



Virgilian Heroism(s) in Giacomo Leopardi's *All'Italia*

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Abstract

This article examines the Virgilian echoes in Giacomo Leopardi's *All'Italia*, focusing on how Leopardi drew on heroic figures from Virgil's *Aeneid* to shape his vision of modern heroism.

The study begins by analysing Leopardi's views on Aeneas, contrasted with the Homeric heroes, as expressed in the *Zibaldone*. Through a close examination of textual and thematic allusions to the *Aeneid* in *All'Italia*, particularly to *Aeneid 2*, the article identifies three forms of heroism in Leopardi's poem: the poet's anguished willingness to sacrifice himself for his homeland, echoing Aeneas's helplessness before the fall of Ilium; the tragic and selfless love of a hero resembling Coroebus; and the aspiration for poetic immortality voiced through Simonides, whose fame is inseparably linked with the Spartan soldiers he commemorates.

*Leopardi's works are quoted from: G. Leopardi, *Poesie e prose*, ed. M. A. Rigoni (vol. I) and R. Damiani (vol. II), 2 vols, Milan, 1987–1988 (abbreviated as *PP*); *Zibaldone*, ed. R. Damiani, 3 vols, Milan, 1997 (abbreviated as *Zib.* with manuscript page numbers). Manuscript page numbers of the *Zibaldone* are provided in square brackets at the end of each citation. Leopardi's translation of *Aeneid 2* is quoted from *PP*, vol. I, and abbreviated as *Tr.Aen.* English translations are taken from: G. Leopardi, *Canti*, transl. J. Galassi, London, 2010; G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. M. Caesar and F. D'Intino, New York, 2013.

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Introduction

The recognition of a prominent heroic dimension in Giacomo Leopardi's poetry emerged in scholarship during the latter half of the 20th century and is now regarded as an indisputable achievement. This perspective moves beyond the notion of Leopardi's 'vita strozzata'¹ and the reduction of his poetic legacy to the idyllic poems of the *Canti*.² Leopardi's enduring admiration for Greek poetry has led scholars to seek models of Leopardian heroism primarily in the Homeric epics. Scholars have highlighted Leopardi's fascination with both Hector and Achilles in the *Iliad*: Hector represents the defeated hero who sacrifices life for his homeland, while Achilles captivates Leopardi for his sorrow as a hero aware of his fate to die young, making him admirable and lovable at the same time.³ Above all, in Leopardi's interpretation, the Homeric heroes embody the supreme vitality of the Ancient Age.

Such a revered and unattainable ancient model is always interwoven, in Leopardi's oeuvre, with echoes of modern authors. Alongside his identification with Homeric heroes and his efforts to emulate their way of feeling, crying, and even facing death, Leopardi's conception of heroism also embraces modern voices, chief among them Virgil.⁴

Leopardi's poetic debt to Virgil—especially evident in the *Canzoni* composed between 1818 and 1823—is well known.⁵ However, less emphasis has been placed on how Leopardi's constant reference to Virgil's poetry shapes his own conception of heroism. While Leopardi celebrates Homeric heroes, he frequently turns to Virgilian models, as if his theoretical preference for the ancient valour is subtly

¹ This expression can be translated into English as 'thwarted life' or 'suppressed life'. It was coined by Benedetto Croce to describe how Leopardi, despite his willingness, was unable to actively engage with historical events due to his biographical circumstances.

² As foundational works on this matter, see W. Binni, *La nuova poetica leopardiana*, Florence, 1947; W. Binni, *La protesta di Leopardi*, Florence, 1973.

³ See G. Arrighetti, 'Leopardi e Omero', in *Leopardi e il mondo antico. Atti del V Convegno Internazionale di studi leopardiani (Recanati, 22–25 settembre 1980)*, ed. U. Bosco, Florence, 1982, pp. 29–51; G. Lonardi, 'Due figure epico-mitiche tra *Zibaldone* e *Canti*. Ettore, Achille', in *Le mythe repensé dans l'oeuvre de Giacomo Leopardi*, ed. P. Abbrugiati, Aix-en-Provence, 2016, pp. 255–61; G. Lonardi, *L'Achille dei «Canti»*. Leopardi, «L'infinito», *il poema del ritorno a casa*, Florence, 2017. On the pervasive presence of Homer in Leopardi's works, see G. Lonardi, *Classicismo e utopia nella lirica leopardiana*, Florence, 1969, pp. 3–110; G. Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero. L'«Iliade»*, Saffo: *antichissimi di Leopardi*, Venice, 2005. On the influence of Vincenzo Monti's translation on Leopardi's reading of Homer, see D. Vanden Berghe, 'Osservazioni sull'omerismo leopardiano', *Italianistica*, 30, 2, 2001, pp. 341–61.

⁴ On Virgil as a modern poet, in comparison with Homer, recalling Schiller's distinction between "naive" and "sentimental" poetry, see G. B. Conte, *Virgilio: l'epica del sentimento*, Turin, 2007, pp. 91–124.

⁵ A significant number of references to Virgil has been collected in Luigi Blasucci's commentary on the *Canti*; see G. Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. L. Blasucci, 2 vols, Milan, 2019–2021. Particularly relevant are the textual contact points between Leopardi's poetic language and his translation of *Aeneid* 2; see L. Blasucci, 'Una fonte linguistica per i «Canti»: la traduzione del secondo libro dell'«Eneide»', in Id., *Leopardi e i segnali dell'infinito*, Bologna, 1985, pp. 9–30; G. Leopardi, *Poeti greci e latini*, ed. F. D'Intino, Rome, 1999, pp. 315–97. Another notable area of Leopardi's allusions to Virgil is found in the marginal notes within the manuscripts of the *Canzoni*; see L. Blasucci, 'L'autocommento alle *Canzoni*: dalle note autografe alle *Annotazioni*', in Id., *I tempi dei «Canti»*. *Nuovi studi leopardiani*, Turin, 1996, pp. 44–61.

“diverted” toward a closer and more accessible form of *modern heroism*. In the *Canzoni*, then, Leopardi crafts heroes who resemble Aeneas or Dido more often than Achilles or Hector.

Focusing on *All'Italia*, I aim to trace its most significant Virgilian echoes and examine how they contribute to specific forms of heroism embodied by Leopardi's characters—that is, by Leopardi himself, as a character within his own poetry,⁶ and by the poet Simonides, whose song occupies the second part of *All'Italia*.

Leopardi and Aeneas

It is first useful to outline Leopardi's general view of Virgil's main hero, Aeneas. From as early as page 289 of the *Zibaldone* (dated 20 October 1820), there is no doubt where Leopardi's sympathies lie in the comparison between Aeneas and the model of Homeric warriors:

Così dunque loderemo sempre più l'Achille difettoso di Omero, che l'Enea, il perfetto eroe di Virgilio, a cagione della credibilità, del vantaggio che ne cava l'illusione e la persuasione [289].

Thus, we will always praise Homer's flawed Achilles more than Virgil's perfect Aeneas on the grounds of credibility and of the advantages that illusion and persuasion gain thereby [289].

Throughout Leopardi's comparison of Homer and Virgil, a distinct pattern emerges: Homer's natural imperfection is set against Virgil's unnatural perfection, with *nature* contrasted to *artifice*.⁷ Leopardi links the relative “naturalness” of

⁶ On Leopardi's self-representation as a character within his own poetry, see M. Piperno, ‘Nothing to Declare? Authorship and Contradiction In and Around Giacomo Leopardi's *Canti*’, *The Italianist*, 37, 1, 2017, pp. 36–49; M. Dondero, *Leopardi personaggio. Il poeta nei Canti e nella letteratura italiana contemporanea*, Rome, 2020, pp. 11–54.

