A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

Permanent WRAP URL:

http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/175053

warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications

FROM FLESH TO SOUL:
THE DICHOTOMY OF THE BODY IN ALFONSO
VARANO, SALOMONE FIORENTINO, AND
GIACOMO LEOPARDI

By

Simona Di Martino

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian Studies

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

April 2022

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

They say that the work of a doctoral student is solitary. Do not believe them, because it is not. There are numerous people who contributed to the completion of my doctoral thesis and whom I would like to thank.

First, I thank the School of Modern Languages and Cultures for funding my PhD. I am grateful to my supervisor Professor Fabio Camilletti who supported me since the very beginning and always found the right words to inspire me and encourage my research and my mania to enthusiastically overwhelm myself with many activities. I thank him for our meetings and chats, for convincing me that sometimes 'less is more', for focalising on the strengths, and openly criticising the fallacies of my research.

I am deeply indebted to all the staff members of the Italian department of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures for having granted me a safe, warm, and welcoming environment that allowed me to work peacefully. Particularly, I thank Jo Lee and Valentina Abbatelli for supporting me with my teaching, for their kind and prompt availability to talk and give good advice, and for endorsing my initiatives.

I would love to thank previous and current postgraduate colleagues in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures for sharing their paths, thoughts, and life with me. Among them, I thank my fellows Andrea Brondino, Emiliano Zappalà and Mary Jane Dempsey for the endless chats during our 'home-made' seminar sessions called 'Lavori in corso', their valuable feedback on my work, and their moral support, even during an unexpected pandemic. I also want to thank Maria Pavlova for her friendship and generosity, Sara Boezio, whose suggestions helped me in my very first steps towards a new PhD experience, Gianmarco Mancosu for welcoming me in the department once I arrived at Warwick, and Federica Coluzzi and Luca Peretti for their friendly advice and for their desire to connect and work together. Among newbies, particular thanks go to Kerry Gibbons, and to Silvia Vari for reminding me of the light-heartedness of my first year of PhD with her chats and laughs.

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself, and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. Parts of the thesis have been or are going to be published in other forms in academic journals and edited volumes. Specifically, parts of Section 1.4, 'Catastrophes and The Human Body' are developed from article '"Orecchie rose e labbra mozze" and Other Bodily Suffering in Alfonso Varano: Dantean Reminiscences in Eighteenth-Century Sepulchral Poetry', *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*, 4 (2021), 121–138, open access and available [here](). Section 1.6, 'Visions of Spectral Bodies' includes material from the article (in Italian) 'Le visioni letterarie di Alfonso Varano e Giacomo Leopardi: tra teologia e *ghost story*?', part of a special issue of *Quaderni d'italianistica* on the theme of the night in Italian literature I have recently edited (forthcoming, 2022). The same article also contains material discussed in Section 3.4, '*Appressamento* and the "Angeliche forme"'. Finally, research undertaken for my thesis forms part of the chapter on 'Sepulchral Poetry and Deathly Motifs. A "Prehistory" of the Italian Gothic' I presented for the volume *Italian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Marco Malvestio and Stefano Serafini (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2022).

Abstract

This thesis advocates the existence of a sub-cluster in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Italian poetry, often imperfectly labelled as 'sepulchral', focusing on the co-existence between the physicality of death, as explored by coeval science, and the religious longing for eternal life. By dynamically relying on Dante's model, these texts explore the tension between belief and secularisation characterising the Enlightenment age, embodied by the corpse as an object of supreme 'abjection' and, at the same time, of devotional contemplation. Moreover, my thesis hypothesises the existence of a direct literary lineage running from the works of Alfonso Varano (particularly *Visioni sacre e morali*, 1789) and Salomone Fiorentino (Fiorentino's *Elegie di S. F. in morte di Laura sua moglie*, 1790) to Giacomo Leopardi's early poetic experiments, and particularly to his youthful, Dante-inspired poem *Appressamento della morte* (1816). As a consequence, I detect a so-far under-investigated strain in Italy's literary history, enabling me to provide a different assessment of Leopardi's sources in composing this poem, beyond its overt Dantean inspiration.

Introduction

Quindi è che scoprendo in un sol tratto molte più cose ch'egli non è usato di scorgere a un tempo, e d'un sol colpo d'occhio discernendo e mirando una moltitudine di oggetti, ben da lui veduti più volte ciascuno, ma non mai tutti insieme (se non in altre simili congiunture), egli è in grado di scorger con essi i loro rapporti scambievoli, e per la novità di quella moltitudine di oggetti tutti insieme rappresentantisegli, egli è attirato e a considerare, benchè rapidamente, i detti oggetti meglio che per l'innanzi non avea fatto, e ch'egli non suole; e a voler guardare e notare i detti rapporti.

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

1. Aims and Objectives

This dissertation individuates and analyses aspects of continuity and fracture within the Italian poetic tradition of literary 'visions' through the analysis of texts, published between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, dealing with the theme of death and the body/soul dichotomy. The timespan I consider ranges from 1789 to 1816, that is between the posthumous publication of Alfonso Varano's *Visioni sacre e morali* (composed between 1739 and 1766) and the composition of Giacomo Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte* (which he never published in his lifetime). My corpus includes three long poetic texts which, by employing Dante's poetry as a thematic and stylistic model, discuss the relationship between body and soul, adapting it to the changing attitudes towards death in the Enlightenment age: Alfonso Varano's *Visioni sacre e morali*, Salomone Fiorentino's *Elegie di Salomone Fiorentino in morte di Laura sua moglie* (first published in 1790), and Giacomo Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte*.[1] Alongside thematic connections, the

---

[1] Varano's and Leopardi's texts are now available in critical edition, whence I quote throughout, see Alfonso Varano, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Riccardo Verzini (Alessandria: Edizioni

reasons behind my choice of sources is twofold. On the one hand, these texts come from a relatively homogeneous background in geo-political terms: Varano, Fiorentino and Leopardi all came from, or lived and published in, an area covering three Italian regions, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, and Marche – which are geographically contiguous and, in the case of Emilia-Romagna and Marche, were part of the Papal States.[2] On the other hand, these works are interconnected, and all written in *terza rima*. Varano's *Visioni* and Fiorentino's *Elegie*, albeit now considered as marginal works within the Italian eighteenth-century literary canon, enjoyed great popularity during their time, and were amongst Leopardi's sources throughout his poetic apprenticeship in Recanati, leaving significant traces, precisely, in *Appressamento*. My work, therefore, reconstructs the existence of a sub-cluster of texts in Italy's lyric tradition, bringing new attention on works that have so far been relatively overlooked by scholars, either for their marginality (Varano, Fiorentino) or by the marginal position within the *oeuvre* of a canonical author (Leopardi).[3]

Let us now focus on the thematic structure of the selected works. The distinction between mortal bodies and immortal souls derives from a dichotomic mode of thinking of classical origin and cemented by Christianity.[4] *Visioni*, *Elegie*, and *Appressamento*, however, testify to a cultural and literary shift from a general, religion-centred interest in death as a theme for spiritual meditation to an

dell'Orso, 2003) and Giacomo Leopardi, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Christian Genetelli and Sabrina Delcò-Toschini (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002) (but see also a previous critical edition by Lorenza Posfortunato (Firenze: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1983)). No critical edition of Salomone Fiorentino's works exists, and I consequently rely on the collection *Poesie di Salomone Fiorentino. Nuova edizione con aggiunte*, 2 vols (Livorno: Barbani, 1815): *Elegie* is included in the first volume.

[2] It is widely known that Leopardi lived and sojourned in various parts of Italy, including cities such as Rome, Milan, Florence, Bologna, and Naples, but one should bear in mind that the young Leopardi who wrote *Appressamento* is deeply rooted in the small and confined environment of his hometown, Recanati, in the Papal State.

[3] Enrico Ghidetti, 'Alle origini della vocazione poetica leopardiana: La cantica "Appressamento della morte"', in *Leopardi oggi. Incontri per il bicentenario della nascita del poeta*, ed. by Bortolo Martinelli (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), pp. 23–47.

[4] Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 28.

aesthetically-oriented use of death as a poetic motif. As such, they offer a fruitful case study for the examination of Italian culture in the age of Revolutions, between continuity and rupture, belief and secularism. These works do not show significant variations from the traditional pattern of how flesh and soul coexist in a human body before death and how they part from each other once death occurs, but this thesis does not aim to examine the process of dying and the metamorphosis of the human body. The 'dichotomy' in the title refers to the spheres of the material and the immaterial, as well as to representations of the body *before* and *after* death.

Criticism has traditionally framed Varano's and Fiorentino's works (and, partly, Leopardi's *Appressamento*) within the broad category of 'sepulchral poetry', generally regarded as a marginal trend in eighteenth-century European poetic tradition and, in the case of Italy, as a mere import from the British Isles.[5] As I will demonstrate, this definition is imperfect: these texts do not employ the stereotyped tropes of sepulchral poetry, and rather rely on traditional Christian imaginary and on Dante's works as a long-lasting, influential model in Italy's literary tradition. At the same time, their thematic use of death as a cultural 'abject', their exploration of poetic exaggeration and excess, and their distinctly Neo-medieval, revivalist taste rather align them to the broader Gothic aesthetics flourishing across Europe in the same years.[6] Unlike other linguistic domains, Italy did not witness the development of a significant Gothic tradition in prose. Poetry, instead, as I will demonstrate, enabled for a negotiation of Gothic 'abjection' – a key-term proposed by Julia Kristeva – with the limits imposed by the omnipresence of the Church, the resistance of Classicism and the

---

[5] A general overview of sepulchral influence across Europe can be found in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), while a specific reference to the Italian context is provided in Francesca Broggi, *The Rise of the Italian Canto. Macpherson, Cesarotti and Leopardi: From the Ossianic Poems to the* Canti (Ravenna: Longo, 2006).

[6] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1–4. See also: Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1–20. On the notion of 'abjection' see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). I will deal more extensively with Kristeva's notion in Section 3.

pervasiveness of Italy's literary tradition, all matters causing Italy's marginalisation within the broader European Gothic literary market. As Chris Baldick points out, the term 'Gothic' itself, which originally referred to the Goths, was taken and used to represent:

> one side of that set of cultural oppositions by which the Renaissance and its heirs defined and claimed possession of European civilization: Northern versus Southern, Gothic versus Graeco-Roman, Dark Ages versus the Age of Enlightenment, medieval versus modern, barbarity versus civility, superstition versus Reason.[7]

Because of such eighteenth-century equation according to which Gothic used to mean 'medieval, therefore barbarous', Italy aligned itself in the ranks of defenders of Classicism.[8] Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Classicist aesthetics helped in forging Italy's national identity in the absence of a unified nation. Within this context, the representation of death could be publicly accepted only in the form of a monumental composure, cementing the idea of 'Italianness' as an unbroken community comprising the living and the dead.[9] Classical models were a more suitable foundation stone than ghosts, therefore the 'abject' was not part of canonical Italian culture.

---

[7] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. xii. The first published work to call itself 'A Gothic Story' was a counterfeit medieval tale by Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Significantly, the preface of its second edition (1765) states that the novel consists of a 'blend [of] the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern', where the ancient concerns 'imagination and improbability' while the modern 'rules of probability' and 'common life', in Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Lownds, 1765), p. 9.

[8] The expression 'medieval, therefore barbarous' is used by Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, p. xii. See also Fabio Camilletti, '1766-1827: The Winter Is Coming', in *Italian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Marco Malvestio and Stefano Serafini (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2022).

[9] Monumental composure as well as a coexistence of the living with the dead can be found in Hannah Malone, *Architecture, Death and Nationhood: Monumental Cemeteries of Nineteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Nonetheless, the poetic sub-cluster I analyse here shows how a reflection on the 'abject' of death found its way within the boundaries of Italy's lyric tradition through a self-reflexive turning on Italian models, and particularly Dante, challenging the same tensions explored, in the same years, by Gothic literature. My work, therefore, provides a starting point for a more in-depth study of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Italian poetry within the broader context of European Gothic aesthetics.

Visioni, *Elegie*, and *Appressamento* are primarily characterised by a strongly imaginative nature, countering the Classicist precepts of 'measure' and composure. The imaginative frenzy displayed in these poems results in a trespass of reason into visionary realms, thereby outlining a new aesthetics, opposed to the Classicist search for natural 'truth' and rather grounded on the spontaneity of feelings and emotions.[10] For this operation, the depiction of dying and dead bodies is central. In the eighteenth century, the human corpse ceased to be a taboo: centuries of anatomical studies on dead bodies opened new pathways to science, while, at the same time, the corpse became an object of literary and aesthetic speculation.[11] The same ambivalence can be found in these poems, portraying the decay of the human body according to the discoveries of modern science, while concurrently representing it as an object of repulsion and oblique fascination.[12]

Three specifically Italian phenomena should be highlighted in assessing these texts and the operation they undertake. First, the omnipresence of Catholicism and the Church made reflections on the body and its, so to speak, biopolitical management, highly problematic, in a century witnessing a global shift in the understanding and representation of death. Wide-ranging sociological studies have been conducted on the matter from a global

---

[10] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 2.

[11] Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. xiii.

[12] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 5.

perspective,[13] adding to Philippe Ariès' pioneering study *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*.[14] More recent research has investigated the specificity of the Italian context in this broader framework, although the discipline of death studies *per se* has not yet received a significant level of attention within the field of Italian Studies.[15] From this viewpoint, my literary analysis may contribute to the development of this field, analysing how literary texts display a continual tension between the depiction of physical suffering and the reassuring presence of religion. In Varano's *Visioni*, for example, the Archduchess of Austria, Maria Anna suffers excruciating pains in life — 'combatte e langue | fra il viver duro e l'aspettata morte' (VI. 190–91) — but rejoices for the consolation provided by the Virgin Mary, who 'd'ogni vil la spogliò parte terrena' (216). Second, the pervasiveness of Classicist normativity, taking the specific shape of an anti-Baroque reaction, prevented authors from overtly dealing with macabre imaginary and exaggerated descriptions, forcing them to circumvent the accusation of *barocchismo* by emphasising the educational and moral intent of their poems and by relying on scientific and philosophical sources.[16] Third, the burden of Italy's literary tradition contributed to provide

---

[13] See, among others, *Death and Representation*, ed. by Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Clifton D. Bryant, *Handbook of Death and Dying* (Thousand Oaks, CA/London: SAGE, 2003).

[14] Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); originally *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en occident: du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil 1975); and Italian edition: *Storia della morte in Occidente: dal Medioevo ai giorni nostri* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989).

[15] See the recent and overarching study Marzio Barbagli, *Alla fine della vita* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018).

[16] Giovanna Scianatico, *La questione neoclassica* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010). See also *Arts and Humanities Through the Eras: The Age of the Baroque and Enlightenment (1600–1800)*, ed. by Philip M. Soergel (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005). When the term 'Baroque' entered European languages, it was generally applied in a negative way, deriding the prevalence of rich ornate decoration in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Only in 1888 did the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin rehabilitate the word 'Baroque', claiming that the Baroque era had been the product of a new aesthetic sensibility that was daring and creative. Although it is difficult to unify the peculiarities of Baroque literature in a precise and exhaustive definition,

these texts with their distinct shape, and to negotiate Gothicising imaginary through the example of canonical authors. Not incidentally, these texts correspond chronologically to the reinstatement of Dante within the Italian and European canon. Until the eighteenth century, Dante was a marginal presence in Italy's literary tradition: the model for lyric poetry was rather Petrarch's vernacular production, perceived to be a clearer, more comprehensible, and 'pure' example of poetic language.[17] Re-employing Dante as a model, thus, was the specific way these authors adopted to negotiate modern, 'Gothic' tensions with the weight of Italy's lyric canon, in a moment when this canon underwent a significant change and witnessed a return of Dante as an anti-Classicist poetic model.

By dynamically relying on the Dantean model, *Visioni*, *Elegie*, and *Appressamento* explore the tension between belief and secularisation animating their time, embodied by the corpse as the object of supreme 'abjection' and, at the same time, of devotional contemplation. Reading 'minor' and 'major' authors together makes it possible to examine the impact of the former (Varano and Fiorentino) and better investigate the sources of the latter (Leopardi). Therefore, ultimately, I hypothesise the existence of a direct literary lineage running from Varano and Fiorentino to the young Leopardi.

2. Existing Scholarship and Gaps

The definition of *poesia sepolcrale* draws its name from the British 'graveyard school' of poetry, whose popularity reached a peak in the mid-eighteenth century.[18] Even the use of such notion, however, has historically been

---

when I refer to a Baroque spirit in this thesis, I mainly refer to an epoch characterised by aesthetic sensibility, fondness for ornamentation, drama, and complexity.

[17] Simon Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy. Florence, Venice and the "Divine Poet"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1–19; See also the chapter entitled 'Varia fortuna di Dante', in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* ed. by Carlo Dionisotti (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), pp. 255–303.

[18] As explained by Eric Parisot, the term 'graveyard poetry' originally emerged in the late nineteenth century to indicate epitaphic verses and was not applied to a specific brand of

inconsistent, even though it has generally been used when referring to a non-homogeneous set of British poetry meditating upon the transience of life, the imminence of death, and the consolation accorded by a Christian afterlife.[19] Only in 1929, thanks to a study by John W. Draper, the term 'graveyard poetry' achieved critical consensus.[20] Within the Italian context, however, a label such as *poesia sepolcrale* has been variously employed, both in reference to Italian translations of British texts as well as to late eighteenth-century Italian poems, without any systematic and organic investigation.[21] In terms of original Italian works, it has been applied in a particularly confusing and undiscriminated way, including authors, such as Varano and Fiorentino, whose work deserves a more nuanced approach.[22]Albeit dealing with the theme of death, Varano's *Visioni* and Fiorentino's *Elegie* (not to mention Leopardi's *Appressamento*) can hardly be labelled as 'sepulchral poems', in that they are not limited to the thematic sphere of mourning and are rather imbued with a distinctly mystic element.

---

eighteenth-century poetics until the 1890s. Eric Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 1.

[19] Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry*, p. 1. As Parisot claims, the term, at its narrowest, may refer at least to four poems: Thomas Parnell's *Night-Piece on Death* (1721); Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743); Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-45); and Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751).

[20] John W. Draper, *The Funereal Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1929).

[21] In the eighteenth century, translations achieved great prominence in Italian literature, which resulted in many authors becoming translators before becoming writers and importing several elements and themes of British graveyard poetry. Among these, one can mention: Angelo Mazza, who translated Parnell's *Night-Piece on Death* and inspired Monti, Foscolo, and Leopardi, see Mario Fubini, 'Introduction', in *Lirici del Settecento*, ed. by Bruno Maier (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1959), pp. IX–CXIX (p. LX); Giuseppe Bottoni, whose translation of Young's *Night Thoughts* enjoyed several editions; and Melchiorre Cesarotti, who composed the most enduringly valued Italian translation of Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. See James D. Garrison, 'Pietoso Stile: Italian Translations of Gray's "Elegy" to 1900', *MLN*, 121 (2006), no. 1, 167–86. Between 1772 and 1835, there appeared at least twelve translations of Gray's *Elegy* into Italian: in the same year as Cesarotti's translation, there appeared a new one by Gennari, and a further one by Torrelli was published in Verona in 1776.

[22] See *Poesia del Settecento*, ed. by Carlo Muscetta and Maria Rosa Massei (Turin: Einaudi, 1967).

Italian literary histories have often overlooked the existence of this relatively marginal production.[23] Enzo Neppi has reconstructed the critical debate on the subject, emphasising the role played by three influential studies written in the 1890s by Vittorio Cian, Bonaventura Zumbini, and Emilio Bertana.[24] No other substantial contribution on the subject appeared until the end of the Second World War, when Walter Binni published *Preromanticismo italiano* (1947).[25] In this book, Binni attempted for the first time to define Italian Pre-Romanticism, detaching it from both the aesthetics of Arcadia and the ideology of the Enlightenment. Two years later, Ettore Bonora's *Il preromanticismo in Italia* focused on translations from foreign sources, seeking to delineate the impact of European literatures on the development of Italian Pre-

---

[23] Among the exceptions, one can cite: Paolo Emiliani Giudici, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1855) p. 323; Giuseppe Maffei, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 7 vols (Naples: Marotta e Vespandoch, 1829–30), II, pp. 324-326; Walter Binni, 'Il Settecento letterario', in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno 9 vols (Milan: Garzanti, 1968), VI, pp. 566–567, 587, 663, 685, 700, 1088; Francesco Flora, 'Il Settecento e il primo Ottocento', in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Francesco Flora 5 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1965), IV, pp. 65, 362; Attilio Momigliano, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Messina: Principato, 1932); Riccardo Merolla, 'Dal classicismo "rococò" a quello "preromantico", passando per l'Arcadia', in *Letteratura italiana. Storia e geografia*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), II, pp. 1080–1083; Giuseppe Savoca, 'La crisi del classicismo dall'Arcadia lugubre e sentimentale alla retorica ossianesca e sepolcrale', in *La letteratura italiana. Storia e testi*, ed. by Gaetano Compagnino, Guido Nicastro and Giuseppe Savoca 10 vols (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1974), VI.II, pp. 245–254.

[24] Enzo Neppi, 'Ontologia dei sepolcri', in *"Dei sepolcri" di Ugo Foscolo*, ed. by Gennaro Barbarisi and William Spaggiari (Milan: Cisalpino, 2006), pp. 165–226. Vittorio Cian, 'Per la storia del sentimento sepolcrale in Italia e in Francia prima dei Sepolcri del Foscolo', in *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 20 (1892), 205–35; see also 'La poesia sepolcrale italiana e straniera e il carme di Foscolo', in *Studi di letteratura italiana*, ed. by Bonaventura Zumbini (Florence: Le Monnier, 1894); and 'Arcadia lugubre e preromantica', in *In Arcadia. Saggi e profili*, ed. by Emilio Bertana (Naples: Perrella, 1909). The literature presented in these studies, again labelled as 'sepulchral poetry', does not consist of Italian literature, but of foreign texts or, at most, translations in Italian.

[25] Walter Binni, *Preromanticismo italiano* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche italiane, 1947).

Romanticism.[26] More recently, a study by Raffaella Bertazzoli explored 'sepulchral' literature from a mainly thematic perspective.[27] All these works, however, failed to capture the distinctiveness of works – such as those by Varano, Fiorentino, and Leopardi – whose relationship with death-related themes is not rooted in the inspiration drawn from British sources, but rather in an innovative negotiation of national literary models, Catholic imaginary, and the new attitudes towards death emerging in the eighteenth century. Moreover, the dearth of scholarly work underscores the fact that death-related lyrics were considered niche literature, a concept that I problematise in this thesis. My reception-based approach and the analysis of the popularity these texts enjoyed during their time, will thus reassess the concept of 'minor' works and dismantle the idea of an egalitarian and agonistic relationship between authors.[28]

Existing scholarship is equally not of much use when it comes to the comparative study of Varano, Fiorentino, and Leopardi, whose joint analysis has never been undertaken, although there exist comparative studies analysing the influence on Leopardi either of Varano (Walter Binni, Riccardo Verzini) or Fiorentino (Giuseppe Nicoletti).[29] Nicoletti hypothesises that Leopardi could have read Fiorentino's *Elegie* and drawn inspiration from Fiorentino's vocabulary when composing the *Canti*.[30] When editing Leopardi's *Crestomazia poetica*,

---

[26] Ettore Bonora, *Il preromanticismo in Italia* (Milan: La Goliardica, 1959).

[27] Raffaella Bertazzoli, *Pensieri sull'ignoto. Poesia sepolcrale e simbologia funebre tra Sette e Ottocento* (Verona: Fiorini, 2002).

[28] The idea that great authors communicate mainly with great authors could be attributable to Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[29] Walter Binni, 'Leopardi e la poesia del secondo Settecento', in *1. Leopardi. Scritti 1934-1963*, in *Opere complete di Walter Binni* (Florence: Il Ponte Editore, 2014), pp. 311–370; Riccardo Verzini, 'Introduzione', in Alfonso Varano, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Riccardo Verzini (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2003), pp. 9–37. Giuseppe Nicoletti, 'Le "Elegie" di Salomone Fiorentino: una fonte per i Canti Pisano-Recanatesi?', in *Una giornata leopardiana in ricordo di Walter Binni*, ed. by Mario Martelli (Roma: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 123–30.

[30] The scholar notes, for instance, the coincidence of the term 'rimembranza', among others: the term constitutes the title of a section of Fiorentino's *Elegie* and would later be crucial to Leopardi's idea of poetry. Nicoletti, 'Le "Elegie" di Salomone Fiorentino', p. 129.

Giuseppe Savoca made useful remarks on Leopardi's choice of selecting excerpts from Varano's *Visioni* and Fiorentino's *Elegie*.[31] Both Varano and Fiorentino would be part, in Savoca's terms, of the 'ombroso sottobosco' whence Leopardi drew inspiration for his own poetry.[32] Renzo Negri's study on the theme of ruins in Italian eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry takes Varano and Leopardi as its chronological extremes, although never analysing the triad Varano/Fiorentino/Leopardi in its own respect.[33] He notices, however, how Varano was one of the authors chosen by Leopardi in his *Crestomazia*, and defines Fiorentino's poetry as a sort of 'poesia preleopardiana'.[34] Much less studied has been the relationship between Varano and Fiorentino, with the exception of Gabriella Milan's biographical profile of Fiorentino for the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, cursorily stressing Fiorentino's merit for originally conveying Varano's 'themes and tones' in his *Elegie*.[35]

More promising seems to be the perspective of contextualising these works in terms of material culture and book history, that is within the publishing market of eighteenth-century Italy and the veritable proliferation of literary works variously related to death, beyond any pre-made critical label.[36] It should be underscored that cutting-edge studies on the context of the eighteenth-century Italian publishing market are still missing from scholarship.[37] A

---

[31] Giuseppe Savoca, 'Introduzione', in *Crestomazia italiana. La poesia*, ed. by Giuseppe Savoca (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), pp. VII–XXVII.

[32] Savoca, 'Introduzione', pp. XXIII, XXV.

[33] See Renzo Negri, *Gusto e poesia delle rovine in Italia fra il Sette e l'Ottocento* (Milan: Ceschina, 1965), p. 13.

[34] Negri, *Gusto e poesia delle rovine*, pp. 85–108.

[35] Gabriella Milan, 'Salomone, Fiorentino', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 100 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997) XLVIII.

<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/salomone-fiorentino_(Dizionario-Biografico)/> [accessed 19 January 2022]

[36] I have preliminarily undertaken such overview in Simona Di Martino, 'Sepulchral Poetry and Deathly Motifs. A "Prehistory" of the Italian Gothic', in *Italian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Marco Malvestio and Stefano Serafini (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2022).

[37] Renato Pasta, *Editoria e cultura nel Settecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1997).

preliminary survey I conducted clearly shows that original works (i.e. not translations) related to the themes of death and tombs were spread throughout Italy, and that most of these works underwent numerous editions over the years.[38] At the same time, one should consider the concurrent circulation of works dealing with death from a religious-devotional perspective, a genre that, as Maria Iolanda Palazzolo writes, never experienced a crisis.[39]

Interesting considerations can be made about the variety of formats in which these works were published. As Rietje van Vliet points out, in the eighteenth century, books were chiefly octavos or small, handily-sized duodecimos.[40] *Visioni*, *Elegie* and *Appressamento*, however, were even printed in sextodecimo, and occasionally in octodecimo.[41] This detail reveals important information about the circulation of these texts. Smaller formats were the easiest to carry and their adoption confirms the popularity of these works. Furthermore,

---

[38] Works by Ippolito Pindemonte, Giuseppe Bottoni, Melchiorre Cesarotti and Iacopo Vittorelli were printed in Venice (Zorzi and Garbo), Verona (Tipografia Mainardi), Padua (Comino), and Bassano (Remondini). In Milan, 'Società tipografica dei classici italiani' published the ultimate collection of Ambrogio Viale's works *Opere scelte*, while Luigi Cerretti's works were mainly printed in Tuscany, in both Florence (Molini e Landi) and Pisa (Nuova Tipografia). Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola's different editions were published all over Italy: Perugia (Costantini), Rome-Siena (Bindi), Venice, Genoa, and Ancona (Sartori). The *oeuvre* of Salomone Fiorentino was mainly published in different Tuscan locations: Arezzo (Belotti), Florence (Grazioli), Pisa (Tipografia Società Letteraria), Livorno (Barbani), Fiesole (Poligrafia fiesolana). However, Fiorentino's *Elegie* also enjoyed various editions across the Italian peninsula: in Emilia-Romagna Rimini (Albertini), Bologna (De Franceschi), Parma (Bodoni), Milan, Genoa, Ancona (Sartori). For more details see Chapter 2. Alfonso Varano's *Visioni* were printed all over Italy: Ferrara (Coatti), Parma (Stamperia Reale), Piacenza (Stamperia del Majno) in Emilia-Romagna, Genoa, Venice (Stamperia Palese, Picotti, Tasso), Milan (Società tipografica dei classici italiani, Silvestri, Bettoni), Turin (Tipografia libreria salesiana).

[39] Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, 'Il commercio della cultura nel Settecento', *Studi Storici*, 40 (1999), no. 1, 315–28.

[40] Rietje van Vliet, 'Print and Public in Europe 1600–1800', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), pp. 424–36.

[41] This is the case for the best-selling *Elegie* by Salomone Fiorentino, which attained extraordinary success, as well as Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola's *Le notti clementine*, which made it all the way to its tenth edition.

the fact that publishing centres were to be found in different areas of Italy shows that investigating this kind of death-related poetry and its diffusion across Italy could reveal important and still-unknown information about a widespread readership of death-related poetry, suggesting it to be a proto-national phenomenon, firmly rooted in the Italian context.

3. Theory and Methodology

In this dissertation, I will undertake a close reading of my primary sources, within the literary-historical context of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Italy. My analysis will primarily focus on the representation of the human body as a compound of corporeal (physical/visible) and spectral (spiritual/invisible) elements, disjointed in the moment of death.

In terms of corporeality, my work inserts itself in, and contributes to, an emerging cluster of Italian Studies, recently reconstructed in its development by Heather Webb and Derek Duncan.[42] Their review includes contributions covering a broad timespan, ranging from the late-medieval to the early-modern period, as well as post-unification and contemporary discourses on race and gender, but significantly does not include any example of works on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Italy.[43] In this thesis, I am to partially fill this gap, by providing an understanding of how the texts I examine delineate specific ideologies of the human body in a social context. Since corporeal representations are always involved in a process of creation and defiance of binary oppositions (sexualisation/a-sexualisation; exoticisation/normalisation; dirty/clean; disease/health), 'studying the representation of the body in literary

---

[42] Derek Duncan and Heather Webb, 'Corporealities in Italian Studies', *Italian Studies*, 75 (2020), 176–93.

[43] Within the nineteenth-century panorama, the necrophiliac taste has only been observed by critics when analysing works pertaining to the *Scapigliatura*, as shown by Alberto Carli in his *Anatomie scapigliate*, where corporeality is explored in terms of 'neobarocco', a term which originates from the macabre repertoire of embalmed, waxed, dissected bodies. See Alberto Carli, *Anatomie Scapigliate. L'estetica della morte tra letteratura, arte e scienza* (Novara: Interlinea, 2004).

works could be understood as a method of accessing experiences in the past'.[44] In particular, alongside the analysis of bodily representations, I examine how Varano's, Fiorentino's, and Leopardi's poetic gaze frames the dead body as an object of contemplation. A milestone on this aspect, specifically focused on the feminine body, has notoriously been Elisabeth Bronfen's study *Over Her Dead Body*. In her monograph, Bronfen questions the pleasantness of the representation of death in the arts, taking as a starting point the fact that both narrative and visual representations of death draw their material from a common repertoire of images that can be read as the product of culture.[45] Bronfen's textual corpus covers mid-eighteenth-century to contemporary works, and she argues that, through representations of the dead feminine body, culture can both repress and articulate its unconscious knowledge of death. From this assumption, Bronfen derives the conclusion that, in line with Ariès' study, representations of death in literature delight the reader because the death occurs in *someone else's* body (the body of 'the other') and as an image. My analytical approach relies on Bronfen's theory to examine *Visioni*, *Elegie*, and *Appressamento* through different viewpoints, depending on the object of the gaze: 'the others' (Varano), 'the beloved' (Fiorentino), and an externalised 'self' (Leopardi).

Discourses on corporeality include analysis of how bodies have been represented in my corpus, and how the canon of beauty, typically referring to female bodies, has been both followed and subverted. I focus on physical beauty and the specific parameter of colour, often defined by the degree of brightness of figures, as done by Giovanni Pozzi in his examination of the *topos* of beauty.[46] Pozzi distinguishes two ways of describing the female body in literary terms:

---

[44] *The Body in History, Culture, and the Arts*, ed. by Justyna Jajszczok and Aleksandra Musiał (New York & London: Routledge, 2019), p. 4.

[45] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[46] Giovanni Pozzi, 'Temi, topoi, stereotipi', in *Le forme del testo, 1. Teoria e poesia*, in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), III, pp. 391–436. On the topic see also Massimo Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è? Indagine sul topos delle bellezze femminili* (Pisa: ETS, 2004), pp. 11–12.

'long canon' and 'short canon'.[47] The 'long canon' constitutes a descriptive device typical of narrative genres (not usually employed in *poesia alta*), and based on bodily proportions, describing the body from head to foot in a progressive order. The 'short canon' (also called *petrarchesco*, even though it existed before Petrarch) is found in poetry. It is based on the brightness of the described figure and then on its colours, and encapsulates a short portion of the body, whose parts are casually enumerated. Authors who employ the 'short canon' focus on hair, eyes, eyebrows, forehead, cheeks, lips, teeth, and sometimes neck, breasts, and hands. My poetic sources subvert the colours traditionally employed by poets to describe women's bodies, even though the same descriptive canons are employed, and apply these descriptive canons to men too.[48] My analysis of Varano's, Fiorentino's, and Leopardi's subversion of the canon of beauty aims

---

[47] See Giovanni Pozzi, *La rosa in mano al professore* (Fribourg: Edizioni Universitarie, 1974), p. 72; Giovanni Pozzi, 'Codici, stereotipi, topoi e fonti letterarie', in *Intorno al "Codice". Atti del III convegno della Associazione italiana di studi semiotici (AISS)* (Florence, 1976), pp. 37–76 (pp. 42–43); Giovanni Pozzi, *Sull'orlo del visibile parlare* (Milan: Adelphi, 1993), and in particular the section entitled 'Il ritratto della donna nella poesia di inizio Cinquecento e la pittura di Giorgione', pp. 145–171; Giovanni Pozzi, *Alternatim* (Milan: Adelphi, 1996), and specifically the section entitled 'Sul luogo comune', pp. 449–526.

[48] Whereas the beauty of bodies was a crucial element for Greek statuary, whose harmonious shapes were established by the Canon of Polykleitos in an un-gendered way (it was valid for men – heroes, athletes, gods – and women), literature too offers numerous examples of description of corporeal beauties. The concept of physical beauty and its preservation, especially as far as women are concerned, has been debated since ancient times, although writers provided women with bodily care suggestions across different epochs. Two cases can exemplify this. In ancient Roman's times, Ovid deals with this matter in his *libellus* called *Medicamina faciei femineae* at the end of his famous treatise *Ars amandi*, where he suggests to ladies how to preserve their beauty. The same topic is the object of the sixteenth-century *Gli ornamenti delle donne* by Giovanni Marinelli, a four-book-long dissertation that he defines 'useful and necessary to every nice person'. It focuses on what kind of ornaments are required for having a beautiful body, and on the ways in which one could artificially gain beauty. Recent scholarship explored the reception of the traditional canon of beauty to carry a thematic analysis on early-modern works, such as Alessandra Paola Macinante in her *"Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi". Metamorfosi delle chiome femminili tra Petrarca e Tasso (*Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2011) and Roberto Fedi, *I poeti preferiscono le bionde. Chiome d'oro e letteratura* (Florence: Le Càriti, 2007).

to highlight their taste for a new aesthetic, which reinstates descriptions of sored and ill human beings from Dante.

As far as spectrality is concerned, I variously engage with scholarly works on the mystical and contemplative tradition from the Middle Ages onwards, considering at the same time the importance of the cult of martyrs and their remains.[49] While hagiographic documents can be read as models for the depiction of corporeal pain, the use of Dante as a source, I argue, provided my authors with a model in representing the invisible.[50] In particular, John C. Barnes's and Jennifer Petrie's edited volume of 2007 on *Dante and the Human Body*, helped me in assessing Dante as a precursor and a model in bypassing the body/soul, visible/invisible dichotomies.[51]

On the subject of death, my study is in constant dialogue with works assessing the changes in the understanding and the representation of death across the long eighteenth century. Ariès' acclaimed monograph *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* is a key reference work, and its insights on Western approaches to corpses and burials are largely valid and still discussed today.[52] From Ariès' work, I derive the concept of the 'death of the other' (labelled by Ariès as 'Thy Death'), which I read in combination with Bronfen's analysis. According to Ariès, across modernity a shift occurred in the Western mindset from the fear of one's *own* death to the remembrance and grief for the death of *others*. Such a change of mentality is clearly recognisable in

---

[49] For an overview see Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[50] Among others, mystical experiences portrayed in various ways by philosophers, mystics, psychoanalysts, writers, and ordinary people are explored in *The Immediacy of Mystical Experience in The European Tradition*, ed. by Miklos Vassanyi, Eniko Sepsi and Aniko Droczi (Cham: Springer, 2017). On mysticism and the influence of the Church in Italian culture see also *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, ed. by Fabrizio De Donno and Simon Gilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Specifically on Dante see Simon Gilson, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

[51] *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007).

[52] Ariès, *Western Attitudes*.

Varano's *Visioni* and Fiorentino's *Elegie*, but also in Leopardi's *Appressamento*, which, although focusing on the death of the poetic subject, recurs to strategies of externalisation that are symptomatic of the age in which it was written.

My analysis draws substantially on Julia Kristeva's theory of horror, centred on the concept of 'abjection'. In Kristeva's terms, the 'abject' is something that is not recognised by the subject and is instead perceived as extraneous and threatening. Recognising this refused, rejected, expelled, and excluded element, enables for disclosing a text's full potential, its 'power of horror'.[53] A prime example of Kristeva's 'abject' is what Mary Douglas terms the 'polluted body', that is an object that disturbs identity, system, order, that does not respect borders, positions, and rules. Situated in the 'in-between', quintessentially ambiguous and composite, the corpse epitomises the notion of 'polluted body' in the highest possible degree.[54] I will, consequently, move from this notion in order to assess the plurality of responses the human corpse triggers in Varano's *Visioni*, Fiorentino's *Elegie*, and Leopardi's *Appressamento*. The negotiation these texts undertake between the uncanniness of death, the moral teachings of organised religion, and the normativity of Classicism, results in an unstable mixture of marvel and terror, repulsion and fascination. Exploring this mixture means, also, to disclose its 'power of horror'.

At the same time, as stated above, the primary strategy adopted by Varano, Fiorentino, and Leopardi for challenging the problem of representing death relies in their intertextual relationship with Italy's lyric tradition, and particularly with Dante. Every new composition, as Harold Bloom famously maintains, is an adoption, manipulation, alteration, or assimilation of literary predecessors in terms of its content, literary style, or form.[55] This is the basis of the concept of 'literary influence'. However, the study of 'influence' has been gradually replaced by the concept of 'reception', privileging, instead, reaction, opinion, orientation, and critique, thus engendering a shift in perspective from

---

[53] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 207.

[54] See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

[55] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.

author-centric to reader-centric.[56] In order to address this aspect, I will make frequent references to Hans Robert Jauss's 'reading response theory', providing a useful framework for discussing the ways my authors 'received' Dante's work (the 'influencer') and the representation of the 'abject' it contains, in both a direct and indirect way, and used it to build their own poems.[57] According to Jauss, each text is unfinished in that it carries potentialities that other readers can adopt and develop in new creations: it 'presupposes a dialogical and at once process-like relationship between work, audience, and new work that can be conceived in the relations between message and receiver as well as between question and answer, problem and solution'.[58] Moving from these premises, I will show how Varano, Fiorentino and Leopardi exploit the potentialities of Dante's *Commedia* in order to erode the precepts of Classicism and incorporate the 'abject' coevally explored by Gothic literature.[59] Whereas, for Varano and Fiorentino, this influence is essentially direct, and aimed at forging a new vocabulary of 'vision' after centuries of Petrarchism, Leopardi's case is more problematic.[60] It is significant that when, in 1828, Leopardi published his *Crestomazia poetica*, he included parts of *Visioni* and *Elegie*. In a time when these works were no longer popular, Leopardi viewed them as models of good poetry, to the point of

---

[56] Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984); see also M. A. R. Habib, *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: A History* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

[57] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[58] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 19.

[59] On Varano's use of Dante's works, see Anna Maria Mazziotti, 'Per una rilettura delle "Visioni" di Alfonso Varano', *La rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 85 (1981), 114–30; Cerruti, Marco, 'La cultura cattolica. Alfonso Varano', in *Il Settecento e il primo Ottocento*, ed. by Marco Cerruti, Folco Portinari, Ada Novajra, in *Storia della civiltà letteraria italiana*, 8 vols (Turin: UTET, 1993), IV, pp. 225–35.

[60] An exhaustive account of 'Petrarchism' and its European circulation and influence is provided also in Isabella van Elferen, *Mystical Love in the German Baroque. Theology, Poetry, Music* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2009).

proposing them as models in an anthology aimed to would-be poets.[61] The fact that Leopardi included Varano's and Fiorentino's works in his exemplary collection suggests that he knew them well and that they exerted an influence on his own work: an influence that can be traced back to *Appressamento*. There, both Dante's *Commedia*, Varano's *Visioni*, and Fiorentino's *Elegie* play the role of the 'influencer', acting as the 'still-unfinished' texts that Leopardi 'receives' and bends to his own poetic agenda.

According to Jauss, to fully understand a literary work, the reader requires multiple readings of that work:

> understanding and interpretation as well as immediate reception and reflective exegesis of a literary text are at once blended in the course of interpretation, then here the horizon of a first, aesthetically perceptual reading will be distinguished from that of a second, retrospectively interpretive reading.[62]

Drawing from this approach, I undertake here a double reading of my primary sources. On the one hand, I adopt a literal mode of reading, locating texts in their historical context and within the reading practices implicitly or explicitly prescribed by authors. On the other, reading these texts in parallel, and within a network of influences, enables me to see them as a consistent and identifiable strain of death-inspired poetry, whose scope goes far beyond their overt and explicitly stated objectives. By so doing, I will show how Varano's *Visioni*, presented as a collection of *poesie d'occasione*, is instead a deeply organic work, consistently employing the tropes of religious poetry in order to account for the 'unspeakable' and 'abject' of death. I will investigate how Fiorentino's poems, presented as eulogies for his departed wife, negotiate the lyric tradition of Dante and Petrarch with the quintessentially modern evaluation of conjugal love and his own elaboration of loss. Finally, I maintain that Leopardi's *Appressamento*, rather than a literary experiment in the imitation of Dante, is a crucial text in

---

[61] Giacomo Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana poetica, cioè scelta di luoghi in verso italiano insigni o per sentimento o per locuzione, raccolti, e distribuiti secondo i tempi degli autori, dal conte Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Stella, 1828).

[62] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 139.

Leopardi's intellectual parable, signalling the abandonment of his deeply religious upbringing and his construction of a new self-performed identity as a poet.

4. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters, each of which deals with one of my primary sources, in chronological order: Chapter 1, discusses Varano's *Visioni sacre e morali*; Chapter 2, Fiorentino's *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie*; and Chapter 3, Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte*. The choice of a chronological structure is not only due to practical and intuitive reasons, but also helps in assessing the various modalities in which these works incorporated and re-used Dante's model: as a direct, explicit inspiration (Varano's *Visioni*), the object of a reconfiguration (Fiorentino's *Elegie*), and a complex texture of direct and indirect intertextual references (Leopardi's *Appressamento*).

Chapter 1 introduces Alfonso Varano and his religious poetry, analysing his twelve *Visioni* as an organic work dealing with the 'death of others'. In particular, it focuses on Varano's depiction of death as a universal phenomenon, involving men and women, as well as people coming from different social classes. The depiction of suffering human bodies is contrasted by the representation of disembodied souls, transfigured in the afterlife, an operation Varano pursues through a systematic reference to Dante's poetry.

The portrayal of illness introduces the second chapter, focused on Salomone Fiorentino's *Elegie* as an example of the 'death of the (beloved) other'. Compared to Varano's *Visioni*, *Elegie* testifies to a shift from the meditation on death as a universal phenomenon to the mourning for a single individual, the poet's dead wife, Laura. Fiorentino too draws from Dante's model, not only from the *Commedia* but also from the *Vita Nova*.[63] His response to Dante, however, involves two major elements of novelty. On the one hand, the beloved is not a distant, unattainable 'other' such as Beatrice, but rather the poet's wife,

---

[63] An up-to-date reading of *Vita Nova* as an elegiac work has been proposed in Stefano Carrai, *Dante elegiaco. Una chiave di lettura per la "Vita nova"* (Florence: Olschki, 2006).

thereby mirroring the new emphasis on conjugal love emerging in the long eighteenth century. On the other, the disembodied soul of Laura is not a mystical, unearthly guide, but rather a ghostly, haunting presence.

In the third and final chapter, focused on Giacomo Leopardi's *Appressamento*, I show how Dante, Varano and Fiorentino lead Leopardi to reconfigure the theme of 'one's own death'. By relying on a vast set of intertextual sources, Leopardi, in *Appressamento*, undertakes a broad autobiographical and literary experiment, employing the theme of death as a self-reflexive re-fashioning of his own performance as a poet, heralding one of the many 'mutations' of his literary persona.

Chapter 1

Alfonso Varano's *Visioni*: The Death of Others

Ricadute le nostre lettere (nella imitazione e studio degli stranieri),
son comparsi nella seconda metà del settecento e principio dell'ottocento
i nostri ultimi lavori d'arte.

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine Alfonso Varano's poetic collection *Visioni sacre e morali*. A successful and widely praised work in its own time, it is a prime example of Italian sacred and moral poetry of the late eighteenth century. I analyse how this work delineates an aesthetics of death that moves from the lyric canon and comes to charge corporeality and spectrality with 'abject' implications.

In particular, Varano subverts the 'canon of beauty' of lyric tradition, resulting in an emphasis of the pale colours typical of the dead rather than the blush and delicate nuances that embellish living bodies. Varano describes both male and female characters employing a new aesthetics in which subjects are portrayed according to the model of the bloodless Christ on the cross: 'pallido, lasso, esangue e quasi estinto' (V. 112). In so doing, Varano focuses on dead or dying characters by adopting an external narrative viewpoint. He represents the shifting attitudes towards death of his own time, a slow change of mentality that Philippe Ariès terms 'Thy Death'.

Ariès maintains that since the eighteenth century, Western societies started to give death a new meaning. Whereas in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period people shared a 'familiar resignation to the collective destiny of the species' and were particularly concerned with their own deaths and the

subsequent divine judgment, from the eighteenth century onwards people exalted death, 'dramatized it, and thought of it as disquieting and greedy'.[64] Death started to be conceived as more worrying when occurring to others rather than to one's self, and both the loss and the memory of the deceased fostered a new cult of tombs and cemeteries as well as the Romantic treatment of death in literature.[65] The change of perspective from 'Own Death' to 'Thy Death' supports Elisabeth Bronfen's theory of the external gaze on dead bodies, simultaneously perceived as objects of art and as examples of 'abjection'. By applying such perspective one can interpret Varano's poem through a new theoretical lens.

Visioni spectacularises the punishment of sinners, suffering, and death and opens the way for a second level of reading that goes beyond the moral aim stated in the title. As a 'responder', to speak in Jauss's terms, to Dante's *Commedia*, Varano privileges the more abject scenes of the poem over the purely mystical ones.[66] Thus, Varano empowers Italian literature with excessive descriptions and abject scenes, concealing them under the veil of religious messages, a legacy that will be inherited by later authors, including Leopardi.

Varano's poem includes both male and female characters, represented during their illnesses and in the transformations their bodies undergo before finally ascending to Heaven. Among them, noble and clerical figures, as well as ordinary people, are unified by an unscrupulous death which, as in medieval illustrations of the *Danse Macabre*, mows down everyone in his path without any consideration of class or gender. The spectral features that characters acquire *post-mortem* derive from Dante's example but, in Varano, they bring new, mixed feelings of fear and wonder to the reader's attention. The coexistence of traditional literary elements and a new focus on the reactions of the viewer (inside and outside the text) makes the experience of Italian sacred and moral poetry comparable to that of the contemporary Gothic aesthetics, which was becoming popular in the rest of Europe.

---

[64] Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, pp. 55–56.

[65] Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, p. 56.

[66] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 139.

The chapter is divided into six sections. Section 1.1, 'Varano and His *Visioni sacre e morali*', introduces the figure of Alfonso Varano, his popularity as an author of religious works, and the scholarly attention he has received so far. I outline *Visioni sacre e morali*, its structure and themes as well as its purpose, and account for its position in the late eighteenth-century Italian context. Section 1.2, 'Death in The Family', gives an account of *Visioni*'s external viewpoint, which is, as in Dante's *Commedia*, that of the pilgrim who has first-hand experience of the afterlife. In particular, this section features examples of the death of family members. Section 1.3, 'External Gaze and Abjection', focuses on the representation of the human body and the transformations it undergoes after death. I specifically focus on the portrayal of Amennira, Varano's beloved, in 'Visione XI'. Section 1.4, 'Catastrophes and The Human Body', examines Varano's treatment of the effects of natural disasters and epidemics on human bodies, highlighting the influence of Dante's *Inferno* on *Visioni*. The last section, 1.5, 'Visions of Spectral Bodies', discusses the nature of spectres, expounding the differences between classical terminology and Dantean examples of spectral images, while paying attention to aspects of excess and a mixed sensation of terror and marvel aroused in the pilgrim.

1.1   Varano and His *Visioni sacre e morali*

Alfonso Varano, born in Ferrara in 1705, was a member of the aristocracy and descended from the old dukes of Camerino.[67] The works Varano produced during his youth were mainly inspired by Virgil and the Classics: they include the eclogue *Il monumento di Dafne*, *La contesa*, *Gli auguri e gl'indovinamenti*, together with Petrarchan poems of philosophical content, written in line with the precepts of Arcadia.[68] In 1726, he was accepted as a member of the *Accademia della Crusca*.

---

[67] Riccardo Verzini, *Biografia di Alfonso Varano* in Varano, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Verzini, pp. 48–49. Most of the information on Varano's life is collected from Pompeo Litta, 'Varano di Camerino', in *Famiglie celebri italiane*, 16 vols (Milan: Ferrario, 1819–83), III, p. 47.

[68] Eclogues and early works are contained in the second volume of Alfonso Varano, *Opere poetiche*, 4 vols (Venice: Stamperia Palese, 1805) which includes *Rime giovanili*, *Rime pastorali*, *Rime profane e sacre*, *Rime anacreontiche* and *Rime scherzevoli*.

Among his most valuable works are two tragedies in the classical style, *Demetrio* (1749) and *Giovanni di Giscala* (1754), which were praised both by contemporary authors and the public. Nevertheless, his most acclaimed work is *Visioni sacre e morali*. Varano may have started to conceive this project as early as 1739, probably inspired by reading *La Provvidenza* (1724–1739) by Gasparo Leonarducci.[69] Evidence of a first draft of his second vision, however, suggests the date of composition was 1752.[70] The first printing of one of his visions, which would later become 'Visione XII' and was dedicated to the death of Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor, was likely issued in 1768.[71] Varano's last work is entitled *Agnese martire del Giappone*, a tragedy dedicated to Pope Pius VI. Varano spent the last part of his life refining and publishing his works.[72]

As far as Varano's reception is concerned, Stefano Strazzabosco, in his informative introduction to his recent edition of Varano's *Visioni*, explains that the author had many imitators, as *Visioni* was a highly admired work.[73] Strazzabosco maintains that the 'moda varaniana', as he calls it, had begun even before the publication of *Visioni*, and he lists a number of admirers including: Alessandro Volta (1745-1827), who, in 1787, wrote a short poem in *terzine varaniane* to celebrate the ascent of De Saussure to the peak of Mont Blanc; Antonio di Gennaro (1718-1791), who produced ten visions modelled on Varano's *Visioni*; Francesco Gianni (1750-1822) and his *La madre ebrea nell'assedio di Gerosolima* (1795); Ambrogio Viale (1769-1805), with his work *Il solitario delle Alpi* (1793); and Salomone Fiorentino with his *Poesie* (1815).[74]

---

[69] Stefano Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', in Alfonso Varano, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Stefano Strazzabosco (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo/Ugo Guanda Editore, 2007), pp. IX-LXXXIII (p. XII).

[70] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', p. XII.

[71] Alfonso Varano, *La Cristiana Apoteosi di Francesco I Imperatore dè Romani sempre Augusto* (Ferrara: Giannantonio Coatti, 1768).

[72] Other information on Varano's life is to be found in Francesco Reina, 'Notizie intorno alla famiglia, alla vita, ed agli scritti di A. Varano', in *Opere scelte con la vita del Varano scritta da F. Reina*, (Milan: Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1818), pp. III–XVI (p. VII).

[73] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', p. XVII.

[74] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione' p. XVII.

The popularity of Alfonso Varano's work is also evident from the large number of editions of *Visioni* across the decades of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The first complete edition was published posthumously in 1789, in three volumes, by the Stamperia Reale of Parma, in sextodecimo format. Other editions followed in various locations throughout Italy, and the size of the books fluctuated between octavo and sextodecimo, with the exception of a few in smaller formats.[75] This data allows us to understand how wide Varano's reception and acceptance were among the public of his time and beyond. His popularity can also be assessed by the type of publication in question, as revealed by the very title *Visioni sacre e morali*. Writing on sacred and moral matters was a consolidated practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and bore a twofold objective: the adjective 'sacred' stressed the focus on revealed religion, while the adjective 'moral' emphasised its applicability to everyday life.[76] Given this duality, Varano communicates two different levels of experience to the reader: one which is secular, corporeal, and painful; another which is otherworldly, spiritual, and grandiose.[77] However, his type of *visio* is different from the Biblical one – which is nevertheless his model – since it does not consist of true revelation from God, but rather contains artificial revelations, more akin to a rhetorical practice, matching the taste of the contemporary

---

[75] The complete list of subsequent editions of Varano's *Visioni sacre e morali* is as follows: a reprint of the first edition appeared in 1801, printed by the Stamperia del Gabinetto Letterario in Genoa; the second edition dates back to 1805 by the Stamperia Palese in Venice; then another followed in 1807 by Stamperia del Majno in Piacenza; another in 1818 by Società Tipografica dei Classici Italiani in Milan; the following was published in 1820 by Tipografia Picotti in Venice; finally two more were printed in 1827 both in Milan, one by Società Tipografica dei Classici Italiani (in 24°) and the other by Nicolò Bettoni. Other editions over the nineteenth century are: 1827 in Reggio Emilia by Fiaccadori; 1834 in Milan by Silvestri and by Tipografia Fusi; 1838 in Venice by Girolamo Tasso (in 24°); 1886 in Turin by Tipografia Salesiana Oratorio San Francesco.

[76] Examples of sacred and moral works before Varano are, among others, Bernardo Morando's *Poesies sacre e morali* (1662) and Giacomo Lubrano's *Scintille poetiche o poesie sacre e morali* (1690). Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', p. XXXV.

[77] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', p. XXXVI.

public.[78] Apart from the Catholic parenetic tradition to which Varano's *Visioni* subscribes, the reception of this work was also considerable due to the fact that each individual vision was conceived for a particular occasion. The twelve visions consist of six lyrics *in morte* of someone; two lyrics on moral and theological matters; two lyrics on natural disasters; and two encomiastic lyrics.[79] Strazzabosco explains that these texts were originally conceived as *poesie d'occasione*, and that Varano gathered them in order to produce a collection of works that he intended to have the same cultural and moral impact on his readers as Dante's *Commedia* had in the Middle Ages. The coherence Varano longed for is conveyed by the constant presence of the poetic self, his own questions for the otherworldly guides – with the aim of clarifying the doctrinal aspects he presented in his work – together with the recursion of specific rhetorical devices, and the progressive order of the visions themselves.[80]

Varano's poetic project consists in a poetic experiment combining the revelations of religion ('semplici verità dei dommi cattolici')[81] and the focus on reason of the Enlightenment age. To come to an acceptance of the higher truths of faith Varano uses both reason, which moderates passions, and science, inquiring into the laws of nature. Varano employs a dramatic style, and the sequence of the visions organically describes the spiritual path of the soul from the 'captivity' of the flesh to the freedom of God's eternal bliss. All the poems

---

[78] Northrop Frye, *Il grande codice. La Bibbia e la letteratura*, trans. by Giovanni Rizzoni (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), pp. 54–55.

[79] The 'in morte' visions are: 'Visione I', on the death of monsignor Bonaventura Barberini; 'Visione II', on the death of Anna Enrichetta di Borbone; 'Visione III', on the death of Cardinale Cornelio Bentivoglio; 'Visione VI', on the death of Maria Anna d'Asburgo; 'Visione VIII', on the death death of Felicita d'Este-Borbone; 'Visione XI', on the death of Amennira. Visions on moral and theological matters are: 'Visione IV', on true and false honor; 'Visione X', on the divine Providence that defeats Death. Visions on natural disasters are: 'Visione V', on the plague of Messina; 'Visione VII', on the earthquake of Lisbon. Visions with an encomiastic purpose are: 'Visione IX', on the victory of the Austrian army against Prussia; 'Visione XII', on the apotheosis of Emperor Francis I.

[80] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', p. XXXVIII.

[81] Alfonso Varano, 'Discorso dell'autore', in Varano, *Visioni*, ed. by Verzini, p. 83.

in the collection, composed of triplets in Dantean rhyme, have as a common thread the commemoration of the death of a public, noble, or religious figure.

1.1.1 Varano's Reception and Use of Dante

Renzo Negri considers Varano the precursor of the so-called eighteenth-century 'visionisti', acknowledging his closeness to Dante's poetry, which he, consequently, contributed to bring back into fashion.[82] However, Negri argues for the originality of Varano's contribution, denying any derivation from European sepulchral trends, which only arrived in the Italian context in the 1770s. The genesis of Varano's *Visioni,* meanwhile, can be dated to between 1749 and 1766.[83] According to Negri, Varano chose the canonised genre of *visio* because it allowed him to convey the rigour of Catholicism, while remaining within the boundaries of the Italian poetic tradition.[84] At the same time, the reemployment of both the genre of the Medieval *visio* and of Dante's style, allowed Varano to strongly support the power of religious poetry, openly polemicising with Voltaire. In the preface to his work, Varano makes a statement in favour of a poetry of Christian inspiration, arguing against the thesis exposed by Voltaire in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751).[85] In his 'Discorso dell'autore' introducing *Visioni*, Varano criticises Voltaire's thought in these terms: 'Egli è un grande errore […] il pensare, che gli argomenti cristiani possano convenire alla poesia così come quelli del paganesimo, la mitologia de' quali, quanto dilettevole, altrettanto falsa, animava tutta la natura'.[86] While Voltaire's position is that Christian topics do not suit the genre of poetry, which requires pagan

---

[82] Negri, *Gusto e poesia delle rovine*, p. 85.

[83] Negri, *Gusto e poesia delle rovine*, p. 86.

[84] Negri, *Gusto e poesia delle rovine*, p. 87.

[85] According to Varano's reconstruction, Voltaire criticised Antoine Godeau's work *I Fasti della Chiesa* (originally *Histoire de l'Eglise* published in Paris, 1633) claiming that the author mistakenly thought he could equal Ovid's *Fasti*. Voltaire, therefore, argues that the purpose of poetry is to delight and deceive, as it is made up of falsehoods arranged with beautiful words.

[86] Varano, 'Discorso dell'autore', p. 83.

mythology instead, Varano offers Dante as an example of a poet who speaks of religious themes without resorting to mythology:

> […] non è egli un quadro perfetto di poesia la descrizione che ci fa Dante nel suo canto dell'Inferno del conte Ugolino e de' suoi figli carcerati dall'arcivescovo di Pisa? Non è animata la natura a scorgervi entro il dolore e l'orrore nel loro più fiero aspetto, senza il soccorso della mitologia?[87]

Varano insists that poetry can successfully have God and religion as subject matters and that: 'può col velame delli versi strani, come dice il nostro Dante, rappresentarci il vero e il sacro nobilmente e dilettevolmente indoleggiato co' suoi colori'.[88] In order to corroborate his thesis, Varano cites from Dante's *Commedia* and exemplifies his point by referring to *Inferno* XXXIII where the tale of Count Ugolino is depicted in all its pain and horror.

Despite the widely recognised reinstatement of Dante's poetry as a model for religious subject matter, the Ugolino episode appears, at first, to be a fairly weak example. The episode is, in fact, hardly related to religious themes at all, and Varano seems to rather suggest that excessive, vivid, crude, and abject representations (as described in Ugolino's episode) are the elements that allow sacred and moral matters to be poetry more than pious and mystical ones. Varano lived in a historical period in which the controlling power of the Church was a combination of brutality and blissfulness.[89] Religious discourse served as a complex, always evolving, and self-interested, 'instrument of ideological and social control, an effective means of communication between ascendant and dominated social groups', as expressed by Roger Price.[90] It provided an ever-

---

[87] Varano, 'Discorso dell'autore', p. 84.

[88] Varano, 'Discorso dell'autore', p. 84.

[89] A study from Piero Camporesi well explains how Hell was long conceived and feared by believers; see Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*, trans. by Lucinda Byatt (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); originally *La Casa dell'Eternità* (Milan: Garzanti, 1987).

[90] Roger Price, *The Church and the State in France, 1789–1870: "Fear of God is the Basis of Social Order"* (Cham: Springer, 2017), p. 2.

present means of containing the potential for subversion and disorder, and of preserving 'hegemony' without recourse to 'coercion'. The idea behind sacred and moral literature was both to admonish those who sin and to scare them with images of pain and suffering, but also to contrast such horrific pictures with the marvel of bliss. After all, even though the eighteenth century is the cradle of the Enlightenment, that is 'nothing without a darkness to enlighten'.[91] Therefore, to make the promise of heavenly bliss stand out, it was necessary to emphasise the grossness of God's punishing pain, an approach which ultimately explains Varano's reception of Dante's goriest traits and his reference to the brutal episode of Ugolino rather than a more mystical and religious one.

Varano's revival of Dante's lexicon and imagery is particularly important, considering that, for centuries, Dante had been excluded from the Italian lyric canon due to his obscurity, gloominess, wildness and difficulty, characteristics that did not match the division of genres established in the Renaissance.[92] During that time, Bembo signalled Dante's excesses in matters of both form and content.[93] For Bembo, 'Dante's insistence on dealing with every possible subject, including science, philosophy and theology, had done inestimable damage to the poem's verbal texture, and had disrupted all sense of stylistic harmony and decorum'.[94] Therefore, since he believed that Dante's language was not pure enough, Bembo discouraged poets from using him as a linguistic model. A quick examination of Dante's reception through centuries shows how marginal Dante's work had been, being finally rediscovered and 'assaulted', as Calcaterra expressively put it, in the late eighteenth century.[95] Indeed, in the sixteenth

---

[91] Emma Galbally and Conrad Brunström, '"This dreadful machine": the spectacle of death and the aesthetics of crowd control', in *The Gothic and Death*, ed. by Carol Margaret Davison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) pp. 63–75 (p. 63).

