

**Emanuela Cervato, Mark Epstein, Giulia Santi and Simona Wright, eds. Mapping Leopardi: Poetic and Philosophical Intersections**

**Alberica Bazzoni**

Volume 41, Number 2, 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087438ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v41i2.36782>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0226-8043 (print)

2293-7382 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bazzoni, A. (2020). Review of [Emanuela Cervato, Mark Epstein, Giulia Santi and Simona Wright, eds. Mapping Leopardi: Poetic and Philosophical Intersections]. *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 41(2), 220–222.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v41i2.36782>

**Emanuela Cervato, Mark Epstein, Giulia Santi and Simona Wright, eds. *Mapping Leopardi: Poetic and Philosophical Intersections*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019. Pp. 503. ISBN 9781527521834.**

This collection of essays explores the poetic and philosophical work of Giacomo Leopardi, engaging with a substantially diverse range of themes and approaches. As the editors explain in the Introduction, the volume is conceived as a map of Leopardi's multifarious *oeuvre* and the existing scholarship. It aims to aid in the orientation toward the vast body of established knowledge as well as to suggest directions for future explorations, aspiring not to an impossible completeness but rather "representing the interconnected diversity of shared exploration(s)" (6). Such a cartographic endeavour is presented by the editors as congruent with Leopardi's own "conception of an open philosophical structure" (1), underscoring the poet/philosopher's view of thought and knowledge as an open-ended, provisional system. In this respect, this collection also effectively complements the recent English translation of *Zibaldone*, edited by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), which provides an invaluable tool for making Leopardi's philosophical work accessible to the English-speaking world, and calls for further translations to be undertaken.

The volume is comprised of sixteen chapters, organised into six thematic parts. The first section, "On the Romantic-Classic Debate," explores Leopardi's original position in the aesthetic dispute taking place at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century across Europe. Simona Wright's essay focuses on Leopardi's distinctive poetics of "hyperreality" as expressed in his *Discorso di un Italiano intorno alla poesia romantica* (*Discourse on Romantic Poetry*) and identifies the idyll *L'infinito* (*The Infinite*) as its paradigmatic example. *L'infinito* is also subject to a detailed analysis by Gabrielle Sims, who interprets it as a laboratory of the poet's radical pessimism. Martina Piperno explores the interlocked notions of authorship, performance and irony in Leopardi's *Inno a Nettuno* (*Hymn to Neptune*), situating it within the context of the widespread practice of forgery in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe.

The second part, "On Literary Forms," is dedicated to the analysis of rhetorical features of Leopardi's philosophical prose and poetic texts. Daniela Bombara traces Leopardi's use of the fantastic genre in the *Operette morali* (*Moral Essays*), showing how the fantastic element serves to create critical distance and to invalidate an anthropocentric viewpoint. Johnny Bertolio's chapter develops a close reading of the idyll *La vita solitaria* (*The Solitary Life*), reading the succession of psychological states in the poem in light of Northrop Frye's "cyclical" poetic model.

The third part, “On Poetics and Linguistics,” explores Leopardi’s poetic practice and theoretical insights into linguistics and poetic forms. Leonardo Bellomo analyses the skilful use of metrical and syntactical structures in Leopardi’s youthful *Puerilia*, and compares them to the poet’s mature stylistic choices in the *Canti* (*Poems*). Stefano Versace reconstructs Leopardi’s original reflections on poetic forms in the *Zibaldone* and shows how they constitute a unitary framework for understanding variations and universality in poetic typology.

Part Four, “Readings of Leopardi,” presents wide-ranging reflections on Leopardi’s poetic work, his understanding of pleasure and imagination, his cosmology, and his aversion to dogmatism and spiritualism. Luigi Blasucci focuses on the role of poetry as a space of positive affirmation within Leopardi’s negative, “painful but true” philosophy (209). Drawing on several poems in the *Canti*, Blasucci identifies three main modalities of poetic affirmation: a nostalgic yearning for a lost happiness; the pleasures of imagination; and the denunciation of negativity. Antonio Prete explores Leopardi’s poetic cosmology, including the idea of the infinite, the moon and the stars, showing how his poetry stages a passionate interrogation on human existence and finitude. The last chapter in the section, by Andrea Penso, focuses on Leopardi’s long poem *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia* (*The War of the Mice and the Crabs*), highlighting the author’s ironic and derisive literary reasoning, which is directed against metaphysical thought and the spiritualism of the Restoration.

Chapters in Part Five, “On Faculties of the Mind and Body,” look at the articulation of the body-mind relationship in Leopardi’s work, demonstrating the author’s anticipatory understanding of the mind as an embodied faculty. Alessandro Carrera reads Leopardi’s theory of pleasure alongside psychoanalytic theory (Freud, Lacan) and reframes it as an ultimately poetic theory of *jouissance*. Silvia Stoyanova provides a compelling analysis of Leopardi’s reflections on the act of reading and puts it in dialogue with contemporary philosophical and psychological scholarship on attention and instrumental intentionality. Vincenzo Allegrini’s essay focuses on Leopardi’s theory of memory, accounting for the author’s own mnemonic practices and the constitutive element of habituation in the dynamic relationship between memory, remembrance and oblivion.

The last section, “On Philosophy and the Sciences,” investigates Leopardi’s philosophical understanding of nature and humanity. In his long essay, which makes use of extended excerpts from *Zibaldone* (given only in English), Mark Epstein focuses on the concept of teleology to expound Leopardi’s radically

materialist thought and proposes the term “infrafilosofia” (*infraphilosophy*) in place of the established “ultrafilosofia” (*ultraphilosophy*) to account for that perspective. Adopting a posthuman ecocritical paradigm, Rossella Di Rosa explores Leopardi’s polysemous category of nature, his subversion of an anthropocentric system of thought and his understanding of a shared materiality among nature, humans and nonhumans. Finally, Valentina Sordoni discusses Leopardi’s youthful essays *Saggio di chimica naturale* (*Essay in Chemistry*) and *Compendio di storia naturale* (*Essay in Natural History*), which were a product of his early education and offer insights into the scientific knowledge of the time, as well as into the author’s early fascination with plants and animals.

Without ever losing track of historical context, and indeed by contributing to an enriched understanding of it, *Mapping Leopardi* successfully links Leopardi’s work to contemporary philosophical questions and concerns such as materialism, ecocritical posthumanism, and the embodied mind. Through the combination of a diverse range of topics and scholarly styles, this volume offers an informative and gentle introduction to Leopardi’s studies for those who are not familiar with his work, while at the same time advancing research in the field. It contributes to bringing Leopardi’s extraordinarily imaginative, radical and insightful poetic and philosophical work to an Anglophone readership and makes it all the more relevant to our contemporary world.

ALBERICA BAZZONI

*ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry*

**Luigi Blasucci. *La svolta dell’idillio e altre pagine leopardiane*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2017. Pp. 212. ISBN 9788815273871.**

Alla limpida critica leopardiana prodotta da Luigi Blasucci si aggiunge ora, in un agile volume, il frutto dei suoi ultimi lavori. *La svolta dell’idillio e altre pagine leopardiane* è diviso in tre parti e, come nei libri precedenti dello studioso, il saggio più rappresentativo è anche quello eponimo.

La prima parte (*Trittico sugli idilli*) consiste in un originale attraversamento degli *idilli* di Leopardi, corrispondenti alla sua prima grande stagione poetica, analizzati sia nel contesto delle successive sedi editoriali (rivista, *Versi*, infine *Canti*) sia sullo sfondo della produzione letteraria coeva. Merito maggiore del *Trittico* è