⁷ The comparison between Homer and Virgil found a significant formulation in Quint. *inst.* 10.1.85–6, where Virgil is described as ‘*Secundus ... propior tamen primo quam tertio*’. Late Antiquity carried on with this comparison, viewing Virgil's *Aeneid* as a successful imitation of the Greek original, while the Renaissance tended to favour Virgil over Homer; see A. Wlosok, *Res humanae, res divinae*, Heidelberg, 1990, pp. 476–98. On the opposite tendency in the context of German Romanticism, see Conte, *Virgilio* (n. 4 above), pp. 91–5 and pp. 125–8; K. Haynes, ‘Classic Vergil’, in *A Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and Its Tradition*, ed. J. Farrell and M. Putnam, Malden-Oxford, 2010, pp. 427–8. Further bibliography about the history of Virgil–Homer comparisons in F. Mac Góráin, ‘Authority’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. F. Mac Góráin and C. Martindale, Cambridge, 2019², p. 449. It is not straightforward to determine to what extent Leopardi engaged consciously with these debates. Among the critiques favouring Homer over Virgil in the 18th century that likely influenced Leopardi's views, we may note Francesco Algarotti and Alexander Pope; see A. Forlini, ‘Omero e la poesia moderna: l'ermeneutica sentimentale del Leopardi’, *Intersezioni*, 2, 1983, pp. 317–45. Voltaire's *Essai sur la poésie épique* favoured Virgil; Leopardi, who was certainly familiar with the essay, reversed this judgment when comparing ancient and modern epic poems in *Zib.* 3095–167; see W. Moretti, ‘Presupposti arcadico-illuministici del discorso leopardiano intorno all'epica antica e moderna’, in *Leopardi e il Settecento. Atti del I Convegno Internazionale di studi leopardiani (Recanati, 13–16 settembre 1962)*, Florence, 1964, pp. 447–57.

each poet to that of their heroes: just as he preferred Homer, so too did he favour Achilles.⁸

In *Zib.* 289, Leopardi focuses on the ‘credibility’ of the actions of Achilles and Aeneas and the resulting ‘illusion and persuasion’ they evoke in the reader’s mind. However, in passages where Leopardi’s comparison between Homer’s epics and the *Aeneid* becomes more rigorous, it is clear that the very concept of heroic virtue is in question, along with the traditionally stark division between an ancient paradigm (Homer) and a modern one (Virgil):

e chi vuol notare la totale diversità che passa tra il carattere e l’idea della virtù eroica che si formarono questi due poeti, e che l’uno esprime in Achille e l’altro in Enea, consideri questo luogo dell’Eneide (X. 521–36) dov’Enea fattosi sopra Magone che gittandosi in terra e abbracciandogli le ginocchia, lo supplica miserabilmente di lasciarlo in vita e di farlo cattivo, risponde, che morto Pallante, non ha più luogo co’ Rutuli alcuna misericordia nè alcun commercio di guerra, e spietatamente pigliandolo per la celata, gl’immerge la spada dietro al collo per insino all’elsa. Questa scena e questo pensiero è tolto di peso da Omero [...]. Ma chiunque bene osservi vedrà che siccome questa scena riesce naturalissima e conveniente in Omero, così riesce forzosissima e fuor di luogo in Virgilio, e ripugna all’idea che il lettore si era formato sì del carattere di Enea, sì della virtù eroica generalmente, dietro alle tracce di quel poema: anzi, dirò anche, ripugna all’idea che se n’era formata lo stesso Virgilio [2760–1].

and anyone who wishes to note the complete diversity which exists between the character and idea of heroic virtue which those two poets formed, and which one expressed in Achilles and the other in Aeneas, let him consider that passage in the *Aeneid* (10, ll. 521–36) where Aeneas having attacked Mago who, throwing himself to the ground and embracing his knees, abjectly begged him to spare his life and take him captive, replies that with Pallas dead there is no place for any mercy or any treaty with the Rutuli, and mercilessly grabbing him by the helmet buried his sword in his neck up to the hilt. This scene and this thought is taken entirely from Homer [...]. But anyone who examines this carefully will see that as this scene proves to be most natural and fitting in Homer, so it seems extremely forced and out of place in Virgil, and is at odds with the idea which the reader had formed both of the character of Aeneas and of heroic virtue in general, following in the footsteps of that poem. Even more, I will also say, is it at odds with the idea of it which Virgil himself had formed [2760–1].

⁸ A preliminary indication of this comparison appears at the very beginning of the *Zibaldone*: ‘e noi proviamo che ci piace più Achille che Enea ec. onde è falso anche che quello di Virgilio sia maggior poema ec.’ [2] (‘and we find that we like Achilles more than Aeneas, etc., so that it is also untrue that Virgil’s poem is greater, etc.’).

In these pages, written on 11 June 1823, Homer's Agamemnon⁹ and Virgil's Aeneas represent two contrasting ideals of heroic virtue: the Homeric valour that shows no pity toward the enemy, and the Virgilian virtue that extends compassion to the vanquished. For Leopardi, it seems highly unnatural and contrived when Aeneas adopts the ferocity typical of Homeric heroes.¹⁰

An intriguing parallel emerges here between Leopardi's observations and the critical debates about Aeneas's character that gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century. Modern scholars have identified a tension within the figure of Aeneas, oscillating between *pious* Aeneas and *ferox* Aeneas, the hero blinded by rage after Pallas's death and capable of actions that seem to undermine his *pietas*,¹¹ culminating in the killing of the suppliant Turnus. Aeneas's fury in *Aeneid* 10—a kind of overwhelming μῆνις that overtakes the pious hero—has been linked not only to the wrath of Achilles but also to the savage ferocity of Pyrrhus in *Aeneid* 2, leading some scholars to describe it as a paradoxical 'pietas of vengeance'.¹²

Leopardi's reading of the Mago episode in *Aeneid* 10 demonstrates his critical insight into a key aspect of Aeneas's character: the ambiguous and problematic nature of his wrath. This wrath does not always align with insanity (nor with *furor* or Homeric ἄτη) and, particularly in the poem's conclusion, Virgil may have deliberately left its interpretation open to question.¹³ We might argue that this fury is not necessarily foreign to Aeneas's heroic identity; on the contrary, it may complement the many dimensions Virgil intended for him, portraying Aeneas as both the executor of *fatum* and a character of flesh and blood.¹⁴ However, this multiplicity of traits in Aeneas appears unnatural to Leopardi, underscoring once again, in his view, the artificiality of Aeneas compared to the natural imperfection—and far greater charm—of Achilles.

In his short essay on epic poetry, spanning pages 3095 to 3167 of the *Zibaldone* (5–11 August 1823), Leopardi delves further into his comparison of Homeric and Virgilian heroes. Once again, this comparison is based on two opposing concepts of virtue; however, this time, Leopardi also considers the differing outcomes these

⁹ Leopardi is referring here to the episode of Agamemnon killing suppliant Adrestus, after the hesitation of Menelaus, in *Il.* 6.37–65.

¹⁰ On criticism and justification of Aeneas's rage as a way to take on the role of Achilles in the poem, see Mac Góráin, 'Authority' (n. 7 above), pp. 451–3.

¹¹ Consider, in particular, the episode of Aeneas's fight with Lausus and Mezentius (*Aen.* 10.791–908), which Putnam interprets as a moment of profound ambiguity, where the *pietas* of Aeneas ultimately kills the *pietas* of Lausus; see M. Putnam, 'Pius Aeneas and the metamorphosis of Lausus', *Arethusa* 14, 1, 1981, pp. 139–56.

¹² See M. Putnam, *The Humanness of Heroes. Studies in the Conclusion of Virgil's Aeneid*, Amsterdam, 2011, p. 20. For previous "pessimistic" readings of Aeneas's rage, see C. Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil. 'Pessimistic' Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 30–50; see also Lact. *inst.* 5.10.1–9.

