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Philosophical Fables for Ecological Thinking: Resisting Environmental Catastrophe within the Anthropocene

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

February 2020

Abstract

This central premise of this thesis is that philosophical fables can be used to address the challenges that have not been adequately accounted for in post-Kantian philosophy that have contributed to environmental precarity, which we only have a narrow window of opportunity to learn to appreciate and respond to. Demonstrating that fables may bring to philosophy the means to cultivate the wisdom that Immanuel Kant described as crucial for the development of judgement in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), I argue that the philosophical fable marks an underutilised resource at our disposal, which requires both acknowledgment and defining. Philosophical fables, I argue, can act as 'go-carts of judgement', preventing us from entrenching damaging patterns that helped degree paved the way for us to find ourselves in a state of wholescale environmental crisis, through failing adequately to consider the multifarious effects of anthropogenic change. This work uses the theme of 'catastrophe', applied to ecological thinking and environmental crises, to examine and compare two thinker poets, Giacomo Leopardi and Donna Haraway, both of whom use fables to undertake philosophical critique. It will address a gap in scholarship, which has failed to adequately consider how fables might inform philosophy, as reflected in the lack of definition of the 'philosophical fable'. This is compounded by the difficulty theorists have found in agreeing on a definition of the fable in the more general sense. I attend to this gap through an examination of Leopardi and Haraway's thinking that considers their contributions to ecological thought. Throughout, I will assess the strengths and weaknesses of what I will show to be their philosophical fabulation. I compare how the ideas of each thinker can be brought to bear on the other, which has not previously been done, despite the shared foundations of some of the ideas of Leopardi and Haraway, including their philosophical resilience and commitment, which rests upon a shared view of the urgency of the need for change. The work I undertake in my two case studies will allow me to show that, despite the thinkers' shared appreciation for the fable's capacity to guide philosophy and their shared foundations, their work ultimately moves in two different directions. This I argue, reveals the potential for significant difference within the genre of the philosophical fable, which I suggest highlights that the form is best considered as a form of practice. Such a practice, I argue, harbours a commitment to having the courage to use our own understandings that Kant advocates in his 1784 essay "Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?".

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to those who have given me thoughtful feedback throughout my work, including students and staff at CRMEP's Annual Progression Seminars, and to my supervisor, Howard Caygill, whose generous support has been invaluable in facilitating my research, for which I will always be grateful. Special thanks to colleagues in the PostHuman Network and to participants, leaders and facilitators of the Leopardi Non-Fiction writing group in Recanati, and to those who have generously hosted me during research trips I could not otherwise have undertaken. Most importantly, immeasurable gratitude is due to my loved family and friends, who have always been ready to have faith in me.

I am also grateful for the financial support I have received from the British Society of Aesthetics (BSA), the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSA) and the British Society of Literature and Science (BSLS), which enabled my research to grow in unforeseen ways, and for generous practical advice and support from colleagues in the Graduate Research School at Kingston University.

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Introduction

Steer your way through the ruins
Of the altar and the mall
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Of creation and the fall
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Day by day
Thought by thought

'*Steer Your Way*', Leonard Cohen

This thesis seeks to contribute to current critical anthropocene discourse by revealing a less human centred way of understanding the world. In the last two hundred years, anthropocentrism has exacerbated environmental damage, making environmental catastrophes increasingly likely. No research has yet sufficiently addressed the extent to which fables may serve as an aid to help philosophy fulfil its promise of fostering wisdom and prudence. Within the Anthropocene, such a project is pertinent because it acknowledges the fable's strength in dismantling human hubris, which underlies our damaged relationship with the living world. Therefore, this study sets centre stage the ecological thought of two critics whose work represents an effort to use fables to help philosophy to flourish, namely Giacomo Leopardi and Donna Haraway. Within their literary and philosophical works, I examine their shared reverence for fables within their separate Italian and feminist philosophies. I question how their play with form relates to their criticisms concerning the issues that have led us to the present, where the damaged relationship between humans and the natural world threaten the continuation of our species and others. By examining how they combine fabulous thinking and philosophy in their consideration of environmental catastrophes and ecological thinking, I endeavour to draw out how their philosophical fables may offer us a blueprint for better judging and living.

Viewing the looming threat of wholescale environmental catastrophe appropriately as a warning that indicates an urgent need to navigate the world in a way that doesn't cause irreversible damage, we must now attend to questioning the validity of the anthropocentric stories we previously told ourselves and, where necessary, rooting these

out. We must learn to improve the way we comprehend the ecological catastrophes that signify the fragility of our stories and lives. As McKenzie Wark argues, those who have led the charge in raising the alarm about the Anthropocene have been scientific workers. Despite those trained in the humanities having extensively critiqued the concept, proposing various new terms to replace it, its resonance has too readily been overlooked. This thesis takes the Anthropocene seriously as a concept that critiques the state of critical thought, that behaves as a standing rebuke of the texts and habituated traditions we have inherited**.** Following from this, we must break with some of critical theory's conservative habits and look back on our archive for more useful critical tools, which initiate, rather than dismiss, cross disciplinary thinking.[1] It begins from the premise that we urgently need to 're-story' to find a better blueprint for the future.[2] In this research, I seek to examine the power of the stories as the basis navigating our lives, suggesting that these can be subjected to a critical eye and utilised as an effective resource that improves, rather than exacerbates our troubled times.[3]

To prepare for this work, I will begin by introducing the key terms and concepts referred to throughout this study. In doing so, I highlight a need for a coherent analysis that ties together seemingly disparate topics, seeking to show the significance of their areas of commonality. I will provide a brief introduction to the scientific concept of anthropocentrism. I will introduce the term 'catastrophe' in an ecological context, which will be examined within subsequent case studies, underlining its relevance within the Anthropocene. Highlighting the relation of these themes to human hubris will lead me to an assessment of how philosophy can be helped to address this problem, after which I will explicate how fables are adept at prompting us to critically re-evaluate our pride, and question to what extent we have the control we consider ourselves to have. Finally, I will

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[1] Wark, M. Critical Theory After the Anthropocene Public Seminar: Public Seminar Publishing Initiative at The New School.

[2] Adsit-Morris, C. (2017) *Restorying Environmental Education: Figurations, Fictions, and Feral Subjectivities.* Springer International Publishing. 46.

[3] Some of the most prominent political campaigns of the past decade have been successful on this basis, using slogans like 'Take back control' and 'Make America great again' to set forth narratives that have won appeal from disenfranchised voters. As Laclau argues in *On Populist Reason* (2005), populism is not limited to a racist, nativist, or proto-fascist ideology of the far right. It can also be the appropriate successor for the politics of the older socialist, social democratic, and labour parties. One might extend this idea by adding that fables harbour potential that warrants adequate consideration for their ability to contribute to such projects.

introduce the thinkers whose works I will examine in relation to these terms for the remainder of this thesis.

Anthropocentricism

Throughout the quarter of a million years during which humans have inhabited the earth, civilisations, cultures, communities and identities have been formed, built and destroyed as a result of the stories that humans have told, shared and understood. But what happens when the stories we tell underly habits, behaviours and practices that not only define an era, but risk causing the wholescale destruction of the environment as we know it? Previously, there have been five great die-offs and at least twenty mass extinctions.[4] The end of the ecological era we currently inhabit will not be characterised by the extinction of large mammals or dinosaurs, but, alongside a third or more of the roughly 6,300 known species of amphibians, by the extinction of humans.[5] We are living with the Anthropocene. Today is a time of severe environmental crisis, which we have caused, and we only have a small window of time in which to fully appreciate our predicament and re-navigate our fate. Ecological catastrophe is, at the current rate of change, only eleven years away.

In the last two hundred years of our inhabitancy on Earth, particularly since the Industrial Revolution, humans have had an unambiguously global impact.[6] The spiralling momentum of global warming, species extinction and environmental degradation we currently bear witness to have, as scientists testify, been caused by us. Humans are on a collision course with the natural world, causing current, impending or potential damage involving ozone and marine life depletion, freshwater availability, ocean dead zones, forest loss, biodiversity destruction, climate change and continued human population

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[4] Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Fortey, R., Smith, A., Barry, T. L., Coe, A. L., Bown, P. R., Rawson, P. F., Gale, A., Gibbard, P., Gregory, F. J., Hounslow, M. W., Kerr, A. C., Pearson, P., Knox, R., Powell, J., Waters, C., Marshall, J., Oates, M. and Stone, P. (2011) 'Stratigraphy of the Anthropocene', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences,* 369(1938), pp. 1036-1055.

[5] Wake, D. B. and Vredenburg, V. T. (2008) 'Are we in the midst of the sixth mass extinction? A view from the world of amphibians', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

[6] Zalasiewicz, J. A. and Freedman, K. (2008) *The Earth after us : what legacy will humans leave in the rocks?* Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press. 1.

growth.[7] The situation is worsening. Extreme weather has become more commonplace and wildfires, flooding, extreme heat and drought have become more likely and more severe.

The ecologist Eugene Stoermer and expert in freshwater diatoms coined the term ‘the anthropocene’ in the early 1980s, introducing it to refer to growing evidence for the transformative effects of human activities on the Earth. The Dutch Nobel laureate and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen helped bring it into global discourse in 2000 when he joined Stoermer to propose that human activities had been of such a kind and magnitude as to merit the use of a new geological term for a new epoch to supersede the Holocene.[8] In their article in *Nature,* 'The Anthropocene: Geology of Mankind', published in 2002, the authors described how only the actions of only 25% of the world population were having catastrophic effects on the living world.

Tropical rainforests are quickly disappearing, releasing carbon dioxide and increasing species extinction, humans are using more than half of all accessible fresh water, energy use has grown 16-fold during the twentieth century, emitting 160 million tonnes of atmospheric sulphur dioxide emissions per year, over twice the natural emissions. Crutzen, Stoermer and their colleagues wrote: ‘Fossil-fuel burning and agriculture have caused substantial increases in the concentrations of 'greenhouse' gases - carbon dioxide by 30% and methane by more than 100% - reaching their highest levels over the past 400 millennia, with more to follow’.[9] In 1992, The Union of Concerned Scientists issued a “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity”, calling on humanity to recognise the magnitude and significance of the changes we are causing to the natural world. This warning from scientists failed to be adequately heeded. Consequently, a second call, signed by eight world leadings scientists and 15,000 signatories from 184 countries was issued in November 2017.[10] The lack of acceptance of and regard for scientists’ warnings

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[7] Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Newsome, T. M., Galetti, M., Alamgir, M., Crist, E., Mahmoud, M. I., Laurance, W. F. and 15, s. s. f. c. (2017a) 'World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice', *BioScience,* 67(12), pp. 1026-1028.
[8] Haraway, D. (2016a) 'Tentacular thinking: Anthropocene, capitalocene, chthulucene', *e-flux,* 75.
[9] Crutzen, P. J. (2016) 'Geology of mankind', *Paul J. Crutzen: A Pioneer on Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Change in the Anthropocene*: Springer, pp. 211-215.23.
[10] Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Newsome, T. M., Galetti, M., Alamgir, M., Crist, E., Mahmoud, M. I., Laurance, W. F. and 15, s. s. f. c. (2017a) 'World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice', *BioScience,* 67(12), pp. 1026-1028.

demonstrates the resilience of human hubris. Given the timescale in which we must act to avert ecological catastrophe, it also underlines the speed with which it must be challenged, and the importance that we use all the tools at our disposal to do so.

Environmental Catastrophes

According to Noam Chomsky, the question of impending environmental catastrophe is one of the central problems for our species' survival. Major anthropogenic global warming, he underlines, is a human problem.[11] The history of natural disasters, as Lucy Jones shows in *The Big Ones: How Natural Disasters Have Shaped Us (and What We Can Do about Them)* (2018), is a history of ourselves.[12] Events like these have always shaped the history of our time on earth, but today their increasing frequency arises from the impact we are having on the planet. The word 'catastrophe' derives from the Greek word καταστροφή, meaning an overturning, a sudden turn or a conclusion, an event which indicates a major shift in the state of things.[13] In Aristotle's *Poetics*, *katastrophē* is intimately associated with *anagnorisis*: the moment of realization.[14] The language surrounding the terms disaster and catastrophe alike often speak of an absolute end and sudden misfortune that can be misleading when the events they refer to are often contributed to by the gradual and hidden effects of processes like global warming. Throughout, I seek to be sensitive to this, and to take the gradual effects of anthropocentrism as one of the objects of my enquiry. Because the effects of disasters can take longer to become apparent, and because the theme of the catastrophe has been used by writers and philosophers for centuries to examine human fragility, in this thesis I will focus primarily on catastrophes rather than disasters, whilst I will recognise that the terms are often used interchangeably. This takes into account contemporary criticisms of the term disaster, such as Timothy Morton's illustration that such examinations can

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[11] Chomksy, N. and Polk, L. (2013) *Nuclear War and Environmental Catastrophe.* Seven Stories Press. 1.
[12] Jones, L. (2018) *The Big Ones: How Natural Disasters Have Shaped Us (And What We Can Do About Them).* Icon Books Limited.
[13] Higgins, D. (2017) *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora.* New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. 12.
[14] Rigby, K. (2015) *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times. Under the Sign of Nature*: University of Virginia Press.

encourage the evaluation of the impact of events according to whether their effects on human beings are considered positive or negative.[15]

According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we now only have eleven years to ensure global warming will not exceed a maximum of 1.5°C to limit the effects of global sea level rise, extreme heatwaves, melting of Arctic sea ice and the continued decline of coral reefs. To contextualise this, it is likely 1.5°C will be reached between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate and exceeding this will dramatically increase risks to people and the ecosystems they depend on.[16] In the 2017 Lancet Countdown on Climate Change and Health, the authors emphasised: 'The human symptoms of climate change are unequivocal and potentially irreversible—affecting the health of populations around the world today'.[17] We cannot afford to progress with the same hesitance to address these issues that we have in the past. The problem of environmental catastrophe requires immediate action on the part of humans if we are to hope for our species' very continuation.[18] Christian Parenti underlines how little time we have to make adjustments in the collective carbon load before we are faced with irreversible consequences in *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (2011), where he points out:

> [E]ven if all greenhouse gas emissions stopped immediately—that is, if the world economy collapsed today, and not a single light bulb switched on nor a single gasoline-powered motor started ever again—there is already enough

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[15] Morton, T. (2012) *"Romantic Disaster Ecology: Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth"*. Romantic Circles: University of Colorado Boulder. Retrieve on 23/10/2019 from: https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/disaster/HTML/praxis.2012.morton.html. For example, according to the International Disaster Database, a natural disaster is an event in which at least one of the following occur: ten or more people are reported killed; one hundred people are reported affected; a state of emergency is declared or a call for international assistance is made.

[16] Change, I. P. o. C. (2018) *Global Warming of 1.5° C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5° C Above Pre-industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty.* Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

[17] Watts, N., Amann, M., Ayeb-Karlsson, S., Belesova, K., Bouley, T., Boykoff, M., Byass, P., Cai, W., Campbell-Lendrum, D., Chambers, J., Cox, P. M., Daly, M., Dasandi, N., Davies, M., Depledge, M., Depoux, A., Dominguez-Salas, P., Drummond, P., Ekins, P., Flahault, A., Frumkin, H., Georgeson, L., Ghanei, M., Grace, D., Graham, H., Grojsman, R., Haines, A., Hamilton, I., Hartinger, S., Johnson, A., Kelman, I., Kiesewetter, G., Kniveton, D., Liang, L., Lott, M., Lowe, R., Mace, G., Odhiambo Sewe, M., Maslin, M., Mikhaylov, S., Milner, J., Latifi, A. M., Moradi-Lakeh, M., Morrissey, K., Murray, K., Neville, T., Nilsson, M., Oreszczyn, T., Owfi, F., Pencheon, D., Pye, S., Rabbaniha, M., Robinson, E., Rocklöv, J., Schütte, S., Shumake-Guillemot, J., Steinbach, R., Tabatabaei, M., Wheeler, N., Wilkinson, P., Gong, P., Montgomery, H. and Costello, A. (2018) 'The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: from 25 years of inaction to a global transformation for public health', *Lancet*, 391(10120), pp. 581-630.

[18] Chomksy, N. and Polk, L. (2013) *Nuclear War and Environmental Catastrophe.* Seven Stories Press.. 'Preface'.

> carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to cause significant warming and disruptive climate change, and with that considerably more poverty, violence, social dislocation, forced migration and political upheaval. Thus we must find humane and just means of adaption, or we face barbaric prospects.[19]

Catastrophes, in their representation in literature and philosophical thought account for this necessity, and whilst I will certainly not rule out disasters, since the terms are often used interchangeably, my critical analysis will focus on events that are closer to the description of the catastrophe than the disaster.[20] As David Higgins demonstrates in *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora* (2017) catastrophe was an important trope in the Romantic period.[21] The extinction of the human species was addressed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* for example, where it is linked to global cooling, in Book Five of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* the destruction of humanity occurs 'by deluge', Charlotte Smith's 'Beachy Head' examines the geological separation of the British Isles from mainland Europe, a joyous apocalypse appears at the end of Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' examined the 'year without a summer' following the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Mount Tambora in 1815, which impacted both the climate and Romantic literature. Higgins notes that apocalyptic narratives derived both from Christian tradition and from developments in geological science proved particularly compelling at times of socio-political upheaval.[22] In *Novacene,* Lovelock makes the same assertion when he notes the concern of poets with the fragility of human existence, referring like David Higgins in *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene* (2017), to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Lord Byron's poem 'Darkness', in their consideration of what the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in 1815 means for the fragility of our existence.[23]

The forces that give our planet life are increasingly exceeding our ability to withstand them, causing significant environmental imbalance, and increasingly leading to

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[19] Parenti, C. (2011) *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence.* PublicAffairs. 226.
[20] Whilst not all catastrophes are environmental, this study is concerned with those of an environmental nature. For the sake of brevity, unless stated otherwise, I will refer to environmental catastrophes as catastrophes from now on in this study. This work will examine ecological concerns relating to the interaction of various forms of life within the context of the threats of environmental catastrophes.
[21] Higgins, D. (2017) *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora.* New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. 12.
[22] Ibid. 8.
[23] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 7.

environmental disasters and catastrophes. Such events shape cities and architecture, elevate leaders, topple governments and influence the way we think, feel, fight and unite. The volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in Pompeii challenged and reinforced prevailing views of religion, the California floods of 1862 revealed the limitations of memory and Hurricane Katrina and the 2004 tsunami taught us about governance and globalisation. These historically and environmentally significant events set off reverberations that have echoes which will be felt long into the future. In turn, as this thesis takes as its starting point, the way we think, feel and unite, and arising from this, the way we behave and the habits we form, also feed back into the earth's systems.[24] Theorists of the Anthropocene demonstrate this, revealing how catastrophic moments, in life, and their representations within literature, epitomise and sharpen focus on the way human civilisations and natural rhythms and cycles interrelate. The dramatic characteristics of catastrophes highlight a 'rupture[s] or inversion[s] of the normal order of things.'[25] Environmental catastrophes spring from 'the intersection of natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions with human populations in varying states of economic, social, and cultural vulnerability.'[26] As Naomi Klein argues in *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal* (2019), social and cultural vulnerability in turn contribute to ecological vulnerability.[27] Literary representations of these paradigm shifting events often share a concern with the fragility of human dwelling within a potentially violent universe, drawing on a shared language of catastrophe.

Deficiencies in the Faculty of Judgement

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant argued that although one may be skilled and knowledgeable in the technical aspects of something that requires our reasonable abilities, one must also take care to develop one's capacity to fruitfully direct their skills, on order to avoid the risk of making poor use of their reason:

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[24] Jones, L. (2018) *The Big Ones: How Natural Disasters Have Shaped Us (And What We Can Do About Them).* Icon Books Limited.
[25] Higgins, D. (2017) *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora.* New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. 8.
[26] Mark D. Anderson, *Disaster Writing: The Culture Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 1.
[27] Klein, N. (2019) *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal.* First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition. edn. New York: Simon & Schuster. 103.

> A physician, a judge, or a ruler may have at command many excellent pathological, legal, or political rules, even to the degree that he become a profound teacher of them, and yet, none the less, may easily stumble in their application. For, although admirable in understanding, he may be wanting in natural power of judgement. He may comprehend the universal in abstracto, and yet not be able to distinguish whether a case in concreto comes under it. Or the error may be due to his not having received, through examples and actual practice, adequate training for this particular act of judgement. Such sharpening of the judgement is indeed the one great benefit of examples.[28]

We see in Kant's work that philosophy has provided us with warnings alerting us that we commonly lack the proper degree of understanding concerning the implications of the advancements of our scientific abilities:

> [Deficiency in judgement is properly that which is called stupidity; and for such a failing we know no remedy. A dull or narrow-minded person, to whom nothing is wanting but a proper degree of understanding, may be improved by tuition, even so far as to deserve the epithet of learned. But as such persons frequently labour under a deficiency in the faculty of judgement, it is not uncommon to find men extremely learned who in the application of their science betray a lamentable degree this irremediable want.] [29]

As Kant argued, learned humans are frequently narrow minded and lack the adequate judgement required to apply their science wisely. Yet do not seem to have heeded these warnings, however. Today we see the resonance of this issue in its underpinning of the ecological crises, which is expressed, amongst other things, in increasing the frequency of environmental catastrophes. The lamentable degree to which Kant's argument is true is compounded by the extent to which the application of science can trigger consequences we were not adequately prepared for because they weren't considered and accounted for. Thus, Kant contends that we need to be encouraging the development of the talent of reason. The philosophical problem we are faced with is how to enact such a development. One response he proposes is through the employment of examples, which he contends can help us to avoid stumbling during philosophical enquiries and develop a practice of avoiding such mistakes. Examples, he wrote: '…are [thus] the go-cart of judgement; and those who are lacking in the natural talent can never dispense with them.'[30] This 'go-cart', a mid-seventeenth century term that denotes a device, like an infant walker, for helping a child learn to walk, is Kant's response to his dissatisfaction with the capacity of humans

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[28] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. [A134/B173].
[29] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. [A134/B173].
[30] Ibid. [A134/ B173 -4].

to use their reason to their full advantage, and our tendency to allow our to get carried away by our reason. Yet, despite Kant's articulation of the philosophical use of examples, which, in the section examining Leopardi will show is related to fables, we still remain blighted by outcomes which arise out of our lack of judgement.[31]

There is the continued resistance to appreciating that literature is well suited to providing instantiations of lessons of philosophical value. There remains an often hushed but nonetheless persistent notion that literature cannot be philosophically serious enough to attend to questions that more concentrated philosophy has found challenging. With the continued prominence of this attitude in mind, it becomes easier to understand why Kant's insight has still not been appreciated. The hesitance to cross disciplinary boundaries between philosophy and literature, has created an oversight concerning fables. This, in turn, has led to a failure to recognise the resonance of works by theorists who recognised the fable's ability to behave as a vehicle for philosophy, which has been to our theoretical detriment. The response to this problem that this work proposes is to present a refutation of such ideas by examining how fables -which have a lineage extending back to the ancients of providing lessons designed to enhance wisdom- can be understood as a tool well suited to attend to deficiencies of judgement. In the context of the environmental crisis we are facing, and the increasing frequency of catastrophes, this question takes on a new urgency, because the period of time in which the opportunity remains for us to radically alter our ways of being and relating to the world is rapidly decreasing.

Regarding the question of how we should understand philosophy, in his first critique, Kant indicates philosophy can set out warnings of which others, such as mathematicians, must take heed because they cannot afford to ignore them. Acknowledging that philosophy cannot be defined with the same exactitude as other sciences, Kant emphasises that the task of philosophy consists precisely in knowing its limits:

> Philosophy is the system of all philosophical knowledge. If we are to understand by it the archetype for the estimation of all attempts at philosophising, and if this archetype is to serve for the estimation of each subjective philosophy, the structure of which is often so diverse and liable to alteration, it must be taken objectively. Thus regarded, philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science which nowhere exists in concreto, but to which, by many different paths, we endeavour to approximate, until the one true path,

[31] A current example are the consequences for democracy of the unfettered power of Facebook in recent years.

> overgrown by the products of sensibility, has at last been discovered, and the image, hitherto so abortive, has achieved likeness to the archetype, so far as this is granted to [mortal] man. Till then we cannot learn philosophy; for where is it, who is in possession of it, and how shall we recognise it? We can only learn to philosophise, that is, to exercise the talent of reason, in accordance with its universal principles, on certain actually existing attempts at philosophy, always however, reserving the right of reason to investigate, to confirm, or to reject these principles in their very sources.[32]

Here, Kant argues that rather than question what philosophy itself is, it is more profitable to consider how we can learn to philosophise, which he defines as exercising the talent of reason. By focusing on considering how we can understand philosophy's limits, we can, according to Kant's formula, be properly considered to be engaged in the project of learning to philosophise.

The limits of philosophy reveal themselves with particularly damaging consequences within the context of human exceptionalism. Some of Kant's work contained its own consideration of this, but could be extended further, most notably in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) where he subtly reminds us that, despite being briefly in the golden age of our power and dominance, we are nonetheless destined to extinction. For example, he briefly considers how 'a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital force (one knows not how) must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came.'[33] He thus focuses less here on the legislative power of the human intellect than in his first critique, resituating humanity on the planet, in doing so, retaining a sense of the limits of human powers of mind. Whilst he did not go on to expand this, those who came after him have used this framework of thought as inspiration for their own, which still needs to be examined further, particularly because it holds resonance for understanding our present ecological crisis insofar as our historic failure to recognise this has played its role in bringing us to this state. For instance, the stratigrapher Jan Zalasiewicz takes up this theme in his work of science fiction, *The Earth After Us* (2008), where he suggests we live according to how we might make the most

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[32] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. [A838/B866].
[33] Kant, I., Gregor, M. and Reath, A. (2015) *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason.* Cambridge University Press. 5: 162.

interesting geological footprint, or fossil evidence, preserved within the geological strata for future extra-terrestrial explorer or colonists.[34]

Fables

There is significant disagreement concerning how the fable should be defined. Compounding this, there has to date only been extremely limited discussion of the way the fable is connected to, in a way that can benefit the practice of philosophy.[35] This is a particularly peculiar blind spot, which I plan to address, given that philosophers, and those closely associated with the discipline, including Lessing, Rousseau, Locke, Herder and Goethe, explicitly discuss the genre in their works. In his excellent overview of the Greaco-Roman terminology of the genre, Gert-Jan van Dijk distilled a concise description of the genre from multiple definitions: 'a fictitious metaphorical narrative'.[36] He shows that the fable's length is variable, it's functions and character may not be restricted, the promythium and epimythium are optional, and certain protagonists, times and places do not need to be specified.[37] For example, he notes that, in studies like *Recueil de fables nouvelles* (1747), Esprit-Jean de Rome d'Ardène delimited the fables length to a maximum of 50 verses, but recent theorists like Harold Blackham, in his study, *Fable as Literature* (1985), cast a wider net allowing for the inclusion of a broader range of works to be considered as fables.[38] For instance, he argues that substantial modern fiction corresponds to the genre is longer than this, such as that of Franz Kafka. By bringing together 'Aesopic' and 'longer fables,' he brings broad works of fiction from Lucian's *True History*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Orwell's *Animal Farm*, he unites these under one heading, allowing for their comparison through the specific lens of the

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[34] Zalasiewicz, J. A. and Freedman, K. (2008) *The Earth after us : what legacy will humans leave in the rocks?* Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press. 5.
[35] One work that does briefly address the fable in relation to philosophy is Tyson E. Lewis's *Rousseau and the Fable: Rethinking the Fabulous Nature of Educational Philosophy* (2012), which focuses Rousseau's concern regarding the inability of the child to uncover the intended meaning of the fable and its inherent ambiguity.
[36] Dijk, G.-J. v. (1997b) *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature: With a Study of the Theory and Terminology of the Genre. Mnemosyne, bibliotheca classica Batava Supplementum,* Leiden ; New York: Brill. 113.
[37] Dijk, G.-J. v. (1997a) *Ainoi, logoi, mythoi : fables in archaic, classical, and Hellenistic Greek literature : with a study of the theory and terminology of the genre. Mnemosyne, bibliotheca classica Batava Supplementum,* Leiden ; New York: Brill. 114.
[38] Dijk, G.-J. v. (1997b) *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature: With a Study of the Theory and Terminology of the Genre. Mnemosyne, bibliotheca classica Batava Supplementum,* Leiden ; New York: Brill. 25.

fable.[39] Dijk also shows that the fable's functions may be persuasive, satirical and illustrative. His work highlights that the fable's possible inclusion of animals and plants and wide-ranging potential audience give it rich potential for transformation and modification and harbouring and advancing political or civic dimensions.

Whilst the substantial areas of contention that exist amongst genre theorists cannot be fully explicated here, these include arguments concerning whether fables are suitable for young audiences, or for education, whether animal characters must be included and at what length a fable becomes too long for such classification.[40] Despite disagreement concerning what the most important aspects of the fable are, there are several themes that arise regularly in the genre that lend it its potential as a rich resource for philosophy, explicated further within my case studies that are worth articulating here. Such features include the fable's suitability to evaluate and express our moral responsibilities, its history of highlighting human hubris, its use of humour and satire to make unflattering portrayals of its protagonists' characteristics more palatable, its ancient human history and political association with establishing a means of resistance and the capacity for its content to reach and resonate with a wide range of audiences, originating from its affiliation with oral storytelling traditions. Taking a broad view of definitions of the fable prevents the unnecessary exclusion of relevant material. For example, Salmon Rushdie, who examines the term 'fabulism' as it applies to contemporary literature, points out that writers are using the machinery of the fable but without wishing to point a simple moral.[41] By recognising that the fable can exist outside of strict delineations of the form, we allow ourselves to question what aspects of the tradition authors have found interest and potential in, which have led to the development of extensions of the tradition, such as postmodern fabulism. This is why I have chosen to begin with Dijk's succinct definition, which will serve as a demarcation of the scope of this study.

This research will focus primarily on the development of European fables. Non-European fable traditions, for example, such as Indian Panchatantra animal fables and West African and Caribbean Anansi fables have their own specificity and richness, which are not best

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[39] Blackham, H. J. (1985) *The fable as literature.* London ; Dover, N.H.: Athlone Press. xx
[40] For a full explication of these, see Gert-Jan van Dijk's work, *Ainoi, logoi, mythoi.*
[41] Rushdie, S. and Reder, M. (2000) *Conversations with Salman Rushdie. Literary conversations series* Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. 44.

addressed here, except, where pertinent, to highlight the similarities to or differences from European fables of these traditions.[42] Anansi, whose wit and perseverance carried slaves in the Caribbean through to their emancipation, was recently popularised in Neil Gaiman's 'Anansi Boys.' Babacar M'Baye writes in *The Trickster Comes West: Pan-African Influence in Early Black Diasporan Narratives* (2010) that Anansi is 'the living force that inspired the black revolutionaries of the diaspora to gather strength from all sides of their societies for the liberation of their people'.[43] The figure, a trickster spider, which originated from the oral tradition of the Ashanti people in Ghana, played significant roles in numerous Akan slave revolts throughout the Americas, alongside multiple roles in African oral traditions and Caribbean cultures.[44] Anansi stories gained political use due to their representation of the strengths of oppressed people, and the character was central to stories where the tables are turned on powerful enemies. They symbolised key aspects of Afro-Caribbean culture and celebrated a vital link with an African past; deploying the figure of these oral tales as a way to build a strong sense of identity.[45] Whilst in Africa and the Caribbean fables were often the form through which human strengths like cunning and wisdom were celebrated, in their European context, it is more common for fables to highlight human folly.[46]

Another essential relationship between fables and slavery is the character, Aesop who was thought to have been a slave., whose story highlights the relationship between the fable and the use of wit and perseverance to fight for emancipation. Within the largely European scope of this research, I will strive to redress aporias arising from the overtly Anglophone nature of current research. Aesop is perhaps the most well-known narrator of fables, who is familiar due to the sixth century BC in the writings of Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle and a collection by Phaedrus. Aesop is considered by many to be a mythical, rather than a historical, person.[47] According to legend of his life, he was a slave on the island of Samos in the age of Sappho who existed from the fifth century BC. Within

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[42] For a comparison of the Panchatantra stories and Aesop's fables, see: Gibbs, L. (2002) *Aesop's Fables.* OUP Oxford.
[43] M'Baye, B. (2010) *The Trickster Comes West: Pan-African Influence in Early Black Diasporan Narratives.* University Press of Mississippi. 96.
[44] Ibid. 17.
[45] Marshall, E. Z. (2012) *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance.* Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Adrados, F. R. (1999) *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable: Volume I. Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age.* Brill. 4.

an account of his life written by the 1st. century AD, he was an adviser to Croesus, killed by being thrown off a cliff by the Delphians.[48] The topic of fables and their relation to resistance has been examined in detail, such as within Thomas Keenan's *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (1997), where Keenan argues that there is an inseparable relationship between ethics and fables.[49] In the children's author and literary critic Michael Rosen's work, *Workers' Tales: Socialist Fairy Tales, Fables, and Allegories from Great Britain* (2018), the function of fables to critique the world and agitate for a better one is also examined.[50]

Fables have a long history of satirising human behaviour and challenging our understanding of ourselves. Particularly in the work of the ancient fabulist Lucian of Samosata, from Syria, and in that of those influenced by his work, the fable has shown itself to be particularly adept to undermining human hubris through the use of satire. As such, it offers itself up as a particularly adept resource to utilise when we need to work to tear down the human arrogance underlying species exceptionalism and anthropocentricism that got us here. Like Aesop, Lucian, who also inspired Latin fabulists, wrote short prose works that taught moral lessons in an entertaining fashion.[51] Lucian wrote about 80 prose satires in Greek, many of which were dialogues where mythical or historical figures are placed in ridiculous positions, allowing the contrast between their traditional dignity and what they are made to say or do a fruitful source of irony. Lucian adopted material that interested him and adapted it to fables, which he used as a mode of invention. His writings, for instance, included 'Zeus the Tragedian' and 'Dialogues of the Gods,' which included comic dialogues between sham philosophers, mock eulogies of astrologers and thinly veiled personal attacks on The Mistaken Critic, The Professor of Rhetoric and The Ignorant Book Collector. Lucianic fables, in addition to being moralising, featured irony, which works as a distancing device, producing a sense of cultural remoteness. This quality of irony has engaged the wit of authors, like the humanist Leon Battista Alberti, and readers alike, whilst preventing descent into facile

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[48] Rosen, 12.
[49] Keenan, T. (1997a) *F ables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics. Meridian : crossing aesthetics* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
[50] Rosen, M. (2018) *Workers ' Tales . Socialist Fairy Tales , Fables, and Allegories from Great Britain. Oddly modern fairy tales* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 12.
[51] Marsh, D. (1998) *Lucian and the Latins : Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance. Recentiores : later Latin texts and contexts* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 85.

allegoresis.[52] His ‘Dialogues of the Gods’, ‘Dialogues of the Dead’ and ‘The Sale of Lives’ dealt with themes of ancient mythology and contemporary philosophers in his time and his characters were developed to initiating ridicule. Lucian makes fun of outlandish tales and his satirical “True Story” is the earliest known work of fiction to include travel to outer space, alien life-forms, and interplanetary warfare. In his work, Lucian often pretends the story he tells are true history, aligning them anecdotally to reality. With works like ‘Trips to the Moon’, he reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously. For instance, he pretends his characters, like ‘the dead’ are alive in order to ridicule modern and present customs. In doing so, he rallies against the human hubris and tear down humans’ inflated understandings of ourselves and challenges our tendency to take ourselves too seriously. He addressed many aspects of the human condition that were traditional themes in Latin verse satire, including wealth and power, philosophy, religion, death and the afterlife.[53] Comedy is often employed within Lucian’s work and more general fables to teach about the dangers, vices, vanities, temptation, treacheries and illusions of the world.[54] They can be used to present, unpack and analyse the causes of our problems, and encourage us to face and respond to fault-finding narratives concerning our abilities and actions.

In *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth* (2001), Andrew Calder writes argues that the prominence of the failings and deplorable characteristics of humans in fables distinguish the genre from the epic, wherein humans are framed with heroic stature, portrayed for example, as kings.[55] As Calder highlight, Lucian’s comic and satirical techniques, turning this tendency on its head in order to portray gods, philosophers, kings and Trojan heroes as petty, self-interested figures lacking in manners and common sense, leading Calder to argue that fables can be understood as being closer to the satiric tradition than to the Homeric one. He argues that in such fables, we can find an antidote to human hubris, which is distinguishable from the eloquence of tragic and epic poetry which magnifies men and women, glorifying their actions and compelling

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[52] Brown, A. (2010) *The return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence. I Tatti studies in Italian Renaissance history* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 33.
[53] Marsh, D. (1998) *Lucian and the Latins : Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance. Recentiores : later Latin texts and contexts* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 12.
[54] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Z63.
[55] Calder, A. (2001) *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth.* Droz. 43.

them to weep over their failings. On the contrary, the lowly inhabitants of the world of the fable regularly include the common: flies, frogs, crows and mice, not gods or fearless heroes, who inflate the grandiosity of human characteristics. Through the fable, a critical light is enabled to shine on problematic human behaviour. Indeed, Lucian, Horace and Erasmus all considered the evils and follies of kings as more deserving of mocking laughter than of pathos or awe.[56] Lucian's harsh, comical style informed the development of the tradition of the fable within Europe prominently in this way, as Maria Giulia Franzoni shows in her study *A philosophy as old as Homer: Giacomo Leopardi and Greek poetic pessimism* (2017).[57]

Ursula K. Le Guin highlights the shared etymology of fairy tales and fables, which both descend from the Latin verb *fari*, 'to speak', emphasising the linguistic history combining speaking and telling tales.[58] The relationship between fables and closely associated genres like fairy tales, aphorisms, allegory, myths and dialogues are too complex to evaluate here and have already receive due attention from numerous scholars before.[59] However, to highlight how I will be understanding the term, we can turn to Blackham's consideration of the books of the Bible. According to him, whilst the books of the Bible, are rich in imagery and are purveyed with similitudes, allusive forms, allegories, dreams, visions, and parables- only Jotham's cautionary tale in the *Book of Judges*, is universally recognised to be fable:

> The trees at some time looked for a king among themselves, and asked first the olive, then the fig, then the vine. All refused because they had their own proper business to look after. Last, the bramble gave ironical consent upon an absurd condition that entailed a fearful penalty. This was Jotham's invention to bring home the realities of a situation to the perpetrators of it.[60]

Blackham separates the fable from similar types of allusive fiction by judging it on its capacity to stand on its own with a general application.[61] This understanding of the fable

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[56] Ibid. 40-1.
[57] Franzoni, M. G. (2017) *A philosophy as old as Homer: Giacomo Leopardi and Greek poetic pessimism.* The University of St Andrews.
[58] Guin, U. K. L. (2017) *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places.* Grove Atlantic./ Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places. 269.
[59]In the work of Dijk, Rosen and Gibbs, for example.
[60] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Judges 9:15-18.

[61] Blackham, H. J. (1985) *The fable as literature.* London ; Dover, N.H.: Athlone Press. Xiii.

– as something that is entirely made up of its message and capable of standing alone – will be drawn from throughout this research.

The purpose of the fable is often thought to be to use sweetness, simile, etc. in order to teach children.[62] This has led to its derision, most pertinently perhaps, from Hegel in Volume 1 of his *Aesthetics*, who wrote: 'But we [also] find amongst Aesop's fables a number which in invention and execution are of great barrenness, but above all are told with the aim of teaching, so that animals or even gods are a mere cloak.'[63] For Hegel, who often presupposes the fable is synonymous with the animal fable, the form is too exemplary. It merely creates an event that is fabricated for the purpose of the lesson it represents and thoughtlessly cloaks this with animal characters, or gods.[64] He objected that fables were too artificially articulated, contending:

> Aesop himself is said to have been a misshapen humpbacked slave; his notions are only witty [witzig], without any energy of spirit or depth of insight and substantive vision, without poetry and philosophy. His views and doctrines prove indeed to be ingenious and clever, but there remains only, as it were, a subtle investigation of trifles.[65]

Hegel conceived that fables can only ever touch the surface of issues they proclaim to examine, because they simply mine their material for proof of the doctrines intended to be communicated at the outset.[66] For these reasons, which I intend to demonstrate are problematic, he designates the slave's form as the origin of prose:

> Aesop does not dare to recite his doctrines openly, but can only make them understood hidden, as it were, in a riddle which at the same time is always being solved. In the slave, prose begins, and so this entire genre is prosaic.[67]

This work will provide a counter to Hegel's judgement concerning the lack of value concerning the exemplary nature of fables. Through a consideration of the fable in conjunction with Kant's idea of the benefits of 'go carts of judgement' and examples, I argue that the fable has more depth and substance than Hegel, and critics like Henri

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[62] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 67.
[63] Hegel, G. W. F. and Knox, T. M. (1998) *Aesthetics.* Clarendon Press.
[64] Ibid. 388.
[65] Ibid. 384.
[66] Keenan, T. (1997b) *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics. Meridian : crossing aesthetics* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 52.
[67] Hegel, G. W. F. and Knox, T. M. (1998) *Aesthetics.* Clarendon Press. 384.

Bergson, accounted for, as I will explain. Along with primers, stories and poems, fables have played an important role for literacy education. Throughout the eighteenth century it was highly regarded as 'either a literary genre with educational utility or an educational tool with the inherent attractiveness of literature'.[68] In *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693), Locke discussed Aesop's fables, celebrating their suitability for delighting and entertaining children.[69] He believed that such stories could stimulate a child's interest in reading and learning and argued that they could be the very origins of progressive education.[70] Schopenhauer also gives an anecdote of a child who refused Aesop's fables from their mother who had given them the fables to read, who claimed to have got beyond such stories, which he follows with the statement: 'In these young hopefuls you have the enlightened Rationalists of the future.[71] Whilst Locke praised Aesop's fables for their ability to delight and entertain a child and also to afford useful reflections to adults who could find them among their serious thoughts and business, his assessment of the educational merits of fables stands diametrically opposed to Rousseau's. In *Emile* (1762), where Rousseau examined the education and training of young children, he held that the morals in the fables of La Fontaine rested on the introduction of ideas that children cannot grasp. Such a situation, Rousseau contended, would lead to a child being led astray by the extraneous details and the beguiling charm of the characters within La Fontaine's works.[72]

In this study, the fable's inclusion of allegorical insights will generally be considered to be more important than its characters, which may include anthropomorphised animals or objects, plants or humans. Whilst I take into account Locke's arguments concerning the fable's ability to educate children, I will primarily be considering fables created for adults, for whom they offer, exemplify and further, moral, political, or cultural insights, some of

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[68] Welch, D. M. (2011) 'Blake and Rousseau on Children's Reading, Pleasure, and Imagination', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 35(3), pp. 199-226. A recent article 'Do storybooks with anthropomorphized animal characters promote prosocial behaviours in young children?', published in *Developmental Science*, conforms with Rousseau's view that a child is likely to be confused by figures in stories intended to present moral lessons.

[69] Lewis, T. E. (2012) 'Rousseau and the fable: Rethinking the fabulous nature of educational philosophy', *Educational Theory*, 62(3), pp. 323-341. 324.

[70] Keenleyside, H. (2016) *Animals and other people : literary forms and living beings in the long eighteenth century.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 166.

[71] Schopenhauer, A. (2007) *Parerga and Paralipomena: A Collection of Philosophical Essays.* Lightning Source. 84.

[72] Lewis, T. E. (2012) 'Rousseau and the fable: Rethinking the fabulous nature of educational philosophy', *Educational Theory*, 62(3), pp. 323-341.

which children may already even take for granted. My starting point will be presenting and analysing the evidence that several theorists have noted the power inherent in fables and adopted and utilised this to create fables that encourage adults to see the world through a different lens. Given this work will be examining the featuring of catastrophes within fables, it ought to be highlighted that Gotthold Lessing argued that the fable must contain a catastrophe to earn its name. In *Fables and Epigrams: With Essays on Fable and Epigram* (1825), he claimed that the catastrophe is an essential aspect of the fable, which must be invented. For him, the fable differs from a story where events occur because the succession of changes within the fable must be crafted to lead to a single conclusion, a sense of unity, the characteristic that, for him, gives the catastrophe its significance. Whilst a series of events within a story may be 'the representation the individual instance of some particular proposition' from which any number of morals may be extracted, for the fabulist, Lessing contends, parts of the narrative must join well with the work's conclusion.[73]

Literature Review

Much of the literature on the genre of the fable is similar in terms of its tendency to overlook the form's potential for philosophy, despite widespread recognition that it encourages introspection on our human qualities via distancing mechanisms, such as the use of comedy, and can be used to portray ethical maxims. Most genre scholarship examining fables, including both classical scholarship and the field of comparative literature, focuses extensively on the various ways the fable can be separated from other closely associated forms of folklore, such as parables, allegory, myths, dialogues and fairy tales. Dijk's work gives an excellent overview of these boundaries and provides a formulation of the fable that can be taken forward into future research. However, accounts of the fable have failed to adequately explore why fables have continuously interested philosophers, including but not limited to Socrates, Plato, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, despite these interests suggesting that fables are an invitation to philosophy.

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[73] Lessing, G. E. (1825) *Fables and Epigrams: With Essays on Fable and Epigram.* John and H.L. Hunt, Tavistock-Street, Covent-Garden. 80.

In *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth* (2001), Andrew Calder suggests, but does not develop, that Aesop helped bring philosophy down to earth by teaching it through animals and everyday objects, making him the natural ally of Socrates.[74] In *Animal Fables after Darwin: Literature, Speciesism, and Metaphor* (2018), Chris Danta examines how Darwin's theory of evolution altered the ancient form of the animal fable by changing the relationship between humans and animals. Notably, Danta questions how the animal fable specifically was adopted and re-adapted by nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors including Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells, Franz Kafka, Angela Carter and J. M. Coetzee, who used the form to challenge traditional views of species hierarchy. Although his work demonstrates how the fable suits has been re-adapted in literary writers, he does not explicate what happens when this suitability is used within philosophy. Andrew Hui's work *A Theory of the Aphorism: From Confucius to Twitter* (2019) questions why modern philosophers use aphoristic fragments to convey their ideas, but whilst many of these ideas are similar to how the fable is used, this is overlooked. Thomas Keenan offers an analysis of the ways the ethico-political concepts of responsibility, rights, freedom, equality, and justice might be re-thought in *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (1997), examining the works of Foucault and Derrida, Marx, Nietzsche and Sade, without ever giving an account of what he understands the fable to be, thereby missing the opportunity to provide an understanding of the philosophical fable.[75] Furthermore, when highlighting the popularity of apocalyptic narratives during periods of political upheaval Higgins misses the opportunity to identify the fable as another literary mechanism well suited to use at such junctions of upheaval, thereby missing the chance to highlight the need for its analysis in a contemporary ecological context.[76] Work needs to be done to bring together these disparate studies, with due consideration for the philosophical fable, which warrants recognition in its own right.