[92] Fabio Camilletti, 'Later Reception from 1481 to the Present', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's "Commedia"*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Baranski and Simon Gilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 259–70 (p. 259).

[93] Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 1–19.

[94] Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy*, p. 1.

[95] Carlo Calcaterra, *Il Parnaso in rivolta. Barocco e Antibarocco nella poesia italiana* (Milan: Mondadori, 1940), pp. 259–282.

century, Petrarchism was prevalent and prevented any re-evaluation of Dante, who remained a relatively marginal presence in Italian literature. However, there were Dantean echoes in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* as well as in other sixteenth-century literary works, such as in the poems of Michelangelo.[96] Despite Bembo's position, the *Commedia* was read and studied in the Renaissance and so was Dante's lyric poetry, even if Petrarch was the main model for lyric poetry. The seventeenth century marks the lowest point in the history of Dante's fame, for his *Commedia* was considered not only an irrelevant 'relict of a past age', but also a potentially anti-clerical work, and therefore not welcomed during a period of strict censorship and absolute monarchy that did not conceive the separation between secular and religious powers (separation that was firmly illustrated in the *Commedia*).[97]

Finally, in the eighteenth century, Dante's *Commedia* was considered a powerful and thought-provoking historical document for those intellectuals who developed an interest in the history of the Italian Middle Ages. This approach matched the European trend towards the historicization of national literary narratives, shedding light on the Middle Ages as the cradle of individual national identities. However, from a literary perspective, the *Commedia* was generally seen as a 'barbaric' and chaotic work, characterised by verbal excess and uninhibited imagination, traits that would become the basis for the turn between Neoclassicism and Romanticism.[98] As an example of this conception, Giambattista Brocchi claimed that Dante employs 'vocaboli barbari inventati a capriccio, espressioni oscure, poca esattezza di disegno e di condotta'.[99] Dante's depiction as a rough and 'Gothic' author started to fade in the 1760s when the

---

[96] Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy*, p. 10.

[97] Camilletti, 'Later Reception from 1481 to the Present', p. 260.

[98] Camilletti, 'Later Reception from 1481 to the Present', p. 261.

[99] The quote is displayed in Michele Barbi, *Problemi di critica dantesca* (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), pp. 259–282.

modern theorization of the sublime, the Gothic vogue and the advent of Romanticism across Europe cast new light on the gloominess of the *Commedia*.[100]

Varano's *Visioni* is variously indebted to Dante's *Commedia*. First, for the overall structure: both poems involve a first-person pilgrim, the poetic self, who experiences an otherworldly journey towards God. Second, both Dante and Varano are accompanied, as characters, by different spiritual guides, who, in certain cases, are their ancestors. Specifically, this happens in Varano's 'Visione V' and in Dante's *Paradiso* XV, XVI, XVII. As his spiritual guide Varano chooses his ancestor Camilla Battista Varano da Camerino (1458–1524), an Italian princess and member of the 'Ordine di Santa Chiara' as nun and later abbess, while Dante depicts his ancestor Cacciaguida degli Elisei.[101] Finally, and most relevantly, the two authors share an interest in bodily suffering. This is exemplified by the hellish punishments in Dante's *Inferno* according to the rule of *contrapasso*, which reflects the bad deeds committed on earth in the afterlife. In Varano's poem, God implements punishments on both the souls of sinners and on the living: such penalties are intended to represent admonitions for worshippers and convey a diffuse sense of excess and abjection.

---

[100] Camilletti, 'Later Reception from 1481 to the Present', p. 262. Carlo Dionisotti also noted that from this moment on, Dante suddenly was brought back to the top in the Italian literature, not as the old progenitor but as the lively teacher of a new way of writing poems, allowing exiles such as Ugo Foscolo to reform the national cult. See Carlo Dionisotti, 'Varia fortuna di Dante', in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), pp. 255–303. Furthermore, Dante's reception among intellectuals from Northern Italy has been the subject of various studies, especially around the city of Verona where Scipione Maffei was considered the promoter of the cult of Dante, followed by Giulio Cesare Becelli, Rosa Morando, Giuseppe Torelli, Giovanni Iacopo Dionisi, and Bartolomeo Perazzini, among others. For a more detailed analysis of this matter see Luca Mazzoni, 'Dantisti veronesi del Settecento', in *Dante a Verona 2015-2021*, ed. by Edoardo Ferrarini, Paolo Pellegrini, and Simone Pregnolato (Ravenna: Longo, 2018), pp. 153–167.

[101] Alfonso Varano includes a few notes on his ancestor and her family's tragical story, in his *Visioni*. Further details in section 1.2.

1.1.2 The Death of Others

The following sections aim to show the ways in which Varano portrays death befalling various characters, both men and women, across his twelve visions. Since Varano's work carries a moral purpose and praises the good, Christian conduct of noble personalities, the portrayal of some of the characters is aimed at providing the readers with models of exemplary Christian deaths.[102] Varano also represents the violent death of family members, a theme that recurs in Fiorentino and Leopardi and which carries a great deal of abjection. 'Visione III' recounts the violent death of an unnamed woman who tries to have an abortion, kills her father, and finally, after discovering the cadaver of her lover, commits suicide, and, in 'Visione V', Varano reveals some details of his family tragedy. The representation of corpses in excessive detail, as well as harrowing images of suffering are indebted to Dante's infernal environment. These Dantean scenes are then 'completed', as Jauss would say it, with a sense of abjection affecting the external viewer involved in the narrative (at times Varano's poetic self, at times other characters in the episode).

In my analysis I also pay attention to the representation of dead bodies in decay, as happens in 'Visione XI', which features the remains of Amennira. Here, the initial funereal setting evokes a passage from Dante's *Commedia*, though the scene is altered and 'completed' by Varano, underpinning Jauss' reader response theory according to which every 'original' text is interpolated, altered, and completed by the reader/author to pursue new aims. The portrayal of Amennira's corpse, redolent of medieval themes such as visual depictions of the dead, allows me to stress the dual response aroused in the external observer, namely repulsion and attraction. Such a reaction derives, according to Kristeva, from the sense of abjection that pervades the subject/observer, because 'we are impelled to move away, but then to look back, setting up a cycle of repulsion

---

[102] It is the case of Archduchess Maria Anna of Austria, main character of 'Visione VI', and Marie Louise Élisabeth of France, whose story takes place in 'Visione X'.

and attraction, fear and intrigue'.[103] Varano depicts the same repulsion in the eyes of his poetic self entering the city of Messina, where half-alive people affected by the plague display unimaginable wounds and lie among the piled up bodies of other victims. By using a poetic language rich in excess, defined as a trespassing of rationality (in 'Visione V' fire is depicted as 'vampe ingorde' (389) and tools to remove cadavers from the street are described as 'lorde di melma'(391–92)), Varano creates a text with a sacred and moral purpose that does not, however, renounce a vivid expressiveness characterised by 'abjection'.

Similar depictions of death allow us to reflect on the application and subversion of the canon of beauty and highlight other influences from Dante. Varano's writings shed light on the revival of the crudest features of traditional literature but also reveal an innovative taste for dramatic and expressive representation. The sense of abjection seems not to conform to Pozzi's analysis of the canon of 'beauty', an element through which bodies have been traditionally evaluated and represented in lyric tradition. I show that Varano highlights different nuances of colours and brightness and breaks the traditional representations of proportions and light, heralding a new, different aesthetic taste.

Varano's *Visioni* depicts a variety of characters, including kings and queens, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. However, the most vivid and abject descriptions are those referring to female figures. This is because, as Bronfen explains, the woman's dead body represents a work of art, and is as if musealized, it is the one that best lends itself to contemplation.[104] Showing the woman's suffering makes her more virtuous in the eyes of the reader, as will be emphasised in literature and visual art during the nineteenth-century 'cult of invalidism'.[105]

---

[103] Rina Arya, *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 2.

[104] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. XIII, 164.

[105] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 25.

The following examination of the death of others in Varano's poetry will show that he is not concerned with representing his own death and his own ascension to Paradise. He does not intend to depict his own death as exemplary, but rather chooses the praise of illustrious personages or his own inventiveness (in the case of unfamiliar characters) to provide examples of Christian deaths, while still highlighting their abject aspects. Death loses its character of familiarity, ceases to be the 'Tamed Death', as Ariès calls it, and becomes a moment of rupture in the everyday, for instance when it involves murder, plague, or natural disaster.[106] Death also takes on heroic traits: the dying fight against illness or are victims of private vendettas. Even the bystanders are no longer participants in the event but become spectators: death is a spectacle because it is observed from outside and concerns 'the other'.

1.2   Death in The Family

The paternal figure appears in Varano's poetic collection in 'Visione III', entitled 'Per la morte del cardinale Cornelio Bentivoglio', where Varano's poetic self meets the lustful and learns of the punishments inflicted on them. There, he depicts one of the most powerful infernal settings across *Visioni*. The lustful are so powerfully 'fleshy' that they look like completely corporeal spirits, unlike the souls that the pilgrim encounters in other visions. Varano's poetic self, as an external viewer, looks surprised by the sinners' materiality:

> Benché sciolte dall'estinte salme
>   pur parean, per mostrarmi il sommo affanno,
>   aver corpo, e agitar l'anche e le palme.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, III. 319–21)</div>

Souls are understood to be unbound from bodies, 'salme', but due to their suffering, 'sommo affanno', the pilgrim thinks they are corporeal, 'aver corpo'. Varano lingers on the description of the punishments that sinners suffer *inside*

---

[106] Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, pp. 11–14.

their bodies. The lustful, consumed by the flame of their passion, burn in the infernal flames, and Varano compares them to living furnaces:

> Di fuoco eran grondanti e piene
> le viscere, e scorrea bollente il sangue,
> come squagliato bronzo, entro le vene.
>
> (*Visioni*, III. 343–345)

Varano's interest in the structure of the human body emerges in a vivid image where the fire synesthetically drips from the bowels, while blood boiling like liquefied metal flows through the veins of the damned souls. This image evokes Dante's 'picciol fiumicello | lo cui rossore ancor mi raccapriccia' (*Inferno*, XIV. 77–78) described as a river of blood where flames are extinguished. The chromatic intensity dampens with the sinners' appearance, for they have 'faccia immortalmente esangue' (III. 348). Varano derives other infernal elements from Dante's *Commedia*, including the voracious snake featuring in *Inferno* XXIV. In this canto, Dante portrays thieves as looped in a vicious circularity, and assimilated to snakes:

> Con serpi le man dietro avean legate;
> quelle ficcavan per le ren la coda
> e 'l capo, ed eran dinanzi aggroppate.
> Ed ecco a un ch'era da nostra proda,
> s'avventò un serpente che 'l trafisse
> là dove 'l collo a le spalle s'annoda.
>
> (*Inferno*, XXIV. 94–99)

The first tercet shows the intertwining of the sinuous body of the snake with the human body, which is, though, imprisoned by the snake's coils. Then, one of the snakes pierces a sinner with a bite between neck and shoulders. Varano takes from the Dantean text the element of the snake, but he employs it as a symbol of lasciviousness: the snake entangles the human body as well as passion entangles the lustful. Varano's poetic self declares:

> Intollerabil più d'altro martiro
>
> > apparia d'essi entro al squarciato petto
>
> > un serpe al cor attorcigliato in giro.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, III. 352–54)</div>

Dante's terms 'legate', 'aggroppate', and 'annoda' reflect in Varano's 'attorcigliato', and the expression 'in giro' emphasises the episode's lustful entanglement.

The gruesome image of a serpent piercing the breasts of sinners grieving in a fiery sea 'mar cocente' (III. 358) prepares the way for the following scene in which Varano's poetic self meets a woman writhing in pain:

> Vidi una Donna a un igneo scoglio in cima,
>
> > che stridea lacerata in modo atroce
>
> […]
>
> e con dirotto pianto e orribil voce
>
> > tentava il serpe sviluppar dal seno
>
> […]
>
> > sdegnosa si torcea, come compressa
>
> > vipera cui rigonfia ira il veleno'.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, III. 373–381)</div>

Bitten by the snake and almost a snake herself, as if metamorphosed into a viper, the writhing woman has no name. She tells the pilgrim that she was the only daughter of a noble family and that she seduced many men and subjected them to her will, thanks to her beauty. Varano describes her with a 'bieca faccia' (388–89), 'abbronzati diti' (392), and 'le sparse sovra gli occhi ignite chiome' (393). The scattered hair is naturally reminiscent of the blond locks of Petrarch's Laura, while, as Strazzabosco notes, the only previous occurrence in poetry of the term 'ignito' is found in Dante, 'ignito sì che vincea 'l mio volto' (*Paradiso*, XXV. 26).[107] Both the adjectives 'abbronzati' and 'ignite' provide the reader with a

---

[107] Varano, *Visioni*, ed. by Strazzabosco, p. 113, see the note regarding line 393.

chromatically bright image in shades of red. However, the woman's colours are not real and do not allow for a parallel with the traditional canon of beauty, because they are tinged with the infernal fire that gives them their red colouring, a nuance which is rare in poetry.[108]

The woman's offence against her relatives is narrated from this moment onwards in the form of a first-person narrative. Surrendering to the passion for one of her suitors, she becomes pregnant and wants to get rid of the burden she is carrying.

> E tal dell'error mio frutto congiunsi
>   alle viscere mie, che d'atra fama
>   pel vicin danno a inorridirmi io giunsi.
> Nel duro stato, e in sì discorde brama
>   d'amar chi m'offendea, d'odiar l'offesa
>   col dubbio cor, mentre odia a un tempo ed ama,
> tentai mille arti ond'io, già grave resa,
>   scuotessi il peso accusator dal grembo;
>   ma il colpo errò nell'omicida impresa.
>
> (*Visioni*, III. 427–35)

Again, the poem focuses on the woman's body by speaking of the viscera, the innermost and deepest part of the body for which the woman feels repulsion, even in Hell. The repugnance felt by the mother towards her child who disturbs her interiority and identity offers a clear representation of the concept of abjection expressed by Kristeva, who insists on the inter-uterine relationship of mother and child. Kristeva explains that psychoanalysts speak of an 'object' as it is elaborated within the Oedipal triangle, namely an object of desire. Within a simple family triad, the mother constitutes the prototype of the object. Kristeva maintains that 'toward the mother there is convergence not only of survival needs but of the first mimetic yearnings. She is the other subject, an object that guarantees my being as subject'.[109] At the same time, the existence of another

---

[108] See Macinante, *"Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi"*.

[109] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 32.

being within her anchors her interiorly in the 'Other'.[110] The presence within the mother of a double otherness, that of the father and that of the child, would appear to her as a mutilation of her 'self'. In order not to renounce her 'self', the mother resorts to abortion as in the case of the woman in Varano's 'Visione III'. Abortion, therefore, symbolises the woman's desire to remove from herself something that she perceives as extraneous and cumbersome.[111]

The semantic field of the last tercet is that of weight embodied by the heaviness of the child in the maternal womb, which parallels the snake coiled around the woman. The terms 'grave' and 'peso' contrast with the action 'scuotessi', emphasising the effort of shaking off a weight too heavy to be thrown away. The term 'grave' meaning pregnant can be found in *Paradiso* XVI: 'al parto in che mia madre, ch'è or santa, | s'alleviò di me ond' era grave' (35–36).

The woman confesses her infanticidal intent, 'omicida impresa' (435) as Varano calls it, and admits that the abortion, attempted with all possible methods 'tentai mill'arti', fails. The woman, not satisfied with what Varano describes as the attempted murder of her child, sets out to kill her father, who is obstructing the marriage between her and the man she loves.

> E contro al padre mio cruda divenni
>   tigre, e con mani in mal oprar non rozze,
>   quello, ond'io nacqui, di tradir sostenni;
> ch'ei sol potea le temerarie e sozze
>   mie fiamme vendicar col sangue reo,
>   e a me vietar le inonorate nozze.
>
> (*Visioni*, VI. 439–444)

---

[110] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 54.

[111] On the other hand, premature death within the womb can also be interpreted as an altruistic gesture from the mother, and a blessing and a deliverance for the future unborn child, who is not exposed to external suffering. A similar interpretation can be read in the verses of an Italian translator and poet Francesca Roberti-Franco in her 'La tomba di una partoriente, VII meditazione' in *I funerali del signor Jerningham, I Sepolcri del signor Hervey e l'Eternità del signor Haller* (Padua: Conzatti, 1781): '[…] Era per lui | minor sciagura nel materno seno | restar sepolto, che vedersi in preda | a' fieri venti in Ocean turbato, | in balia de la forte e di Lei privo | de' primi passi suoi fermo sostegno | e del suo navigar fidata scorta' (20–26).

The woman undergoes a further transformation: whereas in Hell she metamorphoses into a viper, in life she embodies an aggressive tiger. The unnatural transformation of the woman into a beast effectively represents an example of grotesque excess, and even more so if one thinks about the origin of the term 'grotesque'. The term emerged from the famous excavation in fifteenth-century Rome of Nero's *Domus Aurea*, across the Coliseum, where a series of unusual, mysterious drawings combining vegetation, animal, and human bodies were found and it derives from the Italian term for 'cave' ('grotta'). The category of grotesque was later used to indicate a 'repository of unnatural, frivolous, and irrational connections between things which nature and classical art kept scrupulously apart' thus emerging 'in relation to the norms which it exceeded'.[112] The term entered scholarly discourses on womanhood thanks to the work of Mary Russo who intermingles 'the cavernous anatomical female body' with the Kristevan category of 'abjection'.[113] The representation of the unnamed woman in Varano's 'Visione III' as a 'cruda tigre' clearly shows the emphasis of the author on the 'excessive' feral representation of the woman, also depicted when trying to shake off her progeny — 'scuotessi il peso accusator dal grembo' — as beasts shake off excess water when wet. The grotesque, when considered as a bodily category (as Russo does), emerges in the text as a 'deviation from the norm' that brings a woman depicted as feral to commit a feral action.[114] In the excerpt, the woman kills her father for fear that he might avenge the flames (those of amorous passion) which set her on fire and were the cause of her pregnancy. The filthy nature the woman attributes to herself evokes the filthy mode of poetry that Dante articulates in *Inferno* and which will be analysed in

---

[112] Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

[113] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, p. 1.

[114] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, p. 11. Russo explains that exceeding and transgressing the norm can lead to errors, and for this reason she theorises the category of female grotesque as crucial for identity-formation for both men and women 'as a space for risk and abjection', p. 12.

more detail in Section 1.5.[115] The only parts of the female body mentioned in these tercets are the hands, not inexperienced in performing terrible deeds — 'mani in mal oprar non rozze' — as Varano expresses with an effective lithote. The tragic story continues with the woman's poisoning of her father:

> […] Egli perdeo
>> la vita col velen ch'empia gli porsi,
>> e fra sì ingrate braccia alfin cadeo
>>> (Visioni, III. 445–7)

Varano constructs the poetic narrative from the woman's point of view, presenting both her inner thoughts and her view of the exterior world, which makes the sequence of killings visible. After her father's death the woman faces her beloved's own fate:

> (…) e dell'Amante in vece
>> agli occhi il suo m'offrì cadaver muto,
> lacerato da quante a un corpo lece
>> in sé ricever piaghe, in cui le aperse
>> ferro ignoto, che fier scempio ne fece.
>>> (*Visioni*, III. 452–56)

Varano refers specifically to the woman's eyes, which witness the beloved's cadaver, killed by a stranger. The narrator describes the corpse as silent and torn by so many wounds as to call the remains of the body 'scempio'. This time, Varano describes the man's dead body and states that his limbs are livid, 'di pallor livido asperse membra' (457–58) and the woman's gaze recognises how graceful they seemed before, 'che pria parvermi sì leggiadre' (458).

---

[115] In his *Commedia* Dante dealt with murders of parents by their own children in *Inferno* XII. Here, he cursorily suggests that Azzo VIII, Lord of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio from 1293 to 1308, murdered his father Obizzo II d'Este: 'E quella fronte c'ha 'l pel così nero, | è Azzolino; e quell' altro ch'è biondo, | è Opizzo da Esti, il qual per vero | fu spento dal figliastro sù nel mondo' (*Inferno*, XII. 109–12).

A crucial point is represented here by the woman's gaze on the man's dead body, an unusual case. Bronfen's study, for example, investigates and explores how the woman's body is perceived by the external, often male gaze. Varano reverses the point of view and the woman, usually the observed object, becomes an observing agent. The focus of the excerpt is not displaying 'erasure of the feminine', rather 'metamorphosis of the masculine'.[116] In 'Visione III', Varano shows how women can turn from victims to executioners embodying savage animals, while at the same time being capable of mourning over a beloved cadaver: 'col guardo il cor attonito s'immerse' (459). However, Varano's feminine character seems to dismiss Bronfen's argument that 'every representation of dying is not violent precisely because it implies the safe position of a spectator ('voyeur')'.[117] The woman in 'Visione III' declares herself to be confused:

> E allor confusa dall'orride squadre
> de' miei delitti, e dall'amor rapito,
> e dall'agitatrice ombra del padre.
>
> (*Visioni*, III. 460–62)

Therefore, she takes a drastic decision, which does not imply her complacency towards the dead body of the lover:

> Piegai di morte al disperato invito,
> alla stessa feral tazza, che uccise
> il Genitor, io posi il labbro ardito.
>
> (*Visioni*, III. 463–465)

However, the suicide of the woman, who poisons herself by placing her lips on the cup with which she poisoned her father, the lips being another part of the body that makes its entry into poetry in a different way than tradition, shows

---

[116] The expression 'erasure of the feminine' derives from Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 40.

[117] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 44.

that if the death of a beautiful woman remains the most poetic topic of all, as Poe would have it, a man's is insupportable.[118] The male corpse in this episode does not look beautiful in its deathly pallor and, indeed, arouses repentance in the woman and leads her to take her own life. As if that were not enough, the bestial ferocity of the woman guilty of three murders (of her father, herself and, therefore, her child – in Varano's view) closes the episode with a last animal act: 'il manco afferrò braccio co' denti | rabida, e il morse' (496–97). The left arm concludes the sequence of body parts enumerated in these lines. The components of the so-called 'long canon' rarely enter poetry.[119] Varano's choice to include arms in his poetry once again symbolises his modernity, his desire to represent, with corporeality, a deeper complexity, for arms signify a maternal bond, rejection, and possession as in the case of the snakes.

A second family tragedy told from an external point of view is found in 'Visione V', 'Per la peste messinese e coll'apparizione della beata Battista Varano'. Here, Varano finds a way to include a small part of his family history, that of his ancestor Battista da Varano. I will discuss the description of her literary mystical apparition later (section 1.6, 'Visions of Spectral Bodies'), so as to focus here on the chronicle that Varano inserts in 'Visione V'. Camilla Varano was the daughter of noblewoman Cecchina di Maestro Giacomo and Giulio Cesare da Varano, the Duke of Camerino. Contrary to the wishes of his family, in 1481, Camilla entered the monastery of the Poor Clares at Urbino and took the name Battista. She was a prolific writer as testified by her works.[120] In Urbino she wrote the treatise *I ricordi di Gesù* (1483); a collection of poems entitled *Lauda*

---

[118] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', in *The Writer's Art. By Those Who Have Practiced It*, ed. by Rollo Walter Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), pp. 114–30.

[119] Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è?*, p. 13.

[120] Nonetheless, scholars have found some problems of attribution due to the study of apocryphal and dubious manuscript witnesses. See Silvia Serventi, 'Lo status questionis circa gli scritti di Battista Varano', in *Un desiderio senza misura. La santa Battista Varano e i suoi scritti, Atti della IV giornata di studio sull'Osservanza Francescana al femminile, 7 novembre 2009, Monastero Clarisse S. Chiara, Camerino*, ed. by Pietro Messa, Massimo Reschiglian, Clarisse di Camerino (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2010), pp. 99–120.

della visione di Cristo (1479-1481); and *Vita spirituale* (1491), her autobiography from 1466 to 1491, considered a jewel of art and of interior life.[121] Her masterpiece of spirituality is the treatise *I dolori mentali di Gesù* (1488) in which Battista recorded the revelation of the interior sufferings from an agonizing Jesus.[122]

Although a prolific writer, Battista relayed little information about her family, her education, or her life before 1466 and never mentioned nor commented on the murder of her father in any of her writings.[123] Yet, Varano does and, in the wake of Dante's *Commedia*, he incorporates chronicles in his poem. Battista tells the story of her family to Varano's poetic self during her apparition. The description of the violence suffered by her family members recalls other slaughtered bodies across *Visioni*.

> Vidi il diletto mio padre svenato
>> steso giacer nella funerea buca
>> di tre suoi figli trucidati a lato;
> perché crudeltate empia riluca
>> più in empia mano, udii del sangue sparso
>> vantarsi altier lo scellerato Duca.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 100–106)

---

[121] Paul Lachance, 'Battista da Varano (1458-1524): A Survey of Her Life and Writing as a Poor Clare Visionary', *Mystics Quarterly*, 20 (1994), no. 1, 19–25.

[122] An overview of Battista Varano's literary works can be found in: Camilla Battista da Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. by Giovanni Boccanera (Iesi: Scuola Tipografia Francescana, 1958); Camilla Battista da Varano, *Autobiografia e opere complete*, ed. by Silvano Bracci (Vicenza: Hamsa, 2009). Regarding *I dolori mentali di Gesù*, Alfonso Varano includes a note, in his *Visioni*, where clarifies the debated authorship of Battista, restating that she wrote the treatise after a revelation from Christ himself: 'E ad una ad una a me l'aspre diverse | pene dell'Alma afflitta e i moti amari, | dell'agitato immaginar scoverse. [...] | Quest'obbietto d'amor degno e di pianto, | che in carte il pinsi, e di quel poi ch'io scrissi | altri, che a Dio sì piacque, ébbene il vanto'. (*Visioni*, V. 121–23; 127–29).

[123] William V. Hudon, '"In The End, God Helped Me Defeat Myself": Autobiographical Writings by Camilla Battista da Varano', *Religions*, 9 (2018), no. 65, 1–21 (p. 2). As Hudon declares, details about Battista's life must be gleaned from various biographical studies that almost uniformly extol her devotional heroism and mystical gifts.

Giulio Cesare Varano, father of Battista Varano and lord of the city of Camerino, was murdered along with three of his sons in 1502 by Micheletto di Valenza, henchmen of Pope Alexander VI and his son Cesare Borgia.[124] The Varano dynasty was reintegrated into the state of Camerino shortly afterwards, thanks to the support of Pope Julius II. Varano writes that Battista's brothers were found 'a lato' of her father, because Venanzio, Annibale and Pirro Varano were murdered in Cattolica after their father was strangled in Camerino.[125] Battista, though, could not have witnessed her relatives' death, as she had to leave Camerino and find refuge in the village of Atri, in the Abruzzo region. Varano introduced first-person narration to obtain a more sorrowful and realistic account. The figure of Giulio Cesare Varano is presented as 'svenato', devoid of blood and already in the grave, next to the lifeless bodies of his three sons. The alliteration of the sound 'tr' ('tre' and 'trucidati') lends rawness and discomfort to the overall image and continues with the term 'crudelitate' which emphasises the cruelty of the action. Although the sources report that the death of the victims was by strangulation, Varano brings an element of excess to the event by employing terms such as 'svenato' and 'sangue sparso' accentuated by the alliteration of the letter 's'. Varano also pays homage to his ancestor by depicting an episode from her life, the very vision of Christ that inspired her to write her most important work:

> E allora apparve a me, come se fosse
>   a riparar l'umana colpa accinto,
>   quei che a morir per noi pronto mostrosse
> pallido, lasso, esangue e quasi estinto
>   fra i pensier tetri, e per l'estremo affanno
>   di sanguigno sudor le membra tinto.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 109–114)

---

[124] In 1501 Duke Giulio Cesare Varano was excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI for hosting enemies of the pope and for allegedly assassinating a cousin of the pope. See Hudon, '"In The End, God Helped Me Defeat Myself"', pp. 2–3.

[125] Varano, *Visioni*, ed. by Strazzabosco, p. 208, see the comment on lines 97–105.

This sort of image is traditional in apologetic writings, although in her writings Battista maintains to have seen Christ from the back, in a dazzling garment of extraordinary whiteness.[126] The ascending climax in line 112 'pallido, lasso, esangue e quasi estinto' provides the reader with nuances of white, contrasting with the traditional bloodshed of line 114, describing the 'sanguigno sudor' that dyes his limbs.[127]

This image, which refers to the idea of a cloth soaked in blood, derives from Dante, *Inferno* V, 'noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno' (90), as noticed by Strazzabosco.[128] Nonetheless, Dante also employs the term in another text: Beatrice wears a gown of this colour on her first meeting, at the age of nine, with Dante, as we read in the *Vita Nova*: 'Apparve vestita di nobilissimo colore umile e onesto sanguigno, cinta e ornata alla guisa che alla sua giovanissima etade si convenia' (II. 3).[129] Beatrice reappears to Dante in the Eden dressed in a flame-red dress, which has dispelled the dark shadow conferred by the adjective 'sanguigno' (see *Purgatorio*, XXX. 33). Varano's reception of Dante's term 'sanguigno' might allude to the salvation and future beatitude of his ancestor Battista Varano, but also of all pious believers who follow the moral precepts with which he imbued his *Visioni*. A similar vivid visuality, in turn, will resurface in *Appressamento*, where Leopardi reports a high and unique density of terms referring to the semantic field of blood, perhaps carrying a less salvific meaning (see Chapter 3). Varano, a few lines later, reiterates the metaphor of painting when he writes that Battista wrote about the pains Christ revealed to her: 'in carte il pinsi' (V. 128).

---

[126] 'Stando un dì in orazione, et avendo sentito chiaramente che era stato ne l'anime mia, quando se voles partire da essa, me disse: "Si me voli vedere, guardame…" Era vestito de veste candidissime – simile biancheza non se trova in questo mondo – fine in terra… che era una cosa maravigliosa', da Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, pp. 33–34; for a modern Italian rendering see da Varano, *Autobiografia e opere complete*, pp. 127–28.

[127] The same expression 'sudor sanguigno' is employed in Vittorio Alfieri, *Saul*, ed. by Bruno Maier (Milan: Garzanti, 2015), II. 2.

[128] Varano, *Visioni*, ed. by Strazzabosco, p. 209, see the note about line 114.

[129] Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, ed. by Guglielmo Gorni (Turin: Einaudi, 1996).

From both excerpts emerges an external gaze which observes the lifeless body of another, albeit a close one. Such external observers, both Battista, who narrates, and the pilgrim, who listens to her story, do not consider the death of their dear ones as a sign of their own vulnerability and mortality. The modernity of such characters consists of showing their compound pain and accentuating the elements of abjection and exaggeration that make up the readers' tastes.

1.3   External Gaze and Abjection

Among his twelve *Visions* Varano includes poems *in morte* of illustrious people, such as monsignor Bonaventura Barberini ('Visione I'), Anne Henriette of France ('Visione II'), cardinal Cornelio Bentivoglio ('Visione III'), Maria Anna Archduchess of Austria ('Visione VI'), Maria Teresa Felicitas d'Este Duchess of Penthievre ('Visione VIII'), and Marie Louise Élisabeth of France ('Visione X'). Among others, Varano dedicates 'Visione XI' to the death of his beloved, Amennira. Given that Amennira is not a member of the aristocracy, nor is she in holy orders, but belongs to the ranks of ordinary people, 'Visione XI' does not consist of an encomiastic praise poem. Varano depicts sincere mourning, engaging the reader with an apparently authentic sorrow.

This section focuses solely on the case of Amennira, since it constitutes a prime example of a literary approach to death which combines traditional mourning for the beloved, modern attitudes towards the dead, and a new taste for provoking a mixed reaction of terror and wonder in the spectator. This composite reaction derives from the skilful use of elements that provoke abhorrence and disgust in those who witness the spectacle of death, but also exaggeration and excess, which enhance the spectacular nature of the event, arousing wonder in the audience/reader. The human body and its flesh are the objects around which more than half of the poem unfolds itself and onto which the gazes of the double external observer, Varano's poetic self's and that of the reader, are projected. It is only when the poem is coming to an end that a celestial vision appears in 'Visione XI' as Amennira herself ascends to Heaven. Before

her ascent, however, her body is portrayed in complete decay, according to the Baroque iconography of *memento mori.*

The seventeenth century saw an increase in the representation of bodies, and particular attention was reserved for religious people shaken by ecstatic raptures, tortured bodies of martyrs, and radiant bodies of saints.[130] In earlier European history, the body was conceived as the locus of rottenness and, at the same time, fertility, suffice to think about the fear of spontaneous generation which was partly dismantled by Francesco Redi and Lazzaro Spallanzani's studies.[131] During the Baroque age, both the macabre and the feeling of repugnance entered everyday life. As far as literature is concerned, writers emphasised physical suffering and abnormal details, such as severed heads, organs in putrefaction, blood, and wounds.[132] This trend made its way to Varano's poetry. The author vividly describes the decay of bodies due to death, diseases, and earthquakes, together with illustrations of people on the verge of death, and, contrastingly, portraying impalpable bodies ascending to God. As Cerruti underlines, macabre and sepulchral motifs, largely employed by Varano, were extremely popular among readers, for they met the collective sensibilities of his time.[133] A survey of Varano's private library reveals that among his volumes were some translations of the British graveyard poets, such as *Poesie di Ossian* by Melchiorre Cesarotti (Padova, 1763) and *Notti* by Edward Young without the translator's note (1770 in prose).[134] The presence of these texts suggests the author's interest in sepulchral themes. This interest, together with

---

[130] Andrea Battistini, 'L'età barocca', in *Guida allo studio della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Emilio Pasquini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), pp. 283–313.

[131] Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1983), p. 3.

[132] Andrea Battistini, 'Temi e motivi', in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Andrea Battistini (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2000), XXX (*Il Barocco*), pp. 82–130.

[133] Marco Cerruti, 'La cultura cattolica. Alfonso Varano', p. 234.

[134] In his edition of Varano's *Visioni* Strazzabosco includes a long list of books that were part of Varano's own library, disclosing, in this way, fructuous information that allows us to better understand what sources have shaped or contributed to the genesis of *Visioni*. See Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', pp. XXVIII–XXXIII. The complete list of books owned by Varano has been recorded in the catalogue of Varano's possession to be found in Ferrara, fondo Antolini, n° 126.

Varano's knowledge of classical texts (his library included many texts by Latin authors as well as the works of Dante and Petrarch's *Rime*), may have inspired the author to write visions recalling sepulchral modes, along the lines of the *lamentatio.*

Varano's interest in the macabre also derived from contemporary medical and scientific studies. Varano devotes space to descriptions of rotten corpses and the 'pathology of death', as Mazziotti defines it,[135] probably relying on Daniello Bartoli's *L'huomo al punto*, dated 1667, just as Leopardi relied on Federico Ruysch's *Thesaurus anatomicus* (Amsterdam, 1701-26) to write one of his *Operette morali*, even though he did not indulge in horrific details.[136] Varano's library also included scientific and pseudo-scientific treatises such as *Question chirurgico-légale, relative a l'affaire de Demoiselle Famin* by Louis Antoine Valentin published in 1768 by Lottin, and *De humana physiognomonia* by Giovanni Battista Della Porta, published in 1586 by Giuseppe Cacchi, (four books devoted to physiognomy, the non-scientific theory according to which someone's moral and psychological characteristics can be deduced from their physical features).[137] In this vein, André Chastel posits that, in literature, the obsession with death owes much to the circulation of anatomical drawings.[138] Varano employs the word 'ossa' coupling it with anatomical terms. While in 'Visione I', the image of the bones is generically linked with flesh ('degli empj abitator l'ossa e la carne', 273), in 'Visione II' the term 'ossa' is linked with nerves ('visto abbi tu cinto di

---

[135] Mazziotti, 'Per una rilettura delle "Visioni" di Alfonso Varano', pp. 125–26.

[136] Francesca Fedi, *Mausolei di sabbia. Sulla cultura figurativa di Leopardi* (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1997), pp. 81–82. Leopardi deals with Daniello Bartoli also in his *Zibaldone*; see Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Giuseppe Pacella (Milan: Garzanti, 1991) 44, 1313, 1314, 2197, 2396, 2419, 2424, 2758, 3630, 4143, 4259. Leopardi defines Bartoli 'uomo che fra tutti del suo tempo, e fors'anche di tutti i tempi, fu quello che e per teoria e scienza e per pratica, meglio e più profondamente e pienamente conobbe la nostra lingua' (*Zibaldone*, 3630) and also declares him to be the 'Dante della prosa italiana' (*Zibaldone*, 2396).

[137] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione', p. XXXI.

[138] André Chastel, 'Le baroque et la mort', in *Retorica e Barocco, Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, Venezia 15-18 Giugno 1954*, ed. by Enrico Castelli (Rome: Fratelli Boca, 1955), pp. 33–46.

nervi e ossa', 243) and even more specifically, in 'Visione IV' the term 'ossa' is coupled with vertebrae ('su cui spinser le mie vertebre l'ossa', 219). In 'Visione VI', the word appears together with bone marrow ('che l'ossa e le midolle arserne al paro' 396) and finally, the horror described in 'Visione IX' invaded the main character so deeply that reaches his bones and blood vessels ('di tanto orror m'empiè l'ossa e le vene' 368) reminiscent of Dante's 'tremar le vene e i polsi' (*Inferno*, I. 90).

In 'Visione XI', entitled 'Della vanità della bellezza terrena per la morte d'Amennira', Varano describes the voyage of his poetic self towards the tomb of Amennira, the woman he loved during his youth, and who was known in her lifetime for her beauty. The core theme of the poem is represented by the vanity of earthly beauty, a topic that was largely familiar to readers of the time and that was granted a vast visual symbolism.[139] The material decay of the body mirrors spiritual wreckage, according to *Visioni*'s moral purpose.

Although Amennira's episode pivots around the remains of the human body, the word 'corpo' does not appear in the text. In fact, Varano employs a vast array of synonyms to specifically indicate the corpse, such as 'frale' (as a noun), 'membra', 'gelate spoglie', 'salma', and 'estinta spoglia' echoing traditional models, such as Dante and Petrarch, but also Metastasio and Marino, demonstrating the use of standard terms from the Italian canon.[140] In terms of

---

[139] See, for instance, Matilde Battistini, *Simboli e allegorie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), pp. 360–65.

[140] The most recent and accurate lexicographic study devoted to Varano's poem is Luca Serianni's essay entitled *Sul dantismo di Alfonso Varano. Rilievi linguistici*. The thrust of Serianni's research is that Varano's linguistic innovations are not to be univocally reconducted to Dante's language. According to Serianni, Varano would have rather derived his language and style mostly from his contemporaries, and among them, certainly Giovan Battista Marino. To underpin his own thesis, Serianni made a meticulous linguistic analysis of Varano's *Visioni* finally maintaining that the reliance of Varano upon Dante's *Commedia* is less strong than it has been commonly thought, if not totally non-existent. See Luca Serianni, 'Sul dantismo di Alfonso Varano. Rilievi linguistici', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 173 (1996), 26–54, now also in Luca Serianni, *Viaggiatori, musicisti, poeti. Saggi di storia della lingua italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 2002), pp. 183–211. However, I believe it is unarguable that Varano derived from Dante the strong visual impact of scenes.

the human body, 'Visione XI' can be divided into three phases: first, the ephemeral beauty of the human body and the liberation of the soul from flesh; second, Amenirra's corpse; third, Amennira's ghost – which I examine in section 1.5.

The poem begins with a question that is typical of the genre of *lamentatio*: why is the 'bennato spirto in vaga avvolto | spoglia' (XI. 13–14) taken from the body prematurely? The theme of mourning over young dead women is taken up by Leopardi already in his earliest youthful poems and will remain a recurring theme in his poetic production.[141] Varano's poetic self reflects on Amennira's death before even seeing her dead. He thinks about her 'beltà spenta' and 'rare sembianze' (4–5). Varano's poetic self imagines Amennira's 'spoglia' offered 'in dono ai bassi chiostri' (14) and realises that 'il fral di lei sceso è sotterra' (30). The term 'frale', originally an adjective meaning fragile, is largely used by Petrarch, but here is employed as a noun to indicate the human body deprived of the soul.[142] Still avoiding the term 'corpo' Varano refers to the corpse by employing periphrasis such as 'membra pie di spirto prive' (39) and recreates, in the mind of his poetic self, a funeral scene rich in 'lugubri orrori' (38). In opposition to the rotting flesh that soon becomes the protagonist of the episode, Varano imagines his poetic self honouring the tomb of his beloved with perfumed incense:

> Sì che di pianto e di fumanti odori
>   e di fior copra le gelate spoglie,
>   e se vive le amai, spente le onori.
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 40–42)

The powerful parallelism that concludes the line and contrasts the vibrancy of life with the motionless, dull limbs, provides an excellent link to the poem's

---

[141] A prime example of this theme can be found in the youthful poem *Per una donna inferma di malattia lunga e mortale* (1819).

[142] The substantive use of the adjective 'fragile' is attested in poetry since Tasso (*Rime*), Lubrano ('Sonetti' in *Scintille poetiche*), Metastasio (*Poesie*). The same expression recurs frequently in Varano's *Visioni*: III, 147, 249, 295; IV, 614; V, 543; VI 303; VII, 155; X, 280; XI, 30.

following lines, in which Varano finally indulges in a description of the dead woman. The author dwells on the short canon, describing the classic attributes of female beauty: the eyes, the lips, and the hands. However, these elements are emptied of their attributes of beauty and vitality and are dulled: 'languid'occhi', 'scolorito raggio' (44); 'pallide labbra e taciturne' (47); 'fredde mabi eburne' (49). Varano, thus, subverts the lyric canon of beauty: where traditional poetry represents vivid, colourful eyes, a warm appearance, red or pink lips and cheeks, and white but lively hands, Varano presents a woman characterised by paleness, silence, and coldness. Although dead, the woman is nonetheless presented as pleasant in appearance. As Marco Santagata maintains, Dante's Beatrice, even more than Petrarch's Laura, is characterised by 'incorporeality' and 'la sua totale mancanza di fisicità l[a] trasforma in una sorta di manichino, di cui si descrivono solamente i vestiti'.[143] Beatrice wears a dress 'di nobilissimo colore [...] sanguigno' when she first meets Dante, while when she is eighteen she appears 'vestita di colore bianchissimo', and when she dies she is covered 'con un bianco velo'.[144] Varano, instead, dares to portray his beloved in her worst guise, offering the reader an example of a woman to gaze upon without necessarily having to comply with the traditional canon of beauty. Varano takes the opportunity to disrupt the canon to include disturbing, overtly excessive details. He proposes a female image that is still worth gazing upon, but that, nonetheless, remains the image of a corpse, which the poetic self is tempted to reject.

The scene of the poetic self's approach to Amennira's tomb echoes the opening moment of *Inferno* XI. However, Varano does not merely quote Dante, but proposes a completion of the scene described in *Inferno* XI, in accordance with Jauss's theory in that the reader-writer reinterprets and adds meaning to the original work according to their own taste, purpose and context. Varano, in fact, exploits the image of the open grave, which in Dante is only partially uncovered, to reveal its contents to the reader, a passage that does not appear in the Dantean episode. Varano thus completes the scene in *Inferno* XI and allows his poetic self to approach the tomb that Dante the pilgrim shuns. Dante's canto describes the

---

[143] Marco Santagata, *Le donne di Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2021), p. 76.

[144] Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, II. 3; III. 1; XXIII. 8.

structure of Hell, but begins with the perception of a nauseating stench, which is not present in Varano's 'Visione XI':

> E quivi, per l'orribile soperchio
> del puzzo che 'l profondo abisso gitta,
> ci raccostammo, in dietro, ad un coperchio
> d'un grand' avello, ov' io vidi una scritta
> che dicea: 'Anastasio papa guardo,
> lo qual trasse Fotin de la via dritta.
>
> (*Inferno*, XI. 4–9)

Varano's scene follows Dante's image of 'un coperchio | d'un grand'avello' but confers to it a more poignant meaning for the economy of his vision. Indeed, Varano aims to show the contents of the grave, while Dante ignored it and dwells only on the gravestone. The inscription on the tomb in Dante's canto, 'I guard Pope Athanasius', is appropriated by Varano to present Amennira, the main character of the episode: 'Amennira (ahi che lessi!) ohimè qui giace' (112). Amennira's grave is also uncovered:

> Tomba feral, ma nel coverchio aperta
> che pareva da tremoto o turbin fiero
> pel diroccato suo colmo scoperta'
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 103–05)

Varano's poetic self does not immediately approach the tomb: 'Ristetti, inorridii' (115).

At this point we reach the heart of the episode, and the analysis focuses on the description of Amennira's corpse. 'Visione XI' is one of most emblematic examples of literary excess and abjection across *Visioni*. It sets up a 'game' between the writer and the reader who compete to see who dares to go further: the writer in his revolting descriptions or the reader in their reading. The lexicon simultaneously regards terror and wonder, but also disgust, and plays with the opposition of approaching and receding. The sense of abjection on which

Varano insists comes back stronger than before, an abjection behind which he conceals the moral intent of his work. Therefore, Varano shows that, as Kristeva posits, the sacred is a 'two-sided formation'.[145] Drawing on Freud, Kristeva explains that in rituals and discourses which involve the making of the sacred there always exists an attempt at codifying taboos, namely death and incest.[146] The corruption of the body was long considered a taboo that the Church dismantled because it was functional to admonish believers.[147] Varano represents such taboo in his *Visioni* through abject descriptions, because these representations carry moral implications, as happens in Dante's *Commedia* through the *contrapasso*. As well as depictions of the *Danse Macabre*, both Dante and Varano illustrate what people should fear with a didactic purpose. Nonetheless, Varano's dynamic of 'I want but I can't' unveils a modern sensitivity: the horror of death discloses new sensations of marvel. Leopardi will be receptive of this message. Including the presence of a divine emissary, a guardian angel, Leopardi feels authorised to include abjection in his *Appressamento* similarly to what Varano does in his *Visioni*.

Varano's poetic self expresses his feelings as soon as he approaches the grave:

> Ma ribrezzo in toccar l'urna m'assalse
>   e la mia lena interna al terror mista
>   il gel nascente a superar non valse.
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 121–23)

---

[145] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 57.

[146] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 58.

[147] Already in the previous century, the so-called 'school of death' and the 'pastoral of fear' had spread, resulting in popular literature on preparation for death. These texts, dense with macabre evocations, terrifying infernal perspectives and severe intimations presented death with irremediably negative connotations. Among these texts one should consider Giambattista Vanni *Vari e veri ritratti della morte* (1610), Giandomenico Ottonelli *Angustie del peccatore travagliato dalla vicina morte* (1655), Giacinto Manara *Notti malinconiche* (1658). See Stefania Buccini, *Sentimento della morte dal Barocco al declino dei Lumi* (Ravenna: Longo, 2000), p. 20.

The tangibility of what the pilgrim can actually see inside the grave scares him away, and repulsion conquers him as soon as he touches the grave. The pilgrim's desire, 'mia lena interna', to see the remains of his beloved is in vain, because it is mixed with terror and cannot overcome the 'gel nascente'. Varano depicts horror and disgust by employing the term 'gelo', the same coldness that characterises the dead, and it seems that looking at a corpse could metamorphose the living. Although further on in the poem the pilgrim enjoys the vision of a spectral and beautiful Amennira ascending to Heaven, the whole text retains a disturbing patina. The transformation of flesh from living to dead and from decomposed to incorporeal and ghostly across *Visioni* has a disturbing effect on the reader. This happens because, as Botting and Spooner maintain, 'the contagion of the monstrous and the spectral is a characteristically gothic effect', which, as such, generates disturbance.[148] Monsters are 'unacknowledged, wretched creatures, objects of exclusion and thence figures of fear and threat' and are often caused by systems of domination and dehumanisation: death can be equally dehumanising.[149]

A similar disqualification and downsizing of humanity becomes apparent to the pilgrim as soon as he trembles and grasps the edge of the tomb: 'Tremando alfin afferrai l'orlo' (124). Three adjectives, arranged in an ascending climax open the description of the corpse: 'Ahi vista | squallida, lagrimevole, dogliosa' (124–25). It is interesting to note how the depiction of the bystanders' despair, which, according to Ariès, becomes more dramatic in the modern age, is downplayed here. A new intolerance of separation emerges, for survivors are spontaneous in their pain, 'inspired by a passionate sorrow which is unique

---

[148] Fred Botting and Catherine Spooner, 'Introduction: monstrous media/spectral subjects', in *Monstrous media/spectral subjects. Imaging gothic from the nineteenth century to the present*, ed. by Fred Botting and Catherine Spooner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 1–11 (p. 1).

[149] Botting and Spooner, 'Introduction: monstrous media/spectral subjects', p. 2.

among sorrows'. [150] The external gazer's despair will return more strongly in Fiorentino's elegies.[151] The description of Amennira continues as follows:

> Ahi d'umana beltade immagin trista!
> Su letto di putredine schifosa
>   giacea dal tempo nel suo morder forte
>   l'estinta spoglia avidamente rosa:
> fitti i rai spenti entro l'occhiaie smorte
>   guaste le labbra, aperto il petto, e l'anche
>   gonfiate, e tinte di livida morte:
> rigide e impallidite le man bianche,
>   dilacerato il grembo, e combattuto
>   dalle serpi non mai nell'ira stanche:
> lezzo, noia, ed orror quel, che rifiuto
>   fu degli ingordi vermi, ed era in lei
>   la più vezzosa parte il cener muto.
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 126–138)

As shown here, the same body that, when alive, attracted the poetic self is now depicted as horrifying and repulses the observer and the reader. The horrid spectacle in front of his eyes reflects the total decay of the corpse. The body is portrayed in its materiality and its consumption constitutes the focus of the description. The accumulation of adjectives that qualify the sight as dismal, tearful, painful, puts the emphasis on the 'horrific marvel' of the observer. The corpse lies in what is described as a 'bed of disgusting rottenness' and its relicts are consumed. What distances the observer is the ambivalence of his realisation that he is looking at bodily waste, and his feeling of abjection derives from the fact that such an occurrence should be private; he is witnessing something which should not been witnessed. Decomposition also concretises the expulsion of

---

[150] Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, p. 59.

[151] The compassion and overwhelming emotion are already manifest in Dante's *Vita Nova*, when 'una donna pietosa di novella etade (…) si mosse con paura a pianger forte' at the sight of Dante in tears over Beatrice's death. Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, XXIII. 17–18.

what is abject (a useless body), and the observer wants to testify to that because, as a 'subject', he feels protected from abjection.[152] Varano examines every part of the corpse, matching every noun with a relevant and powerful adjective, inserting the image of restless snakes, reminiscent of 'Visione III', which entangle the bones. The description ends with another triplet, 'stench, discomfort and horror', as it began, coming from the sight of what the worms rejected, which was the most charming part of Amennira. The employment of adjectives as well as punctuation convey a double sensation of both disgust and marvel, which is manifested at the same time in the audience (which is, after all, a 'double audience' both the observer — the external gazer within the text — and the reader).

The author describes the corpse following the 'long canon', since he includes 'petto' and 'anche' described as swollen and bruised, like decomposing bodies, 'mani' described as 'pallide e irrigidite' and 'bianche' and 'grembo' in an advanced state of decomposition. Eyes and lips, typical features of the description of women in poetry, are still present in Amennira's portrayal, but they are represented as 'rai spenti', 'occhiaie smorte', and 'labbra guaste'. The depiction of the entire feminine body is unusual in canonical poetry although it was not so in Medieval visual art, as testified by the recurring motif of 'Three living meet three dead'.[153] The three dead, usually, appear in three different stages of decomposition. The second stadium involves the presence of snakes, and the dead are painted full-length in their coffins. As Chiara Frugoni underlines, the Church aimed to show to the public the squalor of death without granting space

---

[152] Arya, *Abjection and Representation*, pp. 1–2, 63–81.

[153] Among other examples, the fresco by Buonamico Buffalmacco depicting the 'Triumph of Death' and the iconography of the motif 'Three living meet three dead' in the *Campo Santo* in Pisa, is the first of a series of three large scenes which embrace the entire cemeterial structure, executed in 1336–41, commissioned by the Dominican friars and recently restored. See Chiara Settis Frugoni, 'Il tema dell'incontro dei tre vivi e dei tre morti nella tradizione medievale italiana', in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Classe di Scienze Morali, series 8, 13 (1967), no. 3, pp. 145–251; Alberto Tenenti, *Humana fragilitas, i temi della morte in Europa tra Duecento e Settecento* (Clusone: Ferrari Editrice, 2000).

to the depiction of Heaven.[154] By contrast, Varano's poem intends to reassure believers that despite the decomposition of the flesh, which represents the vanity of earthly beauty, good Christians acquire an immeasurably better appearance thanks to divine salvation after they ascend to Heaven.

The photographic description of single parts of the body consumed by worms or snakes constitutes a recurring feature in Varano's *Visioni*, deriving in turn from Baroque fashion. Worms are usually paired with bones and flesh and depicted in a very expressionistic style to convey the idea of the corruption of the body in a tragic way. A similar description is found in *Il sepolcro*, a poem written by Euripilo Naricio (whose name outside Arcadia was Francesco Zacchiroli) to commemorate the death of Lorenzo Ricci, elected the eighteenth Superior General of the Society of Jesus (the last before the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773).[155] Here, the poet captures the image of worms devouring a corpse and describes the scene by showing the body little by little.

> Nuotano i vermi e con il maligno fiato
> accrescon l'impurissimo fetore.
> Chi del corrotto cranio addenta un lato,
> chi rode il petto, e chi divora il core;
> ed ogni membro difformato e guasto
> degl'insetti più vili è preda, e pasto.
>
> (*Il sepolcro*, 51–56)

The animals are depicted while they are devouring the corpse, as they are swimming into it. Zacchiroli portrays the single parts of the body following the 'long canon', beginning with the skull, going through the chest, and reaching the heart. The semantic field of the consumption due to the gnawing reminds the

---

[154] *Senza misericordia. Il Trionfo della Morte e la Danza macabra a Clusone*, ed. by Chiara Frugoni and Simone Facchinetti (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), pp. 22–23.

[155] Francesco Zacchiroli, *Il Sepolcro. Ottave di Euripilo Naricio in morte di Lorenzo Ricci, ultimo generale della Compagnia di Gesù* (Lausanne: Martin, 1776).

reader of the Dantean scene of Ugolino.[156] However, the popular depiction of worms also carried a different, composite connotation, as underlined by Vitaniello Bonito. He maintains that worms embody the coexistence of organic and inorganic as well as talent and industry, magic and invention, art and nature.[157] This positive conception is testified to by the popularity of the theme of worms in Baroque literature, for instance in the late-seventeenth century collections of poems by the Jesuit Giacomo Lubrano, *Scintille poetiche*.[158] In his twentieth sonnet, *L'ipocondriaco simile al verme*, he compares the image of the worm to the figure of the poet. The two appear to be very similar in their endeavours; however, while the poet knows he is doomed to the tomb, the worm instead awaits his metamorphosis, which will transform it into a butterfly and will take it to the sky ('tu da la tomba tua risorgi alato'). The concept of metamorphosis, therefore, constitutes another valuable *topos* in Varano's representation of Amenirra's corpse, for it foresees her further ascent to Heaven in a transfigured form. The imagery of worms which entangle rotten corpses also returns in the short poem entitled *Il museo della Morte*, by the Jesuit Ubertino Landi, published in a collection called *Poemetti italiani,* dated 1797. In this short work the author seems to receive Varano's images and style, as evident in the following lines 'quando cinta di larve | donna orribil m'apparve', as well as in the expression 'squallor mortale'.[159]

Other than Amennira's decomposition, *Visioni* portrays an actual Triumph of Death, another Medieval reminiscence, recalling the death of Laura in Petrarca's *Rime* and *Trionfi*. 'Visione IV', entitled 'Sopra il vero e il falso onore', showcases a gallery of sculpted characters subjugated by Death, which hangs over them and affects them all, regardless of their social class.

---

[156] See *Inferno*, 33: 'al traditor ch'i' *rodo*' (8); 'ambo le man per lo dolor mi *morsi*' (58); 'riprese 'l teschio misero co' *denti*, | che furo a l'osso, come d'un can, forti' (78–79). Emphasis is mine.

[157] Vitaniello Bonito, 'Il nodo dell'antitesi: da Góngora a Ciro di Pers', *Lingua e stile*, 23 (1988), no. 3, 427–444.

[158] Giacomo Lubrano, *Scintille poetiche, o poesie sacre e morali* (Naples: Parrino & Muzii, 1674).

[159] Ubertino Landi, 'Il museo della Morte', in *Poemetti italiani* (Turin: Società letteraria di Torino presso Michelangelo Morano, 1797), pp. 59–66.

In orribile mostra il Fabbro mise

    i trionfi di Morte, e i Duci, e i Regi,

    cui le orgogliose teste ella recise,

né gli empj sol, ma i Regnatori egregi;

    perché i vani ostri a paragon de' veri

    oltre misura il successor non pregi.

Orator sommi, e Vati al vol leggieri

    fervido, e illustri Donne, e in nobil'arti

    chiunque gloria avidamente speri

scoprian ne' corpi infradiciati e sparti

    l'amaro fin, che il tutto in cenere volve.

(Visioni, IV. 304–314)

The term 'Fabbro' recalls *Purgatorio* X. 99, although Varano does not use it to refer to the power of God. The parade begins with Death in front, followed by leaders and kings. The same characters can be found in Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis*, in the trinity of 'pontefici, regnanti, imperatori' (80–81), introduced as the happiest men on earth, yet miserable once death arrived.[160] Varano's ranks are filled with more figures than Petrarch's, for in the wake of kings there are talented orators, poets, illustrious women and all those people vainly longing for glory. The aspiration to vain material goods and glory is classically represented here, as in Petrarch's verse, by the purple colour, here called 'ostro', which is clearly paired with gems, sceptres, crowns, and mitres in Petrarch's work. While Petrarch represents the parade as a narration coming from Death itself, which is embodied by 'una donna involta in veste negra' talking to Laura,[161] Varano describes the scene from the viewpoint of both the poetic self and the characters themselves, who realise their doom by looking at 'corpi infracidati e sparti'.

---

[160] 'Ivi eran quei che fur detti felici, | pontefici, regnanti, imperadori; | or sono ignudi, miseri e mendici. | U' sono or le ricchezze? u' son gli onori | e le gemme e gli scettri e le corone | e le mitre e i purpurei colori? | Miser chi speme in cosa mortal pone | (ma chi non ve la pone?), e se si trova | a la fine ingannato è ben ragione' (Petrarca, *Trionfi*, 3, I. 79–87). Francesco Petrarca, *Rime, Trionfi e poesie latine*, ed. by Ferdinando Neri, Guido Martellotti, Enrico Bianchi, and Natalino Sapegno (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1951).

[161] Petrarca, *Trionfi* 3, I. 31.

According to Adriano Prosperi, there is evidence that popular and traditional attitudes towards death, such as the *Danse Macabre*, instructed sixteenth-century people in the importance of sustained preparation in order to have a good Protestant death.[162] An example of this, in the English context, is represented by the case of Richard Daye's 1581 publication of *A Booke of Christian Prayers*, a Protestant work whose association with the depiction of the dance of death has recently been investigated.[163] That research shows how images were used as an educational tool in prescriptive literature, a study which would be valuable in the Italian Catholic context as well. Varano's representation of the march of death not only takes up the iconographic theme of the *Danse Macabre* ekphrastically, of which there are a few examples in Italy, but also enhances the corporeal component and the external observer.[164]

---

[162] Adriano Prosperi, 'Il volto della Gorgone. Studi e ricerche sul senso della morte e sulla disciplina delle sepolture tra Medioevo ed età moderna', in *La morte e i suoi riti in Italia tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, ed. by Francesco Salvestrini, Anna Zangarini, and Gian Maria Varanini (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2007), pp. 3–29 (p. 3).

[163] Amanda Jane Chura, 'The Danse Macabre in Richard Daye's *A Booke of Christian Prayers* (1581): Prescriptive Instruction To Promptly Prepare For Death' (unpublished master's thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

[164] The theme derives from a now lost mural in the Parisian *Cimetière des Innocents*, which depicts the fatal encounter of the living with Death personified. There exist scholarly studies focusing on the origin of different Triumphs and other depictions of Death. These studies, however, have long overlooked autochthonous Italian representations, since Italian exemplars are less known than foreign examples, such as the French *Danse Macabre*, the Spanish *Dança de la muerte*, and the German *Totentanz*. A recent and semi-complete study on the theme on the Dance of Death in medieval and early modern time, which, nonetheless, completely neglects Italian examples, is: *Mixed Metaphors: The Danse Macabre in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Stefanie Knöll and Sophie Oosterwijk (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011). There exist three visual portrayals of this kind in Italy: first, a cycle of frescoes painted by Giacomo Borlone de Buschis in late fifteenth century on the exterior wall of the Oratory of Disciplines, which represents both the triumph and the dance of death; second, the aforementioned Buffalmacco's frescoes on Camposanto di Pisa (see Frugoni and Facchinetti, *Senza misericordia*); third, the Triumph of death painted by an unknown artist between 1441 and 1443 in the courtyard of the Ospedale Grande e Nuovo in Palazzo Sclàfani, today preserved in Palazzo Abatellis, (see Caterina Napoleone, 'Il

1.4   Catastrophes and The Human Body

Varano's representation of dead and tortured bodies and the suffering of the flesh culminates in effects of natural calamities on human beings. 'Visione V', 'Per la peste messinese coll'apparizione della beata Battista Varano', begins *in medias res* with the apparition of the celestial guide Battista Varano, the author's ancestor, who invites the poetic self to sit beside her on a fiery chariot bound for the coast of Messina. The purpose of the journey is to 'destar […] virtude | coll'immago de' mali' (160–1). Varano draws expressionistic and vivid images from the *Commedia*, in order to show the ways in which 'il gran Pastore eterno | vendicherà la profanata legge' (230–1). The gory scenes start at line 334 and continues through to the end of the 658-line-long poem, and the circumstances of exceptional suffering are soon announced by the hyperbolic vision of the 'morte di mille umane spoglie' (338). The author describes the entrance of his poetic self into the city of Messina from the harbour, by walking down a long path, a 'via d'orror carca e di periglio' (337), a path that promises to have hellish overtones. The subsequent lines herald a cycle of encounters with the souls of sinners that recall those experienced by Dante the pilgrim during his descent into Hell.

> Fuor dell'abbandonate immonde soglie
> > giacean gli avanzi della plebe abbietta
> > su vili paglie, e infracidite foglie:
> altri con gola orrendamente infetta
> > di gangrenose bolle; altri avvampati
> > il petto da fatal febbre negletta;
> altri da lunga fame ormai spossati,
> > non pel velen, ma pel languore infermi,
> > fra l'altrui membra putride sdraiati;

Trionfo della Morte a Palermo', *FMR*, 129 (1998), 83–106; and Michele Cometa, *Il Trionfo della morte di Palermo. Un'allegoria della modernità* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017)).

ed altri in lor natio vigor più fermi,

benchè lasciati sotto i corpi estinti,

sòrti fra l'ossa accatastate e i vermi;

ma di squallor mortifero dipinti,

e per orecchie rose, e labbra mozze

dai volti umani in modo fier distinti.