¹³ See D. Konstan, 'The Passions of Achilles and Aeneas: Translating Greece into Rome', *Electronic Antiquity*, 14, 1, 2011, pp. 7–22.

¹⁴ See H. Stahl, 'Aeneas - An 'unheroic' hero?', *Arethusa*, 14, 1, 1981, pp. 157–77 (171): 'Virgil has conceived Aeneas not as a Kantian hero (whose morality is based on a concept of cool-headed duty which excludes emotional consent), but as a flesh-and-blood character who is able to experience the ecstasies of patriotic heroism as well as the immediate appeal of justice violated or unfulfilled'.

virtues produce in terms of happiness. He observes that Homeric virtue is defined primarily by strength and courage, qualities that lead—both in ancient and modern times—to fortune and happiness. In contrast, modern virtue is rooted in moral and philosophical reasoning and serves as an obstacle to happiness rather than a path to it.¹⁵ Thus, we might conclude that the ancient hero was (physically) virtuous and happy, while the modern hero is expected to be (morally) virtuous and unhappy.

In these same pages, Leopardi argues that happy virtue often fails to captivate the reader, particularly the modern reader, who lacks any patriotic attachment to the events described in the poem. The timeless appeal of Homer's *Iliad*, he claims, lies in the fact that Homer created two contrasting heroes: Achilles, who is virtuous and happy, and Hector, who is also virtuous, but unfortunate. It is towards Hector—and the doomed Trojans he strives to defend, knowing they will fall after his death—that readers through the centuries direct their deepest emotional engagement with the *Iliad*.

It is worth noting that, based on these premises, Aeneas appears to have an opportunity to shine. If he cannot embody a Homeric hero—as we have seen—because his virtue is modelled on the modern concept, he might at least stand as an unfortunate hero, like Hector, given that modern virtue, as Leopardi observes, often leads to unhappiness and misfortune. However, this is not the case in the *Aeneid*. Virgil intended his central hero to be both virtuous (*pius Aeneas*) and successful, reserving the element of compassion for specific episodes and secondary—yet significant—characters:

Nell'Eneide l'interesse della compassione non v'è. Dico non v'è, come interesse finale. Quello che si concepisce per Didone, quello per Niso ed Eurialo sono interessi episodici che non ci accompagnano se non per piccola parte del poema, nè hanno che fare colla sostanza e collo scopo di esso, talmente che possono affatto risecarsi senza che la testura nè il principale e finale effetto del poema per nulla se ne risentano o ne siano cangiati. L'interesse per l'Eroe felice, cioè per Enea, e per la parte felice, cioè per li troiani, dovette esser mediocre anche a principio, come di sopra ho mostrato, ed ora è più che mediocre. E ciò, non ostante che il lettore di Virgilio non possa quasi a meno di trasferire o di continuare ne' fortunati troiani dell'Eneide quell'interesse ch'egli ha conceputo per gli sfortunati e vinti troiani della Iliade [3144–5].

In the *Aeneid*, the interest generated by compassion is absent. When I say absent, I mean in terms of the final interest. What is conceived with respect to Dido, Nisus, and Euryalus are episodic interests, which accompany us for but a small part of the poem, which have no connection with either its substance or purpose, to the extent that these episodes may even be cut, without the texture, or the principal and final effect, of the poem being in any way thereby affected or altered. Interest in the successful Hero, that is, in Aeneas, and the successful side, that is, the Trojans, must have been slight from earliest times, as I have shown above, and nowadays is less than slight. And this despite the fact

¹⁵ See *Zib.* 3134–5.

that the reader of Virgil almost cannot help but transfer his interest from the unfortunate, defeated Trojans in the *Iliad* to the fortunate Trojans of the *Aeneid* [3144–5].

These pages from the *Zibaldone* appear to offer little chance for Aeneas to capture Leopardi's interest. Unable to display the vigorous heroism of Achilles, Aeneas also falls short of embodying a modern hero characterised by unfortunate moral virtue. By linking virtue with success and happiness, he emerges as an exceptionally cold character, far removed from the impetuous passions that Leopardi seeks in poetry.¹⁶

However, the conclusion of the quoted passage from *Zib.* 3145 offers a different perspective on Leopardi's relationship with Virgil's hero. Leopardi acknowledges that readers of the *Aeneid* (including himself) tend to feel compassion for the Trojans, a sentiment rooted in the empathy for the defeated Trojans they remember from the *Iliad*. It is no coincidence, then, that Leopardi's initial interest in the *Aeneid* was particularly drawn to its Second Book—that is, the section where Aeneas and the Trojans assume the role of the vanquished, completing the *Iliad*'s narrative by recounting the final night of Troy from an internal perspective. In 1816, at the age of eighteen, Leopardi translated the entire book, adding an introduction that reveals his deep engagement with the events narrated and his admiration for Virgil's poetry:

Perciocchè letta la Eneide (sì come sempre soglio, letta qual cosa è, o mi pare veramente bella), io andava del continuo spasimando, e cercando maniera di far mie, ove si potesse in alcuna guisa, quelle divine bellezze; nè mai ebbi pace infinchè non ebbi patteggiato con me medesimo, e non mi fui avventato al secondo Libro del sommo poema, il quale più degli altri mi avea tocco, sì che in leggerlo, senza avvedermene, lo recitava, cangiando tuono quando si convenia, e infocandomi e forse talora mandando fuori alcuna lagrima. Messomi all'impresa, so ben dirti avere io conosciuto per prova che senza esser poeta non si può tradurre un vero poeta, e meno Virgilio, e meno il secondo Libro della Eneide, caldo tutto quasi ad un modo dal principio al fine.¹⁷

After reading the *Aeneid* (as has always been my habit after reading something that is or seems truly beautiful), I was overcome with emotion, trying to find a way to make those divine beauties mine, if it were somehow possible. Nor could I find peace until I came to a decision and plunged into the second book of the great poem, which had moved me more than any other, so much so that, while reading, I was reciting it aloud without realising it, changing my tone of voice where appropriate, becoming excited and maybe at times even shedding some tears. I can say that, when I started the work, I understood from experience that it is not possible to translate true poetry without being yourself a poet, and this applies even more to Virgil, and even more to the second book of the *Aeneid*, which is full of pathos virtually from start to finish.

¹⁶ On the 'coldness' of Aeneas, see *Zib.* 3607–13 (3–6 October 1823).

¹⁷ *Traduzione del libro secondo della Eneide*, in *PP*, vol. I, pp. 554–5. On Leopardi's translation as a chapter in the history of translations from Virgil, see G. Scafoglio, 'Only a Poet Can Translate True Poetry. The Translation of *Aeneid* 2 by Giacomo Leopardi', in *Virgil and His Translators*, ed. S. Braund and Z. Torlone, Oxford, 2018, pp. 305–17 (the English translation is taken from p. 307).

Just a few years before writing the pages of the *Zibaldone* that compare Homer's and Virgil's characters, Leopardi offers a strikingly different assessment of the *Aeneid's* impact on the reader, particularly its Second Book. For Leopardi, who is drawn to defeated heroes like Hector, it feels natural to identify with the vanquished Aeneas during the fall of Troy.¹⁸ More than that: in *this* Aeneas, Leopardi can find a quality absent in any Homeric hero, a kind of virtue aligned with and accessible to his own time. To Leopardi, the Aeneas of *Aeneid* 2 embodies, in fact, the ideal *modern hero*: virtuous in a modern sense and profoundly unfortunate.

Before analysing the text of *All'Italia* and evaluating the extent to which the heroic model of Aeneas influences the poem, let us briefly consider another intriguing instance of Leopardi's self-identification with Aeneas. Although this connection is discernible only in a subtle allusion, it is particularly significant as it pertains to Aeneas's wrath, a trait that, as we have seen, Leopardi would later criticise as a flaw in Virgil's hero.

