adriani il giovine*, Florence.
- (1825), ed., *Opuscoli di Plutarco volgarizzati da Marcello Adriani il giovine*, Milan.
- Aéliion, R. (1983), *Euripide, héritier d'Eschyle*, Paris.
- Allan, W. (2006), “Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic”, *JHS* 126, 1-35.
- Allen, T. W. (1955), ed., *Homeri Opera Tomus V*, Oxford.
- Almansi, G. (1997), “Dialogo di un fisico e di un metafisico”, in M. Dell’Aquila (ed.), *Letture Leopardiane III Ciclo*, Rome, 179-201.
- Ammendola, G. (1953), ed., *Sofocle, Edipo a Colono*, Turin.

- Anderson, G. (1976), *Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, Leiden.
- Anderson, W. S. (1997), ed., *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, Norman and London.
- Arnim, H. von (1903), ed., *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta; Volumen II, Chrysippi fragmenta logica et physica*, Stuttgart.
- Arnott, W. G. (1996), ed., *Alexis: The Fragments, a Commentary*, Cambridge.
- Arrighetti (1987), *Poeti, eruditi e biografi: momenti della riflessione dei Greci sulla letteratura*, Pisa.
- Asheri, D. (2007), *A Commentary on Herodotus*, Oxford.
- Asmis, E. (1992), "Plato on poetic creativity", in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge, 338-364.
- Audano, S. (2000), "Cicerone tra Mida e Sileno (Cons. fr. 9 Vit. e Tusc. 1.114)", *Paideia* 55, 23-35.
- (2005), "Una nota esegetica alla *Consolatio ad Apollonium*", in A. Pérez Jiménez, F. Titchner (eds), *Valori letterari delle Opere di Plutarco. Studi offerti al Professor Italo Gallo dall'International Plutarch Society*, Malaga-Logan, 29-39.
 - (2006), "Il silenzio di Sileno: Genesi di una presunta variante narratologica in Cicerone (*Tusc.* 1.114)", in C. Santini, L. Zurli, L. Cardinali (eds), *Concentus ex Dissonis: Scritti in onore di Aldo Setaioli*, Naples, 49-65.
 - (2014a), "La retorica dell'indeterminazione: spunti per una lettura della *Consolatio ad Apollonium*", in P. Volpe Cacciatore (ed.), *Plutarco: linguaggi e retorica*, Naples, 16-27.
 - (2014b), "Menandro consolatore tra Plutarco e Leopardi", in A. Casanova (ed.), *Menandro e l'evoluzione della commedia greca*, Florence, 211-246.
 - (2016), "Palinodia consolatoria a proposito di τὸ κρᾶτιστον in Plut. *Cons. ad Apoll.* (108E)", *SCO* 62, 237-244.
- Austin, C., Bastianini, G. (2002), eds, *Posidippi Pellai quae supersunt omnia*, Milan.
- Awad, L. (1963), *The Theme of Prometheus in English and French Literature: a Study in Literary Influences*, Cairo.
- Ax, W., Plasberg, O. (1961), eds, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Scripta Quae Manserunt Omnia: Fasc. 45 De Natura Deorum*, Stuttgart.

- Babich, B. (2014), "Nietzsche's Philology and the Science of Antiquity", in Jensen and Heit (2014), 233-261.
- Babut, D. (1971), "Sémonide et Mimnerme", *REG* 84, 17-43.
 – (1974), "Xénophane critique des poètes", *L'antiquité classique* 43, 83-117.
- Badolle, M. (1927), *L'abbé J. J. Barthélémy et l'hellénisme en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis.
- Baldwin, B. (1973), *Studies in Lucian*, Toronto.
- Barfield, R. (2011), *The Ancient Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry*, Cambridge.
- Baron, H. (1959), "The Querelle of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship", *Journal of The History of Ideas* 20, 3-22.
- Barthélemy, J. J. (1789-1790), *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce dans le milieu du quatrième siècle avant l'ère vulgaire*, Paris.
- Baruffaldi, G. (1809), ed., *Timone. Commedia ... riveduta e corretta ed alla miglior lezione ridotta con alquante annotazioni*, Ferrara.
- Bassino, P. (2013), *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, Doctoral thesis, Durham University.
- Bazzocchi, M. A. (1991), ed., *Giacomo Leopardi, Operette morali*, Milan.
- Beavis, I. C. (1988), *Insects and other invertebrates in classical antiquity*, Exeter.
- Bellucci, N. (1996), *Giacomo Leopardi e i contemporanei. Testimonianze dall'Italia e dall'Europa in vita e in morte del poeta*, Florence.
 – (2005), "Un finale per la Storia del genere umano: il "Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo"", in Cirillo, S. (ed.), *Il comico nella letteratura italiana. Teorie e poetiche*, Rome, 225-239.
- Benatar, D. (2006), *Better never to have been*, Oxford and New York.
- Berlin, I. (2000), *Three critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, Princeton.

Bianchi, U., Horewitz, R., Girardot, K. S. (1971), "Dualistic Aspects of Thracian Religion", *History of Religions* 10, 228-233.

Bigi, E. (1967), *Il Leopardi traduttore dei classici (1814-1817)*, Turin.

Bierl, A., Latacz, J. (2000-2009), *Homers Ilias Gesamtkommentar*, Berlin and New York.

- (2008), *Homers Ilias Gesamtkommentar, Band 4, Sechster Gesang (Z). Faszikel 2, Kommentar*, Berlin and New York.

Binni, W. (1973), *La protesta di Leopardi*, Florence.

Biral, B. (1974), *La posizione storica di Giacomo Leopardi*, Turin.

Biscuso, M. (2003), "Leopardi, Kant e il paralogismo del sublime", in *Quaderni materialisti* 2, 123-154.

- (2006), "Leopardi: Dialogo di un Fisico e di un Metafisico, Arte di prolungare la vita o arte della felicità?", *Giornale di filosofia italiana*, http://www.giornaledifilosofia.net/public/filosofiaitaliana/pdf/saggi/Leopardi_Hufeland.pdf.
- (2010), Review of Marcon (2011), http://www.giornaledifilosofia.net/public/filosofiaitaliana/scheda_rec_fi.php?id=157

Bishop, P. (2004), ed., *Nietzsche and Antiquity*, New York.

Blasucci, L. (1985), *Leopardi e i segnali dell'infinito*, Bologna.

- (1987), "Profilo dell'Ultimo canto di Saffo", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 17, 827-845.
- (1989), *I titoli dei Canti e altri studi leopardiani*, Naples.
- (2003), *Lo stormire del vento tra le piante*, Venice.

Blundell, S. (1986), *The Origins of Civilization in Greek & Roman Thought*, London.

Boedeker, D., Sider, D. (2001), eds, *The New Simonides Contexts of Praise and Desire*, Oxford.

Bompaire, J. (1958), *Lucien Écrivain: imitation et création*, Paris.

Bonanno, D. (2006), *Chartless voyage. Presenze leopardiane nell'opera di Herman Melville*, Pisa.

Bonito, V. M. (2008), “Il Copernico o delle favole antiche”, in A. Prete (ed.), *Sulle “Operette morali”*. *Sette studi*, Lecce, 47-62.

Bottéro, J. (1992), *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, Chicago.

Brandon, S. G. F. (1962), *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions: An Historical and Comparative Study Containing the Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion Delivered in the University of Oxford*, Manchester.

Branham, R. B. (1989), *Unruly Eloquence. Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions*, Cambridge MA.

Braswell, B. K. (1982) “The Song of Ares and Aphrodite: Theme and Relevance to Odyssey 8”, *Hermes* 110, 129-37.

Brogi, S. (2012), *Nessuno vorrebbe rinascere: da Leopardi alla storia di un'idea tra antichi e moderni*, Pisa.

Brown, C. G. (1989), “Ares, Aphrodite, and the Laughter of the Gods”, *Phoenix* 43, 283-293.

Browning, R. (1961), “Herodotus v. 4 and Euripides, Cresphontes fr. 449 N”, *The Classical Review*, 11, 201-202.

Burckhardt, L., von Reibnitz, B., von Ungern-Sternberg, J. (2005), eds, *Jacob Burckhardt: Griechische Kulturgeschichte Band II*, Munich and Basel.