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[74] Calder, A. (2001) *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth.* Droz. 38.
[75] Keenan, T. (1997) *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics.* 99-175.
[76] Higgins, D. (2017) *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora.* New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. 7.

There is no work that evaluates the commonality between philosophers' concerns regarding the development of human societies, specifically their indication of the lack of humans to adequately account for their actions or their misshapen comprehensions of themselves, and the fable's developed, historical capacity to encourage us to carefully consider such weaknesses. To address this, I will bring together, in the first case study in particular, assessments of the risks arising from the Enlightenment and lessons learned from the French Revolution, to distil what have been considered our species' weaknesses and subsequently analyse how these problematic characteristics have been dealt with and explored in modern fables. I will consider the ideas of Kant, Negri and Esposito in relation to contemporary ecocritical theory, in order to respond to the theoretical silence analysing the bridge between the issues they concern and scholarship concerning the literary means that are particularly adept to portray them. Furthermore, this research considers that the preference for English scholarship leads to limited recognition of important ideas, causing us to overlook the contributions of important figures within the context of European philosophy, whose work is particularly relevant to issues facing our society today, but less well known and available to English readers.

Having illustrated that theorists have faced difficulty arriving at a shared understanding of the fable, this work begins from the premise that a definition of the philosophical fable is required as the groundwork for drawing on its resources and benefiting from its strengths, which include facilitating the type of thinking and acting that we are in dire need of today. The approach I will adopt draws from recent work in 'material ecocriticism', in which emphasis is given to the 'constitutive engagement of human discursive systems with the material world.'[77] I endeavour to focus on textuality within an interdisciplinary framework that draws from the work of sociologists and cultural historians. I will take into account the ideas of a broad range of theorists, like the stratigrapher and member of the Anthropocene Working Group, Jan Zalasiewicz, eco-philosopher Timothy Morton, sociologist Jason Moore, all of whom are adept at showing in various ways that humanity needs to give up some of its core beliefs, showing for what it is the fantasy that we can control the planet and the notion that our species represents the pinnacle of the chain of being.

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[77] Iovino, S. and Oppermann, S. (2014) *Material Ecocriticism.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 9.

Understanding our Era

The Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Robocene, Planthropocene, Plantationocene, Neganthropocene, Urbanocene and Novacene are just a few of the terms used to critically consider the assumptions, speculation and diagnoses of the epistemological, ethical and practical organisation of life on Earth in our eras. These -cenes set forth ways to conceptualise the human and, increasingly non-human and more-than-human agency associated with these narratives, concepts, representations, formulations, discoveries and approaches, which are variously considered throughout the course of this thesis. The authors I examine all engage current debates concerning how we ought to understand the causes for the problems we face in contemporary society. Questions concerning the correct term to use to speak of our era are a rich area of ongoing debate, raising important issues pertaining to the cause of the problems this thesis attends to. My starting point draws from Jason Moore's analysis of the Capitalocene, and I argue that our problem is contributed to by the obstacles we face to hearing silenced voices, which relates to Walter Benjamin's concept of history. Throughout, I will consider what the root of our problem appears to be, noting that this is a complex issue.

In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* Jason Moore, who strives to avoid arguments about replacing one word with another, argues that the Capitalocene says three that's the Anthropocene perspective cannot. Firstly, it is 'world ecological', and discloses that the history of capitalism is a relation of capital, power and nature as an organic whole. Secondly, it does not reduce capitalism to the burning of fossil fuels, and instead recognises that relations of power and re-production enfolded coal and other energy sources from the sixteenth century, and thirdly, it challenges false and Eurocentric views of capitalism as emerging during the eighteenth century in England.[78] 'The Capitalocene argument posits capitalism as a situated and multi-species world-ecology of capital, power, and re/production.'[79] Moore rightly notes that the term the Anthropocene has two lives. The first concerns a cultural phenomenon, which considers humanity's role in making planetary natures, whilst the second, more analytic use of the term, is centred around earth system scientists' endeavours to seek the 'golden spike' in the stratigraphic

[78] Moore, J. W. (2016) *Anthropocene Or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism.* Oakland, CA: PM Press. 12.
[79] Ibid. 12.

record.[80] In 'Golden Spikes and Dubious Origins: The Fabulation of Beginnings' in Katherine Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), Yusoff questions the integrity of the concept of the human that the term 'Anthropocentrism' relies upon. She points out that the 'we' used in conjunction with the term cannot be immune to who is writing and mobilising history and that we must be aware of the implications of telling such a history, in order to appropriately consider who is granted agency in shaping the present and future.[81]

As Moore explains, the 'golden spike' is the marker, or reference level for a geological time boundary determining the origin of the Anthropocene, which has variously proposed to have been 1610, 1784 and 1945.[82] For Moore, Capitalism is a way of organising nature, rather than an economic or a social system, it is a project. According to him, the Capitalocene, relied on 'Cheap Nature', which has depleted and is in demise, as we witness with increasingly frequent weather and environmental catastrophes, which signal the breakdown or the strategies and relations that have sustained capital accumulation for over five centuries. Rather than using Moore's concept of the Capitalocene extensively in this thesis, I will be drawing from Moore's work the ways in which he understands the catastrophe to signal these breakdowns, as a first step in understanding how we must respond to these.[83]

James Lovelock underlines the importance of the notion of acceleration to the Anthropocene, which theorists often refer to as the 'Great Acceleration', noting that: 'We have kept our foot on the accelerator for 300 years.'[84] As such, we: 'are now approaching the time when our electronic, mechanical and biological artefacts can run the Earth system by themselves.'[85] A consequence of this development is that intentional selection moves a million times faster than natural selection: 'by moving beyond natural selection, we have already enrolled as sorcerer's' apprentices.'[86] The power of the Anthropocene has

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[80] Strathern, Marilyn (2005). *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
[81] Yusoff, K. (2018). A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. https://manifold.umn.edu/read/untitled-5f0c83c1-5748-4091-8d8e-72bebca5b94b/section/ae14049a-4ac3-4c72-b2d9-afc8e1dea124#ch02.
[82] Cohen, J. J. and Duckert, L. (2017) *Veer Ecology: A Companion for Environmental Thinking.* University of Minnesota Press. 34.
[83] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 12.
[84] Ibid. 81.
[85] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited.41.
[86] Ibid. 43.

forcibly manifested itself in war. It has made bloody conflict increasingly frequent in the age, where war has been the supreme drama of our mechanised society.[87] The warhead of a nuclear missile may contain bombs the small enough to fit in a human hand, yet be of such power that they can wreck a city the size of London.[88] Before industry provided deadly weapons, whilst warfare happened, it was limited in intensity by the capacity of our brains, strengthened by our muscles. Lovelock elucidates the potentially catastrophic effects of the links between the Anthropocene and war, when he writes:

> Somehow I must keep on running until people are persuaded that the outcome of our present course is disastrous. I am not exaggerating; a glance at any news media in the world generally reveals delight at the discovery of some new source of fossil fuel which will keep energy prices low. I must persuade those journalists that it would hardly be worse had the discovery been of mines full of heroin and cocaine. We may be the only source of high intelligence in the cosmos, but our act of avoiding nuclear power generation is one of auto-genocide. Nothing more clearly demonstrates the limits of our intelligence.[89]

Lovelock argues that the growing power of war made us hate nuclear energy and prevented us from using it as a temporary source and reject an opportunity to reduce the amount of fossil fuel we burn. Consequently, he maintains that by using nuclear energy for warfare, we committed a fundamentally evil act: 'The misuse of science' he argues, 'surely is the greatest form of sin'.[90] This misuse is increasingly likely, moreover, when we don't consider what responsible use of science is. Such misuses can be much less effectively avoided if the method of science is rigorously applied, sabotaged, overrated, underrated and ignored, rather than respected and honoured.[91]

My starting point concerning the disorder of our times is that this has been caused by a combination of flaws of human psychology, exploited by capitalism and exacerbated to by the Great Acceleration of the second half of the 20th century, worsening the conditions of the Anthropocene, a term with problematic limits explored throughout this study. Like Haraway, I am hesitant to commit to the term the Anthropocene, because it often perpetuates the mistakes that have contributed to the anthropogenic changes putting the

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[87] Ibid. 45.
[88] Ibid. 47.
[89] Ibid. 49.
[90] Ibid. 49.
[91] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/26/science-advances-genetics-ai-attacks-politics

environment at risk, and also consider our time to be one in which radical change must be undertaken rapidly. Consequently, my position is aligned with that of Lovelock, when he writes:

> I am pretty sure that only Earth has incubated a creature capable of knowing the cosmos. But I am equally sure that the existence of that creature is imperilled. We are unique, privileged beings and, for that reason, we should cherish every moment of our awareness. We should now be cherishing those moments even more because our supremacy as the prime understanders of our cosmos is rapidly coming to an end.[92]

Considering our era as the Anthropocene involves a problematic assumption that we are one homogeneous human race, and blots out unequal relations between humans, as well as failing to capture the comparable shortness of our era, placing the focus on the very beings whose self-importance and lack of critical use of judgement originally contributed to the problems we are in the midst of experiencing.[93] Although it captures some of the causes for our condition well, ultimately, as a human construct, I fear it would be disingenuous to fully adhere to it, for the risk of overlooking the importance of recognising the need to conceptualise our problem in a context outside of our human vantagepoint, such as in the context of geological time, wherein human actions fade into insignificance. I think it is important to recognise that by making a human construct central to the discussion, we run the risk of losing the opportunity to philosophically account for the five extinction events that happened before, in so far as we need to avoid placing too much importance on our own species, which is evidently an entrenched pattern. I will examine further some of the key tenets of the Anthropocene and the debates surrounding the term throughout the course of this thesis.

My hypothesis is that, although scholarship has overlooked this commonality of themes, writers who have engaged in extensive philosophical, historical and literary studies have regardless produced works that attended to these, and that these can offer us today precisely the sort of guidance we appear to require. Thus, they have brought the power of the fable to bear on their analysis of the issues faced in the modern world, intertwining these forms to create philosophical fables. Throughout this thesis, I will examine the ideas and works of these theorists. My work draws on eco-philosophy to try to understand how

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[92] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 5.
[93] Tsing, A. L. (2017a) *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 3.

fables contending with environmental catastrophe can help us formulate a non-anthropocentric ethics. Throughout, I will strive to counteract defeatist responses to considerations of environmental crisis by bringing out recurring themes concerning compassion, contentment, nobility, kindness and solidarity, drawing on a range of sources examining these topics.

Variety of Understandings of the Fable

A significant challenge posed by the lack of philosophical scholarship examining the fable is that the omission of a common definition of the philosophical fable, which would be able to account for its value as a philosophical tool, makes the term ambiguous for those who are interested in questioning and deploying it. Like the term the Anthropocene, which as Jason Moore notes, has two lives, there appears to be a lack of congruency amongst scholars on the matter of whether fables should be considered through a negative or a positive lens. Generally, fables are referred to in a manner that includes a normative evaluation that has been assumed to be self-evident. This assumption creates an area of confusion that obfuscates our understanding of fables, bringing about a wide variety of opinion concerning whether they should be derided or celebrated, often without the existence of the other reading being acknowledged. This has led to the creation of two disparate lines of enquiry being simultaneously pursued without explicit recognition that the fable's form contains the possibility for this variety of perception.

Fables and Fiction

Before beginning my case studies, I wish to briefly consider how the general use of the term, the fable, can be split into two groups. Those in the first believe the genre, some of which merely dismiss the form as 'children's literature', focus on the form's association with fantasy, fiction and obfuscation.[94] They build on the negative aspect of the common analysis that fabulists 'tell the truth through lies.'[95] The genre's negative connotations denote the fictional nature of a narrative, and its general lack of integrity or truth. This

[94] Kenney, M. (2013) *Fables of attention: Wonder in feminist theory and scientific practice.* UC Santa Cruz. 2.
[95] Calder, A. (2001) *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth.* Droz. 43.

can be seen in the conception of Henri Bergson, who, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1936), considers 'fabulation' as a fundamentally negative faculty. He uses the term, which in the English translation is 'myth-making,' to describe an innate, instinctive tendency in humans to anthropomorphise and attribute intentionality to natural phenomena like lightning and earthquakes. This, for Bergson, leads to humans inventing gods, religion and social rules that encourage group obedience within traditional societies.[96] In this way, fabulation reinforces 'closed societies,' which Bergson contrasts with 'open societies,' in which the universal love of humankind is promoted. Closed societies are driven by an 'us versus them' mentality. Throughout the course of my examination of Leopardi, I will argue that he replicates an opposition between nature and humanity, rather than reconsidering the framework through which we consider these, examining to what extent they serve us.[97]

Ronald Bogue tells us, in the *Deleuze Dictionary* that, late in Deleuze's career, fabulation is linked to 'the powers of the false'.[98] In *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (2010), Bogue outlines that, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, 'to fabulate' is to engage in the composition of fables or stories, especially those in which the element of fantasy comes into heavy play.' A fabulist, according to this dictionary, is a 'composer of fables', or a teller of tales; a liar.'[99] In a similar move to the one that views people who always see the worst options as commonly being dismissed as 'catastrophists,' those that reveal a tenuous relationship with the truth are labelled as 'fabulists.'[100] The recent work, *The Fabulists: The World's New Rulers, Their Myths and the Struggle Against Them* (2019) by Michael Peel, uses the fable to designate the questionable stories and narratives that serve the interest of a chosen few but have nonetheless thrived. For example, Peel examines Rodrigo Duterte's violent crackdown on in the Philippines, Britain's struggle over Brexit, Aung San Suu Kyi's defence of Myanmar's military and Syria's civil war.[101] This is a recent example of the general use of the term as though it is synonymous with the sense of lying or 'telling stories', highlighting the negative connotations associated

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96 Parr, A. (2010) *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition.* Edinburgh University Press. 99.
97 Ibid. 99.
98 Ibid. 99.
99 Bogue, R. (2010) *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History.* Edinburgh University Press. 12.
100 Latour, B. and Porter, C. (2017) *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime.* Wiley. 11.
101 Peel, M. (2019) *The Fabulists: The World's New Rulers, Their Myths and the Struggle Against Them.* Oneworld Publications.

with the genre.[102] These negative associations with the fable often prevent us from acknowledging the potential that fables can harbour. In turn, this overlooks how important writers, such as Franz Kafka, William Golding, Ursula K Le Guin, Susan Sontag, Salmon Rushdie and Philip K. Dick have experimented with this potential in their work.[103]

The Fable as an Aid to Thinking

> Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can't worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, it's through its own resources, but in away that links up with something in art (Garrel says there's a mass of terrible suffering in the Louvre, too) or links up art to what it lacked. Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a "fabulation" in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning.
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> Deleuze, Gilles.
> "Control and Becoming: Conversation with Toni Negri." (1995), 1.

Deleuze, unlike Bergson, sees fabulation as containing potential. As Bogue describes in *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics* (2016): 'Bergsonian fabulation has the political function of perpetuating a closed, static society, whereas Deleuzian fabulation promotes the invention of a people and the formation of new modes of social interaction.'[104] In *What is Philosophy?* (1994), Deleuze and Guattari extend the concept of fabulation by tying it to the fundamental aim of the arts of capturing the affects and perceptions of sensation.[105] They argue that art's domain is 'not memory but fabulation' and that creative fabulation has nothing to do with memory, but goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived – 'the artist is a seer, a becomer.'[106] Fabulation, via a general becoming, is the general artistic project of fashioning images that transform and metamorphose conventional representations and

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[102] Burton, J. E. a. *The philosophy of science fiction : Henri Bergson and the fabulations of Philip K. Dick.* 26.

[103] Incidentally, William Golding -author of *Lord of the Flies*, described as a fable by theorists like Harold Blackham- suggested the name Gaia, the Greek goddess of Earth, to James Lovelock to describe the theory he developed which I will demonstrate is relevant to Haraway's speculative fabulation. Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 12.

[104] Bogue, R. (2016) *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics.* Taylor & Francis. 106.

[105] Parr, A. (2010) *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition.* Edinburgh University Press. 100.

[106] Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., Tomlinson, H. and Burchell, G. (1994) *What is Philosophy?*: Columbia University Press. 171.

conceptions of collectivities, thereby enabling the invention of a people to come.[107] Other thinkers like Deleuze, such as Haraway, and Leopardi towards the end of his work, find positive potential in the concept, with which we can create political meaning.[108] Many authors discussed in the course of this work draw on fables' capacity to offer prescient critiques and allegory, using their rich and fertile ground as an aid to help them open up new futures. As I will exemplify, they can be rich imaginative resources, allowing for thought experiments that facilitate radical and new ways of being and flourishing in the world.

The tension of this often-unacknowledged divide between how different theorists relate to the fable is contained and unravels with the development of Leopardi's work, where he moves between a strong focus on considering fables as lies, or representations of 'the powers of the false,' to beginning to appreciate the fable's constitutive potential in the *Canti*, where he begins his work of creating space for new futures. Whilst we understand from his letters and his notes in the *Zibaldone* that he was interested in seeing how the fable could be utilised in his work, in its early stages it is noticeable that Leopardi is considering fables for their ability to convey the falsehood of something, namely, the human hubris at the heart of the Western tradition. Later however, as he becomes more familiar with the genre and learns through his experiments in the *Operette* what they can achieve, his relationship to the form progresses, leading him to reclaim from the fable its moral and liberatory character; its ability to act as a guide. Leopardi's work, I will argue, moves from a view of the fable that is focused on its negative aspects, specifically its relation to untruth, to a consideration and development later in his writing, of the fable's positive potential.

Thesis Outline

> Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient,

[107] Parr, A. (2010) *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition.* Edinburgh University Press. 100.
[108] Ibid. 99.

> how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist.
>
> And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened.

Friedrich Nietzsche
On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense, 79.

The entire philosophical history of our species will soon be mute, and we will be giving back to the planet its matter, if we fail to promptly register the challenge that environmental catastrophes issue us with by forcing us to address the indebtedness of our histories to a problematic notion of human exceptionalism. Capturing imaginations through cosmic imagery, references to infinity and emphasis of the importance of humans on a geological scale, philosophers and poets have found effective ways to remind us to stay humble. Fables provide the perfect setting for these elements to come together. Too little work has been done to analyse the imaginative reasoning for the anthropocentric behaviour that has enabled the exacerbation of environmental crises. We have also seen that there is not sufficient literature that examines how the fable, a form that tears down our ego and exemplifies our folly, fits into this picture.

One of the obstacles challenging us when addressing in these problems is the narrow scope of scholarship that tends to be considered. In the following case studies, I will work to overcome this. Firstly, I will challenge the Anglophone focus of contemporary scholarship by examining an Italian writer whose philosophical thinking through the relationship between humans and nature is too pertinent to our contemporary situation to ignore, namely Giacomo Leopardi. Although Leopardi is the great poet of the Romantic age in Italy, he remains absent from the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness, despite the availability of translations of his work. He was born in 1798 to Conte Monaldo and Contessa Adelaide in Recanati, a city in the March of Ancona. He died in a small town in 1837 on the lower slopes of Mount Vesuvius, where the work that forms the central object of my case study, 'La Ginestra', or 'Broom, or Flower of the Wilderness' was situated.[109] Surpassing his tutors' expertise as a young teenager, he taught himself Greek, pursuing self-guided research in the rich library collected by his father in the house where

[109] From here on, I will refer to Leopardi's work as 'La Ginestra'.

he grew up.[110] He read Latin, German and French, writing his own translations from the classics, philological commentaries, tragedies, philosophical dissertations, and epigrams, including a convincing Greek fraud, a 'newly discovered' ancient 'Hymn to Neptune'. At seventeen, he had completed a learned History of Astronomy, based on more than three hundred reference works, where the cosmological themes that traversed his work can be found. He had a natural affection for philosophy and the literature associated with it and, suffering from poor health and damaged eyesight, spent a year in 1819 without reading, devoting himself almost exclusively to thinking about the subject. Rarely leaving the hometown he once vehemently described as a 'sepulchre in which the dead are happier than the living', he exchanged letters with friends, in Rome, Bologna and Florence, such as Pietro Giordani (1774–1848), who examined Enlightenment ideas imported from France and influenced the development of Leopardi's pessimistic outlook.[111]

In Part 1, I explore how Leopardi expressed profound criticism of the philosophical developments of his time, which he saw to be fracturing reason and the senses. He considered modern rationalisation to have an immunitary character, claiming to heal people by inoculating them with a poison that is lethal to them in the long run.[112] Despite the contemporary relevance of his ideas, and praiseworthy references and citations from philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer and Walter Benjamin, Leopardi's name is still too rarely known amongst philosophers in the United Kingdom. This is the case even following the publication of Timothy Murphy's translation of Antonio Negri's study *Flower of the Desert*: *Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology* in 2016, and Roberto Esposito's account of his philosophical significance within *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (2012). To begin to address this, I will chart the development of the relationship between two integral themes running through Leopardi's work. The first is human ineptitude when it comes to considering ourselves capable of being wrong, or recognising our limitations, which lead to the

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[110] Leopardi's father encouraged him to sit in public each year in the presence of an invited audience to complete exams, during which he and his siblings were interrogated and expected to answer audience members' questions on an extensive syllabus that covered grammar, syntax, rhetoric, history, science, arithmetic, geometry and religion, in Latin. He also read sacred writings in the oratory of Chiesa di San Vito, although he later rejected his father's faith. Shaw, P. (2017) *The Letters of Giacomo Leopardi 1817-1837.* Taylor & Francis. 7.

[111] Ibid. 5.

[112] Esposito, R. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 119.

repetition of our errors with increasingly damaging consequences. The second is what he devised as the cruelty and indifference of nature, a notion cemented by the experience of losing his childhood friend Teresa Fattorini, who he used to watch from his desk embroidering across the square, whose death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty one Leopardi responded to with his poem 'A Silvia', written in 1828.

Building on Sebastiano Timpanaro's analysis of Leopardi, I will examine how Leopardi's work moves from a representation of his evaluation of humans as operating under a collective deficiency in the faculty of judgement to a response to this in which he synthesises Kant's idea of go-cart of judgement and the wisdom of fables.[113] In particular, I will examine how this is instantiated in his epitaph to 'La Ginestra' drawn from the gospel of John, III, 19 and quoted in Greek with an Italian translation, which reads in English: 'And men loved darkness rather than light' to show Leopardi's agreement with Kant that we lack the talent of reason. I will build on the basis of Negri's analysis of Leopardi's critique of the French Revolution, the problems of which he dissected, whose reach have ever increasing effects as our technical advancements overtake our capacity to appreciate their consequences.**[114]** In doing so I will expand on Kant's fear that we have insufficient wisdom with which to govern our capabilities. Examining Leopardi's belief that modern philosophy consists in developing a practice of stripping oneself of one's errors, I will analyse how themes of the necessity of wisdom and the central role of human pride intertwine in his work, and how we might appropriately situate them in the context of his critique of the intellectual landscape of Europe, referring to Esposito's work *Living Thought* to do so. I will endeavour to unpack the nature of how these can be understood with respect for his appreciation of the fables of Lucian and Aesop, and interest in how these can be adopted to serve modern communities, examining his case study of Pignotti's use of the form to offer critiques to adults. Since Leopardi's thought considered the broad range of ways that humans miss opportunities to flourish, it is necessary to narrow the scope of my analysis of his work to strive to gain an understanding of how he

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[113] Timpanaro, S. (1976) *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism.* trans Soper, K. London: NLB. 211-12.

[114] Expressed, for example, in Leopardi's statement: "the height of wisdom is to know its own uselessness", Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 2711).

conceptualised ecological catastrophes, how he expressed this conceptualisation and what it means in the context of an era that has since been identified as the Anthropocene.

Undertaking textual analysis of Leopardi's works written between 1817 and 1836, the *Zibaldone*, *Operette Morali*, *Canti* and his letters of correspondence, I will analyse his thought from the perspective that the form he chose for his work is as important as its content, which has not been examined whilst taking into account his reverence of the fable. I highlight, that although the significance of Leopardi's comparison of the ancients and the moderns has been appreciated by scholars, his consideration of the contemporary value of works of the ancient fabulist, Lucian and the eighteenth century fabulist Lorenzo Pignotti has been overlooked, despite Leopardi's statements and indications that they informed his writing. Taking this focus, I will trace the application of the insights from these studies in his work, demonstrating that these references, which also include his meditations on the capacity for fables to help communities unite around a certain identity and his etymological analysis of the term, are more central to his expression than has previously been accounted for.

By tracing the development of Leopardi's thought from critiquing humans to presenting ethical guidance in his fable inspired works, we may hope to understand more clearly how to refine our capacity for philosophical judgement, which enhance social and cultural stability, in turn contributing to ecological stability. In this analysis, I will take into account the significance of cosmological symbolism in his writing, which he uses to contextualise our position within the universe, challenging us, as Kant does when he refers to 'the starry heavens above' to consider what infinitude means for humans. In this chapter, I will use Emanuele Severino's analysis of Leopardi to examine how the role of genius and untimeliness relate to his ecological thought and reveal themselves in Leopardi's modern adaption of the fable. Throughout, I will also highlight how the development of his thought led Leopardi to set up an inimical distinction between humans and nature, a relationship that recognises the significance of catastrophes, but which is examined with greater nuance in the work of Donna Haraway, who makes her own life and work fabulous, when she writes:

> Once upon a time, in the 1970s, the author was a proper, US socialist-feminist, white, female, hominid biologist, who became a historian of science to write about modem Western accounts of monkeys, apes, and women. She belonged

> to those odd categories, invisible to themselves, *which* are called 'unmarked' and which are dependent upon unequal power for their maintenance. But by the last essays, 'she has turned into a multiply marked cyborg feminist, who tried to keep her politics, as well as her other critical functions, alive in the unpromising times of the last quarter of the twentieth century.[115]

Investigating how beliefs about gender shape the production of knowledge about nature and taught the history of science and women's studies Haraway works deliberately with others, such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Marilyn Strathern, Isabelle Stengers and Anna Tsing, working against masculinist thinking that disappears women's thinking. Drawing on authors like Ursula K. Le Guin, she examines how science fiction can be a means of thinking and theoretical practice itself, not solely containers for illustrations of arguments to be imported from elsewhere.[116]

Through my reading, I will bring Haraway to bear on Leopardi, which has not previously been considered, examining the theorists' shared relation to philosophical fables whilst observing Haraway's feminist engagement with nature. This, I will demonstrate, adds to Leopardi's representation of the relationship between humans and nature, which lacks sufficient nuance, and reproduces the style of thinking he takes issue with. I will show how Haraway contests the suitability of the term the Anthropocene for a transformative time on earth in which the 'old saws of Western philosophy and political economics', human exceptionalism and bounded individualism -with the human-only histories they considered- have become unthinkable. In its place, she uses the term the 'Chthulucene', which refers to the fabulous spider at the heart of my second case study. [117] In Part Two, I examine Haraway's work, primarily focusing on *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), *Making Kin Not Population* (2018) , and her recently published introduction to Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (2020), where she emphasises that some of the best thinking takes place through storytelling. I will examine her work as 'multispecies storytelling in the feminist mode'[118], highlighting

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[115] Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* Free Association Books.
[116] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 12.
[117] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 101.
[118] *SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far*, Pilgrim Award Acceptance Comments Donna Haraway, July 7, 2011).

how she draws from the work of the British social anthropologist Strathern to develop her idea that:

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.[119]

My case study will introduce Haraway's feminist and ecocritical theoretical methodology, and present and evaluate her emphasis on avoiding retelling of stories that have 'done us dirt in Western cultures'.[120] Utilising the concept of (re)storying', I will show that Haraway's work focuses on the centrality of narratives and demonstrates women's theoretical contributions to such efforts. For example, I will explicate how she engages with Ursula Le Guin's 'Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' essay (1986), where Le Guin, reimagines narrative as a feminist project. This will enable me to assess the impact of Le Guin's inspiration drawn from myths of creation and transformation, trickster stories, folktales, jokes and novels to tell the life story, on the work of Haraway.[121] Le Guin understood the capacity of the fable to aid in collecting, protecting, fostering and (re)storying our thick pasts, and even wrote her own fable, 'Ninety-Nine Weeks: A Fairy Tale', about Occupy Wall Street.[122]

In this case study, I will examine how this, along with Haraway's relation to environmental catastrophes, informing her conceptualisation of 'SF', which includes science fiction, speculative feminism, string figures, scientific fact, and most notably, her theory of 'speculative fabulation'. Having explicated Haraway's understanding of 'SF', this chapter will examine the role, in her work, of an eight-legged tentacular arachnid called "pimoa chtulu", a spider who lives under stumps in the redwood forests of Sonoma and Mendocino counties, near California, as an aid to help her with returns, roots, and routes. I will analyse her uses of term 'fabulated' to denote her practice of opening up unexpected elements of one's own embodiments in lively and re-sensitising worlds.

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[119] Strathern, M. (1992) *Reproducing the Future: Essays on Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies.* Manchester University Press.*Reproducing the Future* (Manchester UP, 1992). 10. e

[120] O'Neill-Butler, L. (2016) *Interview with Donna Haraway*: Artforum. Retrieved on 19/12/2019 from: https://www.artforum.com/interviews/donna-j-haraway-speaks-about-her-latest-book-63147..

[121] Le Guin, U. K. (2017) *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places.* Grove Atlantic.

[122] Le Guin, U.K. (2011) 'Ninety-Nine Weeks: A Fairy Tale'. Retrieved on 16/02/2021 from https://bookviewcafe.com/blog/2011/11/21/ninety-nine-weeks-a-fairy-tale/

Throughout, I will compare her commitment to ‘staying with the trouble’, with aspects of Leopardi’s pessimism, questioning whether Haraway’s thought can attend to some of the more problematic aspects of Leopardi’s work, prior to concluding by highlighting how her use of fables creates a space for the possibility of authentic flourishing, what Aristotle referred to in *Nicomachean Ethics* as ‘eudaimonia’.

Ultimately, the thesis I endeavour to put forward is that fables can be a powerful philosophical tool, used to encourage responsible thinking, which, amongst its most urgent effect could be to improve ecological thinking and therefore avert the risk of the Great Acceleration furthering runaway climate change and exacerbating environmental catastrophe. By amplifying Italian and feminist perspectives in my case studies, I endeavour to produce a workable definition of the philosophical fable which others draw upon to advance the question of what it might mean to live responsibly within the Anthropocene. I will therefore conclude by summarising the findings from my case studies, shaping these into a composition of features of philosophical fables – contemporary fables inspired by the ancient tradition and modified to suit the modern purpose of helping philosophy fulfil its own aims pertaining to wisdom and the good life.

PART 1

The Development of Giacomo Leopardi's Nostalgic Fabulation

> Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. The first begins from the place I occupy in the external world of sense and extends the connection in which I stand into an unbounded magnitude with worlds upon worlds and systems of systems, and moreover into the unbounded times of their periodic motion, their beginning and their duration. The second begins from my invisible self, my personality, and presents me in a world which has true infinity but which can be discovered only by the understanding, and I cognize that my connection with that world (and thereby with all those visible worlds as well) is not merely contingent, as in the first case, but universal and necessary. The first view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital force (one knows not how) must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came. The second, on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world, at least so far as this may be inferred from the purposive determination of my existence by this law, a determination not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaching into the infinite.
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> Kant
> *Critique of Practical Reason,* 161-2.

Introduction

In my examination of the work of Leopardi, I will explore how the development of his thought can be traced as a progression through its relation to the fable's negative aspects, for example, employing satire, fictionalisation and highlighting lack of truth, within his *Operette Morali,* which he clarifies is his intention in various letters and entries to his *Zibaldone*. I argue that this underexamined aspect of his thought enabled him to arrive at an appreciation for the fable's more positive, generative aspects, which prompt the use of the imagination to consider viewpoints beyond those immediately apparent to us, in order to establish guides for ourselves and constitute new ethics for ourselves. Throughout, I

will question the role played by nature in Leopardi's studies, arguing that ultimately, it is this aspect of his thought which holds back what can nonetheless be described as his 'philosophical fabulation,' which makes reading him alongside contemporary philosophical fabulists, whose work overcomes the limits of Leopardi's, worthwhile. I will highlight that nature plays an increasingly significant role in his thinking, and that this is ultimately expressed in his meditation on the catastrophe that led to the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompei, namely the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, who Leopardi uses to embody his ideas concerning nature. Firstly, I begin by outlining a challenge associated with understanding the role of the fable in the work of various theorists, and I commence to situate Leopardi's thought within this framework.

Chapter One – Leopardi and His Work

> This tendency, this habit of applying to well-known people and places close to us stories (true or false) belonging to distant people and places, and of modernizing them as well, that is applying the old stories, sometimes very old ones, to modern times and people, has thousands of examples, that we can observe even daily.
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> Leopardi,
> *Zibaldone*, (Z 4224).

Roberto Esposito, Emanuele Severino and Sebastiano Timpanaro on Leopardi

Contemporary Italian thinkers such as Roberto Esposito and Emanuele Severino note that, in its more narrowly defined sense, Leopardi was not an Enlightenment thinker, as he did not suppose that the growth of knowledge would necessarily produce a growth of happiness.[123] In *Living Thought*, Esposito examines the theme of life's primordial force throughout Leopardi's work. He explains that, when philosophy overwhelms life by forgetting its own limits, life has its revenge by subjugating history, thereby reminding us that science and life are not synonymous.[124] Esposito examines the complex relationship between philosophy and life in the work of Leopardi, arguing that the thinker

[123] Timpanaro, S. (1975) *On Materialism.* trans. Garner, L. London: NLB. 20.
[124] Esposito, R. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 139.

believes that human beings have ended up in a historical dimension that corrodes life from the inside. Explaining that, for Leopardi, life seems to have twisted round on itself, Esposito writes:

> Philosophy is the modality through which this devitalization is expressed. It is one particular language that is part of knowledge, but it is also something more intrinsic to the chain of events that, starting from late antiquity, took the name of civilization. Of course, not all philosophers, or philosophies, are equal in quality and inspiration. Leopardi is careful to distinguish between them, but not without noting the direction they take as a whole, whose dissipative effects are obvious to him. The deciding match is played out in the inversely proportionate relationship between matter and spirit, body and reason, action and inaction. In the ancient world, the natural energy of life extended itself through the primacy of corporeality, in the greatest use of the senses and in the free development of the imagination. Modern civilization—anticipated in this respect by both Platonism and Christianity—is instead internally traversed and even constituted by a movement of spiritualization: and although the bodily sphere isn't entirely eliminated, it is destabilised by being made subordinate to a power transcendent to it. In reality, this process of idealization arises from the dual need to reduce reciprocal violence in the community and to free up the higher human functions, sharpening the senses and enhancing the faculty of reason. But the final outcome appears largely counterproductive to Leopardi, because by tearing life away from its natural roots, exactly what was intended to be nurtured is weakened.[125]

Esposito highlights the tension in Leopardi's thought between the bodily sphere and the reason that it is made subordinate to, that is, the conflict between matter and spirit. As a scholar of Heidegger, Emanuele Severino explains further with reference to Nietzsche's 'death of God' in *In viaggio con Leopardi: La partita sul destino dell'uomo* (2015), Platonism and Christianity anticipate this movement, which Leopardi understands weakens precisely what it intended to nurture; the energy of life.[126] Elsewhere in his chapter on Leopardi, Esposito writes: 'although love of self responds to a natural urge, projecting the desire for existence toward a point beyond the reach of the finite forces of individual living beings, it ends up gradually leading human beings out of the order of nature—into that historical dimension that corrodes it from the inside'.[127] Leopardi's work addresses and seeks to express this situation, when he struggles to ascertain the appropriate form to present the *Operette* in: love of self, when unrestrained and without being critically reflected upon, ends up gradually fracturing humans' relationship with

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[125] Esposito, R.(2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 119.
[126] Severino, E. (2015) *In viaggio con Leopardi: La partita sul destino dell'uomo.* Rizzoli. 55-65.
[127] Esposito, R.(2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 118.

nature. It ends up corroding the very life that sustains the object of love. These themes of bodily senses and love of self will be examined later, in their expression within Leopardi's work. Esposito also notes that, for Leopardi, the culminating point of the conflict between reason and life is represented by the French Revolution. He writes:

> The failure of the revolution, for Leopardi, was not due to the subjective errors or factual circumstances that forced it out of its natural course, but the result of a long term process of abstraction by which human life is at the same time protected and undermined. By stripping nature of its veil—by removing it from its latency in the furious search for a naked truth—the Enlightenment, which was a direct progenitor of the revolution, deprived humankind of its material roots.[128]

Esposito observes that Nietzsche more fully theorises Leopardi's conviction that modern rationalization protects life, whilst, in doing so, negating its primal force: 'Modern rationalization has a frankly immunitary character… it claims to heal people by inoculating them with a poison that, in the long run, is lethal to them'.[129] As Esposito writes: '…as is characteristic of all immunization procedures, its consequences wind up being the reverse of the intended effect: the pursuit of health causes a more severe disease; in other words, it brings away the withering of the very sensibility it was supposed to enhance'.[130] As Esposito notes and we find instantiated in these moments, Leopardi criticises our failure to understand the phenomenon of our self-inflicted deterioration of our own lives. For Leopardi, modernity was destined to a wasting away of its vitality due to its ill-considered attempt to detach reason from the bodily impulses that determine human behaviour.[131] Leopardi's thought in this idea of decline opposes the Hegelian notions of growth towards a higher teleological purpose in the dialectical upward progression of Spirit, as set out in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* as Leopardi overtly challenges such notions of 'progressivism'. His early works in the *Operette* take as their starting point his insistence that life is, instead, marked by decline. This theme is carried throughout his writing, characterising it, and ultimately comes to be addressed explicitly in 'La Ginestra', as examined later.

Like Esposito, Severino examines Leopardi's relation to the Western tradition in the context of a deciding match. In his work *In viaggio con Leopardi: la partita sul destino*

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[128] Ibid. 119.
[129] Ibid. 119.
[130] Ibid. 119.
[131] Ibid. 28.

dell'uomo (In conversation with Leopardi: the match over the destiny of humankind), Severino views Leopardi's writings as a playing out a 'match', intended to halt the imminent destruction of humankind, between Leopardi, a Giocatore Nero (Black Player) and the Western tradition, a Giocatore Bianco (White Player). For Severino, Leopardi, along with only a few others, understood the causes behind the unravelling of more than 2000 years of civilization.[132] He stages his book as a chess game in which the scacchiera, the chess board the match is played on, is built by the Giocatore Bianco, the Western tradition. This game occurs between two major players and retraces the main points of Western philosophy and Leopardi's entire production. Whilst Leopardi, the Giocatore Nero, wins this match on the conceptual, philosophical level, the Giocatore Bianco, nevertheless, does not feel defeated, either philosophically or practically.[133] This situation has echoes in today's crisis whereby those in power continue to deny our ecological and environmental crises.

In his discussion of the game between the two players in 'La partita tra il Giocatore Bianco e il Giocatore Nero', Severino unpacks the philosophical resonance of Leopardi's statement written in the collections of philosophical and critical observations called the *Zibaldone*, in December 1819, which lead to the destruction of Platonism and Christianity, the foundations of the tradition of the West.[134] He describes being frightened to find himself in the middle of nowhere, and nothing himself, writing: 'Io era spaventato nel trovarmi in mezzo al nulla, un nulla io medesimo. Io mi sentiva come soffocare considerando e sentendo che tutto è nulla, solido nulla.'[135] His observations and reasoning, Severino argues, intends to establish that all things - sensitive and not - are vanity, that they protrude precariously from nothing and are consequently void. Sixty years before Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, and shown with a similar conceptual course, which Severino traces, Leopardi establishes the necessity of the "death of God".[136] Leopardi writes: 'Certo è che, distrutte le forme Platoniche preesistenti alle cose, è distrutto

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[132] Carle, B. (2016) 'The match between Leopardi, the White Knight and Severino over the destiny of mankind', *Forum Italicum*, 50(1), pp. 264-268.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Severino, E. (2015) *In viaggio con Leopardi: La partita sul destino dell'uomo.* Rizzoli. 25.
[135] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Z85. & Stoyanova, Silvia and Ben Johnston (Eds.). *Giacomo Leopardi's Zibaldone: a Digital Research Platform*. http://digitalzibaldone.net/entry?id=20, (28/11/19).
[136] Severino, E. (2015) *In viaggio con Leopardi: La partita sul destino dell'uomo.* Rizzoli. 63.

Iddio.'[137] No eternal being can exist, he argues, and pre-existing Platonic forms of things have been destroyed, and consequently no order exists: 'In somma, il principio di tutte le cose, e di Dio stesso, è il nulla'[138] Importantly, the death of God, in Leopardi's thought, is not a process, whereby God at first exists and then no longer exists. Instead, it is the ascertainment that the eternal being is, in fact, the outcome of an immense and erroneous illusion. Consequently, as Severino argues, Leopardi's philosophical thought leads the West to face the impossibility of denying the nullity and vanity of things and inevitably leads to the frightening spectacle of truth, a spectacle which Leopardi's work endeavours to help us to face.

Severino's reference to the Western tradition as the Giocatore Bianco helps us to see how Leopardi's ideas push back against the thought and works produced by this tradition.[139] This tradition, Severino shows, invests itself in the idea that the world, in all its aspects, exists within an order and a system of immutable laws, based on the divine and eternal principle of all things, and underpins humans' actions. Severino also introduces a third character, the Terzo Giocatore, who tells the story of the match between the two. This player, I will argue later, has ideas that correspond with Leopardi's, which relate to Esposito's reading of Leopardi as a thinker concerned with human beings leading themselves out of the order of nature. Finally, Severino examines the role of sensations in Leopardi's thought too, referring to the theme of experience. He argues that, for Leopardi, information from the senses should not be treated as mere pieces of data, severed from conscience, but rather, we should see them as teaching us something essential and decisive, as evidence which cannot be denied.[140] Leopardi's thought, as Severino's reading helps to show, is concerned with addressing fallacies that remain, underlying our received tradition. With this framework in mind and with examples from his work, I will soon explicate how Leopardi achieves this. I will be examining how Leopardi's questioning of the integrity of the chessboard relates to his early understanding of fabulation as fictionalisation.

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[137] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Z1342. & Stoyanova, Silvia and Ben Johnston (Eds.). Giacomo Leopardi's Zibaldone: a Digital Research Platform. http://digitalzibaldone.net/entry?id=660, (28/11/19).
[138] Ibid. Z1341. & Stoyanova, Silvia and Ben Johnston (Eds.). Giacomo Leopardi's Zibaldone: a Digital Research Platform. http://digitalzibaldone.net/entry?id=660, (28/11/19).
[139] Severino, E. (2015) *In viaggio con Leopardi: La partita sul destino dell'uomo.* Rizzoli. 5.
[140] Ibid. 61-2.

Lastly, The Italian Marxists Antoni Negri and Sebastiano Timpanaro, whose ideas I will draw on throughout this chapter, both examine the establishment of a new ethics in Leopardi's work, presenting fruitful critiques of Leopardi's thought. Some of this is available in English, such as Timpanaro's essays, 'The Pessimistic Materialism of Giacomo Leopardi' (1979) and 'Leopardi and the Italian Left of the '70s' (1985), which highlight the centrality of the materialism in Leopardi's pessimism. Timpanaro also wrote his observations about Leopardi's thought in 'Alcune osservazioni sul pensiero del Leopardi' in *Classicismo e illuminismo nell Ottocento* (1969), where he examined classicism and enlightenment in the Eighteenth century, as well as in *On Materialism* (1970). Additionally, in *The Freudian Slip* (1974), he considers Leopardi's relation to the Freudian concept of sublimation, suggesting that Leopardi encourages us to address our efforts to projects that would repay us in turn by enhancing our ability to live better lives. Here, he argues that Leopardi questions whether we should: 'opt for 'sublimation' and a prudent accommodation to a society and a nature that inflict unhappiness on us?', refereeing to the cultural malaise that is particularly apparent in Leopardi's earlier work and the concern with nature that increasingly comes to occupy his thought.[141] As I will show, Leopardi responds to his consideration of how we should respond to a nature that makes us unhappy with a willingness to confront 'the pain that is our destiny', which he models throughout his work.

In 'The Pessimistic Materialism of Giacomo Leopardi', Timpanaro, like Esposito, argues that Leopardi was indirectly influenced by Rousseau, and believed, in the earlier phase of his work that human unhappiness was attributable to the 'withdrawal of humans from Nature, the beneficent Mother and bestower of brave-hearted illusions', to instead follow reason, which he saw to be the source of spiritual desiccation and of a false and corrupt civilisation.[142] I will examine the theme of the role of nature in relation in Leopardi's thought in Chapter Two, with reference to Voltaire's poem. In doing so, I also seek to amplify Perry Anderson's appreciation that what is distinctive about Timpanaro's ideas

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[141] Timpanaro, S. (1976) *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism.* London: NLB. Trans. Soper, K. 212.

[142] Timpanaro, S. (1979) *The Pessimistic Materialism of Giacomo Leopardi.* Retrieved on 29/11/2019 from: https://newleftreview.org/issues/I116/articles/sebastiano-timpanaro-the-pessimistic-materialism-of-giacomo-leopardi.

is ‘the inevitability of the ultimate victory, not of man over history, but of nature over man’, by examining how Leopardi informs such a viewpoint.[143] My study, through consideration of the environmental catastrophe, builds upon Timpanaro’s reading of Leopardi, because this area evidently requires more analysis, particularly as the climate emergency escalates.