In his autobiographical notes written in 1819,¹⁹ Leopardi portrays himself as embodying two key attributes of Aeneas. The first is his pity for the death of youth: 'storia di Teresa da me poco conosciuta e interesse ch'io ne prendeva come di tutti i morti giovani' ('story of Teresa, whom I barely knew, and my interest in her, much like the interest I felt for all young people who passed away'),²⁰ 'mio dolore in veder morire i giovini come a veder bastonare una vite carica d'uve immature' ('my sorrow at seeing young people die like seeing a vine laden with unripe grapes being struck with a stick'),²¹ 'così mi duole veder morire un giovine come segare una messe verde verde o sbattere giù da un albero i pomi bianchi ed acerbi' ('so it pains me to see a young person die like cutting down a green harvest or knocking unripe white apples off a tree').²² The second attribute is his wrath: 'Compiacente e lezioso da piccolo ma terribile nell'ira e per la rabbia ito in proverbio tra' fratelli più cattivi assai nel resto' ('Eager to please and affected as a child, but terrible in wrath, and for my rage I became proverbial among my siblings, who were far more wicked in other respects').²³ This latter note closely echoes *Aen.* 12.946–7, where Aeneas, blinded by wrath upon seeing Pallas's belt on Turnus (*furiis accensus et ira / terribilis*), kills him. The final scene of the *Aeneid*, in which the rights of a suppliant are overridden by the desire for revenge, resurfaces in Leopardi's notes. Aeneas—grieving for the fallen Pallas and consumed by uncontrollable wrath against Turnus—may have

¹⁸ For Aeneas in *Aeneid* 2 as a "psychological" model for Leopardi, see Blasucci, 'Una fonte linguistica' (n. 5 above), pp. 24–30.

¹⁹ These pages are commonly referred to by various titles, with *Ricordi d'infanzia e di adolescenza*, first coined and adopted by Francesco Flora, among the most frequently used. For a discussion of the text, its editions, and titles, see G. Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, ed. F. D'Intino, Rome, 1995, pp. 145–54.

²⁰ *Ricordi d'infanzia e di adolescenza*, in *PP*, vol. II, p. 1192. English translations are my own.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1194.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1196.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 1188.

served as a model through which Leopardi imagined depicting himself in a future (though unrealised) autobiography.²⁴

It is worth noting that the *Aeneid* and Aeneas appear elsewhere in these autobiographical pages. Particularly significant for our analysis is the passage 'notato quel far tornar Enea indietro nel secondo libro' ('noted that detail of making Aeneas turn back in the Second Book'),²⁵ which again highlights the enduring resonance of the *Aeneid*'s Second Book in Leopardi's poetic imagination. From here, we must begin our examination of Leopardi's *All'Italia* and its dialogue with Virgil's heroes.

All'Italia: fighting for the homeland

All'Italia is the first poem in Leopardi's *Canti*, composed in September 1818 and first published in early 1819 (though dated 1818) alongside *Sopra il monumento di Dante*. The poem has consistently occupied the opening position in all three editions of Leopardi's *Canti* (1831, 1835, and 1845), as well as in the collection of the *Canzoni* (1824).

To examine the dialogue between *All'Italia* and Virgil, one does not need to look far. This analysis can begin with the poem's opening words ('O patria mia'; 'O my country'),²⁶ which echo Aeneas's invocation in *Aen.* 2.241–2 (*O patria, o divum domus Ilium et incluta bello / moenia Dardanidum!*; 'O my country! O Ilium, home of gods, and you Dardan battlements, famed in war!'),²⁷ as translated by Leopardi in *Tr.Aen.* 337 ('O patria mia...'). In his translation, Leopardi introduces the possessive adjective 'mia', a technique he often employs to heighten the pathos,²⁸ particularly in Aeneas's apostrophes to his fallen homeland. Although it may incorporate other modern influences (notably Petrarch's *RVF* 128), the initial invocation to the doomed *patria* that Leopardi seeks to defend carries, in some sense, the voice of Aeneas and his heroic model from *Aeneid* 2, as mediated through Leopardi's translation completed a few years before *All'Italia*.

Following the mention of a landscape of Roman ruins, the first stanza describes Italy as a beautiful woman (l. 10: 'formosissima donna'; 'beautiful lady') who is wounded and bound as a prisoner:

Chi la ridusse a tale? E questo è peggio,
Che di *catene* ha carche ambe le braccia;
Sì che *sparte le chiome* e senza velo

²⁴ See M.A. Terzoli, 'I buoi del sole e l'ira di Enea. Ipotesi su una mancata autobiografia di Giacomo Leopardi', *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 3, 1, 2000, pp. 121–70 (152–4).

²⁵ *Ricordi* (n. 19 above), p. 1190. Leopardi is referring here to the episode of *Aen.* 2.749–94.

²⁶ *All'Italia*, l. 1.

²⁷ Virgil's Latin texts are cited from Publius Vergilius Maro, *Aeneis*, ed. G.B. Conte, Berlin/Boston, 2019². English translations of Virgil are taken from Virgil, *Eclogues - Georgics - Aeneid I–VI*, trans. by H. R. Fairclough, rev. by G. P. Goold, Cambridge (Mass.)/London, 1999³.

²⁸ On the influence of Annibal Caro's version on this aspect of Leopardi's approach to translation, see G. Corsalini, «*La notte consumata indarno*». *Leopardi e i traduttori dell'Eneide*, Macerata, 2014, pp. 35–6.

Siede in terra neglecta e sconsolata²⁹

[...] Who did this to her?
 And, worse, her arms
 are bound with chains;
 hair undone, without her veil,
 she sits alone and hopeless on the ground

Significantly, several details in this description of Italy reminds us of Cassandra, the daughter of Priam, who is seized by the Achaeans in *Aen.* 2.403–6, where Virgil provides a brief yet intensely poignant portrait: *Ecce trahebatur passis Priameia virgo / crinibus Priameia virgo / crinibus a templo Cassandra adytisque Minervae / ad caelum tendens ardentia lumina frustra, / lumina, nam teneras arcebant vincula palmas* ('Lo! Priam's daughter, the maiden Cassandra, was being dragged with streaming hair from the temple and shrine of Minerva, vainly uplifting to heaven her blazing eyes—her eyes, for bonds confined her tender hands'). With 'sparte le chiome' (l. 14) Leopardi recalls the phrase he chose to render *passis ... crinibus* in *Tr.Aen.* 549; the *vincula* that bind Cassandra's hands become the 'catene' weighing down Italy's arms (l. 13). Moreover, Cassandra's *ardentia lumina* may find an echo in Italy's 'tremebondi lumi' (l. 49),³⁰ and the same line would later surely be borne in mind by Leopardi and used to give voice to Sappho in the *Ultimo canto di Saffo*, ll. 26–7: 'e le pupille invano / supplichevole intendo' (in this instance, Leopardi explicitly notes the reference to *Aen.* 2.405 in the manuscript margin).

The identification of Italy with the chained Cassandra not only underscores the pervasive influence of *Aeneid* 2 at the outset of the *Canti*, but also may provide further insight into the heroic models Leopardi engages with in *All'Italia*. Observing that no one rises to defend the wounded lady, the poet steps forward, offering himself for battle and expressing his willingness to die. At this point, two simultaneous allusions to *Aeneid* 2 emerge, invoking distinct episodes from Virgil's narrative and creating an implicit comparison between them:

Nessun pugna per te? non ti difende
 Nessun de' tuoi? L'armi, qua l'armi: io solo
 Combatterò, procomberò sol io.³¹

No one fights for you? None of your own defend you?
 To arms! Bring me my sword:
 I'll fight alone, I'll fall alone.

