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# With rhymes about the human fate Philosophy in the poetry of Giacomo Leopardi

## *Summary*

Giacomo Leopardi is one of those authors whose texts oscillate on the border between literature and philosophy. It is true that Leopardi does not use traditional forms of philosophical expression, but the fact is that most of the considerations of the Italian thinker are expressed by the simultaneous conduct of two discourses: literary and philosophical. Leopardi experimented almost every form of literary expression, but he went down in history mainly as a poet, who contained a significant part of his highest beliefs in poetry. The practice of philosophizing through poetry is nothing new in literature, and the various connections between literature and philosophy are almost ancient, but the ongoing discussions in the world of Italian critics about the relationship between Leopardi and philosophy suggest that the reflective lyrics of the famous poet from Recanati are an noteworthy case. This article is a reflection on the use of figures of speech in the process of explaining the worldview by Leopardi, with particular emphasis on metaphor, and on the overall impact of the poetic medium on the presentation and shaping of adopted ideology.

**Keywords:** Leopardi, philosophy, poetry, philosophical discourse, literary discourse, figures of speech, imagination, cognition, truth

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Despite decent renown among Polish intellectuals, especially modernists from the period of Young Poland,<sup>1</sup> Giacomo Leopardi did not mark his presence in Polish popular culture visibly enough to be able to surpass the fame of other Italian writers, such as Dante, Petrarch, Eco or Savino (who are known even to the readers unrelated to the literary environments). Polish critics have mentioned Leopardi fairly briefly since the mid-nineteenth century, interest in his work increased temporarily at the end of the century. At that time, the first, not very successful, translations of his work appeared.<sup>2</sup> The monograph of Joanna Ugniewska, *Giacomo Leopardi*,<sup>3</sup> was to be an attempt to fill this incomprehensible gap in Polish criticism, caused by the lack of interest in the Italian poet. Nevertheless, Leopardi is mentioned on the pages of the history of world literature as a figure of extraordinary importance. He is not only the most important Italian poet of the nineteenth century, but also the epitome of a contemporary intellectual: disappointment with the surrounding reality, criticism of blind following the current trends, inability to find an adequate interlocutor, and thus, a deep sense of loneliness and alienation, made him the emblematic figure of the modern thinker, who throughout his life stubbornly asked himself painful, but also great questions about the sense of human existence, doing so with the courage, but also with the desperation of a great poet.

Leopardi is an extremely complex character which often escapes the attempts of academic organization. Critical studies avoid labelling Leopardi as a romantic, while underlining the inadequacy of other potential terms. I will not describe here the debate of researchers about the relationship of Leopardi with the Enlightenment and the Romantic tradition,<sup>4</sup> but it is worth noting that this fact shows that Leopardi's thought goes through phases which are so different that it is impossible to formulate a single, coherent interpretation of his entire work. The nineteenth-century Italian pessimist was attempted to be called a nihilist, progressivist, empiricist or materialist, which provoked lively and sometimes even violent discussions over the intellectual profile of the Italian thinker. Attempts to catalogue the work of Leopardi, resulting in an increase in interest in the philosophical aspect of his work, lead to the situation in which many sources describe Leopardi not only as a writer, but also as a philosopher. It is true that Leopardi

1 Cfr. A. Ceccherelli, *Leopardi w Młodej Polsce (Rzeczywistość i wyobrażenia w kręgu intertekstualności)*, "Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego imienia Adama Mickiewicza" 1997, XXXII, pp. 133–152.