As I will refer to in my textual analysis of ‘La Ginestra’, Timpanaro highlights that Leopardi’s thought can help us avoid ‘a regression to anthropocentric positions, to a too providencialist conception of the course of history… or to the opposite dangers of flat sociologism and irrationalism’ in the development of Marxism.[144] As he writes of his method when reading Leopardi: ‘…the point is not to seek in Leopardi what one can find much better in Marx, Engels, and Lenin. It is to gain, through Leopardi, an awareness of certain aspects of the man-nature relationship which remain somewhat in the shadows in Marxism, and which nevertheless must be confronted - and confronted materialistically.’[145] In this case study, I endeavour to highlight how Leopardi may help us counteract anthropocentric positions, examining how he reveals these to be deeply engrained in our thinking. Following Timpanaro’s method, I will examine how Leopardi questions certain aspects of the relationship between humans and nature which still remain hidden. The readings of Leopardi that Esposito, Severino and Timpanaro issue help us to understand Leopardi’s critique of the tradition of the West, and in turn, lay the groundwork for understanding how Leopardi intended to situate ‘La Ginestra’ as a response to this dilemma when he wrote: 'And men loved darkness rather than light’ as the work’s prologue.

As Esposito highlights, Leopardi illustrates that we are often too reliant on language and logical thinking and have not paid enough attention to the intuitive thinking that plays such a large part in our understanding of the world. Additionally, as George Monbiot articulates in *How Did We Get Into This Mess? Politics, Equality, Nature* (2016): ‘we

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[143] Anderson, P. ‘Thematic Innovations of Western Marxism’ from *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1974). Retrieved on 29/11/2019 from https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3242-thematic-innovations-of-western-marxism.
[144] Timpanaro, S. (1985) 'Leopardi and the Italian Left of the ’70s', *Antileopardini e neomoderati nella sinistra italiana*. Parma: ETS. Retrieved on 29/11/2019 from https://www.marxists.org/archive/timpanaro/1985/italian-left.htm.
[145] Timpanaro, S. (1975) *On Materialism.* trans. Garner, L. London: NLB. 21.

carry with us a ghost psyche, adapted to a world we no longer inhabit, which contains – though it remains locked down for much of the time – a boundless capacity for fear and wonder, curiosity and enchantment'.[146] Leopardi's work, seeks to retrieve this untapped resource, which reminds us of lost opportunities to connect with life. Leopardi's ecological thought is set out most prominently in 'La Ginestra' and remind us of what we have lost and locked down, opening up an opportunity to give us the capacity and guidance to reawaken the boundless capacity for wonder, curiosity and enchantment in our lives that his earlier work seeks to demonstrate we have lost. This drive of resurrection is particularly prominent in areas of Leopardi's thought where he unifies his earlier thinking, in which he utilises the fable's association with falsehoods in narratives to critique human characteristics that are detrimental to us, and reformulates it, to capture the fable's potential to express sorrow while rekindling enthusiasm. 'La Ginestra', as I later examine, turns attention away from human characteristic, and observes the lives of animals and plants lives, within a work that focuses on the matter of the noble characteristics increasingly stripped away in modern life, the substance of which he evaluates and exemplifies through the desert broom.

Moreover, the theme of not being able to see our own errors due to being blinded by our egos underpins Leopardi's interest in fables, because he recognised fabulists' ability to convey the threats contained within 'love of self', or more precisely, what presents itself as such, in a manner that would be less likely than other forms to alienate his readers. Leopardi's warnings of the dangers inherent in the combination of our capacity to further science with our lack of willingness to fathom the limits of our powers and our imaginations has become a trope which has inspired exploration in the work of his successors within Italian literature. For example, in Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno (*Zeno's Conscience, published in 1923), a character becomes so immersed in the specificity of an aspect of his business affairs that he failed to recognise his impending bankruptcy, leading the protagonist to contemplate how humans are 'clever fools': we can admirably use our reason, but regularly to our detriment, fail to consider ourselves and situate our projects within wider perspectives.[147]

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[146] Monbiot, G. (2016) *How Did We Get Into This Mess? Politics, Equality, Nature.* London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso. 89.
[147] Svevo, I. and Weaver, W. (2002) *Zeno's Conscience.* Penguin.

Leopardi's Works: The 'Zibaldone di pensieri', the 'Operette morali' and the 'Canti'

The key works by Leopardi that I examine in this thesis are the *Zibaldone*, the *Operette* and the *Canti*. His extensive personal notebook, amounting to 4,536/4526 closely written pages written between 1817-1832, the *Zibaldone di pensieri,* is the work in which he meticulously recorded his thoughts almost daily with entries ranging from brief jottings to full essays revealing his lifelong concern with, amongst other topics; philology, literature and philosophy.[148] The work is peppered with quotations from Latin, Greek, German, and French, Hebrew and English, and contains Leopardi's critique of Enlightenment notions of 'progress' and his observations on human culture, notably, his admiration for the ancients which contrasts with his critique of modern civilisation. It was not published until 1898-1900, which contributed to Leopardi being ignored as a thinker and philosopher. Nonetheless, it is comparable to Benjamin's kindred text *Passagenwerk*, and, like Nietzsche's *Nachlass,* the collection of unpublished notes that formed the basis for *The Will to Power,* the *Zibaldone* forms the basis, as the following chapters in this study elucidate, of the next important work produced by Leopardi, namely, the *Operette Morali*.[149] Leopardi divided the substantial text by its constitutive parts' dates of composition, copiously annotating the work with marginalia, and cross-referencing it with a granular thematic index , which those of the early 1820s he used to aid the development of the draft of the first twenty pieces of the *Operette,* in 1824, and which thereby enabled the *Zibaldone* to serve as a 'laboratory' for the *Operette*.[150] In turn, the *Operette,* or 'Moral Essays', was made up of twenty four fictional pieces, which Leopardi composed aged twenty six, for its first edition between January and November 1824. In the *Zibaldone*, in July 1821, he referred to these works as a 'philosophical treatise that I am planning' and as 'Lucianesque dialogues and novellas' that would use 'weapons of ridicule.'[151] Finally, I will examine the collection of poems regarded as one of the most significant works of Italian poetry: Leopardi's *Canti,* translated by Jonathan Galassi in 2010. Within this collection, 'L'infinito' is perhaps most well-known, and in a cruel twist of fate that exposes what Timothy Murphy describes as Leopardi's 'untimeliness' - due

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[148] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 17.
[149] Ibid. 17.
[150] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. xxi.
[151] Ibid. (Z 1394).

to Leopardi's work being disregarded and ignored during his own lifetime, the poem was celebrated across Italy for its two hundredth year anniversary, in 2019.[152] These texts: the *Zibaldone*, the *Operette* and the *Canti*, far from encompass the entirety of Leopardi's impressive oeuvre, but they have been chosen as a representation of his work, and selected for examination, because they are most adept to illustrate the arguments I wish to develop here. They will be introduced further, as appropriate, throughout the course of my examination of the significance of the fable to Leopardi's philosophical project.

Michael Caesar, the co-editor of the 2013 translation of the *Zibaldone* completed at Birmingham University, argues that Leopardi's thinking is steeped in classical and early scientific thinking. Leopardi, according to Caesar, demonstrates an alertness to the world around him that allowed him to predict how things would go in the future, sometimes explicitly, as in the case of the environmental crisis wrought by the Anthropocene:

> Leopardi is surprisingly modern, in the way in which he reasons, in his alertness to what is going on in the world around him, but also in the way in which he's in many ways implicitly or explicitly predicting how things will go in the future… He has an idea of a human society that is almost entirely divorced from its origins or indeed from its environment … So he is definitely one of the moderns, even if he is a modern who is absolutely steeped in classical and early scientific thinking.[153]

As Caesar notes, Leopardi considers human society to be 'almost entirely divorced from its origins,' a theme we will find is central to his concern with the fable. My examination will build on Caesar's observation by questioning the extent to which Leopardi's reverence for early scientific thinking, especially as it pertains to the wisdom of the ancients, aids the development of the conceptualisation of the fable implicit in his work.

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[152] Murphy, T. S. (2011) 'Flower of the Desert: Poetics as Ontology from Leopardi to Negri', *Genre*, 44(1), pp. 75-91. 80.
[153] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/01/giacomo-leopardi-zibaldone-translation-published (06/12/2019)

The Origins of the 'Operette' in the 'Zibaldone'

> …I will strive to bring comedy to what hitherto has been characteristic of tragedy, that is, the vices of the great, the fundamental principles of calamity and human misery, the absurdities of politics, the improprieties pertaining to universal morals and to philosophy, the condition and general spirit of the age, the sum total of events, society, contemporary civilization, the mishaps and the revolutions and circumstances of the world, the vices and abominations not of men but of man, the state of nations etc. And I believe that the weapons of ridicule, especially in this utterly ridiculous and chilly age, and also because of the power they naturally possess, will be in a better position to be useful that those of passion, feeling, imagination, eloquence, more even than those of reasoning, although these are very strong today.
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> Leopardi,
> *Zibaldone* on 27 July 1821, (Z 1393-4).

In his introduction to the first English translation of the *Zibaldone*, Caesar links the themes worked out in the *Zibaldone* to Leopardi's ability to bring together his ideas in the accessible form he conveys them with in the *Operette*, when he writes:

> It was in the *Operette* that the principal themes worked out in the notebooks over the previous four years, and the new perspectives that he had focalized in the preceding months, would find a suitable "fictional" form, a form in which they could be presented to the public not as dry philosophy, not as a scientific discourse freighted with technicalities and specialist language, but as trains of thought that were approachable and even entertaining, sometimes humorous, in the form of dialogues or fables.[154]

Patrick Creagh, who translated the *Operette* into English, follows Caesar's method of reading the *Zibaldone* in relation to the *Operette*. He argues that Leopardi had yet to find the right shape for his book at this time, 'or the proper tone of voice and set of fables' to express what he had been building up in the thousands of pages of the *Zibaldone*. According to Creagh, all Leopardi's '…ideas were a long time in wood before being bottled.'[155] He also argues that in the *Zibaldone*, Leopardi's ideas concerning his studies of the fable are most clearly articulated and tell us about the real roots of the *Operette*. Leopardi showed within the *Zibaldone*, and in his letters, particularly to the classical literary scholar Pietro Giordani, that he wanted to accessibly fashion the perceptions and arguments of his material to reach the desired audience, whose imaginations he wished to activate.[156] Whilst Emanuele Severino examines Leopardi's tendency to put his

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[154] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. xxvii.
[155] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 98.
[156] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 14.

reflections on the presentation of art from the *Zibaldone* into practice by illustrating how his notion concerning the intrinsic property of 'works of genius', articulated in Z259/61 influenced his later work, this serious consideration of Leopardi's ideas for the implication of the form of his later work is currently missing concerning his consideration of the value of fables, which I address throughout the following chapters.[157] Appreciation of the *Operette's* fabulous nature often remains solely noted, by both Caesar and Creagh, for example, rather than examined in its own right, as it deserves.

Nonetheless, Leopardi demonstrates that such an examination in the *Zibaldone*, where, on 11th July 1823, Leopardi indicated the significance of the connection of the critique of modern philosophy to his analysis of genre theory:

> From my lengthy reflections on… the fable of Psyche, about which I have spoken elsewhere [—>Z 637-38], and from other very ancient fables or dogmas, etc., that I recall having alluded to in various passages [—>Z63-64], one may infer not only what is generally said, namely that corruption and decline of mankind from a better state is proved by a very remote, universal, consistent, and unbroken tradition, but that such a tradition and the records of the most ancient history and wisdom also prove that this depravity, corruption and decline of mankind from a happy state arose through knowledge, and through knowing too much, and that the origin of this unhappiness was the knowledge of both itself and of the world, and the excessive use of reason. This truth appears to have been known to the most ancient sages, and to have been one of the principal and crucial truths that they, perhaps deeming them dangerous to know, declared under the veil of allegory and covered in mystery and draped in fictions, or contented themselves with hinting at vaguely to the people…[158]

Leopardi explicitly states that reflecting on fables encourages us to see there is a universal, consistent and unbroken tradition of the decline and corruption of humankind. In fact, he claims that the foundation of this problem, 'the origin of this unhappiness' is 'the excessive use of reason.' Whilst Timpanaro and Esposito conduct excellent analyses of Leopardi's criticism of modern philosophy's tendencies, and the implications of relying too heavily on reason alone, these have not yet been extended to account for the connections of these critiques to fables. Leopardi nonetheless expressly asserts here that his numerous reflections on fables are intended to convey that we may have a chance to counteract problems which arise from the 'corruption and decline of mankind'. We could

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[157] Severino, E. 1993. Le "Opere di Genio" di Leopardi. *In: Parascandolo, R.* (ed.).
[158] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 2939-40).

do this by turning to the genre, and through more highly valuing that 'the most ancient sages' appreciated our human tendency to veer towards destruction.

Like Caesar and Creagh, Negri has also highlighted the importance of the relationship between Leopardi's *Zibaldone* and the *Operette*. Nonetheless, too much focus has hitherto rested on this relationship, mentioned here primarily for preparatory purposes, in order to later demonstrate that this developmental trend in Leopardi's work continued, and to highlight the importance of the work Leopardi did in *Operette* for his later work in the *Canti*. I argue that, when these two bodies of works are considered through the lens of the fable, we can see how Leopardi's thought concerning the genre shifted; whilst it began as a means to demonstrate the falsity of received narratives, it developed into a rich genre charged with potential for establishing an ethics for better off societies, which informed his writing of 'La Ginestra'. This has previously been overlooked by Leopardi's critics, particularly those whose work is available in English, which I hope this work will begin to address. To provide further groundwork for this argument, we can briefly examine Leopardi's references in the *Zibaldone* to the fabulists whose work he considers and admires.

Ancients, Moderns and Fables: Lucian, Lorenzo Pignotti and Jean-François Marmontel

In Z67 of the *Zibaldone,* written from June-November 1819, Leopardi recorded a lengthy reflection that reveals his reverence of ancient fabulists, and modern writers whose work has been shaped by these. In particular, this note concerned the work of the Italian fabulist Lorenzo Pignotti, who lived from 1739-1812. Examining the verse fables *Favole e novelle* (1782), he argued that Pignotti's work adjusted the purpose of the fable from its 'use [of] sweetness, simile, etc. in order to teach children'.[159] He writes: 'These fables… have been reduced from their original Aesopian model to not inurbane little satires, or pure games of wit, that is, pleasant comparisons or little stories, of some use to grown men, like Marmontel's Contes moraux and other works of that kind, except that in this case they describe animals, plants, etc. etc.'[160] Jean-François Marmontel, whom Leopardi

[159] Ibid. (Z 67).
[160] Ibid. (Z 67).

makes reference to, was the self-proclaimed inventor of the moral tale, *Contes moraux*, which were an instant success throughout Europe, and led imitators to capitalise on readers' enthusiasm for the moral tale. Additionally, according to Leopardi, Pignotti draws out, from the fable, its capacity to address adults. He admires Pignotti's successful reference to the vices of the social world and qualities of the human character, which Leopardi, who understands the fable's close tie with the formation of identity, believes lead us to our own destruction and unhappiness. These contentions illustrate Leopardi's interest in renewing or reactivating ancient forms to speak to modern audiences. In this respect, Leopardi's argument has recently been reiterated by Wade Davis, who argues in his work *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World* (2009), that ancient wisdom, 'a vast archive of knowledge and expertise' and a 'catalogue of imagination' is at risk and consequently, that 'rediscovering a new appreciation for the diversity of the human spirit as expressed by culture, is among the central challenges of our times.'[161] Leopardi seems to express a similar fear, and takes up this restorative project of rediscovering an appreciation for the insights of the ancients and their relevance to modernity, through writers like Lorenzo Pignotti, Jean-François Marmontel, as well as Lucian of Samosata, whose dialogues and novellas he planned to mimic.[162] Relatedly, in addition to noting the influence of Lucian's ridicule on his *Operette* in the *Zibaldone* on 27 July 1821, Leopardi previously wrote in a letter, in what is thought to be the first germ of his 'philosophical treatise', to his confident Pietro Giordani on 4 September 1820: 'In the last few days, as though to take revenge on the world, I've devised and sketched some short satirical pieces in prose.'[163] These inspirations illustrate Leopardi's intention to revive ancient storytelling traditions, examined further later, which stems from his deep interest in the ancients and classics, and imbues his early fabulation with the nostalgia he begins to distance himself from in the *Canti*.

The satirical prose pieces Leopardi discussed with Giordani also speak to the philosopher's interest in the ancient writer Lucian. Leopardi analysed the benefits of Lucian's tactics of deploying humour, noting of the uses of comedy that it: '…is of

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[161] Davis, W. (2009) *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World.* House of Anansi Press Incorporated. 34.
[162] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.(Z 1394).
[163] Shaw, P. (2017) *The Letters of Giacomo Leopardi 1817-1837.* Taylor & Francis. 107.

particular use when it teaches young men and women about the world, its dangers, vices, vanities, temptation, treacheries, illusions, etc.'[164] Here, Leopardi notes that that comedy and humour may be used as a vehicle for communicating lessons about the world. The Lucianic inspiration of Leopardi's dialogue between Columbus and his pilot Pedro Gutierrez is registered in David Marsh's *Lucian and the Latins* (2001) and is also apparent in Leopardi's 'Dialogue of Nature and the Icelander', which has echoes of Lucian's satirical 'True Story', where Lucian makes fun of outlandish tales in the earliest known work of fiction to include travel to outer space, alien life-forms, and interplanetary warfare.[165] Additionally, in 'Trips to the Moon', Lucian emphasises that we must avoid taking ourselves too seriously, which is a prominent theme traversing the *Operette*. Building on aspects of Lucianic thought enables Leopardi to utilise the fable, by directing it against the human hubris that allows inflated understandings of the blind trust we put in reason. For, Leopardi in the *Operette*, our self-conceptualisation is not only ill-founded, but crucially also leads us with increasing rapidity towards our own demise.

Lucian's dialogues, which included 'Dialogues of the Gods', 'Dialogues of the Dead' and 'The Sale of Lives', dealt with themes of ancient mythology and contemporary philosophers of his time. Leopardi's interest in Lucian illustrates an awareness of a long tradition that, throughout modernity, followed in Lucian's footsteps. The catalogue of Leopardi's library in Recanati shows he knew and read several of the works concerning the motif of death in vogue in 17th and 18th century France, which includes those of Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle and François Fénelon, alongside Nicholas Boileau's *Les Héros de Roman*, which he also notes is in the manner of Lucian.[166] Leopardi's acquaintance to the tradition is a prominent theme from 1819 onwards, informing the composition of the *Operette*. For example, the notes for the dialogue, between a horse and a bull, which did not get included in the final book, clarify that Leopardi intended to play a role in this tradition himself.[167] Lucian formally inspired the satirical dialogues of the *Operette* , which Leopardi expresses within his letters of 1819 to Giordani, where he

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[164] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 63).
[165] Marsh, D. and Press, U. o. M. (1998) *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance.* University of Michigan Press. 191.
[166] Franzoni, M. G. (2017) *A philosophy as old as Homer: Giacomo Leopardi and Greek poetic pessimism.* The University of St Andrews. 58.
[167] Ibid. 58.

first set out his vision for what was to become the *Operette*, he wrote that his proposed work was intended to be created and presented in the 'manner of Lucian'. In 1823, after the plan had persisted in his mind for several years, Leopardi drafted a list for a project, containing a list of seventeen dialogues that included 'Tasso and Spirit' and 'The Sun, the First Hour, or Copernicus', which he actualised and incorporated into the *Operette*, mostly writing these in 1824. Wishing to adapt the characters he drew from Lucian's work, Leopardi considered Lucian's tendency to use the dead in his dialogues, striving, like Pignotti to adapt these, through replacing characters with others, who would speak effectively to the contemporary audience he wished to reach:

> …[taking] the characters and the ridicule from present or modern customs, and not so much from among the dead, since there is already a great abundance of Dialogues of the dead, as from among characters whom one pretends are alive, and even perhaps from animals.[168]

Fantastic characters are employed by Leopardi in this way throughout his dialogues, where his characters include, imps, gnomes, mummies, Fashion, Nature, and members of aN imagined Academy. These characters, as we will see, through their discussions, meditations, arguments and exclamations, helped Leopardi to represent and often ridicule, modern customs. By drawing his inspiration from Lucian, Leopardi hoped his writing would not be viewed by the public as dry scientific discourse freighted with technicalities and specialist language but instead as approachable, entertaining and humorous. By examining the development of Leopardi's *Operette* and the introduction of themes and concerns that are picked up and engaged with in its progression, I want to suggest that the *Operette* can be read a philosophical, experimental and literary workbook that paves the way for an expansion of the fable to encompass and set forth philosophical thought, examples of which can be found in the *Canti*. The *Operette,* as I progress to illustrate, provided the space for Leopardi to construct and engage with scenarios, centred around imaginatively exploring specific motifs, which stayed with him throughout his life, which Leopardi continued to develop until his death. Whilst many readers, including Antoni Negri, Michael Caesar and Patrick Creagh, focus largely on the ties between the *Zibaldone* and the *Operette*, I wish to set forth what currently appears to be missing, namely a close analysis of the relationship between the *Operette* and the *Canti*.

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[168] Leopardi, G., Felici, L. and Trevi, E. (2016) *Tutte le poesie e tutte le prose. Ediz. integrale.* Newton Compton. 1109.

Additionally, As Martina Piperno argues in her comparison of the thought of Leopardi and Vico in the context of Post-Napoleonic Italy, Leopardi seems to have significantly interpreted the feeling of nostalgia for the ancient function of poetry, which spread in post-revolutionary Italy.[169] This nostalgia is found in the work of revolutionary poet Ugo Foscolo and in Vincenzo Monti, who translated the Iliad. For instance, Foscolo encouraged Italian writers to nurture national literature, particularly historical narration, which he thought had the ability to aggregate communities. He exhibited, as Piperno highlights, a nostalgia for ancient epic narration, with its original function of maintain and transmitting a people's cultural heritage, which Leopardi shares in.[170]

Leopardi's Philosophy

Leopardi's early work considers the foundations of Western tradition, as Severino elucidates, to be a fable - a fiction. As such, he is an unrecognised precursor to Nietzsche, who expressed a similar idea in *Twilight of the Idols*, where he describes our release from a 'history of error' in 'How the True World Finally Became a Fable', in which he argues that we have abolished 'the true world.'[171] However, Leopardi's engagement with the fable also progresses, to transforms the fable into its philosophical counterpart, by exceeding its former limiting boundaries that ensured the genre would denote something negative and misleading. Rather than allowing us to continue to be subject to the fable of the tradition of the West, Leopardi transcends this, noting the fable's power, retrieves this and uses it for his own purposes: that of reacquainting life with its natural roots, returning the exiled body and nurturing of the judgement and wisdom that philosophy needs. He transforms the negative fable of philosophy, in the sense that it underpins the tradition of the West into a positive tool that helps philosophy become what it is capable of.

In the *Zibaldone*, Leopardi argued that 'the height of wisdom is to know its own uselessness.'[172] He believed that philosophy is a practice of thinking and acting in such a way that allows us to keep in mind our limits. Undertaking a comparison between ancient

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[169] Piperno, M. (2016) *Temporalities and fractures in post-Napoleonic Italy: Leopardi and Vico's legacy.* University of Warwick. 117.
[170] Ibid. 73.
[171] Nietzsche, F. and Mann, H. (2012) *The Essential Nietzsche.* Dover Publications. 147.
[172] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 2711).

philosophy and modern philosophy in an entry to the *Zibaldone* dated 21 May 1823, for instance, he wrote:

> Comparing ancient philosophy with modern, one finds that the latter is so much superior to the former, principally because ancient philosophers were all trying to teach and construct, whereas modern philosophy normally only sweeps away illusions and demolishes. And if the ancients did do this from time to time, there was not one of them who did not consider it his duty and business to create a substitute.[173]

Leopardi's understands modern philosophy to be a practice concerning the destruction of illusions, and we saw earlier, in Severino's analysis this relates to Nietzsche's idea of the 'death of God', ultimately preceding it. Describing philosophical practice, Leopardi underlines the value of demolishing illusions and emphasises this commitment to be a differentiating factor separating ancient and modern philosophy. He argues that ancient philosophy is hindered by a tendency to replace the illusions it brings down. For Leopardi it suffices however, for these ideas to remain destroyed, revealed as the falsities they are. He understands the deficiencies of reason and the ways in which examples can begin the work of counteracting these by finetuning our powers of judgement similarly to Kant and also observes how much the imagination can bring to philosophy. For him, modern philosophy consists in developing a practice of stripping oneself of one's errors. Both thinkers' work suggests that the history of humanity itself is a fable, with human exceptionalism being its fictional component. They both view philosophical thought, in its positive sense, to involve the use of reason in a context in which its direction and groundwork has been considered and meditated upon. For both, reason's proper use may and must be developed: for Leopardi wisdom encourages this, whilst for Kant, the driving force would be the appropriate use of judgement. For Kant, this can be developed through the use of examples, which Leopardi provides in 'La Ginestra'.

In *In viaggio con Leopardi* (2015), Severino helps develop a profitable reading of Leopardi in 'Il terzo Giocatore, il destino, il non apparire del diventar altro', referring to the 'Third Player', destiny and the non-appearance of becoming something else. He argues that Leopardi's work highlights that Western Civilisation rests upon fallacies, and

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[173] Ibid. (Z 2709).

that our intellectual endeavours have been founded on erroneous grounds.[174] He introduces a 'Third Player' to this game, who describes the match taking place between the Giocatore Nero and Giocatore Bianco, and offers a slightly different interpretation of the issue that divides the two players.[175] As Barbara Carle examines, The Terzo Giocatore points out that the chessboard was built by the Giocatore Bianco on an erroneous basis, that its foundation was false.'[176] The Terzo Giocatore consequently helps us to recognise the catastrophic direction the conflict between the Western tradition and Leopardi's critique of it is taking, whereby Western civilisation itself is threatened. Whilst Severino posits the Terzo Giocatore as separate to the two players in the game, his view that the history of Western thought falters upon close examination, is in fact the same as Leopardi's, as Esposito demonstrates in *Living Thought* when he highlights that Leopardi's work addresses the way that civilisation wanders off course by tearing life away from its natural roots.[177]

Conclusion to Chapter One

So far, I have argued that in the *Zibaldone* Leopardi finds that ancient fables could reveal that the 'corruption and decline of mankind from a happy state arose through knowledge… and the excessive use of reason.' I have demonstrated that Leopardi considered authors such as Lorenzo Pignotti and Jean-François Marmontel, and others, to have successfully adapted the fable for modern use. He admired Lucian of Samosata's use of characters and satirical devices and his work is purveyed with a nostalgia for the ancient function of poetry, which spread in post-revolutionary Italy, such as in Ugo Foscolo Vincenzo Monti.[178] In the *Operette*, we find Leopardi's efforts to contest the reliance upon reason and to evaluate its effects, often using the same devices that he admired in Lucian. Consequently, Leopardi brings his appreciation of fables into his

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[174] Carle, B. (2016) 'The match between Leopardi, the White Knight and Severino over the destiny of mankind', *Forum Italicum*, 50(1), pp. 264-268. 267.
[175] Ibid. 266.
[176] Ibid. 267.
[177] Esposito, R.(2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 119.
[178] Piperno, M. (2016) *Temporalities and fractures in post-Napoleonic Italy: Leopardi and Vico's legacy.* University of Warwick. 117.

writing, using the genre's aptitude to reveal the falsify of received truths.[179] Next, we will see how Leopardi uses the device to illustrate the various ways that the human behaviours in a variety of forms corrode our lives.

[179] Bogue, R. (2006) 'Fabulation, Narration and the People to Come', in Boundas, C. (ed.) *Deleuze and Philosophy*: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 202-224. 221. To ensure clarity through the rest of this thesis it seems useful to clarify my use of the term 'fabulation,' which, in its technical context is associated with storytelling as the production of fables, and in an everyday sense is used to refer to 'telling stories'. Bogue, 26.

Chapter Two – Fictions: *The Operette Morali & the Western Tradition as a Fable*

> il Terzo Giocatore . . . vede che la schacchiera non si appoggia ad alcunche´ ed è l'Errare estremo; e nondimeno è il sostegno su cui si appoggia e di cui si alimenta tutto l'errare e la violenza della civilta` occidentale e ormai di tutta la Terra
>
> The Third Player . . . sees that the chessboard can't support anything and that it is an extreme mistake; and nevertheless it is the support that endorses and powers all the errors and violence of the Western tradition and now of the whole Earth
>
> Severino
> *In viaggio con Leopardi*, 183.

Leopardi undertakes his first incursion into fabulation in the *Operette*, where, by systematically undermining the Western Tradition's central tenants, he depicts it as a fable. The areas that he criticises the relationship between the notion of progress and our severance from life, satirises human delusions of grandeur and exceptionalism, condemns our inability to duly acknowledge theoretical shifts in science, expresses concern for our refusal to confront our fragility, mortality, or the unknown, and observes, although it will not be considered here, the potential impacts of machines on people. His earlier engagements with fables in the *Operette* are informed by his belief in the value of ancient literature, which he draws from Ugo Foscolo, impacting his consideration of ancient fables, which appear in the context of his heavy criticism the Western Tradition.[180] These dialogues explicate Leopardi's view of the distinct lack within modernity, and help aid him to formulate criticisms, which he merely presents, , without proposing any consolation. This comes later in the *Canti*.

Severino's insight that Leopardi strives to halt the imminent destruction of humankind and attend to our destiny by questioning the groundwork, the 'scacchiera' of the Western tradition is displayed throughout these short works. Written when Leopardi was twenty-six, the *Operette*, serves as the workbook that prepares the author for the work that he produces shortly before his death, 'La Ginestra'. This work deserves more critical

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[180] Ferber, M. (2008) *A Companion to European Romanticism.* Wiley. 266.

acclaim, not only for its contemporary relevance, but its success in attaining a balance between expressing life's dearth whilst also offering a glimpse of hope and a means through which to strive towards this. I demonstrate how the development of the *Operette* allowed Leopardi to establish the centrality of certain themes within his critique of modernity more broadly, which he was later able to give more focus and present in accordance with his mature, and philosophical, relationship to the fable. However, my analysis will reveal a weakness in Leopardi's thought, which reduces the connection he establishes between philosophy and the fable by capitulating to dualistic thinking that holds Leopardi's work back, which is most prominent in his analysis of nature.

The exploration of these ideas paves the way for Leopardi to be able to conclude later that, if we change our stance towards nature, we may learn how to repair our relationships, and live fuller, truer lives. To make this argument, I will introduce and examine some of the notable works that make up the *Operette*. In doing so I will show that, Leopardi draws on the fable's history of being able to mock human characteristics to illustrate that reason bring about the withering of the vitality of life that they are supposed to make possible. In the depiction of humans in the dialogues like those between an Imp and a Gnome and Fashion and Death, for example, humans are portrayed as bringing their downfall upon themselves, taking on Death's work of depleting life.

1. Leopardi's Blame for The Disintegration of Life

> 'And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil'
>
> John 3:19,
> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 153.

> 'And men loved darkness rather than light'
>
> Giacomo Leopardi,
> 'La Ginestra' in *Canti*, 286.

Leopardi's *Operette* not only reveals his cultural malaise but is significant for asserting that the dearth of life we suffer from is the fault of humanity. Within his works making up the *Operette* in particular, blame for the pain and suffering of our condition was laid

squarely at the feet of our species. In his dialogues, our woes are largely shown to be a symptom of our egoism and individualism. These works serve as Leopardi's exposition of John 3:19, where the evil tendencies of people are highlighted, which he takes as the point of departure and uses as an epigraph in the *Canti*. This exemplifies one of the many ways, which critics regularly overlook, that the *Operette* made way for the *Canti*. I address this in greater detail later, by using Timpanaro's analysis of 'La Ginestra' as a point of departure, showing that Leopardi's foundational belief that humankind are the primary cause of our own suffering becomes altered, as he develops the critique of nature that his *Operette* prompted him to initiate.

In the *Operette*, Leopardi is interested in condemning humanity, who he sees as the cause of the deteriorated condition of life. For him, as Esposito explains, by defining only one part of the living being, that associated with intelligence, as perfect necessarily means to have taken value away from the other part. Accordingly, as Leopardi's work is designed to illustrate and mourn, we have snapped human life in two by placing one of its dimensions, those relating to the senses and the body, under the dominion of the rational, thereby depriving ourselves of an essential component of life.[181] These themes traversing the *Operette*, particularly those written during this intense burst of creativity and productivity in 1824, further convey the accuracy of Severino and Esposito's analysis of the importance in Leopardi's work of the detrimental effects of honouring the rational mind to the detriment of the intuitive mind, and neglecting the sense, which leads vitality to disintegration.

Leopardi begins the *Operette* with an origin story designed to portray that extent to which our past was one with much greater vitality than that which we may hope to experience today. His overture, 'The History of the Human Race' was written from 19th January-7th February and introduces all the main themes of the *Operette*. The work, described by Negri as 'a mythological fable', highlights Leopardi's conviction that modern life and the human race has deteriorated.[182] Moreover, it expresses the extent to which he blames our species for this: 'the wickedness of men had no other beginning that in their own

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[181] Esposito, R. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 120.
[182] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 122.

calamities.'[183] In this piece, Leopardi highlights how reason and scientific progress bring about banality, which gives way to despair, disgust, and hatred, weakening a sense of wonderment we could have previously enjoyed. The work thereby expresses what Max Weber refers to as disenchantment, a historical process that has stretched over many centuries, which he relates to 'progress,' arguing that modern science and humanities are a part of and driving force behind this.[184] Leopardi, for whom childhood and imaginative power are intimately connected, valorises the imagination over Reason, driving him to believe that the childhood of our race, in which we still could experience wonder was better than its adulthood.[185] The roots of this in the *Zibaldone* are examined by Paola Cori in hers recent book *Forms of Thinking in Leopardi's Zibaldone: Religion, Science and Everyday Life in an Age of Disenchantment* (2019). The sense of wonder that Leopardi mourns is expressed in the opening lines to the work, which notably embodies the concept of 'multispecies flourishing' that I explore in the subsequent case study, where Leopardi writes:

> Narrasi che tutti gli uomini che da pricipio popolarono la terra, fossero creati per ogni dove a un medesimo tempo, e tutti bambini, e fossero nutricati dalle api, dalle capre e dalle colombe nel modo che i poeti favoleggiarono dell'educazione di Giove.[186]
>
> It is said that all the men who peopled the earth in the beginning were created everywhere at one and the same time, and all as children, and that they were nurtured by the bees, the goats and the doves; as the poet used to fable, concerning the upbringing of Jove.[187]

It is significant that Leopardi brings up the fable at the outset of the *Operette* where he expressly expands on ideas concerning the comparisons he made between the ancients, which in 'The History' correspond to children, and the moderns, which correspond to adults. This is because it marks an extension of the ideas he set forth in the *Zibaldone*, where his consideration of the ancients leads him to consider their use of fables. Moreover, suggesting, in an Anti-Hegelian movement, that our story is one of loss and decline, his work predates and shares similarities with Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, which also traces the history of the human story in a similar manner.

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[183] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 37.
[184] Weber, M., Searls, D., Reitter, P. and Wellmon, C. (2020) *Charisma and Disenchantment: The Vocation Lectures.* New York Review Books. 18.
[185] Ferber, M. (2008) *A Companion to European Romanticism.* Wiley. 257.
[186] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 59.
[187] Ibid. 34.

From 10-13 February 1824, Leopardi wrote 'The Dialogue of Hercules and Atlas' where he confirms the sorry state of our planet, which having once throbbed with life now merely buzzes, ticking liked a watch with a broken spring.[188] This lack of life is blamed on human imprudence in 'The Dialogue of Fashion and Death', which Leopardi wrote 15-18 February 1824, following 'The Dialogue of Hercules and Atlas'. Describing both Fashion and Death as 'daughters of decay', Leopardi highlights how easy it is to encourage people to bring harm on themselves in the name of fashion and how susceptible to falling prey to egoism we are, even at the cost of discomfort, pain and agony meant to attain beauty.[189] Fashion persuades humans to wear narrow boots, neck chokers and tight corsets and commit themselves to pleasure and possessions which do them no good, thereby contributing to the disintegration of their own lives.[190] His dramatisation of humankind's self-destruction, which is articulated as us taking on the work of Death herself is an attack on our tendency to live by habit, rather than ethics, which depicts our actions as both empty, and deprived of imagination.[191] Demonstrating the validity of Esposito's assertion that Leopardi mourns life's tearing away from its natural roots in the piece, Fashion boasts: 'I have put into the world such refutations and customs that life itself, as regards the body and the soul, is more dead than alive; so that with perfect truth this century might be called the century of death.'[192] This piece is referred to throughout Walter Benjamin's *Arcade Project* in the context of commodity fetishism to reiterate Leopardi's analysis of the state of modernity.[193] Furthermore, he described humans as living 'more mechanically than anyone in the past' in 'Announcement of Prizes Offered by the Academy of Sillographers', written later the same month between 22-25 February 1824.[194]

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[188] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 47.
[189] Ibid. 51.
[190] Ibid. 51.
[191] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press.114.
[192] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 52-3. & Esposito, R. (2012a) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans. Hanafi, Z. (Stanford University Press. 118-20.
[193] Rolf Tiedemann, W. B., Benjamin, W., Tiedemann, R., Eiland, H., McLaughlin, K. and Press, B. (1999) *The Arcades Project.* Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 62 & 894.
[194] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 55.

2. Human Misanthropy

Whilst Leopardi attributes our pain not only to our egoism, he also decries our individualism, despairs over the malevolent manner in which we treat each other, as he outlines most in 'The Dialogue between Nature and the Icelander', which he wrote on 21, 27 and 30 May 1824. Here, he illustrates our willingness to hurt each other, and highlights how these leads us to run away from the community in which we might otherwise find solace. As the Icelander in the work declares:

> Con che non intend dire che io pensassi di astenermi dale occupazioni e dalle fatiche corporali: che ben sai che differenza è dalla fatica al disagio, e dal viver quieto al vivere ozioso. E già nel primo mettere in opera questa risoluzione, conobi per prova come egli è vano a pensare, se tu vivi tra gli uomini, di potere, non offendendo alcuno, fuggire che gli altri non ti offendano; e cedendo sempre spontaneamente, e contentandosi del menomo in ogni cosa, ottenere che ti sia lasciato un qualsivoglia luogo, e che questo menomo non ti sia contrastato.[195]
>
> I learnt for certain how vain it is to think, if you live among men, that you can, as long as you hurt no one, in turn escape from being hurt by others; and by giving way always of your own accord, and contenting yourself in the very least of everything, succeed in being left any room whatever for yourself, and ensure that this minimum is not contested.[196]

The Icelander complains of not being able to secure his own safety, even when he refrains from hurting anyone else.[197] Expanding on his notion of the opposition of humans amongst themselves, he describes the 'folly of men', reasserting his belief concerning our tendency to overestimate ourselves. Here we see his belief, prominent throughout his earlier work, of humans are to blame for their problems as a result of their foolhardiness. As the Icelander remarks:

> …Tu dei sapere che io fino nella prima gioventú, a poche esperienze, fui persuaso e chiaro della vanità della vita, e della stoltezza degli uomini; i quali combattendo continuamente gli uni cogli altri per l'acquisto di piaceri che non dilettano, e di beni che non giovano; sopportando e cagionandosi scambievolmente infinite sollecitudini, e infiniti mali, che affannano e nocciono in effetto; tanto piú si allontanano dalla felicità, quanto piú la cercano.[198]

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[195] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 118.
[196] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 99-100.
[197] Leopardi uses terms like "common war" and "strife" which Negri believes may refer to Hobbes, who Leopardi had access to through Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*.
[198] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 118.

> … I was convinced and clear about the vanity of life, and the folly of men; who fighting continually amongst themselves to acquire pleasures which give no delight, and possessions which do them no good; putting up with and justifying to one another infinite cares and infinite evils, which weary them and in fact are harmful; find themselves further and further from happiness the more they seek it.[199]

In 'The Dialogue of an Imp and a Gnome', written two months earlier, Leopardi makes a very similar point, when the Imp tells the Gnome how we died out:

> … parte guerreggiando tra loro, parte navigando, parte mangiandosi l'un l'atro, parte ammazzandosi non pochi di propria mano, parte infracidando nell'ozio, parte stillandosi il cervello sui libri, parte gozzovigliando, e disordinando in mille cose; in fine studiando tutte le vie di far contro la propria natura e di capitar male.[200]
>
> Some by warring amongst themselves, some on the high seas, some by eating each other, quite a few by killing themselves, some by rotting in idleness, some by racking their brains over books, some by debauchery ad a thousand kinds of disorderly behaviour; in fact by studying all possible ways of going against nature and coming to a bad end.[201]

In doing so he warns us that we might come to die out, our species might face extinction, primarily due to our folly and lack of self-reflection. In both texts, Leopardi's concern for our tendency to war and fight amongst ourselves reveal this as a central concern for him during this period.

3. 'The starry heavens above': Anthropocentricsm and Our Status in the Universe

> The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition of normal science can emerge is far from a cumulative process, one achieved by an articulation or extension of the old paradigm. Rather it is a reconstruction of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications. During the transition period there will be a large but never complete overlap between the problems that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigm. But there will also be a decisive difference in the modes of solution. When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals.
>
> Thomas Kuhn
> 'The Response to Crisis' in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 85.

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[199] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 99.
[200] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 83.
[201] Ibid. 59.

In one of his final works in the *Operette*, entitled *'*Copernicus', written in 1827, Leopardi sought to emphasise the unreadiness of our species to appreciate the philosophical implications of Copernicus's challenge to the Ptolomaic system. This he deemed, is what underlies our cosmic insignificance.[202] The work explicitly sets out the implications of the transition of a worldview in which the Earth was the centre of the universe to one in which the Sun is centre, and ultimately issues Leopardi's judgement concerning the 'worthlessness of the human race.'[203] In it, we are challenged to register the repercussions of Copernicus's insight that Earth is not the centre of everything, which appeared against a backdrop of a acceptance of the validity of the Ptolomaic system that had endured through thirteen centuries, previously.[204] Leopardi's critique of our inability to comprehend the scale of this shift informs his resolution that the human race's inability to rise to this challenge, and those which are similar, is another instantiation of the cognitive dissonance at the heart of our flawed self-conceptualisation.

Moreover, Leopardi's work, via dialogues like 'The Dialogue of an Imp and a Gnome' established a connection between the species exceptionalism at the core of our anthropocentricism, and its origins, which are shown to extend from the Ptolomaic worldview. Leopardi demonstrates that the pattern, underlying the Ptolomaic system, of considering the Earth to be central has connections to human exceptionalism, which exhibits the same lack of imagination, and is similarly marred by our position of equating our experience with universal significance. This dialogue, written earlier, between 2-6 March 1824, exhibited how the earth can be appreciated and inhabited from many more perspectives than we usually endeavour to consider. Drawing two figures from folklore, he helps us register the capacity for many different beings in the world to co-exist. Revealing the mistake involved in equating experience with value judgements pertaining to broad categories, he presents an argument between the characters. He portrays the duo as engaged in an eccentric squabble, in which the Imp, having casually remarked 'that

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[202] Notably, Leopardi also wrote one of the first general histories of astronomy in 1813, titled *Storia della Astronomia dalla sua origine sino all'anno 1811*. The reception of this work is examined in: Finocchiaro, M. A. (1974) 'A Curious History of Astronomy: Leopardi's Storia Dell'Astronomia', *Isis*, 65(4), pp. 517-519.

[203] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 189.

[204] Kuhn, T. S. *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought.* Cambridge. 140.

men are all dead, and the race is lost' issues a stunning demotion of the worth and significance of the species:

> …quando non solamente si persuadevano che le cose del mondo non avessero altro uffizio che di stare al servigio loro, ma facevano conto che tutte insieme, allato al genere umano, fossero una bagattella. E però le loro proprie vicende le chiamavano rivoluzioni del mondo: benché si potevano numerare, anche dentro ai termini della terra, forse tante altre specie, non dico di creature, ma solamente di animali, che erano fatti espressamente per coloro uso, non si accorgevano però mai che il mondo si rivoltasse.[205]

> …they not only persuaded themselves that the things of the world had no purpose other than to serve them, but reckoned that everything else put together, compared with the human race, was a mere trifle. And therefore their own adventures they called world revolutions, and the histories of their peoples, histories of the world; although even within the confines of the earth one could count perhaps as many species, not simply of creatures in general but just of animals, as there were living men. And yet these animals, who were made expressly for their use, never realised that the world was in rebellion.[206]

In this dialogue, which Negri describes as operating against a 'fable-like backdrop,' Leopardi expresses not only the problematic nature of anthropocentricsm, but also identifies the ignorance it breeds, which creates a blindness to the rebellion of the world, which today we experience in the height of climate breakdown.[207] In his ridiculing manner, inspired by Lucian, Leopardi highlights the tendency common in Western culture to insist on the centrality of the human species, revealing the instability of the groundwork of these narratives by introducing new one which challenge this, for humans and Earth alike. Leopardi establishes a connection between anthropocentricsm and the Copernican revolution in a number of his pieces, where its prominence varies, including 'The Dialogue of the Earth and the Moon,' where the Moon discusses its inhabitants with Earth:

> Perdona, monna Terra, se io ti rispondo un poco piú liberamente che forse non converrebbe a una tua sudita o fantesca, come io sono. Ma in vero che tu mi riesci peggio che vanerella a pensare che tutte le cose di qualunque parte del mondo sieno conformi alle tue; come se puntualmente da per tutto. Io dico di essere abitate, e tu uomini. Ti avverto che non son; e tu consentendo che

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[205] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 84.
[206] Ibid. 60.
[207] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 124.