The exclamation of l. 37 ('L'armi, qua l'armi') is a clear echo of *Aen.* 2.668 (*Arma, viri, ferte arma*), rendered in *Tr.Aen.* 902 as 'Armi, qua l'armi'. It is worthwhile to recall the context in which these words appear in *Aeneid* 2. Aeneas, having

²⁹ *All'Italia*, ll. 12–15.

³⁰ See Blasucci, 'Una fonte linguistica' (n. 5 above), pp. 26–7.

³¹ *All'Italia*, ll. 36–8.

already endured the *nyktomachia* and witnessed Priam's death, returns home to his family. There, his father Anchises refuses to leave the city, despite all hope being lost. Aeneas, in response, declares his intention to die in battle while defending his homeland. This mirrors his earlier state after dreaming of Hector, when he was overcome by *furor iraque* (*Aen.* 2.316) and longed to seek a *pulchra mors* in combat. However, sudden prodigies persuade Anchises to change his mind, leading Aeneas and his family to begin their escape from Ilium, which occupies the final section of *Aeneid* 2. When Aeneas utters this exclamation, he is *no longer* heading into battle; his desire to die defending his homeland is overridden by *fatum*, which demands that he remain alive, no matter how willing he is to sacrifice himself. Despite his wish to die, Aeneas—the *pious Aeneas*, whose heroic model was not particularly appealing to Leopardi—ultimately accepts and fulfils his destined role.

Next to Aeneas's exclamation, another close reference to *Aeneid* 2 appears in these verses, specifically in the verb 'procomberò' at l. 38. Leopardi notes in the margin of the manuscript: 'primusq. Coroebus ... *Procumbit.* *Aen.* 2' (the emphasis is by the author). Following Leopardi's note, all commentaries cite this line by Virgil. However, it has so far been overlooked that this allusion introduces an additional model of heroism in *All'Italia*, one that is somehow complementary to Aeneas's model.

Let us examine Leopardi's note more closely. Leopardi does not specify the exact line numbers, only writing 'Aen. 2'. This may indicate Leopardi's strong familiarity with this passage, or more significantly that he is not *solely* focused on the precise line containing the verb *procumbo*, but rather on the broader episode in which Coroebus is the main character, culminating in his death. Even though the focus should be on the verb *procumbit*, Leopardi's note also recalls the subject of the verb, Coroebus, and the predicative adjective *primus*, which underscores the heroic virtue of his death.

In *Aen.* 2.407–8, right after the description of Cassandra being dragged away as a prisoner by the Achaeans, Coroebus cannot bear the sight and throws himself into battle *periturus*, meaning both with the intention and the fate of dying,³² thus revealing the Trojans' disguise to the enemies, a stratagem he himself had proposed (*Non tulit hanc speciem furiata mente Coroebus / et sese medium iniecit periturus in agmen*; 'Maddened in soul, Coroebus brooked not this sight, but flung himself to death into the midst of the band'). This fatal imprudence can be understood in light of Coroebus's love for Cassandra, as he came to Troy specifically to win her love.³³ His attempt to save her, therefore, is not only a warrior's reaction but also a lover's. Moreover, Coroebus's fury (*furiata mente*) recalls the *furor iraque* that overtook Aeneas's mind in *Aen.* 2.316, and will be repeated in *Aen.* 2.588, referring to Aeneas (*Talia iactabam et furiata mente ferebar*; 'Such words I blurted out and in frenzied mind was rushing on'). Inflamed by a wrath similar to Aeneas's,

³² See Virgilio, *Eneide* 2, ed. S. Casali, Pisa, 2019², pp. 231–2. On the tradition regarding the character of Coroebus, and his Homeric predecessor Othryoneus in *Il.* 13.361–382, see *ibid.*, pp. 212–14.

³³ See *Aen.* 2.341–3: ... *iuvenisque Coroebus/Mygdonides: illis ad Troiam forte diebus/venerat insano Cassandrae incensus amore.*

but with the added flame of love, Coroebus seizes the opportunity to fall in battle, an opportunity that is instead denied to Aeneas. His heroic death comes a few lines later, in *Aen.* 2.424–6, which is the section that Leopardi refers to in the margins of *All'Italia: Ilicet obruimur numero, primusque Coroebus / Penelei dextra divae armipotensis ad aram / procumbit* ('Straightway we are outnumbered; and first Coroebus falls at the hand of Peneleus by the altar of the warrior goddess').

The quotation of this passage from *Aeneid* 2, even though it includes the name of Coroebus, does not seem sufficient to prove that Leopardi is directly drawing on Coroebus's model of heroism. This note could be interpreted, and has been viewed, as one of the many quotations of Virgil as *auctoritas* to justify and clarify linguistic choices, such as the Latin verb *procumbere*. However, an earlier instance of Coroebus in Leopardi's works highlights the role this character plays in his concept of heroism and courage, offering a new perspective on Coroebus's presence in the margins of *All'Italia*.

Between 1811 and 1812, Leopardi composed a series of *Dissertazioni filosofiche* ('Philosophical essays'), likely intended to the annual exam organised by his father to showcase Leopardi's and his siblings's progress in their studies. One of these essays, entitled *Dissertazione sopra le virtù morali in particolare*, examines various moral virtues by defining each and providing illustrative examples. The structure of the text closely follows Francesco Maria Zanotti's *La Filosofia morale secondo l'opinione dei Peripatetici*, and specifically its third part, entitled *Delle Virtù morali in particolare*; however, Leopardi supplements it with his own examples (primarily drawn from ancient history and poetry). This approach, which enriches and disguises the original text, reflects a method Leopardi consistently employed when engaging with his sources in writing the *Dissertazioni filosofiche*.³⁴

The first virtue discussed in the essay is 'Fortezza', defined as '[la virtù] per cui l'uomo sopporta con animo grande le avversità, e le sventure, ed incontra con forte petto i pericoli, vale a dire non li teme più di quello, che dettagli la ragione' ('[the virtue] by which a man endures adversity and misfortune with a great soul and faces dangers with a courageous heart, meaning he fears them no more than reason allows').³⁵ Leopardi identifies Scipio Africanus as the supreme exemplar of this virtue, while positioning Dolon and Coroebus at opposite extremes:

Gli estremi della *Fortezza* sono come è assai chiaro la pusillanimità, e l'audacia. *Dolone* presso *Omero*, e *Corebo* presso *Virgilio* ci presentano ancor essi degli esempj il primo di pusillanimità con abbassarsi per vile timor della morte avanti *Diomede*, ed *Ulisse* e con isvelar loro i disegni dell'armata *Trojana*, e l'altro di audacia col lanciarsi egli solo in mezzo a migliaia di nemici per toglier *Cassandra* dalle loro mani.³⁶

³⁴ See G. Leopardi, *Dissertazioni filosofiche*, ed. T. Crivelli, Padua, 1995, pp. 12–13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 266. English translations are my own.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 266–7. The emphases are by the author.

The extremes of *Fortezza* are, as is quite clear, cowardice and rashness. *Dolon* in *Homer*, and *Coroebus* in *Virgil* present us with examples. The first of cowardice, lowering himself out of vile fear of death before *Diomedes* and *Ulysses* and revealing to them the plans of the *Trojan* army, and the other of rashness, throwing himself alone amid thousands of enemies to rescue *Cassandra* from their hands.

A few years before translating *Aeneid* 2, Leopardi demonstrates familiarity with and particular regard for the episode of *Coroebus's* death, his heroic act of throwing himself into the midst of battle, knowing there was no hope of survival. Moreover, *Coroebus's* impulse is driven by his love for *Cassandra*, the character from *Aeneid* 2 upon whom, as we have seen, Leopardi modelled the personified Italy in *All'Italia*. Thus, *Coroebus's* heroic gesture to save *Cassandra* parallels Leopardi's heroic determination to fight for and save Italy.