2 Cfr. K. Żaboklicki, *Historia literatury włoskiej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2008.

3 J. Ugniewska, *Giacomo Leopardi*, PWN, Warsaw 1991.

4 Most of researchers investigating Leopardi's work maintain that it should be analysed through the prism of the Enlightenment tradition rather than the romantic one, even though he lived in the period of Romanticism; others emphasize the presence of romantic elements in the poetry (lonely pondering under the cover of the night, almost religious contemplating of the mystery of existence, rebellion against destiny, mourning unfulfilled hopes for love, etc.).

does not use genres that are traditional forms of philosophical expression (such as an essay, treatise, manifesto etc.) or a specialized language and therefore not all critics agree on the classification of the Italian writer as a philosopher, but the fact is that Leopardi's work is one of those moments in the history of European culture, when human thought is expressed through the simultaneous conduct of two discourses: literary and philosophical. Although the metaphor and literary imagination may deprive the philosophical argument of the features of a scientific discourse, they may also open the thought to wider interpretations, and thus broaden it.

Leopardi tried his hand at almost every form of literary expression: from various lyrical genres, youthful dramas, *History of astronomy*, an extensive diary of thoughts, known as *Zibaldone*, a collection of short dialogical forms (published under the title *Small Moral Works*), to critical and theoretical literary texts. His letters have also been published. However, he went down in history mainly as a poet, who included a significant part of his highest beliefs in verses. The practice of philosophizing through the poems is nothing new in poetry, and the various connections between literature and philosophy are an almost ancient issue, but the ongoing discussions in the world of Italian criticism about Leopardi's relationship with philosophy suggest that the reflective lyrics of the famous poet from Recanati are a particularly interesting case.<sup>5</sup> Leopardi's philosophy is usually analysed in the context of his prose works, which capture Leopardian models and paradigms in a more factual and transparent way. The interest in Leopardi's prose, with particular emphasis on the *Zibaldone* and the *Small Moral Works*, increased also because the poetry of the famous Italian author grew into a network of repetitive and generally known school and academic analyses and interpretations. It should be remembered, however, that what Leopardi contains in his prose reflection, he also expresses through the medium of poetry, which becomes a significant carrier of philosophical thought, in the full sense of the word. This fact leads us to the following questions: how the use of rhetorical figures affects process of lecturing the worldview? Does the metaphor make the presented image of the world hazy or, on the contrary, broaden its semantics? Is it possible to expose the thesis with verses in a sufficiently explicit way? How does subjectivity and emotional involvement of the lyrical subject influence the nature of the judgments about man and the world? I will try to consider the above doubts on the basis of selected poems by Leopardi, in which the lyrical situation clearly results from careful observation of the world and desperate, almost, attempts to explore the secrets of the human condition.

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5 The still vivid interest in Leopardi's philosophy may be evidenced by the fact that in 2018 the works of Giuseppe Rensi (G. Rensi, *Su Leopardi*, edited by R. Bruni, Aragno, Turin 2018) and Adrian Tilgher (A. Tilgher, *La filosofia di Leopardi e altri scritti leopardiani*, edited by R. Bruni, Aragno, Turin 2018) were published. They investigate Leopardi's philosophical thought confirming his status as a philosopher.

There is no doubt that Leopardi is one of the most eminent Italian poets of the nineteenth century, while his authority as a philosopher has been repeatedly challenged and put to the test of time. It seems that even the native criticism has not managed to solve the dilemma of the “philosophicalness” of his poetry. Skeptics preferred to call Leopardi “a thinker”. According to Umberto Panozzi, the author of the manual on the history of Italian literature, *Periodi e scrittori della Letteratura Italiana*, Leopardi was “a thinker and not a philosopher in the true sense of the word.”<sup>6</sup> It is true that the Italian writer never expressed his thoughts in the form of an orderly doctrinal system, and never tried to control his innate tendency to experience the reality in an extremely personal, subjective way. For this reason, Italian neo-idealism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century looked suspiciously at the inspired poet from Recanati, who wrapped his thoughts in various metaphors and symbols, sophisticated vocabulary and complex syntax. Italian neo-idealists, with Benedetto Croce at the forefront, accused Leopardi’s style of excessive rhapsodicity, fragmentation, lack of order and sometimes even inconsistency. Croce himself “categorically denies all values of Leopardi’s thought, calling it pseudo-philosophy, philosophy for private use, or sees in it only a projection of the private woes of the poet.”<sup>7</sup>