> qualità e gli stessi casi de' tuoi popoli; e mi alleghi i cannocchiali di non so che fisico.[208]

> Forgive me, Lady Earth, if I answer you more freely than might become a subject of yours, or a serving-maid, as I am. But the fact is that is seems to me more than a little vain of you to think that all things in every part of the universe are just the same as yours; as if nature had no other aim but to copy you precisely in every place. I say I am inhabited, and you jump to the conclusion that my inhabitants must be men. I tell you that they are not; and though you allow that they are different creatures, you do not doubt that they have the same properties and ups and downs as your people do; and you quote me some physicist and his telescope.[209]

The germ of this dialogue, as commentators agree on, originates in a passage from 'Icaromenippus' in Lucian's *Satirical Sketches*, which Leopardi referred to both in his *History of Astronomy* (2013) and *Essay on the Popular Errors of the Ancients* (1815) that reads, according to Paul Turner's translation:

> The point is, Menippus, I'm sick and tired of hearing all the clever things that scientists say about me. They seem to have nothing to do but poke their noses into my affairs. They're always wanting to know who I am, what my measurements are, and why my figure keeps changing… Some of them say I'm infested with living organisms[210]

Whilst, Negri recognised the attack on the anthropocentric view in Leopardi's critique of the Western tradition, he fails to situate this appropriately within his view of the universe, considering primarily instead alongside his denunciation of teleology.[211] However, partly due to Leopardi's background of studying astronomy and consideration of the revelations of figures like Copernicus and Galileo, his thought is commonly referred to as his 'cosmic pessimism', and referred to as his 'cosmic vision.'[212] For example, in 'The Pessimistic Materialism of Giacomo Leopardi', Timpanaro explains the shift from Leopardi's 'historical pessimism', to his 'cosmic pessimism', which he contends occurred from 1819.[213] This aspect of Leopardi's thought, his universal, focus and its implications for

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[208] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 93.
[209] Ibid. 72.
[210] Turner, P. (1961) *Lucian. Satirical sketches.* 124. and Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 70.
[211] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 124.
[212] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 58.
[213] Timpanaro, S. (1979) 'The pessimistic materialism of Giacomo Leopardi', *New Left Review*, 116, pp. 29-50. And Rennie, N. (2005) *Speculating on the Moment: The Poetics of Time and Recurrence in Goethe, Leopardi, and Nietzsche.* Wallstein. 141.

humanity informs his philosophical fabulation, which as we will shortly see, is born in the *Canti*.

Considering the philosophical nature of Leopardi's intellectual fascination with astronomy, we might relate him again to Kant, who, in the second Critique, connects the consciousness of existence with a world which has 'true infinity', situating humanity within an 'unbounded magnitude' with 'systems of systems', a countless multitude of worlds that annihilates the importance of our own. Kant, like Leopardi, understandings the weight of the underlying geological connotations. By reminding us to consider the place we occupy in the external world, in connection with the 'unbounded magnitude with worlds upon worlds and systems of systems, and moreover into the unbounded times of their periodic motion, their beginning and their duration', Kant - bolstered by contemporary thinkers like Zalasiewicz and James Lovelock who extend his meditation - reminds us that we are only briefly in the golden age of our power and dominance, and remain nonetheless destined to extinction.

Kant not only refers to awe and infinity, addressed by Leopardi in 'L'Infinito', but also include the 'countless multitude of worlds', which give rise to considerations of the multitude of species inhabiting the earth alongside us. In Kant's passage, the world is depicted as small and fragile, and the status of humans as animal creatures is re-asserted, alongside our connection with the world. He reminds us that we are imbued only for a short time with a vital force, which, despite being temporarily ascribed to us, will ultimately 'give back to the planet… the matter from which it came', a notion examined in the following case study. Rather than focusing on the legislative power of the human intellect, as he does in his First Critique, in his second, Kant resituates humanity on the planet, retaining a sense of the limits of human powers of mind. He glimpses but leaves to others, like Leopardi, to expand on what situating oneself in the world might look like. Leopardi takes up Kant's prompt to review our place within the cosmos, as Esposito notes, when he too reads in sequence the dialogues between an Imp, Gnome, the Earth, Moon and concerning Copernicus, in which the thinker frequently reduces the Earth to only one of an infinite number of planets, rotating anonymously in a sky that is remote and indifferent to the fate of human beings, thereby shattering all humanistic

teleologies.[214] Leopardi sought for the work to give expression to an idea he had earlier formulated in the *Zibaldone*, in which he considered how the ideas of Copernicus completely changed the idea of nature and man by revealing a plurality of worlds, highlighting that humans are not unique beings and showing that the destiny of earth is not unique. In 'Copernicus', where the protagonist is in dialogue with the First and Last Hours of the Day and the Sun, Leopardi explicates Earth's hesitancy to relinquish her empire and vacate her throne at the centre of the universe. As Copernicus asserts:

> …pareva che l'universo fosse a somiglianza di una corte; nella quale la Terra sedesse come in un trono; e gli altri globi dintorno, in modo di cortigiani, di guardie, di servitori, attendessero chi ad un ministero e chi a un altro. Sicché, in effetto, la Terra si è creduta sempre di essere imperatrice del mondo: e per verità, stando così le cose come sono state per l'addietro, non si può mica dire che ella discorresse male.[215]

> …it seemed that the universe was of the nature of a court; in which the Earth sat on as a throne; and the other globes around, in the manner of courtiers, guards and servants, attended some to one office and some to another... in effect, the Earth has always thought herself empress of the universe: and in truth, things being as they have been in the past, one can hardly say she has reasoned badly.[216]

Importantly, he clarifies that the effects of this do not solely apply to physics, but also have profound ramifications for our comprehension of humanity:

> perché esso sconvolgerà i gradi della dignità delle cose, e l'ordine degli enti; scambierà i fini delle creature; e per tanto farà un gradissimo rivolgimento anche nella metafisica, anzi in tutto quello che tocca alla parte speculativa del sapere. E ne risulterà che gli uomini, se pur sapranno o vorranno discorrere sanamente, si troveranno essere tutt'altra roba da quello che sono stati fin qui, o che si hanno immaginato di essere.[217]

> ...it will upset the degrees of the importance of things, and the hierarchy of beings; it will alter the purposes of creatures; and so doing it will cause a vast upheaval even in metaphysics, indeed in everything that touches the speculative part of knowledge. And it will come about that men, even supposing that they are able and wish to consider things sensibly, will discover themselves to be quite another thing, from what they have been so far, or have imagined themselves to be.[218]

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[214] Esposito, R. and Hanafi, Z. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*. Stanford University Press. 121.
[215] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali*. Feltrinelli. 208.
[216] Ibid. 196.
[217] Ibid. 209.
[218] Ibid. 197.

Leopardi questioned humankind's inability and unwillingness to consider things sensibly throughout the *Operette.* Within many of his dialogues he expresses the same point made by Lovelock, when he declared: 'I would sooner expect to see a goat to succeed as a gardener than to expect humans to become responsible stewards of the Earth.'[219] Leopardi consistently reminds us of the work we need to do to rid ourselves of the residue of the ideas we have inherited, helping us to appreciate our reluctance in doing so, which could intensify the effort we exert in future attempts to come to a realistic understanding of ourselves. The way we consider ourselves remains nonetheless a constant subject of mockery in the *Operette* where people are accused of acting out of 'rank pride', depicted as 'urchins', and 'rascally', and mocked for their impishness and presumptuousness.

Italo Calvino, who himself sought passages in Galileo relating to the moon, observes that 'we only have to look at the choice passages from Galileo that Leopardi includes in his *Crestomazia* (Anthology) of Italian prose to realize how much the language of Leopardi—even Leopardi as a poet—owes to Galileo.' Although, in the *Zibaldone*, Leopardi admires the elegance and precision of Galileo's prose, the figure does not obtain a prominent role within the *Operette*, although his style is diffused within it.[220] Leopardi's examination of humanity's unwillingness to come to terms with dramatic shifts in scientific understanding is not restricted to occurring on a cosmic stage, though these are regularly infused with insights of those like Copernicus and Galileo. Such insights are often also set out in relation to explorers and through the use of expedition narratives. The starting point of these dialogues is Leopardi's appreciation that such adventures often instigate radical changes to our understanding of the world, which are therefore worthy of careful consideration.

Leopardi's sources and inspiration include W. Robertson's *History of America* (1777) and Luís de Camões's epic poem *The Lusiad: or, The Discovery of India* (1572), concerning the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who discovered the sea route to India. The latter's presence is particularly prominent in 'The Dialogue of Nature and an Icelander,' where Leopardi wrote that his adventurer 'had an experience similar to the

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[219] Lovelock, J. and Lovelock, J. E. (2000) *Gaia: The Practical Science of Planetary Medicine.* Oxford University Press. 186.
[220] Calvino, I. a. and Creagh, P. t. *The literature machine : essays.*

one that befell Vasco da Gama.'[221] His description of Nature in this dialogue also has stark similarities with the monster in Canto 5 of the work, which took the form of the Cape of Good Hope. In *The Lusiad*, the monstrous figure is described as 'frightful in form, and of gigantic height,' revealing itself as robust and strong.[222] Leopardi's description of Nature shares similarly monstrous attributes:

> Ma fattosi piú da vicino, trovò che era una forma smisurata di donna seduta in terra, col busto ritto, appoggiato il dosso e il gomito a una montagna; e non finta ma viva; di volto mezzo tra bello e terribile, di occhi e di capelli nerissimi; la quale guardavalo fissamente; e stata cosí un buono spazio senza parlare, all'ultimo gli disse.[223]

> He saw from a distance a most enormous torso…which at first he thought must be made of stone, like those colossal herms seen by him many years before on Easter Island. But drawing nearer, he found that it was the immense body of a woman seated upright on the ground, leaning her back and her elbow against a mountain; and not make-believe, but living; her face as beautiful as it was terrifying, her eyes and hair of the most jet black; who stared intently at him.[224]

The final note to make on the topic of explorer narratives, their literary origins and their correspondence to scientific breakthroughs, is that one might question what shape Leopardi would have given a dialogue featuring Darwin's HMS Beagle expedition. One is inclined to wonder, given his concern with critiquing anthropocentricsm, how such a dialogue, tracing Darwin's journey to discovering our place among all other animals, might have informed Leopardi's later thinking.[225]

The scientific shifts that interest Leopardi throughout the *Operette* are famously considered, without reference to Leopardi, by Thomas Kuhn, who examines the reform instated by events like the Copernican Revolution. Kuhn unwittingly explicates the subject matter at the heart of Leopardi's imaginative exploration of the transition period between paradigm changes, which, as Calvino highlights is expressed in a prose that

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[221] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 99 &158.
[222] de Camões, L. and Musgrave, T. M. (1826) *The Lusiad: an epic poem.* J. Murray. 191.
[223] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press, Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 118.
[224] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 99. This representation of femininity in Leopardi could beneficially be read alongside Adriana Cavarero's *Horrorism*: *Naming Contemporary Violence*. (2008), which unfortunately, has not fitted within the scope of this thesis.
[225] Leopardi died in 1837, the year that Darwin returned from his voyage. Antonella Anedda Angioy has compared Leopardi and Darwin's shared viewpoints in: Angioy, A. A. (2017) *'Il topo, le piante, i vermi. Giacomo Leopardi, ed Erasmus e Charles Darwin'.* University of Oxford.

'owes to Galileo.' Paradigm shifts are central to Kuhn's critical work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, first published in 1962, over a hundred years after Leopardi wrote 'Copernicus' in 1827. Despite the chasm of time between the lives of these two thinkers, in Leopardi's work, 'The Dialogue of Christopher Columbus and Pedro Gutierrez,' he articulates what Kuhn was later to express, when he wrote: 'Though history is unlikely to record their names, some men have undoubtedly been driven to desert science because of their inability to tolerate crisis.'[226] Refusing to be such a man, Columbus, in Leopardi's dialogue, asserts his determination not to fall back on unfounded stories in the absence of scientific certainty.

In the piece, Columbus discusses with Gutierrez the challenge whereby, although the arguments of geographers, astronomers, and navigators, can be arrived at by conclusions derived from sound arguments, they still may not hold up to experience. Confirming that this an increasingly common occurrence, Columbus explains that we should nonetheless not let this drive us to desert science: 'I do not say for all this, that we should lend an ear to the fables of the Ancients concerning the wonders of the unknown world...'[227] This remark discloses Leopardi's view of fables, during his writing of the *Operette*. Notably, it underlines the negative characteristics he attributes to the genre, the sense in which he equates these with falsehoods. At this stage of his work, during which he focuses upon writing the *Operette*, he shares in the view set out by Henri Bergson in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1936), where Bergson's considers the innate, instinctive tendency in humans to refer to the fable as a means of 'myth-making' considered in an obstructive sense. This is expressed in Leopardi's dialogue, where Columbus continues:

> … e di questo Oceano; come, per esempio, alla favola dei paesi narrati da Annone, che la notte erano pieni di fiamme, e dei torrenti di fuoco che di là sboccavano nel mare: anzi veggiamo quanto sieno stati vani fin qui tutti i timori di miracoli e di novità spaventevoli, avuti dalla nostra gente in questo viaggio; come quando, al vedere quella quantità di alghe, che pareva facessero della marina quasi un prato, e c'impedivano alquanto l'andare innanzi, pensarono essere in sugli ultimi confini del mar navigabile.[228]
>
> …and of this Ocean; as, for example, the fable of those lands described by Hanno, which by night were full of flames, and torrents of fire belching forth into the sea; indeed, we can see how hollow have so far been all those fears of terrifying miracles and shocks that our ancestors had on this voyage; as

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[226] Kuhn, T. S. (1970) *The structure of scientific revolutions. Second edition, enlarged.* [Chicago ; London]: University of Chicago Press. 78-9.
[227] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali*. Feltrinelli. 160.
[228] Ibid. 177.

> when, seeing that mass of seaweed that made the water look almost like a meadow, and considerably hindered our progress, they thought they were at the utmost limit of the navigable sea.[229]

Here, Leopardi makes a clear association between fables and mistaken conclusions, which he understands scientific endeavours to have the challenging task of demystifying. Describing how these ill-founded narratives considerably hinder our progress, he also expresses his broader understanding, during this period of his work, of how the stories we abide by in our daily lives have a similar effect. As Burton argues in *The Philosophy of Science Fiction: Henri Bergson and the fabulations of Philip K. Dick* (2015), Bergson's employment of the term 'fabulating' is associated with concealing the very fact of fabulation from one's own intellect. Burton writes: 'Fabulating need not entail being aware or conscious that one is engaged in the activity of fictionalizing'.[230] Leopardi, recognises this, undertaking the task of helping us recognise how we ourselves have been engaged in such an activity throughout our history. In fact, for Leopardi, the idea of the Western Tradition is the result of such an activity of fictionalising, which his dialogues are intended to illustrate.

Returning to my comparison between Leopardi and Kuhn, the former's illustrative expression of the importance of the Copernican shift, later analysed in Kuhn's famous text, is one example of many of the theorist's philosophical untimeliness, enhanced by his extensive engagement with Enlightenment literature and thought, drawing for example, upon his knowledge of the work of Fontenelle, which included the dialogues *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (*Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, published in 1686), where Fontenelle explains the Copernican universe.[231] Leopardi's capacity to perceive trends early in their development emerges as increasingly remarkable when one considers how much later many of the concepts that concerned him were heeded to the same extent by subsequent theorists. The continuous thread, concerning the completely changed idea of the human situation, is woven through many of Leopardi's dialogues. As Creagh argues, and I have sought to show, Leopardi's 'Copernicus' contained the epitome of some of his most passionate concerns, particularly the cosmic

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[229] Ibid. 160.
[230] Burton, J. E. a. *The philosophy of science fiction : Henri Bergson and the fabulations of Philip K. Dick.* 26.
[231] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Notes to Z84.

vision we see expressed in works later written for the *Canti*, including 'L'Infinito' and 'La Ginestra.'[232] Until now, we have seen through examining these works how, in the *Operette,* Leopardi's fabulation is invested in expressing the depths of the human impacts of scientific paradigm shifts and questioning our capacity and intention to heed these adequately, allowing them to shape the way we view ourselves. His demonstration of the many ways in which we have previously failed to meet our challenge of taking on board sobering information serves as a prescient warning of the challenge we currently face of adjusting ourselves, whilst the opportunity remains, to avoid exacerbating and slow down climate change. If we don't rise to this challenge, aspects of Leopardi's narratives concerning human extinction threaten to become a reality.

4. The Pain and Fear of Facing the Unknown

> RUYSCH: ...non sentiste nessun dolore in punto di morte?
> MORTO: Che dolore ha da essere quello del quale chi lo prova, non se n'accorge?
> RUYSCH: A ogni modo, tutti si persuadono che il sentimento della morte sia dolorosissimo.
> MORTO: Quasi che la morte fosse un sentimento, e non piuttosto il contrario.
>
> RUYSCH: …did you feel no pain on the point of death?
> MUMMY: What sort of pain is it likely to be, when whoever feels it is unaware of it?
> RUYSCH: At all events, everyone is convinced that the feeling of death is exceedingly painful.
> MUMMY: Almost as if death were a feeling, rather than the opposite.
>
> Leopardi
> 'The Dialogue of Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies' in *Operette Morali,* 135.

One of the ways Leopardi expresses the pain experienced by humankind is by articulating our reluctance to face uncertainty, and the state of vulnerability it leads us to. This often adds to our problems rather than relieving us of them. Furthering his insight that humans are inclined to 'choose darkness rather than light', he questions a method of self-protection, that we have made a habit. Martha Nussbaum articulates these methods, when she writes: 'We are vulnerable in major ways because we love and trust others.

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[232] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 189.

Vulnerability often brings grief.'[233] Whilst our poor treatment of other people originates in the same movement of protecting ourselves against vulnerability, Leopardi suggests that turning away from facing our problems head on, may, in the long term, have the opposite to the intended effect, and increase our pain.

He highlights that, often, rationality makes it painful for us to accept the limits of things outside of our knowledge and control, which reveal our own powerlessness to us. For example, he considers the theme of mortality, a notion that often produces a sense of dread in us in his piece composed between 16 and 23 August 1824. In 'The Dialogue of Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies', Leopardi considers the dualism of the mind and the body, alerting us to the possibility that the conviction of the character Ruysch - that the separation of the soul from the body must be separated with great violence at the point of death - might be mistaken. The Mummy, speaking from its experience as a member of the dead, highlights this to Ruysch, through highlighting that 'the soul leaves the body only because it is prevented from remaining, and no longer has a place there; and not because of any force that tears it away or uproots it.'[234] Thus here, Leopardi illustrates our tendency, as humans, to expect, fear and subsequently turn away from the worst, highlighting that, often, by confronting it we might find it to be something less menacing than we expected. In this way, he extends his critique of our unwillingness to confront our challenges, which purveys the *Operette*, and offers another example of how we make our lives harder for ourselves, by failing to face up to what we fear, which is increasingly affiliated with the unknown. He shows us our tendency to conflate the actual and the possible, and that, whilst something might be out of our control, this might not always entail that it will therefore be problematic for us, or as dreadful as we might expect.

In this sense, against Negri's wishes, we might read Leopardi as a precursor to Kafka, who develops a similar idea in his late animal fables, which are informed by and saturated in accounts of insurance and calculation, particularly 'The Burrow', where Kafka warns us that our inability to stomach uncertainty can unintentionally inhabit our capacity to

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[233] Nussbaum, M. C. (2016) *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice.* Oxford University Press. 136.
[234] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 136.

enjoy the very life we seek to protect.[235] Connected with his critique of our fear of mortality in the *Operette*, Leopardi shows how we avoid acknowledging the fragility of our state, because we fear that doing so could involve undermining our faith in ourselves as strong and in control of the direction of our lives. In the 'The Dialogue of Hercules and Atlas', he emphasises this again:

> Io gli farei toccare una buona picchiata di questa clava: ma dubito che lo finirei di schiacciare, e che io non ne facessi una cialda; o che la crosta, atteso che riesce cosí leggero, non gli sia tanto assottigliata, che egli mi schicchioli sotto il colpo some un uovo. E anche non mi assicuro che gli uomini, che al tempo mio combattevno a corpo a corpo coì leoni e adesso colle pulci, non tramortisccano dalla percossa tutti in un tratto.[236]

> HERCULES: I'd give it a good thwack with this club: but I'm afraid I would crush it, and turn it into a sort of wafer; or that, seeing it's so light, its crust has got very thin, and would shatter under the blow like an eggshell. Nor am I at all sure men, who in my time used to fight with their bare hands against lions, and now against fleas, would not all perish in a flash from the impact.[237]

Leopardi's depiction of the fragility of our state here, depicted as comparable to that of an eggshell, stands out in relation to the degree to which Hercules is able to shatter us on a mere, thereby causing all men to 'perish in a flash'. This theme is taken up again by Leopardi later, but in relation to nature, whose whims are made to appear even more threatening to our survival than that of Hercules. Additionally, for Leopardi, if we fail to acknowledge the extent to which our lives are vulnerable, and ignore that, despite our reason, our destiny will always be, in many regards, out of our hands- before we learn to appropriately situate ourselves in our environment - we will always be hindered by our own fear, and the repercussions of this will become increasingly great. He is driven by a sense that the power of acceleration makes the problem of our lack of judgement increasingly pressing. As Lovelock notes, soon after the Anthropocene began, and introduced particularly by the advent of the railways, we became carried away by the power of acceleration. In the 300 years since, as Leopardi discerned and expressed in works like in the 'Announcement of Prizes Offered by the Academy of Sillographers', we are approaching a time 'when our electronic, mechanical and biological artefacts can

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[235] Negri writes: 'Schopenhauer and Kafka have their own grandeur, and it is hard to see how they could be included in a case study of Leopardi…Leopardi is unlike Kafka' Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 101.
[236] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 73.
[237] Ibid. 48.

run the Earth system by themselves.'[238] His satirical, prophetic announcement read: 'The Academy of Sillographers judges it most highly expedient that men should remove themselves from the affairs of life as far as they can, and gradually give place and let the machines enter in their stead', thereby determining to contribute to 'this new order of things'. Today, Lovelock describes this new order of things as the Novacene.[239]

5. Our Perception of Nature's Animosity

Another important aspect of 'The Dialogue between Nature and the Icelander' of May 1824, is that Leopardi uses the concept of nature to begin to destabilise the belief that other people are our greatest threat. As such, this work contains the germ of an important repositioning of blame in Leopardi's thought. It sees a shift, as the blame Leopardi attributes to humans for our own pain begin to fade away, whilst the harshness of nature is brought to the foreground.

Leopardi's relationship with nature is complex, and it is variably represented within his writing. Although Leopardi praised the European rationalism that emerged in the Renaissance and came to define the Enlightenment, and, although he was ideologically opposed to the excesses of the romantic rule, he still employed some of the most significant themes of romanticism, such as the philosophical dichotomy between human beings and nature, and between nature and civilisation.[240] In 1820, Leopardi's work was in its Rousseauistic phase, in which the cause of human unhappiness arises from our alienation from nature, to which any return, however, would constitute a rejection of reason.[241] In July 1823, he asserted the nature and reason are opposed, and in his early poems, such as 'La quiete dopo la tempesta' and 'Le Ricordanze', both written in 1829, nature is treated with reverence, as something gentle, wise, nursing, kind and provident, which marks a stark contrast with be seen to the hostile representation characteristic of his later work, as seen in 'La Ginestra', examined later. His views of nature were developed, as Leopardi scholars remind us, in the context of the Enlightenment and

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[238] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 41.
[239] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 55.
[240] Federico Sabatini. (2012). "In the Flash of an Eye a Multiplicity of Things": The Poetics of the (In)Finite in James Joyce and Giacomo Leopardi. *Comparative Literature Studies, 49*(1), 1-22. doi:10.5325/complitstudies.49.1.0001. 5.
[241] Bini, D. (1997). Giacomo Leopardi's Ultrafilosofia. *Italica, 74*(1), 52-66. doi:10.2307/479773. 52. And

Romanticism.[242] In the article 'Nourishment and Nature in Leopardi' (2016), Dario Del Puppo illustrates that at some points in his work, Leopardi's consideration of nature underscores a deep connection that interested the author between nature and the intellect, the physical senses and the imagination, which arises in a way that encourages his readers to strive to gain a better understanding of ourselves as natural beings.[243]

The piece follows the Icelander's train of thought as he endeavours to escape his fellow species, only to find himself in a part of the world where nature's power is 'more vigorously displayed than elsewhere.'[244] This dialogue with Nature takes place in heart of Africa near the equator, and it is considered likely that the volcanoes he refers to in it are the active volcanoes of Mount Nyiragongo, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, thought to be the most dangerous volcano in the world, and Mount Nyamuragira. The extremity of Leopardi's choice of setting, with dangerous volcanoes forming a backdrop, seems to have been designed to represent a stark conflict between humanity and Nature, and laid the groundwork for him to take up this theme further in 'La Ginestra'.

In this dialogue, Leopardi described the anthropomorphised figure's ability to inflict substantial harm on humans, whose powers diminish when contrasted against hers, as the Icelander painfully learns. Whilst the protagonist thought his safety lay in his isolation, he ultimately discovers that his isolation left him in a weaker position than he was amongst other people, and that he now faced a far greater risk:

> ISLANDESE: Sono un povero Islandese, che vo fuggendo la Natura; e fuggitala quasi tutto il tempo della mia vita per cento parti della terra, la fuggo adesso per questa.
> NATURA: Cosí fugge lo scoiattolo dal serpente a sonaglio, finché gli cade in gola da se medesimo. Io sono quella che tu fuggi.
> ISLANDESE: La Natura?
> NATURA: Non altri.
> ISLANDESE: Me ne dispiace fino all'anima; e tengo per fermo che maggior disavventura di questa non mi potesse sopraggiungere.

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[242] Del Puppo, D. (2016). 'Nourishment and Nature in Leopardi'. *Italica*,*93*(4), 693-704. Retrieved on 18/01/2021 from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/44504613. 695. And Brose, M. (1983). Leopardi's "L'Infinito" and the Language of the Romantic Sublime. *Poetics Today*, *4*(1), 47-71. doi:10.2307/1772150. 51.

[243] Ibid. 703.

[244] Ibid. 99.

> NATURA: Ben potevi pensare che io frequentassi specialmente queste parti; dove non ignori che si dimostra piú che altrove la mia potenza. Ma che era che ti moveva a fuggirmi?[245]

> ICELANDER: I am a poor Icelander fleeing from Nature; and having fled from her most of my life in a hundred parts of the world, I am now doing so in this one
> NATURE: This is how the squirrel flees from the rattlesnake, until he falls into its mouth of its own accord. I am the very one you flee from.
> ICELANDER: Nature herself?
> NATURE: None other.
> ICELANDER: I am sorry to hear it, to the depths of my soul; and I think it certain that no greater misfortune could befall me.
> NATURE: It might have occurred to you that I dwelt especially in these parts; where you must know my power is more vigorously displayed than elsewhere. But what was it that caused you to flee from me?[246]

In this dialogue, we witness as Leopardi starts to conclude that, no matter how destructive human societies may appear, ultimately, we can find within them a source of respite, which he believes can never be truly offered by Nature, because she does not care for us, because she has no inclination to acknowledge us. Her lack of empathy is taken to be disdain by the Icelander, who accuses Nature of cruelty, prompting her to explain that her behaviour is the result of indifference, rather than mounted attacks, as the Icelander's solipsism leads him to assume. Leopardi portrays nature as the mistress of a perpetual cycle of production and destruction, who remains uninfluenced by the intentions of the people she effects.[247] She fulfils her activities with no care for the results on the inhabitants of the places she alters and destroys.[248] Nature is introduced as the enemy of humanity in this dialogues, where she is forced to explain to the Icelander, who she accuses of narrowmindedness, the importance of suffering as a necessary feature of the cycle of life that serves to preserve its continuation:

> La vita di questo universe e un perpetuo cicuito di produzione é distruzione, collegate ambedue tra sé di maniera che ciascheduna serve continuamente all'altra, ed alla conservazione del mondo; il quale sempre che cessasse o l'una o l'altro di loro, verrebbe parimente in dissoluzione. Per tanto risulterebbe in suo danno se fosse in lui cosa alcuna libera da patimento [249]

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[245] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 118.
[246] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 100.
[247] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 127.
[248] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) The Moral Essays. Columbia University Press. 104.
[249] Severino, E. (2005) *Il nulla e la poesia: Alla fine dell'età della tecnica: Leopardi.* Rizzoli. 18.

> I see that you have given no thought to the fact that the life of this universe is a perpetual cycle of production and destruction, the two so bound together, that each continually serves the other, and the preservation of the world; which as soon as one of the other of these ceased to be, would likewise be dissolved. For which reason it would be detrimental to you if there were anything in the world free of suffering [250]

Severino examines the perpetual and destructive cycles of nature, which Leopardi focuses on in this work, and Negri rightly argues that 'the violent state of the world is represented by the philosophy of Nature' in Leopardi, which we see here.[251] He notes how Nature suggests the sheer immensity of the space in which all possible universes are produced and destroyed, which is another theme was visible in his earlier dialogues.[252] Severino observes that, for Leopardi, her activities are often depicted as perpetual, systematic, rhythmic and cyclical. The emphasis of this aspect of her forces suggests that Leopardi believes we ought to associate such activities with more vitality, and not allow our pride in reason to usurp opportunities to do this.[253] Here, Esposito's insight that Leopardi's work strives to extend philosophical language through responding to the dichotomy 'Philosophy/Life' also comes to the fore.

Leopardi ensures that equal weight is given to both dimensions of life by giving additional weight to nature's vitality, which he regularly represents in relation to weather systems. He thereby challenges the dominion of the rational that the Icelander attempts to ascribe to Nature's activities.[254] He describes the intensity of the cold winter, the scorching heat of the summer, the threat of fires and rumblings of volcanoes. Leopardi highlights that the way we consider Nature is too informed by the meaning we attribute to it and responds by emphasising the vital part of Nature's actions, the rhythms and cycles that she imparts and the ways these affect our lives. Furthermore, when Nature accuses the Icelander of failing to think deeply enough about the way that life is a perpetual cycle of production and destruction, Leopardi also encourages us to think differently about the events in our lives, by prompting us to examine the way that our sustained efforts cannot ensure that we avoid suffering, and that, furthermore, we ought to relinquish attempts to do so. He

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[250] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 104.
[251] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 127.
[252] Severino, E. (2005) *Il nulla e la poesia: Alla fine dell'età della tecnica: Leopardi.* Rizzoli. 18.
[253] I use the term 'activities' as an alternative to 'actions' in an attempt to avoid imputing intent to Nature.
[254]Esposito, R. and Hanafi, Z. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* Stanford University Press. 120.

tries to convince us of the necessity of suffering as a feature of life, urging us - ultimately for hedonistic reasons - not to avoid it, since such suffering may be an essential component of the pleasures we can experience in the future.

The Icelander describes how: 'In other places the constant blue of the sky is offset by the frequent occurrence of earthquakes, by the multitude and fury of the volcanoes, where the whole country seethes beneath the surface'.[255] These never cease to do 'regular battle against the inhabitant of those places', ensuring they are 'them with heat seared with heat between the tropics, shrivelled with cold near the poles, afflicted in the temperate zones by the changefulness of the air, and troubled everywhere by the commotion of the elements...', certainly allowing no tranquillity of life. The object of Leopardi's pessimism is transformed in this piece. Rather than depicting 'human nature' as evil, Leopardi's ideas shift and lead him to the conclusion that Nature is the real enemy to human life.[256] Having exaggerated his image of Nature as a cruel and savage deity, Leopardi is able to clearly explicate the conclusion he has arrived at: Nature should be understood as 'the declared enemy of men, and of the other animals', as the Icelander complains. Henceforth Nature is explicitly considered in the author's work as a far greater threat than that presented by others because people will always be powerless against her forces. At this point, the Icelander, like Leopardi, departs from his earlier views regarding the threat posed by other people, shifting his viewpoint to consider that Nature is more dangerous to humans than other people. Because one could hope to be freed from persecution from other people, which cannot be said of Nature:

> Quasi tutto il mondo ho cercato, e fatta esperienza di quasi tutti i paesi; sempre osservando il mio proposito, di non dar molestia alle altre creature, se non il meno che io potessi, e di procurare la sola tranquillità della vita. Ma io sono stato arso dal caldo fra i tropici, rappreso dal freddo verso i poli, afflitto nei climi temperati dall'incostanza dell'aria, infestato dalle commozioni degli elementi in ogni dove. Piú luoghi ho veduto, nei quali non passa un dí senza temporale: che è quanto dire che tu dai ciascun giorno un assalto e una battaglia formata a quegli abitanti, non rei verso te di nessun'ingiuria.[257]
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> I have searched almost the world over, and had experience of nearly every country; always observing my resolution not to cause annoyance to other

[255] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press., 101.
[256] Timpanaro, S. and Soper, K. (1976) *The Freudian slip : psychoanalysis and textual criticism.* London: NLB. 212.
[257] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 120.

> creatures, or at any rate the least I could, and to seek only for tranquillity of life. But I have been seared with heat between the tropics, shrivelled with cold near the poles, afflicted in the temperate zones by the changefulness of the air, and troubled everywhere by the commotion of the elements... Many are the places I have seen where not a day goes by without a storm: which is to say that every day you assault and do regular battle against the inhabitants of those places, who are guiltless of any injury to you.258

Leopardi elucidates here the problem that, even if the struggles within society could be overcome, we would still face oppression from Nature's cold, relentless cruelty. The Icelander yearns for the 'tranquillity of life' and is mocked as foolish for acting as though the abolition of civilisation might allow this. This shift in Leopardi's thinking lays the groundwork for him to arrive at the position he reaches in 'La Ginestra', where he convinces us to remember an insight that Freud expresses in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, namely that the principle task of civilisation is to defend ourselves against Nature.[259] In Leopardi's dialogue, Nature is depicted as cold, cruel and relentless. She seems to operate with hostility and indifference, and without concern for how she affects human, animal or plant life:

> …e mi risolvo a conchiudere che tu sei nemica scoperta degli uomini, e degli altri animali, e di tutte le opere tue; che ora c'insidi ora ci laceri, e sempre o ci offendi o ci perseguiti; e che, per costume e per istituto, sei carnefice della tua propria famiglia, de' tuoi figliuoli e, per dir cosí, del tuo sangue e delle tue viscere. Per tanto rimango privo di ogni speranza: avendo compreso che gli uomini finiscono di perseguitare chiunque li fugge o si occulta con volontà vera di fuggirli o di occultarsi; ma che tu, per niuna cagione, non lasci mai d'intarsi; ma che tu, per niuna cagione, non lasci mai d'incalzarci, finché ci opprimi.[260]

> … I have therefore resolved to conclude that you are the declared enemy of men, of the other animals, and of all your works: that now you ensnare us, now you threaten us, now you strike us, now you rend us, and at every moment you hurt us or persecute us; and that, by custom and institution, you are the butcher of your own family, and so to speak of your own flesh and blood. So that I am deprived of all hope: having understood that men do stop persecuting all those who flee from them with the real desire to flee and to hide; but that you, for no reason whatever, hunt us down until you crush us.[261]

In his analysis of this piece, Negri describes the Icelander's list of attacks by Nature as 'biblical'. He notes that Leopardi portrays hope as illusory because Nature closes off the

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[258] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 101.
[259] Freud, S. and McLintock, D. (2002) *Civilization and Its Discontents.* Penguin Adult. III.
[260] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 119.
[261] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 102.

possibilities hope would need to rely on, highlighting that the negative extremity of the dialogue is stylistically and logically developed through the exaggeration of the image of Nature as a cruel and savage deity. In his analysis of the Icelander dialogue, Negri argues that Leopardi's work is a dialectical episode that is played out between the violence of nature and human hope: '…to the proposition of the principle of hope there corresponds not only the negation of this principle but also the preposition of solitude, of balance in suffering, and resigned despair.' As he notes, the uselessness of the Icelander's uninterrupted and repetitious demands for happiness and a life unhindered by human society or Nature's events.[262] As we will see in the developments of these topics in 'La Ginestra', Nature's blindness to human achievements and endeavours becomes the core of an ethics of solidarity posed by Leopardi.

This ultimately transforms into a clear focus on nature's destructive and cyclical forces. Through his ecological thinking, Leopardi gradually alleviates the blame he attributes to people, paving the way for the gentler attitude that he fully adopts later, where he seeks to recognise the causes of human pain and, where possible, counteract or alleviate it. As his critics observe, Leopardi continues to draw on a significant range of themes introduced in his earlier dialogues. Specifically, his critique of anthropocentrism and engagement with anthropomorphism intertwine, giving Leopardi more stylistic power to detract from the notion that human life is at the core of life itself.

Leopardi extensively criticises how we commonly attribute concern for humanity to events that really have no relation to us. For him, this is the natural result of limitless extent to which we attribute importance to ourselves and fail to recognise how our position informs our perception of the world, sometimes hampering it. Leopardi's earlier criticism of humankind brings about a moment in his thought where he extends his critique of our anthropocentrism by foregrounding anthropomorphism. Noting our tendency to assume human lives are central to the workings of the universe and using this as a basis of a literary experiment, Leopardi sheds light on the reasoning which our anthropocentric prejudices lead us to. By giving nature human characteristics, such as thoughts, traits, motions and concerns, he stresses the extent of the depth to which our

[262] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 127.

biases are ingrained and the size of the challenge we face in overcoming them. He gives himself the means to give nature the voice she needs to, once and for all, remind us of the solipsistic bias in our thinking. Leopardi's character subsequently reminds the Icelander that, for the most part, she has her mind to things 'quite other than the happiness of men or their unhappiness', assuring him she does not notice when her activities hurt people. She explains: 'if I happened by chance to blot out your whole species, I would not be aware of it'.[263] In doing so, she clarifies that does not know if she pleases or benefits humankind, hinting that the Icelander's understanding of her as inimical is misguided. For Nature, it is merely the case that the effects of her actions come from a thoughtlessness that the Icelander would be wasting energy by hoping to change with appeals and pleas.

In Leopardi's dialogue, Nature emphasises the lack of reason behind her movements, the cyclical essence of life as intricately bound up with destruction, the lack of any degree to which the consequences for people fail to motivate her, and the extent of her power to wipe out life. Whilst here, Leopardi raises the curtain momentarily, bringing himself and his reader one step closer to setting out how we might avoid repeating the mistakes he observes, Leopardi, at this stage of his writing, is yet to provide any affirmative responses to the scenarios that shape his understanding of the source of our difficulties. However, he concludes the piece with a hint that we might incorporating this consideration of context more into our thinking. He conveys that suffering is a by-product of a destruction that is necessary to the continuation of life and considers that this might help us understand things as they are more accurately.

Finally, the absurdity of our closeness to death and destruction is emphasised in the way the dialogue ends, which highlights how we must come to learn to accept what is outside our power, which will inflict itself upon us regardless of whether we do. When the Icelander is encouraged to consider how he could relate differently to the sources of pain in his life, the extent of Nature's apparent ruthlessness is underscored. Just as Nature's gentle side is glimpsed, a dark and sardonic twist occurs in the piece's ending. The dialogue is abruptly cut off by a new narrator, who interrupts the conversation to explain that the rest of the was cut short by the Icelander's sudden and unexpected death:

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[263] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* Columbia University Press. 103.

> Mentre stavano in questi e simili ragionamenti è fama che sopraggiungessero due leoni, cosí rifiniti e maceri dall'inedia, che appena ebbero la forza di mangiarsi quell'Islandese; come fecero; e presone un poco di ristoro, si tennero in vita per quel giorno. Ma sono alcuni che negano questo caso, e narrano che un fierissimo vento, levatosi mentre che l'Islandese parlava, lo stese a terra, e sopra gli edificò un superbissimo mausoleo di sabbia; sotto il quale colui disseccato perfettamente, e divenuto una bella mummia, fu poi ritrovato da certi viaggiatori, e collocato nel museo di non so quale città di Europa.[264]

> …it is said that two lions appeared, so worn out and wasted by hunger that they scarcely had the strength to eat up the Icelander; which indeed they did; and with that scrap of refreshment they managed to survive the day. But there are some who deny this version, and say that a mighty wind arose while the Icelander was speaking, and bowled him over, and covered him with a most superb mausoleum of sand: beneath which, perfectly dried out, and turned into a fine mummy, he was later found by certain travellers, and installed in the museum of some town in Europe.[265]

The image of the Icelander's transformation into a mummy and display in a museum repeats Leopardi's motivation to encourage the cultivation of a proper perspective on the human race. The lack of clarity about the cause of the Icelander's death adds further weight to the absurdity of his demise whilst the piece serves to remind us of the necessary uncertainty, we must live with concerning our own fate. By reminding us that death has no care for the endeavours and progress in understanding of humans, Leopardi demonstrates Camus' insight that 'at any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face'.[266] The work's ending highlights that the cycles attributed to nature can exist independently of her will because, in the dialogue, Nature was occupied in debating with the Icelander at the time of his death. This adds additional weight to Leopardi's contention that we should resist our tendencies to consider nature as being intentionally malicious towards us, whilst, in effect, her sheer power and thoughtlessness for us does makes her our biggest enemy. Leopardi's ending notably stresses that there is no significant degree to which we can defend ourselves against her power. The implication of this is yet to be explicitly drawn out, but it nonetheless provides him with the necessary starting point from which he can develop an idea that marks a space of promise for humanity, namely that we can reason with and hope to adjust the ways of our own species.

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[264] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali*. Feltrinelli. 123.
[265] Leopardi, G. and Creagh, P. (1983) *The Moral Essays*. Columbia University Press. 104.
[266] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 16.

Although it often remains overlooked, the founding of a new morality on the solidarity of communities in their struggle against nature is integral to Leopardi's later work, particularly in English scholarship. This is a shame because it involves a missed opportunity to examine a weakness in his work, notably his reliance on binary thinking which we may be able to overcome by comparing his thoughts to contemporary critics, like Haraway, who grapple with similar themes. We have seen that the theme of a false and corrupt civilisation that hampers access to vitality and happiness, is developed through the *Operette*. In Leopardi's later work, society and the tendencies towards individualism rife within it, are not the greatest dangers facing us that he represents in the dialogue with Nature. Rather here, Leopardi resists trends of misanthropy and redirects grief and hatred away from other people and encourages the establishment of strong and noble communities. In the *Operette*, Leopardi introduced themes and concerns that he contended with throughout his life, which gravitated around a sense of a loss of vitality and dearth of truth in modern life, a lack of capacity to forge meaningful relationships with those who which we share our lives in society. From introducing these themes at the beginning of the *Operette*, Leopardi developed these notions of humans relating to their lives and each other in an unfulfilling way, to an extension of this in Leopardi's portrayal of how humans relate to the world around them. He introduced themes of cosmic significance, prompting us to reconsider the scale of our importance and introduced the concept and character of nature to his works, highlighting our lack of consideration for our position within a cycle of life that extends beyond us and critiques our tendency to view the universe as existing for our benefit alone.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

The relation of many ideas within Leopardi's *Operette* to those considered by philosophers including Max Weber, Thomas Kuhn, Immanuel Kant, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer and Antoni Negri make it hard to imagine why his work has faced so much resistance to inclusion within the philosophical canon, which

perhaps his lack of access for Anglophone readers accounts for. Moreover, the subject matter of these, such as the extinction of the human race and Leopardi's analysis of our readiness to acknowledge paradigm shifts make the dialogues very relevant to our situation today, when the sixth extinction event marks a severe threat to numerous species, including humans. This serves as a prompt to exert extra effort to overcome human hesitancy to face up to the severity of events so as to avert the systemic collapse threatening us, resulting from the combination of co-existing crises, included climate, extreme weather, biodiversity and food and water crises. In the following chapter, we will explore how these dispersed philosophical meditations came together in his own philosophical project, most comprehensively set forth in the *Canti* as I will show in my analysis of its work 'La Ginestra' in which Leopardi's consideration of the opposition between humanity and nature comes into full force during his meditation on the catastrophe of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79AD. In the next chapter, I examine Leopardi's materialist project of solidarity, which Negri alludes to, when he notes that the poet's philosophical project is not only destructive, but constitutive also:

> A radical, revolutionary, and collective humanism organizes Leopardi's poetry and its process: a humanism that destroys all hypocritical fables of the limits of freedom and massive progress, a humanism constituted by an antagonistic foundation and an infinite desire that produces a materialist project of solidarity.[267]

Having seen how the *Operette* included Leopardi's attack on 'hypocritical fables', I move on to examine how Leopardi's vision of fables transformed into something it is appropriate to call philosophical, especially when considered in light of Kant's suggestion of the necessity of examples when judgement is lacking. In the *Operette* the severity of Leopardi's critique of humans, where he explicates through demonstrating the variety of bad outcomes our poor judgements bring about, suggests that the majority of our species are lacking in the natural talent required to adequately guide our intelligence. As such, this leads Leopardi to provide the examples of good judgement that we evidently cannot dispense with. In 'La Ginestra', he recognises the weight of the necessity to attend to our refusal to engage with our pain, doing so with patience and compassion. He shows that, whilst our species can never escape pain, we do have the choice to confront and respond

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[267] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. xxxii.

to it thoughtfully. We can use our intelligence to move beyond our reflexes of escaping or denying pain, approaching it differently as a sign or a warning that it can represent that something is wrong. He demonstrates that our pain is exacerbated by our damaged relationship with nature, which can be soothed by improving our relationships with other people who share our predicaments.

Another signifier of the negative understanding and portrayal of the fable in Leopardi's earlier work, as shown throughout the *Operette*, is that of its influence that on Italo Svevo, who used it as inspiration to meditate on disillusion, deception and disappointment in his lesser known work *A Perfect Hoax*. In the work, the fable is associated with an elaborate prank and the protagonist, Mario Samigli, is mocked for his attempts to write fables, one of which makes reference to Leopardi's 'The Dialogue of Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies'.[268] The centering of the work on aspects of human hubris, which Leopardi picks apart throughout the *Operette* and testifies to Svevo's reading of Leopardi as establishing a connection, in this period of his writing, between fables and the weaknesses of humankind. Svevo expands on the role of birds in Leopardi's thought, which I have not examined, but which appears in the *Operette* in 'In Praise of Birds', written alongside many of the dialogues I have introduced, during Leopardi's burst of productivity in 1824.[269]

[268] 'And so some very short and stiff little mummies (not corpses, because they did not even have a smell) were produced by him at odd moments.' Svevo also takes as a theme in this work Leopardi's association of youth with happiness. Svevo, I. (2003) *A Perfect Hoax.* Hesperus. 5.
[269] Marrone, G. and Puppa, P. (2006) *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies.* Taylor & Francis. 203.

Chapter Three – Philosophical Fables and Go-Carts of Judgement: *The Canti's* 'La Ginestra'

> Examples are [...] the go-cart of judgment, and those who are lacking in the natural talent [of judgment] can never dispense with them.
>
> Kant
> Critique of Pure Reason, A 134/B 173-74.