<div align="right">(Visioni, V. 340–354)</div>

The five tercets introduce a richly described gallery of victims in form of a list, which appears to be long and increasingly disturbing thanks to Varano's use of anaphora. Hence, the reader is invited to go through the whole list almost all at once, driven by the hammering rhythm of the lines that repeat 'altri', as if the succession of involved is not coming to an end. The general sense of abjection and repulsion is conveyed to the reader by the employment of powerful adjectives, such as 'immonde', 'vili', 'infracidite'. Kristeva clearly explains that abjection is felt when 'there looms, […] one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable'.[165]

Here, Varano's poetic self finds himself in a place surrounded by waste, human remains, bodies suffering and broken by the pestilential disease that afflicts them, as a divine punishment. Varano's readers are invited to witness what the pilgrim sees so as to foresee their destiny if their life choices do not conform to those prescribed by religion. Although Varano in the whole of his *Visioni* particularly insists in employing strong adjectives, as seen in the Amennira episode, nouns are equally significant. Varano avoids direct descriptions of entire human bodies, which he instead portrays using a purposefully reductive term such as 'avanzi', as well as enumerating single parts of the body. I would also note that all the verbs indicating the human body are past participles, such as 'infetta', 'avvampati', 'spossati', 'sdraiati', 'estinti', 'sorti', 'dipinti', so to stress the passivity of the suffering bodies. The only active verb

---

[165] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 1.

appears to be 'giacevan', at the beginning of the list, a rhetorical device that Varano effectively employs to highlight that the only action these bodies were capable of performing was lying down, which amounts to none.

Along with a pervasive sense of abjection, Varano provides his readers with imagery of exaggeration and excess. Examples of this approach can be found in the roundup of body parts: 'gola orrendamente infetta', 'gangrenose bolle', 'membra putride'. Once again, nouns are coupled with horrifying adjectives so as to picture appropriately exaggerated, macabre details. One of the most effective scenes of the excerpt is that of the pile of cadavers, gathered one on top of the other:

> Ed altri in lor natio vigor più fermi,
> benché lasciati sotto i corpi estinti,
> sorti fra l'ossa accatastate e i vermi.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 349–51)

The same miserable picture of piled up cadavers ready to be burned by the fire returns about a dozen triplets later in the lyric:

> In mezzo a valle solitaria e vasta
> stridea, scoppiando fra le vampe ingorde,
> di cento adusti ceppi ampia catasta.
> Con picche armate in ferro adunco e lorde
> di melma tratti eran que' corpi al rogo,
> cui più vita sì dura il cor non morde (…)
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 388–93)

Here the human bodies are called 'catasta' rather than 'avanzi' and such a pile is composed by 'cento adusti ceppi', recalling the initial hyperbolic expression forecasting the vision of 'mille umane spoglie'. The second of these tercets explains the image of the pile of corpses the dead bodies are gathered to form a pyre. The urgency of burning cadavers to avoid infection during the epidemic has been narrated in the poetic account of Enea Gaetano Melani who wrote *La*

peste di Messina accaduta nell'anno 1743, a text that Varano knew, had in his library, and employed for his work.[166] In the third chapter, Melani reports 'Già s'ardono i cadaveri. | Pur qualche vivo abbrucciasi' (3–4) and testifies about the madness and all the suffering around him by defining the frenzy as 'dolorosi spettacoli | non più visti, e incredibili' (16–17).[167] Varano dramatises the spectacle and together with depicting bodies no longer recognisable as humans ('dai volti umani in modo fier distinti') due to corroded ears, cut lips ('orecchie rose e labbra mozze'), piled up bones and consuming worms ('ossa accatastate e i vermi'). He also insists on the stench spreading through the streets of Messina. Varano describes the nauseating smell as 'aere maligno' (67) that 'veste d'orror le messinese arene' (69).[168] The vivid expression 'funereo vapor' reinforces the

---

[166] Enea Gaetano Melani, *La peste di Messina accaduta nell'anno 1743 fedelmente rapportata in versi sdruccioli dall'abate di S. Giacinto Enea Gaetano Melani Sanese Protonotaro Apostolico, e Religioso, Gerosolimitano detto tra gli Arcadi Eresto Eleucanteo, che fu spettatore di sì spaventosa tragedia* (Venice: Recurti, 1747).

[167] The spectacle of death constitutes a key element linking medieval and modern culture and literature, as exemplified by Leopardi, who wrote about it in his youth and repeated it in his later works. On bodily spectacle, dated back to late Middle Ages, Heather Webb writes: 'In many of the hagiographical accounts, publics spectate what seem to be dead female (but also male) bodies, a kind of a necro-scopophilia that often does move between the spectating of bodies that seem to be dead and the spectating of bodies that really are dead. The accounts culminate when the holy corpses of these saintly women are eventually laid out and the appearance of death that they so miraculously showed forth in life is then present in its fullest'; Duncan and Webb, 'Corporealities in Italian Studies', p. 182. In such accounts the public is watching, and the spectacle of the dying translates suffering from subject to subject.

[168] The necessity of burying cadavers outside cities that took off in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had, as one of its motivations, the protection of the population from the stench of rotting corpses. The issue is historically reconstructed in: Grazia Tomasi, *Per salvare i viventi. Le origini settecentesche del cimitero extraurbano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001). There exists a specific and local Italian tradition of treatises concerning cemeteries and burial practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It begins with the work of Giambattista Giovio, *I cimiterj* published in 1804, where Giovio himself declares that he will not rely on previous works, most likely referring to Scipione Piattoli's essay and Luigi Lambertenghi's article published in *Il Caffè*. For further details see Giambattista Giovio, *I cimiterj* (Como: Ostinelli, 1804); Scipione Piattoli, *Saggio intorno al luogo del seppellire* (Florence: [n. publ.], 1774); Luigi Lambertenghi, 'Sull'origine e

powerful image, as well as the description of the poisoned air that 'fra l'infocata estate e i roghi accesi, | rende la via del respiro in forse' (437–38). Both the rendering of the huddled and wounded bodies and the description of fires and smoke contribute to Varano's intention to portray Messina as a real hell on earth. The insalubriousness of the air also appears to be a crucial element for Dante. The two expressions singled out — 'aere maligno' and 'funereo vapor' — also occur or have close analogues in the *Commedia*. In *Inferno* V, Francesca calls out to Dante while making his way through the 'aere maligno' (86), a term chosen to stress the negativity of the infernal place, and a few lines later the air is defined as 'aere perso' (89), indicating a nuance between black and purple. In this way, Dante strongly conveys the image of an evil atmosphere, while Varano employed the same lexicon, no less charged with infernal nuances, to emphasise the unhealthy streets of Messina. Dante, on the other hand, insists on the characterisation of the infernal air in other parts of the poem, such as in *Inferno* IX, where he condenses the muddy sludge of Hell into the image of an 'aere grasso' (82). Even in *Purgatorio* XVI, where the wrathful are blinded by an irritating smoke as they had been by anger in life, the air is described as 'aere amaro e sozzo' (13). The air around Dante the pilgrim is infested and thick, and Varano recalls this element to render the image of an earthly hell in his *Visioni*. Varano chooses a precise bodily lexicon, evocative of images and smells, combined with the skilful use of rhetorical figures of repetition to convey a terrible and incisive imagery.

Although Melani was certainly a source for Varano, and particularly for the image of the human pyre, *Inferno* XXVIII and XXIX offer the most suitable

sul luogo delle sepolture', in *Il Caffè (1764-1766)*, ed. by Gianni Francioni and Sergio Romagnoli (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993). The discourse on tombs started in the eighteenth century with Piattoli's position against the practice of burying the dead in churches, since it was considered detrimental to hygiene. Moreover, Piattoli justifies his claim by recalling the examples of the ancient Romans, a position also taken by Lambertenghi. In 1805, another essay on the topic, *Della tumulazione* by Antonio Della Porta, came out and subsequent works by Ippolito Pindemonte and lastly Ugo Foscolo testify to the existence of a lively Italian social debate on tombs and funeral rituals, which is also endorsed by studies by Vittorio Cian and Mario Scotti.

parallel with the *Visioni*'s lexicon of bodily suffering. In *Inferno* XXIX, Dante the pilgrim finds himself in the final *bolgia* of the eighth circle where the falsifiers are punished. They are afflicted by various diseases, and particularly scabies, which reminds us of Varano's plague, described in 'Visione V'. The sinners are heaped on the ground and crawl around, manifesting their suffering. The three most relevant tercets of Dante's canto, when considering Varano's scenes are:

> Qual dolor fora, se de li spedali,
> di Valdichiana tra 'l luglio e 'l settembre
> e di Maremma e di Sardigna i mali
> 　fossero in una fossa tutti 'nsembre,
> tal era quivi, e tal puzzo n'usciva
> qual suol venir de le marcite membre.
> 　[…] Qual sovra 'l ventre, e qual sovra le spalle
> l'un de l'altro giacea, e qual carpone
> si trasmutava per lo tristo calle.
>
> 　　　　　　　　　　　(*Inferno,* XXIX. 46–69)

Dante illustrates an overall situation which is very similar to the one portrayed by Varano. Here, though, the prevailing sensation is an olfactory one. The stench, here called 'puzzo', is due to the pile of diseased and malodorous bodies, which we learn are stacked on top of each other. Dante presents this picture of piled up bodies through a simile, comparing the *bolgia* to two areas of Italy, Tuscany, and Sardinia, afflicted by malaria. Dante hyperbolically imagines emptying out all the hospitals in the two regions and gathering all the sick bodies in the *bolgia*. It is only through this exaggeration that the author makes sure to convey to the reader the powerful stench coming from the pit. Unlike Varano, Dante clearly states that the stench comes from the ill, suffering bodies, while Varano attributes the smell to the burning pyre. Despite this difference, the image of the massed bodies is similar and Varano's lines are indebted to the accumulation in Dante's tercets. Like 'Visione V', Dante lists body parts when he describes the pile of bodies: 'ventre', 'spalle', and someone is 'carponi'. These outraged bodies are also shown in their damaged partiality: Varano's 'orecchie

rose e labbra mozze' mirrors the expression 'ombre triste smozzicate' (*Inferno* XXIX. 6) employed by Dante. As for the bodily lexicon, where Dante uses the adjective 'marcite', Varano employs the word 'putrido', two terms that maintain the harshness of their sound due to the letter 'r'. This letter suggests, in this context, the idea of something that arouses disgust, due to the violence required to pronounce it. Both authors are interested in conveying to the reader a sense of disgust and repugnance, which is so extreme and accurately described that it is excessive and almost horrifying. This horrific language shows an excess of macabre connotations and describes monstrous figures, emphasising the inhuman nature of ill bodies. According to Botting, one can define writings as 'Gothic' when they involve imagination and emotional effects that exceed reason, for Gothic is a writing of excess.[169] Varano's insistence on excessive and abject imagery constitutes just such a Gothic mode and that mode is indebted to Dante.[170]

The last part of the analysis pivots around the gory repertoire of blood and cruel scenes of violently damaged bodies, and specifically examines the images of men pierced through their throats, first described by Dante, then adopted by Varano, and, finally, inherited by the young Leopardi. The scenes involved in the three poems concern three different situations that recall one another in significant ways. In Varano's *Visioni,* the relevant description appears when the author writes about the pyre. Varano claims that people of all ages and social statuses have been victims of the plague. The atrocious scene begins with the enumeration of the bodies prepared for the fire.

> Vivi, che ancor movean gli occhi non chiusi,
> ma palpitanti col ronciglio fitto
> nella gola i sospir versando, e il sangue
> dal collo in sì crudel foggia trafitto.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 400–03)

---

[169] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 2.

[170] See Simona Di Martino, '"Orecchie rose e labbra mozze" and Other Bodily Suffering in Alfonso Varano: Dantean Reminiscences in Eighteenth-Century Sepulchral Poetry', *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*, 4 (2021), 121–138.

These verses include various parts of the body displayed so as to bring the mutilation and suffering of bodies to the fore in the poem. Varano here lists 'occhi', 'gola', 'collo', focusing on the 'short canon'. In this scene, Varano aims to confer a major sense of drama, in order to stress the suffering of the bodies and underpin the moral message to his readers, and he manages to do so by using verbs of movement, gerunds, and past participles. The *incipit* of the first tercet, 'vivi', meaningfully contrasts the preceding image where corpses were piled up in the street. In this scene, instead, human bodies are still moving, they have a last glimmer of life in their limbs but are so damaged and wrecked that they cannot complete their actions. They are in spasm and are gasping, as suggested by the gerunds 'palpitando' and 'versando', but at the same time their throats are pierced, and the past participle 'trafitto' closes the tercet, ending the effort of movement that was initially suggested. Another key element of the scene is 'sangue' gushing from the injured neck.

Dante reaches more harrowing peaks in *Inferno* XXVIII. It seems particularly significant that *Inferno* XXVIII contains the first and only use of the term *contrapasso* explained in its juridical connotations, which well suits the didactic nature of the canto.[171] It is therefore conceivable that Varano drew his inspiration from this Dantean canto because the cruelty exposed here is exemplary even for eighteenth-century readers — remembered that Varano's *Visioni* are defined as 'sacre e morali', thus characterised by a moralising intention. *Inferno* XXVIII is therefore perfect for admonishing sinners if one considers how violently the 'seminator di scandalo e di scisma' (*Inferno* XXVIII. 35) are punished in the ninth *bolgia*. Such punishments are described in such a gory way that *Inferno* XXVIII ranks high in the infernal lexicography of body

---

[171] With this word, Dante indicates the retributive concept which states that every soul shall suffer in the afterlife according to the sins they committed on earth. As a principle of justice, the *contrapasso* derives from the biblical law of retaliation, which required that 'anyone who inflicts an injury on his neighbour shall receive the same in return' (Leviticus 24. 19). See also: Lino Pertile, 'Introduction to Inferno', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 67–90 (pp. 77–78).

parts, a feature that proves to be extremely significant for the present analysis. In the canto by canto catalogue of body parts in *Inferno* compiled by Grace Delmolino, *Inferno* XXVIII ranks second only after *Inferno* XXV, with a tally of forty-one body parts, compared to sixty-three in *Inferno* XXV.[172] The following excerpt includes the densest tercet of the canto, compiling four different body parts: 'gola', 'naso' 'ciglia', 'orecchia'.

> Un altro, che forata avea la gola
> e tronco 'l naso infin sotto le ciglia,
> e non avea mai ch'una orecchia sola,
>   ristato a riguardar per maraviglia
> con li altri, innanzi a li altri aprì la canna,
> ch'era di fuor d'ogni parte vermiglia.
>
>   (*Inferno*, XXVIII. 64–69)

The sinners are gruesomely mutilated by devils, which explains the roundup of body parts. Their wounds are healed and then reopened by the devils, according to the *contrapasso*. As already highlighted in Varano's lines, past participles play an important part. 'Forata' and 'tronco', convey the image of cruel damage to human flesh. Dante employs the noun 'canna' to represent the human throat, to symbolise the fact that such bodies are no longer *human* bodies, and he draws out another relevant feature: colour. Indeed, the sinner's windpipe is described as 'vermiglia', ruby-coloured, all blood-red. The reason for such expressionistic portrayals of outraged bodies has been extensively and precisely illustrated by Ronald L. Martinez with the concept of 'poetry of schism,' which is here worth mentioning.[173] According to Martinez, *Inferno* XXVIII is 'a heap of slashed body parts' and such a disarticulation of the body, mirrored in the disarticulations of linguistic entities – line 21 separates the noun 'modo' and the modifier 'sozzo' –

---

[172] <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-28/> [last access: 13th February 2022]

[173] Ronald L. Martinez, 'The Poetry of Schism', in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. Inferno*, ed. by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), I, pp. 573-576 (p. 573).

embodies the mimesis of the violence that Dante wants to achieve. Furthermore, the sheer accumulation replaces the functional articulation of parts of the living, organic body, divided in the same way that the culprits caused schisms in life. Finally, the bodies described in the episode are dismembered in a scheme dictated by the symmetry of the canto itself.[174] Martinez's annotations highlight Dante's desire to fragment the canto in order to emphasise the guilt of the sowers of schisms. Alongside this symbolic purpose, however, the dismembered bodies also highlight the poet's aim to strike the reader with visually rich images. Such gory writing, which can be called *modo sozzo* or 'foul style', as Dante proclaims it in *Inferno* XXVIII. 21, closely resembles Varano's excessive lexicon. Leopardi later includes precisely 'Visione V' in his *Crestomazia poetica* and receives the Dantean lexicon through the mediation of Varano and employing that same *modo sozzo*, as exemplified by the unusual recurrence of the term 'sangue' in his *Appressamento.*

Mazziotti underlines the way in which Varano's *Visioni* meets the contemporary fashion for literature of consolation, which recalls sacred orators of the seventeenth century and their works dedicated to the death of ecclesiastical figures, panegyrics, and praise of the deceased with elements of prophecy.[175] Although Varano's *Visioni* is made up of single occasional poems collected to form a longer coherent work with a clear encomiastic purpose, the religious commitment of the author leads him to focus on sinners and, consequently, punishments. Cerruti notes the coexistence, in Varano's work, of the anxieties of his time, his Catholic faith, as well as superstitious and even magical aspects.[176] The presence of magic could be explained by the influence of contemporary and prior treatises, such as Calmet's treatise on the apparition of spirits and vampires or revenants, one of the titles included in the list of Varano's possessions.[177] This notwithstanding, the harshest parts of Varano's work are

---

[174] Martinez, 'The Poetry of Schism', p. 574.

[175] Mazziotti, 'Per una rilettura delle "Visioni" di Alfonso Varano', p. 114.

[176] Cerruti, 'La cultura cattolica. Alfonso Varano', p. 232.

[177] Agostino Calmet, *Dissertazioni sopra le apparizioni de' spiriti, e sopra i vampiri, o i redivivi d'Ungheria, di Moravia e di Silesia* (Venice: Simone Occhi, 1756).

certainly related to the decay of bodies which have been victims of epidemics or natural disasters, significant aspects of eighteenth-century life.[178]

Another abject episode comes in 'Visione VII', where Varano describes the astonishment of his poetic self who encounters a series of mutilated bodies. After the earth has been shaken by a violent earthquake, people are buried under the ruins of Lisbon. The scene represents a series of cadavers and horrendously wounded people. The poetic self calls them 'semivivi' (445), half-alive people, and funereally describes the streets of the city:

> L'orrida via d'ogni conforto muta,
>   e di ruine, e di fiaccate, o rase
>   ossa, e di membra luride tessuta'
>
> (*Visioni*, VII. 448–50)

The road is depicted as horrid and with no consolation, paved with bones, which are ruined, tired, and deprived of flesh. The series of hellish images is intense:

> Senza capo giacea l'informe tronco
>   lordo, e grondante di sanguigna pioggia.
> L'un braccio e l'altro bruttamente monco
>   per le strappate mani, e trite in mille
>   pezzi le canne fuor del collo tronco.
>
> (*Visioni*, VII. 458–62)

---

[178] On the same topic see William Spaggiari, *Geografie letterarie. Da Dante a Tabucchi* (Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2015); William Spaggiari, 'Da Lisbona alle Calabrie. La catastrofe e i lumi' in *Città e rovine letterarie nel XVIII secolo italiano* ed. by Silvia Fabrizio-Costa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007). Primary sources on natural catastrophies are, for instance, Enea Gaetano Melani, *Varie notizie intorno a' terremoti. Descrizione esattissima del Regno di Portogallo, colla carta corografica, e colla topografica di Lisbona ec. Relazione dell'orribil tremoto accaduto il dì primo novembre 1755 e delle rovine e danni prodotti in Portogallo, e altrove, Venezia* (Venice: [n. pub.], 1756); Enea Gaetano Melani, *Degli orrendi tremuoti che ne' mesi di novembre e dicembre dell'anno 1755 hanno desolato Lisbona, e varie altre città del Portogallo* (Venice: Albrizzi, 1756); other primary sources to be read in Italian translation are to be found in the anthology *Sulla catastrofe. L'illuminismo e la filosofia del disastro. Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant*, ed. by Andrea Tagliapietra (Milan: Mondadori, 2004).

As illustrated by these lines, the goriness of Varano's images provides the reader with a strong sense of disgust, but also marvel, as seen in 'Visione XI', with the rotten corpse of Amennira. The body here is basically absent as a complete entity, for it is physically divided into parts, described according to the 'long canon', but subverting it. Varano adopts the canon of beauty to portray macabre details and, hence, to give an account of the harshness of nature. First, Varano depicts a shapeless torso, without its head, dirty and dripping with blood. Then, arms are brutally maimed, hands are mutilated and blood vessels from the neck are cut. The copious abundance of blood and the mutilated human body disfigure the human being transforming the victim into a sight of 'horror' which, when performing the second reading as suggested by Jauss' theory of reception, overcomes the mere religious and moral purpose of Varano's poem.

The harrowing scene is completed by the pilgrim's encounter with a woman crushed under the rubble but still alive. Her son, 'un vago pargoletto figlio' (482), lay unharmed on his mother's legs 'su l'imbrunite e stritolate cosce | dell'infelice donna era rimasto' (479–80). Varano traces the last maternal instincts of the woman:

> Sciogliendo ella con man smorta lo stretto
> vel su le poppe, benché infranta, e oppressa
> chiamaval dolce all'amoroso petto.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, VII. 484–86)</div>

The pilgrim recognises that the woman is at the end of her life 'rappresa ormai dal mortal ghiaccio' (493) and approaches her handing her the baby. The dying mother, then, embraces her child: 'l'annodò, lo baciò colla gelata | bocca' (517–18). The following description of the child exaggerates the closeness of the mother-child bond and emphasises the delicacy of the child's body, culminating in total tragedy:

> Le molli del bambin carni leggiadre
> troppo in morir compresse, ed in un punto

spirò l'anima del figlio, e insiem la madre.

<div align="center">(Visioni, VII. 520–22)</div>

The episode provides the readers with a particularly atrocious spectacle, rare to find in poetry, also defined by Varano as a 'spettacol sì amaro' (523) confirming his willingness to stage a particularly cruel scene.

1.5   Visions of Spectral Bodies

Camporesi asserts that to Medieval and Renaissance people Paradise was characterised by an intensely bodily experience made of sweet smells and unchanging beauty and the holy were said to inhabit incorruptible bodies.[179] This is of a particular interest for this study, as Varano's vocabulary strongly stresses the appearance of bodies which are often defined by contrasting Hell and Paradise, opposing corrupted bodies and incorruptible ones. In Varano's *Visioni* it is quite common to jump from the image of ill, consumed bodies and stench of putrefaction to bodies which are described in their unchangeability, incorruptibility, and non-transience, due to their sacred, ghostly, non-material nature. The ghostly and non-corporeal constitutes an element that, though inherited from Dante and traditional literature, eighteenth-century Italian authors enriched with new meanings and features, as in the poems of Varano, Fiorentino and Leopardi. The dichotomy of human bodies, therefore, turns out to be a key element in manifesting a turning point in literature. In fact, the body and its dichotomy between corporeality and spectrality constitute the pivot around which tradition and innovation revolve, through the completion of previous texts, making them more adherent to the era in which the authors live. If, in the case of material bodies, the authors exploit the macabre and abject charge of their time, in the case of spectral bodies, the elements that allows the shift in perspective are excess and the mixed feelings of terror and marvel.

In this and the following section, therefore, I analyse Varano's use of excess to represent spectral bodies and the mixture of fear and wonder in

---

[179] Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, p. 25.

Varano's poetic self caused by the appearance of ghosts. My analysis begins with the case of Amennira, in 'Visione XI', whose essence is problematised by the wide-ranging lexicon employed by Varano in describing her apparition. The definition of Amennira as 'an intangible corpse' guides my exploration of the lexicon of Dante's *Commedia*, a reference par excellence for vision literature. The subsequent sections focus on the types of apparitions that, according to Stramaglia, define the ancient classical 'ghost story', which resonate in Varano's poem.[180] The presence of various spectral entities leads to the comparison of Varano's sacred apparitions with the ghostly ones of coeval British texts, and to compare the effect of supernatural visions on the protagonists of both narratives. This investigation brings to light the lack, in Varano's text, of that element of obsessive persecution (from ghosts towards the protagonists) typical of British novels. It also identifies those spectral descriptions that spotlight the extraordinariness and excess of such visions, which arouse a mixed feeling of terror and wonder in Varano's poetic self.

The excess of Varano's spectral visions can be seen both in the description of incorrupt bodies that are more beautiful than those the deceased had in life, and in the superhuman luminosity of the spectres, which must be dimmed to be visible to the spectator. Such excessive representations, therefore, provoke in the observer an initial feeling of fear, due to the incorporeality of the vision and the fear of persecution, as in 'Visione V', when Battista Varano shows herself to the pilgrim and reassures him that she does not want to torment him. However, fear is driven away by wonder, as happens in 'Visione VI', when the vision of Maria Anna of Austria is accompanied by an explosion of fascinating, colourful lights. If the wounded bodies, the mangled dead, and the decomposed corpses of the previous sections arouse in the reader a mixture of revulsion and attraction, the spectres analysed in this section demonstrate their characterisation as 'excessive' and therefore, according to Botting's reading, 'Gothic', allowing Varano's text to escape simple categorisation as a text with merely sacred and moral intent.

---

[180] Antonio Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae. Storie di fantasmi nel mondo greco-latino* (Bari: Levante, 1999).

1.5.1   Incorruptible Bodies

The first scene that I examine is the transfiguration of Amennira's body before ascending to God in 'Visione XI', for it is a preliminary exploration of the sort of spectres Varano deals with in the poem. The description of her corpse openly contrasts with the subsequent apparition of her ghost, enhancing the 'dichotomy of the body' at the centre of this thesis. The very identification of her appearance as her 'soul' is problematic. When Amennira appears in front of the poetic self, she carries her 'antica immago' (171), thus her human appearance is restored, but her body is an 'impalpabil salma' (178). Varano employs a composite semantic field to play with different bodily connotations. 'Impalpabil salma' constitutes an oxymoron, since the term 'salma' refers to corporal bodies, bodies carrying weight.[181] Yet, her body is not palpable. Varano does not clearly say it, but Amennira seems to have the appearance of a 'ghost', if we consider the original meaning of the word 'fantasma' as apparition, vision, image given by memory, of someone who has passed away.[182] The term 'impalpabil salma', then, provides a simple visual image, without a spiritual connotation. A few moments later, however, Amennira experiences the blissful sensation of ascending to God, resurrecting to a new, heavenly life. Harold Bloom maintains that resurrected bodies are more ethereal and subtle than human bodies, yet they preserve the

---

[181] According to DELI 'salma' means 'corpo umano rispetto all'anima' (before 1294, in Guittone), see *DELI: Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana*, ed. by Manlio Cortelazzo and Paolo Zolli, 5 vols (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1979–88). GDLI registers, as its fourth meaning, the term 'salma' as that 'parte fisica e imperfetta dell'uomo che costituisce il carico materiale, il peso dell'anima' (see *Paradiso*, XXXII. 114); again GDLI defines 'salma' with a fifth meaning of 'cadavere, corpo defunto, in particolare in quanto oggetto di onori funebri', carrying examples from Guarini (seventeenth century) onwards. *GDLI: Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. by Salvatore Battaglia, 21 vols (Turin: UTET, 1961–2002), p. 415.

[182] GDLI records such a definition for 'Fantamsa': 'Immagine, visione o pensiero, sensazione, moto dell'animo suscitato dalla fantasia o dalla memoria; il ricordo stesso, reminiscenza; idea confusa, indefinita, appena abbozzata'; but also 'La forma materializzata, secondo una comune credenza, dello spirito di un trapassato; spettro, ombra, apparizione notturna', p. 648.

characteristic shape of our animal appearance.[183] Such statement helps us to consider Amennira as the ghost of her earthly body *resurrected* in an impalpable shape. The fact that Varano sets the scene in a sort of desert, a non-place, an 'in-between' space symbolising Purgatory, problematises our understanding of Amennira's essence.[184] For centuries, until the coming of Protestantism, the dead hosted in Purgatory were considered by preachers, hagiographers, and schoolmen to be disembodied spirits, though they received corporeal punishments to purify their soul.[185] In Varano's text, Amennira 'nell'infiammatrice alta favilla' (310) purges herself of her sins, but maintains that she does not suffer: 'ivi squallor non avvi, e non pupilla | gonfia di lutto, e non lamento, ed ira' (308–09). However, it is only at the end of the episode that the reader discovers the real essence of Amennira. Her real body, the worn-out one in which she lived on earth, still lies in her grave and she looks at it: 'il putrido e smembrato | suo corpo in rimirar, dolce sorrise' (445–46). Amennira's appearance must, therefore, be composed of her disembodied spirit alone, and the 'salma' to which Varano refers in previous lines may have resulted from the confusion of his poetic self in recognising Amennira's earthly image. Varano reinforces Amennira's non-corporeal nature through her own words, since she refers to her own remains in the grave:

> Guaste quantunque, e incise
>   dai vermi, o Spoglie mie, non rimarrete
>   eternamente già da me divise.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, XI. 448–50)</div>

Amennira, while looking at her remains, adds 'Benché fracide, esangui, ah! Voi mi siete | tenera cura ancor' (451–52). Such a statement confirms what Bynum

---

[183] Harold Bloom, *Visioni profetiche. Angeli, sogni, risurrezioni*, trans. by Nicola Rainò (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1999), p. 143.

[184] The definition of 'non-place' comes from Marc Augé, *Non-Places* (London: Verso, 2008).

[185] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 279–283.

has already noticed regarding Medieval mysticism and especially mystic literature for and by women, that is that the body itself represents a place of yearning for God.[186] The human body can be understood as a 'cherished enemy'[187] for its decomposition was feared, but it still consisted of the vessel that accompanied people through life and would reach them again after the Last Judgement. Devotional texts included descriptions of souls loving the body and put forward the idea that the more perfect flesh is, the more it experiences, in the wake of the body of Christ who experienced both cruel sufferings and full blessings with perfect acuity.[188] The body was interpreted as a locus of experience but also a 'friend', and Amennira testifies to such an attitude with her actions until the end of the episode:

> […] E ondeggiar sembrò la tomba scossa,
>   qual di zefiro al fiato un roseo suole
>   cespo, e festose n'esultaron le ossa.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, XI. 461–62)</div>

Ultimately, human remains can be understood as 'lived experiences' and embody a sort of shrine, an 'archive' of a human being's past life.[189] The element of the shaken tomb, almost a miracle and perhaps a feature with a Biblical origin, and the exultation of the bones lend an atmosphere of excess to the episode, but an excess that is still controlled and does not scare the pilgrim.[190] The apparition of

---

[186] Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 329.

[187] Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 332.

[188] Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 333. See also Abigail Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

[189] The idea of perceiving human bodies, and literature as an archive will be reintroduced in Chapter 3, as I propose a reading of Leopardi's *Appressamento* as an archive of his own poetical thought and upbringing.

[190] Compare the episode of the joyful bones of Ammenira with the biblical episode from Ezekiel 'The Valley of Dry Bones' (I quote in Italian for a more immediate comparison): '"Così dice il Signore Dio: Spirito, vieni dai quattro venti e soffia su questi morti, perché rivivano". Io profetizzai come mi aveva comandato e lo spirito entrò in essi e ritornarono in vita e si alzarono

Amennira, as extraordinary as it is, especially because of the incredibly enhanced beauty of the woman, astonishes Varano's poetic self. The pilgrim is unable to speak 'tacqui, o non ardissi, | o me rendesse muto il mio stupore' (184–85) because of his amazement at seeing 'ritta fra i venti su l'opaco avello | d'Amennira la forma' (165–66).

When she is ready to ascend to God, Amennira's figure looks like an enhanced version of her earthly appearance:

> […] Era il medesmo e vago
> volto, che m'infiammò nei patrii lidi;
> l'aria stessa e il color: non avea pago,
> né mesto, ma tranquillo il viso grave,
> e maggior dell'antica era l'immago.
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 167–71)

The pilgrim is so amazed by such an excessively beautiful image that '[la mente] argomentò che quella fosse un'alma | o dal Ciel scesa o in pace a viver usa' (176–77). Her image seems to be inspired by treatises on women's beauty. For instance, *Gli ornamenti delle donne,* a four-book treatise owned by Varano, in which the author, Giovanni Marinelli, describes the characteristics women need to be defined beautiful, and the ways to obtain such features.[191] Marinelli depicts hair, skin, teeth, and perfumes that are recognisable in some divine representations. Long, dense hair together with flowery fragrances are the most used qualities of divine women, and Marinelli underpins his writing by citing Petrarch and his representation of Laura's golden head of hair.[192] Amennira appears in her blinding beauty made of 'forme rare, e beltà non mai più viste' (426), surrounded by thousands of fragrances, but with wavy dark, rather than golden, hair:

---

in piedi; erano un esercito grande, sterminato' (Ezekiel 37. 9–10). The wind is salso part of Amennira's episode: 'ritta fra i venti su l'opaco avello' (XI. 165).

[191] Giovanni Marinelli, *Gli ornamenti delle donne. Tratti dalle scritture d'una Reina Greca. In quattro libri, con due tavole, una de' capitoli e l'altra d'alcune cose particolari* (Venice: Francesco de' Franceschi Senese, 1562).

[192] Marinelli, *Gli ornamenti delle donne*, p. 88.

> […] Aggiunta al volto avea nuova bellezza.
>
> La fronte lieta crescea grazia al viso,
>
> e due leggiadri solchi in su le tinte
>
> guance rose apria soave il riso.
>
> Fresche aure, e di color celesti pinte
>
> scherzando fean tra mille odori e mille
>
> le brune sventolar chiome discinte.
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 414–20)

Varano's description follows the 'short canon', as he focuses on Amennira's face, both 'volto' and 'viso' in the text. Her forehead is more graceful than her earthly appearance; her cheeks are softly pink and show dimples on them while she smiles; her eyes are 'nere luci' (421), and her dark hair waves in the air. Amennira's description does not differ much from other feminine depictions across *Visioni*. In 'Visione II', Anne Henriette of France, second child of King Louis XV of France who died of smallpox at the age of twenty-four, is defined as angelic with 'nere chiome' (170) and 'occhi neri' (171). Dark eyes are part of the traditional canon, according to the Greek theory of the 'tetrachromacy', exposed by Massimo Peri. This theory maintains that only four colours, namely black, red, yellow, and white, could be found in nature, thus, in the human body. Since ladies sung by poets must embody perfection, their bodies must possess all these colours.[193] Therefore, the canon ascribes the white colour to the teeth, red to either cheeks or lips, yellow to hair, and black to eyes and eyebrows. Nonetheless, Peri observes that blond hair gradually leaves room for new nuances (black or brown) of feminine hair.[194] Varano breaks with the classical canon when he attributes black hair to Henriette and Amennira, instead of canonical blonde. His subversion of the traditional canon of beauty is also visible

---

[193] See specifically: Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è?*, pp. 13–14.

[194] Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è?*, pp. 224, 437 where the scholar states: 'Il decesso della topica classica si consuma dunque fra il sei e il settecento'. Also p. 443: '[…] il topos letterario delle bellezze nasce in età ellenistico-romana […] e conclude la sua vicenda quasi duemila anni più tardi. […] L'ultimo utente di rilievo è Marino'.

in 'Visione VI', after a stunning aurora borealis, Varano depicts the divine apparition of the beautiful Archduchess Maria Anna of Austria, to whom the vision is dedicated. Here, Maria Anna is presented surrounded by lights and her appearance is described, again, following the 'short canon' and she is characterised by brown and black hair:

> Fascia di luce avea, dove s'aduna
> > il più folto del crin: bruno era il crine,
> > che la faccia lambìa fra il roseo bruna:
> le nere ciglia con egual confine
> > doppio fean sottil arco al cerchio nero
> > de' rai, che cinto ardea d'argentee brine.
>
> (*Visioni*, VI. 76–81)

Maria Anna's hair is dark, and her eyes are black, contrasting with the white of her clothes. Strazzabosco notes that the portrayal of the woman is reminiscent of Tasso (apart from the blond hair), Marino and Metastasio.[195] Varano, however, describes historical figures, meaning that features such as eye and hair colours can be influenced by, if not reality, paintings and other visual representations of these figures. This can still be countered by the fact that visual representations of royal members, when not completely idealised, depicted them while wearing wigs, again altering their hair colour. These portrayals might have left Varano the freedom to fashion his own poetical version of historical figures and to assign them dark hair according to his own canon of beauty rather than mere reality. Dark hair will recur in Leopardi's works too, such as in *A Silvia*, as will be shown in Chapter 3. Varano's descriptions of women, therefore, match the tastes of his time, when he applies the canon of beauty to spectral women.

---

[195] See Torquato Tasso, *Rinaldo*, ed. by Michael Sherberg (Ravenna: Longo, 1990), IX. 15: 'Bionda chioma, neri occhi e nere ciglia, | lucidi e vivi quelli e queste arcate'; Giovanni Battista Marino, 'Adone', in *Tutte le opere di G. B. Marino*, ed. by Giovanni Pozzi, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), II, XVI. 101: 'nere le ciglia e le pupille ha brune'; Pietro Metastasio, 'Poesie', in *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Bruno Brunelli, 5 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1965), II, LI. 34–5; 'Due nere luci, sovra cui s'inarcano | nere le ciglia ancora e sottilissime'.

His attitude differs from the norms of his time where the canon of beauty applies to corpses, as Varano subverts that canon in favour of a new, deathly one, where hands and lips are white and cold, and eyes are opaque, circled in black and devoid of light.

1.5.2   Shadows and *Larvae*

In Greco-Roman antiquity, visits from the dead were a phenomenon that was perceived as far from unusual, and the ancients discussed at length those 'doubles' of deceased individuals that we call 'spectres' or 'ghosts'.[196] Besides the times of passage, midday and midnight, which have a symbolic value of suspension and stasis, the night, since antiquity, has constituted the most propitious time of day for supernatural apparitions.[197] In the Scriptures the terms 'vision' and 'night' are frequently placed in relation to each other, a concomitance that suggests the association of visions and dreams.[198] In turn, the dreams mentioned in the Scriptures assume importance because night is portrayed as the most suitable time to hear God's voice or witness his revelation.[199] In the New Testament, Paul experiences a nocturnal vision during which he receives the message of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16. 9) and prophets often have night-time visions (e.g. Isaiah 26. 9; Zechariah 1. 8). Exemplary is the prophet Micah (3. 6), who states, in reporting the Lord's punishment for false prophets, that for them would come 'a night without visions', thus implying the existence of a condition in which the night is naturally accompanied by visions.

In Christian culture, darkness and night, often referred to evocatively by the collective 'tenebre', have a symbolic meaning: they indicate evil and

---

[196] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, p. 8.

[197] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, pp. 47–48.

[198] Zoltán Dörnyei, *Vision, Mental Imagery and the Christian Life. Insights from Science and Scripture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 67–68.

[199] *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. by Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, Ill. / Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 764.

unknowable, uncontrollable negative forces that characterise nocturnal events as shrouded in mystery. In the Bible, darkness is opposed to light, which symbolises life, and is a sign of confusion, deep evil, and death, both in a physical and moral sense, as described in the prologue of John's Gospel (1. 1–18). Darkness is identified with lying (John 8. 41-44), as we learn from the reading of Genesis (3. 1), since it is night when the lying serpent tempts Adam and Eve to doubt God and leads them into rebellion. Moreover, it is night, not only in temporal terms, when the apostle Judas betrays Jesus (John 13. 30) by choosing to sin.

Among Varano's *Visioni*, seven have a nocturnal or partially nocturnal setting. In 'Visione III', 'Visione IV', 'Visione VII' and to a lesser extent 'Visione V', 'Visione IX' and 'Visione X', the night symbolises a sinful situation and accentuates the moralising tone of the compositions with the aim of emphasising the brightness of the supernatural vision. In 'Visione II', 'Visione VI' and again 'Visione VII', the night couples with adverse weather conditions and serves to describe the landscape and the seasonal cycle that terrifies and amazes the spectator. It should be noted that the night recurs in Leopardi's *Appressamento* too, being at the centre of canto I and being gradually defeated by the light of the divine vision in 'Canto IV'.

In 'Visione III' Varano's poetic self reaches the souls of the lustful. They suffer in a dark and muddy swamp, described as a place of perdition, where the vegetation thickens, 'serpeggiando' (27). Varano insists on a lexicon of desire, 'calde voglie' (28), and depicts the surrounding environment with 'paludosi umori' which, 'umbrando' (38), dye everything black until they form a 'così denso vel' (40) as to impede sight:

> […] La mia ristrinse
> visiva forza, che in languida Luna
> fosca notte non mai tanto la vinse.
>
> (*Visioni*, III. 40–42)

The condition of fogginess, which forces the protagonist to walk 'con occhi al suol fitti a capo chino' (46) reflects the natural condition of sinners who lose their way and proceed with uncertain steps 'in mezzo alla caligin bruna' (45).

Varano emphasises this atmosphere by using rich, sustained adjectives, whereby the moon is 'languida', to evoke the sin of lust, and the night is 'fosca', to stress the sinner's perdition. Varano completes the picture with 'lezzo vil de' scellerati amori' (186) and describes the night as the part of the day where man is most prone to sin: 'notte alle colpe amica' (203). One of the Church's main reasons for distrusting night and dreams is in fact carnal relations, 'poiché di notte la carne si risveglia, stuzzica, pungola il corpo lussurioso'.[200]

The abyss of lustful souls reveals to Varano's poetic self, who is fumbling in the dark, the vision of a man with grey hair. Amazed, the pilgrim realises that he is Cardinal Cornelio Bentivoglio, to whom he asks: 'Sei tu nud'alma? O non sei anche estinto?' (93). Bentivoglio provides an explanation of his own image and corporeality:

> E però tu del viver mio disgombra
>   la vana idea, ché non è quel, che vedi,
>   il corpo mio, ma del mio corpo un'ombra;
> e questa col più denso aere, cui diedi
>   moto, forma e color, visibil resi
>   nel mover l'ale dall'eteree sedi:
> perchè non sian da' rai ch'io spargo, accesi
>   del celeste fulgor che mi circonda,
>   i terreni occhi tuoi vinti ed offesi.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, III. 97–105)</div>

Bentivoglio's soul qualifies as a shadow, made visible by Bentivoglio himself so that Varano's poetic self can see him with human eyes without being blinded by his 'celeste fulgor'. The term 'ombra' had already been used by Dante with a precise meaning, which we find in the words of Statius in *Purgatorio* XXV.[201]

---

[200] Jacques Le Goff, *Il corpo nel Medioevo*, trans. by Fausta Cataldi Villari (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005), p. 133.

[201] 'Però che quindi ha poscia sua paruta, | è chiamata ombra; e quindi organa poi | ciascun sentire infino a la veduta. | Quindi parliamo e quindi ridiam noi; | quindi facciam le lagrime e'

Here, Statius explains that the union of the soul, once separated from the earthly body, with its aerial body (which is, however, an organism capable of sensory perception) is called 'shadow' and it is this aerial body that allows the soul to feel pain, speak, laugh, and cry.[202] It is plausible, therefore, to suppose that Bentivoglio's spirit, which descended from Heaven ('l'eteree sedi') and took on a human and corporeal form in order to make himself visible to the author's poetic self, displays precisely the features of the shadow described by Dante, a replica of the earthly body but only momentary, a 'corpo fittizio' as Dante himself explains in *Purgatorio* XXVI.12. Such a contrivance is necessary so that, in the dark night, the pilgrim is not dazzled by the 'excessive' light emanating from Bentivoglio's soul. Such a light, however, continues to enclose Bentivoglio allowing Varano's poetic self to glimpse the surrounding space: 'quel raggio accrebbe, che gli uscia dal volto, | per rischiarar la sculta via nel sasso' (218–19). The luminosity of the souls' faces is another of Dante's traits reused by Varano and later by Leopardi. While Dante the pilgrim turns his gaze to Beatrice to acclimatise his sight and prepare it for the vision of the angelic hosts that will emit a light even more intense than that of the woman,[203] Varano employs the light of Bentivoglio as a sort of lantern that illuminates and guides his poetic self in the night. In *Paradiso* XIV, Dante the pilgrim claims that his human eyes, 'vinti' (78), suffer at the sight of a new circle of blessed souls. Therefore, he resorts to Beatrice thanks to whom 'ripreser li occhi miei virtude | a rilevarsi' (82–83). Conversely, the purpose of Bentivoglio consists of giving 'body' to his own figure, so as not to vanquish and offend the eyes of the pilgrim, but rather to illuminate his path.

The supernatural vision illuminates the way and provides Varano's poetic self with a glimmer of salvation also in 'Visione IV'. Varano describes the

---

sospiri | che per lo monte aver sentiti puoi. | Secondo che ci affliggono i disiri | e li altri affetti, l'ombra si figura; | e quest' è la cagion di che tu miri' (*Purgatorio*, XXV. 100–8).

[202] Manuele Gragnolati, 'Nostalgia in Haeven: Embraces, Affection and Identity in the Commedia', in *Dante and the Human Body. Eight Essays*, edited by John C. Barnes e Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) pp. 117–37 (p. 120).

[203] Gilson, *Medieval Optics*, pp. 84–85.

moment when the pilgrim, 'pien d'affannato tremito' (196) notices a silhouette but cannot distinguish it. The foggy appearance, devoid of material connotations, represents a typical feature of oneiric visions, as it was for the Romans.[204] Varano's poetic self displays terror, obfuscated by the thick atmosphere and unsure where to go: 'E con aperte labbra e arcato ciglio | da stupido terror pendea confuso' (109–10). However, gradually, the pilgrim distinguishes a human likeness:

> […] mi parve
> lume da lungi serpeggiar diffuso;
> e in esso *forma* d'uom dubbia m'apparve,
> ch'esser credei per l'adombrata Luna
> dai tronchi *error* d'immaginate larve.
> Ma, fra i pallidi rai scorgendo bruna
> l'ombra da un *corpo* stesa a me appressarse,
> certo mi resi alfin che la fortuna
> volle, offrendomi un *uom,* fausta mostrarse.[205]
>
> (*Visioni*, IV. 113–121)

Varano conveys the gradualness of the protagonist's visual clarity through an ascending climax, which is also graphically visible with a development in an oblique line running through the triplets. First, the pilgrim sees a 'dubbia forma', then he believes it to be 'immaginate larve' and perceives his own cognition as an error. Finally, the moon's pale rays allow him to glimpse the shadow of a human 'corpo' and he realises it is a 'uomo'. Confusing the human figure with that of frightening *larvae* can be explained by the fact that *larvae* and *lemures*, after the archaic age, are identified as ghosts of the dead and 'hanno un passato di spauracchi demoniaci che conservano un'impronta inequivocabile nell'immaginario popolare'.[206] Once he has realised that the spectral image is that of a blessed men, Varano's poetic self is heartened, 'di sue pupille i lampi […]

---

[204] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, p. 39.

[205] Emphasis is mine.

[206] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, p. 18.

fede mi fero' (163–64) and his sensation only consists of wonder 'io volto alfin maravigliando' (171).

In 'Visione II', dedicated to the death of Anne Henriette of France, daughter of the Most Christian King Louis XV, the reference to the *larvae* of the ancient tradition returns: Varano's poetic self declares that he is so certain of the truth of the vision he is about to recount that he considers it impossible 'dubitar di larve' (30). Yet, the verbal form used by the author expresses doubt, once again, the possibility of error and the fear that derives from it. *Larvae* usually appeared pale and were identified as malign beings.[207] The pilgrim's confusion in 'Visione II', 'Visione III', and 'Visione IV' can be explained by the fact that *larvae* generally present the appearance that the deceased had in life, even if in a weak or indistinct form, what Varano calls 'forma dubbia'.[208] The connotation of *larvae*, thus, recalls the modern conception of frightening ghosts and differs from the apparitions of the dead. For this reason, when the pilgrim mentions 'larvae' he is always heartened by the possibility that it is his own mistake, an 'error', and that the apparition must be a different, not-haunting entity.

Just as in the eighteenth-century ghost stories of English literature (such as *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, and *The Monk* by Matthew G. Lewis, among many others), the spirits encountered by Varano's poetic self appear in a familiar human form, as we have just seen, though not in the clothes they wore when alive or in the sheets in which they were buried, as happens in coeval ghost stories.[209] Nonetheless, even in British novels, ghosts end up as a curious hybrid of divine qualities and human features. This composite nature has been partly explained by ghosts' intimate association with the physical processes of death and decomposition. The prominent position of ghosts within mortuary culture ensured that they retained important affinities with the natural world.[210] The divine qualities are readily

---

[207] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, p. 33.

[208] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, pp. 36–37.

[209] Sasha Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), p. 9.

[210] Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, p. 9.

apparent in 'Visione IV', since the pilgrim, once he has made it clear that the apparition concerns a human figure, introduces it with the epithet 'Angel felice' (176). The pilgrim describes its appearance in this way:

> […] Su le cui ciglia stassi
>> tal d'immortalitade immagin chiara,
>> che palese anche a fragil occhio fassi.
>
> (*Visioni*, IV. 172–74)

The spirit here is so 'corporeal', and thus retains visible human characteristics, that Varano even describes its footprints in the sand: 'io il seguia su l'orme | che ne lasciava levemente peste' (209–10). Like Bentivoglio's spirit, this soul too 'coll'iterar il suo splendore | la notte fuga insidiosa' (205–06), safely leads the poetic self into 'tenebroso orror' (201).

1.5.3   Ghosts Between Fear and Marvel

Varano's *Visioni* displays the goodness of the spirits' intentions and does not allow an exact parallel to be drawn either with ancient ghost stories (Stramaglia's terminology) or with coeval British ghost stories, which teem with vengeful ghosts and haunted houses. Varano's supernatural apparitions maintain the characteristics of ghostly and gothic narratives in terms of feelings they aroused in readers and their appeal to the public.[211] The increase in supernatural stories, for example in England, must necessarily be related to the increase of consumerism, a phenomenon also described as the 'consumer revolution' of the eighteenth century.[212] But if in England supernatural fiction appears as a luxury commodity prompted by the consumer's need for unreal representations, Italian texts shield themselves with the religious and moral purpose emblazoned on

---

[211] On the popularity and circulation of Varano's *Visioni* and similar works see 'Introduction' and Section 1.1.

[212] Emma J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 5.

their titles.[213] Therefore, their popularity is apparently attributable to the devotional inspiration of the readers, rather than to the representation of supernatural visions as excessive and out of the ordinary, facts that would make such works small pieces of escapist literature.

As witnessed in English ghost stories, the success of supernatural texts among readers is due to mechanisms of tension and suspense that the narratives establish in the reader, who, although assailed by fear, is led to continue reading to discover the end of the story. The writer Ann Radcliffe, pioneer of the English Gothic novel, in her posthumous essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826) states that the driving force of supernatural narratives is the terror felt by the protagonist.[214] Terror is an essential element, because it activates the mind and imagination, allowing the mind to overcome, even transcend, its fears and doubts, making the subject move from a state of passivity to activity.[215] The element of terror that drives the protagonist to act also recurs in the Italian sacred and moral poems of the same period, motivated by the didactic necessity of the works. The viewer's first reaction is instinctive and driven by their initial fear because they cannot explain what they are witnessing. The protagonist's gesture is therefore a useful ploy for the author, who finds the perfect space to insert a theological explanation to allay the fear of their poetic self. For example, in 'Visione V', Varano's poetic self is doubtful and hesitates before climbing into the fiery chariot on which sits his celestial guide Battista Varano.

> Fra lo stupore agitò l'alma mia
>> strano impeto così ch'io stesi il piede
>> sul cocchio per tentar l'aerea via:
> e già il pian ne premea; ma dubbia fede,
>> tema ed orror l'assalse, e lo sospese
>> mentre salia su l'infiammata sede,
> e in quel momento a me la destra prese

---

[213] Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, p. 7.

[214] Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (1826), 145–52 (p. 149).

[215] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 48.

> la Donna, e a sè con tal vigor la trasse,
>
> che mio malgrado il piè sul carro ascese.
>
> Credei che in cener muto il corpo andasse
>
> fra le fiamme, che a me parver mortali;
>
> pur d'ingiuria o di duol nulla ei ritrasse;
>
> ch'eran fiamme innocenti, e a quella eguali,
>
> per cui splende e non arde il luminoso
>
> fosforo estratto dagli umani sali.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 22–36)

Varano's poetic self is initially assailed by amazement, recalling a typical reaction of the pilgrim Dante in various passages of the *Commedia*, and then shaken by a 'strano impeto', which leads him to action. The act of climbing onto the celestial chariot, is, however, an action that remains suspended, because the poetic self feels fear and terror in facing an extraordinary phenomenon that he cannot explain. While in many narratives of the time it is through terror that one escapes the object of threat, in 'Visione V', terror catalyses the intervention of Battista who grabs the protagonist's hand and welcomes him, despite his fear, into her chariot.[216] The flames seem so real to the pilgrim that he is assailed by a new fear, that of being burned. Battista reassures Varano's poetic self and shows him that she has fully understood his feelings:

> […] i tuoi ripiglia
>
> spirti pel cammin nuovo oppressi, e spoglia
>
> mista al vano timor la maraviglia;
>
> né dubitar, ch'io sotto aerea spoglia
>
> guerra t'appresti, e ti deluda i sensi
>
> de' danni tuoi con ingannevol voglia.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 46–51)

Although she presents herself in the form of a ghost, 'sotto aerea spoglia', Battista makes clear to the pilgrim that she does not want to torment him in any

---

216 Botting, *Gothic*, p. 48.

way. Varano thus shows that the terror felt by his poetic self derives from the supernatural apparition which may have had malevolent intentions. This element casts light on another aspect of Varano's work: Varano seems blatantly to distance himself from British-style haunting stories. The spectres found in Varano's *Visioni* are benevolent, act for the good of the witness, and do not haunt the pilgrim. Battista utters: 'L'alma a inorridir non usa | fu mai de' mali alla terribil vista' (89–90), implying that Varano's poetic self, a mortal human being, may equate the supernatural apparition with that of a malevolent ghost who wants to torment him.

Battista also invites the pilgrim not to be astonished, thus stripping him not only of his useless fear, but also of his wonder. Both terror and wonder are characterised by excess, an element of Gothic writing that unites Italian visionary poetry with contemporary foreign Gothic literature. The most significant vision in this regard is 'Visione VI' entitled 'Per la morte della serenissima Marianna arciduchessa d'Austria principessa di Lorena', which is set on a winter night:

> […] in preda al verno,
> sorta era già coll'umid'ale orrende
> la fredda Notte […]
>
> (*Visioni*, VI. 3–5)

The pilgrim is near the river Po, unable to turn his thoughts away from the death of Princess Maria Anna (1718-1744), sister of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, whose death had caused widespread grief. Suddenly, the sky is tinged with blood red, then ripped open by a river of light. Announced by these extraordinary visual phenomena, a regal-looking woman appears beside the pilgrim, wrapped in a white mantle. The whole episode is pervaded by wonder and amazement. Varano's poetic self declares the extraordinary nature of what is before his eyes:

> Spettacol grande agli occhi miei s'offerse,
> che i sensi in un momento e i desir tutti
> dell'affannato ingegno a sè converse.
>
> (*Visioni*, VI. 34–36)

Such a declaration of wonder at the spectacular colouring of the sky is followed by a description:

> Colà, dove Aquilon serba i ridutti
> gelidi venti, che poi scioglie irato
> contra le selve annose e i salsi flutti,
> dal polo fin dell'oriente al lato
> con luce di sanguigno ardor feconda
> si tinse il taciturno aere stellato;
> tal che dell'Eridàn presso alla sponda
> ne rosseggiàro al ripercosso lume
> gli uomin, le navi, i tronchi e l'erbe, e l'onda.
> Mentre, seguendo il nuovo suo costume,
> ardea purpureo il ciel, gli apparve al lembo
> un, che l'aure inondò, ceruleo fiume;
> e dall'azzurro e dal vermiglio grembo
> rai ne sgorgàro or agitati, or cheti,
> e ondeggiamenti del focoso nembo
> e globi, che splendean come pianeti,
> e lucide corone ed archi e liste
> e argentee volte e pescarecce reti.
>
> (*Visioni*, VI. 37–54)

The red colour stands out against the black background of the starry sky. Adjectives such as 'sanguigno', 'purpureo', 'vermiglio' and 'focoso', accompanied by verbs such as 'rosseggiaro' and 'ardea', refer to the semantic field of fire, which colours the sky with warm and astonishing shades. A beam of blue light then appears, flowing and undulating like a river, in clear contrast with the previous fiery imagery. 'Corone', 'archi' and 'liste' are terms deriving from a precise scientific observation of the various forms in which the polar

aurora manifests itself.[217] Amazement and wonder do not prevent Varano from providing his readers with a small scientific parenthesis.

> Ben conobb'io nel meditar le viste
>> fiamme dipinte, e con mirabil'arti
>> raccolte da Natura, e fra lor miste,
> che i sottili nitrosi efflussi sparti
>> dal gelo acuto per gli aerei campi
>> salìr del zolfo ad irritar le parti
> dal sole attratte, quando avvien, che avvampi
>> alto del Cane sotto l'ignea stella,
>> e allor scoppiàro in color vari e in lampi.
> Sparìa, poi riaccendeasi ogni facella;
>> ed era or l'ostro illanguidito, ed ora
>> fea di vivo fulgor mostra novella.
>
> (*Visioni*, VI. 55–66)

The flames painted in the darkness of the winter night sky are 'raccolte da Natura […] con mirabil'arti'. According to eighteenth-century theories, the lights derive from chemical-physical phenomena, and explode in flashes and bright colours, evoking the semantic field of heat and explosion: 'fuochi d'artificio', 'avvampi', 'scoppiaro', 'riaccendeasi', and also nouns such as 'lampi', 'facella', 'fulgor'. Varano recounts the phenomenon of the *aurora borealis* probably as learned of from travel reports, and therefore as a fascinating spectacle of lights and colours, rays and curtains, which Algarotti had also written about in the 'Dialogo Quinto' of his *Newtonianismo per le dame* of 1737.[218] However, it is likely that Varano relied heavily on a short work by abbot Antonio Conti of 1739, who had devoted space in his work to both the optical effect of the fata Morgana (another amazing

---

[217] Verzini, in his 'Note esegetiche' to the work, explains that the polar aurora, then called 'boreal' because it was considered typical of that hemisphere only, can appear as a corona (when it is made up of rays or bands converging on the same point), as an arc (when it is perpendicular to the magnetic meridian), as rays (isolated or beams) and finally, as a drape (when it appears as a curtain); Varano, *Visioni*, ed. by Verzini, p. 332.

[218] Francesco Algarotti, *Il Newtonianismo per le dame. Dialoghi sopra la luce e i colori* (Naples: 1737).

optical phenomenon treated by Varano in 'Visione V') and the *aurora borealis*, thus presenting the two natural phenomena in association with each other.[219] Varano's attitude reveals the attention that he paid to the scientific discourse of the Enlightenment, an aspect that he nevertheless reconciles with mystical elements. The splendour that illuminates the night plays a role in the supernatural apparition that follows, modelled on the biblical example, and finding inspiration in the Apocalypse and the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah.[220]

Light effects created by optical devices had already been combined with religious practices and purposes with educational and persuasive intentions by the Jesuits. Among them, Athanasius Kirchner is considered one of the inventors of the magic lantern. Optical devices could, for instance, be employed in churches to multiply the length of aisles through the use of mirrors. Such a contrivance made the boundaries between religious function and scenic representation indefinable.[221] It is plausible that, even in the late eighteenth century, Varano was aware of the optical illusions created by such tools. Among these, the so-called *mondo novo*, an Italian invention that was very popular in the streets of big cities, might have inspired Varano's description of *aurora borealis*.[222]

---

[219] See Antonio Conti, *Riflessioni su l'aurora boreale del signor abate Antonio Conti patrizio veneto* (Venice: Gian Battista Pasquali, 1739). Reflections on the phenomenon of Fata Morgana can be found on pages 1, 2 and 3, and report a dream in which the phenomenon is associated with the apparition of the Virgin. The following pages are dedicated to the aurora borealis: pp. 4–42. The essay is divided into two parts: in the first, the author explains the circumstances for the occurrence of polar auroras, while in the second, he expounds the general principles on which the explanation is based and establishes the analogies between the igneous meteors and the auroras, venturing (by his own admission) to determine the quality, origin, and location of the phenomena.

[220] See for example, as Verzini notes, the description of Maria Anna and that of the woman and the dragon in the Apocalyptic model: 'Nel cielo apparve poi un segno grandioso: una donna vestita di sole, con la luna sotto i suoi piedi e sul suo capo una corona di dodici stelle' (Revelation 12. 1). See Varano, *Visioni*, ed. by Verzini, p. 27.

[221] Donata Pesenti Campagnoni, *Verso il cinema. Macchine spettacolari e mirabili visioni* (Turin: UTET, 1995), pp. 30–32.

[222] On the topic see also *Il Mondo Nuovo. Le meraviglie della visione dal '700 alla nascita del Cinema*, ed. by Carlo Alberto Minici Zotti (Milan: Mazzotta, 1988).

The nocturnal setting has a particular function in visionary works: perfectly suited to conveying a strong religious symbolic meaning, as exemplified in the *Commedia*, and to triggering visionary mechanisms. Varano's text employs nocturnal visions to arouse feelings of terror and wonder in both his poetic self and his readers, through a literature of excess. Night-time constitutes a narrative means to justify the initial terror of the viewer. A nocturnal setting is also suitable for the spiritual apparitions through which Varano conveys his moral messages while amazing his readers with spectacular descriptions.

Varano's sacred and moral literature, imbued with benign supernatural visions, inherits Dante's lexicon and 'cinematic qualities', demonstrating a great attention to the traditional Italian visionary genre.[223] Varano's *Visioni*, however, also demonstrate an interest in a more modern, excessive – or beyond the rational – mode of writing.

---

[223] Gilson, *Medieval Optics*, p. 75.

Chapter 2
Salomone Fiorentino's *Elegie* and The Death of the Beloved

Può nessuno assicurarsi o vantarsi di non aver mai a perder l'uso della ragione, o per sempre o temporaneamente; o per disorganizzazione del cervello, o per accesso di sangue o di umori al capo, o per gagliardia di febbre, o per ispossamento straordinario di corpo che induca il delirio o passeggero o perpetuo?

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

Introduction

In this chapter I examine *Elegie di Salomone Fiorentino in morte di Laura sua moglie*, analysing how Fiorentino manages to negotiate the theme of the 'death of the beloved' as inherited from lyric tradition (particularly Dante and Petrarch) with the conjugal love emerging as a distinct feeling in the eighteenth century, within the context of the modern, middle-class, mononuclear family.[224] The poem consists of chained rhyming tercets, the same poetic metre employed by Varano in his *Visioni* and by Leopardi in his *Appressamento*. Unlike Varano's *Visioni*, however, *Elegie* does not aim to carry a religious or doctrinaire content. Fiorentino came from a Jewish family, and his work employs the Classical model of eulogy as a way of remembering the dead and inspiring compassion in the reader: 'Dove il soccorso non giova, l'unico sollievo, che resta per l'umana miseria, è la compassione altrui. Se queste Elegie vagliono ad eccitarla in qualche core ben fatto avranno ottenuto il loro onesto buon fine'.[225] The work consists

---

[224] Marzio Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto. Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984).

[225] Salomone Fiorentino, *Poesie di Salomone Fiorentino. Nuova edizione con aggiunte*, 2 vols (Livorno: Barbani, 1815), I, p. 38.

of six elegies composed after the loss of Fiorentino's wife, in 1790. The description of the woman's malady takes the shape of a systematic depiction of corporeal sickness, later turning into a spectral presence, making itself manifest to the mourning husband.