Burgess, S. J. (2001), *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer & the Epic Cycle*, Baltimore and London.

Burkert, W. (1960), “Das Lied von Ares und Aphrodite zum Verhältnis Odyssee von und Ilias”, *RhM* 103, 130-44.

– (1977), *Greek Religion*, Oxford.

– (1997), ‘Impact and Limits of the Idea of Progress in Antiquity’, J. Mittelstraß, P. McLaughlin, A. Burgen (eds), *The Idea of Progress*, Berlin and New York, 19–46.

Burton, R. W. B. (1962), *Pindar's Pythian Odes: Essays in Interpretation*, Oxford.

Bury, J. B. (1920), *The Idea of Progress: an Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, London.

- Butler, E. M. (1935), *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany*, Cambridge.
- Buxton Forman, H. (1882), ed., *Shelley's Poetical Works, vol. 1*, London.
- Caesar, M. (1989), "Leopardi e le risorse del dialogo", in AA. VV. (1989), 103-124.
- Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. (2013), eds, *Giacomo Leopardi, Zibaldone*, New York.
- Cairns, D. L. (1996), "Hybris, dishonor, and thinking big", *JHS* 116, 1-32.
- Cairns, D. L., Howie, J. G. (2010), eds, *Bacchylides. Five Epinician Odes*, Cambridge.
- Camerotto, A. (1998), *Le metamorfosi della parola: studi sulla parodia in Luciano di Samosata*, Pisa.
- (2009), ed., *Icaromenippo o l'uomo sopra le nuvole*, Alessandria.
 - (2014), *Gli occhi e la lingua della satira: Studi sull'eroe satirico in Luciano di Samosata*, Milan.
- Campana, A., Pasquini, E. (2011), eds, *Catalogo della biblioteca Leopardi in Recanati (1847-1899)*, Florence.
- Carducci, G. (1898), "Introduzione a G. Leopardi", in AA. VV. (1898), v-xiii.
- Carella, C. (2010), *Umana cosa picciol tempo dura: Leopardi, Saffo e il mondo greco*, Rome.
- Carey, C. (2009), "The Third Stasimon of Oedipus at Colonus", in S. Goldhill and E. Hall (eds), *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, Cambridge, 119-133.
- Caro, E. M. (1878), *Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle*, Paris.
- Carson, A. (1984), "How Bad a Poem is Simonides Fr. 1?", in Gerber (1984), 59-72.
- Cartwright, D. E. (2010), *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, Cambridge.
- Casoli, G. (1990), "Le fonti bibliche e cristiane", in AA. VV., A. Frattini (ed.), *Giacomo Leopardi – Il problema delle "fonti" alla radice della sua opera*, Rome, 41-59.
- Cecchetti, G. (1983), tr., *Leopardi, Operette Morali: Essays and Dialogues*, Oakland.

Cellerino, L. (1995), "Operette morali di Giacomo Leopardi", in AA. VV. (eds), *Letteratura italiana Einaudi, Le Opere III, Dall'Ottocento al Novecento*, Turin, 303-355.

Celli, G. (1992), ed., *Giacomo Leopardi: Dialogo di un folletto e di uno gnomo*, Padua.

Cesareo, G. A. (1893), *Nuove ricerche su la vita e le opere di Giacomo Leopardi*, Turin and Rome.

Chapman, E., Hall, W. (1846), eds, *The Count of Monte-Cristo by Alexandre Dumas*, London.

Chiasson, C. C. (2005), "Myth, Ritual, and Authorial Control in Herodotus' Story of Cleobis and Biton (Hist. 1.31)", *The American Journal of Philology* 126, 41-64.

Chroust, A. H. (1966), "Eudemus or On the Soul: A Lost Dialogue of Aristotle on the Immortality of the Soul", *Mnemosyne* 19, 17-30.

Cilento, V. (1963), "Leopardi e l'antico", in AA. VV. (eds), *Studi di varia umanità in onore di Francesco Flora*, Milan, 601-617.

Clader, L. L. (1976), *Helen*, Leiden.

Clay, J. (1983), *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey*, Princeton.

Collard, C., Cropp, M. J., Lee, K. H. (2009), eds, *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays*, Oxford.

Colli, G., Montinari, M. (1967), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner in Bayreuth, Nachgelassene Fragmente Anfang 1875 bis Frühling 1876*, Berlin and New York.

- (1968), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Jenseits von Gut und Böse; Zur Genealogie der Moral (1886-1887)*, Berlin and New York.
- (1972), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Die Geburt der Tragödie; Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen I-II (1872-1874)*, Berlin and New York.
- (1973), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Idyllen aus Messina, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1881 bis Sommer 1882*, Berlin and New York.
- (1975), eds, *Briefe an Friedrich Nietzsche, September 1864-April 1869*, Berlin and New York.
- (1978a), eds, *Briefe an Friedrich Nietzsche, Mai 1872-Dezember 1874*, Berlin and New York.

- (1978b), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Nachgelassene Fragmente Sommer 1872 bis Ende 1874*, Berlin and New York.
 - (1980), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche Briefe, Januar 1875-Dezember 1879*, Berlin and New York.
 - (1982), eds, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Philologische Schriften (1867-1873)*, Berlin and New York.
- Conte, G. B. (1994), *Latin Literature: A History*, Baltimore and London.
- (1996), *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, Ithaca.
 - (2012), *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario*, Palermo.
- Costazza, A. (2000), “L’entusiasmo della ragione: Poesia e filosofia in Schiller e Leopardi”, *Studia Theodisca* 7, 35-79.
- Cox, V. (1992), *The Renaissance Dialogue*, Cambridge.
- Cuny, D. (2003), “Théognis inspirateur de Sophocle?”, *Cahiers de la Villa Kérylos* 14, 47-62.
- Curi, U. (2008), *Meglio non essere nati*, Turin.
- Curnis, M. (2003), *Il Bellerofonte di Euripide, edizione e commento dei frammenti*, Alessandria.
- Dacier, A. (1714), *Des Causes de la corruption du goust*, Paris.
- (1819), tr., *L’Iliade d’Homère*, Paris.
- Dahlkvist, T. (2007), *Nietzsche and the philosophy of pessimism: a study of Nietzsche's relation to the pessimistic tradition: Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Leopardi*, Uppsala.
- Daiches, S. (1928), “The Babylonian Dialogue of Pessimism: The Folly of Hunting”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3, 615-618.
- D’Alembert, J. Le R. (1779), *Éloges lus dans les séances publiques de l’Académie françoise*, Paris.
- Dalfen, J. (1979), ed., *Marcii Aurelii Antonini ad se ipsum libri XII*, Leipzig.
- Davies, M., Kathirithamby, J. (1986), *Greek Insects*, London.
- Dawe, R. D. (1996), ed., *Sophoclis Oedipus Coloneus*, Stuttgart and Leipzig.

- Dawson, C. M. (1966), "Spoudogeloion: Random Thoughts on Occasional Poems", *YCS* 19, 42-47.
- Dearbon, G. (1835), ed., *Works of Lord Byron In Verse and Prose, Including His Letters, Journals, Etc. with a Sktech of His Life*, Philadelphia.
- De Callières, F. (1688), *Histoire poetique de la guerre nouvellement declarée entre les anciens et les modernes*, Paris.
- Dejean, J. E. (1997), *Ancients against moderns: culture wars and the making of a fin de siècle*, Chicago and London.
- De las Nieves Muñiz Muñiz, M. (2013), *Lecture di Leopardi fra le righe dello «Zibaldone». Aggiunte all'annotazione di Giuseppe Pacella*, Bologna.
- Deichgräber, K. (1972), *Der letzte Gesang der Ilias*, Mainz.
- Deitz, L. (2007), "Wieland's Lucian", in Ligota and Panizza (2007), 175-190.
- Della Giovanna, I. (1899), ed., *Le prose morali di Giacomo Leopardi, commentate da Ildebrando della Giovanna*, Florence.
- Dell'Aquila, M. (1979) "La dialettica mito-personaggio-poeta nelle alternanze di singolare-plurale dell'Ultimo Canto di Saffo", *Otto/Novecento* 5/6, 5-22.
- De Robertis, G. and D. (1978), eds, *Giacomo Leopardi. Canti*, Milan.
- De Roberto, F. (2009), *L'imperio*, Milan.
- De Sanctis, G. (1951), "Il 'Logos' di Crespo e il problema della storia erodotea.", in *id. Studi di Storia della Storiografia Greca*, Florence, 47-72.
- De Sanctis, F. (2007), *Schopenhauer e Leopardi*, Naples.
- Detienne, M. (1999), *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, New York.
- Deussen, P. (1911), ed., *Arthur Schopenhauers sämtliche Werke*, Munich.
- Di Benedetto, V. (1967), "Giacomo Leopardi e i filosofi antichi", *Critica storica* 6, 289-320.