> Let us observe how much imagination contributes to philosophy (which yet is its enemy), and how true it is that in different circumstances the great poet could have been a great philosopher, promoter of that reason which is lethal to the genre professed by him, and how, conversely, a philosopher could have been a great poet. The ability to mine a rich vein of similes is proper to the true poet (Homer [the poet] is the greatest and most fertile model). In a state of enthusiasm, in the heat of any passion, etc. etc., the mind discovers most vivid resemblances between things. Even the most fleeting vigor in the body, if it exerts some influence upon the spirit, causes it to see relationships between very disparate things, to find comparisons, extremely abstruse and ingenuous similes (whether in serious or joking vein), shows it relations it had never thought of, in short gives it a marvellous facility to draw together and compare objects of the most distinct kinds, such as the ideal with the most purely material, to embody in a very vivid manner the most abstract thought, to reduce everything to image, and to create from it some of the most vivid images you could think of. And not only by means of direct similes or comparisons, but also by means of very novel epithets, very bold metaphors, words containing in themselves a simile, etc. All faculties of a great poet, and all contained in and deriving from the ability to discover relations between things, even the most minimal, and distant, even between things that appear the least analogous, etc. Now this is the philosopher through and through: the faculty of discovering and recognizing relations, of binding particulars together, and of generalizing.
>
> Leopardi,
> *Zibaldone* on 7th September 1821, (Z 1650).

Leopardi provides poetic guidance for us in the form of examples within his philosophical fable. As briefly discussed in my Introduction, Kant argued that 'a deficiency in the faculty of judgement', which Leopardi's entire project within the *Operette* set out to demonstrate could be improved by tuition, which he then provides in 'La Ginestra.' Having seemingly drawn a similar conclusion to Kant, when he writes 'the error may be due to his not having received, through examples and actual practice, adequate training for this particular act of judgement. Such sharpening of the judgement is indeed the one great benefit of examples', in 'La Ginestra', Leopardi counteracts fighting amongst ourselves, the tendency to assume we are of central importance, and reluctance to acknowledge our vulnerability, by giving examples of nobility, community, solidarity

and compassion. With such concrete, powerfully delivered instances at hand, he gives us the ability to improve our judgement, and thereby enhance our ability appropriately apply the scientific rules of which, previously in the *Operette*, he demonstrated we have an understanding of alone.[270] Leopardi gives us direction concerning how to live, taking into account our inability to tame and master Nature, and suggesting we might live well within uncertainty, brought about by cultural and intellectual change, universal powerlessness and vulnerability. He moves beyond Dijk's criteria which defines the fable of being a 'fictitious, metaphorical narrative', skilfully developing and binding together an array of ideas previously considered and developed within the *Operette*. In doing so, it marks an important and radical shift in Leopardi's work, where he moves from his use of the fable as a mechanism to critique the West with to an integration of this critique within a new fable, which he creates, which is philosophical in its ability to exemplify areas where our judgement can be improved and our vitality can be reclaimed and fabulous in its exemplary style and ability to act as a guide.

Having seen Leopardi's depiction of human stupidity through the *Operette*, 'La Ginestra' provides the means through which we might prevent further deterioration of life. To see how Leopardi's work relates to the fable, we can turn to Blackham's description of the fable, where we find shared features also in Kant's depiction of examples, and Leopardi's representation of 'great' philosophy. Both Leopardi and Kant find a significant relationship between philosophy and examples that corresponds to that between the universal and particular. Whilst Kant did not extend his theory of go-carts of judgement, we find this extension in Leopardi, particularly in 'La Ginestra'. In his First Critique, Kant argues that philosophy consists 'precisely in knowing its limits.' Leopardi's ideas regarding reason and wisdom are comparable with Kant's consideration of reason and judgement, and he expresses concern that humans are held back by their deficiency in wisdom, which he then strives to cultivate in his literary work. He writes:

> …men would indeed be very wise if wisdom had never been born. And [that] its greatest utility, or at least its first and proper purpose, consists in leading the human intellect back (if that is possible) as near as can be to the state in which it existed before wisdom was born'[271]

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[270] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. A134/B173

[271] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 2711).

Here Leopardi shows his view that before wisdom was born, life was more vital for humans, demonstrating what Esposito and Severino highlight was Leopardi's concern that we have lost contact with our senses and the body has been exiled. Both Leopardi and Kant consider philosophical thinking to exceed the mere employment of reason and extends to the capacity to examine relations between things and depict patterns from generalities.[272] In 'La Ginestra', Leopardi exemplifies that fear might better be met with acceptance and compassion, pride can be replaced with nobility, and we can overcome individualism with community and solidarity. Rather than warring amongst ourselves he suggests that we can acknowledge how our lives are already faced with challenges, some of which we can learn to alleviate, whilst others will always remain out of our power. Extending the notion of fragility, which we see that he articulates in works like 'Hercules and Atlas' and 'Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies', Leopardi examines our vulnerability when faced with nature, on which is altered in 'La Ginestra', when compared against the *Operette*. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius two thousand years ago resulted in the blanketing of the Roman city in poisonous gases and heavy ash and completely wiped out the city in a matter of days.[273] This event demonstrates the radical vulnerability inherent in our lives, which Leopardi understood, we can never fully escape from, and which he believes we have learned to forget, through allowing ourselves to be carried away with the mistaken conclusions drawn from our anthropocentric narratives, which give us a false sense of security, preventing us from accepting our true state. However, as he depicts in the *Operette*, where he described the earth as fragile like an eggshell this is often worsened as a symptom of human hubris, which we can adjust. Whilst in the *Operette,* Leopardi dramatizes anthropocentrism, in 'La Ginestra', he offers an alternative to it. Having concluded that we are lacking in the natural talent of judgement, and derided us for this throughout the *Operette*, Leopardi appears to arrive at a similar conclusion concerning what may be done about this to Kant, when he writes:

> Or the error may be due to his not having received, through examples and actual practice, adequate training for this particular act of judgement. Such sharpening of the judgement is indeed the one great benefit of examples.[274]

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[272] Koffler, R. (1971) 'Kant, Leopardi, and Gorgon Truth', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 30(1), pp. 27-33. https://www.jstor.org/stable/429570?seq=1

[273] Jones, L. (2018) *The Big Ones: How Natural Disasters Have Shaped Us (And What We Can Do About Them).* Icon Books Limited. 13.

[274] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. A134/B173.

Evaluating ‘La Ginestra’ in this light reveals it as an aid for the training of the act of judgement that both Leopardi and Kant are right to suggest we lack. Leopardi registers and highlights the significance of the problem that it is not uncommon to find those who are well equipped to apply their science to also have a proper degree of understanding concerning the potential consequences of their labour. Moreover, events like the eruption of Vesuvius, Leopardi recognised, may remind us of life’s natural roots, which he believes we have veered too far away from in our efforts to free up the higher human functions.[275] Natural disasters such as these, which he considers like his predecessors, including Voltaire, fill the role of environmental catastrophes in Leopardi’s thought, and drive his attempts to find meaning, which we can import from them for the ways we should live our lives. Such events remind us of life’s primordial force and highlights the vulnerability we like to turn away from. Leopardi’s thought and work, having moved through a series of stages, comes to focus on the fragility of life that Mount Vesuvius’s power reminds us of. As Morton asserts:

> Thinking of past disasters causes thinking to leak out around the threat of imminent disaster, like water seeping through a badly constructed dam. In the language of fighter pilots, disaster “cones down” our attention to focus on a singularity that is strictly unthinkable.[276]

This is also true of catastrophes. The active volcano Leopardi calls the 'terrifying mountain', 'Vesuvius the destroyer' is, for him, who previously referred to volcanoes in ‘The Dialogue between Nature and the Icelander’, the ultimate symbol of nature's destructive powers. Having examined forms of presentation, human folly and nature’s strength in the *Zibaldone*, *Operette* and his letters, in ‘La Ginestra’, one of the works in Leopardi’s *Canti*, he focuses on the implications of nature’s strength for mortality, nobility, humility and community. He takes the environmental catastrophe of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which we see haunting evidence of in Pompeii, as a philosophical opportunity to question how we can appropriately centre our fragility and consider how to reclaim the vitality and truth his work shows we have lost in our lives. He does so by expanding the scope of his thought beyond the primary consideration of humans, which his work criticises, exemplifying consideration of non-human life.

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[275] Esposito, R. and Hanafi, Z. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*. Stanford University Press. 139.
[276] Morton, T. (2012) *"Romantic Disaster Ecology: Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth"*. Romantic Circles: University of Colorado Boulder. Retrieved on 23/10/2019 from: https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/disaster/HTML/praxis.2012.morton.html.

The catastrophe within Leopardi's philosophical fable is the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which he uses to remind us of the fragility both of our lives and our understandings of ourselves. Throughout his work we should allow ourselves to be more vulnerable, despite the pain we affiliate with this. He strives to respond to this with sensitivity, masterfully combining comfort with a return to the senses. For Leopardi, the formidable Mount Vesuvius's capability of wreaking havoc on our lives is a significant symbol that reminds us of our vulnerability and finitude. Leopardi was influenced by Voltaire's 'Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne', which reckoned with feelings of cruelty, absurdity and despair following the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake. He also referred to Voltaire's description of Iceland and Mount Heckla in *Historie de Jenni* (1775) , in the *Operette*, where the Icelander bemoans 'the threats and rumblings of Mount Heckla'.[277] Leopardi recognised that Voltaire dealt with similar themes, considering the tense relationship between humanity and nature, and this informs his own choice to use a scene concerning Mount Vesuvius to help depict the fragility of our lives.[278] Prominent historical catastrophic events such as the Lisbon Earthquake, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, and the 1815 eruption of the Mount Tambora in that led to the 'year without summer' and influenced the literature of Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron, have all forced us to hold a mirror up to ourselves, forcing us see the parts of our lives that we prefer to turn away from.

Today, partially as a result of runaway climate change, environmental catastrophes occur with increasing frequency, and their consequences are increasingly damaging. As such, we would benefit from pre-empting the social, political and philosophical consequences of future events, many of which have already been dealt with in literature, which serve as rich resources we should therefore heed. This approach might not save us from individual environmental catastrophes, but it does hold the potential to set in motion a shift in our thinking, which we urgently need to slow down the Great Acceleration that is contributing to the extremity of our situation. Contending with ideas raised in these works, and the emotions which arise in response to them, is, as Leopardi knows and consequently approaches with sensitivity, is challenging work. Environmental catastrophes show us the powerlessness and uncertainty that, alongside our mortality, we try to escape having to

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[277] Leopardi, G. (2014) *Operette morali.* Feltrinelli. 189.
[278] Rosengarten, F. (2012) *Giacomo Leopardi's Search for a Common Life Through Poetry: A Different Nobility, a Different Love.* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. xi.

confront. The absurdity and injustice of such events make our lives and projects feel fragile and futile.

According to Leopardi, a great philosopher, like a great poet, must be able to discover and recognise relations between things, to bind particulars together and to generalise, sharing with Kant the view that the philosopher must be able to 'comprehend the universal in abstracto.'[279] Arising from Leopardi's contention that wisdom comes from recognising the limits of one's powers, 'La ginestra' overflows with suggestions that the benefits corresponding with our use of reason, can be muted by human tendencies towards foolishness and egoism. This concern is expressed prominently at the outset, in the work's epitaph, Leopardi expresses the negative conclusion that he draws from the critiques of humankind that he set out throughout the *Operette,* and in the *Zibaldone,* which his work then addresses itself to in the numerous positive ways that I will delve into later. The ideas set out in his former works - that humans do not foster good relations amongst one another, that we neglect to appreciate or reflect on the fact that we default to considering ourselves to be of central importance, that we have lost the ability to live meaningful lives, or so much as register that our lives lack that meaning, ultimately all lead Leopardi to the understand that humans need to learn the judgement required to actively counter our self-destructive patterns, and this feeds into his environmental thinking.

Both Leopardi and Kant approach their practices by seeking to discover new relations to build upon, while recognising the power of images or embodiments to exemplify these and put these principles to the test in order to aid their appropriate confirmation or rejection. As I explained in the Introduction, Kant believed that the philosopher must not only comprehend the universal in the abstract, but also sharpen the judgement so as to be able to distinguish whether a particular case comes under it, which is 'one great benefit of examples'.[280] Leopardi's project, like Kant's, is in this respect philosophical, because he is engaged in an endeavour to ensure that one is acting in accordance with principles that stand up to scrutiny. I will demonstrate this in my textual analysis of 'La Ginestra'. For Leopardi, as Timpanaro points out, and as we see from Leopardi's notes from 7th September 1821 in the *Zibaldone*, poetry and philosophy are two strictly conjoined

[279] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. A134/B173.
[280] Ibid. A134/B173.

activities.[281] Furthermore, Leopardi's consideration of 'recognizing relations, of binding particulars together, and of generalizing' in relation to philosophy, also has areas of commonality with the characteristics that the genre theorist Harold Blackham, attributes to the fable. As Blackham argues, highlighting the relationship between the fable, the general and the particular, the genre can prompt a rough awakening to such relationships:

> If fable is an aid to thinking about important matters, or a rough awakening to them, the thinking has to be expressible, discussable, testable... Thought generalizes the particular; a fable in its own way particularizes the general, a matter that has been thought to have a commanding importance. In this sense, a fable is a piece of concrete thinking.[282]

Leopardi's work is both an aid, a go-cart, to thinking about important matters, and a rough awakening to them. Moreover, Blackham's description identifying the fable as an aid to concrete thinking that particularises general principles refers to Kantian insights, when he says 'a matter that has been thought to have a commanding importance', like his notion of a go-cart of judgement. Additionally, Leopardi's analysis of the ways the imagination can contribute to philosophy. As Leopardi argued, the philosopher develops the faculty of discovering and recognising relations then bind particulars together in order to generalise from them. According to Blackham, this is precisely what the fabulist does. For Leopardi, who argues that a philosopher could have been a great poet, the fabulist could also have been a great philosopher.[283] Moreover, in his work we see him consider the fable as 'an object of thought', as Severino shows, in the way he considers the West, and a 'means of thinking', which 'La Ginestra' demonstrates should be essential.

In 'La Ginestra', Leopardi extends Kant's consideration of our place in the external world, in the first sense in which he speaks of it in the second Critique, presenting a meditation on the limits of our human intelligence in connection to nature's systems and civilisations' duration. Whilst this theme of examining the fragile boundary between human pride and hubris first took shape in Leopardi's early *Operette,* it strengthens with the development of his work. When he depicts us as earthly in relation to an infinitely large cosmos, construing the earth as a ball to be played catch with, for instance, he

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[281] Timpanaro, S. (1979) 'The pessimistic materialism of Giacomo Leopardi', New Left Review, 116, pp. 29-50. https://newleftreview.org/issues/I116/articles/sebastiano-timpanaro-the-pessimistic-materialism-of-giacomo-leopardi (29/11/2019).
[282] Blackham, H. J. (1985) *The fable as literature.* London ; Dover, N.H.: Athlone Press. 178.
[283] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. *Z 1650.*

illustrates how foolish we are in our narcistic inclination. In pointing out the error of conflating the history of our species with histories of the world he rejects the principle of anthropocentrism. In his dialogues of 'Nature and a Soul' and 'Nature and an Icelander', where he introduces his conception of our vulnerability to the whims of nature, he reserves and exercises his right to investigate the extent of the reach of our reason. As we will see in ‘La Ginestra,’ Leopardi further developed his depiction of nature with 'Mount Vesuvius the Great Destroyer,' where the scale of our vulnerability forms the focal point of his work.

Leopardi draws our attention to reason's limits by reminding us of its inability to protect us from the events of nature that we remain vulnerable to. I will examine how human vulnerability becomes the focal point of ‘La Ginestra’ in my textual analysis. In ‘La Ginestra’, Leopardi cultivates a willingness to inhabit comfort with uncertainty, which reappears as a characteristic that differentiates the work from the fable as it is traditionally conceived: rather than closing enquiry down by providing a singular moral, it opens it up with a multiplicity of questions and viewpoints. This aligns with Leopardi’s philosophical approach, which encourages comfort and curiosity in the wilderness of the uncertainty left behind by the modern destruction of illusions, whilst sharing similarities with Kant’s understanding of philosophy, conveyed over the course of his critical philosophy.

Leopardi assigns philosophical meaning to the fable in ‘La Ginestra’, transforming it from something that restricts our power by dissuading us from facing reality. In ‘La Ginestra’, he registers the fable’s philosophical power, using its devices, such as satire, accessibility, and poignant images to help us reclaim our own power. In doing so, it serves as an aid to help modern philosophy can regain its originary power. In this case study, I have sought to demonstrate that are two senses in which the philosophical fable can be understood: the first is the fable of the tradition underpinning Western civilisation which, as argued by Nietzsche, Kant and Leopardi, and explicated in the work of Leopardi’s readers, including Esposito, Negri and Severino, no longer stands on steady ground. In ‘La Ginestra’, Leopardi draws strength and utility from the fable, addressing wide audiences, considering non-human lives, presenting lessons and using critical humour to help philosophy overcome its blindspots, which are caused by overdeveloped human tendencies, like egoism. I will show that, in ‘La Ginestra’, Leopardi furthers his insight that nature’s cycles can undermine human hubris. I demonstrate how, by focusing on an

environmental catastrophe that demonstrated the conflict between nature and civilisation, he used the fable's methods to guide philosophy back to its aims of encouraging wisdom, sound judgement and a life of flourishing. Leopardi's fabulation in 'La Ginestra' cultivates the possibility of practicing a philosophy in which we learn to make peace with the destruction of illusions.

Through 'La Ginestra', Leopardi demonstrates how much imagination can contribute to philosophy, undermining the distinction he finds problematic that we have drawn between the two areas of life. By combining counter examples to many of the 'the vices and abominations' of contemporary civilisation, he prompts us to see relationships between disparate things, and, through conjuring up the picture of the bright, fragrant broom blossoming on the hillside of Vesuvius, embodies, in a vivid manner the go-cart of judgment, which both he, and Kant are concerned is so desperately required. As Leopardi is notably conscious of, and takes Homer as an example of, the great faculties of a poet and of a philosopher share an area of significant congruence, which he deliberately puts to use not only in 'La Ginestra', but throughout the *Canti*. Negri, unfortunately, does not sufficiently explicate the importance of this within *Flower of the Desert*, which weakens his case for outlining to Anglophone audiences less familiar with the Italian poet the way his must also be considered as philosophy. Having, set out, in July 1821 in the *Zibaldone,* how the weapons of ridicule naturally possess more power than imagination or reasoning, in our 'ridiculous and chilly age', as Leopardi envisaged the *Operette*, in 'La Ginestra', he tests out the thesis he arrived at in September of the same year, where he settled his belief that the imagination can, in fact, make a significant contribution not only to reason, but to philosophy.[284] Collapsing the distinction between the mind and the body, which he expands upon in works like 'The Dialogue of Frederick Ruysch', Leopardi makes 'abstract thought' as vivid and material as he can. This can be seen from the opening lines of 'La Ginestra', where he introduces the poignant image of the dry flank of the fearsome mountain, upon which a solitary broom's thickets are spread, in the otherwise deserted place, haunted as it is by its history.

[284] Ibid. (Z 1393-4).

'La Ginestra'

Considering whether it is appropriate to consider Leopardi to be a philosopher in a passage, Margaret Croce writes in 'Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi Italy's Classical Romantics':

> There has been considerable debate about whether or not Leopardi was a true "philosopher," whether or not there is a system to his thought. In many ways, the answer must surely be yes; there are remarkable consistencies between his discussions of the developments of languages, cultures, human happiness, the function of pleasure and boredom, and the poetic sublime. But we should consider Leopardi's rich philosophical thinking not so much a system of pessimism as a laboratory – the fertile ground for disseminating and exploring ideas that will come to fruition in his poetry.[285]

Croce's image of Leopardi's laboratory will be useful to keep in mind as we examine the 'examples and actual practice', which Kant argues we need that Leopardi offers us throughout 'La Ginestra'. The themes that he provides instantiations of include our shared danger in the face of nature, the need for love, compassion, solidarity, consolation, our fragility and nobility. The most vivid image Leopardi could think of through which to portray the 'resemblances between things' was that of 'La Ginestra', a broom flower that produces yellow, delicately scented flowers on leafless stems that thrive in desert sagebrush steppe sites, scrubland, grasslands, mountain woodlands, coastal dunes and meadows- a tenacious plant that has colonised and thrived on the plateaus surrounding Mount Vesuvius's crater.[286] Only after he has focused on this flower of the wilderness, and the lives of animals for whom the banks of the mountain is their home, does Leopardi examine the implications of his ideas for humans, including within his image of a poor and hardworking farmer living with his family on the mountain's slopes. Leopardi's knowledge of Fontenelle's work concerning the plurality of worlds not only info he uses the notion to counteract the anthropocentrism often involved in
consideration of the destruction caused by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius:

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[285] Ferber, M. (2008) *A Companion to European Romanticism.* Wiley. 266.

[286] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 1650).

Or ti rivveggo in questo suol, di tristi	Now I see you here again,
Lochi e dal mondo abbandonati amante,	lover of sad places that the world has left
E d'affillite fortune ognor compagna.	and constant friend of fallen greatness.
Questi campi cosparsi	These fields
Di ceneri infeconde, e ricoperti	strewn with sterile ashes, blanketed
Dell'impietrata lava,	by hardened lava
Che sotto I passi al peregrin risona;	that echoes to a wanderer's steps,
Dove s'annida e si contorce al sole	where the snake nests and coils under the sun
La serpe, e dove al noto	and the hare goes home
Cavernoso covil torna il coniglio;	to his familiar cave-like den —
Fur liete ville e colti,	these were happy farms and fields,
E biodeggiàr di spiche, e risonaro	they were blond with wheat
Di muggito d'armenti;	and echoed with lowing cattle;
Fur giardini e palagi,	here were gardens, villas, welcome
Agli ozi de' potenti	respite for the powerful,
Gradito ospizio; e fur città famose	and famous cities, which, with rivers
Che coi torrenti suoi l'altero monte	pouring from its fiery mouth,
Dall'ignea bocca fulminando oppresse	the implacable mountain crushed,
Con gli abitanti insieme.	along with their inhabitants.

Lines 14-32

These differing worlds exist alongside each other, quietly informing each other, subtly urging us to be more aware of this ourselves. In doing so, they encourage greater relations between our species and other animals. Informed by his reading of Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), Leopardi reminds us that there are more than human lives at stake in the event of environmental catastrophes, describing the snakes coiled in their nests, the hare's familiar home, and the happy farms and fields. In this passage, Leopardi appears as a precursor to Haraway, who pre-empts her concept of multispecies flourishing, revealing it shares its features with previous writers, like Fontenelle, who examine the shift between the Ptolemaic and the Copernican models. Leopardi deserves a prominent place in the canon of literature dealing with the philosophical resonance of the environmental catastrophe, which critics like Lovelock and Higgins recognise the contemporary relevance of. In the *Canti*, he brings together his

earlier critiques of humans, their reasoning and his time. With ‘La Ginestra’, Leopardi turns the fable into something positive and philosophical, which exemplifies an appropriate response to current ecological and environmental themes. I demonstrate that ‘La Ginestra’ offers underappreciated and positive responses to the critiques purveying his work, which are more commonly known. Leopardi reminds us that Nature is significantly more than a backdrop to a human story, or the resource for human intentionality that we treat it as.

Leopardi’s description of the desert Broom introduces positive ideas concerning compassion and gentleness, denoting an optimistic undercurrent to his cultural malaise, and demonstrating a faith in humanity which appears in his later work, but which is usually overshadowed, especially by his English readers. Leopardi’s optimistic yet critical approach is increasingly visible in recent scholarship concerning the topics he deals with, although it is rare for this to considered in readings of Leopardi, particularly those available in English. Examinations of the importance of themes such as compassion are found in bell hooks’ *all about love* (2000), Martha Nussbaum’s *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016), Noam Chomsky’s *Optimism over Despair* (2017), Slavoj Žižek’s *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously* (2017), Lynne Segal’s *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (2017) and Anne Dufourmantelle’s *Power of Gentleness* (2018), where in the foreword of the book Catherine Malabou highlights that true gentleness contains an element of negativity, which is true, as we will see of the Broom in ‘La Ginestra’. Despite the harshness of his critique of the Western tradition, following the intensification of his expression of the pain of human life with recourse to his analysis of nature, Leopardi highlights positive qualities, which he finds neglected in contemporary life, and which offers us consolation. He reveals the possibility of a different way of inhabiting the world, through which he hopes to rekindle our enthusiasm, by considering a calm, accepting, measured and noble nature.

1. The Transformation of Humanity’s Enemy

Like Severino, in *The Freudian Slip* (1974), Timpanaro notices an ethical shift in Leopardi’s work, which rests on Leopardi’s opposition to nature, and becomes particularly distinct in his later work. Timpanaro examines the establishment of a

'Leopardian ethics', pointing out that a shift occurs in his work in which the author moves away from blaming humans for our problems towards sympathising with humanity. Ultimately this develops into his encouragement for the adoption of stances of compassion, support and solidarity, in response to the threats we all face from nature. This in turn initiates a morality in Leopardi. Timpanaro articulates this when he writes:

> …in a first movement, [Leopardi's thought] opposes a good nature to a corrupt civilisation, and then in a second movement, it identifies nature as the enemy of man and founds a new morality on the solidarity of men in their struggle against it. This does not mean that it forgets the evils conjoined to natural calamities by a false and corrupt civilisation, by an oppressive morality which fights against 'nature's' demands for vitality and happiness rather than against the ways in which nature thwarts their satisfaction. Leopardi thus had every right to affirm, in a passage from the *Zibaldone* (2 January 1829) which anticipates the Ginestra, that his pessimistic philosophy 'not only does not lead to misanthropy… but of its nature excludes the very possibility of it', because 'it makes nature to blame for everything, and in its total exoneration of men, it redirects hatred, or at least grief, against a higher principle, the true origins of the evils of life.[287]

Timpanaro discusses the possibility of Leopardi's critique of human civilisation and morality leading to cynicism, highlighting that Leopardi foresaw this threat. In the passage that Timpanaro refers to, written in the *Zibaldone* in January 1829, Leopardi expressed how his conception of the source of our grief and pain guarded against this risk. Echoing Leopardi, Timpanaro argues that his pessimistic philosophy excludes the possibility of misanthropy. In fact, Leopardi presents us instead with an 'ethics of compassion', through which we are encouraged to understand and alleviate the suffering around us, confronting it in in a delicate and strong way, rather than fleeing from it, as the Icelander flees from his society, and tries to flee from Nature. As Timpanaro argues, Leopardi founds a new morality on the solidarity of communities in their struggle against nature. This new morality is based on considering nature to be the true enemy of humankind.[288] However, whilst Timpanaro notes two movements in Leopardi's work, he overlooked how these movements also signified a movement in Leopardi's conception of fables.

As we saw earlier in the *Operette*, the Icelander 'learnt for certain how vain it is to think, if you live among men, that you can, as long as you hurt no one, in turn escape from being

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[287] Timpanaro, S. (1976) *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism.* trans. Soper, K. London: NLB. 201.
[288] Ibid. 201.

hurt by others' and described 'the folly of men; who fighting continually amongst themselves to acquire pleasures which give no delight, and possessions which do them no good'. In 'La Ginestra', however, it is nature that humans ought to see as our threat: 'Her, he calls his enemy'.[289] Leopardi's shift in thinking here creates new problems by replicating old ones, however, namely failing to adequately consider nature outside of the perspective of human life. He does not address the core issue and maintains an assumption that we must gain our understanding of ourselves through opposition to otherness. This shift can be seen when he presents his idea that nature is truly guilty, and that we should resist adding to each other's hate or anger:

Mostra se nel soffrir, nè gli odii e l'ire	…who shows he's great and strong in suffering
Fraterne, ancor più gravi	and doesn't add to his brother's hate or anger,
D'ogni altro danno, accresce	worse than any other evil, to his ills
Alle miserie sue, l'uomo incolpando	by blaming man for his unhappiness,
Del suo dolor, ma dà la colpa a quella	but assigns responsibility
Che veramente è rea, che de' mortali	to the truly guilty; she who is
Madre è di parto e di voler matrigna.	mother of mortals when she gives us birth,
	stepmother ruling us.

Lines 119-125

Leopardi makes it evident in 'La Ginestra' that, unlike in his earlier work, he views our enemies to be nature, not the friends who we battle fiercely with. This practice, he believes, serves to distract us from our true fragility, which we find too difficult to confront. In this way, Leopardi highlights how we forget our enemies, by taking up arms against our neighbours, when we ought instead to turn our attention to the 'stepmother ruling us'. He writes:

[289] Leopardi, G. (1983) *The Moral Essays.* trans. Creagh, P. Columbia University Press. 99-100.

…Ed alle offese	…But to take up arms
Dell'uomo armar la destra, e laccio porre	against a man, or set a trap
Al vicino ed inciampo,	or make trouble for his neighbour
Stolto crede così qual fora in campo	seems as stupid to him as,
Cinto d'oste contraria, in sul più vivo	surrounded by hostile soldiers
Incalzar degli assalti,	during the heaviest fighting on the field,
Gl'inimici obbliando, acerbe gare	to forget your enemies
Imprender con gli amici,	and battle fiercely with your friends,
E sparger fuga e fulminar col brando	inciting your own men to run
Infra i propri guerrieri.	by threatening them with your sword.

Lines 136-144

Leopardi describes the hostile soldiers, heavy fighting and fierce battles with friends, which he refers to in order to demonstrate the propensity of people to compound our own problems by failing to consider that we might be distracting ourselves from larger issues. In this way therefore, he extends his analysis of the way in which our lack of judgement contributes to our unhappiness, but unlike in the *Operette* he provides us with chances to overcome this, by establishing solidarity with others in our position.

Unlike humanity, which is depicted as continually fighting, causing great suffering in response to unhappiness, the subject of Leopardi's 'La Ginestra', a poignant, non-human, subject, embodies great generosity, shares in the pain of others, and, offers consolation to their neighbours. Such a response to suffering is also proposed in contemporary work, such as in Martha Nussbaum's book, *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016), where Nussbaum encourages us to move beyond the poor, ineffective behaviour, which is often characterised by feelings of powerlessness and anger and build for ourselves a new ethics, stemming from the value of forgiveness, as Leopardi does in this work.[290] In 'La Ginestra', underlining the value of forgiveness and gentleness, he encourages us to consider fostering the development of these behaviours. This helps us to see ourselves as 'allies from the outset', united in our common struggle, as his work earlier work establishes, we need reminding of. His focus on generosity, nobility and understated pride

[290] Nussbaum, M. C. (2016) *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice.* Oxford University Press. 21.

becomes more prominent with the progression of his work. After the focusing on the flower and alluding to the animal lives on the bank, Leopardi's consideration of life, and nobility, takes human form. Whilst the broom is the primary example that Leopardi presents, he also focuses on the nobility of a poor sleepless man, a farmer who lives in harm's way of the 'fatal peak', and whose position therefore symbolises one of human vulnerability.[291] By choosing for a human life to be a secondary exemplary figure, Leopardi's work contributes to undermining the human exceptionalism that he derides throughout the *Operette,* starting in 'The Dialogue of an Imp and a Gnome', and appearing in a more developed form towards the end in 'Copernicus'.

When Leopardi focuses upon the life of a poor and humble farmer, the subject's gentle humility counteracts the view of human nature that Leopardi laid out in his earlier work. He consequently shows us his hope for the human condition and identifies the potential to reframe our relationship with the world around us. Through the farmer, Leopardi shows us there is a critical necessity to forge a greater sense of community within modern life. The character's family face ongoing danger, and whilst embracing meaningful relationships won't protect it from its vulnerability, just as the gentle broom is still left at risk of perishing if Mount Vesuvius were to erupt, he nonetheless commits to living a life of emotional richness, despite his mean possessions. Working tirelessly for his wife and children, he bends to his vines on the scorched and poisoned earth on the fatal peak – 'lifting his anxious eyes…', he readies himself to flee with as many things as he can carry.[292] In spite of the danger he knows he and his family face, he nurtures a life based on close loving ties whilst exhibiting pride and care in the long-time nest and small field he has his family call home. With this character Leopardi gives a gentle nudge for us to imagine taking heed of the lessons provided by the broom. The farmer, who recognises nature's power, adjusts his outlook and behaviour according to this, demonstrating how we might live with greater respect for nature.

Showing an awareness of the folly of worldviews underpinned by human exceptionalism, he chooses rather to accept nature's separation from human desires and endeavours, almost to the extent where he reveres it, thereby partially resolving the conflict with

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[291] Leopardi, G. and Galassi, J. (2014) *Canti: Poems / A Bilingual Edition.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 365.
[292] Ibid. 365.

nature that caused the Icelander such trepidation. Timpanaro underlines the importance of scenes in which this occurs in Leopardi's work, which he argues represents a possibility for attaining an optimal degree of happiness. He contends that this area of Leopardi's thought encourages an awareness of overlooked aspects of the relationship between human and nature. As he argues, such moments are worthy of being sought out and amplified, not only for their ability to strengthen Marxist projects.[293] Timpanaro's reading of Leopardi makes a compelling case for seeing his offering of a thoughtful framework for understanding the interrelations between human and nature. The ideas Leopardi puts forward, as Timpanaro argues, radically differ from the ways Western societies are used to treating nature. Timpanaro's reading of Leopardi shows how Leopardi provides insights into how we might live well. 'La Ginestra' is a resource we would benefit from taking heed of in contemporary life, in which the problems Leopardi diagnosed manifest themselves in environmental crisis are responded to with hope. Leopardi poetically and philosophically contends that, only through uniting in a system outside all hypocrisy and foolish pride, can we begin to acknowledge that humans 'are no more than a tiny part of the universe'. This will help us grapple with what our lives mean, in order to conduct ourselves in a more authentic and valuable manner.[294]

This passage allows Leopardi to demonstrate how choosing nobility over pride allows one to protect themselves against unnecessary pain, marking an extension of this idea from its inception in the *Operette*. The Broom, which Leopardi suggests we might model, is 'far wiser and less fallible' than humans are, because humans allowed senseless pride to raise us to a height from which it would be more painful to fall. In doing so, humans covered their eyes to their own fragility, which they could not protect themselves against. This speaks volumes today, when world leaders embrace accelerationism and fail to tackle the fragility of our species and environment. It exemplifies Leopardi's argument that we tend to presume that, if fate does not make us immortal, then we can, and when we are proved wrong we have two blows to recover from, one to our ego, and one to our societies, assuming that we will recover at all, which it is increasingly possible our species won't.

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[293] Timpanaro, S. (1975) *On Materialism.* trans. Garner, L. London: NLB. 21.
[294] Ibid. 20.

Originating from the theme of human misery considered in dialogue of the Icelander, a shift in Leopardi's thought takes place, whereby the pain caused by other people is replaced with the danger that Nature poses, a danger that is portrayed as far greater. Timpanaro's assertion that Leopardi's pessimistic philosophy ultimately makes nature to blame for everything, exonerating humanity whilst redirecting hatred and grief against 'the true origins of the evils of life' can be seen throughout 'La Ginestra'.[295] Timpanaro's point is also discernible when we analyse the transformation in his language between his earlier and later work. When comparing Leopardi's earlier descriptions of people, which were commonly unflattering, appearing in dialogues in 'La Ginestra', his criticism of people remains but takes on a more subtle form. In 'La Ginestra', this criticism is combined with an overriding sense of sympathy concerning the pain we share through our experiences of being human. Instead, he depicts nature as the blameworthy stepmother.

2. Love, Compassion and Solidarity

> The gentle-tempered person is not vengeful, but inclined to sympathetic understanding
>
> Aristotle
> *Nichomachean Ethics*, 112a1-3

Whilst Leopardi was previously deeply critical of human endeavours in the *Operette,* in 'La Ginestra' he conveys a different message, offering us consolation for the pain that underpins our behaviour. As Severino has noted, the noble desert flower is a source of comfort for us amidst our pain. In Leopardi's early work, we saw his concern of the war between human neighbours, as in works like the Icelander dialogue, as we see in 'La Ginestra', the figures involved in the war that he portrays undergoes a transformation. Much has been made of this shift in Leopardi's thought, but again, none has perceived the role it plays in demarcating his earlier fabulation and his later, more significantly philosophical, fabulation. In 'La Ginestra', the inimical relationship between humans is overridden, to be replaced with that between humanity and nature. Leopardi demonstrates for us his hope to alleviate some of the pain which he recognises to drive humans' poor behaviour, which he was so harshly critical of earlier in his work.

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295 Timpanaro, S. and Soper, K. (1976) *The Freudian slip : psychoanalysis and textual criticism.* London: NLB. 201.

In this work, Leopardi is substantially more sensitive to humanity's pain than earlier in his work and offers forgiveness and advice in response to the weaknesses of humankind. As I examined in relation to operetta like the 'Dialogue of Nature and an Icelander', Leopardi's believes that our societies are lacking in community and love. His concern is often articulated today, for instance, it appears in bell hooks' work *all about love*, where hooks considers the implications of Eric Fromm's claim that: 'the principle underlying capitalistic society and the principle of love are incompatible.'[296] hooks, like Leopardi, laments the effects of the loss of solidarity and love in modern life, highlighting that Tina Turner's boldly titled song 'What's Love Got to Do With It' is a prominent example of a popular message conveying a popular idea in contemporary culture pertaining to the irrelevance and meaningless of love. This highlights the tendency to celebrate individualism and boast about our ability to do without love, leaving us divided, isolated, and ultimately weak, as the Icelander learned.[297]

Roberta Cauchi-Santoro emphasises in her reading of Leopardi that compassion is: 'the sentiment that can counter the impenetrability of stultified social relations' within his thought.[298] Recent literature, such as hooks' *all about love*, shows us that the same concerns blight contemporary life and might serve as a prompt to turn to Leopardi's ideas for guidance concerning how to contend with such challenges. What is often overlooked in discussions of Leopardi, but which readers like Severino and Cauchi-Santoro help us navigate, is that he does not solely honestly depict the despair associated with the state of the world and our human affairs. His work also seeks to restore to life that which it has lost. Leopardi shows us how we can strive to attain the happiness we seek, as an alternative to reverting to justifying the harm we cause one another as a result of our pain, which he understands, ultimately sympathises with, and seeks to use as a unifier, rather than cause for division. Exemplifying consolation and compassion, Leopardi gives us an image of the comfort provided when someone offers us empathy, and shares in our pain:

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[296] hooks, b. (2018) *All About Love: New Visions.* William Morrow Paperbacks. 72.
[297] Ibid. xviii.
[298] Cauchi-Santoro, R. (2013) 'Beyond the Suffering of Being: Desire in Giacomo Leopardi and Samuel Beckett'. 76. & Cauchi-Santoro, R. (2017) *Beyond the Suffering of Being: Desire in Giacomo Leopardi and Samuel Beckett.* Firenze University Press. 37.

… Or tutto intorno	… Now one ruin envelops everything
una ruina involve,	where you take root, noble flower,
dove tu siedi, o fior gentile, e quasi	And, as if sharing in the pain of others,
I danni altrui commiserando, al cielo	Send a waft of sweetest scent
di dolcissimo odor mandi un profumo,	Into the sky, consoling the wilderness.
che il deserto consola…	Lines 33-7

In this passage, Leopardi revives the senses, by elucidating the broom's consolatory as it is sent across the desert sky. Describing the plant's generous qualities, Leopardi offers us consolation by showing us the possibility of happiness within the cultural desert we inhabit, which Severino notes in *Il nulla e poesia*.[299] Leopardi's positive introductory representation of the Broom, which he described as scented, noble and sweet, highlights how one can support their neighbours and environment with dignity. Even from fallen greatness, within wilderness, they can do the metaphorically equivalent of 'embellishing the lonely plain', to provide constant friendship and consolation. As Severino argues and Timpanaro develops, Leopardi's desert flower represents the occurrence of a shift in his thought, where he strives to create a work that can help alleviate suffering. Despite being rooted in a position of precarity, and its comparable weakness to the strength of the rhythms and cycles of nature, the broom nonetheless represents the strengths we can still bring into our lives. It shows us how to gain more comfort with our reality, including our mortality, and accept the pain that comes with appreciating the fleeting nature of our lives.

Leopardi responds to the necessary pain of life by introducing his new and important, elucidation of companionship and solidarity. What Timpanaro sees epitomised in 'La Ginestra' is that nature becomes the final object of Leopardi's pessimism, instead of other humans.[300] This underpins Leopardi's establishment of an ethics, which as Negri highlights, is especially discernible when Leopardi sets out his depiction of one of noble nature:/ Leopardi progresses to suggest that the 'whole human company' ought to be

[299] Severino, 'Il profuma e il *nisus*', 237-239, [Beyond the Suffering of Being, 88].
[300] Timpanaro, S. and Soper, K. (1976) *The Freudian slip : psychoanalysis and textual criticism.* London: NLB. 212.

deemed ‘allies from the outset’, brought together in their shared opposition to their common struggle against nature, on which he believes our solidarity ought to be founded:

… Costei chiama inimica; e incontro a questa	Her he calls his enemy, and believing the whole human company
Congiunta esser pensando,	arrayed against her,
Siccome è il vero, ed ordinata in pria	as they are in fact,
L’umana compagnia,	considers all men allies from the outset
Tutti fra se confederati estima	and embraces all of them
Gli uomini, e tutti abbraccia	with true love, offering
Con vero amor, porgendo	and expecting real and ready aid
Valida e pronta ed aspettando aita	in the alternating dangers and concerns
Negli alterni perigli e nelle angosce	of our common struggle…
Della guerra comune…	

Line 126-35

Here, Leopardi suggests considering ‘all men allies from the outset’ encouraging us to expect ‘true love’ and ‘real and ready aid’. This marks a radical departure from his earlier views, and as such, ‘La Ginestra’ offers a counter to the behaviour of humans depicted earlier in Leopardi’s thought. As Croce points out with regards to the question of the degree to which Leopardi’s work can be considered philosophical, the laboratory of his rich philosophical thinking gives him the opportunity to consider ideas, such as human pride, anthropocentricism, fear of mortality and uncertainty and loss of control, which ultimately come to fruition in his poetry. As we have seen, in ‘La Ginestra’, Leopardi’s renewed examination of these themes from the perspective of nobility, compassion, solidarity, love and community attests to this.

3. The Significance of Consolation

Whilst Leopardi, throughout his work, is committed to standing by his analysis of the to the ‘nullity of things’, ‘La Ginestra’ is significant for its offering of consolation and its ability to rekindle enthusiasm, which momentarily sheds life on the life we have lost. In

the *Flower of the Desert*, named after this work, Negri argues that Leopardi reappropriated his God, not only by refusing to ignore the real conditions of life, but, importantly, by providing a response to pain and solitude. Significantly, Negri himself drew comfort during his own period of political confinement for his alleged association with the Red Brigades, who were responsible for the kidnapping and murder of the leader of the Christian Democrat party, Aldo Moro, in 1978.[301] He argues, in this work, Leopardi shows that 'it is possible to open up a space of hope, to invent an active dystopia, and glimpse a constitutive praxis of a new world.'[302] Negri's depiction of Leopardi's project shares similarities in this regard with to Deleuze and Guattari's description of Kafka's work, which has also been examined from the perspective of furthering a tradition of employing the fable for philosophical purposes.[303] This is particularly resonant in relation to the way in which Kafka's art is considered to be oriented toward the invention of people of the future.[304] Negri here appears to be expressly informed by Deleuze's intention to recapture the fable's political potential, applying this to his own philosophical reading of Leopardi, albeit without expressly connecting this with Deleuze's conception of Bergson's notion of fabulation, which he argues we ought to give political meaning. For instance, using similar language to that employed in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), Negri asserts that Leopardi reveals how: 'it is possible to open up a space of hope, to invent an active dystopia, and glimpse a constitutive practice of a new world.'[305] Severino also perceives and examines the construction of a hopeful discourse in Leopardi, which he notes is significant in the *Zibaldone*, where Leopardi consideration the components of 'works of genius':

> Works of genius have this intrinsic property, that even when they give a perfect likeness of the nullity of things, even when they clearly demonstrate and make us feel the inevitable unhappiness of life, even when they express the most terrible despair, nevertheless to a great soul, that may even find itself in a state of utter prostration, disillusionment, futility, boredom and discouragement with life, or in the harshest and most death-dealing adversities (whether these appertain to the strong and lofty emotions, or to any other thing); they always serve as a consolation, rekindling enthusiasm, and though

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[301] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. xii.
[302] Ibid. xii.
[303] Danta, C. (2008) 'Kafka's Mousetrap: The Fable of the Dying Voice', *SubStance*, 37(3), pp. 152-168.
[304] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1986) *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature.* University of Minnesota Press. 21.
[305] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. xvvii.

> speaking of and portraying nothing but death, restore to it, at least for a while, the life that it had lost.
>
> Leopardi
> *Zibaldone* on October 1820, (Z 259/61)

This is what Severino also refers to, in his work *Il nulla e la poesia* (2005), where he outlines he the importance of the concept of the 'nullity of things' to Leopardi's philosophical project and poetry.[306] Thinking of Leopardi's description of the art which he hopes to attain while tracing the trajectory of his work allows us to shed light on how the *Zibaldone* not only forms the basis of the *Operette*, but also helps to demonstrates how Leopardi finally achieved this goal in the *Canti*, which has largely been overlooked. The exception to this is Severino's analysis. For example, in an interview with Renato Parascandolo in 1993, he discussed how Leopardi's words bring his ability to convey the nullity and pain of human existence into his philosophical approach.[307] Discussing the roles of consolation and genius in 'La Ginestra' specifically, Severino suggests that Leopardi rekindles enthusiasm through setting forth a remedy for pain, thereby emphasising the philosophical importance of Leopardi's understanding of 'genius.' Identifying the importance of the concept of 'consolation', in particular, Severino highlights how the role of the desert flower within 'La Ginestra' is to be the source of this.[308] He goes on to say, that, whilst in *Zibaldone* Leopardi contends that works of genius 'always serve as a consolation', in 'La Ginestra', Leopardi instantiates this idea, portraying the desert flower alongside the pain of appreciating our fragility, mortality and lack of control over our own destiny. Leopardi's desert flower, as Severino is right to point out, represents the value of standing courageously amongst a scene marred by destruction, and offering consolation and solidarity with fellow sufferers. This is captured, for instance, in the sense of the broom's sweet scent, casting across the desert, which in itself represents the state of modern life, lacking in vitality, slowly repossessing what Negri astutely describes as the poetic 'ether' of being:[309]

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[306] Severino, E. (2005) *Il nulla e la poesia: Alla fine dell'età della tecnica: Leopardi.* Rizzoli.
[307] Severino, E. 1993. Le "Opere di Genio" di Leopardi. In: Parascandolo, R. (ed.).
[308] Ibid.
[309] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. 150.