However, while the above allegations may appear to be justified, reducing the philosophical aspect of Leopardi’s work to a collection of disordered or, worse, inconsistent reflections is a mistake resulting from single interpretations that do not take into account the general context of the monumental output of the Italian writer, which constitutes an extremely thoughtful and logical whole. Interestingly, the assessment of the lack of scientific rigor in Leopardi’s system of thought seems to be a matter of interpretation, as some researchers see in this freedom of form rather signs of a truly modern philosophy – unrecognized, admittedly, in doctrine, but taking on its eloquence. This is best demonstrated by Giuseppe Rensi,<sup>8</sup> who, by opposing the idealistic concept of understanding philosophy, tries to show that not only the one who in the process of creating paradigms uses scientific formalism and objectivity is entitled to call himself a philosopher. For Rensi, the philosophical system is merely a tissue that binds individual thought particles, while many of the most authentic philosophers have been fragmentary: ranging from Leopardi, Amiel and Pascal to Nietzsche himself. Attempts to achieve categorical demarcation in this context seem all the more unreasonable as literary attempts to develop universal truths and concepts seem more useful in the process of seeking the truth than striving to give definitive answers. I will not explore the complex relationships in which literature and philosophy have always been entangled, since many

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<sup>6</sup> U. Panozzi, *Periodi e scrittori della Letteratura Italiana*, Paravia, Turin 1982, translated by the author.

<sup>7</sup> J. Ugniewska, *Giacomo Leopardi*, PWN, Warsaw 1991, p. 192, translated by the author.

<sup>8</sup> G. Rensi, *Lineamenti di filosofia scettica*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1921.

comprehensive scientific papers have been written on this subject, I would just like to emphasize that the boundary between literature and philosophy is much more complex than the idealists thought.

A significant increase in interest in Leopardi outside Italy occurred in the post-war period, mainly thanks to the contribution of historical-Marxist criticism, which emphasized the essence of the last phase of Leopardi's work (after 1830). The poet's commitment and progress was admired, contrasted with the lonely and thoughtful lyrical ego from the idylls. This multiplicity of voices in the post-war criticism is important not only because Leopardi has been raised to the rank of a philosopher, but also because it emphasizes the ideological or even "heroic/titanic" line of creativity of the Italian writer (it is about heroism understood as a voluntary and conscious confrontation with destiny). In the light of these interpretations, Leopardi appears not only as a lyrical ego contemplating distant landscapes, but a self-conscious individual, attempting to understand the universe, accepting the inevitable with a great dignity. This attitude is the result of Leopardi's long and persistent meditations on man's relationship with nature, on the theory of pleasure and on the tragedy of human fate, which resulted in truly philosophical conclusions – even though these beliefs are lined with deeply subjective experience and literary imagination.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that Leopardi was fully aware of the specifics of the medium he chose for his reflections. He repeatedly explored the connections between literature and philosophy, showing their common points,<sup>9</sup> but also juxtaposing them in the form of drastic opposition. However, despite the fact that philosophy, seeking the truth, and literature, striving for beauty, are usually placed on two opposite poles of humanistic studies, "a true poet must be ready to become a great philosopher, and a true philosopher to be a great poet."<sup>10</sup> It is one of the many fragments of the *Zibaldone* in which Leopardi explores this issue extremely carefully. This anti-metabolic statement has become a popularly quoted aphorism, but one should not forget that there is a series of interesting statements and solid logical argumentation behind it. Several days earlier, Leopardi describes in his diary the ideal thinker who is able to climb to reach inconceivable intellectual heights because he is "a poet with lyrical inspirations and a philosopher with lofty thoughts,"<sup>11</sup> and also a man with great enthusiasm, passionate, and most impor-

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9 According to Leopardi, philosophy and literature share not only a similar goal, which is cognitive value (fact that conditions, at least in a way, thematic community), but also a similar story: he draws attention to the process of depreciation of the philosopher/poet's status over the centuries. Philosophy and literature, respected in ancient times, are today stripped of their former dignity and prestige (*Zibaldone*, 26 VIII 1823).