- Dickie, M. W. (1976), "On the Meaning of ἐφήμερος", *ICS* 1, 7-14.
- Diels, H. (1921), *Der Antike Pessimismus*, Berlin.
- Diels, H., Kranz, W. (1951-52), eds, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: griechisch und deutsch*, Berlin.
- Dienstag, J. F. (2006), *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit*, Princeton.
- Dietrich, B. C. (1965), *Death, Fate and the Gods*, London.
- Dilly, C. (1796), ed., *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce, dans le milieu du quatrième siècle avant l'ère vulgaire*, London.
- Di Meo, A. (2001), "Leopardi e la 'questione della pluralità de' mondi'" in G. Stabile (ed.), *Giacomo Leopardi e il pensiero scientifico*, Rome, 79-109.
- Ditadi, G. (2011), ed., *Giacomo Leopardi: Dissertazione sopra l'anima delle bestie e altri scritti filosofici*, Trieste.
- Dodds, E. R. (1966), "On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex", *G&R* 13, 37-49.
 – (1973), *The Ancient Concept of Progress: and Other Essays on Greek literature and Belief*, Oxford.
- Dolfi, A. (1986), *La doppia memoria: saggi su Leopardi e il leopardismo*, Rome.
 – (1997), "Leopardi e la malinconia del moderno", in S. Neumeister, R. Siri, (eds), *Leopardi poeta e pensatore/Dichter und Denker*, Naples, 367-382.
- Dorandi, T. (2013), ed., *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Cambridge.
- Dragona-Monachou, M. (1976), *The stoic arguments for the existence and the providence of the gods*, Athens.
- Drake, J. (1699), *The Antient and Modern Stage Survey'd or Mr Collier's View of the Immorality and Profanes of the English Stage Set in a True Light*, London.
- Dunbar, N. (1995), ed., *Aristophanes, Birds*, Oxford.
- Duncan, D. (1979), *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic tradition*, Cambridge.

- Easterling, P. E. (2013), “Sophocles and the wisdom of Silenus: a reading of Oedipus at Colonus 1211-1248”, in D. Cairns (ed.), *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought*, Swansea.
- Edelstein, L. (1967), *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity*, Baltimore.
- Edwards, M. W. (1987), *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*, Baltimore.
 – (1991), *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume 5, Books 17-20*, Cambridge.
- Eiselein, J. (1825), *Johann Winckelmanns sämtliche Werke*, Donaueschingen.
- Ellis, B. A. (2013), *Grudging gods: theology and characterization in Herodotus, and interpretation from Plutarch to the present*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Edinburgh.
 – (2015), “Proverbs In Herodotus’ Dialogue Between Solon And Croesus (1.30-33): Methodology And ‘Making Sense’ In The Study Of Greek Religion”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 58, 83-106.
- Emden, C. (2004), “The Invention of Antiquity: Nietzsche on Classicism, Classicality, and the Classical Tradition”, in Bishop (2004), 372-390.
- Enmarch, R. (2013) “Mortuary and literary laments: a comparison”, in R. Enmarch, V. Lepper (eds), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: Theory and Practice. Proceedings of the British Academy*, London, 83-99.
- Fabio, N. (1995), *L’entusiasmo della ragione: studio sulle “Operette morali”*, Florence.
- Fasano, P. (1985), *L’entusiasmo della ragione: il romantico e l’antico nell’esperienza leopardiana*, Rome.
- Felici, L. (2002), “Lettura della «Saffo» leopardiana”, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* CXIX, 321-360.
 – (2005), *L’Olimpo abbandonato: Leopardi tra «favole antiche» e «disperati affetti»*, Venice.
- Felici, L., Trevi, E. (2013), eds, *Giacomo Leopardi: Tutte le poesie, tutte le prose e lo Zibaldone*, Rome.
- Fénelon, F. (1911), *Lettre à l’Académie*, Paris.
 – (1917), *De l’éducation des filles; Dialogue des morts*, Paris.
- Fernández, J. (2006), “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism”, *Philosophy And Phenomenological Research* 73, 646–664.

- Fielding, H. (1798), *A Journey from This World to the Next*, London.
- Flora, F. (1953-1955), ed., *Giacomo Leopardi: Tutte le Opere*, Milano.
- Fogelmark, S. (2008), "Pindar, Pythian 8.95-6: an Unrecognized Problem", *Hermes* 136, 383- 390.
- Fontenelle, B. Le Bovier de (1691-1699), *Réflexions sur la poétique*, Paris.
 – (1683), *Nouveaux dialogues des morts par Fontenelle*, Paris.
 – (1818a), *Digression sur les anciens et les modernes*, Paris.
 – (1818b), *Œuvres de Fontenelle, Tome III*, Paris.
- Forschepiepe, F. (1943), ed., *Ewiges Griechentum : Auswahl aus seinen Schriften und Briefen. J. J. Winckelmann*, Stuttgart.
- Fowler, D. (1997), "On the Shoulders of Giants: Intertextuality and Classical Studies", *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 39, 13-34.
- Fowler, R. L. (1987), *The Nature of Early Greek Lyric*, Toronto.
 – (1996), "Herodotus and His Contemporaries", *JHS* 116, 62-87.
- Fränkel, H. (1946), "Man's 'Ephemeros' Nature According to Pindar and Others", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 77, 131-145.
 – (1975), *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, London.
- Franzoni, C. (2008), ed., *Johann J. Winckelmann, Il bello nell'arte: La natura, gli antichi, la modernità*, Turin.
- Frye, N. (2000), *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Michigan.
- Fubini, M. (1977), *Giacomo Leopardi. Opere*, Turin.
- Fumaroli, M. (2001), *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Paris.
 – (2005), *Le api e i ragni: la disputa degli antichi e dei moderni*, Milan.
- Galimberti, C. (1964), "Fontenelle, Leopardi e il dialogo alla maniera di Luciano", in AA. VV. (1964), 283-294.
 – (1998a), ed., *Operette Morali: Giacomo Leopardi*, Naples.
 – (1998b), "Il Copernico": uomo e natura in commedia, AA.VV (1998), 385-391.

- Gaisser, J. H. (1969), "Adaptation of Traditional Material in the Glaucus-Diomedes Episode", *HSCP* 100, 165-176.
- (2002), "The Reception of Classical Texts in the Renaissance," in A. J. Grieco, M. Rocke, and F. Gioffredi Superbi, (eds), *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, Florence, 387–400.
- Galluzzi, P. (2001), "Leopardi e la rivoluzione in astronomia e fisica: Copernico e Galileo", in G. Stabile (ed.), *Giacomo Leopardi e il pensiero scientifico*, Rome, 21-42.
- Garin, E. (1975), *Rinascite e rivoluzioni. Movimenti culturali dal XIV al XVII secolo*, Rome.
- Garner, R. (1990), *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry*, London.
- Garvie, A. F. (ed.), (1994), *Homer Odyssey Books VI-VIII*, Cambridge.
- Gentili, B. (1988), *Poetry and its Public in Ancient Greece: from Homer to the Fifth Century*, London.
- (1995), ed., *Le Pitiche, Pindaro*, Rome and Milan.
- Gerber, D. E. (1969), "Semonides of Amorgos, Fr. 1.4", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 100, 177-180.
- (1984), ed., *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury*, Chico.
 - (1984), "Simonides Fr. 1: A Commentary", in Gerber (1984), 125-136.
- Geri, L. (2011), *A colloquio con Luciano di Samosata. Leon Battista Alberti, Giovanni Pontano ed Erasmo da Rotterdam*, Rome.
- Gessner, C., (1559), ed., *Johannes Stobaeus Sententiae ex thesauris Graecorum*, Zurich.
- Ghelardi, M. (2002), ed., *J. Burckhardt – F. Nietzsche. Carteggio; con un saggio di A. Warburg*, Turin.
- Giachery, E. (1999), "Il 'Copernico' e il Leopardi cosmico", in AA. VV. (eds), *Le Operette morali di Leopardi*, Assisi, 58-79.
- Giannattasio Andria, R. (2006), "Giacomo Leopardi lettore di Plutarco", in R. M. Aguilar, I. R. Alfageme (eds), *Ecos de Plutarco a en Europa. De Fortuna Plutarchi Studia Selecta*, Madrid, 107-124.