Qui su l'arida schiena	Here on the dry flank
Del formidabil monte	of the terrifying mountain,
Sterminator Vesevo,	Vesuvius the destroyer,
La qual null'altro allegra arbor nè fiore,	which no other tree or flower gladdens,
Tuoi cespi solitari intorno spargi,	you spread your solitary thickets,
Odorata ginestra,	scented broom,
Contenta dei deserti.	at home in wild places.

Lines 1-7

This scene encourages enthusiasm, thereby enabling us to see the resemblances between things, which he believes the great philosopher can see. Leopardi thereby demonstrates that, between our sad and foolish century and our fragility, and our fear of uncertainty, to comparisons between the way we relate to each other, and in turn, how we relate to nature. The work Leopardi prepared in the lead up to the *Canti* develops from the consideration of form evident in the *Operette* to the wholescale reappraisal of the human at the heart of modern philosophy, and the story we believe about ourselves.[310] The illusion he attends to destroying in 'La Ginestra' is that all of the human qualities that he criticises serve us. These include, among others, tendencies to fracture within societies, greed, human exceptionalism, thoughtlessness. To counteract these views, which his earlier work highlights does great damage to society, he counters these with reflections on lives, scenes and characteristics of value. In doing so he creates a philosophical fable. As Leopardi makes clear in the *Operette,* society is operating under the failing of stupidity, which is why Kant saw a necessity for and praised go-carts of judgement.

Leopardi's work, as we have seen throughout the *Operette,* is littered with images of humans as a species characterised by cleverness and ego, with a foolish willingness to do damage to ourselves and our surroundings through the improper use of our capacities. Using this tactic, he reminds us of the limits of our capacities, and the extent to which we have neglected prompts to keep this in check, for example with the advent of the Copernican revolution. We constantly allow ourselves, he shows, to have our views skewed by our sense of ourselves as central to the universe, rather than as transient and

[310] Leopardi's 'La Ginestra' explicitly addresses the fragility of our civilisation, when focusing on an environmental catastrophe, which he examines in response to this problem. From this perspective, we can view 'La Ginestra' to be a philosophical fable, in a positive sense.

mortal. He emphasises the importance of supporting the development of society through the establishment of a strong sense of social cohesion, as I will soon detail. Bearing in mind the society that he examines and conceives of in this light, Leopardi suggests that wisdom, which he means in the sense of the application of reason risks leading humans astray, in spite, or even because of our intellect.

In 'La Ginestra', Leopardi provides examples that proactively face up to our dearth of judgement, which exists equally in an individual and in a society. On many occasions, Leopardi expands upon and demonstrates Kant's point that even with an excellent command of pathological, legal, or political rules, one may easily stumble in their application. Leopardi provides an antidote to this by ensuring, through the depiction of the appropriate stance, which commands our attention with a quiet dignity, that one might adopt in the cultural, sociological, and ecological wilderness in which we find ourselves, that adequate training is provided for developing the skill of judgement. Kant writes 'Such sharpening of the judgement is indeed the one great benefit of examples', and Leopardi takes heed of the necessity to sharpen our judgement and provides such an example.[311]

4. Accepting our Vulnerability

Leopardi underscores our poor and feeble state by highlighting the capacity of nature to wipe out civilisations which have been built up over millennia. He subjects to scrutiny notions of control that we suppose we have over nature and critiques the Anthropocene before it has been given its name. He reminds us that we remain subject to nature's destructive power, which, due to anthropogenic change, we now further. Mount Vesuvius emerges in Leopardi's work as a looming threat that has no care for people, or concern whether they are noble or cowardly. His work emphasises the cycles of nature and furthers Kant's and Darwin's insights concerning the different scales of time that affect it and us. He depicts nature as indifferent, encouraging us to relinquish our convictions of endless power through highlighting how human endeavours repeatedly fall prey to these cycles. In doing so, he prompts us to consider the vulnerability of human societies, developing a Kantian insight concerning infinity, our human frailty and highlighting the

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[311] Kant, I., Smith, N. K., Caygill, H. and Banham, G. (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. A134/B173.

destructive power of nature, whilst focusing on its seemingly cruel capacity to obliterate entire societies and forms of life, both human and non-human.

Leopardi begins ‘La Ginestra’ with the depiction of a bleak scene where an empire was lost at the caprice of Mount Vesuvius, which he refers to as ‘the destroyer’. He refers to the previous glory of the city, that ‘once was mistress of men’, to emphasis the sadness of the frailty of our lives, displaying a sympathy with the human plight which is striking considering its absence in his earlier thought, where he is critical of people’s disastrous hubris. Leopardi depicts the city, the representations of the feats of what humans can accomplish when we collaborate, picking out and highlighting a source of pride in human abilities. However, this passage serves to remind us that, despite our efforts, despite our constructions of cities and the thriving societies that we are capable of experience, ultimately these may always risk, like Pompeii, being reduced to ashes. Thereby, Leopardi reminds us of the vulnerability we inhabit, of our potential to yield to destruction, prompting us to appreciate that this risk remains, even when we fail to recognise it. He urges us to consider having the strength to face this, and to bring this recognition into our everyday being, which would make it more honest, and potentially, thereby, more fulfilling.

This image forms a stark contrast to the picture of humankind that Leopardi built up in his preceding *Operette*: the story of a foolish species intent on establishing and maintaining control at all costs. He criticises the propensity of humankind to lean towards certainty, which he develops throughout the *Operette*, and admires the superiority of modern philosophy which resists the temptation to teach and construct. Leopardi’s depiction of the desert broom represents his ideal embodiment of the modern philosophical approach. According to such an approach, one respects the limits of their understanding and focuses their attention on developing sound judgement with which to apply their knowledge, which they recognise to be vulnerable. When one has cultivated comfort living within the unknown, and built up respect for ultimate uncertainty, and has become ‘at home in wild places’, one is less likely to try to alter the scenario by creating a substitute for former, demolished ideas.

In order to begin to reclaim the power we have rescinded, Leopardi shows us that we can no longer afford to ignore the consequences of our actions, ways of life, habits and

relationships. Leopardi encourages us to understand that these do not necessarily need to be a cause for despair and anguish, as we often thoughtlessly assume, but can also be beautiful and consolatory. As Leopardi recognised, the Western tradition, in which we are strong, capable and in control does not allow space for the feelings and thoughts arising from the environmental catastrophes that we need to process. Ultimately, environmental catastrophes demonstrate our urgent need for more nuanced ways of deriving meaning from our lives. They reveal to us the inflexibility of our views of ourselves, and the damage we risk causing with these. In 'La Ginestra', Leopardi uses the trope of the environmental catastrophe as an example to illustrate the degree to which we have gone astray, demonstrating, unlike in earlier works like the *Operette* that one can adopt an honourable stance, even in the face of danger and uncertainty. He draws on the literature of catastrophe, using its richness within the context of his transformation of the fable into a work of philosophy. 'La Ginestra' is a fable in the sense that it draws on its form and it is philosophical in the Kantian sense that it facilitates good judgement through being exemplary, and in the Leopardian sense, by drawing relations between the general and particular, cultivating comfort within a world stripped of illusions and reminding us of the worth of the senses. As I have shown Timpanaro argues, which Severino and Negri also note, in this work, Leopardi sets forth an ethical response to the dearth of vitality within modernity. Through looking at Leopardi's analysis of the way humans relate to each other and considering death in dialogues from the *Operette*, 'La Ginestra' can be read as a work where he transcends these ideas and emphasises the importance of humility, community and compassion. It can be read as a philosophical aid for bringing vitality to our lives which expands the capacities of both the fable and philosophy. By referring to a gentle desert flower living resiliently and with love, in spite of challenging conditions, he suggests how humanity might learn to love light rather than darkness.

By arguing and showing us that we have adopted a stance where we have commonly been swayed by pride, Leopardi gives us an opportunity to imagine new ways of thinking. He gives us a choice between facing the reality and accepting our fragility and mortality or comforting ourselves in the short term while demonstrating the damaging effects of such choices. Leopardi is evidently aware that he is working to convince people to give up behaviours that have long since been at the core of human identity, and he responds to the topics that he understands scare us head on. In 'The Dialogue of Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies', Leopardi consoles by suggesting that the mortality that we fear might

be less painful experience than we imagine, offering us a prompt to counter our tendency to turn our back on the source of our fears. Again, in ‘La Ginestra’, he furthers this endeavour, not only critiquing humans’ foolish tendencies, he provides a model of how we could embody a different relationship with the reality of our lives.

Suggesting that we seize control over what we can, which would include improving our relations amongst ourselves, he encourages us to relinquish our concern and energy expended on that which we can’t control, such as acknowledging our mortality. He is frank in his presentation of the pain that marks human life. In addition to focusing on the pain caused by nature, he also examines the challenge we face in accepting our mortality. He encourages us to conserve our energy and use it more wisely, to take stock and carefully choose, based on greater meditation, the best use for our energy. By persuading us to recognise the extent of our powers he reminds us of the humility we often lack and encourages us to honour our fragility in contrast to nature’s strength. He puts into context the importance of our projects and reminds us of the stretch of time that has come before our existence, which Darwin intuits is largely unfathomable to the human intellect. He picks up and develops the contention that he introduced in ‘The Dialogue of Nature and an Icelander’, where having decried the bad behaviour, which is endemic to human societies, the Icelander notes that, within humankind, we have some form of control over our destiny. By evading those that may cause us difficulties, or by adjusting our relations with others, at least on some occasions, we are able to increase our safety.

5. The Noble Response to Our Poor and Feeble State

In addition to the potential for compassion Leopardi later saw in humans, he suggested we might respond gently to the suffering we share in respect to the painful fragility of our lives, ultimately seeking to bring people together in the face of nature’s destructive capacities. In contrast to the warring amongst ourselves reflected in his presentation of contemporary society and the arrogance satirically mocked within his dialogues, here, Leopardi suggests that we should replace our hubris with nobility, which he exemplifies, writing:

Nobil natura è quella	The noble nature is the one
Che a sollevar s'ardisce	who dares to lift his mortal eyes
Gli occhi mortali incontra	to confront our common destiny
Al comun fato, e che con franca lingua,	and, with honest words
Nulla al ver detraendo,	that subtract nothing from the truth,
Confessa il mal che ci fu dato in sorte,	admits the pain that is our destiny,
E il basso stato e frale;	and our poor and feeble state;

Lines 111-117

Furthering his articulation of our 'poor and feeble state', Leopardi articulates his notion of nobility that corresponds to Aristotle's, expressed in *Nichomachean Ethics*, where he explains that a person of noble nature acts in the most appropriate way with the resources, they have available. Here, Aristotle highlights the difference between nobility and pride, arguing that a noble person could not be made wretched through the ordinary misfortunes, but rather be stable and firm.[312] Only grave misfortunes, Aristotle writes, would shift a 'truly good and wise person', whose recovery from such an event would only be 'after a long and complete period of great and noble accomplishments.' This description articulates Leopardi's depiction of the Broom, which, having finally recovered from the destruction caused by the ashes of Mount Vesuvius, becomes stronger through being a source of consolation for its surroundings. As Severino argues, Leopardi's flower exemplifies a refusal to supplicate its power to the nullity of things, which we might ourselves learn from as we endeavour to create meaning in our lives.[313] By focusing on a subject eschewing frantic pride and illusions of grandeur, Leopardi demonstrates what it would look like for us to accept our fate and retain strength within our suffering. Such suffering, he shows us, may stem partly from the knowledge of our mortality and the limits of our powers to control our circumstances. Directly confronting his truth, the broom in the wilderness accepts its fate, refusing presumptions of immortality with compelling elegance:

E tu, lenta ginestra,	And you, too, pliant broom,
Che di selve odorate	adorning this abandoned countryside

[312] Crisp, R. (2000) *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics.* Cambridge University Press. 18.
[313] Severino, E. (2005) *Il nulla e la poesia: Alla fine dell'età della tecnica: Leopardi.* Rizzoli. 239.

Queste campagne dispogliate adorni,	with fragrant thickets
Anche tu presto alla crudel possanza	you will soon succumb
Soccomberai del sotterraneo foco,	to the cruel power of subterranean fire,
Che ritornando al loco	which, returning to the place it knew before,
Già noto, stenderà l'avaro lembo	will spread its greedy tongue
Su tue molli foreste. E piegherai	over your soft thickets. And unresisting,
Sotto il fascio mortal non renitente	you'll bow your blameless head
Il tuo capo innocente:	beneath the deadly scythe;
Ma non piegato insino allora indarno	but you will not have bowed before,
Codardamente supplicando innanzi	hopeless abject supplicant
Al futuro oppressor; ma non eretto	of your future oppressor; you were never raised
Con forsennato orgoglio inver le stelle,	by senseless pride up to the stars
Nè sul deserto, dove	or above the desert, which for you
E la sede e i natali	was home and birthplace
Non per voler ma per fortuna avesti;	not by choice, but chance;
Ma più saggia, ma tanto	no, far wiser and less fallible
Meno inferma dell'uom, quanto le frali	than man is, you did not presume
Tue stirpi non credesti	that either fate or you had made
O dal fato o da te fatte immortali.	your fragile kind immortal.

Lines 297-317

Leopardi recognises the danger of living on the perilous plains and creates an opportunity for us to help us envisage what a noble response to living in precarious conditions may look like, which we can then model ourselves. Whilst admitting our pain, we might, Leopardi reminds us, like the Broom and the farmer, learn to love with less fear, commit to living more fully and cherish more unreservedly our communities from which we have made our pain worse by turning our backs in favour of a desert of rigid certainty, which even then, we discover we cannot fully control. Similarly as for Aristotle, Leopardi's Broom is a model of a noble spirit that has undergone and persevered a long and complete period of accomplishment, enduring grave misfortunes, whilst remaining strong throughout these severe challenges. Whilst Leopardi sets out forthright critiques of senseless human pride throughout the *Operette*, in 'La Ginestra', he also demonstrates that, whilst he is weary of excessive pride and hubris, he attributes value to the

characteristic of nobility, which he models through the desert broom, differentiating nobility from pride, in a hope to guide us to develop our wisdom. Whilst it is understandable for our mastery of information to be a source of pride, Leopardi's work highlights that we must use this gift wisely to cope with the ever-increasing hazards that inevitably threaten us.

Leopardi's critique of our vanity, which appeared in 'The Dialogue of an Imp and a Gnome' leads him to propose a solution to the isolationism and individualism, which he believed has a corrosive effect on society. He insists we respond to the hostility we are all vulnerable to at the hands of nature by joining as mortals in a common pact, to become allies, intent on forming a just society of citizens. Descriptions of Leopardi as a pessimist are often overly simplistic, and fail to credit Leopardi's deep belief in the human spirit, which is reflected in the way he laments how competition and individualism lead to the habitual thwarting of our capacities to care for, comfort and love each other. His recognition of the ease with which nature could destroy our lives and endeavours forms the bedrock for his conception of how we establish strong social bonds**.** As a precursor to Chomsky, who conducts his own critique of the state modern western society in *Optimism over Despair* (2017), where he, like Leopardi, considers that there are 'some widely accepted doctrines with foundations that are much less stable than often assumed' and commits to ideals associated with libertarian socialism which concerns ideas about sympathy, solidarity and mutual aid - ideas which Leopardi calls upon to rekindle our enthusiasm.[314] Although he is rarely recognised for this, Leopardi guides us in how to grasp the opportunities that still exist to improve our lives, showing us that we have, misattributed the source of our troubles to our neighbours.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

In this chapter I have tried to show how, in 'La Ginestra' Leopardi, influenced by his arguments and style developed in the *Operette* where he thought carefully about the benefits of fables, set out to encourage the sharpening of the judgement utilising the great benefit of examples, which marked the departure from his earlier use of fables, and the creation of his philosophical fable. By describing the one of noble nature as strong in

[314] Chomsky, N. and Polychroniou, C. J. (2017) *Optimism Over Despair.* Penguin Books Limited. 194-5.

suffering, Leopardi urges us to accept the requirements of modern philosophy to tear down illusions. Preceding Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God, Leopardi wants us, to practice becoming comfortable with the destruction of old values that now do us more harm than good, thereby furthering modern philosophy, which he believes normally only sweeps away illusions and demolishes.[315] In the passages, where Leopardi considers nobility, he dares us to admit our destiny, reminding us of the strength and nobility involved in facing up to our lives and dilemmas. He suggests such an approach may form the groundwork for ethical behaviour and argues that the one who avoids contributing to the hate or anger of their neighbours, is 'great and strong in suffering.' This radically differs from the behaviour the Icelander described in the *Operette,* where humans continually fight amongst themselves. Here, Leopardi underscores that how we treat others can alleviate our grief. From this perspective, 'La Ginestra' can be seen as Leopardi's attempt to alleviate some of our suffering by changing our worldview so that we at least treat each other with more grace, even if nature rails against us. We see here then, how the critique of contemporary human societies that Leopardi puts forward through characters like the Icelander is altered when it is finally presented again in 'La Ginestra'.

Conclusion to Part One – Philosophical Fables of the Starry Heavens

> The clash between the historical and the unhistorical…lies… in nature, which… coincides with the very substance of life. It is as if a crevice has opened up in the naturalness of *bios* into which the living being is gradually sucked. History—especially modern history—marks the pulse of this current. The farther it advances, freeing itself from its natural limit, the more its vital substance dries up to the point of atrophying it altogether.
>
> Esposito
> *Living Thought,* 119.

Leopardi carefully considered the strengths of Lucian, Pignotti and Marmontel's fabulation, and, ultimately reclaims positive attributes of the fable, leaving behind its association with dishonesty and the obfuscation of truth. Works like 'La Ginestra' represent Leopardi's endeavour to bring together his insights into works of genius, which

[315] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 2709).

Severino examines, with his realisation that the power of stories can help him reach the audience he intended, but struggled, to reach. Moreover, Leopardi's insight that 'very old stories' are habitually used to create identities, informs the underexamined aspect of his work, namely, not only his application of aspects – moral insights, focus on non-human characters, humour – of the fable, but also reveals the drive towards retrieving the past underpinning his use of the fable. Leopardi's anti-Hegelian refutation of progress and belief that our species is in decline combines with his admiration for the ancients, informing his reclamation of the fable's power. Whilst today's critics, as we will see, propel the fable forwards into the future, Leopardi uses the fable to reach back into the past, where he hopes the pathways that we have lost can be reactivated in our imaginations, what Latour calls our 'tracking errors' opening our eyes to radically alternative ways of being to those which today, environmental signals frequently warn us are severely unsustainable.

In this case study, I have shown that Leopardi's fabulation can be seen as portraying a world we have lost and now lament. Whilst Leopardi transcends negative connotations of fables as his work progresses, he ultimately succumbs to the 'us versus them' mentalities that Bergson relates to fable, when he replaces humanities enemy with nature, which Haraway's work avoids by making her starting point a relation to the fable that is more elastic. Haraway's work, which we now turn to explore, is less interested in demonstrating that the Western Tradition, what Latour terms The Old Regime is a fable, in the term's negative sense, which frees her thinking up to navigating pathways forward for new, more fruitful, journeys.

The limit of Leopardi's conceptualisation of nature is avoided in Haraway's work, which offers no concern for the oppositions that Leopardi sustains throughout his work, first in the opposition between human neighbours, and later between humans and nature. Unlike Leopardi, Haraway welcomes multiplicity and the porosity of boundaries, and consistent challenges to think anew. It is this aspect of her work that marks, despite the groundwork she shares with Leopardi, her distinction from him. Whilst Leopardi's fabulation inadvertently continues the tradition it is founded on critiquing, Haraway is sensitive to the requirement to do away with the scacchiera that Leopardi thinks he leaves behind, but nonetheless recreates. She revels in the muck, joyously responding to the opportunity to create value on our own, based upon thoughtfully considered, but nonetheless always

fallible, values. Having focused on a figure commonly yet unjustly overlooked in Anglophone scholarship in this part, next, I move away from focusing on the Western tradition and question the voices that have regularly been excluded to bolster this increasingly faltering narrative.

Leopardi's dramatisation of the environmental catastrophe of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 'La Ginestra' forms the pinnacle of his examination of our situation within the universe as vulnerable beings who are able to reason, and often swayed by our pride. Drawing on the methods and tropes of fabulists, such as satire, instantiation, ridicule of hubris and consideration of the consequences of scientific breakthroughs, Leopardi, in the *Operette*, helps us to see our cognitive dissonance, conflicting attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. He demonstrates the weakness of the basis of our narratives prior to moving beyond this by responding to each of the problems he raised with counter examples of exemplary behaviour, through which we could learn to better our judgement. Through this measure, he contributes to the ecological thought we need to develop to assuage increasing environmental catastrophes.

Deploying the methods and using tropes of fabulists and ancients, Leopardi helps us see our errors, which have prevented us from comprehending the warnings scientists have consistently been consistently issuing, only to be largely ignored, which arise from a situation in which the behaviours that Leopardi diagnosed, combined with the acceleration of technological developments, have exacerbated our crises. By reclaiming the fable as a force for emancipation, rather than the presentation of a fiction, Leopardi helps us view how the Western tradition has contributed to leading us to our present state of deep environmental crisis. He chooses as a result of this, to use the fable to help guide philosophy back to its purpose of improving life. Although Leopardi provides guidance in the form of examples throughout 'La Ginestra', his work however is ultimately hindered by resting too heavily upon a binary division of nature and society. As such, whilst it succeeds in undermining the chessboard on which the 'match' between his own criticisms and the ideas supporting the Western tradition plays out, he inadvertently undermines this, by suggesting an alternative that merely perpetuates the framework of thinking that he has previously reproached.

The Notion of Nature as the Constraint on Leopardi's Ecological Thought

Leopardi's contribution to the question of how philosophical fabulation might serve as an aid in responding to environmental catastrophe is hindered by the way in which he gives grace to humans by transferring his anger to nature, as Timpanaro highlights in *The Freudian Slip* (1974). With this action, Leopardi falls into the trap of reinforcing a distinction between the human and the nonhuman, and humans and nature, that risks perpetuating the power hierarchies of Enlightenment thinking, which we need to learn new ways to navigate from within the Anthropocene.[316] Leopardi's conceptualisation of nature is complex however, since he makes prescient strides in encouraging his readers to consider more that human life, as we see in his depiction of the flank of Mount Vesuvius as a home shared equally by humans, animals and plants. This aspect of his work requires further examination within Anglophone scholarship, in which there is currently a dearth of consideration of his ideas, particularly as they pertain to current ecological thinking. Nonetheless Leopardi's reliance on the 'otherness' of nature, which Timpanaro points out, becomes a problematic basis for Leopardi's argument for stronger bonds between communities, because it rests upon a problematic invocation of the natural world as our enemy, and as something entirely separate from us. Such a conceptual response to the challenges posed by the Anthropocene reinforces a problematic binary by separating nature and culture in a way that reflects the western masculinist knowledges and industrial capitalism.[317]

To overcome this limit in Leopardi's philosophical fabulation, whilst retaining the strengths of his concern for the need to establish a new ethics and considering the extent to which humans' capacity to retreat into hubris when faced with challenges to our conceptions of ourselves, I turn to examine Haraway. I will argue that she begins from similar premises, while arriving at alternative conclusions, which can be considered in our evaluations of the limits of Leopardi's ideas. The problem with Leopardi's ethics is that it relies on the supposition that, to expect real and ready aid from our allies, we must first be united and, crucially, that this unity must arise from our division from nature.

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[316] Johnson, L., Lobo, M., & Kelly, D. (2019). 'Encountering naturecultures in the urban Anthropocene.' Geoforum. 359.
[317] Johnson, L., Lobo, M., & Kelly, D. (2019). 'Encountering naturecultures in the urban Anthropocene.' Geoforum. 359.

Through examining Timpanaro's analysis of Leopardi's work, especially what he calls the second movement of Leopardi's thought, which is revealed in 'La Ginestra' in the *Canti*, we established that the foundation of Leopardi's new ethics is 'the solidarity of men in their struggle against [nature]'.[318] By affirming such a standpoint, Leopardi unwittingly engages in a perpetuation of the very narrative he undertakes to undermine in the *Operette*. The Western tradition has historically been underpinned by an assumption that nature is there for the purposes of human endeavours alone, as theorists like Anna Tsing, who I refer to in the following case study, clearly points out. By overlooking the need for him to critically analyse how his own view of nature could be informed by modern thought, Leopardi misses the opportunity to extend his interest in the existence, examined by writers like Fontenelle, of the plurality of worlds, which could have formed an alternative basis for his ethics, established in response to problematic anthropocentrism. Reading the speculative fabulation of Haraway may help us open ourselves up to the otherness of the world. This would enable us to establish a more stable groundwork for Leopardi's ethics by replacing his problematic notion of our opposition to nature with the idea of 'multispecies flourishing', which I examine in my next case study of the philosophical fable, and the practice of philosophical fabulation.

[318] Timpanaro, S. (1976) *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and Textual criticism.* trans. Soper, K. London: NLB. 201.

PART 2

Donna Haraway's Speculative Fabulation as the 'Life Story'

> It sometimes seems that that [heroic] story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we'd better start telling another one, which people may go on with when the old one's finished. Maybe. The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

Ursula K. Le Guin,
The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, 20.

> Yes, subordination, subjugation, *subaltern*, literally "under the earth," racialized populations are buried people. But there is a lot happening underground. Not only coffins, but seeds, roots and rhizomes. And maybe even tunnels and other lines of flight to new worlds, where alternative forms of kinship have room to grow and to nourish other life forms and ways of living.

Ruha Benjamin
"Black Afterlives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice*"* in *Making Kin Not Population*, 47.

Introduction

Donna Haraway's relation to philosophical fabulation shares with Leopardi's in its assumption of the damage of contemporary life, commitment to facing this destruction, and appreciation of the value of fabulation and stories in responding to this, differs from his project in important ways. Rather than looking back to a nostalgic past, Donna Haraway's philosophical fabulation is an all-inclusive consideration of a world plunged in the depths of an environmental crisis that makes Leopardi's experimental consideration of the extinction of our species look like a distinct possibility.[319] In my case study of

[319] Adsit-Morris, C. (2017) *Restorying Environmental Education: Figurations, Fictions, and Feral Subjectivities.* Springer International Publishing. 46.

Leopardi, I demonstrated how his relationship with the fable changed with the progression of his work, firstly focusing on its negative attributes, and progressively welcoming its facilitative qualities. In Haraway's fabulation, the fable's positive qualities are given from the outset, which gives her work a more generative character. This alternative groundwork frees Haraway to create more imaginative, inclusive, joyous and generative fables.

Similarly, to Leopardi, Haraway's thought is marked by a sense of the destruction our species has caused. Both thinkers share a sense of resistance the poor state of life, a willingness to do justice to this, and a hesitancy to concede to ideas of progress. Of the authors whom she credits her ideas to, she writes: 'There is no way I can name all of my debts to SF's critters and worlds, humans and not, and so I will record only a few and hope for a credit extension for years yet to come.'[320] Some of these influences may not be explicitly known to even Haraway herself, as appears to be the case with Leopardi's ideas, which she may have glimpsed through her readings of Benjamin, which is evidenced in her article 'A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies', which she begins by quoting Benjamin: 'The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule.'[321] Such a connection is comparable to how Negri's familiarity with Nietzsche is said to have been informed by his reading of Leopardi, rather than his reading of Nietzsche himself. As Timothy Murphy, who translated *Flower of the Desert*, suggests in his article 'Flower of the Desert: Poetics as Ontology from Leopardi to Negri':

> …what is the immediate source of all these Nietzschean elements in Negri's writings? They don't arise from direct engagements with Nietzsche; even Negri's post-prison writings contain only occasional and peripheral references to Nietzsche, often framed by Heidegger's reading. They don't seem to arise from explicit reconsiderations of the Nietzschean elements in Deleuze and Foucault either; by the time he begins to write about his new allies, the reorientation has already taken place. Yet Revel is undoubtedly right to describe Negri as a "French Nietzschean", and I will argue that the source of all the Nietzschean elements that she identifies — an "untimely" critique of dialectical and scientistic history, an implacable antagonism toward the abstract administration of life, and subjectivation and ontology conceived as creation or *poiesis* — lies precisely in his interpretation of the Italian philologist, essayist and poet Giacomo Leopardi… Thus I am claiming that Leopardi serves Negri as an anticipatory stand-in for Nietzsche, a dark or

[320] Haraway, D. (2013) 'SF: Science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far', *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 3.
[321] Haraway, 1994, A game of cat's cradle: science studies`, feminist theory`, cultural studies. 1.

> not-so-dark precursor who connects Negri's work to the heterogeneous series of Foucault and Deleuze…. Leopardi [thereby] provided Negri with many of the same theoretical tools that Nietzsche gave to Deleuze and Foucault, and consequently made possible Negri's new line of alliance and his poetic turn despite his minimal direct engagement with Nietzsche.[322]

Haraway's interpretation of our damaged state of life, and her concept of 'staying with the trouble', shares commonalities with Leopardi that could have been influenced by her engagement with Benjamin. The indebtedness to Leopardi of his ideas relating to dearth of modernity is expressed in Benjamin's work, particularly when the dialogue of the Fashion and Death, in which Leopardi's early critique of modernity is captured, appears thirteen times in the *Arcade Project* alone. In this regard, Leopardi, Haraway and Benjamin share in the concern that the normal state of life is one marred by pain, oppression, disappointment and lack. Benjamin perhaps, stood as a stand in for Leopardi, since his ideas are more widely recognised in the European philosophical tradition than Leopardi's are.

When we read Haraway with Leopardi in mind, we see how she furthers his endeavour by observing and avoiding the trap he falls into of capitulating to an opposition he sets up between human and nature, which ultimately limits his philosophical fabulation. I previously demonstrated that Leopardi's work considers the Western Tradition to be based on faulty notions of what composes humankind and questions of how we understand our humanity. His response to this is to try to reactivate moments of a lost past, for example, by bringing the ancients to bear on modern life. While his later work in particular proposes a response, we may take up to the dearth of life that his earlier work emphasised, Leopardi's responses consistently refer to, and are held back by, their groundwork. In his thought, this rests on the belief that there was a better past, which, if only we found the correct methods to use, we could bring back to life through fabulation. We saw, in relation to the fight between the Icelander and his neighbour, for instance, that his thinking frequently relied on oppositions. His belief of the tendency in humankind to 'make trouble for his neighbour' and 'battle fiercely' with their friends and this structure of 'us versus them' is ultimately what holds his theory back. He only replaces this with another fight, one of 'the whole human company' arrayed and allied against

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[322] Murphy, T. S. (2011) 'Flower of the Desert: Poetics as Ontology from Leopardi to Negri', *Genre*, 44(1), pp. 75-91.

nature, whose acrimony, as Leopardi ultimately regards it, forms the basis of our new, common struggle. Haraway's thinking, whilst like Leopardi's in being concerned with the strength of community, companionship and kinship, moves beyond his thinking by embracing warring within thinking itself, which she sees exemplified in Latour's work. She differs from Leopardi in that she does not act as though we need an enemy to direct our vengeance towards - other than that between overly rigid conceptual frameworks -in order to build the strong bonds needed for our collective future and this propels her work forward, into the future. Her views have a generative quality to them. They operate in order to create an alternative to what Le Guin calls the 'killer story' and help us to come up with radically new alternatives. They acknowledge that the story 'so far' simply opens up the potential for a richer future.

Haraway suggests that we replace the term the Anthropocene with the Chthulucene, which might be more able to tell the stories with no determinism, teleology or plan we need.[323] Describing her term, she writes:

> …my prefix "chtulu-" marks chthonic lines and webs, materialities and temporalities of the earth, with no guarantees, no pre-set directions, no human exceptionalism, and no escaping consequences. The Chthulucene is full of the opportunistic sym-poetic liveliness of our mortal planet. *Sympoiesis* is about making-with, becoming-with, rather than self-making through appropriation of everything as resource. The suffix "cene" (Greek, kainos, recent, present) marks presence in many modalities, times at stake, times for cultivating needed *response-abilities*, capacities to respond. The Chthulucene is the time to lust for multispecies environmental and reproductive justice. The term "reproductive justice," joining reproductive rights and social justice, was the potent contribution of Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice in 1994. As Jenny Reardon emphasizes, "justice" is a "gathering concern" tied to stories for reimagining and redefining what is possible. "People come together to make another world possible in the presence of great trouble and enormous difficulties." Call that justice.[324]

Haraway argues that the Chthulucene marks the need for the development of capacities to respond. It demonstrates the urgency of 'multispecies environmental and reproductive justice.' For Haraway, it makes it crucial for us to gather for a reimagining of new stories to redefine what is possible in the presence of enormous difficulties. Arguing against 'pre-

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[323] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 101.
[324] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 68.

set directions', Haraway embraces Leopardi's willingness to face uncertainty, making a precondition for her speculative fabulation.[325] Her prefix 'chthulhu', accentuates the need for materialities and temporalities of the earth without human exceptionalism, and the guarantees we tend to associate with our kind.[326] 'Chthulucene' derives from the Greek words, 'khthôn' (*χθων*) and 'kainos' (*καινος*) which, together: 'name a kind of time place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth.'[327] Haraway tells us: '*Kainos* means now, a time of beginnings, a time for ongoing, for freshness.'[328] In her work, relationality with other species, with kin, are foregrounded, and these are refigured as up to the minute 'chthonic ones', for whom emphasis is placed on the immanent and immediate. This thus requires, for Haraway, 'learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures'.[329] What interests Haraway is not an idealised or utopian future, but rather a welcoming of the complex and mortal demands of living and dying well in the Chthulucene.

Rather than referring to HP Lovecraft's misogynist racial nightmare monster Cthulhu, first introduced in "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), the spider that Haraway brings into play 'entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages'.[330] She contributes to the debate concerning the best way to describe our epoch the term the 'Chthulucene', which she sets forth to stand in for the Anthropocene or Capitalocene, which she deems too closely associated with defeatism. Haraway contests the suitability of the term the Anthropocene for our transformative time on earth due for its conflict with the generative possibilities uncovered in recent developments in the arts, sciences and politics, and interdisciplinary thinking, contending that these have rendered human-only histories unthinkable. She wants her work to make fertile ground for multispecies flourishing and, for her, the as yet unfinished task of the Cthulucene, is to: 'collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the exterminism of the Capitalocene, and chipping and shredding and layering like a mad gardener, make a much hotter compost

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[325] Latour, B. and Porter, C. (2017) *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime.* Wiley.
[326] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 67.
[327] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 2.
[328] Ibid. 2.
[329] Ibid. 1.
[330] Haraway, D. (2016) Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 101.

pile for still possible pasts, presents, and futures.'[331] Being careful to differentiate between her Chthulucene and that of Lovecraft, Haraway calls for a reinstatement of play and engagement in what she calls 'a much better SF game', to examine how critters can live and die well.[332] Additionally, the intention of Haraway's expansion of SF to 'so far', is to show that the past does not represent a blueprint for the future, which separates her fabulation from much of Leopardi's work.

Chapter One – Theory in the Mud

> I have an allergy to the particular etymology of the anthropic: the one who looks up, the one who is not of the earth, the one whose feet are in the mud but his eyes are in the sky; the retelling, once again, of the stories that I think have done us dirt in Western cultures.
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> Haraway, D
> *Interview for Artforum*, September 06, 2016.

For Haraway, thinkers who look up to the sky have often done us dirt in Western cultures. This is true in one way, of Leopardi, who despite his critique of anthropocentrism, rearticulates the distinction between humans and life in his work. Whilst my examination of Leopardi revealed his concern with scientific breakthroughs pertaining to the cosmos, which informed his fabulation in a manner that expanded on Kant's notion of the 'starry heavens above', Haraway's work stands upon an earthlier groundwork, where, to use Kant's parlance, the matter from which our vital force came will be returned. Haraway thereby developing on the closing lines of 'La Ginestra', in which Leopardi suggested we should avoid being raised by senseless pride up to the stars, and choosing to look below, to the earth of the desert instead. Near the outset of *Staying with the Trouble*, she asserts: 'I work with string figures as a theoretical trope, a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking, and sorting. I work with and in SF as material-semiotic composting, as theory in the mud, as muddle.'[333] She asks: 'how do we, as adults, drop the mask of innocence and engage in multispecies civic politics?' and describes this question as what she means by 'staying with the trouble'.[334] Describing her

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[331] Haraway, D. (2016). Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 57.
[332] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 101.
[333] Ibid. 31.
[334] Haraway, D., & Endy, D. (2019). Tools for Multispecies Futures. Journal of Design and Science. https://doi.org/10.21428/7808da6b.05eca6f1

means of theorising as ‘muddle’, Haraway expresses her willingness to get caught up in theoretical entanglements, since this means abandoning the damaging means of thinking in oppositionary terms that she believes compounds the disasters involved in our present.

Haraway suggests that today’s project would involve the reworking of our understandings of nature and culture, so that neither may any longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other.[335] The feminist consideration of nature that Haraway’s work sets out adds a more nuanced understanding of the concept than that of Leopardi. While in relation to their reading of the dearth of our times, framed by Haraway as ‘staying with the trouble’ and the need for companionship, which exceeds boundaries of species, both critics share a common understanding of how we can forge a flourishing path forward. However, Haraway’s ideas of nature are more considered than Leopardi’s, by virtue the feminist perspective she brings to the subject, for example, in her work, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), where she provides a cautionary tale of the invention and reinvention of nature, which she perceives as perhaps the most central arena of hope, *oppression,* and contestation for inhabitants of the planet in our times. Haraway contends that we must foster meaningful relationships within a world in which people ‘kill each other while sucking the planet dry.’[336] To depict our situation, she uses terms like mud, compost, ‘the muck’ and hummus, and argues that our work is to learn to thrive within our much, and that to do so using stories is to inhabit a state that is ‘ripe for multispecies storytelling’.[337] She also expresses a similar sentiment to Leopardi’s in the *Operette* and ‘La Ginestra’ by cultivating an acceptance of death and resisting temptations to turn away from what will later cause us more pain, committing instead to ‘response-ability’, a term which Haraway developed in *When Species Meet* (2007).[338] Haraway’s work begins as though we are in the muck and assumes that it is from within the mud that we must forge a way to find glee. She borrows from Anna Tsing the goal articulated in the phrase of cultivating the ‘arts of living on a damaged planet.’[339]

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335 Haraway, D. (2004) *The Haraway Reader.* Routledge. 9.
336 Haraway, D. (2020) 'Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together', *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Terra Ignota.
337 Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 11.
338 Haraway, D. (2007) *When Species Meet*. Vol. 3. U of Minnesota Press, 2013. 89.
339 Tsing, A. L., Bubandt, N., Gan, E. and Swanson, H. A. (2017) *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene.* University of Minnesota Press. 37.

For Haraway's work, the catastrophe is 'the trouble', the very events we are in the midst of that we need to learn to flourish within. These are the events that contribute to species extinction, the destruction of indigenous communities, and the lack of commitment to creating a habitable, flourishing world, in which 'becoming-with' with others is highly valued.[340]

She depicts 'theory in the mud' and our moment as being 'rich in com-post' and 'hummus', articulating the extent to which we are embroiled in a period of catastrophe. However, she manages to retrieve some power from this moment, through noting that it is 'ripe for multispecies storytelling.'[341] Haraway responds to the catastrophe that we are in the midst of, and which I will begin to explain with recourse to Ruha Benjamin's antiracist work, we must respond by learning to live and die well. Moreover, she sees storytelling as playing a central role in serving as an aid to having us achieve this. Through describing our times as 'the muck' and highlighting the muddy, earthy, multiplicity of the world, Haraway elucidates the earthliness of a current trend in philosophical fabulations. Haraway takes seriously the fact that we are living through environmental crises of such a scale, with a threat so severe, that a common response is plain complacency, prompting her to dub our present 'The Dithering':

> We, human people everywhere, must address intense, systemic urgencies; yet so far, as Kim Stanley Robinson put it in *2312*, we are living in times of "The Dithering" (in this SF narrative, lasting from 2005-2060—too optimistic?), a "state of indecisive agitation". Perhaps the Dithering is a more apt name than either the Anthropocene or Capitalocene! The Dithering will be written into earth's rocky strata, indeed already is written into earth's mineralized layers.[342]

Her work begins with the premise that the catastrophe that we are deep in the midst of catastrophe and living in times of immense danger, noting, as Zalasiewicz elucidates in *The Earth After Us,* that our time will be written into Earth's rocky strata.[343] Haraway does not believe environmental catastrophe, which has long since been well underway can be stopped. She writes: 'The sixth Great Extinction is not a metaphor... Perhaps it can

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[340] Haraway, D. (2016b) Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices Durham: Duke University Press. 168.
[341] Ibid. 11.
[342] Ibid. 103.
[343] Haraway, 2020, Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together. 9.

be reduced. Still, the extinguished kinds will not return, no matter the heroics of technoscientific resurrective biology.'[344] She contends, however that it is important to acknowledge the fine line that exists between appreciating the extent and seriousness of our troubles and succumbing to effects of sublime despair, and its politics of sublime indifference.[345] For her, it is imperative we attend to making a positive difference for 'multispecies flourishing' and eschew narratives that tell us that it is already too late.[346] To express the challenge that lies before us, she turns to the work of Tsing, who:

> …urges us to cobble together the "arts of living on a damaged planet"; and among those arts are cultivating the capacity to reimagine wealth, learn practical healing rather than wholeness, and stitch together improbable collaborations without worrying overmuch about conventional ontological kinds.[2]

Haraway calls her endeavour of seeking real stories that are also speculative fabulations and speculative realisms 'staying with the trouble'.[347] Her term signifies a deep commitment to redoing ways of living and dying attuned to still-possible finite flourishing and still-possible recuperation.[348] This term denotes Haraway's aversion to defeatism and the ways in which she endeavours to make a politics for this world. She relates the notion to SF, when she expands the genre of science fiction, which she includes this under the title 'SF' which includes the notion of 'speculative fabulation'. She argues a story can help one remember what one thought they knew, how it can exercise a muscle critical for caring about flourishing and enhance collective thinking and movement in complexity. Her work represents an effort to remain in the present, instead of dwelling in the future or past, in a way that constitutes a refusal to pretend that our circumstance is acceptable and, similarly to Leopardi's work, allowing for pain to arise from this.

Haraway refuses to evade the dilemma of our situation, in which our egos and ecology conflict and pushes back against comforting narratives of progress which promise a brighter future. Instead, she insists on fully appreciating how it is within our power to change how we live now, whether it is to live with greater nobility, compassion, and sense of humility, or whether it is to foster a stronger community amongst our species, and

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[344] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 78.
[345] Haraway, (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. 4.
[346] Ibid. 3.
[347] Ibid. 10.
[348] Ibid. 10.

others, which she purposefully refers to as 'more than human'.[349] As we will see speculative fabulation arises from enabling one to unfold new worlds through arousing an appetite for what's possible, and to place lures that are susceptible of bringing forth possibilities that were already dormant in situations. According to Haraway, becoming with, not becoming, is the name of the game. She writes 'telling stories together with historically situated critters is fraught with the risks and joys of composing a more livable cosmopolitics'.[350] Companion species are relentlessly becoming-with.[351] Haraway's work is driven by acknowledging missing relatives: this is a multispecies fabric with a key human thread,' she insists.[352]

Whilst we have seen that Leopardi's fabulation moves from the negative connotations to the positive ones, while Haraway's work extends the positive ones from the outset. Donna Haraway's work can be read as an extension of this later aspect of Leopardi's utilisation of the fable, which takes up its capacity to encourage the imagination and open up new futures. Yet Haraway's fabulation differs from Leopardi's in the sense that instead of looking backwards to when a dramatic catastrophe took place, and to a past where the social bond was stronger, from which we have fallen from grace, Haraway's thinking begins from within the catastrophe itself. It exploits the fables generative character, using speculative thinking drawn from Stengers, and combining this with creative fabulation to forge new futures, in which kinship and flourishing is considered to extend beyond our species alone.[353]

Haraway criticises the stories underpinning terms like the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene for falling back on notions of the human as though these may be a given, and which she sees as one of 'those old saws of Western philosophy', also including human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, which, for her, the best social and natural sciences have already made unthinkable.[354] She questions why the epochal name of the Anthropos imposed itself: '…at just the time when understandings and knowledge

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[349] This is notion is unpacked in the insightful 'Prologue: Uplifting Animals' in Danta, (2018), *Animal fables after Darwin: Literature`, Speciesism`, and Metaphor*.
[350] Haraway, 2016, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 15.
[351] Ibid. 12-3.
[352] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm. 79.
[353] Stengers, I. (2010). *Cosmopolitics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
[354] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 30.

practices about and within symbiogenesis and sympoietics are wildly and wonderfully available and generative in all the humusities, including noncolonizing arts, sciences, and politics?'[355] Haraway describes our job as being 'to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible, and to cultivate with each other in every imaginable way epochs to come that can replenish refuge'.[356] Although she is critical of the term the Anthropocene, Haraway's work is underpinned by a belief in the strength of collectives, which leads her to accept the numerous terms currently employed to describe and think through our era.[357] Her attitude to embracing challenges that present themselves, and her appreciation of the multiplicity of viewpoints, is reflected in her use of the phrases 'multiverse' in the place of 'universe', used for example, by her former student Katie King.

The ongoing catastrophes that are increasingly frequent and which increasingly affect rich nations are prompting a jolt to action that open our eyes to the idea that our concept of nature is utterly and fundamentally flawed. The Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene, if that's what we choose to call it, has meant, as a result that the existence of swaths of species, including humans are jeopardised, to the extent that scientists are repeatedly having to sound the alarm that we are immersed in the midst of the Sixth Great Extinction Event. Environmental catastrophes, however, are not the only problems that Haraway's work speaks to and strives to alleviate, as Ruha Benjamin's work, which examines the relationship between kin, an important idea in Haraway's thinking, and social injustice elucidates.