Elegie positions itself halfway between *Visioni* and *Appressamento* in terms of narrative viewpoints: Fiorentino adopts a first-person narration, contemplating the sick body of his wife through an external gaze while, at the same time, focusing on his own bereavement. The intertextual presence of Dante, and particularly of *Inferno* and *Vita Nova*, is widespread throughout the work, as well as that of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, enabling Fiorentino to play with his wife's name, Laura. Fiorentino, however, is deeply aware of the novelty of his undertaking: in the preface, he declares that, by dedicating a series of elegies to his forty-five-year-old deceased wife, he is demonstrating a 'moderna conjugale sensibilità'.[226] In Fiorentino's elegies, the inspiring woman is no longer an inaccessible object of desire, as was in the case with Dante and Petrarch, but she is firmly identified as a real woman, united to the poet through a marriage bond. Her death transforms the absence of Laura's body into a source of poetic inspiration, while, at the same time, the poem itself is constructed as the locus of her impossible return. Death, in other words, turns Laura into a muse, whose role, however, does not merely consist in providing her husband with inspiration, but rather imparting his poems with her own body and life, enabling the text to be a site of reanimation.[227] In this way, Fiorentino anticipates a mechanism that would become widespread in the Romantic period.[228]

The theme of vision is central in Fiorentino's elegies, constructed as a veritable diary of a bereavement, constellated with hallucinations and apparitions. Fiorentino's experience does not take the shape of a journey, but rather of an everyday negotiation of loss by poetic means. Intertextuality plays a major role in this process. As I demonstrate, Fiorentino's poetic language is indebted to both Dante's *modo sozzo*, the foul mode of infernal reality which

---

[226] Fiorentino, Poesie di Salomone Fiorentino, I, p. 37.

[227] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 365.

[228] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, pp. 362–65.

Dante refers to as if it were a genre or style (*Inferno*, XXVIII. 21), and to Varano's *Visioni*, resulting in a text that, at second reading, reveals more than is generally noted by critics.[229] Jauss's invitation to chart the 'history of [a text's] reception' will be particularly fruitful in this case, enabling to detect the multiple strategies of re-use of the lyric canon adopted by Fiorentino in this work.[230]

Section 2.1, 'Fiorentino's Best-selling *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie*', aims to introduce the work and discusses its genesis and literary models. In Section 2.2, 'The Her Death', I examine Fiorentino's representations of pain and illness, drawing parallels with Varano's depiction of female sufferance in *Visioni*, including the episodes of Maria Anna of Austria ('Visione V') and Marie Louise Élisabeth ('Visione X').

In Section 2.3, 'Areal Bodies and the Question of Disembodiment', I discuss Fiorentino's sources in relation to the sphere of the 'invisible'. Like Varano, and even more explicitly, Fiorentino employs scientific sources in his work, showing a quasi-materialistic approach in the description of the afterlife. Fiorentino reflects on the nature of the spirit exiting the body at the time of dying, and the physical relationship it may have with the body of the living, in the terms of feelings that overpass sensory perceptions.

The last section, 2.4, 'The Haunting Ghost', focuses on the obsessive presence of the dead beloved who torments the Subject.[231] Here, my analysis centres on the vocabulary of delusion, reinforcing my hypothesis that *Elegie* can be read as a diary of the poet's troubled journey towards an acceptance of loss.

---

[229] Teodolinda Barolini, '*Inferno* 28: Tuscany's Evil Seed', in *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2018) <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-28/>[11] [accessed 22 January 2022]

[230] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 139.

[231] From now on, I refer to the protagonist of *Elegie* as 'the Subject', so as to avoid ambiguity between the 'poetic self' (the projection of the author's self in the text), and the protagonist of the poem. Unlike in *Visioni*, where the experience of the poetic self is that of the 'pilgrim', representing both himself and all the worshippers, Fiorentino in his text reproposes his own experience, unique and not universal.

2.1   Fiorentino's Best-selling *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie*

Salomone Fiorentino was born in Monte San Savino, near Arezzo, in 1743, from a wealthy family of Jewish cloth merchants. He was educated in Siena and spent most of his life in Cortona and Florence.[232] His works consist mainly of didactic poems and *poesie d'occasione*, as was the custom in the eighteenth century. Among these, Fiorentino wrote *La notte d'Etruria*, a short encomiastic poem that celebrates Pietro Leopoldo, Grand Duke of Tuscany, encomiastic sonnets related to a courtly milieu, and biblically inspired sonnets, such as *Si ricerca perché la legge mosaica inculca i doveri del figlio verso il padre, e tace i doveri del padre verso il figlio*; *Il diluvio universale*; *Paragone fra Jefte e Abramo*, all of which are included in his collection of works *Poesie*.[233] Biblically inspired sonnets and translations of some psalms from Hebrew into Italian clearly testify to Fiorentino's exhibited Jewish identity, which, however, does not permeate his *Elegie*, apart from, perhaps, a brief reference in his 'Elegia VI', 'L'Eternità' (see Section 2.4). The production of Fiorentino's works is influenced by the cultural environment of his time, and results in a mixture of classical features (see the elegy *Per il suicidio di Neera*, clearly derived from Ovid) and vaguely religious references (for instance, the ascension

---

[232] Relevant information on the life and works of Salomone Fiorentino are to be found in the following: Odoardo De Montel, *Sulla vita e sulle opere di Salomone Fiorentino. Discorso letto all'Accademia del Buon Volere la sera del 31 ott.* 1852 (Florence: Tipografia nazionale italiana, 1852); Francesco Pera, *Ricordi e biografie livornesi* (Livorno: Vigo, 1867) pp. 3–4; Ettore Levi-Malvano, 'Salomone Fiorentino e le sue Elegie', in *Miscellanea di studi critici pubblicati in onore di Guido Mazzoni dai suoi discepoli* (Florence, 1907), II, pp. 217–33; Aurelia Josz, 'Salomone Fiorentino', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 3 (1926), no. 4, 172–81.

[233] Stemming from Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–45) the fashion of composing poems set in nocturnal settings bloomed all over Europe, also thanks to the work of translators, as underscored in the 'Introduction'. In the Italian context see *Le notti clementine* by Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola (1774); *Notti poetiche sopra argomenti diversi* by Antonio M. Capra (1777); *Le notti romane* by Alessandro Verri (1792-1804); *Le notti puniche* by Giacomo Leopardi (1810). For reference: Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola, *Rime e prose* (Genoa, [n. pub.], 1797); Mariano Antonio Capra, *Notti poetiche sopra argomenti diversi* (Cesena: per Gregorio Biasini all'Insegna di Pallade, 1777); Alessandro Verri, *Le notti romane*, ed. by Renzo Negri (Bari: Laterza, 1967). Giacomo Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, ed. by Rolando Damiani, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), I, pp. 770-782.

of souls to Heaven). The 1803 volume *Poesie* contains compositions of various kinds, many of them classically inspired, rich in pagan, pastoral, or veiledly Arcadian characters and themes. Among these, the elegy *Il suicidio di Neera* is redolent of Ovid's *Heroides*, where the poet imagines a woman's encounter with death. Sonnet 9, *In morte d'un piccolo figlio dell'autore*, is also elegiac in tone, and will be echoed in later poems by Giosuè Carducci, alongside the long-acclaimed *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie*, the work which augmented the poet's popularity. Fiorentino's poems were highly praised by his contemporaries, including Melchiorre Cesarotti, Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola, Pietro Metastasio, Giovanni Fantoni and, later, Vincenzo Monti and Vittorio Alfieri, as we learn from correspondence Fiorentino had with some of them.[234] Although reluctant to publish his own works, Fiorentino made himself known to his contemporaries, so much so that in 1785 the Accademia degli Infecondi in Prato invited him to join its ranks.

Fiorentino's personal life and career as a poet were hugely influenced by his marriage to Laura Gallico in 1768 and, above all, her death in 1790.[235] From this tragic event, Fiorentino was inspired to write a collection of elegies dedicated to the deceased, *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie*, which underwent two editions in the same year, first in Arezzo (by Caterina Bellotti) and then in Florence (by Grazioli). The work enjoyed widespread popularity among the public of the time, and about thirty years later, in 1828, the work was still applauded by Leopardi, who selected parts of the elegies for his *Crestomazia poetica*, even though

---

[234] See Melchiorre Cesarotti, 'Epistolario', in *Opere*, ed. by Giovanni Rosini (Florence-Pisa: Niccolò Capurro, 1813), IV, pp. 104–107. Cesarotti's generous comments can be also read in Josz, 'Salomone Fiorentino', p.175: 'sublimi e stupende per la nobiltà dei pensieri, la finezza degli oggetti, la robustezza e l'eloquenza dello stile: tali da scriversi tra i più segnalati versi che l'Italia possa vantare in tutti i suoi fasti poetici'. Josz recalls appreciation of Fiorentino's poetry from Giovanni Fantoni, too, 'che lo chiama poeta elegiaco, e lo dice "colui che potrebbe ridestare in Italia l'anima di Callimaco e di Tibullo, e richiamare coi lamenti della elegia la Madre Italia a scuotersi da' suoi vizii, causa della sua umiliazione"' (179).

[235] Information on Laura Gallico are to be found both in Levi-Malvano, 'Salomone Fiorentino e le sue Elegie', and Josz, 'Salomone Fiorentino'.

Fiorentino's influence on Leopardi, as we have seen, has never been investigated in depth by critics.[236]

The publishing history of Fiorentino's *Elegie* was troubled. Initially, the first three elegies, 'La malattia', 'La morte', and 'La visione', were published anonymously under the pressure from Fiorentino's friends; only later the author agreed to publish them under his own name, as explicitly declared in the preface of 1790.[237] The 1790 edition includes a fourth elegy, entitled 'La rimembranza'. *Elegie*'s editions span from 1790 to the end of the nineteenth century, and from 1803 they were included in the overarching volume called *Poesie*, where Fiorentino collected all his poems.[238] There, Fiorentino brought the number of the elegies to six, including 'Il Tempo' and 'L'Eternità'. The high number of editions of *Elegie*, either as a stand-alone volume or collected inside *Poesie*, as well as their small, handy formats, testify to the great popularity the author enjoyed

---

[236] See Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La poesia*, pp. 410–12.

[237] See the preface 'A chi legge' to be found in all editions.

[238] My recollection of Fiorentino's editions includes: *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie* published in Arezzo, by Caterina Bellotti in 1790 (in 16°) and 1791, and with the same title published in Florence by Grazioli in 1790. Then, *Le quattro elegie di Salomone Fiorentino in morte di Laura sua moglie* were published in Rimini, by Paolo Albertini, in 1792, followed by *Elegie in morte di Laura sua moglie* published in Bologna, by Gaspare de' Franceschi alla Colomba, in 1800. All the cited works include three elegies: 'La malattia', 'La morte', and 'La visione'. The *Bodoniana* edition, issued in Parma in 1801, includes for the first time a fourth elegy, 'La rimembranza'. Other editions of *Elegie* were published in Ancona by Sartori: one is undated but was probably issued in 1804; others are dated 1808, and probably 1830. In 1803, the first collected volume of Fiorentino's works, *Poesie*, was published in Pisa by Tipografia della Società Letteraria. It includes other poems from Fiorentino and adds a fifth and sixth elegy: 'Il Tempo' and 'L'Eternità'. Other editions of *Poesie* followed: *Poesie di Salomone Fiorentino* was printed in 1804, both in Milan and Genoa; then, within the collection *Parnaso degl'italiani viventi* (Florence: Molini, Landi & Comp., 1806), XXV; by Barbani in Livorno in 1815 (2 vols. in 12°); in Crema, by Antonio Ronna, in 1817; in Florence in 1818 (2 vols in 18°); in Parma by Bodoni again in 1823 and the same year in Florence by L. Ciardetti; in Livorno by Barbani in 1825; in Florence, by Società tipografica C.C., in 1826; in Fiesole by Poligrafia fiesolana in 1834 and 1836; again in Florence, by G. Steininger, in 1845, and by Passigli in 1856. A new edition was printed in Pisa, by Tipografia della Società letteraria, in 1871 and in 1913 some excerpts can be found in *Poeti minori del Settecento Mazza-Rezzonico-Bondi-Fiorentino-Cassoli-Mascheroli*, ed. by Alessandro Donati (Bari: Laterza, 1913).

during his lifetime and after his death, taking place in 1815. However, although admired by the public, Fiorentino's poems have not attracted any substantial scholarly attention, and a critical edition of *Elegie* is still missing.

The dearth of investigation on a work which had been enduringly successful can be attributed to cursory analyses, leading critics to relegate Fiorentino's elegies within the derivative niche of 'sepulchral poetry'. Moreover, the influence played by Petrarch's lyrics in *Elegie* completely obscured the presence of Dantean traits, elements that scholars might have considered innovative and noteworthy in the eighteenth-century panorama. Among his contemporary admirers, Cesarotti acclaimed Fiorentino by drawing a parallel not only with Petrarch's love poetry, but also with Dante's, especially with regard to the last two elegies, 'Il Tempo' and 'L'Eternità':

> Il Petrarca non piange la sua Laura con maggiore delicatezza di stile, con tanta finezza di affetti reali e tratti dalla natura e con tale varietà di idee e di sentimenti: e il suo "Tempo" e l'"Eternità" hanno di che farsi invidiare dal Padre Dante.[239]

Cesarotti's intuition was correct: echoes of Dante are present in all of Fiorentino's *Elegie*, and most notably in elegy VI, 'L'Eternità'.

In my analysis, I rely on the 1815 Florentine edition, including all the six elegies.

2.1.1   A New Elegy

To mourn his deceased beloved, Fiorentino writes an elegiac text, based on Horace's definition of the elegiac genre in his *Ars Poetica*, that is as a sepulchral querimony. Although during the Classical period the elegy was primarily poetical and characterised by a precise metrical scheme – distiches consisting of a dactylic

---

[239] An excerpt of the letter from Cesarotti to Fiorentino dated Padua 1813 can be found in Josz, 'Salomone Fiorentino', p. 181.

hexameter and a pentameter – the Middle Ages witnessed elegies in prose, written in the vernacular language. Such change was legitimised because translators of elegiac texts, for example Ovid's *Heroides*, did not have a vernacular counterpart to render the elegiac couplet.[240] The elegiac genre, therefore, began to characterise texts in thematical, and no longer metrical, terms. On these grounds, Stefano Carrai has proposed to read Dante's *Vita Nova* as an elegiac text, composed as a prosimetron.[241] According to Carrai, the *Vita Nova* does not only reproduce the rhythm of the elegiac couplet thanks to the alternation of prose and poetry, but, above all, it also explores the lugubrious (from the Latin 'lugēre', 'to cry') themes that are typical of elegies.

The Classicist elegy flourished in the eighteenth century, when Classical models were praised and referred to 'obsessively'.[242] The eighteenth-century elegy, however, has seldom been studied, and academic analysis of the subject merely consists of two contributions: one, slightly outdated, by Ettore Levi-Malvano, and a more recent one by Alessandra Di Ricco. In his essay *L'elegia amorosa nel Settecento*, Levi-Malvano focuses on Ludovico Savioli's *Amori*. As far as metre is concerned, Di Ricco points out that Rolli declares tercets, drawn from the model of Ludovico Ariosto, as the most suitable metre for elegiac compositions.[243] Fiorentino too adopts tercets, but instead of conforming to the elegies of his contemporaries, Savioli and Rolli, whose principal focus was love, he returns to the classical *lamentatio*, and, confirming Carrai's assertion, he designs his elegies as mourning poems.[244]

---

[240] Stefano Carrai, 'Appunti sulla preistoria dell'elegia volgare', in *L'elegia nella tradizione poetica italiana*, ed. by Andrea Comboni and Alessandra Di Ricco (Trento: Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, 2003), pp. 1–15.

[241] See Carrai, *Dante elegiaco*.

[242] Ettore Levi-Malvano, *L'elegia amorosa nel Settecento* (Turin: S. Lattes & C. Librai Editori, 1908), p. 20.

[243] Alessandra Di Ricco, 'L'elegia amorosa nel Settecento', in *L'elegia nella tradizione poetica italiana*, ed. by Andrea Comboni and Alessandra Di Ricco (Trento: Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, 2003), pp. 215–237 (p. 224).

[244] In 1818, Leopardi employed tercets to compose his 'Elegia II', which is rich in the lexicon of sufferance, tears, and mourning, as exemplified by the repetition of the verb 'piangere' and its

Leaving aside metrical issues, Brady, too, asserts that, as a genre, elegy is primarily identified by its content: praise and lament.[245] According to Carolyn Miller, genres could be defined as 'typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations'.[246] In the case of elegies, death represents the recurrent situation.[247] Brady also emphasises that elegies depict the passage from the profane human life into the sacred, for instance when they narrate resurrection, which is exactly what takes place in Fiorentino's *Elegie*.[248] Elegies also follow a ritual, for poets often portray rules of conduct, sometimes exemplified by descriptions of funerals and the attendees' comportment, as Fiorentino exemplifies when he portrays the protagonist dressed with 'negri panni'.

The lamenting, consolatory, and ritualised content evident in elegies provides the reader with idealistic representations (since poets seek to immortalise their subjects) and, overall, with a predetermined horizon of expectations: the reader knows that in an elegy he will find consolation and empathy. The reader's expectation changes, however, after a second reading of Fiorentino's *Elegie*, since the text discloses a more subtle weave that is revealed gradually, as happens in Varano's *Visioni*. Even though *Visioni* was presented as a sacred and moral work, aiming to adopt Dantean poetry as a deposit of mystical scenes and themes (as claimed by Varano in his preface), the work does not meet the reader's expectations in the end, because *Visioni* includes the most vivid and 'corporeal' aspects of Dante and ultimately consists of a writing excessively rich

---

cognates: 'Intanto io per te *piango*, o donna mia | che m'abbandoni, ed io solo rimango | del mio spietato affetto in compagnia. | Che penso? che farò? di chi mi *lagno*? | Poi che seguir nè ritener ti posso, | io disperatamente anelo e *piagno*. | E *piangerò* quando lucente e rosso | apparrà l'oriente e quando bruno, | fin che 'l peso carnal non avrò scosso. | Nè tu saprai ch'io *piango*, e che digiuno | de la tua vista, io mi disfaccio; e morto, | da te non avrò mai *pianto* nessuno. | Così vivo e morrò senza conforto' (70–82), emphasis is mine.

[245] Andrea Brady, *English Funerary Elegy in the Seventeenth Century. Laws in Mourning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 10.

[246] Carolyn Miller, 'Genre as Social Action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70 (1984), no. 2, pp. 151–67.

[247] Brady, *English Funerary Elegy*, p. 2.

[248] Brady, *English Funerary Elegy*, p. 3.

in abjection. Similarly, Fiorentino fills his elegies with elements that we can identify as 'abject', aimed to inspire terror and wonder. His elegies, ultimately, lend themselves to an interpretation far removed from the mournful, and closer to a sort of diary of the poet's delusions, rich in spectral hauntings.

Fiorentino's elegies, therefore, lose their codification as simple mournful texts, and evolve, since he employs them to explore the soul of the survivor without the lavish praise for the deceased. The entire text can be read as the author's intimate journey, as he becomes aware of life's true values and is confronted with dramatic and mournful events. Beginning with the first two elegies, which focus on the woman's illness and gradually retrace her steps up to her death, and ending with the last two, which reflect on the vanity of time and human vices, Fiorentino illustrates the lack of lucidity of the Subject, with whom the reader is invited to sympathise.

In his *Gothic Death*, Andrew Smith explains that eighteenth-century literature witnessed the emergence of a discourse on sensibility as a new form of emotional understanding, which provides a support for models of mourning as well as new ways of understanding grief. In this way, according to Smith, works based on mourning in the eighteenth century are to be understood as a development of the classical elegy.[249] I advocate, though, that the attention to the inner self of the bereaved brings a new modern trait to eighteenth-century elegiac texts, tending towards excessive writings and Romantic themes, which explains their revival by later modern authors, such as Leopardi. Fiorentino's poem can thus be interpreted as a poetic reaction to mourning with features that are not conventionally elegiac, such as the delusional persecution of the ghost of the dead. Although the haunting of the ghosts of the deceased has existed since ancient times, as Stramaglia amply demonstrated, the element of mental obsession is the one that introduces the greatest novelty into the text. The demons of antiquity returned to disturb the living for various but well-defined reasons (lack of burial or business left unfinished, for instance). Instead, the torment of Laura's ghost appears (apparently) without motivation, and the vision

---

[249] See Andrew Smith, *Gothic Death 1740–1914: A Literary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 11–12.

that the widower cannot explain becomes uncanny, if we consider the 'uncanny' to be 'an experience of disorientation' where the world we know 'suddenly seems strange, alienating or threatening'.[250]

The dead woman, furthermore, is not a woman longed for by the poet, but rather his actual life companion. In the poem, Fiorentino recalls the story of his wife's malady, showing how her death had been the result of a series of events, and facing the circumstances from both a personal and a mystical point of view. As Andrea Brady explains, death is never punctual and, in Early Modern and Modern times, 'death began before the last exhalation and ended long after the eyes were closed'.[251] This finds his poetical representation in Fiorentino's elegies, since he first represents Laura in her sickbed, then stages her death, the remembrance of her and finally narrates her divine vision. Thus, *Elegie* mirrors the tripartition described by Brady when the scholar refers to death as a rite of passage composed by liminality, separation, and reintegration.[252] Liminality is fulfilled in the first elegy, when the illness consumes the woman; separation is meticulously described by Fiorentino in his second elegy, the one narrating the death of Laura; and finally reintegration, when the spirit of his wife flies away from her earthly body to be reunited with another entity, perhaps God or the underground, so that her remains will become a fertiliser for new lives (see 'La rimembranza', IV. 91–93).

The death of the beloved woman naturally connects Fiorentino with the Dantean model of *Vita Nova*, and with Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, where the poets represent, respectively, the deaths of Beatrice and Laura. Although many passages in Fiorentino's *Elegie* recall Petrarch's sonnets, such as the reference to the footsteps left on the ground (see sonnet 35: *Solo et pensoso*) and the hair 'a l'aura sparti' (see sonnet 90: *Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi*), Fiorentino's work

---

[250] Jo Collins and John Jervis, 'Introduction', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1–9 (p. 1).

[251] Brady, *English Funerary Elegy*, p. 1.

[252] Brady, *English Funerary Elegy*, p. 1.

seems to me to be steeped in Dante's vocabulary and imagery.[253] Thus, the line of visionary poetry traced by Varano also runs through Fiorentino, more than the critics have hitherto noticed, as will be analysed in the following sections.

Even though Fiorentino does not exploit the theme of the otherworldly journey, which is taken up by both Varano and Leopardi, my thesis intends to shed light on Fiorentino's reception of Dante. A recurring quotation from Dante's works in Fiorentino's elegies is the vivid representation of the figure of Ugolino. The lexical and figurative reprise of the Ugolino episode allows Fiorentino to dwell on the paternal figure, represented by the Subject, who embodies at once both the internal narrator and the external observer. The last elegy, 'L'Eternità', also insists on the semantic field of gnawing and materially consuming tangible bodies, drawing on Ugolino's model, and showcases the greatest array of abject images from the whole collection. The addition of Fiorentino's elegies 'Il Tempo' and 'L'Eternità', in 1803, seems to reflect the widespread interest in Dante's poetry, and confirms the success of the re-evaluation of Dante begun years before by Varano. The episode of Ugolino from *Inferno* XXXIII, together with the story of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V, permeates the literature of the late eighteenth and later nineteenth centuries to such an extent they become ever-present even in short excerpts in foreign anthologies, due to the episodes' richness in drama and pathos. In 1802, with Henry Boyd's complete translation, began the tide of publications of Dante's *Commedia* in the English-speaking world, translations that fostered a long-term engagement with the original version.[254]

---

[253] The figure of Laura as Petrarch's own beloved and 'original character' and subsequent reappropriations of her as a character have been fruitfully explored in Barbara L. Estrin's *Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne and Marvell* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). Perhaps the Laura narrated by Fiorentino would earn a place in a similar quest on the reception of the 'mythical' figure of Petrarch's Laura. However, I prefer to devote attention, given the purpose of this study, to the elegies' Dantean features, and neglect a structured investigation of Laura's crucial presence, which does deserve further development.

[254] Federica Coluzzi, *Dante Beyond Influence: Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), p. 4.

Despite Fiorentino's indebtedness to his illustrious predecessors, one of the most relevant phenomena of his poetry is transposing courtly references from the noblest literary tradition to a very bourgeois everyday life. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, erudite scholars imbued their writings with the recounting of their intellectual lives, giving rise to memoirs and autobiographies.[255] Autobiography as a genre also became a privileged point of observation for the Italian linguistic events of the eighteenth century.[256] Fiorentino, however, does not employ autobiographical references to vaunt his own erudition, but rather to represent an intimate reality, and a new style based on bourgeois ordinary life that his models, Dante and Petrarch, could not have produced. In his Elegie, indeed, Fiorentino depicts moments of ordinary life from which the new bourgeoisie of the time emerges and his decision to narrate the death of his own wife, rather than that of an unattainable ideal woman as Dante and Petrarch did, projects the entire elegy into a domestic dimension. There, the poet includes his everyday life, with his children eating at the table with him, and the bedroom where he goes to rest every night. The inclusion of everyday reality in a high-brow style poem makes it possible to read *Elegie* with a new critical eye, and to re-evaluate the work from the point of view of its peculiarities and novelties.

2.2   The Her Death

Fiorentino's *Elegie* has an undisputed protagonist: Laura, the poet's infirm wife. Although the choice of such a subject derives from the reality of the poet's life, Fiorentino has illustrious poetical precedents. These do not include Dante, for whom Beatrice's death is an unexpected event and who never describes the onset

---

[255] Marziano Guglielminetti, 'Per un'antologia degli autobiografi del Settecento', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 4 (1986), 140–51. See, for instance, *Progetto ai letterati d'Italia per iscrivere le loro vite* published in 1728, a collective work with the aim of highlighting the ability of Italian intellectuals to document the vicissitudes of their cultural formation.

[256] Lorenzo Tomasin, *"Scriver la vita". Lingua e stile nell'autobiografia italiana del Settecento* (Florence: Cesati, 2009), p. 10.

of her illness.[257] Petrarch, on the other hand, paints an earthlier image of Laura in his poems, portraying her physically, even aged, and making various allusions to her illnesses.[258]

Among Fiorentino's contemporaries, instead, Varano's model stands out from the others. The description of an external onlooker, who gazes upon the body of a sick woman, echoes the depictions of Maria Anna of Austria and Marie Louise Élisabeth of France in Varano's 'Visione IV' and 'Visione X'. In both texts the emphasis is on the pain felt by the women. In the case of Maria Anna, her story consists of a first-person narration, while Marie Louise's episode is told by the 'angel of smallpox' who infected her. In Fiorentino's elegy, the Subject narrates the malady of his wife while being completely external to the victim, at least until the moment when the Subject identifies with the dying woman. Such a mechanism of simultaneous identification and expulsion (since the sick woman, by dying, physically distances herself from her surviving husband) creates within the narrative a sense of abjection, similar to what we observed in the previous chapter.

Fiorentino's first elegy, 'La malattia', begins *in medias res*, with the voice of the Subject urging his wife to endure the pain caused by her disease, described as a battle:

> Destati dal profondo, ove ti stai,
>
> letargo di dolor, misero core;
>
> se resister tu vuoi destati omai.
>
> (*Elegie*, I. 1–3)

---

[257] Santagata, *Le donne di Dante*, p. 80. Santagata also explains that, before Dante, writing poems *in morte* was uncommon. In the pre-Dantesque tradition, such as the Provençal one, we can find only a few compositions that mourn the death of the beloved woman (also called *planhs*), since death signalled the interruption of the poem. See Santagata, p. 102. On *planhs* and the Medieval genre of *planctus* see also: Rinaldina Russel, 'Studio dei generi medievali italiani: il Compianto per la morte dell'amata', *Italica*, 54 (1977), no. 4, 449–67 (pp. 459–60).

[258] See for instance, Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere* [*Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*], ed. by Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), sonnet 33.

The powerful expression 'letargo di dolor' conveys the idea that the pain suffered by Laura depletes her strength and does not allow her to react nor even to be vigilant. The violence of the infirmity transpires from the semantic field of a flooding river that destroys the banks:

> Se più tardi, ei crebbe sì che tocca
> ambe le sponde, e spesso avvien che schiante
> gli argini allora per se trabocca.
>
> (*Elegie*, I. 7–9)

The rhythm of the poem presses on with rhetorical questions that emphasise the pain: 'come, o miser cor, reggere a tante | scosse che avventa l'orgogliosa piena?' (10–11).

Laura's suffering is described as if the Subject was talking to the dying from her deathbed, echoing the modern habit of family reunions around the dying, as recounted by Bronfen, who devotes an entire chapter to deathbed scenes.[259] As McManners indicates, the last farewell to the dying in their death chamber was perceived as 'a supreme reward of family solidarity', which is mirrored in statues embellishing Italian funeral chapels and cemeteries across the peninsula.[260] However, neither Varano nor Fiorentino portray family gatherings around the dying, preferring to focus on the representation of tormented bodies. For this reason, the reader learns about Laura's sufferance from the account of the Subject, who almost identifies himself with the dying to convey the power of pain, as if he suffered in turn. 'Barbare son le pene che tu senti' (55), states the Subject. The viewpoint of Fiorentino's elegies is, then, a new one, diverging from Varano's account in *Visioni*, for the Subject embodies an external observer, speaks as if he is directly recounting the scene to Laura

---

[259] See Bronfen, *Over Her Dead* Body, pp. 76–92. On the matter see also Ariès and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1973).

[260] John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 256. See Malone, *Architecture, Death and Nationhood.*

herself, and presents himself to the reader as if he can physically feel Laura's pain. By detailing such pain Fiorentino thus preserves the traditional elegiac tone by means of excessive description of bodily pain:

> Misero cor trona al letargo, e i tuoi
> tumultuosi affetti oblia, confondi;
> poiché desto, il dolore i colpi suoi
> troppo avventa atrocissimi e profondi.
>
> (*Elegie*, I. 67–70)

The close of the first elegy repeats the beginning in a circular fashion, repeating the term 'letargo', which Laura is now invited not to fight, but to abandon herself to. In this way, she would manage to pause and forget about her 'tumultuosi affetti', since once awake her pain, as an internal devouring monster, strikes atrociously. Fiorentino employs an excessive terminology here, visualising the battle of Laura against her malady as a turmoil, as we learn from the word 'tumultuoso', and concretising the sufferance with the term 'colpi', which recalls a real, corporeal fight. The adjectives 'atrocissimi', a superlative, and 'profondi', acutely convey to the reader the idea of sufferance. Leopardi provides a similar description in *Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato dal corruttore per mano ed arte di un chirurgo* (1819), when he writes about 'orrida pena, sotto ferri atroci' (38).[261]

Varano's *Visioni* is resonant as a model if one considers 'Visione VI', where he recounts Maria Anna's death, which occurs to put an end to her great suffering. Maria Anna's pain begins when her husband, Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine, had to leave to go to war, causing her an 'amorosa piaga' (171) and from that moment on, Varano describes her sufferance as that of a woman always on the verge of death. The term 'piaga' suggests that the nature of her pain will soon become more tangible and material than a mere love pain. Maria Anna traces her story, emphasising the pain suffered within her body: for

---

[261] Giacomo Leopardi, 'Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato dal corruttore per mano ed arte di un chirurgo', in *Poesie e prose*, pp. 390–394.

instance, her heart is portrayed as a warrior 'combatte e langue | fra il viver duro e l'aspettata morte' (190–91), an image which parallels Laura's fight against her disease. Maria Anna describes her pain with an ascending climax so as to emphasise a pain so excessive as to be compared to an atrocious martyrdom:

> Allor provai quanto d'ogni aspra sorte,
> o di misero stato, o di martiri
> fosse ne' petti umani amor più forte.
>
> <div align="right">(Visioni, VI. 193–95)</div>

Both Varano and Fiorentino do not spare details. In eighteenth-century Europe, sickness was still described as an imbalance of spirits, embodying the vivifying element present in the human body.[262] Such spirits drew their potency from an aerial substance in the atmosphere, the pneuma, or divine spirit, breathed into the lungs.[263] Together with the classical system of the humours, the psycho-physical balance in the eighteenth century remained at the centre of the representation of illness and in particular that of women.[264] According to traditional models, illness mainly affects the weakest, most sensitive and innocent individuals, usually children and virgins or generally respectful women, so as to emphasise their sanctity.[265] Varano's depiction of Maria Anna's disease does not escape this logic:

> Già pel lungo soffrir gli spirti fiochi
> scorrean de' nervi le compresse vie
> rigurgitando a non usati lochi;
> già le sceme del cor forze natie

---

[262] Gian-Paolo Biasin, *Literary Diseases: Theme and Metaphor in the Italian Novel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), p. 4.

[263] Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, pp. 46, 48.

[264] See *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800*, ed. by Allan Ingram, Sim Stuart, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker, and Leigh Wetherall-Dickson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[265] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*.

> d'ingrato mi vestian peso e torpore,
>
> e nel torpor crescean le pene mie.
>
> > (*Visioni*, VI. 202–07)

The episode describes how feebly Maria Anna's vital lymph flows through the nerves. Her 'forze natie' figuratively clothe Maria Anna's body with heaviness and torpor. Fiorentino depicts the same exhaustion that gradually conquers Laura's body and dwells on the description of the pain with short elliptical expressions:

> Singulti amari, immoderata pena,
>
> acerbi lai, lacerator cordoglio
>
> il fiotto orrendo furiando mena.
>
> > (*Elegie*, I. 13–15)

The scene takes on disturbing connotations, for it insists on physical and emotional effects that exceed reason, traits that, Botting suggests, characterise a writing of excess, and therefore Gothic in nature.[266] In the following lines, the Subject identifies himself with the body of the dying woman, whom he calls 'cara parte di me' (34). The body of Laura is briefly detailed:

> Egro è il tuo corpo, e di vigor già scemo,
>
> e il morbo che infierisce dispietato,
>
> è il flutto che ti tragge al giorno estremo.
>
> > (*Elegie*, I. 37–39)

The disease that rages and, like a flood, breaks until it leads the woman's sick body to death (to be noted is the expression 'giorno estremo', recalling Bartoli's 'punto estremo', evoked by Varano and repeated by Leopardi) also affects the Subject, because he declares 'io palpito e tremo' (35) and 'il mio labbro amare voci getta' (36). According to Kristeva, it is the feminine body that causes

---

[266] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 2.

abjection, and by participating in the nature of Laura's body, the Subject partly personifies such a feminine body.[267] The sense of abjection is conveyed by the fact that he trembles as if he was the one to die, 'abjecting' his own body. Dying can, indeed, be understood as an extreme attempt by the body to free itself from a foreign element, such as a disease. The (figurative) expulsion of Laura's body from her husband's manifests itself in the second elegy, entitled 'La morte', when the Subject affirms:

> Tanto allor dentro mi cresce il duolo
> ch'i' crederei lo spirto si fuggisse,
> lasciando il corpo inanimato e solo.
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 28–30)

The excess of pain is so unbearable that the Subject imagines his spirit leaving his mortal body, rejecting it, as an abject. The death of Laura presents itself in such a painful and traumatic way that the husband identifies with his wife, considering her a part of himself and feeling that he is dying with her.

In terms of the description of the body, Fiorentino relies on the short canon, focusing his portrayal on lips 'labbra smorte' (49), cheeks 'gote' coloured of a 'porpora estinta' (50) and eyes 'occhi grami' (4), a picture similar to Varano's description of Maria Anna in 'Visione VI', who appears cold, 'fredda qual gelo' (224), 'muta pel labbro chiuso alle parole' (225), and with cheeks, 'gote', soaked with her last tears, 'pianto estremo' (232). Weeping is a key element in Fiorentino's poetry, not only to maintain a strong link with the elegiac theme, but also because illness, due to the imbalance of humoral fluids, also manifests

---

[267] Karen E. Tatum, *Explaining the Depiction of Violence Against Women in Victorian Literature: Applying Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection to Dickens, Brontë, and Braddon* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), p. 37. Tatum explains that Kristeva delineates her theory of abjection focusing on it as a perception of fear, 'a simultaneous fascination and horror with a maternal reminder, such as bodily discharges', reminding the male subject of his primal relation to his mother. Women are, therefore, physiologically the prime example of abjection.

itself in the shedding of liquids and tears.[268] The second tercet of 'La malattia' introduces this aspect to the reader:

> E su per gli occhi grami in largo umore
> parte ne versa, e parte dalla bocca
> in parole brevi e sospir versane fuore.
>
> (*Elegie*, I. 4–6)

The image conveys to the reader a strong sense of languor, of powerlessness in the face of illness, and the presence of bodily fluids conveys again a sense of abjection. A similar sense is conveyed by Leopardi in his 1819 work *Nella morte di una donna*, where he writes that 'dal cor l'ambascia si riversa e move' (10) addressing the disgust and the angst felt by the narrator of the tragic chronicle. Body fluids are what a human being is when close to death. This means that the dying is at the border of their condition as a living being, as Kristeva says.[269] The body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border and, Kristeva explains, such wastes drop so that the human being might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in the human body and it entirely falls beyond the limit, from the Latin *cadere*, from which the word cadaver derives.[270]

In response to this undoing and abjection, the dying woman, Laura, can only respond with moans and sighs, 'mesti' and 'languidi accenti' (57). In Leopardi's early work, *Per una donna inferma di malattia lunga e mortale*, dated 1819, the text represents a dying woman characterised by a 'sospiroso e languido sembiante' (41). Such a description seems reminiscent of the sick Laura and her struggle to make sounds: 'il fiato | […] che da' tuoi labbri in fuga è mosso' (91–92). Fiorentino insists on Laura's weakness in the elegy entitled 'La morte' with

---

[268] Diseases were long considered due to an imbalance between the humours that constituted the human body, whose excess manifested in an outflow of these fluids, such as tears. The theory of the four humours, also called 'four temperaments' was first propagated by Hippocrates and Galen. For further details see Roy Porter, *Blood and Guts: A Short History of Medicine* (London: Penguin, 2003).

[269] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

[270] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

expressions such as 'flabili lamenti' (10) and addresses her as 'amata spoglia' (33) when she dies 'più non m'ode e muta giace'(35), which Leopardi mirrors in *Per una donna inferma* by writing 'è morta, e non risponde […] chiusi quest'occhi, e morto questo volto' (17–19). Fiorentino also points out that his woman's youth passed quickly 'un vol d'ombra fugace | fu il breve trapassar dei tuoi verdi anni' (II. 37–38), a reference that might explain why critics wrongly attributed a young age to Laura. The collocation 'verdi anni', nevertheless, recurs in Leopardi's *Per una donna inferma*, 'in così verde etade' (15), and in his later drafted novel *Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno*, 'così mi duole vedere morire un giovine come segare una messe verde'.[271] The struggle of the dying against the malady that devastates the woman's body, is ultimately a legacy Leopardi appropriates in *A Silvia*, where the woman perishes due to an illness, as happens in Fiorentino's *Elegie*:

> Tu pria che l'erbe inaridisse il verno,
> da chiuso morbo combattuta e vinta,
> perivi, o tenerella. […]
>
> (*A Silvia*, 40–42)[272]

The raging disease and the description of the deteriorating body can still be found in Varano's 'Visione X'. The story of Marie Louise is recounted from an external viewpoint, that of a rebel angel, almost a demon, who embodies the role of the narrator and tells the story to an astonished pilgrim (Varano's poetic self). The angel takes away Marie Louise's life because it infects the woman with smallpox and projects an overt external gaze on the body of his prey. The angel who caused Marie Louise's illness describes the deterioration of the woman's body and the onset of the illness, involving the physical description of altered body parts, even more powerfully than in *Elegie*:

---

[271] Giacomo Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, ed. by Franco D'Intino (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1995), pp. 99–101. In this study, D'Intino first gives the fragment the title 'Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno'.

[272] Giacomo Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, I, p. 78.

> E le increspai le fibre, ed ai soavi
>
> liquidi pania infiammatrice aggiunsi
>
> che, in lor confin gli arteriosi cavi
>
> tubi ingombrando, svaporar ne feo
>
> le parti levi, e infracidò le gravi.
>
> (*Visioni*, X. 257–61)

Varano here versifies the degeneration of the woman's body, which he also mentions in his annotations: the angel describes the poisonous and contagious substance that, mixed with the humours, causes symptoms in succession. According to the medicine of the time, smallpox was an inflammation of the blood and blood vessels that leads to the internal organs rotting and becoming rancid.

The sufferance felt by Marie Louise is powerful and reinforced by Varano's display of excess, which is especially potent during her deathbed scene. While waiting for her 'certa morte' (204), Marie Louise worries about her husband, because, unaware of his wife's illness 'non presago di cotanto duolo' (223), she imagines him waiting for the usual reassuring letters when instead he will receive one announcing her passing. Here begins a section that abounds in funereal vocabulary, where the semantic field of blackness predominates over the other colours:

> Altra vedrà squallida e nera
>
> lettera nunzia d'immaturo fine
>
> segnata a lutto da funebre cera.
>
> (*Visioni*, X. 226–28)

Fiorentino depicts a similar funereal scene when, in the second elegy, 'La morte', he declares 'pinger non so la luttuosa scena' (II. 13) but includes details such as the attitude of the Subject towards death like his identity as 'vedovo, sconsolato in negri panni' (42). Varano already depicted Marie Louise's daughter in such a cloth when instead of celebrating her wedding she would prepare herself the farewell to her mother:

Morte i fiori cangia in pruni,

e del nuzial serto gemmato in vece

vestirai l'atre lane e i veli bruni.

(*Visioni*, X. 241–43)

Fiorentino's choice of depicting his wife in her sickbed is aligned to those elements that Bram Dijkstra has defined as 'dangerous fantasies', one of which is the representation of a woman in a state of sickness leading her to death.[273] According to Dijkstra, this image became, in particular during the nineteenth century, an 'icon of virtuous femininity'.[274] In terms of periodisation, this statement could imply that Fiorentino is actually anticipating a theme that will become fashionable later on, such as in the nineteenth-century *romanzo nero*.[275] The rendering of the woman's sufferance also marks a line of continuity with Foscolo's Luigia Pallavicini and his *amica risanata* and Leopardi's Silvia in the wake of the so-called 'odi mediche', as Maria Antonietta Terzoli defines those *poesie d'occasione* which address ill women. Terzoli notices that such poems derive from Ovid and Propertius and evolve in the sixteenth century up until the eighteenth century.[276]

Laura is not the only figure to whom the subverted canon of beauty applies. Indeed, the figure of the mourner, the Subject, mirrors the figure of the ill woman, for instance in the paleness of his face. In the second elegy, the widowed husband is characterised by 'faccia scolorata e lagrimosa' (27), so as to assimilate husband and wife and seal their identity as one part of the other. The male figure in Fiorentino's elegies is perfectly in line with those of other mannish figures in coeval Italian and foreign poems where male characters are affected by melancholia and are characterised by sensitivity, as happens in Pindemonte

---

[273] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p. 24.

[274] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p. 24.

[275] See Folco Portinari, *Le parabole del reale: romanzi italiani dell'Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976) and Enrico Ghidetti, *Il sogno della ragione. Dal racconto fantastico al romanzo popolare* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987).

[276] See Maria Antonietta Terzoli, *Foscolo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000).

and Bertola's poems, among others.[277] As a mourning widower, the Subject is virtuously represented in tears. Such a representation is not, though, novel in the context of the Italian poetic panorama, since an Italian reader had been accustomed to the image of a crying man since Dante's works, in which the pilgrim cries, faints, and turns pale. Yet, it is in eighteenth-century literature that men come to be represented as 'men of feelings', where, for instance, they appear to be a medium for emotional exchange, which also raises questions of how their bodies reveal or conceal what they feel.[278] The loss of vivid nuances of the skin has been traditionally intended as a consequence of either love or death.[279] The adjective 'scolorato' has usually been employed in relation to love in older authors, such as in Dante and Boccaccio, while writers who are chronologically closer to Fiorentino's time, such as Giambattista Marino, Vincenzo Monti, and Giacomo Leopardi, use the term to represent the coming of death.[280] Fiorentino

---

[277] See, for instance, the following lines 'Quel torbido rivo | che inonda, e pianger fa l'agricoltore', in Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola, 'La malinconia', in *Nuove poesie campestri e marittime* (Genoa: [n. pub.], 1779), p. 35; and also the following 'Melanconia,|ninfa gentile, la vita mia|consegno a te.|I tuoi piaceri chi tiene a vile,|ai piacer veri |nato non è', (35–43) in Ippolito Pindemonte, 'La melanconia', in *Le prose e poesie campestri d'Ippolito Pindemonte con l'aggiunta d'una Dissertazione su i giardini inglesi e il merito in ciò dell'Italia* (Verona: Tipografia Mainardi, 1817).

[278] On the topic see Alex Wetmore, *Men of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Literature. Touching Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). The eighteenth century is the time of melancholy, when poets portray themselves in the dark, often in nature, longing for a golden past or a lost lover. This is chiefly represented, within the Italian panorama, in the poems of Pindemonte and Bertola, where the male figures never embody masculine stereotypes of strength and heroism as they will in Romantic literature. See Allan Ingram and others, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century.*

[279] See, for instance, Aurelio Roncaglia, *Poesia dell'età cortese* (Milan: Nuova Accademia, 1961) and particularly the section entitled 'L'amore nella società cavalleresco-cortese' where Roncaglia outlines the traits of the *amore cortese*, stating that this kind of love is absolute and physically manifested. Among the typical symptoms of love, Roncaglia includes the paleness of the face.

[280] The change of colour in the face of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V is clearly indicating the gradual possession of love that is winning over the couple, and their reading is the cause of the paleness as lines 130–131 suggest: 'Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse | quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso'. Even more blatant is Boccaccio's lines from his *Teseida* (1341): 'Voi udirete come elli [Amore] scolora | ne' casi avversi ciascun suo seguace | e come dopo affanno e' doni pace'

employs the verb 'scolorare' in another elegy, *Per il suicidio di Neera*, included in his 1803 edition of *Poesie*. Here, the term once more refers to the act of dying, and allows Fiorentino to depict the metamorphosis the body undergoes when assaulted by death:

> […] del viso adorno
> scolorossi il vermiglio, e s'adombraro
> degli occhi i raggi che muovean d'intorno.
>
> (*Per il suicidio di Neera*, 73–75)

Fiorentino couples 'scolorare' with another poignant verb, 'adombrare', thus focusing on the chromatic sphere to portray the change in appearance of the dying person at the point of death, giving the same attention to colours as is traditionally given to the description of female beauty.[281] Fiorentino does not therefore focus on the coldness of the corpse, but rather on its colour. His portrayal of the ill body of Laura is chiefly related to her facial colour, the paleness of her skin and the loss of vividness in her lips, while nothing overt is said about her beauty – no details regarding her eyes or her hair nor comment on her appearance before her illness. The paucity of physical details of Laura's body and corpse consequently grants more space to the description of her posthumous vision, where the poet devotes a few lines to her divine apparition.

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida*, ed. by Salvatore Battaglia (Florence: Sansoni, 1938), I. 4. On the other hand, in *Il pianto disperato*, Marino writes 'Mentre del bel viso gli ostri | scolori e di morir disposta sei, | donna mortal nel tuo dolor ti mostri' (12–14), and in *La sua donna piangente sopra un fanciullo morto* one can read the following: 'Mentre che 'l caro pargoletto estinto | di pure e calde lagrimette onora | la bella donna, e 'l viso ombra e scolora | che di nova pietá langue dipinto' (1–4) Giovanni Battista Marino, *Poesie varie*, ed. by Benedetto Croce (Bari: Laterza, 1913). See also Leopardi's *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia* (23-66): 'Tu forse intendi […] che sia questo morir, | questo supremo scolorar del sembiante', where the fading of the skin is synonymous with dying.

[281] See Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è?*.

2.3   Areal Bodies and the Question of Disembodiment

In his first elegy, Fiorentino writes of Laura's illness, a theme the author harnesses to address the liminality between life and death. In his second elegy, Fiorentino then turns his attention to her dead body. In this section, I analyse the ways in which the author articulates the discourse around dead bodies, considering both human corporeal remains and questions of spectrality. The idea, already present in Varano's work, that the body constitutes a mere shell for the soul pervades *Elegie*, too. For this reason, the remains of Laura's body are less prevalent than the amount of mutilated and mangled bodies we find in Varano's work, while her spirit receives more attention. It should be considered that Varano imbues his visions with moral meanings and, therefore, involves in his work a vision of the afterlife, including infernal punishments, on the Dantean model, to which Fiorentino does not refer. The deterioration of the human body in Fiorentino is observed through the natural life cycle, which does not intersect with the spiritual sphere. On the other hand, the manifestation of Laura in her impalpable body requires an interpretative effort on the part of the author. Fiorentino seeks an explanation for what the Subject sees, and finds a suitable device in 'aerial bodies', to which Varano also resorted to in his *Visioni*. The spectrality to which Fiorentino seeks to provide an explanation, does not, however, seem linked to the religious sphere, but rather to a more generic supernatural domain, an uncanny one, close to the phantasmagorical and hallucinatory, without relying on mysticism. Finally, this section aims to investigate the dichotomous representation between the 'fleshy' body, 'carnosa massa' (IV, 112), and the disembodied appearance of his wife's spirit, to understand how the poet renders the relationship between the two in his poem.

Although *Elegie* does not involve representations of Hell with extreme punishments, throughout his collection Fiorentino stresses how the human body is inextricably and intrinsically linked to suffering. The body of both the dying wife and the Subject are assailed by superhuman suffering, due to, respectively, illness and the burden of loss. The Subject juxtaposes the human body with the spirit, underlining that it is the human, corporeal entity that experiences

suffering. This happens repeatedly in 'Elegia II', when the sorrowful husband seems to advocate a separation between his inner self and his body: 'Ed io non già, solo il mio fral si duole' (lines 6 and 21). As happens in Varano, Fiorentino makes the adjective 'fral' a noun and employs it to indicate the human body. As an exclusively bodily attribute, sufferance torments human beings and Fiorentino insists on this in the same elegy, soon after the death of Laura occurs, when he claims the body of the Subject to be the target of 'la vorace | favilla del dolor che lo tormenta' (22–23). The reference to a voracious fire, 'vorace favilla', evokes in the reader the flames of Hell, but Fiorentino only suggests punishments in the otherworldly realm without making any reference to it. Rather, his poetry identifies the human body as a cage that imprisons the human essence, which suffers because it is inextricably bound to the materiality of its fragile shell: 'il mio spirto imprigionato geme' (II. 113). The picture that emerges, therefore, suggests that the body perishes while the spirit remains alive, in accordance with Classical philosophy and Christian doctrine, a fact that the poet immediately clarifies in the opening of his third elegy, dedicated to the apparition of Laura: 'dell'estinta sposa anima viva' (III. 1). The expression, one immediately notices, is a chiasmus, a figure that reinforces the dichotomy between extinction and vitality, placed at the extremity of the expression, and between the image of the bride (hence the corporeal and earthly entity) and her soul.

The discourse on corporeality becomes more complex when Fiorentino briefly retraces his love story with his deceased wife to stress the bodily suffering caused by the separation of 'a part' of himself.

> Ma come il Fato in pria nostre alme avvinse
> e poi quaggiù provido amor ci unio
> sicché due salme in una salma strinse,
>   scemo della metà dell'esser mio,
> or cerco te […]
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 49–53)

These lines introduce the term 'salma', which signifies the body, opposed to the term 'alma' but with a similar sound, in order to speed up the rhythm of the

tercets and emphasise the conceptual difference between the two terms through similar sonority. If destiny has united the souls of the couple, sealing their spiritual union with their earthly one through bodily unity ('due salme in una salma strinse'), with Laura's death one half of the Subject has been taken away, the half that made him an entity complete both spiritually and materially. The Subject therefore longs for his soulmate because he lacks a part of the self: 'scemo della metà dell'essere mio'. Such a concept seems redolent of the Platonic myth of Aristophanes (also known as 'The Myth of the Androgyne'), according to which males and females were created by Zeus being originally unified in a single entity and then split into two halves and longing on Earth for their reunification.[282]

With such an explanation, Fiorentino also wants to make a declaration of intent: his elegies recount his personal quest for his own unity, through the search for his lost half. This approach is immediately corroborated by the following tercets, which portray the Subject imagining the afterlife, where he hopes to meet Laura. This is the only part of the elegies where Fiorentino portrays an otherworldly realm and depicts it as a mere product of his imagination. He wonders 'se anche fuor della corporea forma | l'alme han tra lor la conoscenza antica' (II. 103–4), and 'se di terren idee serbano l'orma' (II. 105) and envisions what happens to the soul of his wife Laura, introducing a heavenly structure reminiscent of Dante's, with spheres surrounded by a bright and never-ending light.[283] As explained by Charles Singleton, the general structure of the physical world is conceived according to the astronomical science of Dante's days, but concurrently, nearly all the mundane description

---

[282] Plato writes: 'so ancient is the desire [for] one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of humans', see Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, translated by Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), IX. For further details see also: Francis M. Cornford, 'The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's Symposium', in *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. by W. K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

[283] On the topic see Susanna Barsella, *In the Light of the Angels. Angelology and Cosmology in Dante's* Divina Commedia (Florence: Olschki, 2010). See in particular 'The Angels and the Mechanics of the Spheres', pp. 106–08.

carries a purely symbolic import. In the Dantean system the spheres 'fit into one another, with no empty space between. At the centre of the universe is the solid, round, motionless earth, about which the heavens revolve, carrying with them their luminous orbs'.[284] Further, 'the appearance of the various orders of the blessed in the several spheres, as Dante traverses them, does not indicate that these regions are really inhabited by souls, but is merely a visible token of the different grades of beatitude'.[285] By reading Fiorentino's few notes on his heavenly cosmology, instead, we understand that the different bright spheres need to be crossed by the souls of the deceased until reaching their other half: 'Da cerchio in cerchio andrà, da sfera in sfera | per via, che il guidi a riunirsi insieme' (II. 116–17). This is what Fiorentino imagines for the Subject's soul, when the ties that hold his soul together with his body are broken by the arrival of death, who cuts them with an 'adunca spada', recalling the figure of death described by Petrarch in *Trionfi*.[286] The poet foresees the celestial meeting of spouses separated in life by death and details it:

> E giunto là dove non è mai sera,
> al primo incontro chiameransi a nome
> l'anime fide in lor dolce maniera.
>   E se lor manca di abbracciarsi il come,
> aleggiandosi intorno il puro lume
> confonderan di lor celesti chiome.
>
> <div align="right">(Elegie, II. 119–23)</div>

The two tercets allow us to grasp the confusion of the Subject, who does not really know how to mentally picture the souls of the dead beyond Earth. If a few lines earlier he wondered whether the souls had any memory of their life and

---

[284] See 'Paradise' edited by Charles S. Singleton, in *Companion to The Divine Comedy*, commentary by C. H. Grandgent (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1795), pp. 211–302 (p. 214).

[285] Singleton, 'Paradise', in *Companion to The Divine Comedy*, p. 213.

[286] See Petrarca's *Triumphus Mortis* where death is presented as 'una donna involta in veste negra' (31) and utters: 'Io ho condotto al fin la gente greca | e la troiana, a l'ultimo i Romani, | con la mia spada la qual punge e seca' (40–42).

appearance on Earth, he now asks whether the souls can embrace each other, raising questions about their nature. Fiorentino essentially imagines them having a body, which we learn when he envisages them kissing each other:

> E come dopo lunga lontananza
> tra i caldi baci narransi gli amanti
> le passate lor pene, e la costanza.
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 109–11)

Nonetheless, the poet wonders whether souls *can* embrace each other: 'se lor manca d'abbracciarsi il come'. The term 'come' suggests that Fiorentino is referring to the means by which the embrace is possible, and thus to corporeality. Therefore, Fiorentino demonstrates that the Subject has no clear idea of the 'essence' of the deceased in the otherworldly realm: they can kiss, but can they hug each other?

Fiorentino proposes a solution for the union of two incorporeal souls, whom he imagines meeting in Heaven. There, the bodies of the dead are made of air and would hover around each other, 'aleggiandosi intorno', like incorporeal spirits, if they are not able to properly hug each other 'se lor manca di abbracciarsi il come'. The lack of corporeality in 'aerial bodies', like those encountered in Dante and Varano, is compensated for by another trait typical of human beings: speech. In fact, the souls, who at this point Fiorentino thinks certainly have memories of what they experienced in life and therefore recognise each other, talk as only lovers can do. The language used here by Fiorentino is reminiscent of courtly love, according to which kind souls, 'fide', speak to each other in 'dolce maniera'. In this way, Fiorentino emphasises the dichotomy between corporeality and incorporeality, and proposes a solution to the manifestation of affection between two entities without a physical body. This contrivance allows the poet to keep alive the hope of the Subject and to continue his quest for his other half.

The essence of the bodies of the deceased ascending to Heaven begins to become clearer to readers as they cross the threshold of the third elegy, the one dedicated to Laura's appearance to the Subject, entitled 'La visione'. This

section of Fiorentino's work is redolent, on several occasions, of the encounter between Varano and Amennira, in 'Visione XI', where traits of excess and abjection also return to enrich the scene with meaning, enabling a second level of interpretation.

The inability of the man to cope with grief leads him to make gestures that brutally bring him back to the reality of absence:

> La man, che ognor sentia dolcezza nova
> nello stringerti al sen, benché aria vana
> abbracci sol, di stringerti si riprova.
>
> (*Elegie*, III. 13–15)

The scene evokes the encounter of the pilgrim Dante with Casella in *Purgatorio* II:

> Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto!
> tre volte dietro a lei le mani avvinsi,
> e tante mi tornai con esse al petto.
>
> (*Purgatorio*, II. 79–81)

Both the authors stress the vanity of corporeality with the term 'vana/vane' and both episodes represent how the protagonists try to embrace someone who eludes them. If, in Dante's case, it is Casella's soul that approaches the pilgrim with the intention of embracing him, the protagonist of Fiorentino's elegy imagines he has an entity before him that simply does not exist. Fiorentino always emphasises the need of the Subject for contact with another body, for he names body parts, such as the hand and the chest, and repeats the verb 'stringerti'. The viewpoint is still external, and the Subject relives the narrated events as if he were telling them to the deceased.

The suffering of the Subject comes to a halt when Laura appears to him after six days from her death, when he is experiencing his darkest hour, denying his loss:

Non la rividi allor qual la perdei:

ma in tal atto amoroso, e in tal sembiante,

che trasformati avria gli uomini in Dei.

Radendo agile il suol m'apparve avante;

e dove non so dir, né con qual arte

sostenesse librata ambe le piante.

Candide avea le vesti, e all'aura sparte.

E tutta l'avvolgea cilestre un velo,

che trasparir lasciava ogni sua parte:

[…]

tra nube fatta di vapor sottile

pel notturno seren traspare in cielo.

(*Elegie*, III. 31–42)

Unlike Amennira, who appears from her tomb, Laura manifests herself by fluctuating, surrounded by the vapour of a cloud in a nocturnal setting, which is here kept unchanged from the Greco-Roman tradition described by Stramaglia.[287] Fiorentino provides more details than Varano, and the Subject admits that he is unable to find an explanation for what he sees, showing that he does not immediately resort to a mystical vision. In fact, Varano describes Amennira with hands stretched to the sky in a mystical attitude 'ambe le mani stese | in atto di chi al Ciel libera chiede | Grazia' (XI. 247–49), while Fiorentino only focuses on the inexplicable phenomenon that allows Laura to hover in the air like a ghost. The apparition of Laura's ghost embodies an uncanny aesthetics, since it 'troubles the serene confidence of any explanatory or interpretative framework' and unsettles the Subject.[288]

Laura's look, however, differs from the pale image of her in the deathbed and this is enhanced by the contact with Heaven, an image redolent of Amennira's 'forme rare, e beltà non mai più viste' (XI. 426). The picture described by Fiorentino sounds more modern than that portrayed by Varano, for the interest of the poet shifts from a strictly mystical aesthetics to an

---

[287] See Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae.*

[288] Collins and Jervis, 'Introduction', p. 3.

uncannier one, a mixture of feeling and reflection which can be considered 'a distinctive *aesthetics* of modernity'.[289] Fiorentino introduces here the first hint of the appearance of a ghost, an incorporeal entity which floats in a way that the seer cannot explain, but is still recognisable in its appearance. The rational response of the Subject is, then, to search for an explanation of 'qual'arte' Laura employs to float in the air. Whereas outside Italy, other countries such as England saw 'a great proliferation in the publication and purchasing of ghost stories in a wide diversity of forms and genres', within the Italian context the most acceptable explanation for ghosts were mystical visions.[290] The paucity of study exploring ghosts and Catholicism in the eighteenth century means that we do not have as much context for Italy as we do for Britain, where, following the second half of the eighteenth century, 'reactions to ghost stories also shed new light on existing historical debates about the vitality of eighteenth-century Anglicanism, the relationship between clergy and parishioners, and relations between the established Church and dissenting groups'.[291]

Fiorentino, however, aspires to a scientific, or at least rational explanation, and, through the use of the term 'arte', seems to suggest the presence of a trick. The nocturnal setting and the stupefying phenomenon might indicate a comparison with magic lantern shows, already suggested in the case of the *aurora borealis* in Varano's *Visioni*. In his *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*, dated 1818, Leopardi accuses Romantic poetry of operating like an optical machine that produces nothing but a passive imitation of reality. This reveals that new technical devices entered poetry and shaped a new way to poetically write about objects, with consequences for the aesthetics (everything can be artistically reproduced, and everyone can be an artist) and audience (readers are nothing more than mere spectators).[292] Magic lantern shows, an import from France and England, spread across Italy in the wake of foreign

---

[289] Collins and Jervis, 'Introduction', p. 2.

[290] Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, p. 10.

[291] Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, p. 140.

[292] See Alessandra Aloisi, 'Una macchina dal nome infernale in arrivo da un paese romantico', *Intersezioni*, 3 (2017), no. 2, 163–181.

success, and imitations of Robertson's famous phantasmagorical productions took place in many Italian theatres and were advertised as creating perfect illusions of good-natured ghosts.[293] Among Italian magicians, one can name Giuseppe Pinetti (1750–1826?), who enchanted audiences with the 'power of science' in his shows.[294] In the absence of concrete evidence, one cannot rule out that Fiorentino knew about these spectacles and drew poetical inspiration from them. The fact that the vision of Laura appears to the Subject in the middle of the night, which, with its darkness, leads to diminished sight and therefore an increase in the other senses, such as hearing and imagination, also lends credibility to such an assumption. The sense of disorientation experienced at night, and in the optical spectacles of the time, can be either fascinating or threatening, and thus create the same sense of disorientation to which the Subject is exposed in *Elegie*.[295]

The physical description of Laura recalls Amennira's almost supernatural appearance:

> Serbava il volto amabilmente umile
> e dagli occhi umidetti un certo raggio
> sovrumano piovea, e signorile.
>
> (*Elegie*, III. 43–45)

Fiorentino could have drawn on Varano's depiction of Amennira, since both descriptions highlight the almost enveloping gaze of the woman:

---

[293] Pesenti Campagnoni, *Verso il cinena*, p. 89. See also Fabio Camilletti, *Guida alla letteratura gotica* (Bologna: Odoya, 2018), and specifically on Robertson see pp. 158–60.

