'SOTTO IL COLTELLO ANATOMICO': ANATOMICAL IMAGERY IN LEOPARDI'S *ZIBALDONE*

ENRICA LEYDI (University of Warwick)

Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) lived amid a century of intellectual, cultural, scientific, and political revolutions from about 1750 to 1850 (henceforth referred to as the Revolving Century). He has often proved to be an extremely keen observer of his times, addressing paradigm shifts and a variety of cultural issues in his literary and philosophical works. His 4,526-page commonplace diary, the *Zibaldone,* offers a unique perspective on the Italian Revolving Century, even when speaking of scientific topics, such as medicine and anatomy.

In her study of the medical references in the *Zibaldone*, Giuliana Benvenuti identified two main constants in Leopardi's reflections on medicine: his tendency to juxtapose modern and ancient medicine, and his adherence to a materialistic and sensationalist understanding of human physiology.[1] Maria Conforti examined the questions surrounding the end of life and its potential prolongation,[2] while Sabrina Ferri approached similar issues from a post-human perspective, linking them to debates on the distinction between organic and inorganic matter.[3] However, the reception of anatomy in Leopardi's work has remained largely unexplored, despite its cultural significance in the Revolving Century, especially in Italy, and the fact that anatomical imagery recurs in both the *Zibaldone* and other of his works.

Modern anatomy is considered to start with Andreas Vesalius, the Flemish author of *De humani corporis fabrica* (1554), who worked in Padua, establishing a long-lasting Italian anatomical tradition. Throughout the eighteenth century, Italy remained at the forefront of anatomical research, as well as in the craft of anatomical models and illustrations. From this century onwards, anatomy's commitment to accuracy led to an increasingly meticulous attention to detail, reaching a hyper-realistic style in both anatomical illustration and 3D models. As Lucia Dacome writes, 'anatomical models ended up being fashioned as sites of authenticity, tokens of trustworthy bodily knowledge that provided visually powerful celebrations of

[1] Giuliana Benvenuti, 'La medicina nella biblioteca di Leopardi', in *Letteratura e orizzonti scientifici*, ed. by Giovanni Baffetti (Il Mulino, 1997), pp. 107-122.

[2] Maria Conforti, 'Leopardi e la medicina: prolungamento della vita e concetto di morte', in *Giacomo Leopardi e il pensiero scientifico*, ed. by Giorgio Stabile (Fahrenheit 451, 2001), pp. 121-142; Maria Conforti, 'L'Ignuda Morte delle mummie di Federico Ruysch: sapere del corpo e poesia in Giacomo Leopardi', *Medicina nei secoli*, 22 (2010), pp. 163-180.

[3] Sabrina Ferri, 'Giacomo Leopardi's posthumanism. The *Operette Morali* or the Appeal of the Inorganic', *Rivista Internazionale di Studi Leopardiani*, 15 (2022), pp. 115-138.

anatomy's claims and promises', eventually resulting in being 'considered particularly accurate and truthful – even truer, in fact, than the natural body itself'. Anatomical models thus evolved from mere objects into an 'effective tool of knowledge'.[4]

The purpose of this article is to present some initial findings of a larger study on the influence of anatomical imagery on the work of Giacomo Leopardi. To do so, I will first outline the Italian anatomical culture of the period, focusing on the extensive production of anatomical wax models, particularly in Bologna and Florence, and on the illustrated anatomical atlas by Paolo Mascagni and Antonio Serantoni. These case studies will allow me to address two key aspects of anatomy: on the one hand, the analytical, metonymic, and rational paradigm that dissection promotes both visually and epistemologically; on the other, the tension between hyperrealism and classical idealised beauty in anatomical representations. I will then consider how this anatomical culture is received and elaborated in two entries of the *Zibaldone*, in which Leopardi implies that dissection and anatomical models cannot provide true knowledge, because they promote a part-by-part understanding of the visible, rather than a relational and, therefore, poetic vision of both visible objects and the invisible connections between them. In essence, by examining the *Zibaldone* entries in relation to the Italian anatomical culture of the Revolving Century, this article demonstrates the influence of anatomical imagery in Leopardi's works and offers some insights into his critical engagement with it, thus addressing anatomy beyond its strictly disciplinary status.[5]