- Giannini, P. (1982), “‘Qualcuno’ e ‘nessuno’”, *QU* 11, 69–76.
- Gigante, M. (1998), “Simonide e Leopardi”, *La Parola del passato* 53, 161–200.
 – (2003), *Leopardi e l’antico*, Bologna.
- Gigon, O. (1987), ed., *Aristotelis Opera Volumen tertium: Librorum deperditorum fragmenta*, Berlin.
- Gilbert, N. W. (2015), *The Eternal Feud: Renaissance Perspectives on Ancients versus Moderns*, Charleston.
- Gillot, H. (1914), *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes en France*, Paris.
- Giusta, M. (1984), ed., *M. Tulli Ciceronis Tusculanae Disputationes*, Turin.
- Gomme, A. W., Sandbach, F. H. (1973), eds, *Menander, a Commentary*, Oxford.
- Gossman, L. (2000), *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas*, Chicago.
- Gould, J. B. (1970), *The philosophy of Chrysippus*, Leiden.
- Gow, A. S. F. (1965), ed., *Theocritus. Volume II, Commentary, Appendix, Indexes, and Plates*, Cambridge.
- Granger, H. (1974), “Poetry and Prose: Xenophanes of Colophon”, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 137, 403-433.
- Grass, G. (1991), Interview by Elizabeth Gaffney for *The Art of Fiction* No. 124 in *The Paris Review* 119. (<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2191/the-art-of-fiction-no-124-gunter-grass>)
- Graziosi, B. (2001), “Competition in Wisdom” in F. Budelmann and P. Michelakis (eds), *Homer, Tragedy and Beyond: Essays in Honour of P.E. Easterling*, London, 57–74.
 – (2002), *Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic*, Cambridge.
- Greene, W. C. (1935), “Fate, Good, and Evil in Early Greek Poetry”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 46, 1-36.
 – (1944), *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought*, Cambridge MA.
- Gregory, J. (2005), ed., *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Malden.

- Griffin, J. (1980), *Homer on Life and Death*, Oxford.
- (2006), “Herodotus and Tragedy”, in C. Dewald and J. Marincola (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, Cambridge, 46-59.
- Griffith, M. (1975), “Man and the Leaves: A Study of Mimnermos Fr. 2”, *CSCA* 8, 73-88.
- (2009), “Greek Lyric and the Place of Humans in the World”, in Felix Budelmann (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric*, Cambridge, 72-94.
- Grilli, A. (1982), “Leopardi, Platone e la filosofia greca”, in AA.VV. (1982), 53-74.
- (1992), *Stoicismo, epicureismo, letteratura*, Brescia.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. (1957), *In the Beginning: Some Greek Views on the Origins of Life and the Early State of Man*, London.
- Gutmacher, A. (1903), *Optimism and Pessimism in the Old and New Testaments*, Baltimore.
- Gutzwiller, K. (2005), *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, Oxford.
- Halliwell, S. (1990), “Human Limits and the Religion of Greek Tragedy”, *Journal of Literature and Theology* 4, 169-80.
- (1996), “Plato’s Repudiation of the Tragic”, in M. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic. Greek Theatre and Beyond*, Oxford, 332-349.
 - (2002) *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, Princeton.
 - (2008), *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity*, Cambridge.
 - (2011), *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus*, Oxford.
- Hani, J. (1972), *Consolation à Apollonios, Plutarch*, Paris.
- (1985), ed., *Plutarque, Œuvres morales II*, Paris.
- Hannah, B. (2009), *The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer’s philosophy*, Oxford.
- Harder, A. (1985), ed., *Euripides’ Kresphontes and Archelaos*, Leiden.
- Harding, W. (1995), ed., *Henry D. Thoreau: Walden, an Annotated Edition*, Boston and New York.

- Harrison, E. L. (1991), "Homeric Wonder-Horses", *Hermes* 119, 252-254.
- Heath, J. (1992), "The Legacy of Peleus: Death and Divine Gifts in the *Iliad*", *Hermes* 120, 387-400.
- (2005), *The talking Greeks: speech, animals, and the other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato*, Cambridge and New York.
 - (2013), *Ancient Philosophical Poetics*, Cambridge.
- Heinemann, W. (1918), ed., *The Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Volume X, White Nights and Other Stories*, London.
- Heitz, A. (1973), ed., *Aristoteles: Opera Omnia: Vol. IV Pars 2: Fragmenta Aristotelis*, Hildesheim and New York.
- Held, D. T. (2004), "Conflict and Repose: Dialectics of the Greek Ideal in Nietzsche and Winckelmann", in Bishop (2004), 411-424.
- Henrichs, A. (1986), "The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27, 369-397.
- (2004) "Full of Gods: Nietzsche on Greek Polytheism and Culture", in Bishop (2004), 114-137.
 - (2005), "Nietzsche on Greek Tragedy and the Tragic", in Gregory (2005), 444-458.
- Henry, R. (1960), ed., *Photius: Bibliothèque t. 2*, Paris.
- Hense, O. (1958), ed., *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologii, libri duo posteriores*, Berlin.
- Hepp, N. (1968), *Homère en France au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris.
- Hercher, R. (1864), ed., *Claudii Aeliani de natura animalium libri xvii, varia historia, epistolae, fragmenta, vol. 1*, Leipzig.
- Herchenroeder, L. (2008), "Τί Γὰρ Τοῦτο Πρὸς Τὸν Λόγον; Plutarch's *Gryllus* and the So-Called Grylloi", *American Journal of Philology* 129, 347-379.
- Hershbell, J. P. (1981), ed., *Pseudo-Plato, Axiochus*, Ann Arbor.
- Heubeck, A., West, S., Hainsworth, J. B. (1988), *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, Oxford.

Holub, R. (2008), "Reception Theory: School of Constance", in Selden (2008), 319-346.

Hornblower, S. (2013), ed., *Herodotus: Histories. Book V*, Cambridge.

How, W. W., Wells, J. (1912), eds, *A Commentary on Herodotus: With Introduction and Appendixes*, Oxford.

Hubbard, T. K. (1994), "Elemental Psychology and the Date of Semonides of Amorgos", *The American Journal of Philology* 115, 175-197.

– (1996), "'New Simonides' or Old Semonides? Second Thoughts on POxy 3965, FR. 26", *Arethusa* 29, 255-262.

Hübscher, A. (1978), ed., *Gesammelte Briefe*, Bonn.

Hughes, J. (1730), tr., *Fontenelle's Dialogues of the Dead*, London.

Hunter, R. (2003), *Theocritus: Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus*, Berkeley.

Hunter, R., Russell, D. A. (2011), eds, *Plutarch. How to Study Poetry*, Cambridge.

Invernizzi, G. (1994), *Il pessimismo tedesco dell'Ottocento: Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Bahnsen e Mainländer e i loro avversari*, Florence.

Irigoin, J. (1993), ed., *Bacchylide: Dithyrambes, Épinicies, fragments*, Paris.

Irwin, E., Greenwood, E. (2007), *Reading Herodotus: A Study of the Logoi in Book 5 of Herodotus' Histories*, Cambridge.

Iser, W. (1989) *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore and London.

Jacoby, F. (1923-1959), ed., *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin.

Jaeger, W. (1947), *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Oxford.

Janaway, C. (2006a), ed., *The Cambridge companion to Schopenhauer*, Cambridge.

– (2006b), "Schopenhauer's Pessimism", in Janaway (2006), 318-343.

Jauss, H. R. (1973), *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Frankfurt am Main.

– (1982) *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Brighton.

Jebb, R. C. (1889), *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments*, Cambridge.