[294] Camilletti, *Guida alla letteratura gotica*, pp. 161–62.

[295] On the theme of night see Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Night and the Uncanny', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 51–67 (p. 51). On optical illusions see Tom Gunning, 'Uncanny Reflections, Modern Illusions: Sighting the Modern Optical Uncanny', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 68–90.

> Le nere luci d'amorose stille
>
> di gaudio umide il sen bagnavan miste
>
> a pioggia di chiarissime scintille.
>
> (*Visioni*, XI. 421–23)

The super-human nature of the beloved women is underpinned by the excess of love that characterises both their faces and eyes: Laura's face is 'amabilmente' humble, while Amennira has 'amorose' tears in her eyes. Laura's eyes are 'umidetti' and her gaze rests on the seer like rain. The semantic field of water and rain has been recalled in Varano when he describes Amennira's tears as 'umide' while they 'bagnavan' like 'pioggia'. The nature of Laura's vision, therefore, seems to recall Amennira's beyond-human essence, yet Fiorentino does not openly refer to mystical forces, but rather to a super-human appearance, whose nature still does not seem to be ascribed to any determined sphere or realm. Laura's evanescent body retains its earthly form, and indeed the poet emphasises how the dress she wears, almost a transparent veil, allows a glimpse of her body. The references to Laura's soul vanish as soon as the Subject visualises her; almost as if to underline Fiorentino's interest in representing her corporeal and fleshy reality. The soul, in short, seems to be for Fiorentino a breath of wind, air in motion, passing by.

Fiorentino also evokes Varano's excessive writing when he discusses the Subject's reaction to the vision of Laura:

> Tal la vid'io oltre ogni creder bella,
>
> che l'aspetto divin mi tenne in forse,
>
> e un sacro orror mi chiuse la favella.
>
> Pur la conobbi, e ratto al labro corse
>
> la parola affannata, e dissi appena
>
> Laura… e il labro nel dir più non trascorse.
>
> (*Elegie*, III. 49–54)

The scene closely resembles the pilgrim's reaction to the ghost of Amennira and accentuates the fearful hesitation of Laura's husband with functional rhetorical

figures highlighting the writing of excess to render the spectacularism of the event. Just like the pilgrim who sees Amennira emerge from her tomb, the Subject is incapable of uttering a word, too stunned by the unexpected vision of his deceased beloved. Like the pilgrim, he recognises the woman and finds the courage to speak but just calling out her name, in the same way the pilgrim does with Amennira. What is more striking about these tercets are the oxymoronic expression 'sacro orror' and the divine aspect that sustains the seer's doubt. It seems that the Subject recognises the sacredness, and therefore the exceptional nature, of the vision, but at the same time, he is horrified by it, and therefore afraid of it, as is the case with the sense of abjection Kristeva discusses. Having longed to be reunited with his wife Laura, the Subject does not believe his own eyes, and begins to doubt what he sees. For this reason, Fiorentino writes that the Subject is 'in forse'. The model, again, appears to be Varano, when the pilgrim 'dubita di larve', for he does not distinguish clearly the silhouette approaching him. The expression 'aspetto divin' employed by Fiorentino discloses a more complex, nuanced meaning, since it might refer to a super-human being, even a *larva*, an entity which harbours malevolent features.[296] Fiorentino does not therefore exclude the possibility of deception, and that the apparition is just a dream. The vision of the beloved woman does not appear in Fiorentino's elegies as the vision of a heavenly being carrying a moral or divine message. Amennira, in fact, brought the pilgrim a message of hope, that of the possibility of salvation if guilt was properly expiated. Varano intends to reassure his reader through the example of Amennira, who declares that she does not suffer and joyfully awaits the reunion to her earthly body. The likenesses of the two women are certainly more beautiful than their earthly counterparts, but one must consider that the terms of comparison are, in Varano's case, the woman's decomposed corpse, and in Fiorentino's case, Laura's suffering and dying body.

A few lines after, it is Laura who clarifies the nature of her apparition:

> Per farmi obbietto a' tuoi deboli rai
> sotto di questa aerea sembianza

---

[296] As observed in Section 1.5.

mia luce ascosi, ch'è più bella assai.

(*Elegie*, III. 76–78)

Laura refers to 'aerea sembianza' to indicate the Dantean aereal body that was also located in Varano's work. One also notices the artifice that Laura had to put in place to make herself visible to the human eyes of her husband, by diminishing the light emanating from her. Such a scene evidently reminds us of Varano's 'Visione III', where Cardinal Cornelio Bentivoglio allows the pilgrim to see his appearance by giving movement, shape, and colour to the surrounding air not to detriment the pilgrim's 'terreni occhi', in Fiorentino's version called 'deboli rai':

Col più denso aere, cui diedi
moto, forma e color, visibil resi
nel mover l'ale dall'eteree sedi.

(*Visioni*, III. 100–02)

Laura stresses the concept by presenting herself as blessed:

I' godo là nella superna stanza
del sommo ben, che immaginar quaggiuso
l'accorgimento uman non ha possanza.

(*Elegie*, III. 79–81)

The Subject also compares her to an angel, 'angelica vista' (94), granting her a status which is superior to that of Amennira, who was a purging soul. Echoes of Varano's *Visioni* can also be found when Laura vanishes and 'l'aer ne restò lucido, e vermiglio' (92), where the red nuance of the sky evokes the dazzling colours of *aurora borealis* described in 'Visione VI'.

Although not openly describing the otherworldly realms and keeping the tone of the elegy more consistent with the corporeal, earthly world, Fiorentino includes in his *Elegie* a glimpse of Heaven through Laura's words. The astonishment of the Subject at the sight of Laura's celestial appearance is

balanced by the thought of what could remain of her earthly body. Unlike the love Amennira shows for her earthly remains, Laura, who does not offer any moral message to the reader, despises them, pointing out to her husband that he would not be equally excited to see her remains:

> Oh se quel marmo, ove il mio fral chiudesti,
> ti concedesse al guardo un varco angusto,
> quel che tanto ti piacque a schivo avresti.
>
> (*Elegie*, III. 64–66)

Note here the recurrence of the term 'frale' as a noun, already observed several times, and the general image which clearly evokes the pilgrim approaching the edge of Amennira's tomb to look at its contents in 'Visione XI'. The reaction mentioned by Laura, of dodging and abhorring the vision of her worn-out body, is the same that can be found between the pages of Varano's *Visioni*. Fiorentino spares his readers such a vision in all its clarity and details. Abjection here, therefore, is only potential, and, it could be argued, Fiorentino does not devote space to it in reaction to Varano's text. Fiorentino admits, through Laura's words, that the human body after death is abject and that the Subject would flee it. Therefore, he decides to confirm what Varano has shown, but in 'receiving' the text of *Visioni*, he alters the scene in his elegy, modifying the episode of Amennira from which he seems to have drawn extensively on other fronts. With respect to Varano's episode, which was already indebted to Dante's *Inferno* XI, Fiorentino eliminates the presence of the tomb, which in Dante is only hinted at but in Varano is central.

That said, Fiorentino remains a writer firmly rooted in the eighteenth-century, a time of reforms in burial practices, funereal architectures, and interest in the dead, and does not reflect on the decomposition of the human body. Returning to 'Elegia II', 'La morte', one can read:

> Opaca chiostra, e nel silenzio mesta,
> quella è che or serba dell'estinta sposa
> sul terreno inegual l'orma funesta.

The ground holds the mournful memory of Laura, called here 'estinta sposa'. Several lines later, the Subject refers to what remains of Laura's body and calls it 'tristi avanzi' (96), echoing the words used by Varano in one of his most crude visions, 'Visione V', on the plague of Messina. There, Varano describes 'i tristi avanzi della plebe abbietta' (341), referring to the ill people the pilgrim meets in the Sicilian city.

Fiorentino abandons himself to a macabre description that approaches the abjection of the decomposed body of Amennira, when, in 'Elegia IV', 'La rimembranza', he expresses the thoughts of the Subject in the throes of ranting:

> Chiuse nel cavo sen d'ingorda fossa
> furo le spoglie amate, e sol ne resta
> della sua fame avanzo aride l'ossa.
>
> (*Elegie*, IV. 40–42)

The semantic field is that of eating, as shown by the adjective 'ingorda', and the nouns 'fame' and 'avanzo'. These are expressions that are also well suited to the theme of the fifth elegy, 'Il Tempo', which focuses on the transience of life. Here, the Subject muses on the vanity of earthly goods:

> Non gli effimeri onori, e d'or la fame,
> che marciscono insiem dentro la fossa
> con la fracida carne e il trito ossame.
>
> (*Elegie*, V. 43–45)

The term 'fossa' recurs, and flesh and bones are described as rotten and broken. The alliteration of the letter 'r' makes the sounds crude, emphasising the sense of abjection of the scene. The Subject's reflections go further, revealing an even more materialistic vein that unmasks a remarkable poetic complexity and modernity:

> Io penso: delle care membra sparte
>
> chi sa, che all'aer commista, o di sotterra
>
> qualche pingue nol nutra umida parte?
>
> Perciò m'inchino pienamente a terra,
>
> l'odoro, il bacio, e coglierlo non oso,
>
> che al redivivo fior temo far guerra.
>
> (*Elegie*, IV. 91–96)

After the vision of Laura, the fourth elegy, entitled 'La rimembranza', tones down to a less spectral matter. Here, the Subject is musing about the material decay of his wife. The Petrarchan reference 'sparte', which echoes the hair 'all'aura sparsi', seems to be undermined by the reference to the text of Varano, 'corpi infracidati e sparti' (*Visioni*, IV. 313), as the word 'membra' well evokes Varano's 'corpi', testifying a new, evolving poetic code. In these late-eighteenth-century poems, the canonical term 'sparti/sparsi' loses its connotation as 'hair-related', and comes to indicate scattered human remains, arising from decomposition (as in Fiorentino), or from the wars that scatter the remains of the bodies on the battlefields (Varano). The materialism of Fiorentino emerges from the representation of human remains as nourishment for other living organisms, participating in the natural cycle of life. If Varano often refers to worms and snakes that gnaw the remains of corpses, as happens, for example, to Amennira, Fiorentino prefers the most delicate image of a flower that draws its nourishment from the soil where Laura was buried. Therefore, with a gesture of excessive caution, almost neurotic, the Subject looks away from seizing the flower and again causing the death of his wife, almost reincarnated in the plant.

Thus far, we have realised many similarities between Fiorentino's *Elegie* and Varano's *Visioni*, in terms of representation of the spirits of dead people, settings, and lexical expressions, such as the new connotation of the term 'sparte/sparse'. However, Fiorentino reveals a more carnal interest, since he recounts his sorrow for the loss of his wife, with whom he wants, through the fiction of literature, to be reunited. In *Elegie*, as we have seen, the Subject seeks kisses, and dreams of caresses. Such an approach seems to channel Fiorentino's poetry into a poetical mode that, as Ariès describes, places death alongside

amorous passion, which is what will happen in the nineteenth century when death is sexualised, and Eros appears alongside Thanatos.[297] The point of view of Fiorentino's elegiac narrative continues to be that of an external observer, as in Varano, but embodies an observer much closer to the deceased than the pilgrim of *Visioni*. The point of view through which Fiorentino writes is in fact that of the husband, who had a real love affair with the deceased woman. This trait also differentiates Fiorentino's poetry from the traditional poetry of Dante and Petrarch, who suffer from the loss of the woman they loved but never really possessed. The intimacy that Fiorentino seeks, therefore, allows his poetry to conceal the theme of amorous desire, of the need for physical contact with the deceased woman. Laura has thus far been described by her 'lack' of corporeality and 'invisibility', and the sight of her destabilises the Subject rather than calming and reassuring him, as will be shown in the next section.

2.4   The Haunting Presence

Any articulation of another's death, as Bronfen states, seems to return to the surviving speaker.[298] This also happens because, as Peter Brooks maintains, all narrative seeks a retrospective knowledge, which is exactly that of those who survive who retell the story of the dying.[299] Fiorentino first portrays Laura in her illness, and then in her appearance after death as an uncanny vision, and he narrates the story of his grief using the past tense and alternating the addressee of his monologue, between Laura and his own inner self. The poet refers to his wife in the *incipit* of the first elegy: 'Destati dal profondo dove ti stai | letargo di dolor' (I. 1–2). In the fourth elegy, instead, one can read 'Io so quanto l'immagin mi tormenta | della perduta mia dolce consorte' (IV. 7–8), where the poet does not address her directly as he did before; rather, he seems to record his thoughts and experience as if he were writing a diary. McManners comments that writing

---

[297] Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, p. 57.

[298] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, pp. 15–16.

[299] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), p. 323.

about death consists of writing about cultural attitudes towards survival, society affirming itself, the family expressing its coherence, and the Church exemplifying its beliefs.[300] By invoking this statement, Bronfen acutely specifies that, 'as a poetic motif, death is also about the mourning lover-poet demonstrating his aesthetic skills and his ability to create beautiful images'.[301]

This section aims to show that such a statement applies to *Elegie* through the analysis of Fiorentino's text as a response to his loss, which manifests, at its best, in the representation of Laura as a haunting presence. Her incorporeal presence, or rather, the lack of her corporeality, elicits the Subject's reaction, which only takes a subtle melancholic tone and a much more overt hallucinatory one. If the first elegy, and partly the second, chiefly focuses on physical pain, excessive suffering, and portrays abject images of an ill body, the second elegy's semantic field that Fiorentino draws on is that of illusion, delusion, and a deception of the senses. The effect of this poetry is estrangement, since it embodies a non-acceptance of loss, and the Subject shows how his imagination can delude him in respect of Laura's presence. Through the Subject's memory, the beloved dead continues to live, setting forth a mechanism of masking death. At stake in this 'aesthetisation' of death, Bronfen explains, is the memory image, and the survivors' ability to imagine.[302] However, Fiorentino shows that memory as a preservation of the dead, together with the cultural construction of the fantasy of death, can be dangerous. As in foreign literature sentimental longing for a reunion with the dead in Heaven turns into the horror of vampirism, in Fiorentino's *Elegie* the memory of the deceased materialises the ghostly images of the mind that haunt the protagonist. Such visions, therefore, distance themselves from the benevolent apparitions examined in Varano's *Visioni*.[303] The haunting phenomenon happens due to the ambivalent status of the dead body, neither entirely in the Beyond, nor entirely Here, but also, as Bronfen posits, due to 'the interconnection between a conceptual exclusion of death and its

---

[300] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, p. 256.

[301] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 88.

[302] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 87.

[303] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 87.

representational ubiquity, as though the more a culture refuses death the more it imagines and speaks of it'.[304] 'Aesthetisation', meant to hide death, always also articulates mortality and the act of denial in part affirms what it tries to conceal. The semantic field around which the text pivots is that of delusion and hallucination, as the reader learns from the Subject in the second elegy:

> Così parlo e vaneggio; e benché i' ferva
> d'un insano desir, tanto è l'inganno,
> che ragion signoreggia, e vuol che serva.
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 55–57)

The verbs 'vaneggio' and 'ferva', and the expressions 'insano desir' and 'inganno', which has the upper hand over reason, denote the excessive reaction of the mourner. Mental delusion is also well represented by the verbs 'signoreggia' and 'serva' which bring together two different parts of the psyche, the irrational subjugating the rational one, anticipating in a single tercet all the power of the imagination that will generate persecutory nightmares in the following verses. This tercet, therefore, sounds like a sort of confession, hence my reading of Fiorentino's work as a diary, from the Subject who behaves irrationally and exemplifies his distress by picturing the difficulty of daily life in the absence of his wife. Everyday life enters Fiorentino's poetry with overbearing force, once again emphasising the importance the author attaches to concreteness, to the materiality of existence. The Subject's daily life includes the children he had with the deceased Laura, an element which Varano had already included in his visions.

> Forza è che ne' lor volti io mi consigli;
> e or questo, or quel vo' che mi venga a lato,
> qual più alla madre parmi che assomigli.
>   Pasco alcun poco il ciglio affascinato;
> ma la dolce illusion fugge, e m'accorgo

---

[304] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 88.

che la sposa non è quella che io guato.

<div align="right">(Elegie, II. 61–66)</div>

The Subject shows his behaviour towards his children, who are called to his side according to how much one or the other resembles their deceased mother. However, the resemblance of the children to Laura's face is a figment of the imagination of her husband, who believes he sees the woman in someone else's likeness. Fiorentino presents the situation as the result of the husband's obsession with the dead woman and explains how he realises his 'dolce illusion' dissolves ('fugge') like a dream from which one suddenly wakes up. The family scene involving the father and his children recalls the Dantean story of Count Ugolino in *Inferno* XXXIII, which is, in fact, the one Varano cites in his preface to the reader as an example of true (religious) poetry. There, Dante gives voice to Ugolino, who, in prison, mistakes his sons for someone else: 'io scorsi | per quattro visi il mio aspetto stesso' (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 56–57). Whereas Dante represents Ugolino by looking at his sons who mirror the same starving appearance their father had, Fiorentino retrieves the scene where the father looks at his sons, but introducing this time a new image, that of the dead mother created by the father's imagination. Fiorentino's choice of employing the verb 'pasco' also suggests a reference to Ugolino's a, where the predominant semantic field is that of gnawing and consumption, which the verb 'pascere' recalls. Evoking the same semantic field, while Dante depicts Ugolino and his children hungry and close to death by starvation, Fiorentino depicts a scene of daily life at a table during a meal:

Però qualor sovra l'usato scanno
a mensa i' siedo, ove in un cerchio i figli
chini d'intorno e taciturni stanno.

<div align="right">(Elegie, II. 58–60)</div>

The illusion of seeing Laura's image in the children's faces vanishes as soon as the Subject comes to his senses. Fiorentino then shifts the focus to the Subject who has an immoderate reaction ('Sul desco allora smanioso io sorgo', 67) and

bursts into tears ('d'amarissimo pianto un fiume sgorgo', 69), while Ugolino does not cry but bites his hands ('ambo le man per lo dolor mi morsi', *Inferno*, XXXIII. 58). Like Dante, who depicts Ugolino's sons ready to console their father, Fiorentino proposes a similar scene. The children reach out to hug ('tutti tendon le braccia', II. 71) and comfort the father, fearful of a negative reaction ('Timor nuovo ne' figli avvien che cresca', 70) and aware that they have to rely solely on their surviving father:

> Deh! Padre, per pietà di noi t'incresca:
>   orfani della cara Genitrice,
> per noi chi resta? A noi, pensa, che or sei
> tu genitor, tu madre, e tu nutrice.
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 72–75)

The final tricolon enhances the responsibilities that the Subject carries, and underlines how the widower's mental fragility affects people around him.

The hallucinatory fury does not stop with mealtimes, but rather sharpens with the coming of the night and sleep. As if recording it in his diary, the widower states: 'il maritale abbandonato letto | pietà molesta a riveder mi mena' (II, 80–81). The oxymoron 'pietà molesta' exacerbates the Subject's difficulty in getting out of the swirling situation into which grief has sucked him. Fiorentino goes further to portray how the widower's despair at the lack of bodily contact with his deceased wife causes him disturbing hallucinations. The Subject throws himself into bed with open arms, 'le braccia alte vi getto' (82), recalling the scene of Casella's failed embrace in Dante's *Purgatorio*. Here, however, the bed takes on bodily features, metamorphosing into a human being, and more precisely into a woman, since it is characterised by 'vedovo grembo' (86), which is 'vuoto, e meschino' (87). If in Varano the body of the woman who suffers in 'Visione III' twists and metamorphoses into the snake that bites her, Fiorentino represents the transformation of an inanimate object into a woman. The welcoming surface of the bed thus becomes an empty womb, which cannot accommodate the widower as he would like. The image of the bed transmuted into a sterile woman's body acquires grotesque features, if one considers Russo's definition

of the grotesque as an 'alien experience', stemming from some transformation or appropriation of the female body.[305] Laura's absence, based on her lack of corporeality, is more evident than her spectral presence. Furthermore, the womb represents what Freud considers a symbol of uncanniness par excellence, which, at the same time, is abandoned by the human being at birth and then ardently desired.[306] This dynamic would be the one whereby humans tend to desire the grave or even premature burial, as the cosy coffin and the ground would symbolise the cosy womb.[307] Although this is a bold interpretation that necessitates further investigation, it can be hypothesised that Fiorentino evokes in his elegies these fears and tensions towards premature burial, which will manifest themselves more blatantly over the course of the nineteenth century, starting with Ugo Foscolo's *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* and his obsession with being buried alive, moving on to Leopardi's reflections and, of course, to Edgar Allan Poe and the literary works of the Italian *Scapigliatura*.[308]

The emptiness of the bed, a reference to the Subject's bourgeois life, triggers his imagination, which is exercised when the bed seems to talk to the widower:

> E la scomposta coltre, e il freddo lino
> premo col volto, e con l'ansante petto,
>   parmi ch'ei dica: a che mi sei vicino?
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 83–85)

The adjectives 'scomposta' and 'ansante' give power to the scene and stir the rhythm of the narration, suggesting the raptures of the widower and his

---

[305] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, p. 9.

[306] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

[307] Jan Bondeson, *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (New York: Norton, 2001).

[308] Ugo Foscolo proves to be obsessed with the feeling of being buried alive as he states in his private letter, such as 2166 to Quirina Mocenni Magiotti (8th July 1817) 'mi par anche d'essere oggi un uomo sepolto vivo', in Ugo Foscolo, 'Epistolario', ed. by Mario Scotti, in *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere*, 22 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1933–94), XX, p. 197.

uncontrolled gestures. Fiorentino describes for the first time the male body, and he does so by following the 'long canon'. The men's portrayal includes the face ('il volto'), the arms ('le braccia'), and the chest ('il petto'). This representation contrasts with the woman's bodily descriptions, which strictly follow the 'short canon', focusing on eyes, lips, and cheeks. The use of the 'short canon' is redolent of the poetical tradition where women are described through their virtuous body parts, which are, at the same time, portrayed with the pale and cold colours typical of the aesthetics of death.

The sheets and the linen are described as if they were bodies themselves, for they are 'scomposta' and 'freddo' meaning wrinkled, or in disarray, and cold as a corpse. Fiorentino insists on the fantastic depiction of the bed as imagined by the widower; a few lines after, indeed, the bed interacts with the man:

> Quella, che tanto amasti or più non celo;
> quivi non son le membra dilicate,
> che fur d'alma più bella il più bel velo.
>
> (*Elegie*, II. 88–90)

The poet's representation of his own fantasy reveals the lack of elaboration of his loss, reflecting what Bronfen observed about the mourning lover-poet demonstrating his aesthetic skills and ability to create beautiful poetry. The narrative of mourning in the elegies of Fiorentino reflects the mental state of the survivor, which is caused by the lack of the body of the dead woman.

Fiorentino effectively demonstrates the ability of the mourner's mind to create ghosts, as testified by expressions such as 'funeste immagini' (II. 101), 'l'agitato pensier' (IV. 6), 'l'accesa fantasia molesta' (IV. 43). The mental state of confusion and the deep sadness of the Subject stands at the beginning of the fourth elegy:

> D'ogni dolor più crudelmente acerbo
> è la memoria del tempo felice,
> che viva e vera il misero ne serba.
>
> (*Elegie*, IV. 1–3)

The maxim recalls the words of Francesca in the *Inferno* V and underpins Fiorentino's reception of Dante's merciful tone:

> […] Nessun maggior dolore
> che ricordarsi del tempo felice
> ne la miseria […]
>
> <div align="right">(Inferno, V. 121–23)</div>

The image of the deceased Laura strikes the reader incessantly thanks to the repetitions with which Fiorentino enriches the text:

> Io so quanto l'immagin mi tormenta
> della perduta mia dolce Consorte,
> ovunque io sia, com'io guati, o senta.
>   E il sovvenir di Lei m'ange, sì forte
> che se l'Occaso annotta, e l'Orto aggiorna,
> io provo quel, ch'è poco men di morte.
>
> <div align="right">(Elegie, IV. 7–12)</div>

This excerpt illustrates how the widower suffers from the memory of his wife, and the ubiquity is here stressed by asyndeton 'ovunque io sia, com'io guati, o senta'. The image of his wife torments the Subject and the verb 'ange' coveys the idea of an excessive and disturbing presence, which generates anxiety. The spectral visit evokes those that dot foreign novels, whose Gothic fictions oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the supernatural. Fiorentino published in a moment witnessing a pan-European diffusion of Gothic works, from 1794 (the year in which *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Caleb Williams* were published) to 1807.[309] The largest number of Gothic novels were published, within the British context, in 1800, three years before Fiorentino's

---

[309] Robert Miles, 'The 1790s: the Effulgence of Gothic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 41–60 (p. 42).

first edition of *Poesie*. This phenomenon testifies to mutual preoccupations between the British world and Italy, despite the known differences. Fiorentino does not define the visions of Laura openly as 'ghosts', but he refers to a disturbing 'immagine' of her, which suggests to us that she appears with a ghostly appearance. The internalisation of the supernatural into the projections of the mind is disorienting and, as Castle maintains, 'the gradual reinterpretation of ghosts and apparitions as hallucinations, or projection of the mind, introduced a new uncanniness into human consciousness itself'.[310] The way in which Fiorentino introduces Laura's spectre imposing on the Subject's mind is composite, since her image torments the Subject, but, concurrently, the poet declares her sweetness and contrasts the strength of the verb 'tormenta' with the levity of the term 'sovvenir'. Leopardi reuses 'sovvenire' in similar contexts, where remembering never represents a pleasant experience, in the early works *Per una donna inferma di malattia lunga e mortale*, ('non sia cor sì villano | che non si mova a sovvenir costei', 69–70) and *Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato dal corruttore per mano ed arte di un chirurgo* ('sovvenir del tuo peccato', 84).

As the elegies proceed, the widower's overactive imagination takes on the features of illness: 'dunque a che via, che delirando pensi | mia mente inferma' (IV, 37–38). The mind that is delirious, goes out of the conventional world and exaggerates in imaginative frenzy, can vent itself especially in the night hours. The 'infermità', or illness, that Fiorentino refers to, seems to acquire the features of melancholy, at the time considered a medical condition due to an excess of black bile.[311] From Ficino, during the Renaissance, to Freud, melancholia was interpreted as 'creative lack', a fashionable disease affecting male thinkers, 'if not the secret of their inspiration', as Juliana Schiesari claims.[312]

---

[310] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 17.

[311] *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*, ed. by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019) p. 3.

[312] Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. xi, 8. See also Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005).

It appears as 'a specific representational form for male creativity', resulting in the conversion of 'the feeling of disempowerment into a privileged artifact'.[313] Mediated by the representational practice of melancholia, Fiorentino preserves his subjectivity and even affirms himself through literary and cultural production, even while declaring his infirmity. It has been shown that, throughout history, literature witnesses a 'systematic exclusion of women from the canon of melancholia',[314] where female figures are usually represented as inspiring muses, nymphs, or the personification of Melancholia itself, rather than playing an active role in producing art.[315] Laura, as the object of Fiorentino's poem, embodies the role of a muse, because her death provides inspiration to the poet. The poet-muse relation becomes problematic, because 'the status of muse is transferred […] on to a corporally existent beloved, only now she is dying or already dead'.[316] This attitude comes openly into play in the nineteenth century, according to Bronfen: 'while the original act of taking possession and giving birth to the poet is mimicked, the Romantic inversion is […] an example of the poet's taking ultimate control over the departed woman'.[317] Fiorentino's *Elegie* demonstrates that a similar dynamic had already occurred in late-eighteenth-century Italy. The invocation of the dead beloved, then, does not seem to represent an attempt to 'preserve her artificially against death', but rather an attempt 'to eternalise the poet's skill', since the beloved woman, literally dead, simultaneously serves a figurative function, becoming a 'metonymy for death'.[318] What happens is that the vitality the muse traditionally possessed paled into an abstraction resulting in what Steele Commager calls 'a fading metaphor'.[319]

---

[313] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 8.

[314] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 4.

[315] As shown in: Fabio A. Camilletti, *Leopardi's Nymphs: Grace, Melancholy and the Uncanny* (London: Legenda, 2013).

[316] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 365.

[317] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 365.

[318] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 365.

[319] Steele Commager, *The Odes of Horace. A Critical Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967). On the same theme see also: *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature*, ed. by Efrossini Spentzou and Don Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Ultimately, the dead beloved/muse is replaced by the text, and she serves, due to this replacement, an allegorical function, resulting in the woman once again being *de facto* excluded from the literary work.

However, male poets sometimes operate an appropriation of the feminine for their self-presentation, as Anne-Julia Zwierlein notices, for instance, via an appropriation of the female function of childbearing. This is also partly evident in *Elegie* if we consider child caring as an alternative for childbearing, when Fiorentino shows that his children consider him 'genitore', 'madre', and 'nutrice'.[320] In a sense, then, Fiorentino, as the male survivor, 'incorporates' the object of his loss, Laura, but on the other hand, since he cannot pursue such a role, he manifests a desire to replace the female body with a preferred body, the body of the text, of disembodied words, thus privileging his relationship, as poet, with the divine. Paradoxically, the very act of 'creating', or better, 'giving birth' to a new being, a text, demonstrates the femininity of men, in their roles as poets and creators. The Subject's obsession makes the elegies a perpetual dialogue with the poet's imagination, resulting in a sort of mental alienation of the poet suspended between actual disease and divine possession. As Camilletti explains, this can drive the subject to give 'provisional concreteness to unreal things in the same way as dreams'.[321] The continuous 'sovvenire' in the mind of the Subject of his dead wife, her ubiquity, the anguish of the Subject, the desire to see the image of the dead woman contrast with the desire not to recall the times spent together as well as her illness. This contradiction charts the whole poetic experience as a hallucinatory consequence of Fiorentino's loss.

Although the poet displays his poetic abilities in his rendering of hallucinations, the Subject, apparently, does not seem to draw inspiration from its melancholic status, and he begs the night, typically an inspiring muse, not to

---

[320] Anne-Julia Zwierlein, 'Male Pregnancies, Virgin Births, Monsters of the Mind: Early Modern Melancholia and (Cross-)Gendered Constructions of Creativity', in *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*, ed. by Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 35–49 (p. 35).

[321] Camilletti, *Leopardi's Nymphs*, pp. 83–84.

stir up memories in his mind: 'Amica notte […] | quanto perdei non rammentarmi almeno' (IV. 67–69). Often a harbinger of nightmares and a creator of ghosts, the night sends shadows to the Subject, 'spesso qualche ombra invii' (71), and arouses in him a 'rimembranza tenera, e crudele' (101) which does not restore the Subject's soul, but rather distresses him further. The night, therefore, remains a perfect setting for supernatural visions, as it is for Varano, and in accordance with biblical tradition, but in Fiorentino it acts as a catalyst for the persecutory and invisible presence of the deceased woman.

The Subject also proves delirious as he retraces the point of death of his wife Laura. In the fourth vision, 'La rimembranza', he gives an account of what he experienced when his wife passed away:

> Cred'io quando la mia Fedele
> si sciolse dal suo fral con un sospiro
> […]
> circondasse me squallido, e in deliro.
>
> (*Elegie*, IV. 103–08)

The Subject convinces himself that when his wife died her spirit left the body and fluttered around him. The poet describes what the Subject thinks he has experienced:

> E cento fiate il vol pria di lasciarmi
> ritrocedesse a questa parte bassa,
> par lambirmi le gole, e carezzarmi.
> I' nol sentii, che di carnosa massa
> vestito il senso apprendere non puote
> l'urto legger d'un'anima che passa.
>
> (*Elegie*, IV. 109–14)

The widower believes that the spirit of his wife, immediately flown to an otherworldly realm, returned to Earth 'ritrocedesse a questa parte bassa', and believes she stroked his face a hundred times. Despite the Subject being

convinced that his wife's spirit enacted such an affectionate deed, the dichotomy of the human body comes into play and complicates the perception of the widower himself. In fact, the man admits that he did not really feel his wife's caress because of his earthly essence. His body, being human, is made of flesh, 'carnosa massa', and cannot perceive the slight impact of a spirit. The term 'anima' used by Fiorentino seems to lose its religious connotation and simply indicates the incorporeality of the spirit that gives lifeblood to the body. One can note the use of terminology that refers to the scientific field, which is typical of the eighteenth century, such as 'massa', and 'urto', suggesting the random movement of molecules colliding, and evoked at the end of the sixth elegy: 'mira dispersersi | gli atometti de' rai che sembran polve' (VI. 128–29). The Subject's admission that he did not really realise that he had been touched by the spirit of his deceased wife thus reveals that everything described is probably still a figment of his delusional imagination. The skill and delicacy with which Fiorentino describes the interaction of the two bodily entities, the material and the spectral, prove Bronfen's claim, and thus show the poet's ability to create beautiful images.

Both the imagination of Laura's spirit and the memory of her illness and death also inspire terror in the widower. A mixed sensation of terror and wonder like those we find in Varano's *Visioni* returns in Fiorentino's *Elegie*, proving it to be an intrinsic feature of visionary texts. The psycho-physical state of the subject experiencing the loss of a dear one is a fundamental trait of the representation of fear and discomfort. From 'Elegia II', the Subject confesses that his heart can hardly bear any other tragic event because it is weakened by the memory of Laura's malady: 'dal labbro i flebili lamenti | tornanmi al cor che li sostiene appena' (II. 10–11). The remembrance of her sufferance projects him back to that miserable state and causes him spasms and tremors, redolent of the fear he felt back then: 'rammentar nel dì fatal qual era, | mi serpeggia un tremor di vena, in vena' (14–15). Feelings of tension and distress are often represented by discomfort in certain parts of the body, mainly related to blood circulation. The expression 'un tremor di vena in vena' recalls Varano's phrase 'di tanto orror m'empiè l'ossa e le vene' (368) in 'Visione IX', indicating the terror felt by

Varano's poetic self when he remembers the sight of the Angel of Death. Both sentences remind the reader of the Dantean 'mi fa termar le vene e i polsi' in *Inferno* I. 90, where Dante states his terror due to the fierce beast in front of him. Fiorentino also portrays terror stemming from the remembrance of the dreadful experience, with symptoms such as suddenly feeling very cold or warm, as in 'Elegia II', 'gelo e avvampo' (97), similar to what Leopardi describes in his *Nella morte di una donna*:

> […] Io gelo e sudo
> pur quando nella mente
> mi ritraggo il tuo scempio […]
>
> (*Nella morte di una donna*, 29–31)

The Subject's mind not only relives the traumatic experience of his wife's illness and consumption until her death, but other real nightmarish scenes that convince the protagonist about the worth of leading an honest life without vices to aspire to eternity.

Such a representation is the thrust of the sixth elegy, 'L'Eternità', where Fiorentino seems to project the reader into the dreaming mind of the Subject, later clearly understood as a nightmarish setting. Here, excess and abjection come into play again. Indeed, the whole scene recalls some elements of Varano's *Visioni*, particularly 'Visione V', which, as we have seen, concerns the Messina's plague and is one of the most vivid. Fiorentino evokes 'Visione V' from the very beginning of his 'Elegia VI', revealing himself to be receptive both to the lexicon of suffering (in turn derived from Dante) and to the aspects of terror and wonder linked to the phenomenon of the vision of the blessed Battista Varano. A first element that arouses fear and wonder in Varano the pilgrim is the fiery chariot on which Battista Varano sits. The chariot also appears in Fiorentino's elegy, 'carro arroventato' (VI. 2) towed by 'destrieri focosi' (5), although it represents the sun, called 'Oriental Pianeta' (3) and does not transmit fear or anguish. The scenery is set during the night, as we learn from the fact that the moon, 'la bruna madre dei riposi' (7), illuminates the earth with its night light, 'viva lampa' (8), a

term which will be inherited by Leopardi at the very beginning of *Appressamento* to indicate the setting of the sun. The picture is almost idyllic and retains an Arcadian patina, with personifications of the stars and the Time, the 'Veglio edace', to which Fiorentino dedicated the previous elegy.

The idyll is broken by the entrance of 'Caducità' that 'coll'unghion grifagno' (VI. 23) causes 'spavento' (24) and guides the poet to imagine 'un ciel che non ha stelle' (29). The Subject's imagination begins to delineate a nightmarish atmosphere momentarily interrupted by the bright personification of Eternity on a throne and then followed by the personification of other entities such as 'l'orrendo Caos' and 'Natura' (49) followed by the worst human vices. In this section, Fiorentino indulges in those gory tones that he had previously avoided by concentrating on mental delirium. Although it is a dream, an evanescent fantasy made up of personifications of non-existent beings, the episode is strongly depicted as 'corporeal', as one can notice from line 64 onwards:

> Che il mal seme dell'umana famiglia
> di lacrime e di sangue il suolo inonda,
> ve Opinion col Diritto s'accapiglia.
>
> (*Elegie*, VI. 64–66)

The dyad of 'tears and blood' combined with the verb 'to squabble' ('s'accapiglia') opens the way to a veritable procession of human vices that parade before the dismayed gaze of the Subject that dreams them up. The surrounding darkness thickens and intensifies, turning into a storm, which acts as a sounding board for the terrifying vision that follows:

> E in mezzo a una tempesta furibonda
> cotanta oscurità lo sguardo accieca,
> ch'altri non può trovar dove s'asconda.
>
> (*Elegie*, VI. 67–69)

Fiorentino seems to be telling the reader that there is no way out of chronic vices, in so doing evoking the moralising tone of Varano. The storm engenders a crowd of creatures and sows death and destruction, recalling the catastrophic events which Fiorentino may have read in Varano, for instance 'Visione VII' on the Lisbon earthquake. In order to grasp the parade of excess and abjection presented in the next triplets, one should read a sufficiently long excerpt:

> Turba di mostri spaventosa e cieca
> muove nel buio danza forsennata,
> e stragi, e morti, e in un rapine reca
> […]
> Il Fanatismo dalla negra cresta
> forbisce il ferro con quella che indossa
> di Religione insanguinata vesta;
> e a lei che trema, e per vergogna è rossa,
> del mostro che snudolla, e che gavazza,
> l'impeto ad arrestar manca la possa.
> Crudeltà doppia i colpi, e a chi stramazza
> strappa dal seno il cuor fumante e il guasto,
> e dentro il preme alla nefanda tazza.
> Di quell'umor nel rabido contrasto
> pria coll'immondo labro un sorso sugge,
> e addenta poi lo scellerato pasto.
> La Barbarie alla fiamma, che lo strugge,
> d'un piè respinge, allora dismembrato
> corpo che guizza, e dalla pira fugge.
> Nella sozza cloaca ov'è gittato
> il figlio in brani, un genitor si lorda
> la man pietosa tra 'l fetente strato.
>
> (*Elegie*, VI. 70–93)

The overall picture provided by the poet is rather stark. The style is the low-brow one of Dante's *Inferno*, 'modo sozzo', in particular *Inferno* XXVIII, the canto that features the second highest number of human body parts, as already seen in

the previous chapter. The coincidence of Dante's atrocities in Fiorentino's poem does not seem to be accidental, given the relationship the poet has been shown to have with Varano's *Visioni*, for instance when drawing inspiration from the episodes of Amennira for the description of Laura.

The parade of personified entities, such as Religion, Fanaticism and Cruelty, takes the form of a gallery of monsters described as 'blind' and groping in the dark. This swirling confusion, which mirrors the delirious mental state of the Subject, is described as a frenzied and unstoppable dance. Fiorentino chooses particularly heavy adjectives such as 'forsennata', 'nefanda', 'immondo', loading the text with excess that floods the reader. In addition to adjectives, the poet makes extensive use of verbs that are unusual in poetry, deriving from low-brow, non-lyric language, such as 'snudolla', 'gavazza', and 'stramazza', which emphasise the violence of the monsters' actions and in an almost onomatopoeic way suggest the confusion and dirtiness of the scene. From the first verse this excerpt employs adjectives such as 'spaventoso' and 'fetente', while expressions like 'sozza cloaca' emphasise the vileness of the monsters in question and the filth in which they wallow, arousing a sense of abjection in the reader. Abjection certainly increases when one focuses on blood, which, as analysed in the previous chapter, constitutes one of the highest expressions of disgust and crudeness. One of the first adjectives used by Fiorentino is 'insanguinata' which refers to the garment of Religion, stained with sins. The damaged body parts include the heart, extracted from the still-beating chest, 'cuor fumante', in a manner reminiscent of Dante's episode in the *Vita Nova* where Beatrice feeds on Dante's heart in a dream. In the same vein, a dismembered body appears at the end of the poet's terrible fantasy, darting about as if it were still animated by some vital spark: 'dismembrato | corpo che guizza'. This body escapes from the fiery pyre where it should be burnt, immediately bringing to mind the pyre of corpses described by Varano, and Melani before him, in the episode of the plague of Messina. Another reminder of Varano's work is found when Fiorentino refers to the 'tazza' that contains humour, which is reminiscent of the scene in 'Visione III' where the unknown female murderer tells of having

poisoned herself by drinking from the same cup from which she poisoned her father.

In this elegy, Fiorentino strongly re-evokes the figure of Count Ugolino and with him a lexicon that draws on the semantic field of eating, chewing, and drinking. A monster is pictured while 'coll'immondo labro un sorso sugge' using the term 'labro', reminding us of Dante, who chooses the synecdoche 'bocca' instead of face, in the famous verse 'la bocca sollevò dal fiero pasto' (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 1). Soon after the verb 'addenta' increases the violence of the scene, a verb which reflects the Dantean 'rodo' (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 8) and completes it with the image of a 'scellerato pasto', recalling Dante's 'fiero pasto'.

The last picture portrays a son with a torn body, 'il figlio in brani', and his father, with the hand covered in blood 'un genitor si lorda | la man', a hand which is described as 'pietosa', suggesting that the man is not the son's murderer. The 'fetente strato' details a pile of bodily remains where the strong adjective indicates the putrefaction of the corpse, thus arousing abjection in the reader. The term 'lorda' also suggests the abundance of blood and filth, and renders the image of the soaked, filthy hand, which in the text emerges as detached from the rest of the body.

The widower's entire vision has now taken on the appearance of a nightmare that comes to an end. Fiorentino concludes his collection of elegies by stating that 'e gioie, e affanni | fantasmi son dell'egro che delira' (VI. 133–34). The wise person, the one who lives by grasping the true essence of life is the one who aspires to eternal happiness. Despite a final invitation to aspire to eternity, Fiorentino demystifies religiosity with realistic details, such as the clash of atoms in the air: 'mira dispersi | gli atometti de' rai che sembran polve' (128–29). Such an approach, which reflects Varano's desire to combine sacred poetry with scientific truths, had already been amply demonstrated by Fiorentino's insistence on the physicality of bodies and the absence of such corporeality with Laura's disappearance. Across his elegies, the author manifested a strong need for kisses, caresses, and embraces, so strong that he led the Subject to imagine that his wife's soul might have touched him as he left her dying body.

The poet's imagination played a great role in the work, underpinning Bronfen's statement that writings about death concern the survivor rather than the dead; that is to say, within the poetic work, Fiorentino refers to the illness of the Subject, shifting from the physical illness of his deceased wife to the mental illness of the man who survives her. As Francesco Giusti explains 'Nel soggetto in lutto la realtà si mescola con la memoria e le cose della vita quotidiana vengono investite di una funzione più alta di quella che abitualmente è riconosciuta loro'.[322] This happens, for instance, when Fiorentino describes the Subject's daily routine, when he sits at the table with his children and when he goes to bed. Giusti also remarks:

> Le *cose* che il soggetto coinvolge nel suo lutto […] non possono restare un accumulo casuale di oggetti, necessitano di un qualche tipo di organizzazione al fine di collaborare effettivamente all'elaborazione del lutto. Il semplice *accumulo*, perciò, chiede di diventare un *archivio*.[323]

The way to recast and remember the objects within the grieving person is to create literature. The archive to be produced through poetry, therefore, consists in the creation of narratives in fragments and implies a necessary gap between the self and reality, allowing for the possibility of psychological repair and aesthetic effectiveness.[324] The form of *canzoniere*, as a collection of lyrics after the death of someone, aims to 'become an archive' of the poet's past experience. This is what happens, for example, in Dante's poems: from the book of his private memory, Dante arrives, through the intentional reassembly of selected parts, to the articulated meaningful construction of that archive, which then turns out to be the booklet intended for the public called *Vita Nova*.[325] In Hardison's own words:

---

[322] Francesco Giusti, *Canzonieri in morte. Per un'etica poetica del lutto* (L'Aquila: Textus Edizioni, 2015), pp. 100–1.

[323] Giusti, *Canzonieri in morte*, p. 101.

[324] Stefano Ferrari, *Scrittura come riparazione. Saggio su letteratura e psicoanalisi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007), p. 163.

[325] Giusti, *Canzonieri in morte*, p. 103.

From the point of view of the *ars metrica*, poetry does not represent or "imitate" a pre-existing reality. It is, rather, a medium adapted to the "bodying forth" of a kind of reality that cannot otherwise be bodied forth, and meter is the element that makes the bodying forth possible.[326]

One should also keep in mind that Fiorentino added the last two elegies, 'Il Tempo' and 'L'Eternità', only at a later time, in the wake of the success received following the first four. He decides to complete the work by further focusing on the themes that he perceived as most appealing to the public: that is, reflections on the caducity of life and vivid scenes of haunting monsters. The author might also have drawn on his personal experiences of a few years before, when he suffered from violence and alienation and was forced to take refuge in Florence during the persecution of Jews by the Catholic anti-French 'Viva Maria' movement.[327] The extreme violence expressed in 'L'Eternità' and the personification of abstract entities such as 'Caos', 'Fanatismo' and 'Crudeltà' find their *raison d'être* when associated with the cruelty shown against the Jews in the anti-Napoleonic struggle between 1799 and 1800 across Tuscany. Political turmoil, started in 1792, escalated in the repression of that part of the Jewish population that had joyfully embraced the libertarian ideals: 'alcuni giovani Ebrei si compromisero annaffiando, si disse, gli alberi della Libertà' in the words of Josz.[328] From Fiorentino's letters, dated 1798, we learn that 'si è sparsa la voce che tutti gli Ebrei siano rivoluzionari, che a Livorno si siano trovate armi nelle loro case, e contro essi si appunta la persecuzione'.[329] Although the issue is still

---

[326] O. B. Hardison, *Prosody and Purpose in the English Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1989), pp. 25–26.

[327] On the topic see Santino Gallorini, *Viva Maria e nazione ebrea. I fatti di monte San Savino e Siena* (Cortona: Calosci, 2009); *Partire partirò, partir bisogna. Firenze e la Toscana nelle campagne napoleoniche, 1793-1815*, ed. by Paolo Cuturri, Gianni Doni, Stefano Pratesi, and Daniele Vergari (Florence: Sarnus, 2009); '1799: un pogrom in toscana', ed. by Lionella Neppi, Modona Viterbo and Sonia Oberdorfer, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 53 (1987), no. 3, 241–259.

[328] Josz, 'Salomone Fiorentino', p. 177.

[329] Josz, 'Salomone Fiorentino', p. 177.

debated among scholars, it seems that in Siena thirteen Jews were executed, and three corpses were burned together with the 'Tree of Freedom', a symbol of the French Revolution's ideals. In particular, the Jewish community of Monte San Savino, where Fiorentino was from, was brutally attacked and, as a precaution against further violence, Jews were eventually exiled by the local authorities. Among them, Fiorentino was forced to flee with his family to Florence in 1799, where he lived in Via delle Oche for the rest of his life and where a plaque now commemorates him. The whole episode might have left traces in Fiorentino's 'Elegia VI', as in the figure of 'turba di mostri spaventosa e cieca' symbolising the persecutors in their 'danza forsennata' that causes 'stragi e morti'. The figure of 'Fanatismo' sows discord and death by disguising itself as 'Religione' with its 'insanguinata vesta', while true Religion is unable to stop the cruel advance of the monster of Fanaticism, creating an imagery that conveys the idea of persecution and the impossibility of reacting to the obstinacy of those who fanatically gain the upper hand. The image of 'Barbarie', associated with the burning of humans 'alla fiamma, che lo strugge | d'un piè respinge, allora dismembrato | corpo che guizza, e dalla pira fugge', would become clearer if considered in the light of historical accounts about the burning of Jews considered traitors and supporters of the French.

Chapter 3

Giacomo Leopardi's *Appressamento* and One's Own Death

> RUYSCH: Mille domande da farvi mi vengono in mente. Ma perché il tempo è corto, e non lascia luogo a scegliere, datemi ad intendere in ristretto, che sentimenti provaste di corpo e d'animo nel punto della morte.
>
> MORTO: Del punto proprio della morte, io non me ne accorsi.
>
> GLI ALTRI MORTI: Né anche noi.
>
> RUYSCH: Come non ve n'accorgeste?
>
> MORTO: Verbigrazia, come tu non ti accorgi mai del momento che tu cominci a dormire, per quanta attenzione ci vogli porre.
>
> RUYSCH: Ma l'addormentarsi è cosa naturale.
>
> MORTO: E il morire non ti pare naturale? mostrami un uomo, o una bestia, o una pianta, che non muoia.

<div align="center">Giacomo Leopardi, 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie', in Operette morali</div>

Introduction

In this chapter I examine Giacomo Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte*. Unlike Varano's *Visioni* and Fiorentino's *Elegie*, Giacomo Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte* focuses on male characters only, shifting from the depiction of the 'death of the other', observed in the other two poems, to one's own death, subverting a widespread interest in 'Thy Death' that has been postulated by Ariès as culturally specific to the nineteenth century. In *Appressamento*, describing a prophetic experience that heralds the subject's impending death, Leopardi too draws his inspiration from Dante: still, Dantean references appear to be mediated by other sources, including, I argue, *Visioni* and *Elegie*, therefore creating a complex intertextual architecture. Consequently, in this chapter, I

propose a backdating of Leopardi's reading of Fiorentino's *Elegie* (and particularly of the sixth one, 'L'Eternità', added to the 1803 edition of *Poesie*). Despite the fact that critics generally assume that Leopardi read the elegies at a later phase, and specifically when he writes the two *sepolcrali* in the 1830s, my recognition enables me to insert Fiorentino among Leopardi's influences in the crucial year 1816.

I interpret *Appressamento* as a tension between Leopardi's creative desire and a rational authoritarian principle that compromises its total realisation. The poem can only apparently be understood as 'sacred and moral', after a 'first, aesthetically perceptual reading', as Jauss calls it, while I aim to demonstrate that it instead tends towards and exposes an 'excessive' and 'abject' imagery when read a second time, with a 'retrospectively interpretive reading'.[330] The same kind of aesthetics was also emerging in Romantic Europe, and constituted a model from which Leopardi apparently wanted to break away, since he joined the Classicist flank of the Classicist/Romantic quarrel, even though he maintained a problematic relationship with the Classicist ideas, as we will see later.[331] From this perspective, therefore, *Appressamento* embodies a kind of 'reliquary', as it happens with Fiorentino's elegies, that is an archive of his young tendencies. Thus, by reading his youthful work, a more mature Leopardi rediscovers his young self, his battles, and his 'old heart' ('cuore d'una volta').[332] Twelve years after *Appressamento*, in fact, Leopardi notes in his *Zibaldone* his desire to 'provar qualche *reliquia* de' miei sentimenti passati, messa quivi entro, per conservarla e darle durata, quasi in deposito' (*Zibaldone* 4302, emphasis is mine). Such a wish

---

[330] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 139.

[331] Fabio A. Camilletti, *Classicism and Romanticism in Italian literature: Leopardi's Discourse on Romantic Poetry* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 23.

[332] Letter to Paolina Leopardi, Pisa 2 May 1828, in Giacomo Leopardi, *Epistolario*, ed. by Franco Brioschi and Patrizia Landi (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), p. 1479. The concept of the 'relic' in Leopardi's works, although not associated with the text of the *Appressamento*, is set out in: Franco D'Intino, 'Il Poeta e la tecnica. Le immagini della cera e del reliquiario in Leopardi e Wordsworth', in *Romanticismo europeo e traduzione. Atti del seminario internazionale di Ischia 10-11 aprile 1992*, ed. by Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones, Annalisa Goldoni, and Romolo Runcini (Ischia: Valentino editore, 1995), pp. 269–82.

finds a partial explanation in Leopardi's re-elaboration of his youthful poem in a later fragment, *Spento il diurno raggio*, containing some of *Appressamento*'s poetical suggestions. As a last chapter of the journey 'from flesh to soul', *Appressamento* appropriately seals the encounter of the corporeal and the spiritual in the image of the relic, which contains both. Lastly, the idea of the poem as a 'container' allows us to interpret *Appressamento* as a repository, a literary youthful archive, which – distancing itself from *poesie d'occasione* such as *Visioni* but closer to an intimate and personal poetics such as that of *Elegie* – consists of a stratified, personal work. Embodying an archive itself, *Appressamento* can thus be read as a representation of a new, burgeoning modern sensitivity.[333]

The chapter is divided into six sections. Section 3.1, 'Genesis of Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte*', provides an account of the poet's youthful cultural environment and his personal and health conditions, to give the reader an overview of the work, its structures, its main themes, and its *raison d'être*. Section 3.2, 'One's Own Death', introduces textual analysis and focuses on the main difference between *Appressamento* and the pair *Visioni/Elegie*. The death of Ugo d'Este, recounted from his own viewpoint and the death of the poetic self, constitute the section's case study on the representation of the suffering corporeal human body. Section 3.3, 'The Body of the Monster', concerns an analysis of non-human bodies, namely Leopardi's personifications of vices transformed into cruel and abject monsters. Through the analysis of the parade of personified creatures, I also aim to show the influence that a minor author, such as Fiorentino, exerted on the young Leopardi. Section 3.4, '*Appressamento* and the "Angeliche forme"', takes as its primary subject matter the examination of spectral bodies, focusing on angelic figures. There, I assess aspects of continuity with the ancient tradition regarding spirits of the dead and ghosts, as well as its specific terminology, and I draw parallels with Varano's depictions of angels. In Section 3.5, 'From "Angeliche forme" to "visi smorti"', I investigate

---

[333] Only a few months later, between July and August 1817, Leopardi begins the daily secret writing of his *Zibaldone*, a huge, long-secret manuscript where Leopardi logged, in a spontaneous and untidy way, his reflections on man, society, and nature with great originality.

the representation of different spirits, such as those of the damned souls, emphasising Dantean reminiscences and the influence of Varano's *Visioni*.

3.1   Genesis of Leopardi's *Appressamento della morte*

Unlike the subsequently forgotten Alfonso Varano and Salomone Fiorentino, Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) was one of the greatest Italian poets of the nineteenth century, unanimously regarded as a central figure in European literature. A summary of Leopardi's life and fame – not only as a poet, but also as a philologist and thinker – would be pleonastic and unhelpful. I believe it more fruitful to offer a few notes on Leopardi's youth and underline the role played by the provincial and unreceptive town environment in which he grew up. Leopardi's severe clinical picture provides additional context to reconstruct the existential condition that led the poet, despite his young age, to predict his own death in *Appressamento della morte*.[334]

Leopardi's birthplace, Recanati, was a secluded hill town in what is now the Marche region, then one of the most conservative corners of the Papal States.[335] In Recanati, his natural inclination for literature and erudite works was enhanced by the rich library of his father, Monaldo Leopardi, which gained him a vast knowledge of the classics, philology, Latin, ancient Greek, and Hebrew. However, Leopardi refers to Recanati as a barbarous and uncivilised town, 'natìo borgo selvaggio' (30), lacking in cultural stimuli and liveliness, and expresses his desire to leave on several occasions.[336] The epistolary correspondence between

---

[334] For a very brief and approximate list of works on Leopardi's biography see Antonio Ranieri, *Sette anni di sodalizio con Leopardi* (Milan: SE, 2005) first published in 1880; Renato Minore, *Leopardi. L'infanzia, le città, gli amori*, ed. by Vincenzo Guarracino (Milan: Bompiani, 1997); Gino Tellini, *Leopardi* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2001); Rolando Damiani, *All'apparir del vero. Vita di Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002); Pietro Citati, *Leopardi* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010).

[335] Franco D'Intino, 'Introduction', in Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino, trans. by Kathleen Baldwin (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), pp. XI–LXVIII (p. XXII).

[336] Giacomo Leopardi, 'XXII Le ricordanze', in *Canti. Edizione critica*, Alessandro Donati (ed.) (Bari: Laterza, 1917), p. 84. Costanza Geddes da Filicaia, *Fuori di Recanati io non sogno. Temi e percorsi di Leopardi epistolografo* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2006), p. 102.

Leopardi and his friend Pietro Giordani reveals different aspects of Leopardi's personal life, and it is thanks to their letters that we have discovered Leopardi's disregard for Recanati. In a letter dated 30 April 1817, Leopardi claims that the landscape is the only positive aspect of Recanati he can think of.[337] But it is not until a few years later, in November 1822, that Leopardi leaves his birthplace for the first time on the occasion of his longed-for, but ultimately disappointing, stay in Rome.[338] The genesis of *Appressamento della morte* dates back to his stay in Recanati, during which Leopardi mainly translated classical authors and wrote philosophical dissertations.[339] His full immersion in classical texts explains the *Appressamento*'s 'stile ultra arcaico', an expression Christian Genetelli used in his introduction to the latest critical edition of the work.[340] During this period, Leopardi undertook his poetic apprenticeship, and developed a taste for a more sentimental lyric, to the point of including elements of Dantean and Petrarchan poetry, as well as the original themes and *topoi* later developed.

Concurrently, from 1814 Leopardi suffered from dysuria, and the years 1815 and 1816, when he composed *Appressamento*, were characterised by other serious health problems that forced Leopardi into isolation and caused him pain and distress.[341] In the following years, Leopardi experienced a progressive spinal deformity and relapsing-remitting visual disorders, which he referred to in his letters, associated with headaches and photophobia (1817–1819). A few years

---

[337] Emilio Bigi, 'Leopardi e Recanati', in *Le città di Giacomo Leopardi. Atti del VII Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani, Recanati, 16-19 novembre 1987* (Florence: Olschki, 1991), pp. 3–21 (pp. 19–20).

[338] Geddes da Filicaia, *Fuori di Recanati io non sogno*, p. 54.

[339] Among these, one can name *Puerili e abbozzi vari*, which constitutes a collection of Leopardi's early writings since 1809, and his essay called *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi*, which followed in 1813.

[340] Christian Genetelli, 'Introduzione', in Leopardi, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Christian Genetelli and Sabrina Delcò-Toschini (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002), p. IX–XXX (p. XI).

[341] Citati, *Leopardi*, p. 30.

after, bowel disorders appeared (1825–1830), also testified by his father,[342] followed by bronchial and pulmonary complications, until clinical signs of cardio-respiratory failure led him to a premature death in 1837.[343] For centuries, scholars have tried to investigate the causes of his early death and to identify his illness, and recently Erik Pietro Sganzerla and Michele Augusto Riva hypothesised that Leopardi suffered from juvenile ankylosing spondylitis (JAS), a chronic inflammatory condition characterised by reactive arthritis, acute eye inflammation, inflammatory back pain, and inflammatory bowel disorders.[344] Leopardi's clinical conditions seem relevant here due to the fact that some of the author's biographical notes reveal that he wrote *Appressamento* on the spur of the moment, truly believing that he was close to death: 'Composizione notturna tra il dolore ec. della Cantica'.[345] One can therefore explain the vivid sufferance and fear depicted in *Appressamento* as real experiences of the author. Part of Leopardi's *Argomenti di elegie*, dated 1818, also reports this biographical element:

---

[342] Monaldo Leopardi, 'Memoriale autografo ad Antonio Ranieri', in *Il Monarca delle Indie. Corrispondenza tra Giacomo e Monaldo Leopardi*, ed. by Graziella Pulce (Milan: Adelphi, 1998), pp. 303–30.

[343] Erik Pietro Sganzerla and Michele Augusto Riva, 'The Disease of the Italian Poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837). A Case of Juvenile Ankylosing Spondylitis in the 19th Century?', *JCR: Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, 23 (2017), no. 4, 223–25 (p. 223).

[344] See, among others, Crescenzo Pavone, *Le malattie di Giacomo Leopardi* (Naples: Tipografia Giliberti e Massa, 1925); Maria Conforti, 'The poet who lost his head: Giacomo Leopardi's pathographies', in *Littérature et Médecine. Approches et perspectives (XVIe-XIXe siècles)* ed. by Andrea Carlino and Alexandre Wenger (Génève: Dro, 2007), pp. 135-155; and finally: Erik Pietro Sganzerla, *Malattia e morte di Giacomo Leopardi. Osservazioni critiche e nuova interpretazione diagnostica con documenti inediti* (Milan: BookTime, 2016). James Cassidy and Ross Petty, 'Juvenile ankylosing spondylitis', in *Textbook of Pediatric Rheumatology*, ed. by James Cassidy and Ross Petty (Philadelphia: Saunders, 2001), pp. 323–44.

[345] Giacomo Leopardi, 'Ricordi di infanzia e di adolescenza' in *Prose* ed. by Rolando Damiani (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), p. 1188.

'O mio core, ec. non ho sentito passione non mi sono agitato ec. fuorché per la morte che mi minacciava ec.'.[346]

Franco D'Intino notices that *Appressamento* constitutes the first of Leopardi's original works, where the author's 'ancient' self and 'modern' self are in dialogue, forging a highly allegorical work, rich in temptations towards innovations but also hampered by the classical rigour and religious education he received.[347] The genesis of *Appressamento*, indeed, occurs in conjunction with the 'mutazione totale' (*Zibaldone* 144) that marks a shift in Leopardi's poetics 'dal bello al vero' (*Zibaldone* 1741).[348] Such a coincidence invites us to read Leopardi's *Appressamento* very carefully and not to consider the poem as a youthful work simply related to a near-death experience of the author, but rather as a text which is stylistically 'immature' but poetically projected towards a modern mode.

It was 1816 when Giacomo Leopardi, at only eighteen years of age, composed his poem *Appressamento della morte*, which remained unpublished during his lifetime and excluded from the 1826 collection of poems.[349] *Appressamento* was first published in 1880 by the lawyer Zanino Volta and reprinted in 1899 by Mestica.[350] More recently, the poem enjoyed two critical editions, by Lorenza Posfortunato (1983) and by Sabrina Delcò-Toschini (2002), whose version includes a rich commentary by Christian Genetelli.[351]

---

[346] Enrico Ghidetti, 'Alle origini della vocazione poetica leopardiana: La cantica "Apressamento della morte"', in *Leopardi oggi. Incontri per il bicentenario della nascita del poeta*, ed. by Bortolo Martinelli (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), pp. 23–47 (p. 32).

[347] Franco D'Intino, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio". Lettura di Franco D'Intino', in *Lectura leopardiana. I quarantuno 'Canti' e 'I nuovi credenti'*, ed. by Armando Maglione (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), pp. 697–720 (p. 702).

[348] Martina Piperno, 'Mutazione', in *Lessico Leopardiano 2014*, ed. by Novella Bellucci, Franco D'Intino, Stefano Gensini (Rome: Sapienza Università Editrice, 2014), pp. 101–106 (p. 102).

[349] Lorenza Posfortunato, 'Premessa', in *Appressamento della morte* (Florence: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1983), pp. 7–8.

[350] Giacomo Leopardi, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Zannino Volta (Milan: Hoeply, 1880).