ANATOMICAL WAXWORKS

Non-anatomical waxworks had been popular in Italy since the Renaissance and Baroque periods; however, after the work of Gaetano Zumbo (1656-1701)[6] and the decline of the Baroque taste for hyper-realistic portraiture,[7] wax became increasingly popular for anatomical and pathological models due to its ability to replicate the colours and textures of human flesh with remarkable fidelity. Anatomical models served as invaluable educational tools and played a crucial role in popularising anatomical knowledge among medical students and the general public. These models allowed human anatomy to be explored in a visually accessible way, effectively mitigating the discomfort associated with traditional dissection methods.

The origins of anatomical wax modelling can be traced to Bologna, where the anatomy room of the Institutum Scientiarum et Artium, housed in Palazzo Poggi,

[4] Lucia Dacome, *Malleable Anatomies. Models, Makers, and Material Culture in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 9.

[5] I refer the reader also to Enrica Leydi, 'L'età delle Macchine. Automi e Simulacri Anatomici in Leopardi', *Cahiers d'études italiennes*, 40 (forthcoming 2025), for an extended analysis of the interplay between mechanical and anatomical models in Leopardi.

[6] Andrea Daninos, *Gaetano Giulio Zumbo: 1656-1701* (Officina Libraria, 2023).

[7] Julius von Schlosser, *Storia del ritratto in cera. Un saggio*, ed. by Andrea Daninos (Officina Libraria, 2011), pp. 151-208.

operated between 1711 and 1799. Here, Ercole Lelli (1702-1766)[8] worked and established his school, which included prominent figures like Anna Morandi (1716-1774) and her husband, Giovanni Manzolini (1700-1755).[9] Following these pioneering efforts in Bologna, the Florentine school of anatomical wax modelling emerged. The La Specola wax laboratory, founded in Florence in 1771, remained active for nearly a century, significantly advancing anatomical education and research. Clemente Susini (1754-1814) soon became the most renowned figure of the Florentine School.[10] Through his exceptional craftsmanship and collaborations with anatomists like Paolo Mascagni, Susini elevated anatomical wax modelling, producing models that captured the intricacies of human anatomy with unprecedented accuracy. Both the Bolognese Palazzo Poggi and Florence's La Specola attracted a wide range of visitors, including Grand Tour travellers and other non-scientists, and soon became an arena for educating the gaze of artists, surgeons, and antiquarians alike.[11]

While anatomical models were primarily designed as didactic tools for medical students, providing accessible yet realistic simulations of dissection, they were also intended to appeal to a wider audience. These models were a combination of anatomical precision and idealised beauty, with references to dissection minimised by means of classical allusions. This combination is epitomised in the life-size wax anatomical models of the female body known as Anatomical Venuses. Two such models, crafted by Clemente Susini and his workshop, are still on display in Palazzo Poggi in Bologna and in La Specola in Florence, known respectively as 'Venerina' and 'Venere dei Medici'. The Anatomical Venuses embody the complex interplay between hyperrealism and a classical aesthetics characteristic of Italian wax models from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The educational value of artificial anatomy was not only recognized retrospectively but also widely acknowledged by contemporary foreign visitors. One notable example is René Desgenettes's report on Italian anatomical cabinets, published in the *Journal de Physique* in May 1793. Best known as the chief surgeon to Napoleon's army during the Egyptian Expedition and at the Battle of Waterloo, Desgenettes (1762-1837) also served as military doctor for the Italian campaign. During this time, he wrote the article 'Réflexions générales sur l'utilité de l'anatomie artificielle ; et en particulier sur la collection de Florence, et la nécessité d'en former de semblables en France', describing the La Specola waxworks and advocating for the establishment of a similar collection in France for scientific and artistic education.[12] As Degenettes noted, the success of anatomical museums contributed greatly to the spread of anatomical

[8] Dacome, *Malleable anatomies*, pp. 56-92.