- Jedan, C. (2009), *Stoic Virtues: Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics*, London and New York.
- Jenkyns, R. (1989), “Virgil and Arcadia”, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 79, 26-39.
- Jensen, A. K., Heit, H. (2014), eds, *Nietzsche as a Scholar of Antiquity*, London and New York.
- Johnson, C. D. (2012), *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg’s Atlas of Images*, Ithaca.
- Kallendorf, C. K. (2007), ed., *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, Oxford.
- Kamerbeek, J. C. (1984), ed., *The Plays of Sophocles Part VII: The Oedipus Coloneus*, Leiden.
- Kannicht, R. (2004), ed., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta, Vol. 5 Euripides*, Göttingen.
- Kaplan, F. (1982), ed., *Les Pensées de Pascal*, Paris.
- Karttunen, K. (1989), *India in Early Greek Literature*, Helsinki.
- Kassel, R. (1958), *Untersuchungen zur griechischen und römischen Konsolationsliteratur*, Munich.
- Kassel, R., Austin, C. (1991), eds., *Poetae Comici Graeci*, Berlin.
- Keller, O. (1909-1913), *Die antike Tierwelt*, Leipzig.
- Kelly, A. (2009), ed., *Sophocles: Oedipus at Colonus*, London.
- Kelly, G. (2008), *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian*, Cambridge.
- Kenneth, F., Kitchell, Jr. (2014), *Animals in the ancient world from A to Z*, London.
- Kim, J. (2000), *The Pity of Achilles, Oral Style and the Unity of the Iliad*, Oxford.
- Kirk, G. S. (1954), ed., *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, Cambridge.
- (1985-1993), ed., *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Cambridge.
 - (1990), *The Iliad: A Commentary II*, Cambridge.

- Klibansky, R., Panofsky, E., Saxl, F. (1979), eds, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, Oxford.
- Knight, A. H. J. (1933), *Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche, and particularly of his connection with Greek Literature and Thought*, Cambridge.
- Kock, T. (1934), ed., *Comicorum atticorum fragmenta, Vol. 2*, Leipzig.
- Kullman, W. (1985), “Gods and Men in the Iliad and the Odyssey”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89, 1-23.
- Lambert, W. G. (1963), *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford.
- La Penna, A. (1991), *Tersite censurato e altri studi di letteratura fra antico e moderno*, Pisa.
- Lasserre, F. (1975), *Strabon. Géographie vol. 8*, Paris.
- Latacz, J. (2014), “On Nietzsche’s Philological Beginnings”, in Jensen and Heit (2014), 3-26.
- Lateiner, D. (1982), “A Note on the Perils of Prosperity in Herodotus”, *RhM* 125, 97-101.
- Lattimore, R. (1962), *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Urbana.
 – (2007), *The Odyssey of Homer*, New York.
- Laurenti, R. (1964), “Pessimismo e non pessimismo nella poesia di Semonide l'Amorgino”, *Sophia* 32, 83-100.
 – (1985), “È pessimistica la prima lirica greca?”, in P. Cosenza (ed.), *Esistenza e destino nel pensiero Greco arcaico*, Naples, 51-67.
- Leconte de Lisle, C. M. R. (1867), tr., *Homère, Iliade*, Paris.
- Leaf, W. (1900-1902), *The Iliad I-II*, London.
- Lefkowitz, M. R. (1969), “Bacchylides’ Ode 5: Imitation and Originality”, *HSCP* 73, 45-96.
 – (1977), “Pindar’s Pythian 8”, *The Classical Journal* 72, 209-221.
- Leshner, J. H. (1999), “Early Interest in Knowledge”, in A. A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 225-249.

- (2001), ed., *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments*, Toronto.
- Levi, P. (2014), *Se questo è un uomo*, Turin.
- Levin, S. B. (2001), *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited: Plato and the Greek Literary Tradition*, Oxford.
- Levine, J. M. (1981), “Ancients and Moderns Reconsidered”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, 72-89.
- (1991), *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age*, London.
- Levine Gera, D. (2000), “Two Thought Experiments in the Dissoi Logoi”, in *The American Journal of Philology* 121, 21-45.
- Levy, O. (1921), ed., *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, London.
- Ligota, C., Panizza, L. (2007), eds, *Lucian of Samosata Vivus et Redivivus*, London and Turin.
- Lloyd, M. (1987), “Cleobis and Biton (Herodotus 1,31)”, *Hermes* 115, 22-28.
- Lloyd-Jones, H. (1976), “Nietzsche and the Study of the Ancient World”, in O’Flaherty, Sellner, and Helm (1976), 1-15.
- Lobel, E., Page, D. (1955), eds, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, Oxford.
- Lonardi, G. (1969), *Classicismo e utopia nella lirica leopardiana*, Florence.
- (1992), “L’ultimo canto di Saffo”, *Rivista di letteratura italiana* X, 173-191.
- (2005), *L’oro di Omero. L’ “Iliade”, Saffo: antichissimi di Leopardi*, Venice.
- Lovejoy, A. O. (1960), *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea*, New York.
- Lowry, E. R., Jr. (1995), “Glaucus, the Leaves, and the Heroic Boast of *Iliad* 6.146-211”, in J. Carter, S. Morris (eds), *The Ages of Homer*, Austin, 193-203.
- Lurie, M. (2004), *Die Suche nach der Schuld: Sophokles' Oedipus Rex, Aristoteles' Poetik und das Tragödienverständnis der Neuzeit*, Munich.

- (2012), “Facing Up to Tragedy: Toward an Intellectual History of Sophocles in Europe from Camerarius to Nietzsche”, in Ormand (2013), 424-440.

Lynn-George, M. (1988), *Epos: Word, Narrative and the Iliad*, London.

Macleod, M. D. (1972-1987), ed., *Luciani Opera*, Oxford.

Macleod, C. W. (1982), ed., *Homer Iliad Book XXIV*, Cambridge.

Magris, A. (1984), *L'idea di destino nel pensiero antico, I: Dalle origini al V secolo a.c.*, Udine.

Manuel, F. E. (1959), *The Eighteen Century Confronts the Gods*, Cambridge MA.

Manuwald, B. (2012), *Sophokles König Ödipus*, Berlin.

Maehler, H. (1984), ed., *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis*, Leipzig.

- (1992), ed., *Bacchylidis carmina cum fragmentis*, Stuttgart and Leipzig.
- (2004), ed., *Bacchylides, A Selection*, Cambridge.

Manotta, M. (1998), *Leopardi. La retorica e lo stile*, Florence.

Marcon, L. (2007a), “Il difensore di Salomone: Leopardi e Qohèlet”, *Studia Patavina* 2, 1-16.

- (2007b), “La ragione, il corpo, la vita: Kant, Hufeland e Leopardi”, in *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 25, 49-71.
- (2011), *Kant e Leopardi, Saggi*, Arezzo.
- (2014), *Leopardi, Giobbe, Qohèlet*, Arezzo.

Mariani, C. (1991), *Alfabeto leopardiano*, Bergamo.

Marquard, M. (1905), *Die pessimistische Lebens: Auffassung des Altertums*, Dissertation, Kempten.

Marsh, D. (1998), *Lucian and the Latins. Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance*, Ann Arbor.

Martin, N. (1996), *Nietzsche and Schiller: Untimely Aesthetics*, Oxford.

Martindale, C. (1993), *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*, Cambridge.

- (2007a), “Introduction: Thinking Through Reception”, in Martindale and Thomas (2007), 1-13.
- (2007b), “Reception”, in Kallendorf (2007), 297-311.

Martindale, C., Thomas, R. F. (2007), eds, *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, Oxford.

Mattioli, E. (1980), *Luciano e l'umanesimo*, Naples.

- (1982) “Leopardi e Luciano”, in AA. VV. (1982), 75–98.

Mayer, C. – A. (1984), *Lucien de Samosate et la Renaissance française*, Geneva.

McCartney, E. S. (1954), “The Gold-Digging Ants”, *The Classical Journal* 49, 234.

Meijer, P. A. (2007), *Stoic theology: proofs for the existence of the cosmic god and of the traditional gods: including a commentary on Cleanthes' Hymn on Zeus*, Delft.

Melosi, L. (2015), ed., *Giacomo Leopardi: Operette Morali*, Milan.