[351] Giacomo Leopardi, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Lorenza Posfortunato (Firenze: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1983); Giacomo Leopardi, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Christian Genetelli and Sabrina Delcò-Toschini (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002). Both Christian Genetelli,

First criticised, and even considered a forgery, by some scholars, *Appressamento* has now been recognised as an experimental piece by the young Leopardi, who later began working on it again.[352] Some scholars have maintained that Leopardi rejected his work due to the archaic language he employed and the complex structure of his sentences, for their combination resulted in an intense and magniloquent expressiveness.[353] Genetelli also underlines Leopardi's unusual choice of employing archaisms in the poem, claiming that Leopardi presents a 'repertorio di usi inconsueti' in this work that will be abandoned in later poems.[354] The Catholic ideology behind *Appressamento* would be rejected by Leopardi only one year later, undermining any chance for the poem to be, so to speak, accepted by Leopardi himself.[355] The subsequent re-elaboration of the *cantica* is evident in the work *Spento il diurno raggio*, which we can now read as fragment XXXIX in Leopardi's *Canti*, probably dated not earlier than 1831.[356] There, one can appreciate a more mature refinement and an evident downsizing of the original *Appressamento*, together with the absence of a religious motif. D'Intino provided a convincing and, so to speak, 'archaeological' interpretation of such a transformation, thus disclosing Leopardi's intimate goal in writing *Appressamento* and his will of dismissing such a goal in his later rewriting.[357] According to D'Intino, Leopardi, who in 1816 composed his first complex original work after

who edited the introduction and the comment, and Sabrina Delcò-Toschini, who provided the critical version and a precise philological note, reconstruct the history of the work underpinning it with a close reading of Leopardi's epistolary exchange with his friends and the publisher Stella.

[352] Enrico Ghidetti, 'Alle origini della vocazione poetica leopardiana', p. 33.

[353] See both Enrico Ghidetti, 'Alle origini della vocazione poetica leopardiana', and Walter Binni, 'III. 1815-1816. Traduzioni poetiche e primi tentativi di poesie originali', in *Lezioni leopardiane*, ed. by Novella Bellucci (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1994), pp. 37–52.

[354] Christian Genetelli, 'Appunti sull'"Appressamento della morte" di Giacomo Leopardi', *Versants: Revue Suisse Des Littératures Romanes*, 33 (1998), 83–104 (p. 91).

[355] Sabrina Delcò-Toschini, 'Per il testo dell'"Appressamento"', in *Appressamento della morte* (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002), pp. XXXI–LXVI (p. XXXVIII).

[356] Delcò-Toschini, p. XXXIX. Delcò-Toschini posits that the re-elaboration of the early poem in the fragment *Spento il diurno raggio* must date back to 1831 at the earliest, due to the absence of such a fragment in the 1831 Florentine edition of Leopardi's *Canti*.

[357] See D'Intino, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio"'.

years of translations of classical models, later decided to disfigure the original text and present it to the reader in the form of a fragment. In this way, Leopardi implicitly asks the reader to reconstruct the original meaning of the poem in an 'archaeological' way, which is, for Leopardi, a form of psychoanalysis.[358] Further on, D'Intino explains that *Appressamento* constituted for Leopardi the result of an interior battle between the 'ancient' self and the 'modern' one, which also means between the suffocating religious precepts imposed on him by his mother, Adelaide, embodied by the angel in the poem, and his ambition to reach poetical glory, illustrious but nonetheless mundane.[359] Such an interpretation clarifies the presence in *Appressamento* of the vices, personified as monsters, because they embody all those sins against which Leopardi fought or was urged to fight by his parents and tutors.[360] Christianity, then, reassures humans, but at the cost of one's life, since the actual glory is only the heavenly glory of Paradise, which can uniquely be attained through death. Fragment XXXIX is therefore, according to D'Intino, a critical reading of Leopardi's youthful composition, and a modern denunciation of the religious education imparted by the angel, whose ideology Leopardi destroys. In light of D'Intino's interpretation, *Appressamento* can be read as an archive of Leopardi's poetical apprenticeship and a relic of his intimate struggle between the 'ancient' and the 'modern' selves.[361] In this way, Leopardi's text evokes Fiorentino's *Elegie*, meant as the diary of the journey of the poet in his quest for acceptance of his loss (see Chapter 2), and reveals a deeper meaning at a second reading.

The basis of D'Intino's reading, however, departs from the young Leopardi's idea of creating a kind of poetry which was grandiose, allegorical, and intense, tightly linked to imagination and feelings.[362] Leopardi made use of

---

[358] D'Intino, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio", p. 703.

[359] D'intino, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio", p. 707.

[360] D'intino, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio", p. 706.

[361] On the concept of 'archive' in the field of literary criticism Michael Lynch's article constitutes a landmark: Michael Lynch, 'Archives in formation: privileged spaces, popular archives and paper trails', *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999), no. 2, 65–87.

[362] Binni, 'III. 1815-1816. Traduzioni poetiche e primi tentativi di poesie originali', p. 51.

personifications of Catholic tradition and sketched his poem towards an 'apparent' moralistic-religious direction, to satisfy his desire for a poetry of imagination like that of the ancients, albeit in a modern Italian perspective – or, even more convincingly, one can say that Leopardi's attempt to reproduce 'ancient imagination' is better represented by his *Inno a Nettuno* (written in 1816), and that the *Appressamento* aims to go back to the onset of modernity. Apart from Latin and Greek ancient sources, with Virgil predominant, Leopardi took as recognisable models both Dante and Petrarch. Although traces of Dante's *Commedia* are particularly evident in Leopardi's early poem – suffice it to look at the very categorisation of the text called *cantica*, divided in *canti* and written in *terza rima* – Leopardi, in his *postilla* to *Appressamento*, claims to have read Dante's work only once.[363] Such a statement received sceptical responses among scholars, such as Figurelli:

> Le reminiscenze dantesche vi appaiono numerose e frequenti nell'invenzione, nel disegno, nell'intonazione generale, nelle immagini, nell'elocuzione, nello stile e nel maneggio della terzina; si ché, se non proprio una lunga consuetudine col poema di Dante, dobbiamo pur ammettere che il L. ne avesse una conoscenza ben più profonda e remota di quella che può darne una sola lettura.[364]

Dante's *Commedia* constitutes one of the classical texts marking Leopardi's conversion from erudition to poetry ('dall'erudizione al bello') in 1816, as seems clear from the letter dated 30 April 1817 to Giordani.[365] In Autumn 1816, Leopardi states the importance of Dante not only as 'ricordevole' but rather 'divino' in his prose piece *Della fama di Orazio presso gli antichi* and, drawing on his

---

[363] See Lorenza Posfortunato, 'Appendice' in *Appressamento della morte* ed. by Lorenza Posfortunato, p. 77. Leopardi declares: 'Quando scrissi non avea letto Dante che una sola volta e mi fece gran meraviglia il trovar poi nel 19. Purg. data agli avari la stessa pena di giacer colla faccia volta in giù che loro *intl.* avea dato io nel principio del 3. Canto senza saper nulla di quel luogo'.

[364] Fernando Figurelli, *La formazione del Leopardi fino al 1819* (Naples: De Simone, 1971), p. 82.

[365] Leopardi, *Epistolario*, I, pp. 88–99.

theory of the imitation of the ancients, he also maintains that 'Dante sarà sempre imitato, agguagliato non mai'.[366]

Provided that Dante was an evident source of inspiration and imitation for the young Leopardi, if only for the idea of the supernatural journey during which the traveller meets punished sinners, other sources have proven to be crucial for Leopardi's inspiration.[367] Having to rely on coeval or earlier authors for building up a poetical idea based on sentiments, scholars have no doubt that Leopardi has employed Vincenzo Monti's descriptive style. Notably, Leopardi takes up from Monti three specific themes. First, the initial spectacular layout with the effective representation of the landscape, at first serene and radiant, then dark and stormy; second, the figure of the angel, who announces the poet's forthcoming death and explains the vanity and sinfulness of worldly feelings and goods; and finally, the personification of feelings and vices which, in the II, III and IV cantos are marked by a religious and moralistic disqualification.[368]

In branding as false Leopardi's claim to have read the *Commedia* only once, critics overlooked the fact that eighteenth-century visionary poets may have constituted intermediate sources for Leopardi, having mediated Dante's poetics. A similar hypothesis satisfactorily explains the fact that Leopardi blends in his *cantica* Dantean traits, motives, lexicon, and poetics typical of eighteenth-century Italian literature. A verified model of the young Leopardi is the visionary poetry of Alfonso Varano, who, dusting off Dantean and Petrarchan Christian allegories in his *Visioni sacri e morali*, had left his mark on eighteenth-century literature. Varano's poem is suited to Leopardi's moralistic drive due to its juxtapositions of values and vices, alongside the vivid language.[369] From Varano, Leopardi took the expressive taste for the macabre, the corrupt, the purulent, even accentuating the violence of the adjectives (see, for instance: 'losco duce'

---

[366] Giacomo Leopardi, *Prose*, ed. by Rolando Damiani (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), pp. 927, 437.

[367] On the influence of Dante in Leopardi's *oeuvre* see also: Domenico Consoli, 'Leopardi e Dante', in *Leopardi e la letteratura italiana dal Duecento al Seicento. Atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani, Recanati 13-16 settembre 1976* (Florence: Olschki, 1978), pp. 39–90.

[368] Binni, 'III. 1815-1816. Traduzioni poetiche e primi tentativi di poesie originali', p. 51.

[369] Binni, 'Leopardi e la poesia del secondo Settecento', pp. 328–29.

> 'lercio duce'). Such a violent language has been reinstated in some parts of Leopardi's rejected *canzoni* dated 1819, such as *Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato dal corruttore per mano ed arte di un chirurgo* and in his second sepulchral poem, *Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna scolpito nel monumento sepolcrale della medesima*, dated 1834, when Leopardi described the substantial decomposition of a corpse ('sozzo a vedere, abominoso, abbietto', 33; 'vista vituperosa e trista', 18–19).[370] Furthermore, Verzini emphasises that:

> Leopardi sembra condividere con Varano, se non averlo direttamente derivato, un tratto dominante dell'impronta poetica di alcuni dei suoi *Canti*, che è quel carattere di visionarietà che in entrambi gli autori ha la sua più chiara esplicitazione nella descrizione paesaggistica.[371]

The discourse on Leopardi's sources is particularly pertinent because it becomes part of the quarrel surrounding Romanticism, which reached its peak in 1816.[372] Leopardi, who had entered the debate with its most complex and radical contribution *Discorso di un italiano sulla poesia romantica*, whose drafting started in 1818 and that was posthumously published in 1906, outlines new perspectives for a modern Italian literature. Given his background as a classical philologist, he fashioned a project of engagement with tradition and classical models, while at the same time being aware that such a project was 'grounded in the lucid acknowledgement of the cultural fracture produced by the Enlightenment at the dawn of modernity'.[373] When reflecting upon Italian Romanticism, with all due caution to the specificity of the case, one needs to consider the role that both classical antiquity and the Renaissance played in Italian modern literature by examining their dialectics, which means questioning the existence or the refusal of a continuity between these traditions. Such a discourse results in a quest for a definition of Italian culture and identity, in terms of the literary canon, the

---

[370] Binni, 'Leopardi e la poesia del secondo Settecento', p. 330.

[371] Verzini, 'Introduzione', p. 17.

[372] Camilletti, *Classicism and Romanticism*, p. 4.

[373] Camilletti, *Classicism and Romanticism*, p. 7.

relationship with foreign strains of thought, cultural openness and innovations. It is in the wake of such reflections that one should read *Appressamento* as a response to the changing historical and literary panorama of Leopardi's time and as a reception of classical models through mediations and further creative elaboration of his contemporaries – such as Varano and Fiorentino.

In fact, Varano and Fiorentino, although both receptive to Dante's (and partly Petrarch's) works, can be identified as two inspirational sources for the shaping of *Appressamento*, even though scholars did not dwell on their contributions to the poem. Such an approach can be easily explained by the fact that Dantean and Petrarchan styles, words and poetical constructions have attracted critics' attention, only leaving space for a parallel reception-based reading of *Appressamento* and Vincenzo Monti's *Bassvilliana* and *Mascheroniana*. However, narrowing the focus on the representation of death, the body, and the phenomenon of visions allows a comparative approach to the images and scenes shown in the previous chapters.

3.1.1 Structure and themes

Appressamento is divided into five cantos and organised in a narrative structure. The sequential arrangement in *canti* is based on Dante's *Commedia*. The metrical scheme employed by Leopardi is the Dantean *terza rima*, as seen in *Visioni* and *Elegie*. The narration that Leopardi pursues is consequential, and similar to Fiorentino's elegies, which are chronologically developed, and unlike Varano's *Visioni*, for they follow a doctrinal path.

Regarding the themes in *Appressamento*, one should notice the coincidence of some of them with traditional elegiac ones. It is the case for the mourning of death, the despair caused by the caducity of life, and the dissolution of hope, features that are important to Leopardi and characterise his poems from youth until the so called 'sepolcrali'.[374] The interest taken by Leopardi in the

---

[374] This is also stated with regard to visual culture in Leopardi's poetry, where the themes are the same; see Fedi, *Mausolei di sabbia*, p. 78.

elegiac genre is corroborated by his youthful elegies, and the fragments published in the collection *Disegni letterari*, dated between 1818 and 1819.[375] These dates testify to the fact that Leopardi's elegiac works, all variously rejected by the author and published only in fragments within other poems, come after *Appressamento*, which therefore represents their archetype. A similar assumption can also be supported by the fact that one of the most recurring motifs in Leopardi's future production and certainly crucial in his elegies – the praise of the immature end as the only escape from the evil to come – is a feature missing from *Appressamento*, a theme probably not yet developed by the young Leopardi. As I will demonstrate, *Appressamento* can be interpreted as a first attempt to elaborate a complex and still immature poetical thought, and it proves to be so fundamental for Leopardi that we can find traces of it in later works, beginning with his elegiac poems. By reading his sketch, now entitled 'Elegia di un innamorato in mezzo a una tempesta', one can realise how three years later, Leopardi still considers his youthful poem to hold some value: 'Anche si potranno […] usare le immagini del Canto secondo e quarto della mia Cantica'.[376] Overall, however, we cannot define *Appressamento* as an elegy *per se*, but rather an elegiac 'worksite', a repository of themes that will emerge in later poems. 'Canto V', the last one, is the only part of *Appressamento* that can be more systematically understood as an elegy, due to its plaintive tone, its focus on the transience of human life, and the grief of the young poet who knows he must die without having experienced life. A coherent presence of introspective and mourning elements, however, does not find place in the overall structure of the *cantica*. Thus, it leaves us in no doubt that, apart from the metre used and the themes dealt with, *Appressamento* cannot be ascribed to the elegiac genre.

As for the structure of the *cantica*, 'Canto I' begins with idyllic landscape scenes where the *locus amoenus* abruptly leads to a violent storm, evolving in a description of a *locus terribilis*, which scares the poetic self, alone in his room.

---

[375] See, in particular, 'Argomenti di elegie', in *Poesie e prose*, pp. 617–19; 'Elegia di un innamorato in mezzo a una tempesta', in Giacomo Leopardi, *Disegni letterari*, ed. by Franco D'Intino, Davide Pettinicchio, and Lucia Abate (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2021), pp. 75–81.

[376] Leopardi, *Disegni letterari*, p. 75.

Once the storm dies down, an angel appears to announce to the poetic self the approaching of his death and offers him images of afterlife through an 'ammiranda vision' (I, 122). Soon in the next canto the reader is taken away with the poetic self through a journey into an imaginary elsewhere in which the poetic self takes on the guise of a pilgrim and encounters the personifications of various vices and sinners. The pilgrim first meets the sorrow caused by Love ('Canto II'), then followers of Error, the Fame, and the boastful ones, and finally the atrocities of War and Tyranny ('Canto III'). The gallery of vices and sinners concludes with the entrance of the pilgrim into Paradise and the vision of Christ and the Virgin Mary ('Canto IV'). The last episode, 'Canto V', ends where the *cantica* started, with the protagonist in his own room, feeling that life is abandoning him.

A similar pyramidal structure has been shown in Varano's *Visioni*, where the ordering criterion is exemplified by an itinerary towards divinity. In his work, Varano coherently organised a sequence of theological matters that span from 'Visione I' – dealing with the themes of the Grace and free will – to 'Visione XII' – where the pilgrim contemplates the ascent of the Emperor Francis I among the souls of the blessed. Thus, Varano organically develops a spiritual journey of the soul to redeem itself from the captivity of flesh reaching beatitude and eternity.[377] Though visiting a similar gallery of sinners and reaching the peace of Paradise with the vision of Christ and the Virgin, Leopardi does not share the same salvific aim as Varano. This is evident when considering that the end of Leopardi's *Appressamento* is composed of a *lamentatio* about his own miserable doom, which condemns him to die young, still too unaware of the things of the world. Descriptions of the brightness of Heaven, both in Varano and Leopardi, share common traits with Dante's *Paradiso*. On the contrary, *Appressamento*'s last canto, which constitutes Leopardi's lamentation, is the section with the fewest references to Dante in the entire work.

Varano, Fiorentino and Leopardi appear to share an interest in the transience of earthly life, which was particularly in fashion during the late

---

[377] Verzini, 'Introduzione', p. 28.

eighteenth century and encompassed most of the coeval so-called 'sepulchral' lyrics.[378] At the same time, the means by which they reflect on, and examine, the theme are different from one another. As has been shown, while Varano ponders the moral implications of devotees who do not follow the Catholic precepts, ensuring pain and punishments for their conduct, Fiorentino, on the other hand, meditates on his poetic self's interest in material and earthly goods when he despairs at the absence of his dead loved one. However, both Varano and Fiorentino experience such musings while observing, or thinking about, a dead woman – namely, Amennira in the case of Varano, and Laura, Fiorentino's wife. Leopardi, though, is only concerned with the transience of life in a self-referential discourse, in light of the vanity of poetic glory. His reflection happens in 'Canto V', during the poetic self's lamentation for his premature death, for he realises that his life has been too short, and he did not have the chance to gain any glory for his poetry.

Death shadows many characters in the poem and stands out as the undiscussed protagonist. The representation of death in *Appressamento*, however, differs from that of the other two authors. While Varano depicts a gallery of deceased male and female characters, and Fiorentino portrays the death of a single woman, Leopardi focuses on the death of male figures only, including himself. Leopardi's descriptions of dying men can also be read by following the canon of beauty already employed with regard to women in the previous chapters and outlined by Pozzi. Following such a canon, one should focus on the colour palette recurring in Leopardi's scenes. It can be observed that two colours in particular recur in *Appressamento*: red and white. Red, the colour of blood, is mainly employed by Leopardi to describe battles and wars and therefore wounds and scars, while white enlightens faces, for both lips and skins of dying men appear with a white complexion.

The representation of men close to death includes the portrayal of the poetic self. In 'Canto V', Leopardi pictures his feeble body while life is leaving

---

[378] The most popular examples of such poetry are Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola and Ippolito Pindemonte, but the line-up of melancholic poets whose poems are steeped in *memento mori* is much wider, from Antonio Capra to Ambrogio Viale, see footnote 277.

it. The place where this happens is the poet's room, where the man is immersed in all his pain. The lexicon employed is one of death and tears, and verbs with the meaning of 'leave' and 'exit' recur frequently. In the last part of the canto, Leopardi particularly insists on oppositions, alternating between birth and the approach of death ('e mia morte al natal sarà sembiante', V. 57; 'e morrò come mai non fossi nato', 59); the material body and the spirit ('Deh m'aita a por giù lo mortal velo | e come fia lo spirto uscito fore', 100-1); the levity of the host of souls in Heaven, and the weight of the stone to cover his tomb ('Mi copra un sasso, e mia memoria pera', 118). In this way, Leopardi inserts himself into a popular lyrical stream comprising those poets who, in the late eighteenth century, wrote about dreamlike visions foreseeing their own death.[379] Among these, one should consider Francesco Cassoli with his poem *Alla lucerna* and, above all, the Jesuit Clemente Bondi, particularly his *La morte in sogno*, whose collection of poems stood on the shelves of the library at Leopardi's house.[380]

Ultimately, but of great importance, *Appressamento* reinforces Leopardi's tendency to identify with the main characters of his works. In *Crocifissione e morte di Cristo* (1813) Leopardi had previously shown that he could transfigure a devotional matter into a personal myth,[381] and invites the reader to pity him and his condition, when he writes, for example: 'verso il miserabile oggetto che lo spettacolo v'offre, il più degno della commiserazione vostra e del vostro dolore'.[382] By identifying himself (vicariously through his poetic self) with the dying person, Leopardi represents a shift from the religious sphere to a personal, aesthetic one, reversing Bronfen's sense of complacency, according to which the living are fascinated by the dying because they do not identify with the latter: 'death as state or process is focalised externally, signifies the "death of the

---

[379] The genre is not, though, a complete novelty. In fact, Celio Magno wrote his poem *Me stesso piango, e de la propria morte* already in the sixteenth century.

[380] *Catalogo della biblioteca Leopardi in Recanati (1847-1899)* ed. by Andrea Campana (Florence: Olschki, 2011), p. 77. Clemente Bondi, *Tutte le opere*, 3 vols (Venice: 1798), in 8°, also in *Poeti minori del Settecento*, ed. by Donati.

[381] Charles Mauron, *Dalle metafore ossessive al mito personale* (Milan: Garzanti, 1976), p. 281.

[382] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 550.

other"'.[383] At the same time, as Bronfen states, the fascination with death can also be explained by the chance to visualise the Beyond, which is, ultimately, what Leopardi's poetic self experiences.[384] The bliss of the afterlife embodies, in *Appressamento*, the 'retta via', poetically speaking, that Leopardi was brought up to accept (by the angel, by his family and particularly his mother, Adelaide), but which does not embrace the romantic, modern sentimental poetry that the poet finally chooses to pursue.

As already observed in Varano's and Fiorentino's works, Leopardi also emphasises the duplicity of the body. Indeed, experiencing one's own body, according to Leopardi, constitutes a privileged point of knowledge.[385] The materiality of the body finds room in many places throughout *Appressamento* where Leopardi indicates the body is a mere cover for the soul, which is the 'true essence' of a human being: 'E pur bell'alma vostro corpo serra' (III, 25); 'Uom da suo corpo a questa terra avvinto' (IV, 183); 'Deh m'aita a por giù lo mortal velo, | e come fia lo spirto uscito fore' (V, 100–1). While the body bleeds and suffers, the soul floats and freely reaches those who call it to a higher mission. The clear perception of materiality and immateriality in respect of the human body characterises this type of poetry, a dreamlike vision that carries all the features of a real, extraordinary but frightening experience. The rendering of light and darkness, and the emphasis on the contrast between night and day allow a sharper dichotomy between the material body and the impalpable one. This opposition exalts the elements of 'abjection', generally relevant to the materiality of cadavers, and 'excess', which applies to descriptions of both material bodies and the extraordinary nature of souls.

---

[383] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 102.

[384] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 91.

[385] D'Intino, 'Introduction', in Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Caesar and D'Intino, p. XXXIV.

3.1.2   Leopardi Reader of Varano's *Visioni*

During his time, Varano was considered a representative of non-Arcadian poetry, as testified by Frugoni, who accentuated the independence of Varano from the trends of his time.[386] Later, the widespread popularity of Varano's *Visioni sacre e morali* was exemplified by its presence in, amongst other works, Leopardi's *Crestomazia italiana* and *Zibaldone*. The popularity of Varano declines after that, since *Visioni* began to be read as a Counter-Reformation and dry theological poem, as claimed by Settembrini.[387] Strazzabosco also highlights the existence of two principal twentieth-century critical approaches to Varano's work: some insert it in eighteenth-century grandiloquent literature, while others, such as Binni, Mazziotti, Cerruti and Negri, consider Varano the restorer of Dante's poetry, as well as a mediator of themes that were crucial for Italian Romanticism.[388]

In his *Crestomazia poetica,* Leopardi posits that he conceived such an anthology with the aim of showing a landscape of valuable minor lyrics to offer the reader unexplored themes and images for new insights.[389] In his introduction to the work, Leopardi informs the reader of his criteria of choice, declaring that, while compiling his selection, he sought lyrics of the most elegant, poetical,

---

[386] Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni, *Opere poetiche*, 9 vols (Parma: [n. pub.], 1789), I, pp. 450–51.

[387] Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione' p. XX. See Luigi Settembrini, *Lezioni di letteratura italiana*, 3 vols (Naples: Morano, 1872), III, pp. 122–123.

[388] Strazzabosco mainly refers to the influences that Varano had on Vincenzo Monti, Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi; see Strazzabosco, 'Introduzione' p. XXI. In his introduction Verzini notices that the conceptual approach to grief and providence proposed in *Visioni* is akin to that found in Alessandro Manzoni's *Promessi sposi* and tragedies. Also, catastrophes, such as the Lisbon earthquake in 'Visione VII', allow the formulation of a message that goes beyond the Christinian one and recalls the fellowship between people that later emerges more clearly in Leopardi's *Ginestra*, emerging from the awareness of sharing a common condition of human precariousness; see Verzini, 'Introduzione' pp. 16–17.

[389] Savoca, 'Introduzione', pp. XIII, XXII.

philosophical, and beautiful kind, among Italian literary production.[390] Leopardi's aim, moreover, was to select those texts that stood out from the others for their linguistic, historical, literary and moral values. Leopardi's *Crestomazia* presents Varano as one of the few authors who possesses poetic originality, of which, according to Leopardi himself, there was a lack in the Italian eighteenth-century literary landscape.[391]

There are nineteen excerpts from *Visioni sacre e morali* contained in Leopardi's *Crestomazia*, representing the biggest selection of the eighteenth-century section. These excerpts include the plague of Messina and the earthquake of Lisbon, and two sections that Leopardi entitled *Angeli della morte* and *In morte della sua donna*.[392] In his edition of Leopardi's *Crestomazia*, Giuseppe Savoca notes that Leopardi was particularly interested in Varano's linguistic array and violent adjectives, together with his attention towards the genre of *visio*.[393]

If there is no doubt that Varano was an inspirational source for the young Leopardi, further investigation is needed to analyse in which ways Leopardi received Varano's imagery and how it merged it with other models, such as Fiorentino's *Elegie*.

3.1.3   Leopardi Reader of Fiorentino's Elegie

Throughout this chapter I hypothesise that the young Leopardi drew inspiration from Fiorentino's text more than has hitherto been believed by critics.

---

[390] It should be noted that Leopardi's concept of 'elegance' consists of the non-determined, the vague and the irregular, elements alien to the Italian literary panorama that Leopardi probably recognised in Varano's work and imported into his own poetry.

[391] Leopardi, *Crestomazia Italiana. La Poesia*, pp. 564–65.

[392] The complete list of Varano's excerpts, with new original titles chosen by Leopardi, includes: Il precipizio (from 'Visione I'); Il turbine (II); La fata morgana (V); L'aurora boreale (VI); La tempesta del mare (VII); Il prato (X); Il deserto (XI); Le sorgenti dell'Arno (XII); La peste di Messina (V); Il terremoto di Lisbona (VII); Il tempio della vendetta di Dio (I); La valle della pietà divina (VI); Gli angeli della morte (X); La provvidenza divina (X); In morte di sua donna (XI).

[393] See also Emilio Bigi, 'Il Leopardi e l'Arcadia', in *Leopardi e il Settecento: Atti del I Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani, Recanati 13-16 settembre 1962* (Florence: Olschki, 1964), pp. 49–76.

Fiorentino's elegies have never been systematically read together with Varano's *Visioni* and Leopardi's *Appressamento*, despite the faint hints of some critics. Among them, Walter Binni posits the influences of Fiorentino's texts on those of the young Leopardi, but he confines this acute observation to a footnote:

> Le elegie del Fiorentino, con il loro petrarchismo preromantico, ben si collocano nella zona della cantica ed elegie leopardiane (e magari della loro continuazione entro il *Sogno*) del '17-18 e collaborano al tono di parlato elegiaco in terzine di lata scuola petrarchesca, assecondando il gusto di quella fase fra espansione sentimentale e bisogno del paragone immaginoso agevolato anche dal Monti e dal Varano.[394]

Savoca underpins Binni's hypothesis, in the edition of *Crestomazia poetica* he edited, when he puts the emphasis on Fiorentino's expressions such as 'negri panni', later to be found in Leopardi's *Sepolcrali*, showing that the reception of Fiorentino's poetry could have lasted until the 1830s.[395] The same remark can be found in Ghidetti's and Felici's editions of Leopardi's *Canti*, while, as Nicoletti noticed, Gavazzeni avoids such references in his edition dated 1998.[396]

All critics seem to have overlooked or misinterpreted important details that slightly alter the view of Fiorentino's influence on Leopardi. The most striking of these oversights concerns the age of the woman mourned by Fiorentino's poetic self. The preface the author includes in his first edition, and that he keeps unaltered in all the subsequent prints, clearly states:

> Che un Marito pianga la propria Moglie rapita da morte nel fiore degli anni è certamente facil cosa a trovarsi; ma che un Marito pianga una Consorte quasi

---

[394] Binni, 'Leopardi e la poesia del secondo Settecento', p. 360.

[395] Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La poesia*, p. 586.

[396] Nicoletti, p. 127. See Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti* ed. by Enrico Ghidetti (Florence: Sansoni, 1988); Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti* ed. by Lucio Felici (Rome: Newton Compton, 1996); Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti* ed. by Franco Gavazzeni (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998).

novilustre, e colle lacrime del più acerbo dolore, non è facil prova della moderna

conjugale sensibilità.[397]

The novelty of Fiorentino's poem is therefore announced by the author himself and consists of having as the main subject the poet's deceased wife, a no longer young woman, who is almost forty-five years old. Critics have, instead, variously remarked on how Leopardi took up the theme of the sick *young* woman who died in her 'verdi anni', when in fact Fiorentino claimed to be writing about a mature woman. A misunderstanding like this one denotes, in my opinion, a superficial attitude towards Fiorentino's reception and attributes to Fiorentino a *topos*, that of the woman who dies young, which does not characterise his poetry.

Nicoletti suggests, as did Santini, that Leopardi used the 1823 edition of Fiorentino's *Poesie* to compile his *Crestomazia* in 1828.[398] However, if it is true, as Binni claims, that Leopardi was influenced by Fiorentino in the composition of his youthful poems in 1817-18, I believe that Leopardi's knowledge of Fiorentino's text can be backdated. The undated edition of *Elegie* in Leopardi's library catalogue does not rule out the possibility that Leopardi owned an earlier copy, nor is it inconceivable to believe that the undated copy in question could be the edition printed in Ancona, possibly issued in 1804.[399] I suggest that Leopardi read Fiorentino's elegies before 1816, the year in which he wrote *Appressamento*, and that they were a repository of themes and lexicon for the making of his *cantica*. Leopardi could have drawn inspiration from Fiorentino's sixth elegy, 'L'Eternità', which Fiorentino adds in the 1803 edition of *Poesie*. Given that Leopardi composed *Appressamento* in 1816, it does not seem inappropriate to suppose that Leopardi may have read an edition of Fiorentino's *Poesie* between 1803 and 1816.

---

[397] Fiorentino, *Poesie di Salomone Fiorentino*, p. 37.

[398] See Emilio Santini, 'Della "Crestomazia Italiana" e di altre antologie', in *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, series 2, 9 (1940), no. 1/2, 35–64 (p. 55).

[399] See Campana, *Catalogo della biblioteca Leopardi in Recanati*, p. 243.

3.2   One's Own Death

This section aims to show the ways in which Leopardi responds to Varano's model, as well as Dante's as received through Varano's *Visioni*. I claim that *Appressamento* shapes an aesthetics of death based on excess and stages a 'spectacle' based on abjection. To achieve this, Leopardi employs both a coloured-based physical description of bodies, recalling the canon of beauty classically employed to praise women, as maintained by Peri, and a self-centred perspective rather than an external viewpoint, as instead happens in Varano's and Fiorentino's poems.

If *Visioni* and *Elegie* mainly portray the sufferance, illness, and death of female characters, *Appressamento* constitutes a turning point in modern visionary texts, and proposes a trend reversal. Across the five cantos, the reader encounters historical and mythical figures from ancient Greece and Rome, weeping and despairing about their own condition as damned souls, as the sinners depicted by Varano and Dante. However, one male character stands out from the others, Ugo d'Este, who appears towards the end of 'Canto II', retracing his own tragic death. Ugo narrates his own death at the hands of his father from his own viewpoint, detailing his despair and terror until being on the verge of death. The homicide of Ugo ably serves Leopardi's purpose of envisaging his own death later in the poem. The poet describes both the crudeness of Ugo's episode and the portrayal of the poetic self's upcoming death as spectacles, highlighting the excessive and abject, therefore appealing, representation of blood and flesh at the end of life, as was the custom in hagiographers' accounts.[400]

The episode of Ugo and Parisina is a striking example of pain, both psychological, due to the growing fear of death, and physical, considering the cruelty suffered by Ugo. Such an example traces the images already fashioned by Varano, framing Leopardi's work within the contemporary interest in abjection. The chronicle of Ugo and Parisina dates back to the fifteenth century, and can

---

[400] About the spectacle of death in hagiographical accounts see Duncan and Webb, 'Corporealities in Italian Studies'.

be found in Matteo Bandello's *Novelle*.[401] The story recounts the affair that Parisina Malatesta had with her stepson, Ugo d'Este, tragically ended when the Marquis Niccolò III d'Este of Ferrara, husband of Parisina and father of Ugo, had the two lovers beheaded.[402] The story crossed the Italian borders and reached Britain, where Edward Gibbon briefly told the story in his *Miscellaneous Works* in 1796. Gibbon's version constituted the source for Lord Byron's poem *Parisina*, published in 1816, the same year in which Leopardi wrote his *Appressamento*, including the episode in his *cantica*. Genetelli claims that Leopardi, who learned about the story from a review of Byron's poem in *Spettatore italiano*,[403] incorporated the chronicle in his work to pursue his case against romantic poetry, and to reappropriate it in the name of the great Greek-Latin-Italian tradition, under attack by northern authors.[404] A similar choice would also explain the tribute to Dante's episode of Paolo and Francesca, in the name of the unequalled Italian fourteenth-century model. In the pages of *Spettatore*, an anonymous reviewer criticised Byron's *Parisina* by pointing out the presence of a perpetual gloom in his poem, among other elements, thus highlighting a key

---

[401] Matteo Bandello, *Novelle*, ed. by Elisabetta Menetti (Milan: BUR, 2011). See 'parte prima' novella XLIV entitled 'Il marchese Niccolò terzo da Este trovato il figliuolo con la matrigna in adulterio, a tutti dui in un medesimo giorno fa tagliar il capo in Ferrara'.

[402] The first historiographic account of the chronicle derives from Antonio Frizzi, *Memorie per la storia di Ferrara* (Ferrara: Abram Servadio, 1850), pp. 450–53. A new accredited version of the episode was then published in: Angelo Solerti, 'Ugo e Parisina. Storia e leggenda secondo nuovi documenti', in *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 45 (1893), fascicolo XII-15, 61–84. The story enjoyed great popularity, as demonstrated by various publications, such as: Giuseppe Petrucci, *Ugo d'Este e Parisina Malatesta* (Ferrara: Taddei-Soati, 1903); *Parisina*, ed. by Raffaello Barbiera (Milan: Treves, 1913); Alfonso Lazzari, *Ugo e Parisina nella realtà storica* (Florence: Rassegna Nazionale, 1915); Gianna Pazzi, *Stella dei Tolomei. Rivale di Parisina Malatesta* (Roma: Cosmopoli, 1934); Alfonso Lazzari, *Parisina* (Florence: Olschki, 1949); Elena Bianchini Braglia and Roberta Jotti, *Madonna Parisina* (Modena: Ass. Terra e Identità, 2007).

[403] Cecilia Gibellini, 'Byron and Leopardi', in *Nuovi quaderni del CRIER. Byron e l'Europa, l'Europa di Byron*, ed. by Francesco Piva, Angelo Righetti and Laura Colombo (Verona: Fiorini, 2008), pp. 215-230 (p. 215). The review is 'The Siege, ecc. L'assedio di Corinto, Poema. Parisina, Poema in 8°. Londra, Murray, 1816', *Spettatore. Parte straniera*, 15 October 1816, 73–78.

[404] Christian Genetelli, 'Leopardi "contra" Byron', *Cenobio*, 44 (1995), 145–54.

argument of future accusations by Leopardi towards Byron. In his *Zibaldone*, indeed, Leopardi stresses the uniformity of Byron's works as a resounding flaw of Romantic poetry, and pinpoints certain specific elements as causes of such ineffective uniformity.[405] Among these, Leopardi refers to the presence in Byron's works of continuous excess, a continuous intensity, and a continuous extraordinariness. According to Leopardi, such an insistence produces the effect of uniformity. Leopardi, then, interestingly defines Byron's poetry as a 'writing of excess', which constitutes the formulation of the concept of Gothic according to Botting, as we already discussed in previous chapters.[406] Nonetheless, my analysis of Leopardi's *Appressamento* focuses on Leopardi's excessive representation of corporeal experiences, which is particularly exacerbated in the episode of Ugo and Parisina. Although Byron's version indisputably emphasises the gory details when Hugo faces his death sentence, Leopardi's depiction of the same scene seems to fill the page with a sense of anguish and a vividness comparable to those of Byron.[407] Furthermore, the absence of Bandello's *Novelle* in Leopardi's private library seems to underpin the hypothesis that Leopardi

---

[405] See Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 3822: 'Le poesie di Lord Byron molto più e più presto ci stufano e lascian freddi, per la grande uniformità che vi si sente, la quale può esser vera, e nascere da mancanza della vera e sottile arte poetica […]; e può anche esser che sia apparente, e nasca solo dal continuo eccesso in ogni cosa, dalla continua intensità, dal continuo risalto straordinario di ciascuna parte. Il che da un lato produce l'effetto dell'uniformità, e lo è veramente, in quanto è *continuo eccesso* ec. benché variato, quanto si voglia, ne' suoi subbietti, qualità ec. Dall'altro lato stanca come l'uniformità, perché troppo affatica gli animi, che ben tosto non possono più tener dietro all'entusiasmo del poeta'.

[406] Botting, *Gothic*, pp. 1–4.

[407] 'All feelings seemingly subdued, | In deep disdain were half renewed, | When headsman's hands prepared to bind | Those eyes which would not brook such blind, | As if they dared not look on death. | "No—yours my forfeit blood and breath; | These hands are chained, but let me die | At least with an unshackled eye— | "Strike"—and as the word he said, | Upon the block he bowed his head; | These the last accents Hugo spoke: | "Strike"—and flashing fell the stroke— | Rolled the head—and, gushing, sunk | Back the stained and heaving trunk, | In the dust, which each deep vein | Slaked with its ensanguined rain; | His eyes and lips a moment quiver, | Convulsed and quick—then fix for ever' (444-461). Lord George Gordon Byron, *The works of Lord Byron*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1898), III.

became aquatinted with the chronicle only by reading about Byron's version and thus with his 'excessive' way of representing it.[408] What can be hypothesised, then, is that Leopardi's refusal of *Appressamento* is a sort of auto-censorship of the excessive and abject, or, in other words, we can perhaps say a repudiation of the 'Gothic' considering the British model to which we are referring.

There are two main points that characterise Leopardi's version of Ugo and Parisina's story. First, Leopardi frames the episode of Ugo and Parisina in a supernatural setting, unlike Byron's version, and closer to Paolo and Francesca's tale. Such a decision, however, does not discourage Leopardi to fill the story with abjection and crude details, in the wake of Varano's *Visioni*. Through the supernatural and the terrifying happenings, Leopardi's poem produces emotional effects on its readers rather than a rational response. Such emotional effects allow a Gothic interpretation of *Appressamento*, as the following analysis underpins.[409]

Second, the whole episode in *Appressamento* is not recounted by the female character, Parisina. Conversely, in Dante's model, Francesca is the storyteller, and in Byron's poem, Parisina plays such a significant role that the poem is titled after her. Leopardi, instead, introduces Ugo as a main character, and he is the one and only protagonist of the story, while Parisina makes a cursory appearance, defined as 'druda' (II. 157), which has a pejorative connotation. Rather, the male-centred representation of Ugo and Parisina's episode, as has been mentioned already, allows Leopardi to foretell, almost as a poetic exercise, the death of his own poetic self. Despite being dead, Ugo appears before Leopardi's poetic self in a miserable state, as if his earthly condition had remained unchanged in the otherworld: '[…] ed i' mi vidi un mesto avante | Giovane e tal che d'ello anco mi spiace' (II. 92–93). His description significantly echoes Varano's lines in 'Visione V'. There, Varano's poetic self wanders through the pestilent Sicilian streets and stumbles upon an unhappy young man: 'Un giovane Guerrier sparuto e fiacco' (V. 491). Both Varano's soldier and Leopardi's young man are visibly identified with capital

---

[408] See Campana, *Catalogo della biblioteca Leopardi in Recanati.*

[409] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 3.

letters, and their appearance is, respectively, 'fiacco' and 'mesto', without much strength in their bodies. The two characters share a cadaveric look and express despair through their bodies. Varano clearly stresses that the soldier resembles a cadaver and that he is in pain:

> Un cadaver parea ritto sul suolo;
> pur su la fronte un non so qual soave
> cipiglio avea d'invidiabil duolo.
>
> (*Visioni*, V. 496–98)

Similarly, Leopardi's poetic self is greatly moved by Ugo's sorrow, 'Tanto mi vinse suo flebil sembiante' (II. 94), and actively asks the angel, his guide, to interact with the soul. The adjective 'flebil' seems to address the faded appearance of the soul, which strongly contrasts with the vividness of the flesh represented in the murder scene that follows.

Ugo, however, does not recount his homicide immediately, and shows a reluctance to reveal the truth about his tragic death, as the following lines show: 'Disse, o ristette o quasi si pentia, | poi seguitò: [mio padre] mi trasse al punto estremo' (103–4). Proceeding with the story, the readers learn that Ugo's death came at night, the typical moment when death occurs as represented in Daniello Bartoli's *L'huomo al punto*, which may have been one of Leopardi's sources, as it is certainly counted among the volumes of Leopardi's library.[410] Moreover, Leopardi depicts Ugo as imprisoned in a tower, staging the scene in the dark. The very precise representation of Ugo's death, the almost photographic detail

---

[410] Campana, *Catalogo della biblioteca Leopardi in Recanati*, p. 65. Monaldo's library totalised fourteen books by Daniello Bartoli, mostly in small formats, such as in 8°, 12°, 16°. Among these *L'uomo al punto di morte* (Rome: 1667), in 8°. D'Intino posits the influence of Bartoli's essay in Leopardi's *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia* and specifically in a scene where the 'verginella' – which D'Intino identifies with Silvia – finds herself 'combattuta e vinta'. Leopardi could have drawn the warlike metaphor, according to D'Intino, from Bartoli's *L'uomo al punto cioè*, which refers to an extract on ancient Rome, but also from a passage from Varano's *Visioni* anthologised in *Crestomazia poetica*. See Franco D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia. Motivo persefoneo e mistica eleusina in Leopardi', *Filologia e critica*, 19 (1994), no. 2, 211–71 (pp. 225–226).

staged by Leopardi can perhaps be interpreted as the poet's desire to dwell on the infinitesimal. Reminiscent of Bartoli's syntagm 'il punto estremo', Leopardi poetically represents what he theorises in his notebook: 'Come l'uomo non s'accorge nè sente il principio della sua esistenza, così non sente nè s'accorge del fine, nè v'è istante determinato per la prima conoscenza e sentimento di quello nè di questo' (*Zibaldone* 283). The instant, then, according to Leopardi, is nothing more than one tiny shred of present that is given to man to live. Unlike the past and future, the present is so infinitesimal that it is not really perceptible. 'Il presente non è in verità che istantaneo, e fuori di un solo istante, il tempo è sempre e tutto passato o futuro' (*Zibaldone* 3265) is, indeed, what Leopardi notes in his *Zibaldone*. The moment described by the dying Ugo, then, a moment suspended between life and death, acquires for Leopardi a truly unique importance and cognitive curiosity. Is the threshold between life and death perhaps the only moment in which humans can truly experience the 'moment'? However, by setting the episode in the afterlife, Leopardi contrasts the infinitesimal experience of the dying with the eternity that the souls of the dead encounter, according to the teachings of Bartoli, who states 'e in quel sì forte Punto, del trapassar che fanno da un sì lontano estremo, com'è il brieve tempo che son giunti, e già più non è nulla, e la sempre durevole eternità, in cui entrano a durarvi in perpetuo'.[411]

By representing Ugo's point of death, his agony, and the focus on the very instant of dying, Leopardi consciously chooses to have the protagonist of the story die in a different way from his literary model, Byron, who had maintained the same death sentence traditionally attributed to the historical figures involved. In *Appressamento*, Ugo d'Este is not decapitated, as happens in all the previous literary accounts, including Byron's poem, where both the lovers are beheaded.[412] Such a choice is not obvious, but perhaps suggests that Leopardi

---

[411] Bartoli, *L'huomo al punto*, p. 76.

[412] Apart from Byron, Bandello, though being a literary rather than a historical source, narrates that the lovers die at night (between 21 and 22 May 1425) and that both were beheaded at the same time: 'La sera poi, quasi ne l'imbrunir de la notte, in quella medesima torre per comandamento del padre gli fu dal manigoldo mózzo il capo. Fu altresì a la donna in quell'ora

was interested in portraying the anger of Ugo's father and preferred to convey the idea of a private revenge to be set in a tower, recalling Ugolino, rather than a public execution, as in Byron's version.[413] Whereas Leopardi does not even devote space to the figure of Parisina he nonetheless modifies Ugo's doom and chooses for him a different death.

> E 'l genitore entrar che tenea steso
> il destro braccio e ne la man mirai
> un ferro e 'n la sinistra un torchio acceso.
>   Morta è disse tua druda e tu morrai.
> Su le ginocchia i' caddi in quel momento:
> piagneva e volea dir: mio padre, errai.
>   Ma la punta a mia gola e' ficcò drento,
> e caddi con la bocca in su rivolta,
> e 'l vital foco tutto non fu spento.
>   Parvemi che l'acciaro un'altra volta
> alzasse, e di vibrarlo stesse in forse;
> poscia com'uom che di lontano ascolta,
>   l'udii cercar de l'uscio: indi ritorse
> il passo, e 'n cor piantommi e lasciò 'l brando,
> perché l'ultimo ghiaccio là mi corse,
>   e svolazzò lo spirto sospirando.

(*Appressamento*, II. 154–169)

---

medesima ne l'altra torre tagliata la testa […]', in Matteo Bandello, 'Le novelle di Matteo Bandello', in *Tutte le opere di Matteo Bandello*, ed. by Francesco Flora (Milan: Mondadori, 1942), p. 579.

[413] An investigation on the beheading of Ugo and Parisina has been recently the subject of historical research. Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan and Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur bring attention to the unusual death sentence that occurred to three women of the Renaissance period, including Parisina. They explain that no unfaithful woman was then subjected to such a punishment, being beheaded, and least of all publicly, suggesting that Niccolò III had specific reasons for executing his mistress so brutally. See Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan and Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Decapitate. Tre donne nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, trans. by Rossana Lista (Turin: Einaudi, 2019).

Ugo's father enters the tower where Ugo is imprisoned carrying a sword and a torch. The death sentence is announced by a single phrase, where the verb to die is stressed by the chiasm which locates 'morta' and 'morrai' (a polyptoton), respectively, at the beginning and at the end of the line. The following scene has a rapid pace, due to the polysyndeton. Niccolò III pierces Ugo's throat with his sword but that does not kill him immediately. On the verge of death, in fact, Ugo thinks that his father is leaving the room. However, suddenly, Niccolò III turns back and stabs his son again in his heart leaving his weapon there. Whereas a few lines before the 'vital foco' was not yet extinguished, now Ugo feels that 'l'ultimo ghiaccio' is running along his body. Contrasting with the heaviness of the material objects of the scene, Leopardi concludes the sequence, and the whole of 'Canto II', with an image of levity: the soul of Ugo's spirit flies out of his body, free from bodily constraints: 'svolazzò lo spirto sospirando'. The alliteration of the letter 's' conveys lightness to the scene and the term 'sospirando' suggests that the spirit emits a subtle sigh while leaving the body. Fiorentino outlines the exact same scene in his 'Elegia IV', 'La rimembranza', where Laura's spirit leaves her body with a sigh: 'la mia fedele | si sciolse dal suo fral con un sospiro' (IV. 101–02). Always eluding literary critics, this passage highlights a similarity between Leopardi's text and Fiorentino's elegy, which is impossible not to notice. While Fiorentino provides the reader with a (delusional) tactile sensation ('par lambirmi le gole, e carezzarmi', IV. 111), Leopardi only describes the visual effect of a sort of ghost that comes out of Ugo's cadaver to fly away, possibly the same that, in an otherworldly setting, is narrating the episode to Leopardi's poetic self.

The violence of the homicide of the son at the hands of the father could be redolent of Leopardi's youthful translation of the fourth idyll of Mosco, *Megara moglie d'Ercole*, where the father commits a horrendous murder at the expense of his children:

> […] Io vidi, io stessa
> cogli occhi miei que' tenerelli figli
> dal padre lor trafitti […]

The same verb 'trafiggere', to stab, recurs in 'La flagellazione', one of Leopardi's youthful poems included in his *Discorsi sacri*, where the term employed is 'trafittura di chiodi'.[415]

A further meaningful detail to be noticed is that Niccolò III hits Ugo in his throat when he is about to speak and express his repentance. Leopardi sets a similar scene in *Consalvo*, where he represents Consalvo, the dying, in the act of speaking just when he is on the verge of death, in this case to confess his love to Elvira: 'Ma ruppe alfin la morte il nodo antico | alla sua lingua' (24–25). By depicting Niccolò III in the act of stabbing his son when he is trying to talk, Leopardi emphasises the character's inability to speak, a trait we observed in *Visioni* and *Elegie* too. In 'Visione XI' the pilgrim is unable to talk to the resurrected Amennira as well as in 'Elegia III', 'La visione', the widower struggles to speak to Laura's ghost even though he recognises her. In both cases, the men are amazed and scared at the same time by the women's apparitions and their astonishment prevents them from speaking. Both texts also represent the inability to speak due to illness or being on the verge of death, as happens in the case of Maria Anna and Marie Louise, and throughout 'Elegia I'.

Despite the importance attributed to the inability to speak, the guilt of Ugo depends on his utterance of the words of love towards Parisina: 'E al fine un punto fu che 'l cor non resse | tanto ch'io dissi: T'amo, e 'l dir fu roco' (II. 119–20). On the theme of spoken and unspoken words, D'Intino puts forward the hypothesis that the whole *cantica* of *Appressamento* regards the poetic vocation of the young Leopardi.[416] Leopardi must choose carefully, according to the precepts of his guardian angel, what to 'say' in his poetry. Further on, in the analysis of the death of Leopardi's poetic self, the protagonist's inability to speak, due to fear, the ineffability of the divine vision, and finally the arrival of death, underline the immaturity of the young Leopardi who must 'choose' whether to

---

[414] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, I, p. 504.

[415] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 555.

[416] D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia', p. 234.

follow the angel's precepts in order to receive the vision of Christ and the Virgin Mary as a reward, or to undertake the human path. Once Niccolò III pierces Ugo's throat, Leopardi's poetic self decides to renounce the desire and creative power of the word and allows himself to be conquered by the chill of death.[417]

The tragic account of Ugo's death recounted by Ugo himself allows Leopardi to represent the death, not at all heroical, of a male character. Ugo's episode in 'Canto II', seems to prepare the reader for the core theme of the whole *cantica*: the prospect of the poetic self's own death, which occurs in 'Canto V'. Whereas his enfeebled constitution intensified his introspection,[418] as he himself declares in *Zibaldone*, when he writes 'il vigore del corpo nuoce alle facoltà intellettuali, e favorisce le immaginative, e per lo contrario l'imbecillità del corpo è favorevolissima al riflettere' (*Zibaldone* 115), Leopardi devotes attention to a detailed review of the changes in the protagonist's own body at the point of death. The experience of his own death seems to activate the poetic self's senses, for not only does he experience feebleness, paleness and aphonia, he also perceives the weight of his inner thoughts, as the following lines demonstrate:

> Sento che va languendo entro mio petto
> la vital fiamma, e 'ntorno guardo, e al mondo
> sol per me veggo il funeral mio letto.
>   E sento del pensier l'immenso pondo,
> sì che vo 'l labbro muto e 'l viso smorto,
> e quasi mio dolor più non ascondo.
>   Poco andare ha mio corpo ad esser morto.
>
> (*Appressamento*, V. 4–10)

As happens in the case of Ugo's death, Leopardi's poetic self realises that his vital flame still burns within him and languishes inside his chest. As well as classical medicine, accommodating and even requiring the presence of the 'spirit'

---

[417] D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia', p. 235.

[418] D'Intino, 'Introduction', in Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Caesar and D'Intino, p. XXXIV.

within the materiality of the flesh, Leopardi believed that ideas, feelings, thoughts, and states of mind *were* the body.[419] Such a conception explains why Leopardi's poetic self feels the weight of his own thoughts and claims that he cannot hide his pain anymore. Whether that pain, 'dolore', indicates physical or emotional distress is not obvious, but certainly the poetic self is able to realise that his body is approaching death. The theme would be reworked years later, in 1824, in *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie*, where Leopardi enacts a dialogue between the scientist Ruysch and his mummies, which are temporarily – and thanks to extraordinary circumstances – resurrected and can only speak for fifteen minutes by answering questions from a living person.[420] Ruysh asks them what sensations they felt at the point of death. To be noticed here, Ruysch asks 'che sentimenti provaste di corpo e d'animo nel punto della morte', emphasising that both the body and the soul should have been sensitive to death. The mummies reply: 'Del punto proprio della morte io non me ne accorsi'.[421] Ruysch, disappointed by such an answer, explains to the mummies that it is commonly believed that death is very painful: '(…) tutti si persuadono che il sentimento della morte sia dolorosissimo'.[422] The pain, Ruysch explains, is believed to derive from the separation of the spirit from the body, but the mummies assure him that such a separation is easy and painless: '(…) l'entrata e l'uscita dell'anima sono […] quiete, facili e molli'.[423] This is something that Leopardi reflects on, and comes to a conclusion about, in *Zibaldone*: 'l'entrata e l'uscita sua [of the soul from the body] sia facilissima leggerissima e dolcissima, non essendoci mica nervi nè membrane nè ec. che ve la tengano attaccata, o catene che ve la tirino quando deve entrarvi' (282–3). From this way of

---

[419] Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 56.

[420] The fact that the dead cannot speak is another theme that interests Romantic sensibilities, as Edgar Allan Poe testifies when he writes: '*Why* cannot a man talk after he is dead? *Why – Why –* that is the question', in Edgar Allan Poe, 'Editorial Miscellany', *Broadway Journal*, 2 (1845), no. 23, p. 359, emphasis in original.

[421] Giacomo Leopardi, 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie', in *Operette morali*, ed. by Ottavio Besomi (Milan: Mondadori, 1979), p. 243.

[422] Leopardi, 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch', p. 245.

[423] Leopardi, 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch', p. 247.

presenting death, and conveying the message that dying is not as painful as is commonly believed, emerges an interest in recording the ways in which death becomes constructed as 'a potential object of knowledge'.[424] Therefore, *Appressamento* represents a means through which it is possible to acquire knowledge about death. Concurrently, Bronfen asserts that pictures or paintings and visual art in general acquire the same purpose, because 'To witness a death not only always implies that the observer's consciousness persists beyond the spectacle of death but that he survives as an observer of an image of death'.[425]

Both texts and visual images expose the beholder to death. The reader is confronted with cruel but spectacular scenes, represented in *Appressamento* both by the violence of the father's piercing of his son's agonising body and by the final moment in which Ugo expires and frees his spirit from his earthly body. Leopardi already gave evidence of such cruel and sorrowful spectacles in *Crocifissione e morte di Cristo*, written and performed in 1813, the second part of his *Discorsi sacri*. In this work, the teenage Leopardi reveals his fascination for the lugubrious. The spectacularism of the tortures suffered by Christ is repeatedly emphasised with explicit references to the excessiveness (emphasis is mine): 'il miserabile oggetto che lo *spettacolo* v'offre' (550); 'il funesto luttuoso *spettacolo* del cruento sacrificio' (551); 'scena ferale della orribil *tragedia*' (551); 'Qual luttuoso *spettacolo*, o cristiani!' (554); 'alla vista di quelle colpe che di sì lugubre *spettacolo* furon cagione' (554) and also 'ferale *eccesso*' (551); 'l'*eccesso* fatale che sul Calvario si compie' (554); 'già nega la terra di sostener questo *eccesso* e traballa' (554).[426]

Yet, *Appressamento* is a youthful work, and despite Leopardi representing in it a suffering poetic self, he remains faithful to what he expounds in his *Zibaldone*. He exemplifies one of the two cardinal passions that, according to his thought, derives from the love of the self: fear (as opposed to hope) and

---

[424] Smith, *Gothic Death*, p. 75.

[425] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 102.

[426] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, I, pp. 550–54.

hatred.[427] However, fear always prevails over hope.[428] In fact, once death is approaching Leopardi's poetic self, he declares 'Tutto dispare, e mi vien morte innante, | e mi lascia mia speme in abbandono' (V. 53–54). Hope leaves the dying body, and the protagonist realises that his fame will vanish, and he will not be able to *see* it with his own body from the otherworld: 'non vedrò mia fama | tacer col corpo da la morta riva' (46–47). The term 'morte' both as a noun and as an adjective recurs in 'Canto V': the otherworld is a 'morta riva' while the earth is a 'mortal piaggia' (20). The concreteness of death is embodied by the human body, described as pale, colourless, and defined as 'miserable', 'questo misero compagno' (13), a phrase that also occurs in *Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato dal corruttore per mano ed arte di un chirurgo*, 'questo infelice | carco' (131-32) and in *Il sogno*, 'questa misera spoglia' (44). Leopardi depicts the material body as an instrument to allow human beings to be on earth, and similar to what Varano did before, he assigns responsibility for sins to the human body and not to the spirit: 'e fu quando peccai, | colpa di fral non di perverso core' (104–105).

The dying body is thus described following the traditional 'short canon' of beauty, with white colour in the face and tears in the eyes: 'Or bianco 'l viso, e l'occhio pien di pianto' (94). The scene recalls Fiorentino's wife Laura, in her deathbed, with eyes full of humours and pale cheecks: 'occhi grami in largo umore | parte ne versa' (I, 4–5) and 'porpora estinta' (I, 26). In 'Canto III', Leopardi associates the white colour with the coming of death, qualifying the time, 'ora', rather than the human body: 'venir pallida e muta l'ultim'ora' (III.

---

[427] D'Intino, 'Introduction', in Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Caesar and D'Intino, p. XXXVI and Leopardi, *Zibaldone* 2630, 1827.

[428] Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 458: 'Quanta parte abbia nell'uomo il timore più della speranza si deduce anche da questo, che la stessa speranza è madre di timore, tanto che gli animi meno inclinati a temere e più forti, sono resi timidi dalla speranza, massime s'ella è notabile. E l'uomo non può quasi sperare senza temere, e tanto più quanto la speranza è maggiore. Chi spera teme e il disperato non teme nulla. Ma viceversa la speranza non deriva dal timore, benché chi teme speri sempre che il soggetto del suo timore non si verifichi. (26 dicembre 1820). Osservate che la passione direttamente opposta al timore, è la speranza. E nondimeno ella non può sussistere senza produrre il suo contrario'.

168). Moreover, other than the human body, Leopardi anthropomorphises death itself, in 'Canto V', providing it with freezing hands and fingers: 'La man fredda di morte, e tra le dita | lo suon mi tronca e 'n bocca la parola' (V. 89–90) and again, the freeze of the approaching death possesses the hopeless poetic self:

> […] Sola Speranza, io tremo
> e sento 'l cor che batte e sento un gelo
> quando penso ch'appressa il punto estremo.
>
> (*Appressamento*, V. 97–99)

Leopardi had forerunners in the representation of one's own death. Among these, Clemente Bondi who wrote and published *La morte in sogno* in 1808.[429] The main character, Bondi's poetic self, does not realise whether what he sees is a dream or 'vision dell'alma' (13), but surely describes his 'corporea salma' (15) following the mode already employed by other authors – white cheeks, pale lips, feverish state. In the background his character can hear 'il cantico funebre' (26), and the author seizes the moment in which the soul comes out of the body 'l'anima spaventata uscir io miro' (33). The floating ghost is horrified by the sight of its rotten body, a disgust expressed with a language of excess, 'ribrezzo | nauseoso spettacolo' (53–54), a disgust which cannot be present in Leopardi's *Appressamento*, because his poetic self is only told that death is approaching. In the case of Bondi's work, the mortal body is described in a way that reminds us of Varano's Amennira and Fiorentino's Laura, consolidating the human remains' repertoire in poetry:

> […] Cadavere già guasto
> e ormai vicino a imputridir, distrutto
> a ingordi vermi preparato pasto.
>
> (*La morte in sogno*, 43–45)

---

[429] See *Poeti minori del Settecento*, ed. by Donati, pp. 240–41.

The religious aim of the poem allows Bondi to illustrate the vision of God, 'ombra smarrita [...] trovossi in faccia a Dio nuda e romita' (64–66), as both Varano and Leopardi do, as well as to impart the lesson of asking for forgiveness and repenting, and pursues, in so doing, that sacred and moral aim so popular in eighteenth-century poetry. The awakening of the poetic self concludes the poem with an abrupt vanishing of both the 'gelo mortale' (138) and 'ogni fantasma' (140), leaving the poetic self with the unsettling premonition of his 'sognata morte' (147). Bondi's protagonist, however, terrified by such a vision, cannot distract his mind from the image of ghosts, 'fisso col pensiero in quelle larve' (142). Leopardi's *Appressamento*, though containing a more disturbing ending, for the angel clearly informs the protagonist that his vision is true: '[...] veduto non hai nè sogni nè larve: | certa e verace vision fu questa' (IV, 203–4), closes his poem with a less obvious sense of persecution, and rather a sense of expectation. As maintained by Botting, 'internal states and individual statements indicating psychical delusions, paranoia and persecution are coloured in more distinct Gothic terms than external persecution',[430] which means that the turmoil caused by mental suffering and nightmarish experiences, such as premonitions of one's own death, possesses more frightening shades than physical actions.

It can be argued that across his whole poetical production, Leopardi manifests symptoms related to psychical delusions and paranoia, which is something that can be interpreted from reading Botting. Such a recurring, paranoid preoccupation is identifiable with premature death. It appears, probably for the first time, in a youthful idyll dated 1810 and entitled *L'amicizia*, rich in death-related collocations such as 'gelida salma', 'morte acerba' and where death is symbolised by a 'gelida falce'.[431] The motif recurs in the play *La virtù*

---

[430] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 63.