[9] Rebecca Messbarger, *The Lady Anatomist: the Life and Work of Anna Morandi Manzolini* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[10] Anna Maerker, *Model Experts: Wax Anatomies and Enlightenment in Florence and Vienna, 1775–1815* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

[11] Dacome, *Malleable anatomies*, p. 57.

[12] René-Nicolas Desgenettes, 'Réflexions générales sur l'utilité de l'anatomie artificielle ; et en particulier sur la collection de Florence, et la nécessité d'en former de semblables en France', *Journal de médecine, chirurgie et pharmacie*, 94 (1793), pp. 162-176, 233-252.

knowledge and, I add, to the popularisation of anatomical imagery and form of thinking.

PAOLO MASCAGNI AND ANTONIO SERANTONI

The new anatomical style also influenced anatomical illustrations. A notable example is Paolo Mascagni's *Anatomiae Universae Icones*. Mascagni (1755-1815) was a prominent anatomist who taught at the universities of Siena, Pisa, and Florence. This life-sized anatomical atlas represents the culmination of Mascagni's career, although it was published only posthumously due to a complicated legal affair.

The announcement of the atlas's publication appeared in June 1822 in an article in the *Biblioteca Italiana*. Here, Mascagni's legal heirs, Nicola Mascagni and Girolamo Mattei, entrusted the editing of the anatomical book to three professors at the University of Pisa – former friends of Mascagni: surgeon Andrea Vaccà Berlinghieri (1772-1826), physician Giacomo Barzellotti (1768-1839), and writer Giovanni Rosini (1776-1855). The three editors declared their intention to publish a prospectus of the book as soon as possible.[13] The book's outline was indeed published in January 1823 in the *Biblioteca Italiana*, summarising Mascagni's intentions as follows:

> esibire per mezzo di nuove tavole le parti tutte del corpo umano, e [...] presentarle precisamente quali sono in natura, facendo a ciascuna di esse conservare la sua ordinaria e rispettiva posizione. E siccome le rappresentanze tutte riescono più o meno imperfette, quanto più o meno si discostano dalla forma e grandezza degli oggetti rappresentati, stabilì seco medesimo che per mostrare insieme, ed esporre nella vera e loro naturale situazione i muscoli, i vasi sanguigni, i nervi, i visceri, le cartilagini, le ossa, in quanto infine costituisce la macchina umana, era necessario che la grandezza loro fosse quella dell'uomo adulto.[14]

The final volume measures 102 cm in length and 75 cm in width, contains 88 plates – 44 in colour and their outline-only copies, complete with legends identifying and naming each part of the body – plus the cover and the dedication to Leopold II, Grand Duke of Tuscany. The illustrations in the book are by Antonio Serantoni (1780-1837) – 'disegnatore, incisore e lavoratore di cere anatomiche', according to the subtitle to his biography[15] – and reflect the tension between scientific hyper-realism and classical idealised beauty characteristic of anatomical images from the Revolving Century. On the one hand, the illustrations exhibit meticulous attention to detail, with each part of the body carefully delineated and any reference to dissection concealed; on the other, they depict a perfectly proportioned archetype of the human body, not a flawed individual.

---

[13] *Biblioteca Italiana,* Tomo 26, June 1822, pp. 419-420.

[14] *Biblioteca Italiana*, Tomo 29, January 1823, pp. 130-131.

[15] Pietro Vannoni, *Biografia di Antonio Serantoni: anatomista, incisore e lavoratore di cere anatomiche* (Battelli e figli, 1838).

Anatomiae universae Icones covers the entire human body, excluding only the skin and microscopic layers. The plates are so large that there is a set of three which, when placed side by side, form a complete life-size representation of the human body: one plate for the feet and legs, one for the lower body, and the last for the upper body and head. Overall, this monumental work was intended to be a virtual dissection of a cadaver, layer by layer, progressing from the superficial muscles, through the intermediate layer, the deep muscle layer, and finally the skeleton, thus offering a comprehensive part-by-part exploration of the human anatomy.