Mendelson, E. (1976), ed., *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems*, London.

Merkelbach, R., West, M. L. (1967), eds, *Fragmenta Hesiodica*, Oxford.

Mette, H. J. (1984), “Zwei Akademiker heute: Krantor und Arkesilaos”, *Lustrum* 26, 7-95.

Meyer, M. (2014), “The Ancient Quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy in Nietzsche's Early Writings”, in Jensen and Heit (2014), 197-214.

Miranda, E. (2005), “Per un'etica tragica. Il paradigma dell'antico in Schopenhauer e Leopardi”, *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 23, 35-52.

Miller, C. H. (1979), ed., *Desiderius Erasmus, The Praise of Folly*, New Haven and London.

Momigliano, A. D. (1955), *Introduzione alla Griechische Kulturgeschichte di Jacob Burckhardt*, Florence.

- (1994), “Introduction to the Griechische Kulturgeschichte by Jacob Burckhardt”, in G. W. Bowersock, T. J. Cornell (eds), *A. D. Momigliano: Studies on Modern Scholarship*, Berkeley CA, 44-53.

Montanari, F. (1996), ed., *Vocabolario della lingua greca*, Turin.

- Monti, V. (1815), tr., *Iliade di Omero*, Naples.
- (1838), *Proposta di alcune correzioni ed aggiunte al Vocabolario della Crusca*, Piacenza.
 - (1841), *Prose varie*, Milan.
- Most, G. W. (1999), “The Poetics of Early Greek Philosophy”, in A. A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 332-362.
- (2000), “Friedrich Nietzsche: Between Philology and Philosophy”, *New Nietzsche Studies* 4, 163-170.
 - (2003), “Anger and Pity in Homer’s *Iliad*”, in S. Braund and G. W. Most (eds), *Ancient anger: Perceptions from Homer to Galen*, Cambridge, 50-75.
 - (2011), “What Ancient Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry?”, in P. Destrée, F.- G. Hermann (eds), *Plato and the Poets*, Leiden, 1-40.
 - (2016), “The Rise and Fall of the Quellenforschung”, in A. Blair, A.- S. Goeing (eds), *For the Sake of Learning: Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, Leiden, 933-954.
- Mullach, F. A. (1860), ed., *Fragmenta philosophorum graecorum*, Paris.
- Müller, M. C. G. (1966), ed., *Theodori Metochitae miscellanea philosophica et historica*, Amsterdam.
- Müller, E. (2005), *Die Griechen im Denken Nietzsches*, Berlin and New York.
- Murray, A. T. (1919), *Homer: the Odyssey, with an English Translation*, Cambridge, MA.
- Murray, O., Stern, S. (1998), ed., tr., *Jacob Burckhardt: The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, London.
- Nagy, G. (1990), *Pindar’s Homer, The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past*, Baltimore and London.
- (1999), *The best of the Achaeans: concepts of the hero in Archaic Greek poetry*, Baltimore and London.
- Navia, L. E. (1996), *Cynicism: A Critical Study*, Westport CT and London.
- Negri, A. (1994), *Interminati spazi ed eterno ritorno. Nietzsche e Leopardi*, Florence.
- (1997), *Leopardi un’esperienza Cristiana*, Padova.
 - (1998), “Il riso di Nietzsche e il riso di Leopardi”, in AA.VV. (1998), 65-86.

- Nencioni, G. (2002), “Leopardi e l’Accademia della Crusca”, in AA.VV. *Leopardi a Firenze: atti del Convegno, Firenze, 3-6 giugno 1998*, 1-15.
- Nestle, W. (1921), “Der Pessimismus und seine Ueberwindung bei den Griechen”, *Neue Jahrbuecher* 47, 81-97.
- Nestle, W. (1942) “Odyssee-Interpretationen II”, *Hermes* 77, 113–39.
- Newmyer, S. T. (1999), “Speaking of Beasts: The Stoics and Plutarch on Animal Reason and the Modern Case against Animals”, *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 63, 99-110.
- Newton, R. M. (1987), “Odysseus and Hephaestus in the *Odyssey*”, *CJ* 83, 12-20.
- Niccoli, E, Salvarani, B. (1998), *In difesa di “Giobbe e Salomon” Leopardi e la Bibbia*, Reggio Emilia.
- Nichols, J. G. (2008), tr., *Canti: Giacomo Leopardi*, Richmond.
- Nisbet, R. A. (1994), *History of the Idea of Progress*, London.
- Nisetich, F. J. (1977), “The Leaves of Triumph and Mortality: Transformation of a Traditional Image in Pindar's Olympian 12”, *TAPA* 107, 235-264.
- Noël, F. De La Place, de M. (1804), *Leçons de littérature et de morale*, Paris.
- Norbrook, D., Harrison, S. J., Hardie, P. R. (2015), *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, Oxford.
- Norman, J., Welchman, A., Janaway, C. (2010), trs, ed., *Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Representation. Volume 1*, Cambridge.
- Nussbaum, M. (2001), *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge.
 – (2006), “Schopenhauer, Nietzsche”, in Janaway (2006), 344-374.
- O’Flaherty, J.C., Sellner, T. F., Helm, R. M. (1976), eds, *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*, Chapel Hill.
- Opstelten, J. C. (1952), *Sophocles and Greek Pessimism*, Amsterdam.

Orlando, S. (1973), "Il pessimismo antico nel Leopardi traduttore: nota sulle versioni seimonidee in appendice ai Canti", in A. Accame Bobbio, A. Chiari (eds), *Studi in onore di Alberto Chiari*, Brescia, 911-937.

Ormand, K. (2013), ed., *A Companion to Sophocles*, Malden, Oxford and Chicester.

Pacella, G. (1966), "Elenchi di letture leopardiane", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* CXLIII, 557-577.

– (1991), "Lecture di Leopardi a Roma", in AA. VV. (eds), *Leopardi e Roma*, Roma, 237-253.

Page, D. L. (1962), ed., *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford.

Pantin, I. (2007), "Kepler et Lucien: Des voyages extraordinaires au *ludus philosophicus*", in Ligota and Panizza (2007), 115-128.

Panofsky, E. (1955), *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, New York.

– (2010), *Il significato nelle arti visive*, Milan.

Pantelia, M. C. (2002), "Helen and the Last Song for Hector", *TAPA* 132, 21–28.

Pasquini, E. (1984), "Leopardi fra traduzione e citazione: due trafilè distinte", in AA. VV., *La Critica del testo. Problemi di metodo ed esperienze di lavoro*, Salerno and Rome, 603-623.

Patey, D. L. (2008), "Ancients and Moderns", in H. B. Nisbet, C. Rawson (eds), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. 4, Eighteenth century*, Cambridge, 32-71.

Paton, W. R., Wegehaupt, I., Polhenz, M., Gärtner, H. (1974), eds, *Plutarchi Moralia Vol. 1*, Leipzig.

Payne, E. F. J. (1966), tr., *Arthur Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Representation*, New York.

Pelling, C. (2006), "Educating Croesus: Talking and Learning in Herodotus' Lydian Logos", *Classical Antiquity* 25, 141-177.

Pellizer, E. (1976), "Bergk, Leopardi, Winterton e Semonide fr. 29 Diehl: uno dei più sicuri risultati della ricerca filologica", *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 22, 15-21.

Perfetti, S. (2013), “Posthumanism, Materialism and Midrash: the dissolution of all hopes in Giacomo Leopardi's Canticle of the Wild Cock”, *Teoria* 23, 29-45.

Perrault, C. (1692), *Parallèles des anciens et des modernes*, Paris.

Peruzzi, E. (1998), ed., *Leopardi, Canti, edizione critica*, Milan.

Piccaluga, G. (1980), “Il dialogo tra Diomedes e Glaukos”, *Studi Storico Religiosi* 4, 237-258.

Piccioni, L. (1970), ed. *Giuseppe Ungaretti, Vita d'un uomo, Tutte le poesie*, Milan.

Pigoñ, J. (2008), *The Children of Herodotus: Greek and Roman Historiography and Related Genres*, Cambridge.

Pippin Burnett, A. (2005), *Pindar's Songs for Young Athletes of Aigina*, Oxford.