In *All'Italia*, Leopardi appears to inherit not only *Coroebus's* boldness but also the solitude that makes his sacrifice even more poignant (compare the *Dissertazione*: 'col lanciarsi egli solo in mezzo a migliaia di nemici' with *All'Italia*, ll. 37–8: 'io solo / combatterò, procomberò sol io'). However, *Virgil's* *Coroebus* does not die alone; he is the first among a group of fallen warriors, after which *Aeneas* remarks that he survived the battle, even though he was ready to die if fate had decreed it (*Aen.* 2.431–4: a passage to which we will return shortly). In *All'Italia*, by referencing *Coroebus's* episode, Leopardi seems to conflate the scene of *Coroebus's* solitary impulse to save *Cassandra* with the scene of his death as the first to fall among his companions.

This suggests that Leopardi cites *Aen.* 2.424–6 (or, simply, 'Aen. 2') in the margins of *All'Italia* not merely as a linguistic *auctoritas* but as a reference to a character who, in his memory, exemplifies *Virgilian audacia*. For the young Leopardi, who in 1811–1812 wrote the *Dissertazioni filosofiche* primarily for his father and his father's circle, *Coroebus* was not a model of *fortezza* but a figure of extremism, unconcerned with risks or death, lacking the balance that true virtue requires. However, for the more mature, "heroic" Leopardi who in 1818 composed *All'Italia*, *Coroebus* transformed into the epitome of heroic valour, a quality notably absent in the *pius* *Aeneas*.

Thus, while Leopardi speaks like *Aeneas* (*Arma, viri, ferte arma* / 'L'armi, qua l'armi'), he chooses to die like *Coroebus* (*primusque Coroebus ... procumbit* / 'procomberò sol io').

***All'Italia*: singing for the homeland**

The fourth stanza of *All'Italia* marks a pivotal moment in the poem. After lamenting Italy's plight and her desperate situation, after offering himself to battle and reflecting on the absence of comrades (because Italian soldiers are exploited in Napoleon's Russian campaign), Leopardi shifts his focus to the 'antiche età' (l. 62) and the heroic ideals of the past. These ideals find their exemplar in the Spartans who fought and perished at Thermopylae:

E voi sempre onorate e gloriose,
 O tessaliche strette,
 Dove la Persia e *il fato* assai men forte
 Fu di poch'alme franche e generose!³⁷

and you were ever honored and renowned,
 Thessalian passes,
 where Persia and destiny failed to overpower
 a few bold and noble souls!

Persia, but also *fatum*, were unable to defeat those heroic warriors who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of Greece. It is worth noting that, according to Leopardi's reasoning here, fate did not defeat the Spartans *because* they died at Thermopylae, thereby achieving immortality through their heroic death.³⁸ The word 'fato' recurs at l. 90 ('Qual nell'acerbo fato amor vi trasse?'), where it signifies the death of the soldiers,³⁹ and again at l. 134 ('Che se il fato è diverso, e non consente...'), where it refers to the individual destiny of the singer,⁴⁰ with intriguing implications for the poem's final message, as we will see.

To sing and celebrate the episode of the battle at Thermopylae, Leopardi invokes Simonides of Ceos, who, in the second part of *All'Italia* (specifically, from l. 84 to the end), assumes the voice of the speaker, creating a noticeable overlap between Leopardi's and Simonides's perspectives.⁴¹ Virgilian elements are discernible in this section as well. I will underscore a few significant instances before examining the poem's conclusion, which will once again bring us back to *Aeneid 2* and the conception of heroism that Leopardi drew from it.

Before making him speak, Leopardi represents Simonides as a sort of *vates*:

E di lacrime sparso ambe le guance,
 E il petto ansante, e vacillante il piede,
 Toglieasi in man la lira:

³⁷ *All'Italia*, ll. 64–7.

³⁸ See *All'Italia*, ll. 77–78: 'E sul colle d'Antela, ove morendo/si sottrasse da morte il santo stuolo' ('And climbing the Antela hill, where/the sacred band who died became immortal'). These verses appear to allude to an epigram by Simonides of Ceos found in *Anth. Pal.* 7.251 (οὐδὲ θεθνήσκει θανόντες); while l. 125 of *All'Italia* ('La vostra tomba è un'ara'; 'Your tomb is an altar') is an explicit quotation from Simonides's poem for the fallen soldiers of Thermopylae that Leopardi read in Diodorus Siculus, 11.11. On Leopardi and Simonides, and the presence of Simonides's poetry in *All'Italia*, see E. Peruzzi, 'Il canto di Simonide', in Id., *Studi leopardiani II*, Florence, 1987, pp. 7–74; M. Gigante, 'Simonide e Leopardi', in Id., *Leopardi e l'antico*, Bologna, 2002, pp. 81–118.

³⁹ The expression 'acerbo fato' may be derived from *funere acerbo* in *Aen.* 6.429 and 11.28; see G. Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. G. De Robertis and D. De Robertis, Florence, 1978, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Straccali summarises the three meanings of 'fato' in *All'Italia*; see G. Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. A. Straccali, Florence, 1985 [1st edn. 1892], p. 23.

⁴¹ That this was a deliberate intention of the author is explained in the poem's dedicatory letters to Vincenzo Monti; see *PP*, vol. I, pp. 155–9 (note especially the expressions 'rifare il suo canto' and 'tornare a fare la sua canzone', referring to Simonides's poem for the soldiers fallen at Thermopylae).

*Beatissimi voi...*⁴²

And, cheeks wet with tears,
out of breath, unsteady,
he lifted up his lyre:
Most blessed, you...

As Blasucci noted,⁴³ 'il petto ansante' in l. 82 might stem from the *pectus anhelum* of the Sibyl in *Aen.* 6.40, as is seemingly confirmed by the textual variant in the manuscript 'E il petto anelo'. Similarly, in l. 81, 'di lacrime sparso' could also reflect a Virgilian influence, recalling *Aen.* 2.651 (*effusi lacrimis*), which Leopardi translated as 'sparsi di pianto' (*Tr.Aen.* 881). An explicit Virgilian "design" is then evident in l. 84, where Simonides's song begins abruptly with an invocation to the soldiers ('Beatissimi voi'), without any introductory verb, seamlessly continuing from Leopardi's own voice. In the prose draft of *All'Italia*, Leopardi writes: 'Qui si può fingere il canto di Simonide ma passando alle parole sue di colpo come Virgilio citato dal Monti nel settimo dell'Eneide' ('Here, one can feign Simonides's song but by suddenly transitioning to his words, as Virgil quoted by Monti in Book Seven of the Aeneid').⁴⁴ This note presents a small puzzle for scholars, as it is unclear which passage of *Aeneid* 7 or which quotation of it by Vincenzo Monti Leopardi is referring to. One suggestion has been to locate the reference in *Aen.* 7.120–34, where Aeneas celebrates his arrival in Latium by recalling Anchises's prophecy (and the Latin word *continuo* might explain Leopardi's idea of a speech starting 'di colpo').⁴⁵ However, Lombardi's hypothesis that Leopardi is misquoting *Aeneid* 7 and actually means *Aeneid* 8 seems more plausible (a small inaccuracy that is quite excusable in the context of a draft). Specifically, Lombardi points to *Aen.* 8.290–6, which Vincenzo Monti quoted and commented on in a dialogue published in 1816 in the *Biblioteca Italiana*, focusing precisely on Virgil's technique of a sudden transition from the poet's voice to that of the characters:

Dapprima i fatti dell'eroe sono in bocca al poeta. Indi per la figura detta metabole dai rettorici, ossia conversione, Virgilio li pone improvvisamente in bocca a quel coro; e ne sorge una bellezza poetica sommamente ammirata.⁴⁶

At first, the deeds of the hero are narrated by the poet. Then, by using the rhetorical figure known as metabole, or conversion, Virgil places these words

⁴² *All'Italia*, ll. 81–4.