Mascagni's atlas was a great success, but its large format made it not only difficult to print and handle, but also very expensive. The need for a more practical edition soon became clear. This time, it was Antonio Serantoni who took matters into his own hands. An article published in the *Antologia Vieusseux* in January 1832 reports that Serantoni toured the peninsula to raise funds to reprint the plates of Mascagni's atlas in a smaller and more affordable format. According to the article,

> il Serantoni [...] ha seco recato una figura di femmina da lui modellata in cera, grande al vero, decomponibile nelle tre cavità, onde osservare si possono i visceri nella loro sede. Questo suo sorprendente lavoro è sotto ogni rapporto lodevolissimo, ed ha meritato i più lusinghieri encomi da persone dell'arte, e particolarmente dal Panizza, celebre professore nell'università di Pavia. Il pregio particolare, e quello che distingue quest'opera dalle altre vedute (oltre alla scrupolosa esattezza) gli è la notomia del cervello, nella quale l'occhio vulgare trova di che ammirare nel sorprendente magistero della natura, e l'uom dotto passi chiaramente in rassegna quel tanto che forma il soggetto di studj incessanti. Ne sarà al ceto inutile il soggiungere che nell'esposizione di quest'oggetto d'arte è conservata ogni decenza: e, per chi ama congiunto all'utile il bello, diremo che quella figura in cera è di non comune bellezza, e vi si scorge congiunto un macchinismo che dà moto agli organi della vista.[16]

This quotation not only recounts an episode in the history of Mascagni's anatomical atlas, but also encapsulates several issues concerning anatomical models that we have already touched upon. Firstly, the waxwork in question is an Anatomical Venus, and the passage emphasises that Serantoni's work was appreciated both by scientists for its anatomical precision and by the public for its beauty. Secondly, the diverse audience suggests that Serantoni displayed his creation in venues accessible not only to medical professionals but also to the general public. This idea is reinforced by the comment on the decency of the Venus, which would have been unnecessary if it had been exhibited only for a medical audience.

In short, the excerpt and the case studies considered demonstrate that anatomy is an inherently visual discipline, heavily reliant on the visual arts. They also show that anatomical museums, exhibitions, and illustrated books were accessible and widespread, fuelling the cultural imagination with anatomical imagery, educating the viewer's gaze to the paradigm of dissection, and promoting hyperrealism as the primary style for scientific representation. Hence, given its popularity and success in Italy during the Revolving Century, anatomy should be considered not only within its strictly disciplinary boundaries but also in relation to literature and philosophy.

---

[16] *Antologia Giornale di scienze, lettere e arti*, Tomo 45, January, February, and March, 1832, p. 164.

ANATOMY IN LEOPARDI'S *ZIBALDONE*

It is not surprising, then, that traces of this anatomical culture can also be found in Leopardi's oeuvre. Anatomy is explicitly mentioned in two *Zibaldone* entries written in the summer of 1823. In the first entry, Leopardi discusses the difference between true artworks and mechanical copies, mentioning a 'simulacro anatomico' as an example of the latter. As I will show, this phrase captures the tension between hyperrealism and ideal beauty typical of the Italian anatomical production. In the second entry, Leopardi likens dissection to the limitations of the analytical paradigm in capturing the invisible dimensions of life. For him, anatomy seeks in the materiality of the corpse what lies beyond it, i.e., the relational and, therefore, poetic essence of the world – an idea also central to his *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie*.

Leopardi wrote the two entries after a visit to Rome, which was his first experience away from his hometown of Recanati. Although Rome was not known for its contributions to anatomy at the time, Desgenettes mentions, when discussing Lelli's waxworks, that 'plusieurs copies sorties de Bologne sont répandues en différentes-villes d'Italie; il y a entr'autres à Ferrare et à Rome' [several copies from Bologna are spread across various cities in Italy; among others, in Ferrara and Rome].[17] This remark leads one to speculate that Leopardi may have seen one of Lelli's wax models or similar works in Rome, although no evidence supports this directly. Similarly, it is possible, though likewise unprovable, that Leopardi saw the articles about *Anatomiae Universae Icones*, given his readership of the *Biblioteca Italiana*. While it may be difficult – and perhaps unnecessary – to determine the exact trigger for Leopardi's reflection on anatomy, it is clear that he was receptive to the influence of the contemporary anatomical culture. Thus, the anatomical references in his work should be read within this context, beginning with the two entries in the *Zibaldone*.