Piscopo, U. (1999), *Leopardi, altre tracce*, Naples.

Pluche, N. A. (1732), *Le Spectacle de la Nature*, Paris.

Pohlenz, M. (1922), “Hermann Diels ueber den antike Pessimismus”, *DL* 43, 217-220.

– (1954), *Die griechische Tragödie*, Göttingen.

Polato, G. (2007), *Il sogno di un'ombra: Leopardi e la verità delle illusioni*, Venice.

Polizzi, G. (2008), “Spettacolo senza spettatore. Dalla ‘pietade illuminata’ al Dialogo di un Folletto e di uno Gnomo”, in *id.*, “...per le forze eterne della material”. *Natura e scienza in Giacomo Leopardi*, Rome, 55-102.

– (2010), “La scoperta del ‘meglio non essere mai nati’ nelle letture del primo soggiorno romano”, in AA. VV. (2010), 195-216.

– (2011), *La concezione dell'umano, tra utopia e disincanto*, Milan and Udine.

Pope, A. (1806), tr., *The Iliad of Homer*, London.

Prod, R. (2013), *Lukians Schrift „Wie man Geschichte schreiben soll“*. *Kommentar und Interpretation*, Wien.

Porena, M. (1959), *Scritti leopardiani*, Bologna.

Porter, J. (2000a), *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, Stanford.

- (2000b), *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy*, Stanford.
- (2014), “Nietzsche’s Radical Philology”, in Jensen and Heit (2014), 27-50.

Presti, S. (2016), *Il salto di Leucade. Aspetti e forme del pensiero antico in Giacomo Leopardi*, Caltanissetta.

Prete, A. (1998), *Finitudine e infinito*, Milan.

Privitera, G. A. (1970), *Dioniso in Omero e nella poesia greca arcaica*, Rome.

Raboni, G. (2012), “Ultimo canto di Saffo”, in E. Fumagalli, C. Genetelli, G. Pedrojetta (eds), *Lettura dei Canti di Giacomo Leopardi*, Novara, 115-130.

Radt, S. (1985), ed., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta, vol. 3 Aeschylus*, Göttingen.

Randino, S. (2000), “Leopardi, “Canti”, XL: Dal greco di Simonide”, *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 18, 235-250.

Redfield, J. M. (1975), *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector*, Chicago.

Regenbogen, O. (1930), “Die Geschichte von Solon und Kroesus”, *Gymnasium* 41, 1-20.

Reginster, B. (2012), “Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner”, in B. Vandenabeele (ed.), *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, Oxford, 349-366.

Relihan, J. C. (1993), *Ancient Menippean Satire*, Baltimore.

Rennie, N. (2005), *Speculating on the Moment: The Poetics of Time and Recurrence in Goethe, Leopardi, and Nietzsche*, Göttingen.

Richardson, N. J. (1981), "The contest of Homer and Hesiod and Alcidas' Mouseion", *The Classical Quarterly* 31, 1-10.

- (1993), *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume 6, Books 21-24*, Cambridge.

Riedweg, C. (1990), “The ‘Atheistic’ Fragment from Euripides’ Bellerophon (286 N²)”, *Illinois Classical Studies* 15, 39-53.

Rigault, H. (1856), *Histoire de la Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. Paris.

- Rinon, Y. (2006), "Tragic Hephaestus: The Humanized God in the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey'", *Phoenix* 60, 1-20.
- (2008), *Homer and the Dual Model of the Tragic*, Michigan.
- Ritter, J., Gründer, K. (1989), eds, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Basel.
- Robinson, C. (1979), *Lucian and His Influence in Europe*, London.
- Roić, S. (1997), "Pensiero, forma letteraria, espressione: Leopardi e Vico", in S. Neumeister, R. Siri (eds), *Leopardi poeta e pensatore/Dichter und Denker*, Naples, 135-146.
- Romm, J. S. (1989), "Lucian and Plutarch as Sources for Kepler's Somnium", *Classical and Modern Literature* 9, 97-107.
- Ronzitti, R. (2012), "Il gallo nell'Avesta, nel Veda e in Leopardi", *Rivista Italiana di Linguistica e di Dialettologia* 14, 29-64.
- Rose, V. (1876), ed., *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta*, Leipzig.
- Rosenmeyer, T. (1969), *The green cabinet: Theocritus and the European pastoral lyric*, Berkeley.
- Ross, D. (1952), *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, Oxford.
- Ross, F. D. (1965), "Rhetorical Procedure in Thoreau's 'Battle of the Ants'", *College Composition and Communication* 16, 14-18.
- Rota, P. (1998), *Leopardi e la Bibbia*, Bologna.
- Roth, J. (1956), *Joseph Roth: Werke in drei Bänden*, Köln-Berlin.
- Ruozzi, G. (2009), "Formiche e cicale", in G. M. Anselmi, G. Ruozzi, D. Aric, E. Pasquini, A. Bertoni, S. Verhulst (eds), *Animali della letteratura italiana*, Rome, 110-118.
- Russell, D. A., Wilson, N. G. (1981), eds, *Menander Rhetor*, Oxford.

- Russo, J., Fernández-Galliano, M., Heubeck, A. (eds), (1992), *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, Oxford.
- Sabnis, S. (2008), Review of Ligota and Panizza (2007), *BMCR*.
- Saint-Évremond, C. de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, Seigneur de (1692), *De la Tragédie Ancienne et Moderne* [1692], in *Œuvres en prose*, ed. by R. Ternois, vol. 4, Paris 1969, 170–84.
- Sandbach, F. H. (1972), ed., *Menandri reliquiae selectae*, Oxford.
- Sangirardi, G. (1998), “Luciano dalle ‘prosette satiriche’ alle Operette Morali”, *AA.VV.* (1998), 305-383.
 – (2000), *Il libro dell’esperienza e il libro della sventura*, Rome.
- Sansone, D. (1991), “Cleobis and Biton in Delphis”, *Nikephoros* 4, 121-132.
- Scheel, H. L. (1959), *Leopardi und die Antike*, Munich.
 – (1998), “Leopardi e i satirici greci e latini”, in *AA.VV. Il riso Leopardiano: Comico Satira Parodia*, 25-31.
- Schein, S. L. (2013), “Sophocles and Homer”, in Ormand (2013), 424-439.
- Schmidt-Dengler, W. (1975), ed., *Morias Enkomion sive Laus Stultitiae*, Darmstad.
- Schier, R. D. (1967), “Trees and Transcendence: Holderlin’s ‘Die Eichbaume’ and Rilke’s ‘Herbst’”, *German Life and Letters* 20, 331-341.
- Schwartz, E. (1887), ed., *Scholia in Euripidem*, Berlin.
- Scodel, R. (1992), “The Wits of Glaucus”, *TAPA* 122, 73-84.
- Selden, R. (2008), ed., *The Cambridge history of literary criticism. Volume 8, From formalism to poststructuralism*, Cambridge.
- Setti, G. (1906), *La Grecia letteraria nei “Pensieri” di Giacomo Leopardi*, Livorno.
- Severino, E. (1997), *Cosa arcana e stupenda: l’Occidente e Leopardi*, Milan.
- Shannon, R. S. (1975), *The arms of Achilles and Homeric compositional technique*, Leiden.

- Shapiro, S. O. (1996), "Herodotus and Solon", *Classical Antiquity* 15, 348-364.
- Sider, D. (1996), "As is the Generation of Leaves in Homer, Simonides, Horace, and Stobaios", *Arethusa* 29, 263-282.
- Silk, M. S. (2014), ed., *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought*, Chichester.
- Silk, M. S., Stern, J. P. (1981), *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Cambridge.
- Silver, M-F. (1990), "La Grèce dans le roman français de l'époque révolutionnaire: *Le voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce au IV^e siècle avant l'ère vulgaire*", *Man and Nature* 9, 145-155.
- Sim, S. (2015), *A Philosophy of Pessimism*, London.
- Simmel, G. (1991), *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, Chicago.
- Singh, G. (1997), *Leopardi filosofo anti-filosofo*, Pisa and Rome.
- Small, H. (2007), *The Long Life*, Oxford.
- Smyth, H. W. (1926), tr., *Aeschylus: Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides, Fragments*, London and New York.
- Sneed, M. R. (2012), *The politics of pessimism in the Ecclesiastes: a social-science perspective*, Atlanta.
- Snell, B. (1953), *The Discovery of the Mind*, Oxford.
 – (1964), ed., *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis*, Leipzig.
- Sole, A. (1990), *Foscolo e Leopardi fra rimpianto dell'antico e coscienza del moderno*, Naples.
 – (2001), "Verso l'Islandese": la traduzione leopardiana di due frammenti di Simonide di Amorgo", *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 583, 321-350.
- Soll, I. (1988), "Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life": Reconsiderations of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*", in R.C. Solomon, K.M. Higgins (eds), *Reading Nietzsche*, New York-Oxford, 104-131.
- Soll, I. (2012), "Schopenhauer on the Inevitability of Unhappiness", in B. Vandenberghe (ed.), *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, Oxford, 300-314.