⁴³ Leopardi, *Canti* (n. 5 above), p. 21.

⁴⁴ *Argomento di una canzone sullo stato presente dell'Italia*, in *PP*, vol. I, p. 621. English translation is my own.

⁴⁵ See D. De Robertis, *Leopardi. La poesia*, Bologna-Rome, 1996, p. 44; G. Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. F. Gavazzeni and M. M. Lombardi, Milan, 1998, p. 100.

⁴⁶ V. Monti, *Matteo giornalista, Taddeo suo compare, Pasquale servitore e ser Magrino pedante*; see M. M. Lombardi, 'Allusioni montiane e foscoliane nelle «Canzoni» di Leopardi', *Strumenti critici*, 105, 2, 2004, pp. 273–85 (273–77). English translation is my own.

suddenly into the mouths of that chorus; and this gives rise to a poetic beauty that is greatly admired.

Whether or not this hypothesis holds true, it is certain that Leopardi intended to open Simonides's song with a poetic technique once again inspired by Virgil, particularly the one he found highlighted by the contemporary poet to whom *All'Italia* was dedicated.

As Virgil's poetry is pervasively present in the introduction and the first words of Simonides's song, the same can be said about its conclusion. After celebrating Spartans's deeds and their glorious death at Thermopylae, Simonides pronounces another *makarismos* that repeats literally the one of l. 84 and introduces, with an *adynaton*, the theme of the eternal memory of heroes, which is central in the last stanza:

Beatissimi voi
Mentre nel mondo si favelli o scriva.

Prima divelte, in mar precipitando,
spente nell'imo strideran le stelle,
che la memoria e il vostro
amor trascorra o scemi.⁴⁷

[...] You are blessed
as long as men will live to tell your story.

The stars will fall from the sky and into the sea
and scream as they're put out
before we forget you
and our love for you will die.

Commentaries recall similar *adynata* in Virgil, particularly those of *ecl.* 1.59–63 (Tityrus's eulogy for his benefactor) and *Aen.* 1.607–9 (Aeneas's words to Dido; with a mention of stars that makes this passage seem closer to Leopardi's inspiration). We may also add *ecl.* 5.76–8 (Menalcas referring to Daphnis).

Leopardi reflects on the endurance of poetry over time and the memory it preserves for both its subjects and authors in passages of the *Zibaldone* written not long after *All'Italia*. When approaching this theme, he introduces his thoughts with three Latin quotations, one of which is from Virgil's *Aeneid* 9 and refers to the famous episode of Euryalus and Nisus:⁴⁸

Tityrus et segetes, Aeneiaque arma legentur
Roma triumphati dum caput orbis erit.
Ovid. *Amorum* l. 1.

⁴⁷ *All'Italia*, ll. 119–24.

⁴⁸ For the relevance of this episode in Leopardi's reading of the *Aeneid*, see F. D'Intino, *L'amore indicabile. Eros e morte sacrificale nei Canti di Leopardi*, Venice, 2021, pp. 17–93.

Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,
Nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo:
Dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
Adcolet, imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.
Virg. Aen. IX. 446.

Usque ego postera
Crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium
Scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex.
Hor. Carm. III. od. 30. v. 7.

Roma non è più la Regina del mondo, nè il padre Romano tiene le redini dell'imperio, nè il pontefice ascende più al Campidoglio colla Vestale, e questo da lunghissimo tempo; e tuttavia si leggono ancora i versi di Virgilio, e Niso ed Eurialo non son caduti dalla memoria degli uomini, e dura la fama di Orazio. La fortuna giuoca nel mondo, e certo questi poeti non s'immaginavano che il tempo dovesse penar più a distruggere i versi loro, che l'immenso e saldissimo imperio Romano, opera di tanti secoli. Ma quelle carte sono sopravvissute a quella gran mole, per mero giuoco della fortuna la quale ha distrutte infinite altre opere degli antichi ingegni, e conservate queste oltre allo spazio segnato dalla stessa speranza, dallo stesso amor proprio, dalla stessa forza immaginativa de' loro autori. (23. Dic. 1820.) [455–6]⁴⁹

Rome is no longer Queen of the World, the Father of Rome no longer holds the reins of the empire, the Pontifex Maximus no longer climbs to the Capitol with the Vestal virgin, a very long time has gone by, and yet the verses of Virgil are still read, Nisus and Euryalus have not been forgotten, and the fame of Horace endures. Fortune is fickle, and these poets certainly never imagined that time would have had more difficulty destroying their verses than the vast and solid Roman empire, built over so many centuries. But these sheets of paper survived that mighty edifice, through a whim of fortune, which has destroyed countless other works of ancient genius, and preserved these beyond the space allotted by hope itself, self-love itself, their authors' own imaginative power. (23 Dec. 1820.) [455–6].

It is tempting to read the three Latin quotations as a coherent set, considering the internal relationships among them. Ovid's quote refers to the perpetual fame of Virgil by mentioning the themes of his poetry (see the consequent observation in Leopardi's note: 'si leggono ancora i versi di Virgilio'), establishing a conceptual link to the following quote. Then, a difference—or rather a kind of complementarity—must be noted between Virgil's and Horace's citations: the former focuses on the

⁴⁹ On the same idea ends an essay that Leopardi surely knew, namely Francesco Algarotti's *Saggio sopra Orazio*: 'Il tempo ha di già distrutto il Campidoglio; e i versi d'Orazio sono tuttavia cantati dalla voce del tempo' ('Time has already destroyed the Capitol, yet Horace's verses are still sung by the voice of time').

eternity that poetry guarantees to the memory of heroes, with a subtle, elegant doubt expressed by the poet about the power of his effort (*si quid mea carmina possunt*), while the latter vigorously asserts that the poet's work will perpetuate his memory among posterity.⁵⁰

In addressing the dead soldiers at Thermopylae as 'Beatissimi voi' (ll. 84 and 119), Leopardi may have sought to replicate the shocking effect found in the *Fortunati ambo!* that Virgil addresses to Euryalus and Nisus, immediately after their tragic deaths, in *Aen.* 9.446. Additionally, the limitation expressed in l. 120 ('mentre nel mondo si favelli o scriva') echoes Virgil's tone when circumscribing the reach of his poetry's power (*si quid mea carmina possunt*).

The overlap of memories that poetry realises—the memory of the heroes and that of the poet—illustrated in the juxtaposition of Latin quotes in *Zib.* 456, is a key concept for interpreting the conclusion of *All'Italia*:

Deh foss'io pur con voi qui sotto, e molle
 Fosse del sangue mio quest'alma terra.
Che se il fato è diverso, e non consente
Ch'io per la Grecia i moribondi lumi
Chiuda prostrato in guerra,
 Così la vereconda
 Fama del vostro vate appo i futuri
 Possa, volendo i numi,
 Tanto durar quanto la vostra duri.⁵¹

If only I were down below with you,
 and this sweet earth were wet with my blood, too.
 But if my fate is unlike yours,
 and will not let me shut my eyes
 dying fallen on the field for Greece,
 still may the modest glory of your bard,
 if the gods will it,
 endure as long as yours
 in times to come.

In the first part of *All'Italia*, we observed Leopardi portraying himself as a hero—or perhaps an aspiring hero—oscillating between the models he drew from *Aeneid* 2: the fundamental helplessness of Aeneas and the irrational bravery of Coroebus.