In *Zibaldone* 2845-2861 (29-30 June 1823), as Alessandra Aloisi summarises, 'si parla [...] di problemi che ruotano attorno alla questione dell'imitazione, di cui la traduzione può essere considerata un caso particolare'.[18] Here, Leopardi discusses translation and draws a parallel with another form of imitation: the plastic arts, particularly marble sculpture and wax modelling. He argues that languages like German mimic and translate foreign languages with mechanical precision, whereas languages such as Italian and Greek translate other languages without losing their own character:

> Questo è imitare, come chi ritrae dal naturale nel marmo, non mutando la natura del marmo in quella dell'oggetto imitato; non è copiare né rifare, come chi da una figura di cera ne ritrae

[17] Desgenettes, 'Réflexions générales sur l'utilité de l'anatomie artificielle; et en particulier sur la collection de Florence, et la nécessité d'en former de semblables en France', p. 167.

[18] Alessandra Aloisi, 'Una macchina dal nome infernale in arrivo da un paese romantico', *Intersezioni*, 37 (2017), p. 174.

> un'altra tutta compagna, pur di cera. Quella è operazione pregevole, [...]; questa è bassa e triviale. (*Zib*. 2850)[19]

The motif of wax modelling continues in the entry ('la lingua tedesca come una cera o una pasta informe e tenera', 'né la preparazione della pasta né la fattura della stampa', *Zib*. 2857), and the comparison with marble sculpture serves to highlight the difference between genuine imitation – resulting in an authentic artwork – from mechanical copying, which produces mere duplicates of the original. In this sense, for Leopardi, languages behave in a similar way to plastic arts, since they are both forms of imitation. He concludes that certain translations are 'lodate e celebrate piuttosto [...] per gusto matematico che letterario, piuttosto come curiosità che come opere di genio, piuttosto come un panorama o un simulacro anatomico o un automa, che come una statua di Canova' (*Zib*. 2861). I propose that Leopardi's mention of a 'simulacro anatomico' here likely refers to an anatomical wax model, given the recurring motif of wax in this entry and the popularity of such objects at the time.

For Leopardi, the term 'simulacro' usually denotes the representation of something that is no longer real or exists only as an image.[20] Notably, 'simulacro' is often associated with the image – whether tangible or mental – of a beautiful dead woman. For instance, in the poem *Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna, scolpito nel monumento sepolcrale della medesima* the phrase 'il simulacro / della scorsa beltá' (vv. 6-7) describes the portrait on a tombstone, while 'il simulacro di colei che amore / prima insegnommi' in *Il sogno* (vv. 7-8) evokes the mental image of the beloved's face after her death.[21] Given Leopardi's particular association of 'simulacro' with the gendered image of a deceased woman, it is likely that by 'simulacro anatomico' Leopardi was referring not only to any anatomical wax model, but specifically to an Anatomical Venus.

More generally, Leopardi's use of the word 'simulacro' underscores the perceivable yet illusory essence of its referents, making it particularly apt for describing anatomical wax models, given their deceptive nature. These models paradoxically present the corpse as aesthetically pleasant and incorruptible, while purporting to adhere to reality and to produce objective scientific knowledge. Thus, 'simulacro anatomico' allows Leopardi to convey the inherent ambiguity of anatomical representations, capturing the tension between hyperrealism and idealised beauty. In this sense, anatomical waxworks can still be called simulacra, as they function as tools of knowledge that offer models both highly realistic and symbolically charged. Such

---

[19] I quote from Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Giuseppe Pacella (Garzanti, 1991) and I indicate just *Zibaldone* or *Zib*. followed by the manuscript's page number and (when available) the fragment's date, as is customary in Leopardi-related scholarship.