10 G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 8 IX 1823, translated by the author.

11 Ibidem, 26 VIII 1823, translated by the author.

tantly – imaginative. Leopardi writes about the role of imagination in the process of conceptualisation of thoughts two years earlier (7 XI 1821). It is by using the imagination that the “enthusiastic human spirit” can see “relationships between the furthest things” that a prudent objectivist cannot see. Thanks to the unfettered pragmatism of imagination, it is possible to find the right comparisons, to see the “the darkest and most brilliant” similarities, to acquire “the wonderful ability to bring the most distant things closer” – like matter and ideas – which makes it possible to materialize the greatest abstraction and to reduce the physical world to imagination. “This is what a philosopher is: an entity capable of discovering and exploring the relationships between things, of connecting details, of generalizing.”<sup>12</sup> According to Leopardi, this complex system of dependencies and associations, discovered through creative elation, can be described not only by a series of comparisons, but also by new epithets and bolder metaphors. We know, of course, that the “literary” nature of Leopardi’s philosophical discourse still raises many reservations from the point of view of scientific reasoning, but it is also somewhat understandable why Leopardi associates the process of cognition with “imagination” or “enthusiasm” rather than with a neutral description. So, if Leopardi is far from the image of the philosopher-scientist, we can be sure that he is fully aware of the nature of the discourse he chooses and of the consequences that literary matter brings to the reception of philosophical content.

Leopardi’s theoretical considerations lead us to claim that his definition of “poetry” is very broad in the meaning and includes also philosophy, or at least some of its important aspects. It is true that Leopardi’s lyrics are less directly oriented towards philosophical problematization, but the philosophical thought of the Italian writer

should be considered primarily in the context of the most poetic texts: from the *Canti* to the *Small Moral Works*, not limited to the discursive lecture offered by the *Zibaldone*. Only in poetic texts do they appear to us as truly “double”, according to the optics described in the famous fragment of the *Zibaldone*.<sup>13</sup>

It is a fragment in which Leopardi explains why for a man of extraordinary imagination (and thus, as we said above, a poet-philosopher), all things exist “twice”: “such a man will see the tower, the village, he will hear the sound of a ringing bell; at the same time he will see in his own imagination a different tower and a different village, he will hear a different bell.”<sup>14</sup> Real objects, therefore, seem to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 7 IX 1821, translated by the author.

<sup>13</sup> C. Galimberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, p. 15, translated by the author.

<sup>14</sup> G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 30 XI 1828, translated by the author.

be only a shadow cast by shining ideas, created and stored in the human mind, which creates its own immortal world without borders. It is a fictional world, the only source of happiness – happiness that only children and ancient civilizations who are unaware of its illusion can truly enjoy. Illusions (*illusioni*), truth (*vero*) and imagination (*immaginazione*) are key concepts in the philosophy of the thinker from Recanati.

As Galimberti writes, these are also concepts whose essence the poetics of Leopardi's lyrical compositions reflects in a particularly fluent way – not only because the very essence of any poem is based on the use of these categories, but also because in many poems of the Italian author there is a special relationship between the stylistics of the poetic expression and the way of presenting the worldview. This happens, for example, in the case of the famous *Infinity*, in which appropriately selected vocabulary, rhetorical figures and grammar of the poetic expression become the interpretation of the philosophical thought. The poem constitutes a poignant, extremely lyrical meditation on infinity understood as the limitlessness of human imaginations. The whole monologue is structured around a series of eloquent opposites: the “lonely hill” on which the lyrical subject is located contrasts with the planes below; a hedgerow, obscuring the view, is the opposite of infinitely stretching spaces; the rustling of the wind among the bushes is a counterweight to this immeasurable silence of eternity. Moreover, the whole lyrical situation oscillates between past and present. The concept of appearances of Leopardi is reflected in the language of the poem very clearly, not only through this series of contrasts, but also at the strictly grammatical level: the pronoun “this” always points to elements belonging to the physical world, while the pronoun “that” refers to that world of ideas and illusions, which exceeds the boundaries of empirical experience. Also, the vocabulary used in the poem is selected with great care (the inestimable importance of the poetics of words in the process of creating images is described by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone*). The poem is full of words and phrases indicating a certain limitlessness/indeterminacy (“superhuman silence”, “depthless calm”, “endless”, “eternal” “immensity” etc.). In addition, the use of enjambement reflects the lack of clear boundaries.