Right after Coroebus's death in *Aen.* 2.424–6, Leopardi encountered lines that must have left a profound impression on him. I am referring to Aeneas's self-excuse for not having fallen in battle, in *Aen.* 2.431–4:

Iliaci cineres et flamma extrema meorum,
testor, in occasu vestro nec tela nec ulla

⁵⁰ For a comparison of these texts, see Virgil, *Aeneid. Book IX*, ed. P. Hardie, Cambridge, 1994, p. 154.

⁵¹ *All'Italia*, ll. 132–40.

*vitavisse vices, Danaum et, si fata fuissent
ut caderem, meruisse manu. Divellimur inde...*⁵²

O ashes of Ilium! O funeral flames of my kin! I call you to witness that in your doom I shunned no fight or hazard, and had the fates willed my death at the hands of the Greeks that I had earned that death! We are torn from there...

These exact lines are quoted in *Zib.* 1394 (27 July 1821), where Leopardi speaks of his literary works as an effort to 'scuotere' (rouse) his country, that is, as a way to save it with the 'armi' (weapons) he has at his disposal:

Così a scuotere la mia povera patria, e secolo, io mi troverò avere impiegato le armi dell'affetto e dell'entusiasmo e dell'eloquenza e dell'immaginazione nella lirica, e in quelle prose letterarie ch'io potrò scrivere; le armi della ragione, della logica, della filosofia, ne' Trattati filosofici ch'io dispongo; e le armi del ridicolo ne' dialoghi e novelle Lucianee ch'io vo preparando.

*Iliaci cineres, et flamma extrema meorum,
Testor, in occasu vestro, nec tela, nec ulla
Vitavisse vices Danaum; et, si fata fuissent,
Ut caderem, meruisse manu*

(Virg. Aen. 2. 431. seqq.). (27. luglio 1821.) [1394]

Thus to rouse my poor country and poor century, I shall find that I have employed the weapons of feeling and enthusiasm and eloquence and imagination in lyric poetry, and in whatever literary prose works I may write, the weapons of reason, logic, philosophy in the philosophical treatises that I am planning, and the weapons of ridicule in the Lucianesque dialogues and novels I am preparing.

Iliaci cineres, etc. [1394]

In the conclusion of *All'Italia*, Simonides takes the floor as Leopardi's alter ego, not merely as a poet who sings of heroic deeds, but more precisely as the figure who sings of heroes *because* he cannot be one of them. After oscillating between Aeneas and Coroebus, that is, between a 'would-be' hero forced to accept *fatum*, and a hero-lover who throws himself toward certain death, Leopardi in the second part of *All'Italia* turns to the kind of heroism truly within his reach: the power of poetry to immortalise not only heroes but also the poet who celebrates them.

It must have been clear to Leopardi that this choice required stepping back from the battlefield and relinquishing the option of *procumbere*. This is why, in the end, Simonides speaks again with the voice of Aeneas, invoking the *fatum* as the only obstacle preventing him from achieving the heroic death he desires ('Che se il *fato* è diverso e non consente...'), thus mirroring Aeneas's situation in *Aen.* 2.433–4 (*et, si fata fuissent / ut caderem, meruisse manu*), as Leopardi would later do again in *Zib.*

⁵² These lines by Virgil present a textual problem related to their punctuation, on which see Virgilio, *Eneide* 2 (n. 30 above), pp. 238–9 and 364–5. On Leopardi's translation of this passage, and the punctuation in the edition of Virgil he employed, see F. Vallana, 'Leopardi traduttore di Virgilio. I tanti volti di una fedeltà', *Maia*, 73, 2, 2021, pp. 417–39 (428–30).

1394. The ‘fato’ which Spartan soldiers were able to overcome through their deaths (see ll. 66–7: ‘dove la Persia e il fato assai men forte / fu di poch’alme franche e generose!’) proves somehow stronger than Simonides and Leopardi. Though they wish they could die at Thermopylae or beneath the walls of Ilium, they ultimately embrace another form of heroism: that achieved through the poetic act of singing about heroes. This form of *poetic heroism* aspires to ensure their fame, linking them as poets forever to the heroes whose immortality they help secure—a notion Leopardi derived, among other sources, from Virgil’s celebration of Euryalus and Nisus in *Aeneid* 9.

Conclusions

While Leopardi remained captivated by the vigorous vitality of Homeric heroes, whose brilliance endures even in death, he was far from indifferent to the heroic models drawn from Virgil. On the contrary, Leopardi’s *All’Italia* demonstrates how Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and particularly *Aeneid* 2, represented for him a source of valuable suggestions to shape a modern kind of heroism, after the fall of illusions that, in Leopardi’s view, marks the end of antiquity. When a simple, glorious death is no longer an option, the *Aeneid*—the first “modern” epic poem—emerges as a path to follow.

In *All’Italia*, three kinds of Virgilian heroism can be detected. The first is the heroism of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 2. Even though Leopardi’s opinion of this character was generally unfavourable, especially when he compared him to Achilles or Hector, Aeneas could still serve as a model insofar as he was a defeated hero, desperate about the fate of his homeland, willing to die, but unable to. Much like Leopardi himself.

Secondly, in the episode of Coroebus, Leopardi found a model of a hero who *did* die, and did so in defence of a woman he loved: Cassandra. Similarly, Leopardi sought to save Italy, whose personification he modelled on Cassandra’s portrait. The verb ‘procomberò’ at l. 38 of *All’Italia* seems to carry a deeper significance than has been acknowledged thus far.

Finally, by channelling his voice through the Greek poet Simonides, Leopardi embraced a form of heroism more fitting for him: the heroism of poetry and the enduring glory it can confer. Once again, Virgil offered an important precedent for this concept, namely the celebration of Euryalus and Nisus in *Aeneid* 9, which may be subtly alluded to in the vocative phrase ‘Beatissimi voi’. The self-excuse Aeneas offers in *Aeneid* 2 for not perishing on the last night of Ilium thus provided Simonides-Leopardi the appropriate words to reaffirm the notion that he, too, would have died, if not for the interference of fate.

It may be noted that Simonides’s final wish for his fame to become immortal ‘volendo i numi’ (l. 139) generates a striking tension with the conclusion of the *Bruto minore*, where the hero, in direct opposition to the gods, wishes for the

obliteration of his own name.⁵³ A similar idea pervades the ending of the *Ultimo canto di Saffo*, where no hope of happiness or memory remains for the desolate singer, save an obscure death in a dark night. Both of these poems, composed in December 1821 and May 1822, reflect the long and transformative journey the concepts of virtue and heroism underwent in Leopardi's mind.

It is no coincidence, then, that a different model underpins these later Leopardian "heroes": Dido from *Aeneid* 4.⁵⁴ As the illusion of virtue fades, the model of Aeneas grows weaker and more distant, while the tragic figure of Dido emerges as a more fitting reference point for portraying suicidal characters who have definitively lost faith in the gods. Yet in *All'Italia*, at the ideal starting point of Leopardi's *Canti*, a semblance of heroic virtue still lingers, as Virgil's guidance delineates three possible paths to modern heroism.

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⁵³ See *Bruto minore*, l. 120: 'e l'aura il nome e la memoria accoglia'; 'and the wind take my name and memory'.

⁵⁴ Brutus is described as 'fermo già di morir' (*Bruto minore*, l. 12), echoing *Aen.* 4.564 (*certa mori*); Sappho's exclamation 'Morremo' (*Ultimo canto di Saffo*, l. 55) recalls Dido's words in *Aen.* 4.659-660 (*Moriemur inultae, / sed moriamur*). On the echoes from the *Aeneid* in these poems, see A. La Penna, *Tersite censurato e altri studi di letteratura fra antico e moderno*, Pisa, 1991, pp. 249-320 and pp. 321-336; Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero* (n. 5 above), 133-136. On Dido, see *Zib.* 2217-2218.