[20] *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*: 'Ma qual era in quel tempo la fantasia nostra [...] che simulacri vivi e spiranti che sogni beati che vaneggiamenti'. Here I quote from Giacomo Leopardi, *Poesie e prose. Prose*, ed. by Rolando Daniani (Mondadori, 2009), p. 360; *Zib*. 784, 15 March 1821: 'Eneide (lib. II, dove parla del simulacro di Pallade)'; *Zib*. 4410, 14 October 1828: 'Gli antichi dèi della Grecia ec. erano nell'immaginazione de' greci ec. e ne' loro simulacri ec. di figura mostruosa e spaventevole'.

[21] I quote from Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. by Andrea Campana (Carocci, 2017), p. 248, 436.

interpretation aligns with Domenico Secondulfo's definition of simulacra as 'strutture generative simboliche, [...] modelli consolidati, che imprimono nella realtà che passa attraverso il loro filtro caratteristiche particolari a loro immagine, producendo omologie strutturali, analogie formali, di contenuto e significato'.[22]

The second entry in which Leopardi deals explicitly with anatomy is *Zibaldone* 3237-3245, written on 22 August 1823. Here, Leopardi contends that to 'esamina[re] la natura delle cose colla pura ragione, senz'aiutarsi dell'immaginazione né del sentimento' can rightly be called '*analizzare*' (his emphasis) (*Zib*. 3237), as reason can only comprehend things by breaking them down into parts and considering each part in isolation. Thus, he argues that 'la natura così analizzata non differisce punto da un corpo morto' (*Zib*. 3239). The verbs used here – 'risolvere', 'disfare', 'scomporre' – emphasise the taking apart carried out by rational consideration. This analytical process of understanding is both mental and visual, or rather integrated by both mental and visual operations. Visual does not simply mean perceived by sight, but rather understood through images, usually drawn from direct experience and elaborated by the mind. The gnoseological overlap between visuality and intellect is suggested in this passage by the verbs 'esaminare' and 'analizzare', as well as the noun 'osservazione' – words whose etymology or semantic field encompass both the direct experience of an object by a subject and its mental assimilation. By claiming that rational analysis reduces nature to a cadaver, Leopardi implies that it equates living nature with lifeless matter, turning it into an inert object, ready to be dissected, observed, and studied.

The entry continues with an invitation to the reader to imagine and adopt the estranged point of view of an intelligent and rational creature of a different species and nature to our own – a kind of alien, one might say – and that

> ci fosse portato innanzi un corpo umano morto, e notomizzandolo noi giungessimo a conoscerne a una a una tutte le più menome parti, e chimicamente decomponendolo,[23] arrivassimo a scoprirne ciascuno ultimo elemento. (*Zib*. 3239)

The act of dismembering, observing, and understanding is here condensed into the verb 'notomizzare' – literally, to cut up a body to reveal and study its anatomy. Dissection becomes, for Leopardi, paradigmatic of the rational cognitive procedure that breaks down, analyses, and examines nature from a perspective of supposed objectivity. He argues that just as the alien would gain little insight into human life by dissecting a cadaver, it is similarly impossible to truly grasp or infer the spirit of nature 'colla semplice conoscenza, per dir così, del suo corpo, e coll'analisi esatta, minuziosa,

[22] Domenico Secondulfo, 'Il simulacro come forma e processo', in *I volti del simulacro. Realtà della finzione e finzione della realtà*, ed. by Domenico Secondulfo (QuiEdit, 2007), p. 16.