Leopardi continues meditating on infinity in many of his later poems. *The setting of the moon*, one of the last works of the Italian master, explicitly refers to the poetics of the *Infinity*: “a thousand lovely insubstantial images and phantoms”, projected by the “far-flung shadows” construct the same inconceivable dimension of “delightful deceptions” that the human mind desiring immortality undergoes. However, while in the case of the *Infinity* we are dealing with charming, lyrical meditation on the infinite beauty of imaginations, the lyrical ego from the *The setting of the moon* emphasizes the rather painful awareness of the illusion of this dimension. The ultimate ridding of delusions is for Leopardi the end of youth, metaphorically reflected by the eponymous moonset. When the moon sets, nature



is overwhelmed by darkness, what happens also in human life, which, stripped of youthful delusions, is deprived of its former light. However, while nature will soon be flooded with sunlight, which is even more intense than moonlight, human life will never be coloured by another glow. The problem of “the duality of things”, illusion and truth, explored by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone*, is shown in the poem through an extensive metaphor. In Leopardi’s philosophizing poems, metaphor is a carrier of relevant content. The setting of the moon becomes the end of youth, the volcano heralds death, the hedgerow symbolizes the border of cognition, the flower of broom is the embodiment of dignity and courage in the face of the inevitable.

Much attention has already been devoted in the academic reflection to cognitive values of poetic discourse, and in particular to the metaphor. However, this is not entirely consistent reflection, as the admissibility of metaphor in philosophical discourse remains until today a subject of vivid discussions. As an example of diametrically different opinions in that matter, Jan Garewicz cites Fitzosborne, who “refuses the metaphor the right of citizenship in philosophy and treats it as a relic of pre-scientific thinking” and Popper, “according to which the philosophical language consists only of metaphors.”<sup>15</sup> Regardless of what position we take on this matter, the fact is that the presence of metaphor in philosophical discourse remains a phenomenon of extraordinary importance. This is demonstrated, among others, by the practice of using the metaphor in the titles of philosophical works (*Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus, *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels), resulting from the fact that the metaphor is a catchphrase synthesizing the views contained in the books, binding them in its imagery and eloquence. In addition to the semantic capacity that characterizes metaphor in philosophy, it is often also an extremely exponential tool (Plato’s cave, Marx’s opium of the people, Nietzsche’s Apollo and Dionysus). Expressing complex ideas in the forms available to human’s imagination guarantees greater accessibility of the lecture, hence Garewicz points out didactic aspect of metaphorical discourse as one of the potential reasons for which philosophers use metaphor in their argumentations. However, he rightly suspects that such a simple answer does not solve the matter. “Rather, the point is that thought repeatedly eludes expression in strictly philosophical terms.”<sup>16</sup> The metaphysicality and magniloquence of philosophical thinking often breaks down into a strict, specialized language that, in all its simplicity and plasticity, is not able to match the intellectual provocation contained in the metaphor. It is not my purpose to prove the importance of metaphor in philo-

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<sup>15</sup> J. Garewicz, *O metaforze w filozofii: Sowa Minerwy*, [in:] *Wypowiedź literacka a wypowiedź filozoficzna*, edited by M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1982, p. 79, translated by the author.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81, translated by the author.



sophical discourse, since this question has been explored many times, I would only like to emphasize the importance of the explanatory function of the metaphor in Leopardi's philosophical poetry, which has repeatedly emphasized in his writings the importance of imagination in the process of seeking the truth.