[431] For the full reference: 'Giorno fatal!... terribil giorno!... è questo | quel dì ferale, in cui profonda, e nera, | oscura tomba... oh Dio!... l'ossa rinchiuse | del fido Tirsi: omai di sette lune | scorse il giro dacchè funesta notte | a lui gli occhi ingombrò; gelida salma | ei giacque in preda a cruda morte acerba | e il petto offrì de la tremenda falce | a l'impeto fatale al colpo orrendo... | terribil colpo, che atterrò, trafisse | un amico fedele, e seco al suolo | barbaro stese la tranquilla pace | di un misero Pastor; con lui sepolta | la mia gioja sen giace, e sol compagno | m'è ne

indiana (1811), composed by Leopardi at thirteen years of age as a Christmas gift for his father Monaldo.[432] In this work, the collocation 'morte acerba' recurs two times in scenes 5 and 7 and framed by macabre descriptions.[433] In 1819, in the unfinished work *Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno*, Leopardi delineates premature death as a key feature, and the figure of a terrible persecutor, 'il tiranno', haunts the fragment.[434] A sense of threat and oppression also surfaces in his notes for one of his *Operette morali*, entitled *Dialogo Galantuomo e Mondo*, perhaps dated 1821, where Leopardi hints at a poet, a man hated by his father, who dies prematurely before he could develop his skills.[435] At the same time, Leopardi more generally proves to be very sensitive to premature death and, being of fragile health himself, he identifies with young girls, whose death is reported in the village of Recanati, as it is the case for the main character of the lyrics *Per una donna inferma di malattia lunga e mortale* (1819) and *Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato dal corruttore per mano ed arte di un chirurgo* (1819). In both cases the poet mourns the loss of women in their 'verde etade' (*Per una donna inferma*, 15), whose lives would have still had to be experienced 'ch'esser doveva | tanto tempo fra noi' (21-22). In a letter addressed to Pietro Giordani, dated Recanati 30 April 1817, Leopardi suffers due to the loss of one of his father's cousins, and strongly

---

l'acerbo duolo il lutto, e il pianto' (27–41), in Giacomo Leopardi, *Puerili e abbozzi vari*, ed. by Alessandro Donati (Bari: Laterza, 1924), p. 13.

[432] Giuseppe Tusiani, 'Osservazioni su "La Virtù Indiana" di Giacomo Leopardi', *Italica*, 28 (1951), no. 2, 111–114 (p. 111).

[433] *La virtù Indiana*, II. 5: 'Ah fuggi, o Prence, | da queste mura; un tetro orror di morte | minaccia i passi tuoi, questo, che impugno | funesto acciaro del tuo sangue asperso | Nizam già volle, in lui confida in vano | il genitor deluso, a l'empie turme | il varco egli aprirà, cadrà trafitto | per di lui mano il rege istesso, in preda | te pure ei brama a cruda *morte acerba*' (emphasis is mine) (413–421) in Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, I, p. 823; II. 7: 'Ah taci, intendo, | il genitor perì; misero Padre!... | monarca sventurato! ah questo dunque | si riserbava a' tuoi funesti giorni | lacrimevol destin! questa di tante | sventure esser dovea la meta estrema!... | prence infelice! ah se di questo sangue | non giunse il prezzo a liberarti, avrai | da questo ferro ampia vendetta; a l'opra, | miei fidi, andiam, del nostro rege inulta | non sia *l'acerba morte*, a l'ombra afflitta | vittima cada il traditor crudele, | seguite i passi miei' (455–467), in Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, I, pp. 824–5.

[434] D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia', p. 220.

[435] D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia', p. 220.

expresses his sorrow for death interrupting affections not yet developed, but only imagined and potential:

> Dopo non l'ho veduto più, ma so che m'amava e volea rivedermi, e forse presto ci saremmo riveduti, per lettere certamente, perché io appunto ne preparava una per lui che sarebbe stata la prima, quando seppi la sua morte, e di questa morte che ha troncato tanto non posso pensare senza spasimo e convulsione dell'animo mio.[436]

Still in 1831, when Leopardi writes *Sopra un bassorilievo antico sepolcrale dove una giovane morta è rappresentata in atto di partire, accomiatandosi dai suoi*, the thrust of his lyric is the death of a beautiful, young lady.

Such an overarching obsession, therefore, shows that Leopardi was genuinely interested in the portrayal of death in youth, and the concurrence of his own physical condition and his religious education facilitated the insertion of such a meaningful trait in his *oeuvre*. His identification with female characters can be read as a sign of modernity, which arguably brings Leopardi close to Edgar Allan Poe and his maxim that 'the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'.[437] However, the female death represented by Leopardi is not reassuring, since it does not stage the death of the other, as happens in the cases analysed by Bronfen. On the contrary, Leopardi's portrayal of death is disturbing because it concerns the death of the self, and, furthermore, does not spare realistic details of bodies deprived of life. As I demonstrate further on in this chapter, the pervasiveness of abjection in Leopardi's works, and particularly the gory details in *Appressamento*, contributes to the existence of a part of Italian literature rooted in the past but aiming at modernity. This cluster can be found within late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century sacred and moral Italian literature, since such texts repropose classical and traditional themes, such as supernatural visions and portrayals of the dead, but at the same time they fill them with excessive representations of dying and abject bodies.

---

[436] Leopardi, *Epistolario*, I, p. 93.

[437] Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', p. 114.

3.3   The Body of the Monster

In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), William Godwin describes the feudal system as a voracious stuffed monster, employing this metaphor to symbolise the barbarity and tyranny of feudal power.[438] Similarly monstrous and disturbing creatures characterised by symbolical meanings can also be located in Leopardi's *Appressamento*, when they all parade in 'Canto III'. First among them is Avarice, followed by a giant symbolising Error who enters the scene triumphally. Third to appear is the frightening ghost of War, called 'membruto mostro' (III. 124), seeding death and destruction. Another fiercer monster, 'più fero' (178), concludes the procession: it embodies Tyranny and is described as 'gran vermo' (202) and 'orribil idra' (226), which constitute more powerful images than the stuffed monster evoked by Godwin. Although visually less striking, Botting asserts that 'the metaphor of the stuffed monster links politics and fiction by associating feudalism and tales of terror with the persistence of superstitious, barbaric and irrational values', and it allows Godwin to employ Gothic strategies in a political way, to display social and psychological oppression, as he does in his novel *Caleb Williams* (1794).[439] By representing his 'belva lorda' (206), Leopardi similarly connects politics and literature, and stages scenes of terror to denounce barbarous and illogical attitudes.[440] He does so by filling the canto with wounded bodies, blood and violent scenes. Godwin had already employed a vivid corporeal lexicon in his work, including words such as

---

[438] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 476.

[439] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 61. Andrea Mariani posits that Leopardi could not have direct knowledge of Godwin's work; similarities between Godwin's and Leopardi's pieces are, nonetheless, noteworthy. See Andrea Mariani, 'Leopardi e Shelley: appunti per un'analisi contrastiva', *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 8 (1987), no. 1, 1–22 (p. 18).

[440] Leopardi had already manifested passionate anti-tyrannical attitudes in his childhood, as testified by his *Ricordi d'infanzia e di adolescenza*: 'mio discorso latino contro Cesare recitato a babbo e riflessione su questo mio odio pel tiranno e amore ed entusiasmo in leggere la sua uccisione' in Leopardi, *Prose*, pp. 1197–98.

'carcasses', 'slay' and 'terrify': 'The monster is at length destroyed, and they who followed in his train, and fattened upon the carcasses of those he slew, have stuffed his skin, and by exhibiting it hope still to terrify mankind into patience and pusillanimity'.[441] Leopardi punctuates his poem with excess and traits of abjection. A remarkable example of this is the fact that *Appressamento*'s 'Canto III' ranks ten occurrences of the term 'sangue', and a considerable number of references to dust, graves, and tombs: 'Oh quanta gente è qui che ne la tomba | non è fatta anco polve' (70–71); 'Vostra terrena via piena di doglia, | e com'è fral quaggiù vostra natura' (83–84). Ugo's episode already stages the appearance of a weapon, the sword with which the father kills Ugo, anticipating the profusion of weapons in the following canto.

Weapons play a major role in imagining the canto's pervasive bloodshed, and they open the section where War enters the scene:

> Cotal si vide in mezzo all'aer tetro
> un lampeggiar di scudi e lance e spade
> che tremolava intorno a fero spetro.
>
> (*Appressamento*, III. 115–17)

The presence of weapons in sacred and moral lyrics are not uncommon, as exhibited by Varano, who extensively describes battlefields in his *Visioni*: 'orride risse | dei campi armati' (IX. 475–76). Varano features weapons such as 'crude spade' and 'cavi bronzi' in 'Visione IX' (353–54), dedicated to the victorious battle of the Austrian army against the Prussians at Kolin (18 June 1757), as well as the reference to 'feral lampo' (354). Moreover, in 'Visione X' there appear 'inalberate lance, | e folto di stendardi un cerchio' (180–1). The presence of war and violence does not surprise the reader, since battles fought by Catholic rulers are generally remembered and extolled by authors, who, as in the case of Varano, feel invested in the task of writing about them as a way of celebration: 'Ah! in me s'adempia quella voce diva: | "Vedi, e poi scrivi"' (IX. 4–5). Conversely, Leopardi intends to criticise the bloodshed, but he does not disdain the macabre

---

[441] Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 474.

details, and to emphasise the guilt and sin of the sowers of death he seems to echo the crudeness of the lexicon of *Visioni*. Leopardi's descriptions largely rely on abjection and aim to depict an excessive violent environment, as exemplified by the monstrous embodiment of War:

> Tentennava sua testa atro cimiero,
> e pendea 'l brando nudo in rossa lista,
> digocciolando sangue in sul sentiero.
>   Iva 'l membruto mostro e facea trista
> tutta sua via, che dietro si lasciava
> foco ch'ardea tra l'erbe in fera vista.
>   Ve', l'Angel disse, la crudel che lava
> col sangue i campi, e col brando rovente
> fa tante piaghe e tante fosse scava.
>   Altro costume de l'umana gente:
> cacciar lo ferro gelido e la mano
> del prossimo nel corpo e del parente.
>
> (*Appressamento*, III. 121–32)

The monster of War, described as an army leader with crest and sword, leaves traces of blood on his path, staining his own arm and the ground red. Leopardi describes his sword 'brando' as scorching in line 128 but transforms its heat in frost two lines later, when the weapon 'lo ferro' turns 'gelido' for a more powerful parallel with the hand of death, 'la mano'. The image of the sword thrust into the body of a member of the same family recalls the earlier episode of Ugo's murder at the hands of his father. Leopardi stresses the cruelty of the whole episode and purposely fills the poem with a deathly aesthetics. In line 129 Leopardi declares that War wounds and digs ditches for the corpses it harvests, 'fa tante piaghe e tante fosse scava', and through an effective chiasmus places the two connotative terms, 'piaghe' and 'fosse' in the centre of the line. Furthermore, Leopardi underlines the monster's destructive fury, echoing the opening of *Inferno* XVII: 'Ecco la fiera con la coda aguzza, | che passa i monti e

rompe i muri e l'armi!' (1–2) says Dante, while Leopardi writes 'strugger mura, arder tempi e farsi brutto | di cenere e vestirsi di terrore' (III. 136–7).

In order to convey the almost palpable materiality of the bodies involved in war, Leopardi plays with the word 'sangue' and uses the impersonal, infinite form of verbs to highlight the concreteness of the body parts of the dead (emphasis is mine):

> *Brillar* tra morti e 'nsanguinati come
> lion che 'n belva marcida si sfama:
> *rider* tra genti lagrimose e dome.
> Dunque *far* solo il mondo è vostra brama,
> E 'l *viver* vostro è per l'altrui *morire*.
>
> (*Appressamento*, III. 142–46)

Indeed, all the verbs emphasised in this excerpt reflect actions that require a concrete body to be performed. At times, Leopardi is reminiscent of Varano's expressions, such as 'corpi infracidati e sparti' (IV. 313) and 'udii del sangue sparso | vantarsi altier lo scellerato Duca' (V. 104–05). The word 'blood', a key term in 'Canto III', occurs in the text as an adjective and is paired with remains and bones – 'Coprì di spoglie sanguinose e d'ossa' (III. 156) – and as a noun: 'Ecco 'l gran vermo d'uman sangue grasso' (202).

One of the crudest scenes of Leopardi's 'Canto III' is the description of the monster of Tyranny, the only one deserving a proper body, portrayed as a human being:

> Aveva umane forme e umana labbia,
> e passeggiar parean la guancia scura
> […]
> Nel buio viso l'occhio fiammeggiante,
> a carbon tra la cenere, che splenda
> solingo in cieca stanza era sembiante.
> Al crin gli s'attorcea gemmata benda,
> e scendea regio manto da le spalle

com'acqua bruna che di rupe scenda.

(*Appressamento*, III. 181–92)

Leopardi represents the monster with 'umane forme' and lists lips, cheeks, eyes, hair and shoulders, thus featuring all the body parts that poets traditionally praised in women. This description evidently shows that such excesses transgress the limits of aesthetics, undermining boundaries between life and fiction, fantasy and reality. Transgression and overstepping boundaries are typical features of what Kristeva calls abjection, but also of the monstrous, according to Botting and Spooner.[442] The visionary nature of Leopardi's poem depends on excessive scenes, language, and feelings, although the declared purpose is to restore reason in the readers, to pursue a moral, religious aim, analogous to Varano's. In both texts there exists, though, a constant tension between moral messages and aesthetic visuals, and the insistence on visually vivid representations of outraged bodies suggests that both the authors indulge in a taste for the macabre. However, Varano and Leopardi needed to conceal such a trending taste behind the veil of sacredness, unassailable from the point of view of the Catholic morality.

Although the overall depiction of Tyranny conveys fear and anguish, the most striking feature of the monster is its clothing, its robe stained like that of a butcher:

Sprizzato era di sangue, e per lo calle
di sangue un lago fea la sozza vesta,
che 'n dubbia e torta striscia iva a la valle.

(*Appressamento*, III. 193–5)

Genetelli underlines the climax that draws the path of human blood, from drops, 'digocciolando', to a pond, 'di sangue un lago', until 'impregnating' the garment, 'sozza vesta'. Recalling his youthful aversion to tyranny, mentioned earlier, Leopardi inserts an apostrophe, deprecating Tyranny and violently stressing the

---

[442] Botting and Spooner, 'Introduction: monstrous media/spectral subjects'.

image of blood 'impregnating' the fabrics: 'e del cui lercio sangue | tinta bramasti aver la mano e i panni' (224–25). The depiction of a blood-stained cloth recalls the witty association proposed by Camporesi of cuisine and infernal punishments, or treatments to cadavers, such as embalmment and the like. According to Camporesi, 'la cucina riflette il senso della morte, il rapporto che l'uomo ha col destino del suo corpo' and he states that contemporary society has purified the image of death, which is why the association between cooking and the treatment of corpses no longer seems natural to us.[443] Nowadays, addressing the truculent aspect of death would mean dealing with an exquisitely abject matter, and for this reason, should be avoided. Indeed, 'la ricetta del Della Porta per imbalsamare (condire) i cadaveri desta malessere alla lettura proprio per l'analogia tra i processi di squartamento, salatura, affumicazione, condimento, cottura della carne animale e l'uomo', Camporesi maintains.[444] The culinary treatment of meat has something as grim and sinister about it as death. Leopardi reserves such a treatment for masculine figures, as has hitherto been shown, and insists on a particular terminology, more suited to cooking and slaughter than to the description of corpses, and drawing on Varano's model, and certainly Dante's.[445] Among vivid terms, Leopardi depicts 'rosso petto' and 'squarciato fianco' (219), redolent of Varano's 'squarciato petto' (III. 353), an expression that again finds its place in *Appressamento*'s line 255, 'squarciato 'l petto vidi e 'l volto bianco', rhyming with the previous 'aprir lo fianco' (III. 253), also found in Petrarch's *Italia mia* (*RVF*, CXXVIII. 45). Leopardi calls such a scene 'truce vista' (III. 257), and dissolves Tyranny with the intervention of a lightning that 'su la fera cadde e l'arse' (261), as happened in Varano's 'Visione V' to a scorched man in pain affected by the plague, who throws himself into the fire: 's'abbronzò, frisse abbrustolato ed arse' (V. 462).

Leopardi tackled intense and gory scenes in *Crocifissione e morte di Cristo*, where he depicts the spectacle of death embodied by Christ's torture and

---

[443] Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, p. 24.

[444] Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, 23.

[445] The vividity of Dante's pictures is evident in *Inferno* XXVIII and XXIX, as shown extensively in Chapter 1.

sacrifice. The poet represents the blood dripping when he describes Christ hanging from the Cross: 'Il solo rimirar quella croce, su cui svenata cader deve la vittima divina, il solo veder quel sangue, che stilla tutt'ora dal corpo […]'.[446] The verb 'stillare', to drip, conveys a gentle image, contrasted with the description of the tortures inflicted to Christ that are much more similar to the depiction of the monster in *Appressamento*:

> Voi lo vedeste percosso da schiaffi, imbrattato da sputi, flagellato e grondante sangue da ogni parte del suo corpo divino; voi lo vedeste vestito di lurida porpora, beffeggiato e deriso qual re da scherno e da burla, coronato da un serto pungente di acutissime spine.[447]

Such a scene features a more copious representation of blood, dripping from all sides, after the body has been whipped by the torturers; it follows the most excruciating part of the crucifixion:

> Lo sollevano, lo trabalzano, lo inalberano e, nello scuotersi delle fibre convulse e nel trepidar del petto anelante e nell'allargarsi delle ferite, giù lo piombano nella fossa che tosto rosseggiar si vede del sangue che a rive scorre dalle vene dilacerate del Nazareno Signore.[448]

After a powerful climax, where the figure of Christ is lifted up and hung on the Cross, while his body is horribly fragmented ('disnodando […] le giunture'), his lacerated veins dye the pit where he is laid in blood red. The scarlet hue is softened only by the image of the body at the moment of death that confers pallor to the previously bleeding body: 'è già pallido in volto... è col capo chino sul petto... è senza spirito'.[449]

Varano's 'Visione IX' on the battle of Kolin, which involved the Austrian army against the Prussians, conveys a similar residuality and

---

[446] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 550.

[447] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 553.

[448] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 553.

[449] Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 554.

fragmentation of bodies, due to war and fight. Although Varano describes the battle in traditional terms, echoing the sound of marching soldiers and the confusion of flags and weapons ('Già d' immenso fragore il pian rimbomba: | già appaion miste insieme armi e bandiere', IX. 342–43), the scene also depicts the effects of combat on human bodies.

> Mani omicide e di ferir in atto,
> altre all'assalto, altre a resister fiere:
> chi pendea dai ripari, e chi più ratto
> salia tra vivo foco e fumo e polve
> su i corpi uccisi o non estinti affatto.

> (*Visioni*, IX. 344–48)

Varano focuses on the hands, as Leopardi does in previously analysed scenes, both referring to the monster of Tyranny, 'cacciar lo ferro gelido e la mano' (III. 131), and to Ugo's father: 'ne la man mirai | un ferro' (II. 155–56). Both in Varano and Leopardi, hands are associated with weapons or with the act of injuring somebody else (see Varano's expression 'di ferir in atto'), and qualified by the adjective 'omicide'. The rhythm of the scene is rapidly accelerated by the anaphorical use of 'altre' and 'chi', as well as the use of polysyndeton 'vivo foco e fumo e polve', which also constitutes a climax. Like that which Leopardi describes in 'Canto III' ('dietro si lasciava | foco ch'ardea tra l'erbe in fera vista'), Varano portrays scorching fire, a crucial element to convey the idea of destruction. The image described here is that of running soldiers climbing on cadavers and still-alive bodies, a crude scene that is reminiscent of the piled-up corpses in 'Visione V'. Yet, the following passage is more striking for its visual charge and its intense colouring, as well as for the gestural and fragmented representation of the human body, which Leopardi himself aims to achieve in his *Appressamento*:

> Onde mirando altri col volto esangue
> languir, ed altri le convulse membra
> di polvere agitar lorde e di sangue,

l'alma, cui suo l'altrui tormento sembra,

di tanto orror m'empiè l'ossa e le vene,

che la memoria ancor triste rimembra.

(*Visioni*, IX. 364–69)

Varano's poetic self lists here the harsh scenes he attended to, unveiling a profusion of repellent details. The first fragment of the human body that enters the scene is the bloodless face, 'volto esangue', of a soldier, which is coupled with a verb, 'languir', suggesting a calm and almost cathartic action, soon contrasted by the following verb 'agitar' and the adjective 'convulse'. Varano describes the limbs of other soldiers, 'membra', as 'lorde […] di sangue', covered in blood, giving the reader a picture of a war scene coming to an end. Leopardi, who does not include excerpts from 'Visione IX' in his *Crestomazia poetica*, seems to echo in his *Appressamento* the image of dripping blood, even though he adds the verb 'digocciolando' (never employed again in his works, not even in other forms), which is absent in Varano's poem. While in Leopardi's 'Canto III', the cloth of the monster drips blood because the monster is the entity that causes death rather than the one who suffers it, Varano focuses on the exsanguinate and bloodied victims, and ends the scene with other bodily fragments: bones and veins.

Although Leopardi's text shares many and significant similarities with Varano's *Visioni*, particularly with respect to wounded bodies, blood and the horror of violence, also worthy of attention is the resemblance of the gallery of monstrous vices in *Appressamento* with the parade that Fiorentino portrays in his 'Elegia VI', 'L'Eternità' (analysed in Chapter 2). The two episodes are incredibly similar, and I posit here that Leopardi read and drew inspiration from Fiorentino's work, both in terms of its lexicon and imagery. Fiorentino's excerpt is restrained, only 24 verses long (from line 70 to 93), while Leopardi dedicates the entire 'Canto III' to the parade of personified vices. The general structure of the episode is strongly symbolic in both texts, and Leopardi seems to expand the scene described by Fiorentino into a wider context, enumerating more creatures and emphasising the presence of blood. From this perspective, *Appressamento* can

be read as a 'completion' of *Elegie*, since Leopardi received Fiorentino's text and adapts it to his new and urgent poetic goals, according to Jauss' reception theory. This is possible because the context is, as we will see, very similar, and both texts insist on a cruel and excessive imagery that emphasises the overcoming of human limits. Bestiality constitutes the core of both poems, and the style, though generally highbrow, recalls the plurilingualism Dante employs in *Inferno*. Both Fiorentino and Leopardi, in fact, do not renounce strong terms such as 'snudolla' and 'gavazza', as in the case of Fiorentino, and Dantean adjectives like 'lordo' employed by both: 'un genitor si lorda | la man pietosa' (*Elegie*, VI. 92–93); 'belva lorda' (*Appressamento*, III. 206). In Dante's *Commedia*, the adjective 'lordo' recurs with its proper meaning of 'filthy', 'dirty' and 'grimy', such as in *Inferno* VI 'quelle facce lorde | de lo demonio Cerbero' (31), and in *Inferno* XVIII 'vidi un col capo sì di merda lordo' (116); but it also carries a figurative, moral meaning, as testified to in *Purgatorio* VII: 'Padre e suocero son del mal di Francia [Filippo il Bello]: | sanno la vita sua viziata e lorda' (110).

The two episodes represent a set of gruesome creatures that sow death and destruction. In 'Elegia VI', they are presented as 'turba di mostri' (VI. 70), echoing *Appressamento*'s 'turba folta' (III. 101), where they are also referred to as 'nefando stuol che fu mortale | a lo sgraziato mondo' (232-33). Both authors represent the fierceness of these monsters through animal metaphors. In *Elegie* one reads about 'Fanatismo dalla negra cresta' (VI. 76) mirrored in Leopardi's *Appressamento* 'orribil idra […] che gonfia sopra il mondo alza la cresta' (III. 226-27), where the term 'crest' symbolises the tendency to prevail over the weak by evoking the rooster's crest. The animalistic and predatory nature of the creatures described is revealed in Fiorentino by terms that evoke eating, biting, and attacking, reminiscent of the canto of Ugolino, 'addenta lo scellerato pasto' (VI. 87), while Leopardi proposes a similar cruelty with a more explicit animal simile 'come Lion che 'n belva marcida si sfama' (III. 143). Fiorentino emphasises the predator's attack on prey, 'a chi stramazza | strappa dal seno il cuor fumante e guasto' (VI. 82-83), evoked by Leopardi in the expression 'squarciato il petto' (III. 255). One of the key images of both pieces is the bloodstained garment worn by Religion (with which Fanaticism shields itself) in Fiorentino, 'di

Religione insanguinata vesta' (VI. 78), and by Tyranny in Leopardi: 'sprizzato era di sangue, e per lo calle | di sangue un lago fea la sozza vesta' (III. 193-94). In 'Elegia VI', Religion appears to be a victim of Fanaticism, which she is unable to counter, and looks frightened: 'Lei che trema e per vergogna è rossa' (VI. 79). In *Appressamento*, Leopardi associates the red colour with blood – 'ch'avea rosse | le man de l'empio sangue' (III. 247-48) – while representing one of the monsters as 'pien di sospetto e di spavento' (199). The last image represented by Fiorentino, and taken up by Leopardi, is that depicting a 'figlio in brani', who is mourned by his own father with 'man pietosa' (VI. 93), while Leopardi describes the fury of war between blood relatives: 'cacciar lo ferro gelido e la mano | del prossimo nel corpo del parente' (III. 131–32).

Overall, it appears that Fiorentino's parade of monsters, probably deriving from the author's experience of the persecution of the Jews between 1799 and 1800, served Leopardi as a model for his description of the personified vices in *Appressamento*. Both texts can be defined as writings of excess, given their insistence on blood and their narrative style. Both Fiorentino and Leopardi choose strong, emphatic verbs and expressions, often alliterative, such as 'stramazza', 'strappa', 'sozza cloaca' in *Elegie*, and 'sprizzato' and 'sozza vesta' in *Appressamento*. Leopardi's decision to anthropomorphise vices seems to be redolent of Fiorentino's, as well as the further animalisation. The authors also share the same attention to the human body and the abject sensations it arouses. Fiorentino depicts the human body as 'dismembrato | corpo' (VI. 89-90) and spasming like a fish gasping and flailing out of the water, 'che guizza' (90), while Leopardi dots his poem with 'morti insanguinati' (III. 142) and 'spoglie sanguinose' and 'ossa' (156). Thus, they both feature the remains of the body, and show with rawness and realism what people normally refrain to look at, what is improper and unclean. It is, though, through the profanation of the human body that abjection emerges in the texts, and precisely when Fiorentino and Leopardi detail the ways in which the human body is mutilated and cruelly vilified.

As has been shown, then, Fiorentino's *Elegie*, and particularly 'Elegia VI', imbued the young Leopardi with a powerful lexicon and violent imagery that

Leopardi included in his innovative work. Whereas the concept of 'rimembranza' coupled with the verb 'sovvenire', as seen in Fiorentino's elegies, will later become a crucial element for Leopardi, Fiorentino also brings a natural imagery to Leopardi's poetics. In *Appressamento*, *Le fanciulle nella tempesta*, and *Elegia di un innamorato in mezzo a una tempesta* (probably dated 1819), which is now part of a new edited collection of unpublished material called *Disegni letterari*, a storm recurs, as it happens in *Elegie*:[450]

> […] Tempesta furibonda
> cotanta oscurità lo sguardo accieca
> c'altri non può trovar dove s'asconda.
>
> (*Elegie*, VI. 67–69)

Leopardi includes, in 'Canto I', a blind darkness, to stress the impossibility of seeing in the dark:

> E nella selva era terribil cosa
> il volar foglie e rami e polve e sassi,
> e 'l rombar che la lingua dir non osa.
> I' non vedeva u' fossi ed u' m'andassi.
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 70–73)

As far as natural elements are concerned, Fiorentino refers to the moonrise at the beginning of his 'Elegia VI', describing the coming of night as a theft of sunlight by the moon: 'E se la bruna madre dei riposi | ci fura un tempo la sua [of the sun] viva lampa' (VI. 7–8). Similarly, the opening of *Appressamento* introduces an idyllic nightscape, where the moonlight illuminates the peaceful surrounding landscape observed by the poetic self, referring to the sunlight as 'lampa': 'Era morta la lampa in Occidente' (I. 1). Another cursory image that the young Leopardi might have derived from Fiorentino's elegies is the humble

---

[450] Leopardi, *Disegni letterari.*

figure of the 'villanello'. The 'villanello' is frightened in *Appressamento* when the storm arrives together with the monsters:

> O notturna del mar cupa minaccia
> perché 'l villan che presso il turbo crede,
> si desta e sorge ed al balcon s'affaccia.
>
> (*Appressamento*, III. 106–08)

Fiorentino, instead, portrays the 'villanello' in a bucolic environment:

> E come il villanel da sommo all'imo
> d'erbosa balza trae per gioco il fianco,
> e sfida l'altro a chi discende il primo.
>
> (*Elegie*, IV. 121–23)

Both the authors use the image of the peasant from the countryside as a simile. Moreover, Leopardi seems receptive to the idea of the air lapping and caressing the poetic self, redolent of Fiorentino's expression 'urto legger di un'anima che passa' (IV. 114):

> Quella vaghezza rimirando fiso,
> sentia l'auretta che gli odori spande
> mollissima passarmi sopra il viso.
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 22–24)

By analysing a series of lexical borrowings and a complex web of imagery, this investigation shows that the young Leopardi could have been indebted to Fiorentino's *Elegie* more than has hitherto been recognised. The fact that the parade of monsters is taken up by Leopardi in his *Appressamento* acquires a new meaning, both in terms of modernity, and in terms of archival memory. Leopardi seems to insert in his poem aspects that, in the light of what he writes in the two letters to *Biblioteca Italiana*, he considers 'modern', probably 'excessive', that suit his representation of violence and subversion of the given order. The theme of

the storm, which opens the *cantica*, is proposed by the author as a classic theme, on which he had already written before. The apparition of the angel, as we have seen in the light of D'Intino's convincing interpretation, embodies Leopardi's inner struggle between the precepts of his rigid Catholic upbringing and his rebellious poetic tendencies. The centre of the work, 'Canto II', 'Canto III', and 'Canto IV', are the densest in respect of Dante's lexicon, and are those that most often feature innovative imagery, such as the representation of the 'own death', and the parade of monsters. Although Leopardi chooses the poetic device of 'personification', already navigated by Dante and Petrarch, he also inserts the powerful and evocative elements (verbs, adjectives, rhetorical devices) already used by Fiorentino, to give substance to an abject language that fascinates and repels at the same time. Concurrently, one should notice that in his *Crestomazia poetica*, dated 1828, Leopardi records only small excerpts of *Elegie* and, in particular, he does not include the brutal scenes from 'Elegia VI', 'La Rimembranza'. His approach suggests a rejection of such rawness by the more mature Leopardi. The poet manifests the same 'abjection' or repulsion in *Appressamento*, which remained unpublished until well after Leopardi's death, although the subsequent reworking of this early work in the fragment *Spento il diurno raggio* still shows a hidden, almost forbidden attraction to the rawness and excess of bodies and spectres. In this sense, therefore, *Appressamento* embodies an archive of poetic tendencies of the young Leopardi, who later repudiates part of his juvenile work.

3.4   *Appressamento* and the 'Angeliche forme'

Appressamento welcomes elements typical of an otherworldly realm, as happens in *Visioni*, but it also includes earthly features, charting a sort of continuity with the everyday life staged in *Elegie*. The transition from the earthly reality of the poet observing an idyllic landscape from his room's window to the angel-led journey of the poet-pilgrim throughout otherworldly realms is marked by a polyptoton: 'mira, ed i' mirai' (I. 124). As happens in the journeys narrated by Dante and Varano, the sight represents the sense through which the seer

apprehends a new realm. The glow of light brings the seer into a new place, where the pilgrim feels lost, as in Dante's *Inferno* and in part of Varano's *Visioni*, and where a celestial guide leads the way, as happens in *Appressamento*'s 'Canto II'. After the blinding light disappears, Leopardi's pilgrim utters:

> Ed i' vedeva gente molta e magna
> passar non lunge innanzi a quel chiarore,
> che n'era piena tutta la campagna.
>
> (*Appressamento*, II. 10-12)

This tercet leaves us confused: where is the pilgrim? Why is he in the countryside? Why can he see human figures? And what kind of entities are they?

This section aims to find a way to answer some of these questions, in order to analyse the ways in which Leopardi deals with the representation of human bodies in the afterlife, and to what extent he distances himself from Dante's, Varano's and Fiorentino's solutions. *Appressamento* does not provide the reader with clear and unequivocal explanations of the realms where the narration takes place. Varano pursues a sacred and moral aim, which means that his text requires the interpretation of the reader. At times, celestial guides or ghosts of the deceased provide clarity or explanations, as happens with Cardinale Bentivoglio in 'Visione I' and Battista Varano in 'Visione V', where they respectively make clear to the pilgrim why he can see a blessed made of pure light, and the reason why God afflicted the city of Messina with the plague. In *Appressamento*, Leopardi intentionally concealed clarifications because the whole *cantica* has a metaphorical meaning, only accessible to the readers step by step, where each step can be 'described phenomenologically as […] successive readings'.[451] But one can also argue that Leopardi does not intend to re-create an ordered, Dantean world, but rather, he seems to be interested in representing to his poetic self his stylistic options, an ancient mode or a modern one, as exposed before relying on D'Intino's interpretation. Given that *Appressamento* is a metaphorical narration, the author does not want to propose Catholic truths, as

---

[451] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 140.

Varano did, nor does he mean to reconstruct the essence of the deceased as Fiorentino's Subject attempted to do in *Elegie*. For these reasons, the reader does not know whether Leopardi the pilgrim can actually embrace the people he sees in the afterlife, if they are corporeal or not, apart from when he meets the souls of the blessed, Christ, and the Virgin Mary, who, the reader learns, are made of light, according to Dante's model.

To better understand what kind of people the pilgrim meets during his journey and which realms he crosses, we need to retrace his steps. The pilgrim starts his journey by meeting a 'misera turba' (II. 16), led by 'Amore' who, 'sogghignando' (13) flies 'su la gente di suo regno' (14). These people are the lustful ones, a group of damned souls that we also encountered in *Visioni*. Among them, Ugo d'Este recounts his own story and, by diving into his past, the reader learns about his death, which is an episode previously discussed, since it pertained to a fully bodily experience, for Ugo takes the pilgrim back to when he was made of flesh and bones. In 'Canto III', the pilgrim meets the monsters, personified and animalised entities, whose corporeality has been examined in the previous section. Leopardi presents proper spectral entities only in 'Canto IV', where the vision of 'santo regno' (IV. 42) occurs. This is the moment when Leopardi, in a way clearly reminiscent of Dante's *Paradiso*, describes a blaze of light, gentle melodies, and the meeting of the pilgrim with the revered Dante – 'l magno Alighier' (130) – Petrarch, and Tasso.[452] Finally, the vision of Christ and the Virgin Mary appears: 'tra sua luce sopra 'l firmamento | apparve Cristo e avea la Madre al fianco' (160–61).

It is evident that Leopardi details the pilgrim's encounters with various characters from the afterlife, but he does not include much contact between them. Varano derives from Dante's *Commedia* the empathic behaviour of his poetic self, who shows compassion and tends to have a tactile experience with those he meets. Like the *Commedia*, in Varano the human is integrated into the afterlife, into co-presence with other individuals in a network of relations based

---

[452] 'E vedi quel vicin ch'anco s'ascolta | lagnarsi che la mente al mondo tristo | ebbe a cosa mortal troppo rivolta. | Mira colui che lagrimar fu visto | tutta sua vita, e or di suo pianto ha 'l frutto, | e canto l'armi e 'l glorioso acquisto' Leopardi, *Appressamento*, IV. 133–38.

on mutual recognition and interpersonal attention. As Webb argues, Dante enables the creation of a transmortal community in which 'the plenitude of each individual's person is realized and through recognition of the personhood of other individuals who constitute that community, whether living or dead'.[453] Conversely, Leopardi depicts otherworldly figures almost like distant images that the pilgrim sees through a screen and with which he does not interact. This happens because Leopardi is interested in the representation of their actions, as in the case of Ugo d'Este and the monsters' parade, or of their essence, as in the case of the angelic crowd and Christ and the Virgin, but not in the relationship the pilgrim can establish with them, not in human relations. Once again, it must be stressed that Leopardi is inspired by Dante's model and Varano's mediation but does not really intend to follow the didactic-moral path taken by the two authors. *Appressamento*, in line with *Elegie*, looks more like a personal exercise, a personal experiment, an archive to record the poet's aspirations and intimate travails. What Leopardi takes from his models *Commedia* and *Visioni*, regarding spectrality, are the dark setting, the double sensations of terror and wonder, and partly spectral descriptions; each of these aspects will be sequentially analysed.

3.4.1   A Nocturnal Apparition

The otherworldly journey begins in the dark, following the storm staged in 'Canto I', as we learn from the very first tercet of 'Canto II':

> Parve di foco una vermiglia lista
> a l'orizzonte a galla sopra il mare
> ch'atava in quell'orror la dubbia vista.
>
> (*Appressamento*, II. 1–3)

As already examined in *Visioni* and *Elegie*, the spectres, angels and souls of the deceased appear at night. Darkness is therefore a constant element, which

---

[453] Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 26.

remains unchanged in all the texts examined. The 'luce vermiglia' of the *incipit* recalls Dante's *Inferno* III, 'balenò una luce vermiglia' (134), but the term 'lista', indicating a streak of red that pierces the darkness, recalls the fiery bands present in the winter night sky described by Varano in 'Visione VI'. 'L'orror', to which the poet refers, is the surrounding darkness that does not make vision clear, so that the 'ombre', hence the shapes, are more difficult to distinguish. Also to be kept in mind is that, once Laura's ghost disappears, the Subject in Fiorentino's 'Elegia III' testifies that 'l'aer ne restò lucido, e vermiglio' (III. 92). The shade of red in the sky constitutes, then, an element that constantly finds room in texts dealing with otherworldly visions.

Darkness also means that objects in the visual range are not clearly defined and therefore creates a feeling of indefiniteness, open to interpretation. The same effect, though, is caused by an excess of light, as Leopardi demonstrates metaphorically: the light coming from the angel's apparition (religious precepts and classical poetry) should make things clearer but at the same time it can blind and have the same effect as darkness. The supernatural vision is announced by the splendour that envelops the spirit in 'Canto I': 'un lume scese e femmisi presente' (I. 87). The supernatural apparition, this time not of a dead person but of a divine emissary, the protagonist's guardian angel, arrives after the calm, almost by stealth.

> Un lume scese e femmisi presente.
>   Splendeva in quella tenebria selvaggia
> sì chiaro che vincea vampa di foco,
> qual fornace di notte in muta piaggia,
>   e splendendo cresceva a poco a poco;
> e 'n mezzo vi pareva uman sembiante
> vago sì ch'a 'l ritrar mio stile è roco.
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 87–93)

The protagonist describes the approach of a light that becomes more intense than a flame until it illuminates the darkness of the night, growing more and more like a 'fornace', a term that recurs only one time in the *Commedia* – 'e già

mai non si videro in furnace | vetri o metalli sì lucenti e rossi' (*Purgatorio*, XXIV. 138–39) – as well as in *Visioni* (in 'Visione III' the blood flows through the veins of the lustful, gurgling like that of a furnace). The splendour is intensified by the alliteration of the letter 's' in line 88 and by the surrounding darkness, which recalls Dante's forest and refers to the night, the symbol of sin, as already observed in Chapter 1. The light, 'lume', is pale, 'chiaro', and the emphasis on its intensity is conveyed through the alliteration of the letter 'v', which in the expression 'vincea vampa' increases the image of luminosity. Such an effect is also due to the verb 'vincere' that carries an augmentative value, reiterated immediately afterwards by the verb 'crescere'. Similarly, the polyptoton 'splendeva' 'splendendo' reiterates the contrast with the darkness cited immediately after.

Dwelling on the supernatural vision, one can see how Leopardi traces the same apparitions that Varano describes in his *Visioni*, representing a figure that 'pareva uman sembiante'. The lexicon employed by Leopardi differs from the Latin vocabulary chosen by Varano – who often addresses ghosts with nouns such as *figura*, *imago*, *spectrum*, *umbra*, *visio*, *larva* or *lemures*[454] – and indicates, with the adjective 'vago', the beauty of the appeared subject. A few lines later, the reader is informed that the entity that has appeared to the poetic self is his guardian angel, 'radiante come d'Espero la stella' (I. 98).

3.4.2   Terror and Wonder, but Also Horror

In the rest of Europe, feelings of terror and wonder permeate popular gothic and supernatural novels with their strong charge of excess, and literary critics observe that, during the late eighteenth century, 'haunting' became a ubiquitous trope in European art.[455] Contemporary Italian literature is presented as an exception within the European panorama, but Fiorentino's *Elegie* and the

---

[454] Stramaglia, *Res inauditae, incredulae*, pp. 21–42.

[455] Robert Miles, 'Seeing Ghosts: The Dark Side of the Enlightenment', in *Haunted Europe: Continental Connections in English-Language Gothic Writing, Film and New Media*, ed. by Michael Newton and Evert Jan van Leeuwen (New York & London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 18–35 (p. 19).

haunting presence of the ghost of Laura show that failure to process grief can cause delusion and obsession, leading the author to manifest his ability to create 'haunting literature'. Moreover, the insistence on the dual representation of terror and wonder had long been employed by Italian authors, and Leopardi is no exception. The feeling of fear and terror, together with astonishment, is even reinforced in *Appressamento*.

The same elements of initial terror and subsequent wonder that we examined in Varano's 'Visione V', where the pilgrim is doubtful and hesitates before climbing into the fiery chariot on which sits his celestial guide (see Chapter 1), can be found in Leopardi's *Appressamento*. There are two main moments that illustrate the seer's terror: one preceding the apparition of the angel announcing the protagonist's imminent death, and the other following this unfortunate announcement. Before the announcement, during the storm, Leopard's poetic self begins to feel the first signs of fear ('la dolcezza in cor farsi paura', I. 33) and, suddenly catapulted into the nature that looked idyllic before, he runs as if to escape the weather that terrifies him:

> I' sentia già scrollarmisi i ginocchi
> […]
> Talora i' mi sostava e l'aer tetro
> guardava spaurato e poi correa
> sì ch'i panni e le chiome ivano addietro.
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 58–63)

The first sensation reported by the protagonist is that of trembling knees, which do not, however, prevent him from running away, albeit in confusion: 'tant'era pien di dotta e di terrore' (74). As already seen in 'Visione V', terror constitutes the engine of characters' movement. Like in Radcliffe's ghost novels, it enables escape, for the victims realise to feel terror and react by distancing themselves from it. Terror allows its effect to be delimited, because the threat it manifests can be distinguished and overcome.[456] The frantic escape of the poetic self is

---

[456] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 48.

also due to confusion, since, as Radcliffe explains, 'by blurring one image into another, leaves only a chaos in which the mind can find nothing to nourish its fears and doubts, or to act upon in any way'.[457] In much foreign fiction of the 1790s it is by means of terror that the source of the threat is escaped because it is expelled from the domain of rationality and domesticity and proper order can be reaffirmed. Leopardi, instead, shows that his poetic self cannot escape from the storm, for it represents the coming of the angel, which he cannot evade. The vision of the angel arouses fear within Leopardi's poetic self too – 'Ed i' tremava dal capo a le piante' (I. 94) – but unlike *Visioni* and similar to the Subject's reaction in *Elegie*, the protagonist of *Appressamento* is not frightened by the supernatural apparition: 'ma pur dolcezza mi sentia nel petto | in levar gli occhi a quel che m'era innante' (95–96). The image of the figure fleeing from the incipient storm is also maintained by Leopardi in the fragment *Spento il diurno raggio*, where he replaces his poetic self with a woman, who cannot escape her upcoming death. There, she is the one whose knees tremble – 'Discior sentia la misera i ginocchi' (52) – and her behaviour is exactly the same as that described by Leopardi in his early work:

> Talvolta ella ristava, e l'aer tetro
> guardava sbigottita, e poi correa,
> sì che i panni e le chiome ivano addietro.
>
> (*Spento il diurno raggio*, 55–57)

Once the storm abates and the poetic self's run comes to a halt, a new sensation emerges, that of horror. Everything suddenly subsides, heralding the vision:

> Taceva 'l tutto, ed i' era di pietra
> e sudava e tremava che la mente
> come 'l rimembra, per l'orror s'arretra;
> e 'l palpitar si facea più frequente.
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 82–85)

---

[457] Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', p. 150.

The part of the human body that reacts to the sensation of fear is the hypothalamus, which, when alerted, reacts by mobilising the entire organism. The result is a series of somatic behaviours such as those described by Leopardi: hyper- or hyposecretion of the glands causing excessive sweating, tremors and spasms, an accelerated heartbeat, breathing that is too fast or too slow, polyuria or anuria, immobilisation behaviour or violent externalisation.[458] The emotion of fear, therefore, is realised through both an external manifestation and an internal experience, thus releasing an unusual energy that is diffused throughout the organism.[459] As one can notice, horror, 'l'orror', differs from terror, because it arouses stasis, as opposed to the dynamism of flight caused by terror, enhanced by the chiasmus – 'Taceva 'l tutto, ed i' era di pietra' – where everything is calm and silent and the poetic self is petrified. Horror exerts its effects in frightening tales, and as the text exemplifies it 'freezes human faculties, rendering the mind passive and immobilising the body'.[460] A similar static response can be found in *Visioni*, when the pilgrim discovers the remains of Amennira, and in *Elegie*, when the Subject assists the death of Laura. The causes of horror can indeed be imputed to 'a direct encounter with physical mortality, the touching of a cold corpse, the sight of a decaying body'.[461] Frightened by the fear of the unknown, the poet protagonist of *Appressamento* does not react, because horror 'marks the response to an excess that cannot be transcended'.[462]

Leopardi details a further example of fear and wonder after the encounter with the guardian angel, when the poetic self is shaken by the news of his own death.

I' mi fei bianco in volto e venni gelo,

---

[458] Jean Delumeau, *La paura in Occidente. Storia della paura nell'età moderna*, trans. by Paolo Traniello (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2018), p. 22.

[459] Delumeau, *La paura in Occidente*, p. 23.

[460] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 48.

[461] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 48.

[462] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 49.

> attonito rimasi e mi sentia
>
> ritrarsi 'l core ed arricciarsi 'l pelo.
>
> E muto stetti, e pur volea dir: Sia,
>
> o Signor, quel ch'è fermo in tuo consiglio,
>
> ma voce de la strozza non uscia.
>
> E sol potei chinar la fronte e 'l ciglio,
>
> e caddi al suol boccone […]
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 106–13)

The reaction, even more ferocious than the previous one, reinforced by the alliteration of the letter 'r' in line 108, is that of pseudo paralysis.[463] The poet suffers a sort of a pre-death, since the colour of his skin turns pale and his body becomes cold, while his heart slows down its beat. As seen before with the episode of Ugo d'Este, Leopardi anticipates the approach of death, depicted again in 'Canto V':

> […] Io tremo
>
> e sento 'l cor che batte e sento un gelo
>
> quando penso ch'appressa il punto estremo.
>
> (*Appressamento*, V. 97–99)

The poetic self's immobility is the result of the threat of death, the horror of the danger of death, which is better expressed through stasis, as claimed by Bettinelli:

> La profonda impressione che fa nell'anima, lo spavento, e l'orrore del pericolo proprio, ovvero d'altrui, che si fa proprio ha più forza, e dura più lungamente d'ogni altra. Chi ne parla trova le immagini più evidenti, e più poetiche, e i colori più espressivi, e adattati, anzi basta il silenzio, la immobilità, il gesto, il guardo, il volto a dipignerlo vivamente.[464]

---

[463] Delumeau, *La paura in Occidente*, p. 23.

[464] Saverio Bettinelli, 'Dell'entusiasmo delle belle arti', in *Opere edite e inedite in prosa e in versi, seconda ed. riveduta, ampliata e corretta dall'Autore*, 24 vols (Venice: Adolfo Cesare, 1799), III, pp. 170–71.

The silence is also reiterated by the impossibility of talking, as death is coming, impeding the protagonist to utter words, as happens to Laura in 'Elegia I', 'La malattia'. An anticipation of death, finally, can be recognised in the end of the excerpt, where Leopardi portrays the man while falling down, as the last and only, 'solo', gesture afforded to him by his paralysis: 'caddi al suol boccone'. Faced with the incomprehensibility of the world, the only way out is to fall, 'la caduta', as D'Intino explains, followed by the return, 'il ritorno', which can be represented occasionally as homeland, origin, nature, death, childhood, birthplace, or as an apocalyptic 'new life', where to find own self, 'nel solco di un impulso vitale soggettivo in continuo divenire'.[465] The fall recurs in the text once again at the moment of the apparition of Christ and the Virgin Mary:

> Quando con suon vastissimo s'aprio
> in mezzo al santo loco il ciel più addrento,
> e allor cademmo al suol l'Angelo ed io.
>
> (*Appressamento*, IV. 157–59)

This fall is followed by a new beginning back to the earth, where the poetic self cannot help but fall again:

> Allora un lampo la notte m'aprio,
> e tutto cader vidi, allor piagnendo
> a miei dolci pensieri i' dissi: addio.
>
> (*Appressamento*, V. 34–36)

3.4.3   Spectral Descriptions

Although Leopardi does not grant space to the interaction between the pilgrim and the supernatural entities who populate the text, their apparitions involve

---

[465] Franco D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno. Cinque movimenti dell'immaginario romantico leopardiano* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2019), pp. 15–17.

physical descriptions. The first of these to appear in 'Canto I' is the guardian angel, portrayed according to the traditional feminine canon of beauty: he has blonde hair, is radiant, has youthful traits, and wears white clothes.

> Bianco vestia lo Spirto benedetto
> raggiante come d'Espero la stella,
> e avea 'l crin biondo e giovenil l'aspetto.
>
> (*Appressamento*, I. 97–99)

His classical representation is redolent of Dante's description of Manfredi in *Purgatorio* III, 'biondo era e bello e di gentile aspetto' (107). Contrastingly with the palette observed for material human bodies, which focuses on nuances of red with regard to blood and corporal wounds when not on the paleness of the face, here the angel is characterised by yellow and pure white. As has been amply shown in previous chapters, Varano dwells on descriptions of spirits, corpses (such as Amennira) and souls of the dead, while Fiorentino describes his wife Laura without dwelling too much on her physical appearance. He writes that his wife appears as more beautiful than in real life, focusing on her ethereal look, describing the vaporous cloud-forming mass that lifts her off the ground ('nuba fatta di vapor sottile', III. 40), and her white robes ('candide avea le vesti' III. 36). Varano describes the spirits' features, such as Bonaventura Barberini's white beard ('di candida barba ispido il mento' I. 47), and hair colour ('bruno era il crine', VI. 77) and eyebrows ('le nere ciglia', VI. 79) of Maria Anna of Austria. The colour palette used to describe these spirits varies, as we have seen, from the soft whites and light blues of veils and robes to the black of eyelashes, eyes, and hair. Only in a few cases are the eyes of male spirits cerulean – Bonaventura Barberini has indeed 'cerulei gli occhi' (I. 143). Leopardi, on the other hand, maintains the whiteness of the robes, but subverts the eighteenth-century new canon discussed in this thesis when he chooses to represent the angel with blond hair. The blond colour is in line with the Italian literary tradition, according to which Petrarch's Laura embodies the ideal of tetrachromatic beauty defined by Massimo Peri and described in the previous chapters. Nonetheless, Leopardi's representations of women, such as Silvia or Virginia (see *Nelle nozze della sorella*

Paolina) usually involves black hair – the syntagm 'negre chiome' occurs twice in his *Canti*. A shift from the traditional *topos* is also underpinned by Leopardi's words in *Diario del primo amore* and *Zibaldone*, where he notes 'capelli biondi belli in Italia nel 500. neri al presente' (*Zibaldone* 8).[466] The blond angel, therefore, embodies an example of a classical *topos* from a virtuous, Christian poetry to which Leopardi adhered. His blondness seems to indicate a traditional Petrarchan and then Tassian model, rather than denoting an ideal type of beauty, and this constitutes the only example of a blond-haired spirit in the corpus of works analysed in this thesis. The colour scheme chosen by Leopardi accords with the classical Latin model, white-yellow (white cloth and blond hair in this case), later standardised by Petrarch and subsequently disseminating throughout Europe.[467] Moreover, as Peri's study postulates, the end of this classical *topos* occurred between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with Gian Battista Marino as the last major exponent.[468] The description of the blond and radiant guardian angel is the only one Leopardi includes in *Appressamento*, since, as will be seen in the next section, not all spirits have angelic features, but rather possess features more akin to their human forms. Leopardi needs a blond angel to symbolise the prescriptions of classical poetry to which he is called to adhere, and at the same time the angel's beauty is so 'excessive' that the poet cannot express it in words: 'vago sì ch'a 'l ritrar mio stile è roco'. This rhetorical device

---

[466] On the *topos* of blond hair in traditional Italian lyrics see Macinante, *"Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi"*, and Fedi, *I poeti preferiscono le bionde*. In *Diario del primo amore* one can read: ' E una delle cagioni di ciò (oltre l'essere ora il cuor mio troppo signoreggiato da un sembiante), come anche di tutta questa mia crisi, è, come poi pensando m'è parso di poter affermare, l'impero che, se non fallo, per natura mia, hanno e debbono avere nella mia vita sopra di me due cose. Prima i lineamenti forti (purchè sieno misti col delicato e grazioso e non virili), gli occhi e capelli neri, la vivacità del volto, la persona grande: e però io aveva già prima d'ora ma con molta incertezza osservato che le facce languide e verginali e del tutto delicate, capelli o biondi o chiari, statura bassa, maniere smorte, e così discorrendo, mi faceano molto poca forza, e forse forse qualche volta niuna, quando queste qualità davano in eccesso, e per avventura in altri facevano più gran presa', in: Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 1176.

[467] Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è?,* pp. 114–15.

[468] Peri, *Ma il quarto dov'è?,* pp. 437–43.

allows Leopardi to shift attention to the protagonist's reaction and confirms D'Intino's theory, according to which *Appressamento* represents the impossibility to freely express the author's internal tensions.[469]

In the same vein, light plays a crucial role in 'Canto IV'. Here, after a blaze of light and unspeakable bliss, the author describes the vision of such a strong radiance that 'quaggiù', on earth, 'non ha sembiante' (IV. 90). Unlike Cardinal Bentivoglio in Varano's *Visioni*, here the protagonist is unable to distinguish the spirits that appear before him, who thus take on an evanescent appearance. The nullifying effect of excessive light had already been represented by Dante in *Paradiso* XXX, where the splendour was so excessive 'che nulla m'appariva' (51). The Dantean lexicon, with its references to the light of Heaven, is reproposed in *Appressamento* 'Canto IV', with a list of terms across six different tercets: 'splendore' (65); 'lucido' (66); 'Lume di Sole' (67); 'brillando' (69); 'limpido ciel' (70); 'il Sole | versa la sua luce e sua tranquilla imago' (71–72); 'splendean l'erbette di sì vago lume' (82); 'luccicar' (83); 'e la luce era tanta' (85); 'splende' (86); 'raggiante' (86); 'splende al Sol' (87); 'intrecciavansi i raggi tra le piante' (88); 'rifletteansi in onde tanto chiare' (89); 'fulgor' (90). The light is so excessive that again the poet expresses his inability to describe what he sees: 'i' vidi cose in mezzo a quel fulgore, | cui dir non può la lingua, e 'l pensier vole' (74-75). As already seen in the *Commedia*, *Visioni* and *Elegie*, in *Appressamento* the divine light is too intense for the pilgrim and Leopardi stresses the inability to actually distinguish shapes:

> Sì mi vinser que' raggi in un momento:
> perché l'umide luci i' riserrai,
> che 'l poter venne manco a l'ardimento.
>
> (*Appressamento*, IV. 94–96)

---

[469] See D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia', pp. 230–31; D'Intino, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio"', p. 705.

The angel reiterates that humans – 'uomo da suo corpo a questa terra avvinto' (183) – cannot see the light of divinity, metaphorically alluding to the need to follow the precepts from which Leopardi intends to escape:

> […] E sol non vede
> tuo mortal guardo quel che veder mai
> non può da questo mondo altro che fede.
>
> (*Appressamento*, IV. 175–77)

What the pilgrim can see are the Heaven's inhabitants, described in the following terms:

> Alme vestite di lucido manto
> ivan per quelle vie del Paradiso,
> sciolte le labbra al sempiterno canto.
>   Oh che soavi lumi, oh che bel viso,
> oh che dolci atti in quel beato stuolo,
> oh che voci, oh che gioja, oh che sorriso!
>
> (*Appressamento*, IV. 100–05)

The spirits are here defined as 'alme', their clothes are cursorily described, and they are represented in their human features of 'viso' and 'sorriso', echoing the vision of Beatrice in *Paradiso* XIV, who appears 'bella e ridente' (79). Like Varano and Fiorentino, Leopardi also decides not to entirely describe the souls, and rather focuses on the 'short canon'. As Webb convincingly maintains about Dante's *Paradiso*, Heaven is the realm of the face, a feature that by any means suggests that bodies are absent or de-emphasised; rather, Webb claims, 'faces are the unique intersection between body and soul, and as such, are the locus of transhuman, paradisiacal *persona*'.[470] Christ and the Virgin Mary appear before the pilgrim, but Leopardi does not even describe their faces since they consist of pure light, and what is not even partly corporeal cannot be visually represented:

---

[470] Webb, *Dante's Persons*, p. 165.

> Quella nube tel cela da' cui rai
>
> lo fiammeggiar di cento Soli è vinto,
>
> dove pur di mirar forza non hai.
>
> (*Appressamento*, IV. 178-80)

After having enjoyed the vision of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the guardian angel informs the protagonist of the truthfulness of what he has witnessed – 'certa e verace vision fu questa' (IV. 204) – but, above all, assures him: 'che veduto non hai sogni né larve' (IV. 203). The classical term *larvae* retains, in Leopardi, the negative meaning that had already characterised Varano's text, according to the original, classical conception. The extraordinariness of supernatural visions vanishes completely in the re-elaboration of Leopardi's *cantica* in the fragment *Spento in diurno raggio*, as does the monsters' parade. This lack reveals Leopardi's maturity and reinforces the thesis of *Appressamento* as a reliquary repository of youthful interior and personal tensions of the poet. What remains in *Spento il diurno raggio* is the incipient storm and feelings of terror, which allows the woman to run, but condemns her to a dead end. The woman falls, the sky darkens, and she turns to stone:

> Si spense il lampo, e tornò buio l'etra,
>
> ed acchetossi il tuono, e stette il vento.
>
> Taceva il tutto; ed ella era di pietra.
>
> (*Spento il diurno raggio*, 74–76)

If death in *Appressamento* has only approached the protagonist because he is still represented as free to choose between the coercion to write classical poetry or the sacrificial freedom of modern poetry, in the mature reworking of his *cantica*, Leopardi represents his final choice.

3.5   From 'Angeliche forme' to 'visi smorti'

The previous section addressed the angelic representations of souls, spanning the protagonist's guardian angel to Christ and the Virgin Mary. This section

examines otherworldly spirits that are more similar to damned souls than to angelic entities. Therefore, the spirits' descriptions do not rely on luminous effects, and Leopardi portrays the characters with more human, and miserable, connotations. In this way, one can notice that features of spectral creatures are again strictly linked to Dante's traditional portrayal of otherworldly realms, and the pilgrim's experience depicted in *Appressamento* is indebted to Classical tradition. Out of metaphor, Leopardi intends to convey the message that a would-be poet, his poetic self, must learn from Classical models, while also possibly avoiding their mistakes in his work. In 'Canto II', where the parade of the lustful ones takes place, Leopardi lists a number of characters from Ancient Rome and the Hellenic world, and carefully selects a language that draws on the semantic field of sin and shame, clearly electing Dante as his model:

> Quel vergognoso là che s'allontana,
> e 'l Prence tristo per lo cui delitto
> Tant'alta venne la virtù Romana.
> Appio è quel là che conto a voi fé' 'l dritto,
> pel cui malvagio amore un'altra volta
> Roma fu lieta e suo tiranno afflitto.
> Antonio è quel che lamentar s'ascolta,
> e di suo fato no ma par si lagne
> sol che sua donna scaltra gli sia tolta.
> Vedi Parisse più vicin che piagne
> Ilio in faville e la reggia diserta
> e morti i frati e serve le compagne
> e d'erba e sassi la città coverta:
> e fu cagion di tanta doglia Amore.
> E vedi quel ch'ha sì gran piaga aperta.
>
> (*Appressamento*, II. 34–48)

In every tercet, Leopardi couples a character with an adjective or a verb suggesting misery, pain, and discomfort. Sextus Tarquinius is the 'Prence tristo', who walks away from the others with shame, because, by committing the 'delitto' of outraging Lucretia, he provoked the downfall of his father, Tarquin the Proud,

and thus of the Roman monarchy. Appio Claudio is associated with an illicit love, 'malvagio amore', for the commoner Virginia, who is engaged to the tribune Lucius Icilio, an affair that caused the expulsion of the Roman Decemvirs from the city. His shame and misery are suggested by the adjective 'afflitto'. Mark Antony follows, and Leopardi represents him sonorically, for one can hear him while crying, 'lamentar s'ascolta', and the man complains, 'si lagne', that he is parted from his beloved woman, the cunning Cleopatra. Last, Paris cries 'piagne' due to the sorrow 'doglia' of witnessing the fall and destruction of his homeland due to his love for Helena. The protagonist, then, experiences the privilege of seeing with his own eyes, thanks to the angelic vision, the great tragedies caused by Love. At the same time, the damned souls are not described in their incorporeal state and they are humanised in their feelings. The whole sequence, therefore, can be interpreted as a small elegiac passage, where Leopardi manifests the misery and the shame of such sinners, which are features that allow a comparison between his poetic self, still alive, and the dead men's souls.

Leopardi insists on the same semantic field of misery at the beginning of 'Canto III', following Ugo d'Este's account of his tragic death at the hands of his father, in the last episode of 'Canto II'. At that point, Leopardi's poetic self, recalling the reactions of Dante the pilgrim across the whole *Commedia*, is moved by compassion towards the sinner, and shares the same feelings of the dead. 'I' lagrimava già per la pietate' (1), writes Leopardi, echoing Dante's *Inferno* VI (whose firts lines refers to the previous canto of Paolo and Francesca):

> Al tornar de la mente, che si schiuse
> dinanzi alla pietà de' due cognati,
> che di trestizia tutto mi confuse.
>
> <div align="right">(Inferno, VI. 1–3)</div>

At the same time, Leopardi's poetic self defines Ugo as 'miser'alma che perduta | avea suo fallo e altrui crudelitate' (III. 2–3). Nonetheless, his reaction is that of keeping the head bowed and being silent in the face of such cruelty: 'e 'l ciglio basso e la bocca era muta' (4). Although reminiscent, once again, of Dante's

reaction after the tale of Paolo and Francesca, Leopardi repeatedly stresses the image of people walking with their head down in his otherworldly experience. 'Ben vi convien di andar col ciglio basso' (204) constitutes an admonition for those sinners who face one of the vicious monsters, in 'Canto III', but the syntagm is already present in 'Canto II' to describe the souls of sinful women.