- Solmi, S. (1987), "Le due "ideologie" di Leopardi", in *Studi Leopardiani*, 99-110.
- Sorel, C. (1627), *Le berger extravagant: où parmi des fantaisies amoureuses on void les impertinences des romans & de poésie*, Paris.
- Sotheby, W. (1833), tr., *Homer: The Iliad and Odyssey*, London.
- Sotiriou, M. (1998), *Pindarus Homericus, Homers-Rezeption in Pindars Epinikien*, Göttingen.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, C. (1979), "The Myth of the First Temples at Delphi", *The Classical Quarterly* 29, 231-251.
- Southey, R. (1837), ed., *The Works of William Cowper vol. xi*, London.
- Stäglich, H. (1933), *Chronologisch geordnete wissenschaftliche Bibliographie des Schrifttums zum Thema Pessimismus, 2 Bde.*, Leipzig.
- Stahl, H. -P. (1975), "Learning through Suffering? Croesus' Conversations in the History of Herodotus", *Y.C.St.* 24, 1-36.
- Stasi, B. (2010), "La morale della favola: le traduzioni da Simonide nei Canti leopardiani, in Teorie e forme del tradurre in versi nell'Ottocento fino a Carducci", in A. Carozzini (ed.), *Atti del Convegno Internazionale Lecce, 2-4 ottobre 2008*, Galatina, 235- 251.
- Steffen, W. (1961), "Bacchylides' Fifth Ode", *Eos* 51, 11-20.
- Steinberger, J. (1902), *Lucians Einfluss auf Wieland*, Göttingen.
- Stern, J. (1967), "The Imagery of Bacchylides Ode 5", *Gr. Rom. Byz. Stud.* 8, 35-43.
- Stolberg, F. L. (1823), tr., *Homer's Ilias*, Hamburg.
- Stroux, J. (1925), *Nietzsches Professur in Basel*, Jena.
- Sully, J. (1877), *Pessimism: A History and a Criticism*, London.
- Svarlien, D. A. (1995), "Reversal of Imagery and Values in Bacchylides 3 and 5", *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 50, 35-45.

- Taplin, O. (1992), *Homeric soundings: the shaping of the Iliad*, New York.
- Tassoni, A. (1620), *Pensieri diversi*, Carpi.
- Terrasson, J. (1715), *Dissertation critique sur l'Iliade d'Homère, où à l'occasion de ce Poëme on cherche les regles d'une Poëtique fondée sur la raison & sur les exemples des Anciens & des Modernes, vols. 1–2*. Paris.
- Thomas, R. F. (1999), *Reading Virgil and His Texts: Studies in Intertextuality*, Ann Arbor.
- Timpanaro, S. (1965), *Classicismo e illuminismo nell'Ottocento italiano*, Pisa.
 – (1988), 'Epicuro, Lucrezio e Leopardi', *Critica storica* 25, 359–402.
 – (2008), *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi*, Bari and Rome.
- Tommaseo, N., Bellini, B. (1977), eds, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Milan.
- Tomassi, G., (2011), ed., *Luciano di Samosata. Timone o il misantropo. Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, Berlin and New York.
- Trabattoni, F. (1999), "La filosofia di Leopardi: tra Platone e Severino", *Acme* 52, 251-263.
- Treves, P. (1962), *Lo studio dell'antichità classica nell'Ottocento*, Milan and Naples.
- Tsagarakis, O. (2000), "Studies in *Odyssey* 11", *Hermes Einzelschrift* 82, Stuttgart.
- Tucker, H. (2000), "Pleasure, Seduction, and Authorial Identity in Charles Sorel's *Le Berger extravagant*", *Neophilologus* 84, 347-358.
- Uden, J. (2010), "The contest of Homer and Hesiod and the Ambitions of Hadrian", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 130, 121-135.
- Vandenabeele, B. (ed.), (2012), *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, Oxford.
- Van Groningen, B. A. (1966), ed., *Theognis: le premier livre édité avec un commentaire*, Amsterdam.
- Verdenelli, M. (2004), "Scacco alla Regina: Leopardi e il 'primo amore', in AA.VV., *Memoria e infanzia tra Alfieri e Leopardi: atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Macerata, 10-12 ottobre 2002*, Macerata, 1-31.

- Vermeule, E. (1979), *Aspects of death in early Greek art and poetry*, New York, Los Angeles and London.
- Vernant, J. P. (1978), *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, New York.
 – (1984), *The Origins of Greek Thought*, New York.
- Versnel, H. S. (2011), *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology*, Leiden.
- Vian, F. (1987), ed., *Les Argonautiques Orphiques*, Paris.
- Vivante, P. (1985), *Homer*, New Haven.
- Von Löhneysen, W. (1960-1965), ed., *Sämtliche Werke, Arthur Schopenhauer*, Stuttgart and Frankfurt am Main.
- Von Reibnitz, B. (1992), *Ein Kommentar zu Friedrich Nietzsche "Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik": (Kapitel 1-12)*, Basel.
- Voss, J. H. (1839), tr., *Homer's Ilias*, Stuttgart and Tübingen.
- Vossler, K. (1923), *Leopardi*, Munich.
- Vox, O. (1979), "La prima discendenza delle foglie di Omero", *Belfagor* 34, 442-447.
- Vyverberg, H. (1958), *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment*, Cambridge MA.
- Warren, J. (2013), "Gods and men in Xenophanes", in V. Harte, M. Lane (eds), *«Politeia» in Greek and Roman philosophy*, Cambridge and New York, 294-312.
- Warren, J. (2014), *Presocratics*, London.
- Wehrli (1931), *Lathe biōsas: Studien zur ältesten Ethik bei den Griechen*, Leipzig and Berlin.
- Weinbrot, H. D. (2005), *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, Baltimore.
- West, M. L., Maehler, H. (1970), eds, *Bacchylidis Carmina cum Fragmentis*, Leipzig.

West, M. L. (1967) “The Contest of Homer and Hesiod”, *The Classical Quarterly* 17, 433–50.

- (1971), ed., *Iambi et elegi graeci ante Alexandrum cantati vol. I*, Oxford.
- (1972), ed., *Iambi et elegi graeci ante Alexandrum cantati vol. II*, Oxford.
- (1989), ed., *Iambi et elegi graeci ante Alexandrum cantata vol. I, editio altera*, Oxford.
- (1992), ed., *Iambi et elegi graeci ante Alexandrum cantata vol. II, editio altera*, Oxford.
- (2003), ed., *The Homeric hymns : Homeric Apocrypha; Lives of Homer*, Cambridge MA and London.

West, S. (2003), “Croesus’ Second Reprieve and Other Tales of the Persian Court”, *The Classical Quarterly* 53, 416-437.

Whitmarsh, T. (2001), *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: the Politics of Imitation*, Oxford.

Wieland, C. M. (1820), *Lucian of Samosata from the Greek*, London.

Willcock, M. (1976), *A Companion to the Iliad*, Chicago.

Young, D. C. (1968), *Three Odes of Pindar: a Literary Study of Pythian II, Pythian 3 and Olympian 7*, Leiden.

Zanatta, M. (2008), ed., *Aristotele, I dialoghi*, Milan.

Zanker, G. (1994), *The Heart of Achilles*, Michigan.

Zinn, E., Sieber-Rilke, R. (1955), eds, *Sämtliche Werke, Reiner Maria Rilke, Gedichte, Erster Teil*, Wiesbaden and Frankfurt am Main.