It is worth emphasizing that Leopardi's lyrical work has developed remarkable coherence in terms of imagery and symbolism. Leopardi's carriers of metaphorical content are usually elements of nature, which is one of the problems that the Italian writer explores with extreme desperation. The famous wild broom and the deadly volcano, whose metaphorical significance we have mentioned above, are contrasted against the background of wilderness – another recurring motif in Leopardi's poems. It is a wasteland whose inhabitant – a man – is condemned to eternal loneliness. From this great desert of the world it is sometimes possible to see the beauty of the stars, while at other times it is a place tormented by destructive forces, which in the poetry of Leopardi are embodied by fire. In the poems of the Italian poet, fire and light are two secret forces that dominate the world, but also over communities. In a letter to Pietro Giordani, Leopardi compares reason with a spark that is supposed to illuminate but not ignite – just like the moon, which in one of Leopardi's last poems, unlike the sun, does not burn, but shines with reflected light. Also *Sapho's last song* resounded in the light of the setting moon. Leopardi's most momentous considerations take the form of this lonely reverie, being depicted against the background of this great metaphysical moon night. The moonlight symbolizes in the work of the Italian poet nothingness that is present in Leopardian thought from the first philosophical meditations to the last poetic experiences.<sup>17</sup> We could, therefore, say that the concepts described within the *Zibaldone* with a professional language (world, nothingness, loneliness, destiny) are explained in the poetry with the help of metaphors depicting them, which in a synthetic summary seem to summarize the most important fragments of Leopardi's philosophical discourse (desolation, moonlight, sparrow, motion of the celestial bodies).

The fact that poetry was for Leopardi not only the pursuit of beauty, but also of cognition, can be testified by more than one statement formulated by the Italian author. According to Tristan from the *Small Moral Works*, the oldest poets and philosophers are “full of ideas, stories, and reflections on extreme human misery.”<sup>18</sup> These are images and stories, not final statements. Attempts to read some aspects of Leopardian thoughts in the context of his lyrical work seem therefore justified. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that sometimes a reliable interpre-

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<sup>17</sup> Galiberti mentions an interesting wordplay used by Leopardi (C. Galiberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, p. 20): Luce di luna e luce del nulla (the light of the moon and light of nothingness) – evident phonic similarity indicates the identity of meanings.

<sup>18</sup> G. Leopardi, *Operette morali*, BUR, Milan 2008, p. 590, translated by the author.

tation of Leopardi's poems can even lead to a reinterpretation of his theoretical considerations. In this way, Leopardi's poems become not only a colourful, lyrical reflection of the philosophical concepts contained in the *Zibaldone*, but also their complementation and sometimes even enlargement. One of such poems is *Sappho's last Song*, in which Leopardi extends the concept of nature with one more important aspect: something that the lyrical ego of the poem calls "heaven", "Jove", "blind decider of fates". It is about destiny, which is another secret force ruling human fate, hiding behind the face of nature. As Galimberti writes, considering the vision of nature constructed in *Sappho's last song* may shed more light on the Leopardian philosophy of nature than the resumed discussions around the *Zibaldone*.<sup>19</sup> It is a vision constructed on the basis of lyrical ego's deep conviction of the irresistible beauty of illusions created by nature, under the guise of which one discovers what really awaits him: illness, suffering and death. To face the latter is being forced the Leopardian Sappho, who has lost forever broadly understood beauty. The concept of the final exclusion of man from the dimension of beauty and youthful illusions is emphasized in the poem by a carefully selected lexicon, expressing a sense of loss ("gone", "none", "died", "no") and contrasting elements ("tranquil night", "bashful light", "quiet woods" and "rumbles", "darkened air", "roaring anger of the rising river water") emphasizing the fact that, in nature, two opposing forces meet: beauty and destiny (illusions and truth) – concepts constantly recurring in Leopardi's poems under the form of the same imagery. What characterizes Leopardi's lyricism is that it always becomes a carrier of cognitive value. The Italian author's poetic imagination radiates with myths and symbols that constitute a coherent system of senses.