[23] Alongside the anatomical imagery there is the chemical imagery, for which I refer to Gaspare Polizzi, 'Leopardi, la chimica, i chimici', *Memorie di Scienze Fisiche e Naturali*, 29 (2005), pp. 157-182; Valentina Sordoni, *Il giovane Leopardi, la chimica e la storia naturale* (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018); Giacomo Leopardi, *Compendio di storia naturale. Con l'aggiunta del Saggio di chimica e storia naturale del 1812*, ed. by Gaspare Polizzi and Valentina Sordoni (Mimesis, 2021).

materiale delle sue parti anche *morali*' (his emphasis) (*Zib*. 3241). According to Leopardi, nature is designed to produce a poetic effect and

> Nulla di poetico si scorge nelle sue parti, separandole l'una dall'altra, ed esaminandole a una a una col semplice lume della ragione esatta e geometrica: nulla di poetico ne' suoi mezzi, nelle sue forze e molle interiori o esteriori, ne' suoi processi in questo modo disgregati e considerati: nulla nella natura decomposta e risoluta, e quasi fredda, morta, esangue, immobile, giacente, per così dire, sotto il coltello anatomico, o introdotta nel fornello chimico di un metafisico che niun altro mezzo, niun altro istrumento, niun'altra forza o agente impiega nelle sue speculazioni, ne' suoi esami e indagini, nelle sue operazioni e, come dire, esperimenti, se non la pura e fredda ragione. (*Zib*. 3241)

By using the anatomised corpse as a term of comparison and challenging the notion of absolute truth typically associated with anatomy's epistemological paradigm, Leopardi presents this discipline not as a holistic study of the body but as a method of rational investigation that reduces the body to its component parts for analytical scrutiny. In Leopardi's thought, anatomy therefore appears as the antagonist of imagination due to its historical reliance on visuality. According to Leopardi, anatomy lacks vision in that it relies solely on sight – i.e., the physiological act of perceiving external objects through the eyes – rather than on the faculty of the mind to play and generate images beyond sensual perception. Imagination, he argues, enables a holistic vision that encompasses the relational essence of things, in contrast with anatomy's narrow, fragmentary focus on isolated parts.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, in *Zibaldone*, Leopardi recognises and addresses two interwoven features of anatomical representations: on the one hand, the metonymic and analytical paradigm rooted in the dissection practice, which we have seen in the illustrations and structure of Mascagni's *Anatomiae Universae Icones;* on the other, the tension between hyperrealism and idealised beauty, epitomised in the Anatomical Venuses.

More deeply, Leopardi's engagement with anatomy can be aptly said a 'form of thinking'. Paola Cori in *Forms of Thinking in Leopardi's* Zibaldone explains that her study

> attempts to provide an interpretation of how religion, science, and everyday life influenced Leopardi's thought at both conscious and unconscious levels and determined specific configurations of writing. These three central categories are generative forms, or, in other words, themes which have become forms, external objects of observation of a certain cultural, literary, or scientific significance which affect or stimulate Leopardi's intellect and imagination to the point of becoming internalized and so activating their truest essence as an influence over words.[24]

[24] Paola Cori, *Forms of Thinking in Leopardi's* Zibaldone*. Religion, Science and Everyday Life in an Age of Disenchantment* (Legenda, 2019), p. 3.

Indeed, Leopardi recognises anatomy not only as a practice or discipline, but rather as a methodical approach to the material world that organises and interprets reality through the dissection and categorisation of its parts. This approach becomes a form of thinking when the anatomical paradigm is used not only as a means of scientific inquiry, but also as a framework and model for philosophical reflection and even writing. Anatomical thinking and writing are rational, analytical and proceed metonymically, piece by piece, suppressing the invisible poetic connections between things and focusing only on the tangible materiality of individual objects. In this sense, anatomy in Leopardi's *Zibaldone* becomes and is recognised as a generative form. As such, it is criticised for the narrow view of nature it offers and for its limitations in capturing the poetic essence of the world.

In his *Zibaldone,* then, Leopardi captures something even more profound than just two features of anatomy: he understands that anatomy has gone beyond its strictly disciplinary status to constitute a paradigm, a form of thinking. This form of thinking is shaped by the paradigm of dissection and takes the form of hyperrealism concealed by ideal beauty, spread by the popularity of collections of artificial anatomy such as those displayed in Palazzo Poggi and La Specola, anatomical atlases, and the discourses around them, such as the article by Desgenettes.