Kin and Black AfterLives

In her essay 'Black AfterLives Matter. Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice', Ruha Benjamin argues that speculative methods can be used to experiment with alternatives to the racist status quo. Currently subjugated people, for whom empathy is rationed, as she shows, are left to petition repeatedly for admission into the category of human. For example, as she points out, even the fundamental assertion that Black Lives Matter must be perversely defended with empirical, and often traumatic, empirical

[355] Ibid. 57.
[356] Ibid. 100.
[357] O'Neill-Butler, L. (2016) *Interview with Donna Haraway*: Artforum. Available at: https://www.artforum.com/interviews/donna-j-haraway-speaks-about-her-latest-book-63147.

evidence.[358] Citing Octavia E. Butler's novel *Kindred*, in which Sarah, an enslaved woman and a voice from the black afterlife warns the modern protagonist of the dangers of running away from a Maryland plantation, Benjamin argues that stories matter because of their ability to show *what is possible*.[359] She argues that stories can produce the meaning and material with which to build and throw into question what we consider the real world.[360]

In her examination, Benjamin shows the variety of technologies, such as military technologies, which are reproductive. One example she describes is how US nuclear testing on the Marshall Islands, which took place from 1946 to 1958, still wreaks havoc on the health of the Marshallese.[361] In addition to causing cancers in the short and long term, the intergenerational harm caused by the radiation fallout includes congenital disabilities that have caused babies to die at birth. Those suffering from the history of the fallout of the testing have had their capacity to thrive, propagate, and imagine, in order to create their own futures diminished.[362] Through such considerations, Benjamin critically explores the extent to which reproductive capacity may be celebrated and encouraged or disparaged and repressed depending on one's social status.[363] She describes the experience of one classmate, who, while having a c section when she was seventeen was subjected to her doctor asking her mother in a matter-of-fact tone: 'While I have her open, should I just go ahead and tie her up-?', for instance.[364] Forty years prior to this, the civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer was given an unwanted hysterectomy after checking in to Sunflower City Hospital to have a tumour removed, adding to the long history of poor, unsuspecting Black women being operated on in this way without their consent and with no regard for their reproductive rights.[365]

As well as examining the relationship of the military to reproductive technologies, Benjamin also warns us that our scientific ability to engineer genomes raises questions of

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[358] Benjamin, 52-3.
[359] Benjamin, 52.
[360] Ibid. 52.
[361] Ibid. 55.
[362] Ibid. 53.
[363] Ibid. 55.
[364] Ibid. 55.
[365] Ibid. 56.

which traits are deemed desirable and worthy of extending into future generations.[366] She writes: 'Top down eugenic policies give way to reproductive technologies that allow consumers to select "socially desirable" traits.'[367] She argues that our newfound capacity to synthesize human biology raises fundamental questions about reproductive value.[368] It urges us to challenge our thinking about the implications it has for social life and public policy, considering housing, education, employment and incarceration. Resources like water, food, education and healthcare are all used as tools of reproduction, impacting life chances. Recognising this leads us to consider technology as an elastic notion, as the work of reproductive justice analysts Dorothy Roberts and Charis Thompson shows us. Adopting an approach informed by these thinkers allows us to see that the engineering of human genomes is entangled with the assembly of water systems and the structuring of tax codes, which itself is tied to the construction of racially segregated neighbourhood, which are manufactured in relation to the US prison apparatus.[369] Whilst the generic sense of engineering is to work to bring something about, Benjamin considers the outcomes of these sociotechnical designs and challenges our assumptions that results of engineered work are necessarily positive.

Benjamin's analysis of the issues of intimacy and kinship is expressly anti-racist, as is necessary when considering issues of reproduction from an ecologically concerned perspective. The annual report 'Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care 2020' from MBRRACE-UK, who work to improve the care provided to women, babies and families during pregnancy and the newborn period shows severe racial inequalities in the care women receive. This includes the appalling statistic that Black women are four times more likely to die as a result of pregnancy than white women in the UK today.[370]

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[366] Ibid. 60.
[367] Benjamin, R. "Catching our breath: critical race STS and the carceral imagination." *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 2 (2016): 145-156. 149.
[368] Benjamin, 60.
[369] Ibid. 61.
[370] Knight, M, Bunch, K, Tuffnell, D, Shakespeare, J, Kotnis, R, Kenyon, S, Kurinczuk, J (Eds.) (2020). Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care: Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2016-18. Retrieved on 16/02/2020 from https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/assets/downloads/mbrrace-uk/reports/maternal-report-2020/MBRRACE-UK_Maternal_Report_Dec_2020_v10.pdf. iii. And Knight, M., Bunch, K., Tuffnell,. D, Shakespeare, J., Kotnis, R., Kenyon, S., & Kurinczuk, J. J. (Eds.). (2019). Saving lives, improving mothers' care: Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland confidential enquiries into maternal deaths and morbidity 2015-17. Retrieved on 15/02/2020 from https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/assets/downloads/mbrrace-uk/reports/MBRRACE-UK Maternal Report 2019 - WEB VERSION.pdf. iii.

Historically, this number was five times more, and one example of crucial collective action responding to the deadly combination of racism and sexism that Black women experience during pregnancy is the campaign FIVEXMORE, which presents six steps that pregnant black women can take to put an end to these statistics, including trusting one's feelings, speaking up and documenting everything they experience and are told.[371] These statistics are the result of the experience of the distress and pain of Black women during and after pregnancy being consistently treated by medical professionals as less significant than that of white women, a problem which is partly rooted in the sustenance of pseudoscientific beliefs about Black women's ability to bear pain.[372] One recent high profile example of this issue is Serena Williams's experience of health complications after childbirth and bias continues to affect care and put Black women's lives at risk in a range of clinical settings extending beyond childbirth.[373] The recent death of Dr Susan Moore, a physician in Indianapolis, who described being made to feel like a drug addict for asking for treatment, before later dying of Covid-19 illustrates this.[374] In the self-recorded video she posted to Facebook, Dr Moore described a white physician telling her he would send her home at night, in spite of her weak medical condition, leading her to assert, days before she died: 'this is how Black people get killed', yet again showing the dire need for systemic change.[375]

In her work, Benjamin examines the underlying causes of these disparities and questions how to go about tackling them, highlighting the importance of kinship and collective action as suitable measures of resistance. [376] She argues that, to counteract such inequities, racialised people are forced to learn to inhabit subterranean spaces, where they are required to forge new forms of kinship.[377] Shining a light on the role social media has played in this plight in recent years, Benjamin points to the viral nature of hashtags such as #CrimingWhileWhite. In posts using this hashtag, white people described the crimes

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[371] Retrieved on 10/02/2020 from https://www.fivexmore.com/6steps.
[372] Hoffman KM, Trawalter S, Axt JR, Oliver MN. Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2016;113(16):4296-4301. doi:10.1073/pnas.1516047113. 4296.
[373] Omeish Y, Kiernan S. Targeting bias to improve maternal care and outcomes for Black women in the USA. EClinicalMedicine. 2020; 27:100568. Published 2020 Oct 3. doi: 10.1016/j.eclinm.2020.100568. 1.
[374] Omeish Y, Kiernan S. Targeting bias to improve maternal care and outcomes for Black women in the USA. EClinicalMedicine. 2020; 27:100568. Published 2020 Oct 3. doi:1 0.1016/j.eclinm.2020.100568. 1-2.
[375] Givens, Raymond. "One of Us." *New England Journal of Medicine* (2021): e18.
[376] Benjamin, 56.
[377] Ibid. 56.

which they were excused of, giving concrete evidence of the extent to which white people are given second chances that Black people are not afforded, underpinning Benjamin's poignant claim that 'second chances are the currency of white supremacy.'[378] In her examination of how Afterlives are engineered, she argues that law and custom may kill with impunity and that white people may be born over and over. As such she shows how social reproduction begets afterlives.[379] Her argument makes it evident that social reproduction needs careful attention as we work to formulate less destructive ways of living in the world, in which more than solely a select few are given the opportunity to flourish.

The routine degree to which white people are given second chances and the disparity of power that Benjamin ties to Afterlives is also often compounded when it is weaponised, as increasingly occurs in divided societies. Recently, there have been several cases of white women baselessly accuse Black men of crimes, exploiting their white privilege while putting Black men's lives in concrete danger by facilitating encounters with authorities known to be violently racist and risking the chances that these males will subsequently be given. A particularly disturbing example of this, due to his young age, is the experience of the fourteen-year-old son of jazz musician Keyon Harrold, who was falsely accused by a white woman in a hotel lobby of stealing an iPhone, who later, upon finding her phone refused to acknowledge the repercussions of her behaviour.[380] Another example is a dog walker in Central Park, Amy Cooper, who called the police to claim that a Black man who had asked her to put her dog on a leash was threatening her life, thereby bringing him under direct threat of police violence.[381] Furthermore, the disparity in the policing of crowds according to race, particularly in America, was shown in the contrast

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[378] Ibid. 42-3 and 56.
[379] Ibid. 42-3.
[380] Associated Press. 'Jazz trumpeter Keyon Harrold claims woman assaulted his son after false theft accusation'. Published 29/12/2020. Retrieved on 14/01/2021 from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/29/jazz-trumpeter-keyon-harrold-claims-woman-assaulted-his-son-after-false-theft-accusation.
[381] Jirard, S. A. (2020). 'Policing America: Racism, Reform, and Redefining Justice'. 1. Retrieved on 14/01/2020 from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d5ad9e0100bdf0001af0f5e/t/5fbd47244145100551f8038c/1606240047582/Jirard+Policing+America_Racism+Reform+and+Redefining+Justice_Color.pdf.

between the treatment of Black Lives Matters social justice activists and the largely white domestic terrorists and rioters who stormed the Capitol.[382]

As previously stated, Benjamin describes how Black people have utilised social media to forge new forms of kinship.[383] She also illustrates how social media has been used as an instrument to conjure up spiritual kin and vivify collective action.[384] In a particularly resonant passage, discussing a speech by the mother of Sandra Bland, who died in jail after being charged an overzealous bail of $5000, Benjamin describes how unjust Black deaths bring about a collective awakening, which is increasingly tied to an invocation of the idea of 'ancestral presence'.[385] She cites the scholar of modern slavery Zhaleh Boyd, who shows that this connection with ancestry is signified in hashtags which call upon recent ancestors like Tamir Rice, Micheal Brown and Ayana Jones as spiritual kin who can animate social movements, bringing their lives to the foreground, and tracing how the digitally mediated form of connectivity is extended to legendary African figures' use of co-presence.[386] Boyd and Benjamin help us see how the use of social media in the fight for racial equality absorbs and learns from the call to ancestral powers of Queen Nanny, Boukman and Gullar Jack, in their fight against imperialist, white supremacist opponents.[387] As well as being highlighted on social media, as Benjamin and Boyd examine, the strength of this idea of ancestry as a means for resisting racist forces also commonly features in Jazz music, which is experiencing a renaissance, particularly in the UK, thanks to movements such as Tomorrow's Warriors, cofounded by Janine Irons and Gary Crosby.[388] This reference to ancestry is discernable in contemporary music such as

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[382] Borger, J. 'Maga v BLM: how police handled the Capitol mob and George Floyd activists – in pictures'. Published 07/01/2021. Retrieved on 14/01/2021 from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/06/capitol-mob-police-trump-george-floyd-protests-photos.
[383] Benjamin, 46.
[384] FIVEXMORE have established a campaign of this nature, encouraging people to raise awareness of racial disparities in pregnancy by using the hashtag #fivexmore on their social media accounts. They amplify campaigns doing crucial work to decolonise contraception and facilitate remote access to programmes such as Black Mums Matter Too, to help women navigate their perinatal journey collectively. Books such as Candice Brathwaite's *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* (2020) have also arisen out of this space and respond to the overrepresentation of white motherhood on social media apps, such as Instagram, documenting the experience of Black British motherhood.
[385] Benjamin, 45.
[386] Ibid. 46.
[387] Benjamin, 46.
[388] Rubenstein R. (2001) Haunted Longing and the Presence of Absence: *Jazz*, Toni Morrison. in: *Home Matters*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. doi: 10.1057/9780312299750_8. 112. And Werner, Craig Hansen. *Playing the Changes: From Afro-Modernism to the Jazz Impulse*. University of Illinois Press, 1994. 288.

that of Shabaka and the Ancestors, as well as in the Sons of Kemet album 'Your Queen Is a Reptile', for example, in which each track is named after a woman of colour, such as Queen Nanny of The Maroons, who Hutchings asserts history has overlooked.[389]

Speculative Methods

In addition to examining the significance of the role of the ancestor, Benjamin argues that speculative methods can be used to experiment with alternatives to the racist status quo.[390] She writes:

> *Fictions… are not falsehoods but refashionings through which analysts experiment with different scenarios, trajectories, and reversals, elaborating new values and testing different possibilities for creating more liveable worlds.*[391]

One speculative tale that Benjamin cites as an example that is useful for thinking through refashionings of the social structure and the way it informs reproduction is the book series *The Expanse*, which was adapted for television. It presents, she writes, a diverse cast that challenges contemporary racial and gender hierarchies while simultaneously signalling how, in the future, racial vision and division may be reconciled.[392] In the work, generations in two hundred years' time are forced by overpopulation to colonise Mars and the Asteroid Belt, where they are born and raised as Martians and Belters, who are physically more vulnerable.[393] For Benjamin, who analyses the comparison between the physically and militarily stronger descendants on Mars to the weaker Belters, the series emphasises the powerful narratives required by systems of domination:

> Rather than acknowledge how exploitation and ghettoization produce the weak physiology of Belters, those in power view such physical differences as proof that the subjugated are not strong enough to govern themselves. Through interlocking logics of racism and ableism, biological differences become indicators that oppressive social orders simply reflect the natural order.394

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[389] 'History needs to be set alight': Shabaka Hutchings on the radical power of jazz by Ammar Kalia. Published 10/03/2020. Retrieved on 15/01/2021 from https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/mar/10/history-needs-to-be-set-alight-shabaka-hutchings-on-the-radical-power-of-jazz.
[390] Benjamin, 52.
[391] Ibid. 59 and Benjamin, R. "Racial fictions, biological facts: Expanding the sociological imagination through speculative methods." Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience 2.2 (2016): 2.
[392] Ibid. 57.
[393] Ibid. 57.
[394] Ibid. 57.

The Belters live in a world of manufactured scarcity and precarity like our own and their experience also reflects those of subjugated groups in our society.[395] Whilst the land and labour of the Belters are deemed valuable, their lives are not, and the physical differences distinguishing Belters from Martians are '*materializations* of a dominating imagination', Benjamin argues.[396] As she highlights, *The Expanse* examines not only how racism may be a carryover from humanity's past, but also how it may be reproduced and reimagined. It attends to the challenge of studying race and striving to denaturalise it without dematerialising it, while staying attentive to the practices and sociopolitical determinants that produce it.[397] Benjamin cites many other contemporary writers of the speculative tradition, who are Black, Latinx and indigenous writers and who remake and reproduce kinship in different ways, creating a bounty of anti-racist feminist worlds.[398] She describes collections like *Dark Matter* and *Octavia's Brood* (2015), as a 'rescue mission' for our under siege radical imaginations, and highlights the work of writers like Jewelle Gomez, Tananarive Due, Nalo Hopkinson, Andre Hairston, NK Jemison and Nisa Shawl to demonstrate that speculative methods are a mode of extending present configurations of power and difference into the future to see how else they might materialise and morph.[399]

Through the lens of the Afterlife, Benjamin examines how whose traits are reproduced, and the manner in which they may be reproduced, can inform what questions we can ask in order to foster change:

> Is it possible to channel our tool-making prowess to artfully engender more just and equitable futures? Can we decolonize our afterlives, and make black reproductive matter as part of ongoing futurist, feminist agendas? Ultimately, reproductive justice entails crafting and imagining the worlds we cannot live without just as we dismantle the ones we cannot live within, where crafting and dismantling have as much to do with imaginaries as they do social policies.[400]

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[395] Ibid. 57.
[396] Ibid. 58.
[397] Ibid. 59.
[398] Ibid. 59.
[399] Ibid. 60.
[400] Benjamin, 61.

Benjamin asserts that ongoing regimes of social control and containment are a central tenant of maintaining social order that further natal alienation.[401] One in seven Black children in the US have one parent in prison as a direct consequence of this regime, and the criminalisation of Black teenagers leads to their engineered exclusion from opportunities as adults, creating a cycle that takes energy, skill and effort to resist on a daily basis that white people are spared the need to expend.[402][403] Like Audre Lorde says in her paper 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', delivered at Amherst College in 1980:

> The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.[404]

As Benjamin argues in response to such ongoing regimes of social control and containment, the targets of institutionalised kinlessness are positioned so that, in order to attain reproductive justice, they must work deliberately and creatively to engender institutions and environments that foster a kinful existence.[405] She draws on Malika Cyril's work on 'e-carceration', to show that the e-monitoring advocated for as a social and technical alternative to incarceration forces youth back into custody because of 'technical violations'.[406] These new mechanisms, which are sold as attractive fixes, end up being new grounds for subjugation.[407]

Because the popularity of electronic monitoring technologies allow the companies producing them to posit themselves as being 'family friendly', they show how feminist concerns regarding subjugated groups' wellbeing are appropriated, not to ends that help such communities to flourish, but rather to threaten the ability of Black families to survive.[408] This is why Benjamin argues we need a Black feminist science and technology

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[401] Ibid. 60.
[402] Murphey, D. and Cooper, P.M., 2015. Parents behind bars: What happens to their children? Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved on 14/01/2021 from: https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-42ParentsBehindBars.pdf.
[403] Perera, J. "How Black Working-Class Youth are Criminalised and Excluded In The English School System." Published by the Institute of Race Relations 2020. Retrieved on 14/01/2021 from: https://irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/How-Black-Working-Class-Youth-are-Criminalised-and-Excluded-in-the-English-School-System.pdf. 18, 22 and 40.
[404] Lorde, A. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde. 1984. Freedom, California: Crossing (2007). 115.
[405] Benjamin, 61.
[406] Ibid. 62.
[407] Ibid. 62.
[408] Ibid. 62.

studies (STS) approach to prison abolition, which she expands on in 'Catching Our Breath: Critical Race STS and the Carceral Imagination' (2016). In Black Afterlives Matter, Benjamin argues that, to prevent the proliferation of surveillance colonisation after incarceration, work to bring about reproductive justice must not only abolish prisons, but also do away with the many innovative 'e-offspring' the carceral system produces.[409]

Self-help, Grassroots Action and Social Mothering

> Certainly, there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation.
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> Lorde, Audre
> *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde.* (1984). 114.

Contrasting with the oppressive nature of these systems, Benjamin highlights the innovative forms and methods of kinship that work to counteract the damage wrought by such systems.[410] Organisations like Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC) unite mothers against the institutions that lock away their children, and mobilise, forming a political identity around the 'symbolic power of motherhood'.[411] The Mothers ROC organised radical self-help strategy sessions within the community rooms or a public housing project.[412] In the strategy sessions, members successfully extended their reach to reclaim their power and space. They organised a gang truce that enabled family and community members to safely navigate turfs and participate in a funeral procession for a young man killed by police. In the following weeks, they organised rallies and protests, developing a sustained effort that gave family members the support and tools to demand justice for their children who were consumed by the carceral system.[413] The Mothers ROC analysed and committed to fighting against anti-Black racism, while also welcoming into their ranks Latina and white mothers of prisoners.[414] Rather than letting real differences of race separate them, Mothers ROC united with those who shared their experience of mothering those who were incarcerated, drawing on this commonality as a source of

[409] Ibid. 63.
[410] Benjamin, 63.
[411] Ibid. 63.
[412] Ibid. 63.
[413] Ibid. 63-4.
[414] Ibid. 63-4.

strength. As Benjamin informs us that the political geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, this 'social mothering' presents us with a 'glimpse of utopia's work' by successfully mobilising across the proliferation of boundaries that oppressive carceral geographies depend upon.[415]

Social mothering appears in speculative fiction, such as in the speculative author Marge Piercy's work to refashion family structures, kinship and social mothering in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), where Piercy expands on Benjamin's analysis of the utopian power of 'social mothering'.[416][417] In this work, Connie Ramos, a woman of colour who is incarcerated in a mental institution, engages in dialogues with a time-traveller - similarly to in *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler, which Benjamin cites.[418] Through Connie's conversations with her futuristic companion Luciente, she learns about the social mothering that takes place in the future, where every child is adopted by three co-mothers, or 'coms', who are 'seldom sweet friends', so children are not caught up in love misunderstandings, and where 'kidbinders' mother everybody's children.[419] In her analysis of social mothering in the work, Elaine Orr argues in 'Mothering as Good Fiction: Instances from Marge Piercy's "Woman on the Edge of Time"' (1993) that Piercy's clear message is twofold: 'powerful white men have been the chief authorities in relation to all mothers, and white women have often reaped the cultural rewards of "good" mothering while depending on women of color and poor women to bear the brunt of the work and the societal anger that results when mothers aren't perfect.'[420] Orr's argument and Piercy's fiction support Benjamin's analysis of the experience of Mothers ROC, who bear most heavily the brunt of society's anti-Blackness, and illustrate how works of speculative fiction can open up a space in which to examine how societal relations in relation to mothering could play out differently in the future.

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[415] Ibid. 64.
[416] Piercy's work is cited by Haraway who borrows the term 'per' from *Woman on the Edge of Time* and adopts it for use in her Camille Stories.
[417] Haraway, D. Modest Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. Femaleman©_Meets_Oncomouse™: Feminism and Technoscience. Routledge Chapman & Hall: New York. Golovan SP, Meidinger RG, Ajakaiye A. e al.(1997). 1 and 21. and Haraway, D. Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature Haraway, D. J. (2010). New York: Routledge. 7.
[418] Benjamin, 52.
[419] Piercy, M. Woman on the Edge of Time: The classic feminist dystopian novel. Random House, 2016. 75-6.
[420] Orr, E. "Mothering as Good Fiction: Instances from Marge Piercy's" Woman on the Edge of Time"." *The Journal of narrative technique* 23.2 (1993): 61-79. 75.

Returning to Benjamin's essay, she describes the importance of forming solidarity across differences in the way that Mothers ROC accomplished.[421] Such choreography of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls 'interracial political solidarity' must take shape, as Benjamin argues, across education, healthcare, work and any other life-affirming projects that suffer the detrimental effects of oppressive regimes of social control.[422] Furthermore, as Jessica Perera encourages us to recognise in her case study of how the English school system criminalises and excludes Black working-class youth in London, such efforts of solidarity must always be continuous, because the gains made by Black self-help groups, civil rights projects, anti-racist teachers and others frequently face erasure and pushback by politicians.[423] For Benjamin, who closes her essay with a consideration of kinship, kinfulness arises as an effect of, not a precursor to social struggle.[424] In the end, she argues: 'cultivating kinship is cultivating life.'[425] She concludes: kinship is imaginary, which means it can be borne out of a creative process of fashioning reciprocity and care.[426] Benjamin's examination of kinship highlights what is at stake in Haraway's speculative fabulation around the idea, which is set out in her *Camille Stories.*

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[421] Benjamin, 64.
[422] Ibid. 64.
[423] Perera, Jessica. "How Black Working-Class Youth are Criminalised and Excluded In The English School System." Published by the Institute of Race Relations 2020. Retrieved 01/01/2021 from: https://irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/How-Black-Working-Class-Youth-are-Criminalised-and-Excluded-in-the-English-School-System.pdf. 17-18.
[424] Benjamin, 64.
[425] Ibid. 65.
[426] Ibid. 65.

Chapter Two – Speculative Fabulation: *'Camille Stories: Children of Compost'*

> With all the unfaithful offspring of the sky gods, with my littermates who find a rich wallow in multispecies muddles, I want to make a critical and joyful fuss about these matters. I want to stay with the trouble, and the only way I know to do that is in generative joy, terror, and collective thinking.[427]
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> Haraway, D
> 'Tentacular thinking: Anthropocene, capitalocene, chthulucene', 75.

Whilst, like Le Guin, Haraway sees that we are in distinct danger of not only being part of the 'killer story', the damaging and faltering narratives underling the West, but of getting finished along with it, Haraway's speculative fabulation is her urgent effort to 'seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.'[428] Haraway conceives of speculative fabulation as collective, situated and consciously playful.[429] Throughout Haraway's work, she reveals the generative and joyous character of her SF practice. She argues, for instance, that we must 'lust for multispecies environmental and reproductive justice' and that 'kin' may be used as an assembling word, helping us to thinking about how kin generate kin.[430] In *Staying with the Trouble*, she describes 'speculative fabulation' as a 'a practice of worlding.'[431] She considers speculative fabulation and the proliferating SFs, to be important practices in everyday life and scholarly writing, a mode of attention, and a theory of history.[432] Fabrizio Terranova - with whom Haraway wrote her invitation to collective fabulation the *'*Camille Stories', alongside Vinciane Despret - describes speculative fabulation as:

> A type of narration that enables one to unfold new worlds through arousing an appetite for what's possible (what could or could have taken place). It is not just about understanding a totally new creation, the remarkable difference is that it is about placing lures susceptible of bringing forth today possibilities that were already in situations.[433]

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[427] Haraway, D. (2016a) 'Tentacular thinking: Anthropocene, capitalocene, chthulucene', *e-flux*, 75.
[428] Guin, U. K. L., Haraway, D. and Bul, L. (2020) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.* Ignota Books. 20.
[429] Ashburner, X. (2019) 'Fabrizio Terranova (Dir.). Donna Haraway: Storytelling for Earthly Survival. Icarus Films, 2016', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 34(99), pp. 128-130. 128.
[430] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 103. & Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm 68.
[431] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 230.
[432] Truman, S. E. (2019) 'SF! Haraway's Situated Feminisms and Speculative Fabulations in English Class', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 38(1), pp. 31-42.
[433] Fabrizio Terranova. Retrieved on 17/02/20 from: https://fabbula.com/speculative-fabulation-word/.

Influenced by the work of thinkers like Sarah Lefanu, Pamela Sargent, Shulamith Firestone, Judith Merril, Marleen Barr, Vivian Sobchack, Fran Bartkowsky, Eric Rabkin, Laura Chernaik, Sherryl Vint, Teresa De Lauretis, Margaret Atwood, Monique Wittig, and more, Haraway insists we need to consider what decolonial feminist reproductive freedom would look like in a troubled multispecies world.[434] It would not suffice, she argues, to merely produce an anti-imperialist, antiracist, anticlassist and prowoman project.[435] Such a project, she contends, must radically alter the humanist basis of our thought, thereby changing, our histories and the stories we tell about our lives. With this goal in mind, she examines how science fiction and speculative fabulation can be important means of thinking and, indeed, theoretical practices in themselves itself, and not just containers for illustrations of arguments to be imported from elsewhere.[436]

To do this, she draws on SF, which she describes as: 'that potent material semiotic sign for the riches of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, science fact, science fantasy—and, [I suggest], string figures.'[437] It gives Haraway ideas, stories, and shapes, with which to think ideas, shapes, and stories in feminist theory and science studies.[438]

'Camille Stories: Children of Compost'

In the 'Camille Stories', Haraway exemplifies the way in which we might rebalance human numbers, examining theories of feminist concern regarding reproductive justice while relating this to ecological thought. Like 'La Ginestra', the 'Camille Stories' offer guidance for the cultivation of the judgement, of which we currently suffer an extreme dearth, particularly in terms of our treatment of the environment. This lack of judgement is reflected in our refusal to act to the alarm raised by 1700 independent scientists, including the majority of living Nobel laureates in the sciences, on the 'World Scientists'

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[434] Haraway, D. (2013). SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, No.3*. doi:10.7264/N3KH0K81/.
[435] Haraway, (2016), Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 6.
[436] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 12.
[437] Haraway, D. (2013). SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, No.3*. doi:10.7264/N3KH0K81.
[438] Haraway, 2020, Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together. 10.

Warning to Humanity', twenty five years ago, which had to be reissued in 2017.[439] One of the recommendations that the signatories - which included Eileen Crist, the feminist environmentalist who writes against 'human-exceptionalist business-as-usual' discourse with which Haraway aligns herself - proposed was that we stabilise the human population.[440] Despite the first warning being issues in 1992, by the time the second warning was published, the human population had increased by 35%. As such, it threatens to exert such a stress on the Earth that it could overwhelm other efforts to realise a sustainable future.[441] Haraway, like many other feminists before her, recognised the connection between the liberation of women and the depletion of the Earth's resources. Arguing that 'making kin differently is at the heart of feminism', she examines the role that reproductive justice has on the environment, arguing therefore for the establishment of kin rather than reproduction.[442] As she articulates in *Making Kin*, where she contends that analyses such as that provided in the world scientists' warnings must be done if we are serious about making kin for multispecies environmental and reproductive justice: 'The super-peopling of the earth with both humans and industrial and pathogenic nonhumans is a worlding practice premised on the commitment to endless growth and vastly unequal wellbeing.'[443] Haraway questions how to imagine and practice multispecies kin making and multispecies reproductive justice in sustained times of excess human generation.[444]

An important way in which she takes up this task is in the speculative fabulation is written up and included within Chapter 8 of *Staying with The Trouble* (2016). She made the 'Camille Stories: Children of Compost', with Terranova, who directed the film 'Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival' having met at a "narration spéculative" workshop at the *Gestes Spéculatifs* colloquium organized at Cerisy by Stengers in the summer of 2013.[445] These are an example of speculative fabulation, where the story of people living in an ongoing time of extinction due to climate change is told.

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[439] Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Newsome, T. M., Galetti, M., Alamgir, M., Crist, E., Mahmoud, M. I., Laurance, W. F. and countries, s. s. f. (2017b) 'World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice', *BioScience,* 67(12), pp. 1026-1028.
[440] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 49.
[441] Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Newsome, T. M., Galetti, M., Alamgir, M., Crist, E., Mahmoud, M. I., Laurance, W. F. and countries, s. s. f. (2017b) 'World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice', *BioScience,* 67(12), pp. 1026-1028. 1026.
[442] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 72.
[443] Ibid. 72.
[444] Ibid. 73.
[445] Haraway, D. (2019) 'It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies,* 34(3), pp. 565-575.

In the communities formed within these stories, human numbers are intentionally reduced, whilst the increasing of flourishing of all species are prioritised within transformative practices for intentional kin making.[446] A clear difference is marked between the first and last articulation of the Camille Stories, in which human numbers are reduced from 10 billion in 'Camille 1', where Camille died in 2100 to 3 billion – a stable level - in 'Camille 5', where Camille died in 2400.[447] Her work helps us maintain hope that, through building joyous communities, we can instantiate infectious ways of being that can initiate substantial change in response to the 'Great Dithering'.[448]

Tasked with the challenge to fabulate a baby, and to find a way to bring the infant through five human generations, Haraway, with the others in her group sought to find a way to imagine flourishing with and for a renewed multispecies world within our time of surplus death affecting both individuals and kinds.[449] The story Haraway includes in *Staying with the Trouble* is not a conference report intended for the archives, that strives to tell exactly the same story that her cowriters Vinciane Despret and Fabrizio Terranova would remember, but rather it is included as an 'ongoing speculative fabulation', taking up and extending the stories, while encouraging others to do the same, and to use the experience as a teaching tool for engaging with the environmental crisis.[450] Haraway describes the 'Camille Stories', as invitations to participate in a kind of genre fiction, speculative fabulation, which is committed to strengthening ways to propose near futures, possible futures, and implausible but real nows.[451] She relates the participation of readers in the stories of the Children of Compost to the arts of fan fiction, suggesting that, among the 'arts of living on a damaged planet', which Anna Tsing urges us to cobble together, we might include an invitation to participate in 'sym fiction'. She writes: '…The Children of Compost want the Camille Stories to be a pilot project, a model, a work and play object, for composing collective projects, not just in the imagination but also in actual story writing.'[452] Such fiction would bring earthly ones together.

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[446] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 152, 154, 159.
[447] Ibid.144.
[448] Ibid. 145.
[449] Haraway, 135.
[450] Ibid. 135.
[451] Ibid. 136.
[452] Ibid. 136.

Haraway envisages the Camille Stories as a means with which we can create stories and live in a flourishing manner in the teeth of the impoverisation and destruction, which characterise our times of surplus death.[453] In their efforts to rise to the challenge they had been set, Haraway and her cowriters endeavoured to ensure that the baby they would fabulate would play a part in learning, through their five human generations, to radically reduce the pressure of human numbers on earth. They agreed that they could not approach these generations through the lens of heteronormative reproduction and with this development, as Haraway describes, they were immediately left with a child who, by virtue of their separation from the story of heteronormative reproduction, neither had any truck with conventional genders, nor with human exceptionalism.[454] As a result, this child was born for what Haraway describes as: 'sympoiesis-for becoming-with and making-with a motley clutch of earth others.'[455] By departing from the problematic norm of human exceptionalism, this protagonist rendered present generations of vulnerable, coevolving species of the not-yet-born and not-yet-present: Camille is born of compost, ripening in the earth, 'under the earth', where lines of flight to new worlds may be envisaged, and where other life forms and ways of living may be nourished.[456]

The Conditions for Utopia

Haraway situates Camille and the Communities of Compost as inhabitants of a utopian movement, as characters in the stories and literatures in the history of the earth that may help us to recraft conditions that enable flourishing both in the present, marred as it is by the rate and scope of the destruction wrought by our epoch, and in times to come.[457] Camille was born into a powerful and interlaced, planetwide eruption of numerous communities, or individuals and organisations joined with each other and migrant communities with the shared aim of reshaping the life of earth's inhabitants for an epoch that could come after the discontinuities of the Anthropocene

[453] Ibid. 135-6.
[454] Ibid. 136.
[455] Ibid. 136.
[456] Ibid. 135.
[457] Haraway, 137.

> In system-changing simultaneous waves and pules. Diverse indigenous peoples and all sorts of other labouring women, men and children – who had been long subjected to devastating conditions of extraction and production in their lands, waters, homes and travels – innovated and strengthened coalitions to recraft conditions of living and dying to enable flourishing in the present and in times to come. These eruptions of healing energy and activism were ignited by love of earth and its human and nonhuman beings and by rage at the rate and scope of extinctions, exterminations, genocides, and immiserations in enforced patterns of multispecies living and dying that threatened ongoingness for everybody. Love and rage contained the germs of partial healing even in the face of onrushing destruction.[458]

In their carefully considered world, inhabitants of ruined places like our own dangerous centuries of irreversible climate change and continuing high rates of extinction, went against the mistaken endeavour to start from scratch and resisted the powerful, destructive fictions of settler colonialism and religious revivalism.[459] People found themselves profoundly tired of waiting for never materialising external solutions to local and systemic problems. They asked and responded to the questions of how to live in the ruins, with the living and ghosts alike.[460] The diverging communities from every economic class, colour, caste, religion, secularism and region found themselves tied together, living by transformative yet simple practices which served as infectious lures for many other people and communities whose development was marked by creativity.[461] These innovative ways of establishing linking practices grew from the sense that, in ruined places, kin must be made in innovative ways.[462] This included the way children, who 'must be rare and precious' ought to be raised, with robust company of other young and old ones of many kinds.[463] Kin relations, in Haraway's speculative utopia, can be formed at any time in life, and parents and relatives can be invented or added at significant points of transition, enacting strong and lifelong commitments and obligations of diverse kinds.[464] Crucially, failed models of population control, like those expressions of imbalanced structures of power that Benjamin described, provided strong cautionary tales. [465] The endeavour was to make kin and to rebalance human numbers, thereby reducing the strain on the earth, and to engage intense energies and passions, while

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[458] Haraway, 137.
[459] Ibid 138-40.
[460] Ibid. 137-38.
[461] Ibid. 138.
[462] Ibid. 138.
[463] Ibid. 138.
[464] Ibid. 138.
[465] Ibid. 138.

simultaneously seeking to increase flourishing, for humans and other earthly inhabitants.[466]

These communities had to work intentionally across significant difference and deep damage to establish their kin.[467] The key task for the Children of Compost was to work to build upon the efforts of anticolonial, antiracist and proqueer feminist movement to undo the conception of the necessity of a 'natural' tie between kin.[468] For the emerging communities, reproductive freedom remained a vexed question because the process necessarily had to avoid exacerbating deep inequalities, and the decision to bring a new human infant into being is strongly structured to be a collective decision.[469] Coercion to make or not make a new child was considered a crime that could lead to banishment from the community, and recrafting definitions and practices of reproductive freedoms was one of their chief obligations.[470] In the world of the Camilles one's reproductive freedom was actively cherished, while individual decisions to make a baby were discouraged.[471]

Sympoeisis

> If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming with – in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake.
>
> Haraway, D.
> *When Species Meet* (2008), 244.

In the 'Camille Stories', Haraway explores 'sympoiesis', which means 'making' and 'worlding-with'.[472] In these stories, she brings together human members of a group with actively threatened species, challenging anthropocentrism's centering of human life.[473] Haraway sets forth a notion of 'becoming with', which reflects a rich web that we can inhabit, moving away from the human-machine relation that she considers in the *Cyborg Manifesto* and focusing instead on the human-animal relation, re-engaging with the

[466] Haraway, 138.
[467] Ibid. 138.
[468] Ibid. 139.
[469] Ibid. 139, n7. 217.
[470] Ibid. n7. 217.
[471] Ibid. 139.
[472] Ibid. 58.
[473] Ibid. 140.

work's brief examination of the human-animal relation, by appealing to 'boundary creatures' to complicate our thinking.[474] Taking up the speculative methods that Benjamin argues can help us test different possibilities for creating more liveable worlds with alternatives to oppressive status quos, Haraway uses SF to attend to the issue of species extinction by elaborating on new values and trajectories relating to kinship in her configuration of Camille's situation.[475] Moving suddenly into the realm of science fiction, Haraway lays out the setting she creates for Camille, where humans who are born in the context of community decision making are born as 'symbionts' with animals of actively threatened species, whose possibility of a future is fragile.[476] Haraway tells us that human babies born through individual choice do not become biological symbionts, giving rise to complex difficulties and sometimes violent clashes between what she terms 'syms', those who have been born with genetic aspects of threatened species and 'non-syms', those that haven't been modified.[477] Haraway calls the creation of something new in the biological mode, through cobbling together living entities to open up the palette of possible collaborative living 'symbiogenesis.'[478] She note Benjamin's warning that our scientific ability to engineer genomes has implications for social life that can easily replicate injustice and responds by purposefully adopting an approach of engineering a design that will have positive effects.[479] This 'becoming with' of 'syms' encourages each new child to live with the animal or plant part of themselves, in turn enabling the development of care and nurture that lacked to the extent that the very ongoingness of the nonhuman species was threatened.[480] The bodily heritage of each symchild's has genes and microorganisms from the animal added to it at birth to encourage sensitivity to and cultivate the animal's response to the world for the human member of the team.[481]

Haraway describes how, despite the difficulties between of hierarchical caste formations and more conventional human individuals, that the Children of Compost came to see their

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[474] Rae, G. The Philosophical Roots of Donna Haraway's Cyborg Imagery: Descartes and Heidegger Through Latour, Derrida, and Agamben. Hum Stud 37, 505–528 (2014). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-014-9327-z. 522.
[475] Benjamin, 52-59.
[476] Ibid. 140.
[477] Ibid. 140.
[478] Ibid. 218.
[479] Benjamin, 60.
[480] Haraway, 140.
[481] Ibid. 141.

share kind as 'humus, rather than as human or nonhuman.'[482] Corridors of connection and care are restored and help communities to imagine and practice repair of ruined lands and waters. The central tenant of the new child's education is how to nurture the animal symbiont, and the other beings the symbiont requires, to cultivate ongoingness that will last for at least five human generations.[483] This nurturing of the animal variant necessitates being nurtured in turn, and inventing new practices of care, recuperations, survival and flourishing.[484] Each new child is given the treasured power of individual freedom to choose a gender, and bodily modifications are normal and accepted, as long as they tend to both symbionts' wellbeing.[485]

Haraway's play with 'becoming-with' in the 'Camille Stories' undermines solipsistic thinking, because sym children are given the opportunity to learn about their position in a complex system through the affective capacities of their own bodies, and those of the more-than-human world.[486] As Kate Wright argues in 'Becoming-with' in 2014, the theme involves becoming attuned to a multiplicity of worlds through an encounter with a new relationship context, which creates a greater opportunity for consideration of how lives are always connected.[487] Petra Tschakert notes in 'More-than-human solidarity and multispecies justice in the climate crisis', published in 2020, that Haraway's work helps us stop 'inflicting violence on those classified beneath us in the brutal hierarchy of humanity', as Naomi Klein points out is essential for us in *On Fire* (2019).[488] Haraway's ethic of 'becoming with' and 'making kin' is grounded in connectivity and encounter. It involves making ontological room for other beings and reframing our ethical encounters with unknown others.[489]

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[482] Ibid. 140.
[483] Haraway. 140.
[484] Ibid. 140.
[485] Ibid. 141.
[486] Wright, K; Becoming-with. *Environmental Humanities* 1 May 2014; 5 (1): 277–281. doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615514. 279.
[487] Ibid. 280.
[488] Klein, N., (2019). On fire: the (burning) case for a green new deal. New York: Simon & Schuster. 21.
[489] Tschakert, P. (2020) More-than-human solidarity and multispecies justice in the climate crisis, Environmental Politics, DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2020.1853448. 10-11.

Were Leopardi writing today, Haraway's concept of 'becoming with' would provide him with a conceptual tool to extend and strengthen his critique of species exceptionalism and anthropocentricism, particularly within his depiction of life on the flanks of Mount Vesuvius in 'La Ginestra', where he could further develop his poetic examination the interplay of the multiplicity of worlds within the scene. As contemporary readers, we could explore how what Deborah Bird Rose terms the 'embodied knots of multispecies time' could allow us to extend his work. for example, we might consider how this notion could prompt us to examine how the relationships among living beings on Mount Vesuvius offer the basis for an account of the life-giving and life-affirming qualities of ethical time, encouraging us to become more accustomed to thinking in terms of temporal diversity.[490]

In Haraway's 'Camille 1', Camille's people, who were dedicated to living well within ruins, moved to a site that had been devastated by coal mining in the Appalachian Mountains of southern West Virginia. They allied themselves with the struggling multispecies communities they found there and in other places that had been ravaged and eviscerated by fossil fuel extraction and deforestation.[491] The Communities of Compost understood their task to be to cultivate and invent the arts of living with and for damaged worlds already in place. Rather than treating ruin as an abstraction or a type, they saw their task as being for those living and dying in ruined places.[492] They knew they could fail this at any time because they had to continuously and tirelessly work against a legacy of centuries of economic, cultural, and technological exploitation of people and other beings, alongside the excess extinctions and exterminations that continued to stalk the earth: 'Still, successfully holding open space for other critters and their committed people also flourished, and multispecies partnerships of many kinds contributed to building a habitable earth in sustained troubled times.'[493] Their work, as such, was fragile and the dangers were intense.

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[490] Deborah Bird Rose, "Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time," *Environmental Philosophy* 9, no.1 (2012): 127-140. 128.
[491] Ibid. 141.
[492] Ibid. 143.
[493] Ibid. 143.