The example of the poems cited above clearly shows that Leopardi's poetic reflections on the world are often based on the construction of lexical contrasts and antithetical combinations. Reality seen through the eyes of the Italian poet appears as a system of multiple contrasts. He opposes the power of love and the power of death (*Love and death*), illusion and truth (*To Silvia*), loneliness and happiness of lovers (*The solitary Thurst*), the eponymous *Calm after the storm* with "lightning, clouds and wind" (this is, incidentally, a poem praising the perception of the world through the tension between opposites). This juxtaposition of semantic oppositional segments of expression not only emphasizes the particular position of the lyrical ego and colours his monologue, but above all it reflects the vision of the world that Leopardi has professed all his life: a place which is contradictory in its essence, absurd and full of inexplicable paradoxes. *The evening of the holiday* is a composition that is one of many examples of poems illustrating this belief through a series of opposing meanings: a troubled lyrical ego looks at a woman sleeping in peace; the picturesque illustration of a quiet night contrasts with the

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<sup>19</sup> Cfr. C. Galimberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001.

subject's internal dilemmas. In the poem, the motif of "ancient nature" returns. It is a nature which not only devotes man to suffering, but also denies him all hope. In Leopardi, nature is subjected to personification extremely often – one of the most significant concepts of the Italian poet is the personified nature-stepmother. Speaking of personification in Leopardi, first of all, of course, we should mention the *Small Moral Works*, in which the dialogues are lead, among others, by Death, Fashion, Nature, Earth, Moon. However, obviously, personification, as a procedure "characterized by a high degree of poetic conventionality,"<sup>20</sup> is also used in many of Leopardi's poems. As an example we could mention the moon – the addressee of the *Night song of a wandering shepherd in Asia*, the *Love and death* that the fate made siblings, or about the exhausted, wounded woman from the poem *To Italy*, embodying Italy and its recent history. These are poems in which Leopardi revives, sets in motion and give a voice to some of the most significant elements of his philosophical system. This makes Leopardi speak from "the interior of the metaphor", using the expression of Józef Tischner.<sup>21</sup>

The same critic hypothesized that philosophical thinking in man's life derives from the tragedy that marks his existence, and the first task of philosophical metaphysics is to bring out this basic pain.<sup>22</sup> Such a statement would somehow explain Leopardi's tendency to explain his worldview through a tender poetics of lyrical compositions. The Italian writer's philosophy mainly concerns the drama of human existence, awareness of the illusory character of happiness, and sometimes even the temptation of self-destruction. No wonder that in his painful reflections, Leopardi reaches for the language of emotions, images and metaphors. This is because, as we have said, the metaphor has pictorial properties, and at the same time, through the lyricism of the poetry Leopardi is not only able to explain the complex reasons of all things, but he also expresses the emotional attitude of the lyrical ego towards reality – this is an element that scientific discourse does not allow and, as we presume basing on Leopardi's considerations, it is an element that as an artist he wanted to keep. It is this lack of scientific objectivity that some critics will accuse Leopard-philosopher of (even in the context of the *Zibaldone* deliberations), but this self-awareness and detailed auto-analysis are what make Leopardi's philosophical reflection so stimulating. It expresses basic pain of a human being – the pain of radical uncertainty.

The purpose of this reflection was not to show that Leopardi deserves to be called a philosopher, as it is not as important as it may seem. More noteworthy is

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20 *Słownik terminów literackich*, edited by J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1988, p. 351, translated by the author.

21 J. Tischner, *Myślenie z wnętrza metafory*, [in:] *Wypowiedź literacka a wypowiedź filozoficzna*, edited by M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1982, pp. 53–64.