Some lustful women are described in 'Canto II' as 'alme […] sole | con la faccia scarnata e 'l ciglio basso' (II. 55–56), who walk slowly and silently: 'movon lente senza far parole' (57). The reader learns they have been Vestal Virgins, 'Vestali furo' (58), punished in the otherworld for betraying their vow of chastity. Leopardi, then, depicts a severe punishment meted out to Vestals carried away by passion, their 'crudo foco' (59), an expression that also recalls the sacred fire cultivated by those priestesses. The author writes that, according to strict Roman law, Vestals who violated the oath of celibacy had to be condemned to immurement, buried alive:

> Vestali furo, e sotto flebil sasso
> menolle dura legge e crudo foco
> di per loro a compor lo corpo lasso.
>
> (*Appressamento*, II. 58–60)

Such a crude condemnation derives from the sacredness that chastity of the Vestals represented for the Roman state, for when the Virgins entered the *collegium*, they became daughters of the state; sexual relationships with other Roman citizens were consequently regarded as *incestum*, an act of treason.[471] Whipped and dressed in funereal clothes, the guilty Vestals were normally carried in a closed litter, as if they were corpses in a coffin, to the *Campus Sceleratus*, which was located near the *Porta Collina* but still inside the walls (on the Quirinale). There, in an underground chamber, Vestals were supplied with a few days of food and water so that the Vestal would not technically be buried in the city, as burying a person within the city was against the Roman law, but instead would

---

[471] Inge Kroppenberg, 'Law, Religion and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins', *Law and Literature*, 22 (2010), no. 3, 418–39.

descend into a 'habitable room'. These types of burials were the only way to execute guilty Vestals without spilling their blood, which was forbidden, but once the tomb was closed their memory was erased.

The corporeal 'heaviness', a still-alive body imprisoned in a tomb, contrasts with the adjective 'flebil' that Leopardi couples with 'sasso', whose quality of being 'hard' is transferred metaphorically to the law 'dura legge'. Completes the scene the human body described as 'lasso', tired and exhausted due to lack of nutrition and energy. Employing such adjectives, therefore, Leopardi conveys the idea of levity that, in the previous scene, characterises the 'alme' of the Vestals as they are walking while silently looking down. The reader has now all the elements to picture their appearance, for their 'faccia scarnata' is explained by their consuming death due to starvation.

At the same time, as D'Intino noticed, Leopardi's poetical mode proceeds by subtraction, to provide readers with a modern experience, and yet projecting them against the backdrop of a mythical antiquity.[472] Indeed, Leopardi believes that providing the reader with a few details allows them to fill the voids left by words with their imagination: 'Perchè descrivendo con pochi colpi, e mostrando poche parti dell'oggetto, lasciavano l'immaginazione errare nel vago e indeterminato di quelle idee fanciullesche, che nascono dall'ignoranza dell'intiero' (*Zibaldone* 100). Such a literary mode, Leopardi states, was already successfully employed by Dante:

> Dante che con due parole desta un'immagine lascia molto a fare alla fantasia, ma dico fare non già faticare, giacchè ella spontaneamente concepisce quell'immagine e aggiunge quello che manca ai tratti del poeta che son tali da richiamar quasi necessariamente l'idea del tutto (*Zibaldone* 57)

An example of such a writing style can be found in an excerpt from Alessandro Verri's *Notti romane*, upon which Leopardi reflects in a thought from his *Zibaldone* in 1819, and which refers to a scene involving the death of a Vestal:

---

[472] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, p. 298.

Citerò un luogo delle Notti romane, non perch'io creda che quel libro si possa prendere per modello di stile, ma per addurre un esempio che mi cade in acconcio. Ed è quello dove la Vestale dice che diede disperatamente del capo in una parete, e giacque. La soppressione del verbo intermedio tra il battere il capo e il giacere, che è il cadere, produce un effetto sensibilissimo, facendo sentire al lettore tutta la violenza e come la scossa di quella caduta, per la mancanza di quel verbo, che par che ti manchi sotto ai piedi, e che tu cada di piombo dalla prima idea nella seconda che non può esser collegata colla prima se non per quella di mezzo che ti manca. E queste sono le vere arti di dar virtù ed efficacia allo stile, e di far quasi provare quello che tu racconti. (*Zibaldone* 82)

Following this idea, Leopardi refrains from macabre details, as it will not happen in later literature, when the *topos* of women buried alive becomes extremely popular. Leopardi, instead, simply focuses on the miserable state of the souls of Vestals, portraying figures that are certainly more ghostly than angelic. At the same time, the insistence of the poet on the levity of the souls is in contrast with Verri's excerpt, where the woman hits her head, presumably against the wall that encloses her, and lies down, leaving the reader to imagine her violent fall.

Leopardi is so fascinated by this theme that he takes notes for a writing project involving a Vestal woman buried alive and saved by a man who notices her, now in *Disegni letterari*.[473] Although sketched and never developed, Leopardi's notes seem to be redolent of the cursor scene in *Appressamento*, which serves as an archive for the more mature Leopardi, a proponent of recordkeeping culture. If it is true that the poet does not want to enrich the scene with too many words, following Verri's example, one should notice that Leopardi's choice of the term 'scarnata' is eloquent enough. The same adjective, in fact, recurs in his youthful sonnet *La Morte*, dated 1810, where he writes 'veggo che attorno ria gli fan corona | e Peste e Febre e la scarnata Tisi' (9–10). In this case, the adjective 'scarnata' qualifies the phthisis, clearly describing the consumption of the flesh, as in Petrarch and Varano (as shown in Chapter 1).

---

[473] See Leopardi, *Disegni letterari*. The reference to Leopardi's envisaged 'libro poetico' is the following: 'Una Vestale moribonda nella sua sepoltura al campo scellerato, liberata improvvisamente da qualcuno', in Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, II, p. 1213.

The depiction of souls with a skinny face and walking alone with their eyes looking down in shame, takes us to the path already undertaken by Varano, where there is a division between angelic souls and the damned, according to Dante's model. Dante, however, explicitly separates the damned from the angelic souls, by placing them in different parts of the otherworld with a hierarchical order in mind. Varano and Leopardi, on the other hand, create a more, so to speak, confusing world, where pilgrims meet now the damned, now the impalpable souls of angels and the blessed. Leopardi depicts such a promiscuity in the following tercets, at the beginning of 'Canto III':

> Ivan latrando quelle genti grame,
> e su lor crespa fronte e su la cava
> lor mascella parea seder la fame.
> Al lume i' gli scorgea che s'avventava
> da le Angeliche forme ai visi smorti,
> e men chiaro e più fioco ritornava.
>
> (*Appressamento*, III. 40–45)

Following the parade of vicious monsters, Leopardi portrays damned souls as beasts, for they bark, 'latrando', and are qualified as 'genti grame', where the term 'grame' reminds us of the Dantean she-wolf ('molte genti fé già viver grame' *Inferno*, I. 51). Like the souls of the Vestals, these damned souls are described as consumed, for they have skinny jaws, 'su la cava | lor mascella parea seder la fame', a feature that underlines the misery of certain spirits in Leopardi's depiction. Leopardi's poetic self declares that he can see these souls because the 'Angeliche forme', reminiscent of Varano's 'sembianze angeliche' (X. 695), cast light on the damned ones. Thus, he clearly shapes, in the mind of the reader, a space populated both by angels and other, guilty, and aesthetically dissimilar, spirits, described as 'visi smorti'.

Although the spirits are somehow corporeal in their representation, however, as Roy Porter explains, 'during the Enlightenment, the term "spirit" chiefly conveyed the idea of an exceedingly fine medium, the most ethereal possible, far more delicate than the ponderous substance which "matter" might

routinely suggest'.[474] Leopardi gives an account of such a representation, for instance, in the 'Canto II''s scene where Ugo d'Este passes away, and his soul leaves his corporeal body: 'e svolazzò lo spirito sospirando' (II. 169).

In addition to *Visioni* and *Elegie*, *Appressamento* represents a tension between corporeality, sufferance, physical pain and incorporeality, spectrality, and eternity. The text evidently shows its debt towards traditional Dantean poetry, but also engages with the poetical style of Varano and Fiorentino, and receptively demonstrates to the reader the intrinsic dichotomy of the human being. *Appressamento* mirrors the excessive and sometimes double nature of spectral bodies that has been found in the other texts. The excess, understood as 'extraordinariness', exemplifies in *Appressamento* both a divine-driven force, such as the blinding light emanating from the angel, Christ, and the Virgin Mary, and a terrifying experience, which results in the poet's stasis and powerlessness before his own mortal destiny. It is as if Leopardi personally placed himself at a crossroads: to aspire to the eternity of the soul, as Fiorentino suggests in his 'Elegia VI', or to pursue his own poetic vein and explore those aspects of the human being that intrigue and terrify at the same time, and which we can now call 'abjection'?

---

[474] Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, pp. 56–57.

Conclusion

Chiunque esamina la natura delle cose colla pura ragione,

senz'aiutarsi dell'immaginazione nè del sentimento, nè dar loro alcun luogo,

[…] potrà ben […] risolvere e disfar la natura,

ma e' non potrà mai ricomporla.

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

The movement of the imagination, says Coleridge, is drawn in an infinite process that is both progressive and circular in form, producing the line of a spiral that escapes closure.[475] A circular path, always open and never really concluded, like that of the ouroboros, the snake with its tail in its mouth; this is metaphorically the path undertaken by this thesis, which begins with a reading of Varano's *Visioni*, passes through Fiorentino's *Elegie*, and ends with Leopardi's *Appressamento*. Jauss' theory, according to which texts require 'a first, aesthetically perceptual reading' and 'a second, retrospectively interpretive reading', underlies this concept.[476] Texts are always open to new interpretations, a new circle of readings, and are never permanently concluded. The more authors become readers of previous texts, the more these same texts evolve and say something new that they did not express before. In this sense, *Visioni*, *Elegie* and *Appressamento* constitute a reliquary, a container full of blended literary experiences, ancient and traditional ones, as well as new, modern traits. And, in the end, the imagery coming from Dante's *Commedia* becomes a novelty when the authors incorporate it in new texts, imbuing it with new messages.

---

[475] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia literaria or Bio-graphical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, p. 395.

[476] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception*, p. 139.

The hybridism underlying my corpus and my investigation on abject, though fascinating, depictions of corporeality and spectrality pave the way for new studies towards an 'archaeology' of the Italian Gothic.[477] Re-reading earlier texts, as I do in this thesis, allows for an understanding of the ways in which literature that is now considered minor played an important role in another historical period, laying the foundations for those which followed. An 'archaeological' reading of a phenomenon, stemming from Michel Foucault's *Archéologie du savoir* (1969), consists of a study whose object is not the alleged 'origin' of a pre-made theoretical construct but rather the stratifications by which that specific construct was assembled.[478] Few scholarly works on the Gothic have been tentatively, though insufficiently, produced by scholars within Italian Studies itself. Mostly they provide surveys of Gothic elements in Italian literature, aligning the 'Gothic' with the 'Fantastic', and reiterating the narrative about Italy's isolation from the European context.[479] This established view also favoured the exclusion of Italian texts, especially those produced in the eighteenth century, from foreign scholarship on the European Gothic(s), which, to this day, still does not recognise the existence of the Gothic within the Italian context or declare a lack of interest in it. In the very first page of Avril Horner's introduction to her edited volume *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760-*

---

[477] A seminal study in this direction is my essay 'Sepulchral Poetry and Deathly Motifs. A "Prehistory" of the Italian Gothic', already mentioned in footnote 36. In this contribution I analyse small excerpts from Varano's *Visioni*, Fiorentino's *Elegie*, and Leopardi's *Appressamento* together with a series of other late-eighteenth-century texts. By attempting an analysis of the texts' imagery characterised by 'excess' and 'abjection' I suggest reading such poetical works with autochthonous, mainly Dantean, origins as works related to the foreign Gothic experience.

[478] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, transl. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971). The same approach is followed in *Archaeology of the Unconscious: Italian Perspectives*, ed. by Alessandra Aloisi and Fabio Camilletti (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[479] Within the field of Italian Studies recent contributions on the matter are *The Italian gothic and fantastic: encounters and rewritings of narrative traditions*, ed. by Francesca Billiani and Gigliola Sulis (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007); *Il fantastico italiano: bilancio critico e bibliografia commentata (dal 1980 a oggi)*, ed. by Stefano Lazzarin, Felice Italo Beneduce, Eleonora Conti, Fabrizio Foni, Rita Fresu, and Claudia Zudini (Florence: Le Monnier, 2016).

1960, one can read: 'Where are the comprehensive histories of French or Italian Gothic, for example? Sadly, they are not to be found in French or Italian universities, where study of the Gothic has yet to gain a secure foothold'.[480] Still in need of a 'secure foothold', eighteenth-century Italian literature would benefit from an 'archaeological' examination of what scholars consider 'Gothic concerns', by digging into its past and looking back *all'antico*, as Leopardi puts it. In this way, one realises that Italian literature deals with those very same tensions populating Gothic literature in other cultural domains. Among different branches of investigation, this thesis inspects religious and moral literature.

An archaeological approach also outlines returning and recurring readings, *ritornanti*.[481] A passage from Leopardi's *Operette morali* stresses the importance of returning to old and previously read books:

> Soli in questo naufragio continuo e comune non meno degli scritti nobili che de' plebei, soprannuotano i libri antichi; i quali per la fama già stabilita e corroborata dalla lunghezza dell'età, non solo si leggono ancora diligentemente, ma si *rileggono* e studiano.[482]

A far as re-reading is concerned, Leopardi maintains that we go back to books that have already had a certain degree of established reputation, which explains his engagement with both *Visioni* and *Elegie*, works that had long had an established popularity, and the works of Dante, a model Leopardi mediates from *Visioni* and *Elegie* in a time when Dantean poetry had already been re-established. The reappropriation of excessive and abject lexicon and imagery from works that Leopardi considers worthy of attention and includes in his *Crestomazia* makes possible Leopardi's first structured poetical work, *Appressamento*, where he records his internal struggle between a traditional and a new kind of poetry.

---

[480] Avril Horner, 'Introduction', in *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760-1960*, ed. by Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 1. This volume examines the Gothic in French, Spanish, Russian, and Arab contexts.

[481] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, p. 286. The idea of a perpetual return connects and contrasts, during the European Romanticism, with the idea of the 'fall', *la caduta*.

[482] Leopardi, 'Il Parini, ovvero della gloria', in *Operette morali*, p. 206, emphasis is mine.

My study shows that Leopardi's *Appressamento* is built on a stratification of previous works, and the comparative analysis of *Visioni*, *Elegie* and *Appressamento* demonstrates the formation and the circulation of a network of ideas and discourses on interconnected concerns.

The combination of the corporeal and the spiritual makes *Appressamento*, the end point of my analysis, a 'relic object'. My analysis makes it possible to read *Appressamento* in a way that differs from traditional readings, which are ill-suited to comparative interpretations with contemporary or slightly earlier authors such as those chosen in this thesis. Reading *Visioni*, *Elegie*, and *Appressamento* together allows to trace continuities and differences with respect to their common model, Dante, and between the texts themselves. In the poem of the eighteen-year-old Leopardi, it is possible to highlight the author's self-referentiality, more prominently than in *Visioni* and *Elegie*.

This thesis supports D'Intino's hypothesis that *Appressamento* constitutes *in nuce* the entire poetics of the mature Leopardi, which one finds, for instance, in the autoreferential poem *A Silvia*.[483] The reception and re-reading of texts, I advocate, not only applies to works of minor authors, but also to minor works of canonical authors, as is the case for Leopardi's *Appressamento*. The author himself, therefore, returns to re-read his own poetic diary, the relic of himself that he has left behind in the text. In this way, the author returns to consider what he has written as something intimately personal, so much so that my analysis is conducted on a text never voluntarily published by Leopardi, but at the same time the author puts himself in the shoes of an interpreter of his own 'secret self'. Even when the poet is the object of the poem, the reader does not immediately know his feelings, but only those that the poet has represented as a 'spectator of himself'.[484] Leopardi demonstrates, by writing *A Silvia*, that 'la rappresentabilità dell'io implica necessariamente la sua perdita', which seems to me a lesson that Leopardi learns from Varano and Fiorentino.[485] Throughout

---

[483] D'Intino posits this thesis partly in 'I misteri di Silvia', and in *La caduta e il ritorno*.

[484] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, p. 305.

[485] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, p. 305.

Visioni, Varano's poetic self embodies 'a pilgrim', a figure that Dante had previously experimented with in his *Commedia*, giving up his own individuality to embody the human condition of sinners on a path of purification to God, while in *Elegie*, Fiorentino represents the Subject in his delirium, embarking on a journey to recompose his self. Evidently, in *Appressamento*, Leopardi is aware that to find his identity (his ancient or modern self) he must die, as the guardian angel announces in the poem. Even in 1828, when he wrote *A Silvia*, Leopardi was aware of this requirement and, in identifying himself with Silvia he staged his own death, which in *Appressamento* was only announced but never achieved. One should also remember that the fragmentary version of *Appressamento*, what we now know as *Spento il diurno raggio*, also includes the figure of the young woman who dies prematurely, indicating Leopardi's awareness and maturity with respect to the first experiment in *Appressamento*, as seen in Chapter 3.

The process of continuous re-reading, which brings us back to the image of the endless spiral, thus leads authors (readers of themselves and of others) to understand and interpret themselves, 'paragonarmi meco medesimo' (*Zibaldone* 4302), to quote Leopardi.[486] Leopardi himself provides the image of the text as a 'deposit', which I take up in this thesis: 'provar qualche reliquia de' miei sentimenti passata, messa quivi entro, per conservarla e darle durata, quasi in deposito' (*Zibaldone* 4302). Also linked to the semantic field of the remnant, the relic, the depository, are the terms 'vestigia' and 'orma', examined by D'Intino in his study of the movements of Romanticism, within which the scholar includes Leopardi. At the centre of the discussion on traces and footprints, Leopardi places death, a key element of my thesis, and he does so because '[le] più acerbe e *mortifere* disgrazie [...] servono sempre di consolazione, raccendono l'entusiasmo, e non trattando nè rappresentando altro che la morte, le rendono, almeno momentaneamente, quella vita che aveva perduta' (*Zibaldone*, 259-260).[487] It is precisely from the spectacle of death (staged by Dante and then received by Varano and Fiorentino up to Leopardi), that the reader feels 'enlivened'.[488]

---

[486] On this, see also Camilletti, *Leopardi's Nymphs*.

[487] Emphasis in the text.

[488] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, pp. 313–14.

Precisely because it tends towards death, a poetic work, according to Leopardi, must stage a drama with an unhappy ending, because such an image serves to create an aesthetics of poetic energy.[489]

This brings us to the elaboration of the poem *A Silvia*, where Leopardi puts into practice the poetics of the sacrificial drama that he had previously sketched and preluded in *Appressamento*. However, poetry commemorates the deceased, and, in this way, it eternalises them. This is what happens to Silvia, a woman who died young, 'nei suoi verdi anni', but also what Leopardi wanted to happen to the poet protagonist of his youthful work *Appressamento*. There, nonetheless, Leopardi proves to be still immature and let the guardian angel announce the necessity of death, which the protagonist does not yet accept, 'Sento ch'ad alte imprese il cor mi chiama. | A morir non son nato' (V. 49–50). 'Canto V', the final one, closes by evoking the terms 'orma' ('Morir quand'anco in terra *orma* non stampo', 67), 'vestigio' ('Né di me lascerò *vestigio* al mondo', 68), 'ombra' ('mia vita sul mondo *ombra* non lassa', 84), and the verb 'cadere' ('che già s'abbassa mio tenebroso giorno e *cade* omai', 83). These terms are signs of a tragic, dramatic ending, that the reader already expects from the title of the work, but that does not really take place in the poem.

To borrow an expression used by D'Intino, *Appressamento* can be understood as a 'cartone preparatorio' of more complex poems, 'uno stratificarsi continuo di temi e immagini in cui le fasi precedenti non vengono cancellate, ma riassorbite nel processo di un'esecuzione che riparte sempre'.[490] My thesis identifies *Visioni* and *Elegie* as privileged sources for Leopardi's process. Leopardi proves to be a highly receptive author, sensitive to the issues of his time, so much so that each chapter of this thesis opens with references from different works of Leopardi that perfectly fit the most poignant aspect addressed in the chapter. In this way, my study intends to underline how the aspects contained in each work are traits that characterise Leopardi's thought, and to which the author tried to give an answer. The reception of the excessive and abject aspects from Dante's *Commedia*, and in particular the dichotomy of the body articulated in flesh and

---

[489] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, p. 315.

[490] D'Intino, *La caduta e il ritorno*, pp. 331, 333.

soul, appears to be a fundamental element for the strand of visionary texts that appeared and/or were conceived between 1789 and 1816.

Finally, my study shows how the mystical element veiled the excess and abjection that characterise *Visioni*, *Elegie*, and *Appressamento*, so as to conceal those traits that have instead appeared as evident in foreign prose. Further developments of imageries discussed in these poetical works will emerge later in the nineteenth century. Among these, the figure of the ill woman whose sickness is symptom of virtue can be found in *Ginevra o L'orfana della Nunziata* (1839) by Antonio Ranieri, where the body of an innocent young woman is terribly ill and badly treated; but also the many popular novels by Carolina Invernizio, where innocent and virtuous women fall victims of petty men who poison or condemn them to long debilitating illnesses, which nevertheless do not prevent them from triumphing in the happy ending.[491] Between the Unification and the *fin de siècle* another dichotomy surfaces in Italian literature, that of the visible and the invisible, generally resulting in 'a superiority of the invisible over the visible (in particular, that of literature over science), facilitated by the Catholic background of the country'.[492] A renewed interest in this dichotomy, where the visible represents corporeality and the invisible spectrality, is found for example in the works of the *Scapigliatura*, where medical normativity and arts meet and conflict with each other. The same interest also entangles with the Italian *Spiritismo*, a discipline standing between the realms of reality and imagination that still leaves

---

[491] Particularly on the prolific writer Carolina Invernizio and her portrayal of virtuous female victims see Simona Di Martino, 'Il fatto di cronaca al femminile nella narrazione dei misteri urbani italiani oltre il romanzo. Il caso di Dino Buzzati e *I misteri d'Italia*', *Transalpina - La letteratura dei "misteri urbani" in Italia: dai modelli ottocenteschi alle riscritture novecentesche*, 25 (forthcoming 2022). On the development of popular novels, among others, see also Brian Moloney and Gillian Ania, '"Analoghi vituperi": la bibliografia del romanzo dei misteri in Italia', *La Bibliofilía*, 106 (2004), no. 2, 173–213; Francesca Facchi, 'Per una metodologia del protogiallo italiano: Problemi e proposte', *Forum Italicum*, 53 (2019), no. 2, 511–53.

[492] Gabriele Scalessa, 'Between Medicine and Spiritualism: The Visible and the Invisible in Italian Literature 1865-1901' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick 2015), p. 7.

its mark on twentieth-century literature, for instance in Luigi Pirandello, Italo Svevo, and Dino Buzzati.[493]

---

[493] The boom of the occult in Italian culture is the core theme of Fabio Camilletti, *Italia lunare: gli anni Sessanta e l'occulto* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Alfieri, Vittorio, *Saul*, ed. by Bruno Maier (Milan: Garzanti, 2015)

Algarotti, Francesco, *Il Newtonianismo per le dame. Dialoghi sopra la luce e i colori* (Naples: 1737)

Alighieri, Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. by Tommaso Di Salvo (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1987)

———, *Vita Nova*, ed. by Guglielmo Gorni (Turin: Einaudi, 1996)

Bandello, Matteo, *Novelle*, ed. by Elisabetta Menetti (Milan: BUR, 2011)

———, 'Le novelle di Matteo Bandello' in *Tutte le opere di Matteo Bandello*, ed. by Francesco Flora (Milan: Mondadori, 1942)

Bartoli, Daniello, *L'huomo al punto, cioè l'huomo in punto di morte* (E. Ghezzi, 1667)

Bettinelli, Saverio, 'Dell'entusiasmo delle belle arti', in *Opere edite e inedite in prosa e in versi, seconda ed. riveduta, ampliata e corretta dall'Autore*, 24 vols (Venice: Adolfo Cesare, 1799)

Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Teseida*, ed. by Salvatore Battaglia (Florence: Sansoni, 1938)

Bondi, Clemente, 'La morte in sogno', in *Poeti minori del Settecento*, ed. by Alessandro Donati (Bari: Laterza, 1913), pp. 240–41

Byron, George Gordon, Lord, *The works of Lord Byron*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1898)

Calmet, Agostino, *Dissertazioni sopra le apparizioni de' spiriti, e sopra i vampiri, o i redivivi d'Ungheria, di Moravia ec. del r.p.d. Agostino Calmet abate di Senones*

tradotte dal franzese su la seconda edizione riveduta, e corretta (Venice: Simone Occhi, 1756)

Capra, Mariano Antonio, *Notti poetiche sopra argomenti diversi* (Cesena: per Gregorio Biasini all'Insegna di Pallade, 1777)

Cesarotti, Melchiorre, 'Epistolario', in *Opere*, ed. by Giovanni Rosini (Florence-Pisa: Niccolò Capurro, 1813)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia literaria or Bio-graphical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)

Colonna, Vittoria, *Rime*, ed. by Alan Bullock (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1982)

Conti, Antonio, *Riflessioni su l'aurora boreale del signor abate Antonio Conti patrizio veneto* (Venice: Gian Battista Pasquali, 1739)

Fiorentino, Salomone, *Poesie di Salomone Fiorentino. Nuova edizione con aggiunte*, 2 vols (Livorno: Barbani, 1815)

Foscolo, Ugo, 'Epistolario', ed. by Mario Scotti, in *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere*, 22 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1933–94)

Frugoni, Carlo Innocenzo, *Opere poetiche* 9 vols (Parma: [n. pub.], 1789)

de' Giorgi Bertola, Aurelio, *Nuove poesie campestri e marittime* (Genoa: [n. pub.], 1779)

———, *Rime e prose* (Genoa: [n. pub.], 1797)

Giovio, Giambattista, *I cimiterj* (Como: Ostinelli, 1804)

Godwin, William, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)

Lambertenghi, Luigi, 'Sull'origine e sul luogo delle sepolture', in *Il Caffè (1764-1766)*, ed. by Gianni Francioni and Sergio Romagnoli (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993)

Landi, Ubertino, 'Il museo della Morte', in *Poemetti italiani* (Turin: Società letteraria di Torino presso Michelangelo Morano, 1797), pp. 59–66

Leopardi, Giacomo, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Christian Genetelli and Sabrina Delcò-Toschini (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002)

———, *Appressamento della morte*, ed. by Lorenza Posfortunato (Florence: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1983)

———, *Canti* ed. by Enrico Ghidetti (Florence: Sansoni, 1988)

———, *Canti* ed. by Lucio Felici (Rome: Newton Compton, 1996)

———, *Canti* ed. by Franco Gavazzeni (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998)

———, *Crestomazia italiana poetica, cioè scelta di luoghi in verso italiano insigni o per sentimento o per locuzione, raccolti, e distribuiti secondo i tempi degli autori, dal conte Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Stella, 1828)

———, *Crestomazia italiana. La poesia*, ed. by Giuseppe Savoca (Turin: Einaudi, 1968)

———, *Operette morali*, ed. by Ottavio Besomi (Milan: Mondadori, 1979)

———, *Disegni letterari*, ed. by Franco D'Intino, Davide Pettinicchio and Lucia Abate (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2021)

———, *Epistolario*, ed. by Franco Brioschi and Patrizia Landi (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998)

———, *Poesie e prose*, ed. by Rolando Damiani, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1988)

———, *Prose*, ed. by Rolando Damiani (Milan: Mondadori, 1992)

———, *Puerili e abbozzi vari*, ed. by Alessandro Donati (Bari: Laterza, 1924)

———, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, ed. by Franco D'Intino (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1995)

———, *Versi Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia*, ed. by Alessandro Donati (Bari: Laterza, 1921)

———, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Giuseppe Pacella (Milan: Garzanti, 1991)

Leopardi, Monaldo, 'Memoriale autografo ad Antonio Ranieri', in *Il Monarca delle Indie. Corrispondenza tra Giacomo e Monaldo Leopardi*, ed. by Graziella Pulce (Milan: Adelphi, 1998), pp. 303–30

Lubrano, Giacomo, *Scintille poetiche, o poesie sacre e morali* (Naples: Parrino & Muzii, 1674)

Marinelli, Giovanni, *Gli ornamenti delle donne. Tratti dalle scritture d'una Reina Greca. In quattro libri, con due tavole, una de' capitoli e l'altra d'alcune cose particolari* (Venice: Francesco de' Franceschi Senese, 1562)

Marino, Giovanni Battista, 'Adone', in *Tutte le opere di G. B. Marino*, ed. by Giovanni Pozzi, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1976)

———, *Poesie varie*, ed. by Benedetto Croce (Bari: Laterza, 1913)

Melani, Enea Gaetano, *Degli orrendi tremuoti che ne' mesi di novembre e dicembre dell'anno 1755 hanno desolato Lisbona, e varie altre città del Portogallo* (Venice: Albrizzi, 1756)

———, *La peste di Messina accaduta nell'anno 1743 fedelmente rapportata in versi sdruccioli dall'abate di S. Giacinto Enea Gaetano Me-lani Sanese Protonotaro Apostolico, e Religioso, Gerosolimitano detto tra gli Arcadi Eresto Eleucanteo, che fu spettatore di sì spaventosa tragedia* (Venice: Recurti, 1747)

———, *Varie notizie intorno a' terremoti. Descrizione esattissima del Regno di Portogallo, colla carta corografica, e colla topografica di Lisbona ec. Relazione dell'orribil tremoto accaduto il dì primo novembre 1755 e delle rovine e danni prodotti in Portogallo, e altrove, Venezia* (Venice: [n. pub.], 1756)

Metastasio, Pietro, 'Poesie', in *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Bruno Brunelli, 5 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1965)

Petrarca, Francesco, *Canzoniere* [*Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*], ed. by Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 2004)

———, *Rime, Trionfi e poesie latine*, ed. by Ferdinando Neri, Guido Martellotti, Enrico Bianchi, and Natalino Sapegno (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1951)

Piattoli, Scipione, *Saggio intorno al luogo del seppellire* (Florence: [n. pub.], 1774)

Pindemonte, Ippolito, *Le prose e poesie campestri d'Ippolito Pindemonte con l'aggiunta d'una Dissertazione su i giardini inglesi e il merito in ciò dell'Italia* (Verona: Tipografia Mainardi, 1817)

Poe, Edgar Allan, 'Editorial Miscellany', *Broadway Journal*, 2 (1845), no. 23

———, 'The Philosophy of Composition', in *The Writer's Art. By Those Who Have Practiced It*, ed. by Rollo Walter Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), pp. 114–30

Radcliffe, Ann, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (1826), 145–52

Ranieri, Antonio, *Sette anni di sodalizio con Leopardi* (Milan: SE, 2005)

Roberti-Franco, Francesca, *I funerali del signor Jerningham, I Sepolcri del signor Hervey e l'Eternità del signor Haller* (Padua: Conzatti, 1781)

Tasso, Torquato, *Rinaldo*, ed. by Michael Sherberg (Ravenna: Longo, 1990)

Varano, Alfonso, *Opere poetiche*, 4 vols (Venice: Stamperia Palese, 1805)

———, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Riccardo Verzini (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2003)

———, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Stefano Strazzabosco (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda Editore, 2007)

da Varano, Camilla Battista, *Autobiografia e opere complete*, ed. by Silvano Bracci (Vicenza: Hamsa, 2009)

———, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. by Giovanni Boccanera (Iesi: Scuola Tipografia Francescana, 1958)

Verri, Alessandro, *Le notti romane*, ed. by Renzo Negri (Bari: Laterza, 1967)

Walpole, Horace, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Lownds, 1765)

Zacchiroli, Francesco, *Il Sepolcro. Ottave di Euripilo Naricio in morte di Lorenzo Ricci, ultimo generale della Compagnia di Gesù* (Lausanne: Martin, 1776)

Dictionaries

DBI: Dizionario biografico degli italiani, 100 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1960–2020)

DELI: Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana, ed. by Manlio Cortelazzo and Paolo Zolli, 5 vols (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1979–88)

GDLI: Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, ed. by Salvatore Battaglia, 21 vols (Turin: UTET, 1961–2002)

Secondary Sources

Aloisi, Alessandra, 'Una macchina dal nome infernale in arrivo da un paese romantico', *Intersezioni*, 3 (2017), no. 2, 163–181

Aloisi, Alessandra, and Fabio Camilletti, eds, *Archaeology of the Unconscious: Italian Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2020)

Ariès, Philippe, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Marion Boyars, 1976)

Arya, Rina, *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Asor Rosa, Alberto, *Letteratura italiana. Storia e geografia*, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1988)

Augé, Marc, *Non-Places* (London: Verso, 2008)

Baldick, Chris, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Baranski, Zygmunt G., and Simon Gilson, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)

Barbagli, Marzio, *Alla fine della vita* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018)

———, *Sotto lo stesso tetto. Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984)

Barbiera, Raffaello, ed., *Parisina* (Milan: Treves, 1913)

Barnes, John C., and Jennifer Petrie, eds, *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007)

Barolini, Teodolinda, '*Inferno* 28: Tuscany's Evil Seed', in *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2018)

Barsella, Susanna, *In the Light of the Angels. Angelology and Cosmology in Dante's* Divina Commedia (Florence: Olschki, 2010)

Bartlett, Robert, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013)

Battistini, Andrea, 'L'età barocca', in *Guida allo studio della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Emilio Pasquini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), pp. 283–313

———, 'Temi e motivi', in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Andrea Battistini (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2000), XXX (*Il Barocco*), pp. 82–130

Battistini, Matilde, *Simboli e allegorie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002)

Bertana, Emilio, *In Arcadia. Saggi e profili* (Naples: Perrella, 1909)

Bertazzoli, Raffaella, *Pensieri sull'ignoto. Poesia sepolcrale e simbologia funebre tra Sette e Ottocento* (Verona: Fiorini, 2002)

Bianchini Braglia, Elena, and Roberta Jotti, *Madonna Parisina* (Modena: Ass. Terra e Identità, 2007)

Biasin, Gian-Paolo, *Literary Diseases: Theme and Metaphor in the Italian Novel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021)

Bigi, Emilio, 'Il Leopardi e l'Arcadia', in *Leopardi e il Settecento: Atti del I Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani, Recanati 13-16 settembre 1962* (Florence: Olschki, 1964), pp. 49–76

——, 'Leopardi e Recanati', in *Le città di Giacomo Leopardi. Atti del VII Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani, Recanati, 16-19 novembre 1987* (Florence: Olschki, 1991), pp. 3–21

Billiani, Francesca, and Gigliola Sulis, eds, *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic: Encounters and Rewritings of Narrative Traditions* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007)

Binni, Walter, 'III. 1815-1816. Traduzioni poetiche e primi tentativi di poesie originali', in *Lezioni leopardiane*, ed. by Novella Bellucci (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1994), pp. 37–52

——, 'Leopardi e la poesia del secondo Settecento', in *1. Leopardi. Scritti 1934-1963*, in *Opere complete di Walter Binni* (Florence: Il Ponte Editore, 2014), pp. 311–370

——, *Preromanticismo italiano* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche italiane, 1947)

Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973)

——, *Visioni profetiche. Angeli, sogni, risurrezioni*, trans. by Nicola Rainò (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1999)

Boccanera, Giacomo, *Biografia e scritti della B. Camilla-Battista da Varano, Clarissa di Camerino (1458–1524)* (Rome: Editrice Miscellanea Francescana, 1957)

Bondeson, Jan, *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (New York: Norton, 2001)

Bonito, Vitaniello, 'Il nodo dell'antitesi: da Góngora a Ciro di Pers', *Lingua e stile*, 23 (1988), no. 3, 427–444

Bonora, Ettore, *Il preromanticismo in Italia* (Milan: La Goliardica, 1959)

Botting, Fred, *Gothic* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005)

Botting, Fred, and Catherine Spooner, 'Introduction: monstrous media/spectral subjects', in *Monstrous media/spectral subjects. Imaging gothic from the nineteenth century to the present*, ed. by Fred Botting and Catherine Spooner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 1–11

———, eds, *Monstrous media/spectral subjects. Imaging gothic from the nineteenth century to the present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015)

Brady, Andrea, *English Funerary Elegy in the Seventeenth Century. Laws in Mourning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Broggi, Francesca, *The Rise of the Italian Canto. Macpherson, Cesarotti and Leopardi: From the Ossianic Poems to the* Canti (Ravenna: Longo, 2006)

Bronfen, Elisabeth, 'Night and the Uncanny', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 51–67

———, *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992)

Brooks, Peter, *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984)

Brundin, Abigail, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)

Bryant, Clifton D., *Handbook of Death and Dying* (Thousand Oaks, CA/London: SAGE, 2003)

Buccini, Stefania, *Sentimento della morte dal Barocco al declino dei Lumi* (Ravenna: Longo, 2000)

Calcaterra, Carlo, *Il Parnaso in rivolta. Barocco e Antibarocco nella poesia italiana* (Milan: Mondadori, 1940)

Camilletti, Fabio, '1766-1827: The Winter Is Coming', in *Italian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Marco Malvestio and Stefano Serafini (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2022)

———, *Classicism and Romanticism in Italian literature: Leopardi's Discourse on Romantic poetry* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013)

———, *Guida alla letteratura gotica* (Bologna: Odoya, 2018)

———, *Italia lunare: gli anni Sessanta e l'occulto* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018)

———, 'Later Reception from 1481 to the Present', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's "Commedia"*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Baranski and Simon Gilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 259–70

———, *Leopardi's Nymphs. Grace, Melancholy and the Uncanny* (London: Legenda, 2013)

Campana, Andrea, ed., *Catalogo della biblioteca Leopardi in Recanati (1847-1899)* (Florence: Olschki, 2011)

Camporesi, Piero, *La carne impassibile* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1983)

———, *La Casa dell'Eternità* (Milan: Garzanti, 1987)

———, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*, trans. by Lucinda Byatt (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990)

———, *The Incorruptible Flesh. Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. by Tania Croft-Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Carli, Alberto, *Anatomie Scapigliate. L'estetica della morte tra letteratura, arte e scienza* (Novara: Interlinea, 2004)

Carrai, Stefano, 'Appunti sulla preistoria dell'elegia volgare', in *L'elegia nella tradizione poetica italiana*, ed. by Andrea Comboni and Alessandra Di Ricco (Trento: Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, 2003), pp. 1–15

———, *Dante elegiaco. Una chiave di lettura per la "Vita nova"* (Florence: Olschki, 2006)

Cassidy, James, and Ross Petty, 'Juvenile ankylosing spondylitis', in *Textbook of Paediatric Rheumatology*, ed. by James Cassidy and Ross Petty (Philadelphia: Saunders, 2001), pp. 323–44

Castle, Terry, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Cecchi, Emilio, and Natalino Sapegno, eds, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 9 vols (Milan: Garzanti, 1965–69)

Cerruti, Marco, 'La cultura cattolica. Alfonso Varano', in *Il Settecento e il primo Ottocento*, ed. by Marco Cerruti, Folco Portinari, Ada Novajra, in *Storia della civiltà letteraria italiana*, 8 vols (Turin: UTET, 1993), IV, pp. 225–35

Chastel, André, 'Le baroque et la mort', in *Retorica e Barocco, Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, Venezia 15-18 Giugno 1954*, ed. by Enrico Castelli (Rome: Fratelli Boca, 1955), pp. 33–46

Chura, Amanda Jane, 'The Danse Macabre in Richard Daye's *A Booke Of Christian Prayers* (1581): Prescriptive Instruction To Promptly Prepare For Death' (unpublished master's thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2011)

Cian, Vittorio, 'Per la storia del sentimento sepolcrale in Italia e in Francia prima dei Sepolcri del Foscolo', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana,* 20 (1892), 205–35

Citati, Pietro, *Leopardi* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010)

Clery, Emma J., *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Collins, Jo, and John Jervis, 'Introduction', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1–9

———, eds, *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Coluzzi, Federica, *Dante Beyond Influence: Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021)

Cometa, Michele, *Il Trionfo della morte di Palermo. Un'allegoria della modernità* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017)

Commager, Steele, *The Odes of Horace. A Critical Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967)

Compagnino, Gaetano, Guido Nicastro and Giuseppe Savoca, eds, *La letteratura italiana. Storia e testi*, 10 vols (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1974)

Conforti, Maria, 'The poet who lost his head: Giacomo Leopardi's pathographies', in *Littérature et Médecine. Approches et perspectives (XVIe-XIXe siècles)* ed. by Andrea Carlino and Alexandre Wenger (Génève: Dro, 2007), pp. 135–55

Consoli, Domenico, 'Leopardi e Dante', in *Leopardi e la letteratura italiana dal Duecento al Seicento. Atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani, Recanati 13-16 settembre 1976* (Florence: Olschki, 1978), pp. 39–90

Cornford, Francis M., 'The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's Symposium' in *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed by W. K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968)

Crouzet-Pavan, Elisabeth, and Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Decapitate. Tre donne nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, trans. by Rossana Lista (Turin: Einaudi, 2019)

Cuturri, Paolo, Gianni Doni, Stefano Pratesi, and Daniele Vergari, eds, *Partire partirò, partir bisogna. Firenze e la Toscana nelle campagne napoleoniche, 1793-1815* (Florence: Sarnus, 2009)

Damiani, Rolando, *All'apparir del vero. Vita di Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002)

Davison, Carol Margaret, ed., *The Gothic and Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017)

De Donno, Fabrizio, and Simon Gilson, eds, *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Delcò-Toschini, Sabrina, 'Per il testo dell'"Appressamento"', in *Appressamento della morte* (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002), pp. XXXI–LXV

Delpiano, Patrizia, *Church and Censorship in Eighteenth-Century Governing Reading in The Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 2018)

Delumeau, Jean, *La paura in Occidente. Storia della paura nell'età moderna*, trans. by Paolo Traniello (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2018)

De Montel, Odoardo, *Sulla vita e sulle opere di Salomone Fiorentino. Discorso letto all'Accademia del Buon Volere la sera del 31 ott.* 1852 (Florence: Tipografia nazionale italiana, 1852)

Di Martino, Simona, 'Il fatto di cronaca al femminile nella narrazione dei misteri urbani italiani oltre il romanzo. Il caso di Dino Buzzati e *I misteri d'Italia*', *Transalpina - La letteratura dei "misteri urbani" in Italia: dai modelli ottocenteschi alle riscritture novecentesche*, 25 (forthcoming 2022)

———, '"Orecchie rose e labbra mozze" and Other Bodily Suffering in Alfonso Varano: Dantean Reminiscences in Eighteenth-Century Sepulchral Poetry', *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*, 4 (2021), 121–138

———, 'Sepulchral Poetry and Deathly Motifs. A "Prehistory" of the Italian Gothic', in *Italian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Marco Malvestio and Stefano Serafini (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2022)

D'Intino, Franco, 'XXXIX. "Spento il diurno raggio". Lettura di Franco D'Intino', in *Lectura leopardiana. I quarantuno 'Canti' e 'I nuovi credenti'*, ed. by Armando Maglione (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), pp. 697–720

———, *La caduta e il ritorno. Cinque movimenti dell'immaginario romantico leopardiano* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2019)

———, 'Introduction', in Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino, trans. by Kathleen Baldwin (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), pp. XI–LXVIII

———, 'I misteri di Silvia. Motivo persefoneo e mistica eleusina in Leopardi', *Filologia e critica*, 19 (1994), no. 2, 211–71

———, 'Il Poeta e la tecnica. Le immagini della cera e del reliquiario in Leopardi e Wordsworth', in *Romanticismo europeo e traduzione. Atti del seminario internazionale di Ischia 10-11 aprile 1992*, ed. by Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones, Annalisa Goldoni and Romolo Runcini (Ischia: Valentino editore, 1995), pp. 269–82

Dionisotti, Carlo, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967)

Di Ricco, Alessandra, 'L'elegia amorosa nel Settecento', in *L'elegia nella tradizione poetica italiana*, ed. by Andrea Comboni and Alessandra Di Ricco (Trento: Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, 2003), pp. 215–237

Donati, Alessandro, ed., *Poeti minori del Settecento. Mazza-Rezzonico-Bondi-Fiorentino-Cassoli-Mascheroni* (Bari: Laterza, 1913)

Dörnyei, Zoltán, *Vision, Mental Imagery and the Christian Life. Insights from Science and Scripture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020)

Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966)

Draper, John W., *The Funereal Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1929)

Duncan, Derek, and Heather Webb, 'Corporealities in Italian Studies', *Italian Studies*, 75 (2020), 176–93

van Elferen, Isabella, *Mystical Love in the German Baroque. Theology, Poetry, Music* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2009)

Emiliani Giudici, Paolo, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1855)

Estrin, Barbara L., *Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne and Marvell* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994)

Facchi, Francesca, 'Per una metodologia del protogiallo italiano: Problemi e proposte', *Forum Italicum*, 53 (2019), no. 2, 511–53

Fantato, Michela, *Malinconia, salute, malattia, convalescenza nella letteratura veneta fra Sette e Ottocento. Il caso di Ippolito Pindemonte* (Rome: Cierre Grafica, 2013)

Fedi, Francesca, *Mausolei di sabbia. Sulla cultura figurativa di Leopardi* (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1997)

Fedi, Roberto, *I poeti preferiscono le bionde. Chiome d'oro e letteratura* (Florence: Le Càriti, 2007)

Ferrari, Stefano, *Scrittura come riparazione. Saggio su letteratura e psicoanalisi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007)

Figurelli, Fernando, *La formazione del Leopardi fino al 1819* (Naples: De Simone, 1971)

Flora, Francesco, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 5 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1965)

Foucault, Michel, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971)

———, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1973)

Freud, Sigmund, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005)

———, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003)

Frizzi, Antonio, *Memorie per la storia di Ferrara* (Ferrara: Abram Servadio, 1850)

Frugoni, Chiara, and Simone Facchinetti, *Senza misericordia. Il Trionfo della Morte e la Danza macabra a Clusone* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016)

Frye, Northrop, *Il grande codice. La Bibbia e la letteratura*, trans. by Giovanni Rizzoni (Turin: Einaudi, 1986)

Fubini, Mario, 'Introduzione', in *Lirici del Settecento*, ed. by Bruno Maier (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1959), pp. IX–CXIX

Galbally, Emma, and Conrad Brunström, '"This dreadful machine": the spectacle of death and the aesthetics of crowd control', in *The Gothic and Death*, ed. by Carol Margaret Davison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) pp. 63–75

Gallorini, Santino, *Viva Maria e nazione ebrea. I fatti di monte San Savino e Siena* (Cortona: Calosci, 2009)

Garrison, James D., 'Pietoso Stile: Italian Translations of Gray's "Elegy" to 1900', *MLN*, 121 (2006), no. 1, 167–86

Gaskill, Howard, ed., *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2004)

Geddes da Filicaia, Costanza, *Fuori di Recanati io non sogno. Temi e percorsi di Leopardi epistolografo* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2006)

Genetelli, Christian, 'Appunti sull'"Appressamento della morte" di Giacomo Leopardi', *Versants: Revue Suisse Des Littératures Romanes*, 33 (1998), 83–104

———, 'Introduzione', in *Appressamento della morte* ed. by Christian Genetelli and Sabrina Delcò-Toschini (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2002), pp. IX–XXX

———, 'Leopardi "contra" Byron', *Cenobio*, 44 (1995), 145–54

Ghidetti, Enrico, 'Alle origini della vocazione poetica leopardiana: la cantica "Apressamento della morte"', in *Leopardi oggi. Incontri per il bicentenario della nascita del poeta*, ed. by Bortolo Martinelli (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), pp. 23–47

———, *Il sogno della ragione. Dal racconto fantastico al romanzo popolare* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987)

Gibellini, Cecilia, 'Byron and Leopardi', in *Nuovi quaderni del CRIER. Byron e l'Europa, l'Europa di Byron*, ed. by Francesco Piva, Angelo Righetti and Laura Colombo (Verona: Fiorini, 2008), pp. 215–230

Gilson, Simon, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000)

———, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy. Florence, Venice and the "Divine Poet"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)

Giusti, Francesco, *Canzonieri in morte. Per un'etica poetica del lutto* (L'Aquila: Textus Edizioni, 2015)

Gragnolati, Manuele, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005)

———, 'Nostalgia in Haeven: Embraces, Affection and Identity in the Commedia', in *Dante and the Human Body. Eight Essays*, edited by John C. Barnes e Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) pp. 117–37

Guglielminetti, Marziano, 'Per un'antologia degli autobiografi del Settecento', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 4 (1986), 140–51.

Gunning, Tom, 'Uncanny Reflections, Modern Illusions: Sighting the Modern Optical Uncanny', in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*,

ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 68–90

Habib, M. A. R., *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: A History* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008)

Handley, Sasha, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007)

Hardison, O. B., *Prosody and Purpose in the English Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1989)

Hogle, Jerrold E., 'Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

———, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Holub, Robert C., *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984)

Horner, Avril, ed., *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

———, 'Introduction', in *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760-1960*, ed. by Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

Hudon, William V., '"In The End, God Helped Me Defeat Myself": Autobiographical Writings by Camilla Battista da Varano', *Religions*, 9 (2018), no. 65, 1–21 doi:10.3390/rel9030065

Ingram, Allan, Sim Stuart, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker, and Leigh Wetherall-Dickson, eds, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long*

Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Jajszczok, Justyna, and Aleksandra Musiał, eds, *The Body in History, Culture, and the Arts* (New York & London: Routledge, 2019)

Jauss, Hans Robert, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)

Josz, Aurelia, 'Salomone Fiorentino', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 3 (1926), no. 4, 172–81

Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, eds, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019)

Knöll, Stefanie, and Sophie Oosterwijk, eds, *Mixed Metaphors : The Danse Macabre in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011)

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

Kroppenberg, Inge, 'Law, Religion and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins', *Law and Literature*, 22 (2010), no. 3, 418–39

Lachance, Paul, 'Battista da Varano (1458-1524): A Survey of Her Life and Writing as a Poor Clare Visionary', *Mystics Quarterly*, 20 (1994), no. 1, 19–25

Lazzari, Alfonso, *Parisina* (Florence: Olschki, 1949)

———, *Ugo e Parisina nella realtà storica* (Florence: Rassegna Nazionale, 1915)

Lazzarin, Stefano, Felice Italo Beneduce, Eleonora Conti, Fabrizio Foni, Rita Fresu, and Claudia Zudini, eds, *Il fantastico italiano: bilancio critico e bibliografia commentata (dal 1980 a oggi)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2016)

Le Goff, Jacques, *Il corpo nel Medioevo*, trans. by Fausta Cataldi Villari (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005)

Levi-Malvano, Ettore, *L'elegia amorosa nel Settecento* (Turin: S. Lattes & C. Librai Editori, 1908)

———, 'Salomone Fiorentino e le sue Elegie', in *Miscellanea di studi critici pubblicati in onore di Guido Mazzoni dai suoi discepoli* (Florence: 1907), II, pp. 217–233

Librandi, Rita, *La letteratura religiosa* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012)

Litta, Pompeo, 'Varano di Camerino', in *Famiglie celebri italiane*, 16 vols (Milan: Ferrario, 1819–83), III, p. 47

Lynch, Michael, 'Archives in formation: privileged spaces, popular archives and paper trails', *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999), no. 2, 65–87

Macinante, Alessandra Paola, "*Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi*". *Metamorfosi delle chiome femminili tra Petrarca e Tasso* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2011)

Maffei, Giuseppe, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 7 vols (Naples: Marotta e Vespandoch, 1829–30)

Maier, Bruno, ed., *Lirici del Settecento* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1959)

Malone, Hannah, *Architecture, Death and Nationhood: Monumental Cemeteries of Nineteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2017)

Mariani, Andrea, 'Leopardi e Shelley: appunti per un'analisi contrastiva', *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 8 (1987), no. 1, 1–22

Martinez, Ronald L., 'The Poetry of Schism', in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. Inferno*, ed. by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, 3 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), I, pp. 573–576

Mauron, Charles, *Dalle metafore ossessive al mito personale* (Milan: Garzanti, 1976)

Mazziotti, Anna Maria, 'Per una rilettura delle "Visioni" di Alfonso Varano', *La Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana*, 85 (1981), 114–30

Mazzoni, Luca, 'Dantisti veronesi del Settecento', in *Dante a Verona 2015-2021*, ed. by Edoardo Ferrarini, Paolo Pellegrini, and Simone Pregnolato (Ravenna: Longo, 2018), pp. 153–167

McManners, John, *Death and the Enlightenment. Changing Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth-century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

Middeke, Martin, and Christina Wald, eds, *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Milan, Gabriella, 'Salomone, Fiorentino', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 100 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997) XLVIII <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/salomone-fiorentino_(Dizionario-Biografico)/> [accessed 19 January 2022]

Miles, Robert, 'Seeing Ghosts. The Dark Side of the Enlightenment', in *Haunted Europe. Continental Connections in English-Language Gothic Writing, Film and New Media*, ed. by Michael Newton and Evert Jan van Leeuwen (New York & London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 18–35

———, 'The 1790s: the Effulgence of Gothic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 41–60

Miller, Carolyn, 'Genre as Social Action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70 (1984), no. 2, pp. 151–67

Minici Zotti, Carlo Alberto, ed., *Il Mondo Nuovo. Le meraviglie della visione dal '700 alla nascita del Cinema* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1988)

Minore, Renato, *Leopardi. L'infanzia, le città, gli amori*, ed. by Vincenzo Guarracino (Milan: Bompiani, 1997)

Moloney, Brian, and Gillian Ania, '"Analoghi vituperî": la bibliografia del romanzo dei misteri in Italia', *La Bibliofilía*, 106 (2004), no. 2, 173–213

Momigliano, Attilio, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Messina: Principato, 1932)

Muoni, Guido, *Poesia notturna preromantica* (Milan: Società Editrice Libreria, 1908)

Muscetta, Carlo, and Maria Rosa Massei, eds, *Poesia del Settecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967)

Napoleone, Caterina, 'Il Trionfo della Morte a Palermo', *FMR*, 129 (1998), 83–106

Negri, Renzo, *Gusto e poesia delle rovine in Italia fra il Sette e l'Ottocento* (Milan: Ceschina, 1965)

Neppi, Enzo, 'Ontologia dei Sepolcri', in *'Dei Sepolcri' di Ugo Foscolo*, ed. by Gennaro Barbarisi and William Spaggiari (Milan: Cisalpino, 2006), pp. 165–226

Neppi, Lionella, Modona Viterbo and Sonia Oberdorfer, eds, '1799: un pogrom in toscana', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 53 (1987), no. 3, 241–259

Nicoletti, Giuseppe, 'Le "Elegie" di Salomone Fiorentino: una fonte per i canti pisano-recanatesi?', in *Una giornata leopardiana in ricordo di Walter Binni*, ed. by Mario Martelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 123–30

Palazzolo, Maria Iolanda, 'Il commercio della cultura nel Settecento', *Studi Storici*, 40 (1999), no. 1, 315–28

Pasta, Renato, *Editoria e cultura nel Settecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1997)

Parisot, Eric, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013)

Pavone, Crescenzo, *Le malattie di Giacomo Leopardi* (Naples: Tipografia Giliberti e Massa, 1925)

Pazzi, Gianna, *Stella dei Tolomei. Rivale di Parisina Malatesta* (Rome: Cosmopoli, 1934)

Pera, Francesco, *Ricordi e biografie livornesi* (Livorno: Vigo, 1867)

Peri, Massimo, *Ma il quarto dov'è? Indagine sul topos delle bellezze femminili* (Pisa: ETS, 2004)

Pertile, Lino, 'Introduction to Inferno', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 67–90

Pesenti Campagnoni, Donata, *Verso il cinema. Macchine spettacolari e mirabili visioni* (Turin: UTET, 1995)

Petrucci, Giuseppe, *Ugo d'Este e Parisina Malatesta* (Ferrara: Taddei-Soati, 1903)

Piperno, Martina, 'Mutazione', in *Lessico Leopardiano 2014*, ed. by Novella Bellucci, Franco D'Intino, and Stefano Gensini (Rome: Sapienza Università Editrice, 2014), pp. 101–106

Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. by Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925)

Porter, Roy, *Blood and Guts. A Short History of Medicine* (London: Penguin, 2003)

———, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin, 2003)

Portinari, Folco, *Le parabole del reale: romanzi italiani dell'Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976)

Posfortunato, Lorenza, 'Premessa', in *Appressamento della morte* (Florence: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1983), pp. 7–8

Pozzi, Giovanni, *Alternatim* (Milan: Adelphi, 1996)

———, 'Codici, stereotipi, topoi e fonti letterarie', in *Intorno al "Codice". Atti del III convegno della Associazione italiana di studi semiotici (AISS)* (Florence, 1976), pp. 37–76

———, *La rosa in mano al professore* (Fribourg: Edizioni Universitarie, 1974)

———, *Sull'orlo del visibile parlare* (Milan: Adelphi, 1993)

———, 'Temi, topoi, stereotipi', in *Le forme del testo, 1. Teoria e poesia*, in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), III, pp. 391–436

Price, Roger, *The Church and the State in France, 1789–1870: "Fear of God is the Basis of Social Order"* (Cham: Springer, 2017)

Prosperi, Adriano, 'Il volto della Gorgone. Studi e ricerche sul senso della morte e sulla disciplina delle sepolture tra Medioevo ed età moderna', in *La morte e i suoi riti in Italia tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, ed. by Francesco Salvestrini, Anna Zangarini, and Gian Maria Varanini (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2007), pp. 3–29

Quondam, Amedeo, 'Note sulla tradizione della poesia spirituale e religiosa (parte prima)', in *Paradigma e tradizioni*, ed. by Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006), pp. 127–211

Reina, Francesco, 'Notizie intorno alla famiglia, alla vita, ed agli scritti di A. Varano', in *Opere scelte con la vita del Varano scritta da F. Reina* (Milan: Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1818), pp. III–XVI

Ribola, Valeria, and Paolo Verdarelli, eds, *I volti di una dinastia. I da Varano di Camerino, catalogo della mostra, Camerino, Palazzo Ducale, 21 luglio-4 novembre 2001* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2001)

Roncaglia, Aurelio, *Poesia dell'età cortese* (Milan: Nuova Accademia, 1961)

Russel, Rinaldina, 'Studio dei generi medievali italiani: il Compianto per la morte dell'amata', *Italica*, 54 (1977), no. 4, 449–67

Russo, Mary, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1994)

Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, eds, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill. / Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998)

Santagata, Marco, *Le donne di Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2021)

Santini, Emilio, 'Della "Crestomazia Italiana" e di altre antologie', in *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, series 2, 9 (1940), no. 1/2, 35–64

Savoca, Giuseppe, 'Introduzione', in Giacomo Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La poesia*, ed. by Giuseppe Savoca (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), pp. VII–XXVII

Scalessa, Gabriele, 'Between Medicine and Spiritualism: The Visible and the Invisible in Italian Literature 1865-1901' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2015)

Scianatico, Giovanna, *La questione neoclassica* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010)

Schiesari, Juliana, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992)

Serianni, Luca, 'Sul dantismo di Alfonso Varano. Rilievi linguistici', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 173 (1996), 26–54

———, *Viaggiatori, musicisti, poeti. Saggi di storia della lingua italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 2002)

Serventi, Silvia, 'Lo *status questionis* circa gli scritti di Battista Varano', in *Un desiderio senza misura. La santa Battista Varano e i suoi scritti, Atti della IV giornata di studio sull'Osservanza Francescana al femminile*, 7 novembre 2009, Monastero Clarisse S. Chiara, Camerino, ed. by Pietro Messa, Massimo Reschiglian, Clarisse di Camerino (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2010), pp. 99–120

Settembrini, Luigi, *Lezioni di letteratura italiana*, 3 vols (Naples: Morano, 1872)

Settis Frugoni, Chiara, 'Il tema dell'incontro dei tre vivi e dei tre morti nella tradizione medievale italiana', in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Classe di Scienze Morali, series 8, 13 (1967), no. 3, pp. 145–251

Sganzerla, Erik Pietro, *Malattia e morte di Giacomo Leopardi. Osservazioni critiche e nuova interpretazione diagnostica con documenti inediti* (Milan: BookTime, 2016)

Sganzerla, Erik Pietro and Michele Augusto Riva, 'The Disease of the Italian Poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837). A Case of Juvenile Ankylosing Spondylitis in the 19th Century?', *JCR: Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, 23 (2017), no. 4, 223–25

'The Siege, ecc. L'assedio di Corinto, Poema. Parisina, Poema in 8°. Londra, Murray, 1816', *Spettatore. Parte straniera*, 15 October 1816, 73–78

Singleton, Charles S., ed., 'Paradise', in *Companion to The Divine Comedy*, commentary by C. H. Grandgent (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1795), pp. 211–302

Smith, Andrew, *Gothic Death 1740–1914. A Literary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)

Soergel, Philip M., ed., *Arts and Humanities Through the Eras: The Age of the Baroque and Enlightenment (1600–1800)* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005)

Solerti, Angelo, 'Ugo e Parisina. Storia e leggenda secondo nuovi documenti', *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 45 (1893), fascicolo XII-15, 61–84.

Spaggiari, William, 'Da Lisbona alle Calabrie. La catastrofe e i lumi', in *Città e rovine letterarie nel XVIII secolo italiano*, ed. by Silvia Fabrizio-Costa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007)

———, *Geografie letterarie. Da Dante a Tabucchi* (Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2015)

Spentzou, Efrossini, and Don Fowler, eds, *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Stramaglia, Antonio, *Res inauditae, incredulae. Storie di fantasmi nel mondo greco-latino* (Bari: Levante, 1999)

Tagliapietra, Andrea, ed., *Sulla catastrofe. L'illuminismo e la filosofia del disastro. Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004)

Tatum, Karen E., *Explaining the Depiction of Violence Against Women in Victorian Literature. Applying Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection to Dickens, Brontë, and Braddon* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005)

Tellini, Gino, *Leopardi* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2001)

Tenenti, Alberto, *Humana fragilitas, i temi della morte in Europa tra Duecento e Settecento* (Clusone: Ferrari Editrice, 2000)

———, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957)

Terzoli, Maria Antonietta, *Foscolo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000)

Tomasi, Grazia, *Per salvare i viventi. Le origini settecentesche del cimitero extraurbano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001)

Tomasin, Lorenzo, *"Scriver la vita". Lingua e stile nell'autobiografia italiana del Settecento* (Florence: Cesati, 2009)

Tusiani, Giuseppe, 'Osservazioni su "La Virtù Indiana" di Giacomo Leopardi', *Italica*, 28 (1951), no. 2, 111–114

Vassanyi, Miklos, Eniko Sepsi and Aniko Droczi, eds, *Immediacy of Mystical Experience in The European Tradition* (Cham: Springer, 2017)

Verzini, Riccardo, 'Introduzione', in Alfonso Varano, *Visioni sacre e morali*, ed. by Riccardo Verzini (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2003), pp. 9–37

van Vliet, Rietje, 'Print and Public in Europe 1600–1800', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), pp. 424–36

Walker Bynum, Caroline, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

Webb, Heather, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Webster Goodwin, Sarah, and Elisabeth Bronfen, eds, *Death and Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)

Wetmore, Alex, *Men of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Literature. Touching Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Wolfreys, Julian, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002)

Zarri, Gabriella, 'L'autobiografia religiosa negli scritti di Camilla Battista da Varano: "La vita spirituale" (1491) e le "Istruzioni al discepolo" (1501)', in *"In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria". Verità e finzioni dell'"io" autobiografico*, ed. by Francesco Bruni (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), pp. 133–58

Zumbini, Bonaventura, *Studi di letteratura italiana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1894)

Zwierlein, Anne-Julia, 'Male Pregnancies, Virgin Births, Monsters of the Mind: Early Modern Melancholia and (Cross-)Gendered Constructions of Creativity', in *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*, ed. by Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 35–49