22 Cfr. *Ibidem*.

the fact that Leopardi's philosophical thought is expressed not only in prose and deserves a full-scale analysis, which takes into account the lyrical aspect of the thoughts of the Italian master. Through this article, we have tried to show that there is a clear relationship between the stylistics of the Italian author's poetic expression and the way he presents his beliefs. Leopardi in his "poetising thought" – using the expression of Antonio Prete<sup>23</sup> – utilises not only lexis, semantics and grammar of poetic expression, but also the great explicative potential of rhetorical figures, especially metaphor. This is due to Leopardi's belief in the invaluable role of imagination in the process of cognition, which he writes about many times in his theoretical considerations. "The process of cognition [...] takes into account the imagination."<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, the choice of poetry as a carrier of philosophical content significantly affects both the reception of Leopardi's philosophy and the very formation of the worldview, which is influenced by personal experience of the world and subjectivity of relating facts characteristic for the lyrical ego. It should be remembered that the overall interpretation of Leopardi's poems should include two mirror questions: "how does the worldview is expressed in Leopardi's poetic texts?" and "how does poetic activity affect the worldview?" Taking the tension between these questions into account reflects the complexity of the whole situation. The peculiarity of Leopardi's "philosophical" poetry lies in the fact that the tragic considerations of the Italian poet (such as consciousness of one's destiny, boredom, disappointment, anxiety etc.) are described through the subtle forms in which the desperation collide with the lightness of form and the beauty of the poetic imaginativeness. This fact changes the reception of Leopardi's thoughts radically: overwhelming in content, yet tantalising with poetic craftsmanship, poems by Leopardi become something like Petrarch's "dolce tormento". "At the most intense moments, Leopardi raises his lament and protest against the dark power that governs us, while remaining impressed by the inexpressible beauty accompanying this revelation."<sup>25</sup> Uncovering the truth, or as Leopardi wrote, getting rid of youthful delusions, is inevitably associated with the burden of the painful consciousness of all things, but it is from this tragedy that Leopardi's "poetizing ego" is born, and by discovering beauty in what is tragic he somehow justifies this tragedy. It was Leopardi's "poetising thought", that, with the philosopher's intellect and sensitivity of the poet, hit in the most desperate tones of human tragedy.

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<sup>23</sup> A. Prete, *Il pensiero poetante: saggio su Leopardi*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1988.

<sup>24</sup> G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 12–23 VII 1820, translated by the author.

<sup>25</sup> C. Galimberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, p. 21, translated by the author.

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Aleksandra Koman

## Mową wiążaną o losie człowieka. Filozofia w poezji Giacoma Leopardiego

### *Streszczenie*

Giacomo Leopardi jest jednym z tych autorów, którzy w historii kultury zachodniej zapisali się jako twórcy z pogranicza literatury i filozofii. Co prawda Leopardi nie posługuje się tradycyjnymi formami wypowiedzi filozoficznej, jednak faktem jest, że większość rozważań włoskiego myśliciela wyraża się poprzez jednoczesne prowadzenie dwóch dyskursów: literackiego i filozoficznego. Leopardi próbował

swych sił niemalże w każdej formie wypowiedzi literackiej, do historii przeszedł jednak głównie jako poeta, który znaczną część swych najwniośniejszych przekonań zawarł w mowie wiązanej. Praktyka filozofowania za pośrednictwem wiersza nie jest w poezji niczym nowym, a rozmaite związki literatury z filozofią stanowią zagadnienie niemalże starożytne, jednak toczące się do dziś w świecie włoskiej krytyki dyskusje na temat relacji Leopardiego z filozofią pozwalają sądzić, że liryka refleksyjna słynnego poety z Recanati stanowi przypadek nad wyraz zajmujący. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi refleksję nad użyciem środków poetyckich w procesie wykładania światopoglądu przez Leopardiego, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem metafory, oraz nad ogólnym wpływem medium poetyckiego na prezentowanie i kształtowanie przyjętej ideologii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Leopardi, filozofia, poezja, dyskurs filozoficzny, dyskurs literacki, środki poetyckie, wyobraźnia, poznanie, prawda

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