In the story of 'Camille 1', The infectious nature of the Communities of Compost proved successful enough to prevent the earth's population from reaching more than 11 billion by 2100. By restricting the population levels in 2100 by 1 billion to 10 billion, breathing room was created that opened up possibilities for ongoingness for many threatened ways of living and dying for both human and nonhuman beings.[494] The Communities of Compost lived in a town they called New Gauley to honour the lands and waters that were devastated by mountaintop removal coal mining and they understood that the Great Dithering could end in radical collective action which could ferment a turbulent but generative time of reversals, revolt, revolution and resurgence or in terminal crises.[495] For their first few years, rather than birthing new children, they concentrated on building an economy, culture, rituals and politics in which children would be rare but precious. Haraway wrote that: 'the kin-making work and play of the community built capacities critical for resurgence and multispecies flourishing.'[496] The kin making practice of friendship was celebrated and built upon, and by 2025, the community felt ready to birth their new babies to be bonded with animal symbionts. The older children, who had helped found the community, were ready to be older siblings to the symbiont youngsters, although everybody knew that it would not be easy to learn to live collectively in care-taking symbiosis with another animal as a practice of making flourishing multispecies futures and repairing damaged places.[497]

Camille 1 was referred to with the gender-neutral pronoun 'per', which applied to every person whether or not they decided to develop the identity of one gender – and Camille 1 was the only youngster linked to an insect, a monarch butterfly of North America.[498] The point was to give the butterflies, which were declared the state insect of West Virginia, a chance to have a future in a time of mass extinctions.[499] New Gauley, over the first hundred years, welcomed 100 new births with babies joined with animal symbionts. Scientists in this time were unsuccessful in their attempts to establish human-animal symbiosis with adults, finding the critical receptive times for humans were in foetal

[494] Ibid. 144.
[495] Ibid. 144-5.
[496] Ibid. 145.
[497] Ibid. 146.
[498] Ibid. 141.
[499] Ibid. 142.

development, nursing and adolescence.[500] Neither were animals modified with human material, because their roles in the symbioses were to teach and to flourish in all possible ways in damaged, dangerous times. The Communities of Compost committed to maintaining their size while keeping their new births to a level compatible with the earth's numbers declining eventually by two thirds. Migrants from communities of ruin elsewhere, leaving desperate situations, were seen to bring with them and their trauma extraordinary insight and skill for the work to be done, which ensured they were welcomed.[501]

For three generations, New Gauley emphasised the in-migration of people, and by 2300, more a billion human beings on earth had been born into new kinds of symbiotic relationships with other critters.[502] All symbiont children developed visible traits and sensory similarities to their animal partners in early childhood, and the consequences of this blindsided the adult 'compostists', including the eruption of five serious conflicts in New Gauley and the symbiotic young struggling to integrate mindful bodies unimaginable to their parents and being the only one of its kind in a generation.[503] Symbiont children developed complex subjectivities composed of loneliness, intimacy with non-human others, intense sociality, specialness, lack of choice, sureness of future purpose and fullness of meaning. This tended to turn into arrogance and exceptionalism toward non-sym children, as well as their own parents and as a partial consequence of this, non-sym children and adults sometimes felt threatened by the symbionts, which challenged non syms in their efforts to diverge from equating humanity with Anthropos.[504]

New Gauley compostists found that storytelling was the most powerful practice for comforting, inspiring, remembering, warning, nurturing compassion, mourning and becoming-with each other and recognising their differences, hopes and terrors. The Communities cherished elaborating on the science and arts, and emphasised a deep and wide range of approaches to educating. Play was the most powerful and diverse activity

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[500] Ibid. 146.
[501] Haraway, 147.
[502] Ibid. 148.
[503] Ibid. 149.
[504] Ibid. 149.

for navigating crafting safe ways to navigate conflict and collaboration and this, with the practice of friendship, formed the core of kin-forming apparatuses. Many forms of libraries evoked curiosities and sustained knowledge projects for learning to live and die well throughout the work of healing other beings, damaged places and selves and decolonial multispecies studies were essential. In their studies of the experiences of intentional, dystopian, utopian, experimental and revolutionary communities, they were frequently disappointed at how so many of these accounts began with a premise of starting again, rather than learning to inherit, without denial, and to stay with the trouble of damaged worlds:

> Although hardly free of the sterilizing narrative of wiping the world clean by apocalypse or salvation, the richest humus for their inquiries turned out to be SF—science fiction and fantasy, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, and string figures.[505]

SF blocked the foreclosure of utopias in Camille 1, thereby keeping politics alive. Storytelling was the 'seed bag' for flourishing for compostists, and Camille 1 was fed on stories.[506]

The Seed Bag and the Killer Story

Haraway wrote the introduction to Ursula K. Le Guin's, essay 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', which was published in 2019. Le Guin's parents were anthropologists, and the writer influenced Haraway's thinking about narrative and the figure of the woman gatherer, prompting her to employ the idea of the 'seed bag' in her 'Camille Stories'.[507] In her essay of 1986, Le Guin begins by musing that, in the temperate and tropical regions where hominids appear to have evolved into human beings the vegetable was the staple food. To stay alive and fat, she writes of we gathered seeds, roots, sprouts, shoots, nuts, leaves, berries, fruits and grains, adding bugs and mollusks, and netted or snared birds and fish, or rats and rabbits to increase protein intake.[508] This work was much easier that peasants slaving away in someone else's field after the invention of agriculture, and the average prehistoric person could make a nice living working about fifteen hours a

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[505] Ibid. 150.
[506] Ibid. 150.
[507] Haraway, 2020, 'Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together'. 9.
[508] Le Guin, 25.

week.[509] This left a lot of time for other things, so that those without a skill or a baby to care for, decided to hunt mammoths, becoming the hunters that occupy the cave wall and the mind. These hunters would stagger back, returning not only with meat and ivory, but also, crucially, with a story.[510] These stories were more compelling than the experience of preparing seeds and oats because they had action and a hero, the latter of which was considered tremendously powerful. These stories, of men hunting and returning to the wild oat patch occupied by women and their children, pressed women and children into the 'tale of the Hero', although this wasn't their story, as Le Guin tell us; it was his.[511]

Le Guin describes how, in Virginia Woolf's notebook, where she was planning what ended up as *Three Guineas,* Woolf recorded that she wished to reinvent English in order to tell a different story. Under the heading 'Glossary', she included heroism, which she defined as 'botulism', equating the hero with the bottle. Proposing the bottle as hero, Le Guin suggests considering bottle in its older sense, beyond referring to a bottle of wine, to a sense of container in general, to something that holds something else. She reminds us that, without something to put food in, even something as uncombative as an oat will escape us; using one's stomach as a primary container to put oats in while they are handy does not help the following day when it is cold and raining and a few oats to chew on will be beneficial, and without a suitable container life is made more challenging.[512] According to many theorisers, Le Guin writes, a container in which to hold gathered products, like some kind of sling or net carrier, must have been amongst the earliest cultural inventions.[513]

Considering the earliest cultural invention in this light, as Elizabeth Fisher does in *Women's Creation* (1975), goes against the story of the bone, the sticks, the spears and the swords used by the Ape Man that we have all heard about countless times. As Le Guin argues, this in itself, is news. [514] Yet it must also be old, since long before the weapon; the knife and the axe, we needed something to bring home the fruits of our labour – the potatoes we dug- in: 'with or before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool

[509] Ibid. 25.
[510] Ibid. 27.
[511] Le Guin, 28.
[512] Le Guin, 28.
[513] Ibid. 28.
[514] Ibid. 29.

that brings energy home. It makes sense to me. I am an adherent of what Fisher calls the Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution'. [515] Le Guin described how this theory personally grounds her in human culture. She describes the alienation she felt from the long-told story of culture originating in the use of objects to bash and kill, which interrupted her desire to have any part in it.[516] Wanting to be human too, she, and women more generally, were encouraged to be loyal to civilisation, as Lillian Smith observed in her challenge to Freud's mistake for woman's lack of civilisation.[517] Le Guin resolved that, if that's what it took - to make a weapon and kill with it - to be human, then she was evidently extremely defective as a human being: 'That's right, they said. What you are is a woman. Possibly not human at all, certainly defective. Now be quiet while we go on telling the Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero.'[518] Soothed by the balm of the 'carrier bag' theory, Le Guin considered how it is a human thing to do to put something that is useful, edible, or beautiful, something that you want, into a bag, and then take it home with you, in order to later eat, or share, or store. This new narrative prompted by women like Woolf and Fisher, enabled Le Guin to feel, freely and gladly, like she was a human being after all, for the first time.[519]

The story of the hero hid Le Guin's humanity from her. It highlighted how the story can make all the difference. Diverting from 'the killer story', the 'Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero', allowed her to see how, in allowing ourselves to become embroiled in the killer story, it alienates us denies us our full humanity, thereby reducing our very capacity for survival. Consequently, Le Guin urges us to consider what a new story would look like, which could continue once the old one has finished, thereby highlighting to us the benefits of SF.[520] While she acknowledges that this doesn't come easily, she reminds us that the 'untold' story is an exaggeration, that people have been telling the life story for ages, in a myriad of words and ways, including myths of creation and transformation, trickster stories, folktales, jokes and novels.[521]

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[515] Ibid. 30.
[516] Ibid. 30.
[517] Ibid. 30.
[518] Le Guin, 32.
[519] Ibid. 33.
[520] Ibid. 33.
[521] Ibid. 34.

Haraway draws on Le Guin's appreciation of the power of stories, of their ability to nourish us and give us new narratives that allow those that have historically been excluded to also feel important, significant and cared for. The Communities of Compost in Haraway's 'Camille 1' also sought to avoid telling the story of the hero in their endeavour to relate honestly with and engage in the troubles of the past in damaged places. Le Guin's 'seed bag' and 'carrier bag', intended for oats and seeds and berries, diverged from the killer story, in which Le Guin humorously reminds us of how unendearing the hero looks: '[the Hero]… needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle. You put him in a bag and he looks like a rabbit, like a potato'.[522] Haraway follows Le Guin's subsequent suggestion that we avoid the linear, progressive definition of science and technology and redefine these as primarily cultural carrier bags rather than weapons of domination. In doing so, Haraway followed Le Guin's lead, and contributed to making science fiction a far less rigid and narrow field.[523] Discussing the way her reading of Le Guin informs her work, Haraway writes:

> I want to engage in a carrier-bag practice of storytelling, in which the stories do not reveal secrets acquired by heroes pursuing luminous objects across and through the plot matrix of the world. Bag-lady storytelling would instead proceed by putting unexpected partners and irreducible details into a frayed, porous carrier bag. Encouraging halting conversations, the encounter transmutes and reconstitutes all the partners and all the details. The stories do not have beginnings or ends; they have continuations, interruptions and reformulations—just the kind of survivable stories we could use these days.[524]

Haraway's 'Camille Stories' fit this description of having continuations and reformulations, and they highlight for us how we can use fabulation as a teaching tool in the context of our own time of crisis. Her engagement with Le Guin's 'seed bag' or 'carrier bag' theory encourages us to do our own work of continuous storytelling, involving the reconstitution of partners in new social organisations, which she exemplifies in the 'Camille Stories', where she invites our participation, creativity and the activation of our imaginations.

As Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick argue in *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway* (2013), for both Le Guin and Haraway, challenging the influence of the 'killer story' and searching for alternatives is an urgent task, one which prompts Haraway

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[522] Ibid. 25.
[523] Le Guin, 36.
[524] Haraway, D. (2004) *The Haraway Reader*. Psychology Press. 127-28.

to seek other storytelling partners, who produce different readings that might teach us to see differently.[525] Haraway's use of symbiosis in the 'Camille Stories' represents her engagement with other storytelling partners. Another relevant example of how fabulation can be used to encourage us to see the world from a different, and less anthropocentric, point of view is Tsing's example of speculative fabulation, which follows Haraway's concept of companion species, title: 'Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species: For Donna Haraway'.[526] This work rewrites Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), telling world history from the point of view of fungal associates, and it was included as part of a web-book *Party Writing for Donna Haraway!*, which is part of the reception of Haraway's work, sharing journeys to the unfamiliar prompted by her thought.[527]

In 'Camille 2', the second Camille asks for chin implants of butterfly antenna as a coming-of-age gift at age fifteen. This sign of lived symbiosis in its second generation (Camille 2 was born in 2085, when human numbers are 9.5 billion) adds 'to the corporeal pleasure of becoming-with' by enabling the vivid tasting of the flying insect's world to become the heritage of the human partner. Camille 1 had mentored Camille 2, and sought to prepare per for visiting diverse communities, however Camille 2 was unable to know how to greet the Monarcas, who were the syms of the living butterflies and the dead of the indigenous Mazahua people when meeting them on per first trip to Mexico. It became essential for Camille 2 to learn about the Mazahua's land and water struggles, migrations for ill-paid work and illegal forest cutting, and to come face to face with the Mexican and U.S. states' ongoing suppression of and extraction from indigenous peoples. Camille 2 had to grasp how active the dead were for the Mazahua, and how critical they were to the work of compostists who sought to restore damaged land and its human and nonhuman beings. This involved letting go of colonialist notions of religion and secularism in order to appreciate the semiotic materiality of those that came before: 'Until sympoiesis with the dead could be acknowledges, sympoeisis with the living was radically incomplete.'[528]

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[525] Grebowicz, Margret, and Helen Merrick. Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway. Columbia University Press, 2013. Harvard. 131-32.
[526] Tsing, A. "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species: For Donna Haraway." Environmental humanities 1.1 (2012): 141-154.
[527] King, K, *Party Writing for Donna Haraway*. Retrieved on 01/01/2020 from: https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/11832.
[528] Haraway, 157.

Camille 2 learned about the struggles for water and forest eco-justice in the region, a struggle that continued throughout per lifetime and after.

By the time of Camille 3's birth in 2170, when human numbers were 8.5 billion, two thirds of the residents of the Communities of Compost around the world were symbionts engaged in intense work and play for sustaining vulnerable beings across the harshest centuries of planetary crisis and suffering.[529] Rapid climate change and interlocked ecosystem collapses swept the earth, in which the mass extinction event of the Capitalocene and Anthropocene continued.[530] However, by the time that Camille 3 was fifty years old, it was clear that human numbers were declining within a deliberate pattern of heightened environmental justice.[531] This imagined future within Haraway's work exemplifies the capacity of speculative fabulation to create an image of what a better future to which we can aspire to might look like. It encourages us to take seriously the possibility of patterns of heightened environmental justice, which we can use to help us turn this into a reality, while recognising that, even after 150 years of significant work to counteract our planetary crisis, work to make life on our planet sustainable will necessarily remain ongoing. As Haraway writes in 'Camille 3', a powerful recognition and strengthening of practices not obliterated in the Capitalocene and Anthropocene was required for responding to planetary crisis, and birth rates were deliberately brought below replacement rates, while practices of making kin, not babies, had taken hold inside and outside the Communities of Compost.[532] 'Camille 3' shows how, against all expectations, it was possible to make space for many of the earth's most vulnerable, and by the time of per generation, forests in the transvolcanic belt of Mexico were resurgent and water had been restored to the pillaged aquifers.[533] Humus-friendly technological innovation, creative celebrations and rituals, profound economic restructuring, reconfiguration of political control and demilitarisation had all made an impact and were growing in force.[534]

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[529] Ibid. 159.
[530] Ibid. 152-59.
[531] Ibid. 159.
[532] Haraway. 160.
[533] Ibid. 160.
[534] Ibid. 160.

By 2200, it was inescapably clear that the changes arising from the general recognition that both humanity and animality had been fundamentally transformed and that the changes were not the same everywhere.[535] This recognition was exhilarating, turbulent and dangerous, and the daunting task of Camille 3's generation was to invent earthwide cosmopolitics between and among syms and non syms. In a passage that highlights the influence of Le Guin's impact on Haraway's fabulation, Haraway writes in 'Camille 3':

> Peoples from every fold of earth had long been both generated and nourished by stories, myths, performances, powers, and embodiments of entities not divided into categories recognizable to most conventional Western philosophy and politics. Such stories and embodiments were also deeply embedded in the practises and accounts of both recent and long-established peoples living throughout what was once called the West. Camille 3's generation found biologies and storytelling to be the richest veins for weaving the needed fabrics to bind syms and non-syms together.[536]

Camille 3 and many of per generation were entranced by coming-of-age stories in SF, including that of Lyra Belacqua and her demon told by Phillip Pulmann in the trilogy *His Dark Materials*, which spoke to their generation's appreciation that 'living-with was the only possible way to live-well'.[537] These stories, heartened syms and non syms, who were forging planetwide ontological revolutions for making kin, which can also inspire us today.[538]

The penultimate Camille, detailed in 'Camille 4' was born in 2255 when human numbers were 6.5 billion and new viral diseases afflicted the food plants that many species including the monarchs relied upon, causing them to disappear. Camille 4 mentored the young sym Camille 5 before dying in 2355, by which time it had become clear that the migrations of the butterflies were doomed.[539] By 2300, thousands of Speakers for the Dead had been tasked with bringing creatures who had been irretrievably lost into potent presence. They taught practices of remembering and mourning that escaped the shackles of 'Double Death', which plagued the ways of living and dying in the Plantationocene, Anthropocene and Capitalocene.[540]

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[535] Ibid. 160.
[536] Ibid. 161.
[537] Ibid. 162.
[538] Ibid. 160-162.
[539] Ibid. 163.
[540] Ibid. 164.

Camille 5 was born when human numbers were 4 billion, in 2340, and by 2425 over 50 percent of all critter species living in 2015 had vanished.[541] Human syms had taken on ever more properties of their animal partners, and many were syms with extinct partners.[542] Camille 5 inherited the task from per mentor to become a Speaker for the Dead, bringing lost lifeways into ongoing presence through active memory. This required movement through mourning, and the task of the Speakers for the Dead was to strengthen the healing that was gaining momentum across the earth.[543] By Camille 5's generation, there were millions of vanished species and there was extensive work to do to replenish heart and mind for and with those who chose to stay with the trouble.[544] Speakers for the Dead ultimately became their own kind of sym, and were tasked with bringing into being the emerging ways of life of an always evolving home world, seeking and releasing the energies of the past, present and future Cthulucene, and refusing to cease the layered, curious practice of becoming-with others for a habitable and flourishing world.[545]

Haraway 'Camille Stories' exemplify her engagement with speculative fabulation, which she encourages others to take up in order to consider new ways to live and die well within the trouble. John Halstead notes examples of works dealing with this theme in *Another End of the World is Possible* (2019), taken not only from literature, but also from films, music and photography. For example, in literature, he cites Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis series, Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* and John Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*.[546] We could also take Halstead's list as inspiration to consider the many contemporary authors who have chosen to write their own fables, reclaiming the form's expressive power, including Susan Sontag with her fable of an office worker, 'The Dummy', and Le Guin's 'fable of Occupy Wall Street', 'Ninety Nine Weeks: A Fairy Tale' and Salmon Rushdie, in *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*.[547] These authors all heed and thrive upon the fable's generative qualities.

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[541] Ibid. 166.
[542] Ibid. 166.
[543] Ibid. 166.
[544] Ibid. 167.
[545] Haraway, 168.
[546] Halstead, J. (2019) *Another End of the World is Possible.* LULU Press. 38.
[547] K. Le Guin, U. (November 21, 2011) 'Ninety-Nine Weeks: A Fairy Tale'. Retrieved on 23/12/2019 from: https://io9.gizmodo.com/ursula-k-le-guin-writes-a-fable-of-occupy-wall-street-5862142.

Haraway's criticism of our species and questioning of 'so-called Western scripts' aligns with the critique of the West that Leopardi depicts throughout the *Operette*. However, Haraway arrives at a different conclusion to Leopardi. Whilst he draws a distinction between our species -who he starts to have more sympathy for later in his work- and nature, Haraway blurs such distinctions, pushing instead for multiplicity, for the extension of kinship beyond our own species. Moving away from human exceptionalism, modern theorists are increasingly viewing our situation from the perspective that we are earthbound creatures, considering this to be a more significant attribute than being human. Her work extends Leopardi's fabulation because it does not rely on nature being the enemy we need in order to establish the communities and networks of solidarity we require in order to thrive within the muck.

Haraway explains how her own formation as a historian of biology and science studies scholar and feminist shaped the development of her understanding that population works as a category that makes worlds in its reproductionist and productionist image, which resources everything.[548] She responds to the oppression faced by women due to their capacity for reproduction by developing a compelling argument for building structures of kinship that truly encourage the flourishing of those involved , formulating as her core question: 'How to ensure that babies are rare, nurtured, and precious and that kin be abundant, surprising, enduring, and treasured?'[549] She questions what is to be done about 'multispecies reproduction justice and flourishing', about how, as the sociologist Jenny Reardon questions, we might redefine and reimage stories of what is possible.[550] We see then, that Haraway's understanding of nature led to her development of kinship, which is a category that applies to a broader scope of beings than Leopardi's notion of companionship does. For Haraway, 'making kin' should involve the establishment of strong connections, which should be given as much, if not more, credence as making babies.[551] She considers kinship and love outside the nuclear family structure, which has historically oppressed women and children and served to reproduce the lives of the dominant power.

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[548] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 83.
[549] Ibid. 91.
[550] Ibid. 68.
[551] Ibid. 17.

Haraway's notion of speculative fabulation is inspired by the speculative thinking of Stengers, from whom she wished to learn how we ought to respond to our precarity.[552] Haraway examines both living and dying well, emphasising that the best thinking often takes place through storytelling. She draws on feminist and ecocritical theoretical methodology, she uses the work of the British social anthropologist Strathern to develop her idea that we need to develop how we think. For Haraway, the British social anthropologist who wrote *The Gender of the Gift* embodies 'the art of feminist speculative fabulation in the scholarly mode'.[553] Strathern's work taught her that anthropology is a knowledge practice that studies relations with relations. SF', she writes in *Staying with the Trouble*: 'is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come.' String figures, according to Haraway, are like stories. They:

> …propose and enact patterns for participants to inhabit, somehow, on a vulnerable and wounded earth: My multispecies storytelling is about recuperation in complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, as beginnings. In the face of unrelenting historically specific surplus suffering in companion species knotting, I am not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. Call that staying with the trouble. And so I look for real stories that are also speculative fabulations and speculative realisms. These are stories in which multispecies players, who are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference, redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation.[554]

For Stengers, Haraway's 'So far' indicates defiance against continuities claiming the power to warrant their own continuation. It resists by saying the past has no power on the present, to legitimate what has worked 'so far', or to disqualify alternatives. It proclaims the battle cry that things did not need to be what they are, and, as Stengers asserts, frees facts freed from their charge of authority.[555] As Haraway heeds from Le Guin, we need

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[552] Haraway, D. (2013). SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, No.3*. doi:10.7264/N3KH0K81/.
[553] Haraway, 2016, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 12.
[554] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 10.
[555] Stengers, Reclaiming Imagination Speculative SF as an Art of Consequences, 14.

to start telling new stories, for the sake of our ongoingness.[556] She also notes Tsing's claim in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2017) that:

> Ever since the Enlightenment, Western Philosophers have shown us a Nature that is grand and universal but also passive and mechanical. Nature was a backdrop and resource for the moral intentionality of Man, which could tame and master Nature. It was left to fabulists, including non-Western and non-civilizational storytellers, to remind us of the lively activities of all beings, human and not human.[557]

Throughout the course of this work, we have examined, primarily through Leopardi, how fabulists can remind us of the lively activities of all beings and prompt us to think carefully about our relationship with nature. Such works, we have seen, include Nietzsche's mockery of the arbitrariness of the human intellect in 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, Lucian's "True Story" and "Trips to the Moon", and Leopardi's cosmologically inspired fables criticising anthropocentrism. Haraway's consideration of non-Western and non-civilizational storytellers also helps to remind us of the lively activities of more than human beings and prompts us to recognise and consider the importance of stories to such groups. For example, this is shown in her examination of the role of Navajo weaving, which she describes as cosmological performance, for its thoughtfully use of the wool of Navajo-Churro sheep, with whom the Navajo's relations represents due care for nature, considering the sheep as a companion species, as well as in her repetition of references to the reverence of stories of the Agta people, who are modern hunter gatherers in the Philippines. Through reading Leopardi, we found that, despite one's care in heeding the folly of human exceptionalism, the matter of dismantling its effects may be more complex than we might at first imagine. The problem nonetheless remains that we need to urgently assess our narrative and the inclusion within this of our opposition to nature in our attempts to responsibly respond to ongoing environmental catastrophe.

Haraway's work has enduring strength in its refusal to capitulate to societal norms, as we see on her work on kinship in relation to familial and reproductive structures, for example. Without Leopardi's nostalgic recourse to the past, Haraway's work moves beyond what

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[556] Tsing, A. L. (2017a) *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 20.
[557] Tsing, A. L. (2017b) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.* Princeton University Press. vii.

came before, and she seeks to ensure there is adequate appreciation of the necessity to expand the groups of lives that are deemed to matter and who current systems serve. She sees SF as a powerful tool for overcoming the tunnel vision of what the Western philosophical tradition takes to be its subject, recognising speculative fabulation as a resource with which to counter this. For example, of Marge Piercy, she writes: 'Like all good SF, [they] redid what counts as—what is—real.'[558] Haraway revels in the 'turbulent and generative rivers of SF', enjoying its 'voluptuous pleasures.'[559] In doing so, she brings to the fore the narratives and stories too often excluded, often in order to maintain the 'so-called modern Western scripts' perpetuated by the victors of history, the dominant subject within the narrative whose groundwork is somehow sustained despite its increasingly flawed basis.[560] She follows the lead of the British social anthropologist Strathern, from whom she says she describes herself as indebted:

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. Marilyn wrote about accepting the risk of relentless contingency; she thinks about anthropology as the knowledge practice that studies relations with relations, that puts relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected other worlds.[561]

In her article, 'It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories', published in 2019, Haraway reframes Strathern's claim, arguing that speculative fiction facilitates the challenging search for multispecies reproductive justice.[562] Arising from her contention that 'the colonial and imperial roots and routes of SF are relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated', Haraway uses 'string figure theory' to pay attention to the thread, the matter, used to by Colombian women in Bogotá, Bucaramanga, and Santa Marta, to make bags for collecting 'the stuff of living', known as *mochilas*. Haraway examines the importance of storytelling in relation to weaving, examining how such

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[558] Haraway, D. (2013) 'SF: Science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far', *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 3.
[559] Haraway, D. (2013) 'SF: Science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far', *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 3. This ethos is expressed in musical terms by Ezra Collective, in their Album 'You Can't Steal My Joy' 2019.
[560] She begins the *Cyborg Manifesto* with an excerpt from Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* that reads: 'I want to do something very important. Like fly into the past and make it come out right'. Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* Free Association Books. 7.
[561] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 12.
[562] Haraway, D. (2019) 'It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 34(3), pp. 565-575. 1.

practices help groups to work through their trauma. Her focus on string figures, exhibited for example in practices of women weaving and working with fabric enables Haraway to tap into a rich wealth of material which is usually overlooked. Describing the impact of Le Guin on this aspect of her work, she writes:

> Ursula Le Guin's now famous, then mimeographed and hand circulated manuscript called "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" gave me the courage and the conceptual apparatus to cheer for woman the gatherer in her argument with man the hunter in credible accounts of hominid evolution.[563]

As Haraway examines, carrier bags capture worlds full of many kinds of human and more-than-human people of many kinds. She contends that mochilas strengthen the people who make and use them, making their people more worldly and capable of discerning what is really happening and how it can be different. Each one grows from and demands a response to the urgent questions about how to remake history for the kinds of living and dying that deserve thick presents and thick futures. Haraway writes that, in August 2019, she attended a two-week working trip in Bogotá, Bucaramanga and Santa Marta to examine indigenous flourishing, deep and broad natural social justice and care in communities of layered complexity and resurgent pain. She split her introduction into a discussion of three theoretical *mochilas*, the first of which is where she discussed the embroidery work of AMARÚ, la Mujeres Defensoras del Agua y de la Vida, (the Association of Women in Defense of Water and Life). She described 'Flore-Ser', the first of her three *mochilas,* as a habitat of textile activism by a collective that works for environmental and reproductive rights and collected the physical pieces from her visit in her bag.[564]

This amplification and sensitivity to communities written out of narratives is a significant strength of her work. Often, these communities are those whose lives face immediate, significant, change as a result of climate change, who, as marginalised communities, often remain unheard. For instance, her consideration of Le Guin's carrier bag theory relates closely to Arhauco people claiming their identities in alliance with other Indigenous people, including Kogui, Wiwa and Kankuamo, in order to control their stories and their land in the face of ongoing climate change and ecotourism, and throughout her work she

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[563] Haraway, D. (2013) 'SF: Science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far', *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 3.
[564] Le Guin, 2020, The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. 14.

considers the Black Mesa Water Coalition, Navajo weavers and Hopi people.[565] She works as an ally to anthropologists, such as Leonardo Montenegro, who supports Wayùu communities in the struggle against multinationals like Anglo-American Glencore and BHP Billeton for land. Evading Eurocentrism, she admires the strong alliances that the African-descent and Indigenous communities continue to foster and questions how to join in telling the needed stories, in building the needed worlds, and in muting the dead ones.[566]

Haraway underlines how 'staying with the trouble' involves the work of readying ourselves to the task of allowing for consideration of new narratives and futures that are radically different to what has gone 'so far'. Tsing, who Haraway engages with, recognises the potential for fabulists to remind us of the lively activity of all beings, which is a notion that Haraway extends in her work. She uses the term 'so far' to denote that the stories we engage with do not necessarily need to offer a blueprint for the future or indeed accurately convey the past. Strathern encouraged Haraway to see the importance of stories and the benefits of accepting the risks associated with relinquishing certainty.[567] Sarah Shin and Ben Vickers write in the Preface to Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,* that the challenge that lies before us is to find ways to:

> …listen to the whispers of the trees and the dispossessed, the echoes of grandmothers' tales and what we already know in the deep, dark, stanchion place from which intuition rises; the hold of the story, the bag of stars, the spell, the dream, the crucible of our awakening.[568]

What differentiates Haraway's rising to the challenge of this task from that of Leopardi is that, whilst his project is focuses heavily on retrieving the 'place from which intuition rises,' Haraway's project is more mindful of 'the dispossessed', a reference to Le Guin's work of the same name. Her work is more attuned to the explicit repression of particular subjects' narratives, and seeks these out to amplifies them, employing them to serve her endeavour to find ways to flourish in kinship, thereby extending Leopardi's call for more solidarity. More importantly, Haraway's work is backwards looking specifically in order

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565 Haraway, D. (2020) 'Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together', *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Terra Ignota. 16-7.
566 Ibid. 18.
567 SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far – her fabulation
568 Haraway, D. (2020) 'Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together', *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Terra Ignota. 4.

to serve her forward propulsion, alongside her commitment to the present. Her vision of catastrophe - which we have seen that she deems us to be in the midst of - informs her lack of willingness to mourn a lost 'good life'. Recognising that the good life so commonly held up as lost by philosophers is dependent on the exclusion and repression of others, she seeks to redeem this by ensuring a more radically inclusive future.[569]

For Haraway, we must find and test out ingenious iterations of the sort of world we want to live in if we are to hope to find a habitable life on Earth. To do so we may utilise the space of possibility in the story. She shares her appreciation of the extent of the power that storytelling might behold with Leopardi, who notes in the *Zibaldone* the capacity of the story to closely connect with ones' identity, which gives it an endearing nature that draws people to its narrative:

> I myself have heard various stories told in Italian towns, very distant from one another, various claims about the origins of proverbs, various celebrated ridiculous events, etc., said to have happened expressly to one person in one town; and it was the same in every city, always exactly the same story with just a different name; and I had already heard many of the stories since my childhood told in my own home town and by my parents, with the names of people from the town or region. And some of them I have also found in ancient Italian storytellers, with other names, and the stories are now told as if they happened just a little while ago, to people know to the narrators, or known to someone from whom they heard them.[570]

In her introduction to Le Guin's carrier bag theory, Haraway repeats an example she gives in *Making Kin Not Population* that concerns the Agta people, who, she tells us: 'value storytellers over all other kinds of persons, no matter how useful and functional other kinds of people might be in their society.'[571] Haraway's comment highlights the extent to which the fabulative work of Haraway and Leopardi is propelled by their appreciation of the depth to which stories can capture communities, which both also wish to be built and strengthened.

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[569] Esposito, R. (2012b) *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy.* trans Hanafi, Z. Stanford University Press. 139.
[570] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 4224).
[571] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 93.

Haraway considers embroidery and stitchwork in relation to storytelling is resembles her effective effort to examine untold stories, and to bring new ones into existence.[572] In her introduction to Le Guin's essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 'Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together', she highlights the importance of such string figures when she writes: 'storytelling in embroidery is not a luxury; it is making room for the life story in what Ursula K. Le Guin's called 'the bag of stars.'[573] Slow hand stitching, she argues, is vital for personal and intimate healing, 'for rebinding destroyed communities and for telling histories of land, water, displacement and still possible futures', it is intricately bound up with the fight against masculine domination in all its forms.[574] Haraway described here how Le Guin's 'Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' gave her the courage and conceptual apparatus she incorporates into her work, which she described in the introduction to *Staying with the Trouble* as coming to the rescue when questioning how science fiction and science fact can cohabit happily.[575] For her, speculative feminism, like speculative fabulation was and is an SF practice, a practice that gives her ideas and, stories and shapes to think with which she thinks.[576]

Haraway explains that the role of weaving is important to her practice, relating this to one of two coloured fibres running through her work, writing:

> For the complex or boundary objects in which I am interested, the mythic, textual, technical, political, organic, and economic dimensions implode. That is, they collapse into each other in a knot of extraordinary density that constitutes the objects themselves. In my sense, story telling is in no way an "art practice"--it is, rather, a fraught practice for narrating complexity in such a field of knots or black holes. In no way is story telling opposed to materiality. But materiality itself is tropic; it makes us swerve, it trips us; it is a knot of the textual, technical, mythic/oneiric, organic, political, and economic.[577]

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[572] Haraway, D. (2020) 'Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together', *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Terra Ignota. 15.
[573] Ibid. 16.
[574] Ibid. 15.
[575] Haraway, 2013, SF: Science fiction`, speculative fabulation`, string figures`, so far. & Haraway, 2016, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 7.
[576] Haraway, 2020, Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together. 9.
[577] Haraway, D. J. (1994) 'A game of cat's cradle: science studies, feminist theory, cultural studies', *Configurations*, 2(1), pp. 59-71.

She describes storytelling as a 'fraught practice' that helps us come to terms with complexity and 'boundary objects', those which exceed the categories imposed on them from the outside. She states that she owes many of her ideas to Le Guin, discussing in her introduction to her work the 'mochila', the bags she received in Colombia, which we can examine to reveal the role of strings, threads, fabric and embroidery in her thought, which closely tie together with her proposal for responding to todays' catastrophes. Describing the significance of these carrier bags to today's 'theory in the muck, she writes:

> …each mochila is a bag for the gripping tales and strange realism – the serious fiction, the science fiction, the SF –required for inhabiting the worlds of seeds and stars…To carry, to wear, any of these bags is to enter into the knotting of capacities to respond, to become-with each other in the untold stories we need.[578]

Using an idea of string theory - named 'cat's cradle' in U.S. English - to examine new ways of living well in our damaged worlds, Haraway examines weaving practices of communities and women's craftwork as examples of retrieving sensibility in our lives, discussing weaving, particularly of Navajo women and a crochet project, Crochet Coral Reef.[579] In *Staying with the Trouble,* she writes '…both the Crochet Coral Reef and Navajo weaving are at the heart of thinking/making for more livable politics and ecologies in the times of burning and extraction called the Anthropocene and Capitalocene.'[580] She explains weaving to be a cosmological, rather than merely economical, performance: 'knotting proper relationality and connectedness into the warp and weft of the fabric.' [581] The geometric patterns, repetition and invention of the weavings, she explains, are not produced to be possessed as property, but to propose and embody world-making and world-sustaining relations. Their value, as such, arises from their world-making character, in their instantiation of a crucially sensible 'pattern for right leaving' in an age in which the connection between reason and sense has been severed: 'it performs and manifests the meaningful lived connections for sustaining kinship, behaviour, relational action… for humans and nonhumans'.[582] The practice brings together humans and nonhumans by using the wool of Navajo-Churro sheep, who are

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[578] Haraway, 2020, Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together. 11-2.
[579] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 169.
[580] Haraway, 2016. Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 90.
[581] Ibid. 90.
[582] Ibid. 91.

farmed according to Navajo matrifocal pastoralism, in which sheep are a core companion for living and dying. The art signifies care and reciprocity and enacts relations of natural order.[583]

For Haraway, the relationship between species is crucial and embodies the futures that we can imagine and bring into being for ourselves, and the communities we can forge. She values the openings that such relationships create and does not see the depletion of bottom lines as a problem, but as an opportunity: 'there are quite definite response-abilities that are strengthened in such stories.'[584] She insists that we must pay heed to our differences, allowing space for them, which enables us to cultivate a comfort in complexity that we might otherwise shy away from. This, she believes, enhances collective thinking and exercises a muscle that is critical for caring about flourishing.[585] She writes: 'each time I trace a tangle and add a few threads that at first seemed whimsical but turned out to be essential to the fabric, I get a bit straighter that staying with the trouble of complex worlding is the name of the game of living and dying well.'[586] Haraway uses the image of fabric to consider how we can 'stay with the trouble', a concept which means facing difficulties without shying away from them. Her reference brings to mind the narrative textiles used to help victims of sexual and gender-based violence help recover from abuse and heal trauma through creating story cloths and the neurobiological research which examines this.[587]

Haraway's response to life within the catastrophe is to draw on the power of stories. She deciphers and intervenes with narrative, highlighting that this pathway has persevered by virtue of who has historically been listened to, and who have been silenced. By looking at her work in unearthing and uncovering those voices who don't come from a dominant position and were therefore not sufficiently heard, Haraway becomes a guide in unearthing what ideas have previously been silenced, which can now be taken up now, when the degree of our environmental crisis makes it more likely that they may be heard.

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[583] Ibid. 91.
[584] Haraway, 2016, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. 29.
[585] Gough, N. and Adsit-Morris, C. 'Troubling the Anthropocene: Donna Haraway, Science Fiction, and Arts of Un/Naming', Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 0(0), pp. 1532708619883311. 29.
[586] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices Durham: Duke University Press. 29.
[587] Gantt, L. and Tinnin, L. W. (2009) 'Support for a neurobiological view of trauma with implications for art therapy', The Arts in Psychotherapy, 36(3), pp. 148-153.

For instance, she refers to this when she writes ‘my Colombian friends understand in their bones the importance of what Le Guin taught us to do, to keep telling the ‘other story, the untold one, the life story’.[588] These stories, for Haraway, can be told about new people, about new ‘kin’. Such stories can include multispecies flourishing and embody the act of breaking bread together, of cum panis. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2017) Tsing highlights that, in addition to the histories handed down by Western philosophers, whose concept of nature has had problematic aspects, non-civilization storytellers and fabulists have long since reminded us of the lively activities of beings other than human that other stories have long since been told. Haraway’s work, when it considers arts of weaving and engagements with endeavours to make visible these stories, which are regularly overlooked, hidden, unacknowledged, damaged, destroyed, or written out. Her alternatives are often also radical and new.

[588] Haraway, 2020. ‘Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together.’ 10-14.

Chapter Three – Natureculture and The Joyful Fuss

Haraway introduces the term 'natureculture' in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), where she evaluates the relationship between 'nature' and 'culture', rejecting the ontological divide between nature and culture and human and nonhuman. Throughout her work, she seeks to embody a conceptual courage that is accompanied by an understanding of her notions of 'kinship' and 'multispecies flourishing'. She commits herself to 'contradictory ways of thinking' and draws from Strathern a commitment to the relentless contingency of relations, which she understands has consequences for who lives and who dies and how, an idea which arises from her reading of Stengers, who argues that decisions must always somehow be made in the presence of those whose lives they affect, makes clear for her.[589] Haraway's notion of beings and relationships of a sym-biotic nature, which she variably refers to as symbiogenesis, sympoietics and symbiosis, exemplifies her commitment to constantly renewing and negotiating life's entanglements.[590] Symbiotic relationships, Haraway explains, are vulnerable; the fate of one species, for instance, may potentially have ripple effects for whole ecosystem, as sea otters do for kelp forests surrounding them.[591] This important aspect of her work differentiates her thinking from that of Leopardi, who perpetuates a distinction between humanity and nature, by replacing nature as the enemy for humanity. Rather than perpetuating old frameworks of opposition, and simply altering its categories, as Leopardi does, Haraway relinquishes this attachment to a desire to the authority previously offered by religion, which as Nietzsche reminds us, we can no longer call upon in this way. In *Making Kin* (2018), she writes:

> With many others, I asked how biological knowledge might be shaped in other-than-colonizing-patriarchal-racist-capitalist apparatuses and categories. In the so-called science wars of the 1990s, those quests led some (especially some male Marxist) colleagues to call us "anti-scientific." That was their problem; ours was a lust for SF, science fact and speculative fabulation all together.[592]

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[589] Haraway, D. (2013) 'SF: Science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far', *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology,* 3. And Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 84.
[590] Tsing, A. L., Bubandt, N., Gan, E. and Swanson, H. A. (2017) *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene.* University of Minnesota Press. 5.
[591] Ibid. 164.
[592] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 84.

Whilst Leopardi's work includes critiques of human exceptionalism, Haraway considers how we may work to move beyond this, through utopian and speculative enquiry.
Her work activates our imagination when thinking about the future and starts from the position that we are already in the midst of catastrophe. According to Haraway, those who believe they have answers to the present urgencies are dangerous and embark on 'decision discourse', which flattens out nuance precisely where it ought to be encouraged. Haraway contends that our moment of crisis necessitates a war between concepts and is willing to not only partake in this tension but finds joy in it.[593]

For Haraway, the practice of speculative fabulation is our only hope for real politics. Against those who accuse her of being 'anti-scientific', she writes: 'That was their problem; ours was a lust for SF, science fact and speculative fabulation all together.'[594] She resides in joy, refusing to be held back by her detractors, and her fabulation is committed to championing the beings and relationships that are so often left unacknowledged. She draws from Anna Tsing a reluctance to worry about 'conventional ontological kinds' and strives instead to learn practical healing rather than wholeness, stitching together improbable collaborations. [595]

> With many others, I asked how biological knowledge might be shaped in other-than-colonizing-patriarchal-racist-capitalist apparatuses and categories. In the so-called science wars of the 1990s, those quests led some (especially some male Marxist) colleagues to call us "anti-scientific." That was their problem; ours was a lust for SF, science fact and speculative fabulation all together.[596]

Haraway writes: 'There is only the relentlessly contingent sf worlding of living and dying, of becoming-with and unbecoming-with, of sympoiesis, and so, just possibly, of multispecies flourishing on earth'.[597] Discussing nature, she argues: 'What used to be called nature has erupted into ordinary human affairs, and vice versa, in such a way and with such permanence as to change fundamentally means and prospects for going on, including going on at all.'[598] By arguing that nature now belongs within the same

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[593] Ibid. 41.
[594] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 84.
[595] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 136.
[596] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 84.
[597] Ibid. 40.
[598] Ibid. 40.

framework as human affairs, she extends her conception of kinship and companionship, not only to other species, but also, unlike Leopardi, to nature.

Haraway issues a significant critique of models of theological anthropology based on the story of Genesis in her influential work *Cyborg Manifesto*, where, drawing on the term 'cyborg,' coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960, noting that technologies, humans and animals are interactive and co-constitutive.[599] She writes in her manifesto: 'a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.[600] Her notion of kinship paves the way to rethink the figure and status of the human, who, rather than being separate from or hierarchically above animals, is involved in complex partnerships. Lovelock also questions the significance of cyborgs, notably arguing that they are likely to reign in the next stage in Darwinian evolution:

> …our reign as sole understanders of the cosmos is rapidly coming to an end. We should not be afraid of this. The revolution that has just begun may be understood as a continuation of the process whereby the Earth nurtures the understanders, the beings that will lead the cosmos to self-knowledge. What is revolutionary about this moment is that the understanders of the future will not be humans but what I choose to call 'cyborgs' that will have designed and built themselves from the artificial intelligence systems we have already constructed. These will soon become thousands then millions of times more intelligent than us.[601]

In 'A manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s' she refuses traditions of progress, and of racist, male-dominant capitalism, arguing that we should find joy in the confusion of boundaries, ultimately by taking responsibility for their construction:

> In the traditions of "Western" science and politics-the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other-the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This essay is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction.[602]

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[599] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 29.
[600] Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books. 154.
[601] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 29.
[602] Haraway, D. J. (2004) *The Haraway Reader*. Routledge. 8.

As Haraway expresses well, climate and ecological crises are an extension of racist, sexist, and colonial projects employed by the West until this day. Since these rely upon traditions of progress which we can no longer reasonably adhere to, those who wish to be reasonable must take heed of Haraway's argument for taking pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and taking it upon ourselves to build new narratives. Such endeavours underly an inclusive politics, based not on the unfounded and unjust exclusion of the other but the result of the form of thinking of which we have claimed to date to have been so proud. Her fabulation reminds us of the lively activities of all beings, including those that are more than human, like cyborgs, and is content to leave the histories to rot in the compost. Unlike in Leopardi's work, where his concern for the fable is closely connected with his studies of the ancients, Haraway's use of the fable is much more interested in the time yet to come. As such, it has a less recuperative aspect to it, for example, it makes no explicit references to the ancients, and, it begins from the comprehension that we already inhabit an epoch defined by environmental catastrophe. Haraway builds again from the ground up with the fable as her generative tool, making new webs of knowledge and new kin, that are more equipped to deal with the task at hand.

Haraway's approach enables her to consider what kinds of qualities we might wish to embrace, which leads her to foreground her notions of multispecies flourishing and kinship, which share similarities with Leopardi's considerations of a multitude of worlds, and community. Driving Haraway's questioning of inherited categories is her recognition that many 'worlds' are made invisible by apparatuses of diverse instruments and skills. She argues these break down at:

> the self-invisible universality of categories and operations in a world full of other actually existing worlds, complete with robust practices of counting and ways of shaping possible realities. This is NOT a relativist point; it is an onto-epistemological one obscured by generations of colonizing power…*the issue is, which worlds world worlds?*[603]

She foregrounds the obfuscation of dominant structures by generations of colonizing power, highlighting that 'actually existing worlds' have systematically been disregarded, seeking to bring these to the foreground through her concept of 'multispecies flourishing.' Haraway differs from Leopardi because her critique pertains not only to all humans, but

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[603] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 89.

beyond humans, to 'myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages'—including the more than human, other than human, inhuman, and, as she writes 'human-as-hummus'.[604] Haraway describes her 'queer family of feminists, anti-racists, scientists, scholars, genetically engineered lab rodents, cyborgs, dogs, dog people, vampires, modest witnesses, writers, molecules, and both living and stuffed apes who teach [her] how to locate kin and kind now.'[605] She conceives of kinship in a sense that is neither anthropomorphic nor anthropocentric.[606] My purpose, she writes, 'is to make "kin" mean something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy.' Haraway tells us that Shakespeare's punning between *kin* and *kind* revealed that the 'kindest' were not necessarily kin as family, which is an insight we can register when we consider how we might stretch the imagination and change the story. Her conceptual courage informs her understanding of nature, which she does not try to oppose in any of her work. She recognises that it is no longer reasonable to consider that our old conceptualisation of nature – that it is a backdrop for human endeavours – holds up to scrutiny, and as Haraway registers, this means that we must face the challenge of setting forth new ways of thinking, which do not assume that we can continue to carry on depleting nature's resources without expecting consequences. Moreover, these may increasingly become unforeseen, or beyond the scope of our ability to protect ourselves, and our companion species, against. As Latour asserts, our notion of nature has been revealed to be wholly inadequate.[607]

Haraway provides concrete examples offering imaginings of a future in which communities take seriously questions such as how to take heed of and appropriately respond to environmental catastrophe. For example, in the 'Camille Stories' she experiments with ways that her notion of 'becoming-with' can coincide with attempts to think responsibly about how to reduce human numbers, thereby reducing the extent to which the earth's resources are drawn upon for the sake of our species alone. Haraway asserts that, if there is to be a multispecies ecojustice that can sincerely embrace diverse human people, 'it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory,

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[604] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices Durham: Duke University Press. 101.
[605] Haraway, D. J. (2004) *The Haraway Reader*. Routledge. 3.
[606] Ibid. 1.
[607] Latour, B. and Porter, C. (2017) *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime.* Wiley. 37.

and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species.'[608] She describes these kinships as being made up of machinic, organic and textual entities, as full of 'bumptious life', with which we share our earth and flesh, and discusses 'affinity groups'. Building on this, she seeks to discover how we can build ongoing stories, rather than histories that end. Her kinships are viewed as 'about keeping the lineages going', which she wishes to ensure are both critical and novel. She asks herself: 'How to recognise and empower the many ways diverse peoples do and have done person-making and kinship-making, without imperatives to increase human numbers or reduce the worlds of nonhumans?'[609] Moreover, she insists that these kinships must be 'multispecies', writing: 'No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too.'[610] In doing so Haraway maps out Leopardi's intuition of the importance of relations between worlds that he deduced from his research concerning astrological history, and the significance of Copernican and Galilean insights. Her notion of multispecies flourishing develops on Leopardi's recognition of the significance of the existence of multiple worlds coexisting in one place at one time.

Natureculture

Haraway coined the term 'natureculture' in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), in which she extends her consideration of how to overcome the divide between the human and the nonhuman set out in the *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985).[611] In *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), she embraces feminist theory that rejects binary dualisms, including the nature-culture binarism, using her term 'natureculture' to designate an alternative to conceiving of 'nature' and 'culture' as polar opposites or universal categories, thereby challenging the ontological divide between nature and culture, human and nonhuman.[612]

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[608] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 102.
[609] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 97.
[610] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 100.
[611] Haraway, D. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Vol. 1. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 4.
[612] Haraway, D. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Vol. 1. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 6-8.

Setting out her idea of 'natureculture' in this work, Haraway describes Marilyn Strathern as an 'ethnographer of naturecultures', who thinks in terms of partial connections, in patterns within which players are 'neither wholes nor parts', and operating in relations of significant otherness, while inviting cross-species conversations.[613] Haraway's work represents a development in science and technology studies (STS), in which zones of human-animal interaction become important, which are viewed simultaneously as 'natureculture'.[614] Her thought calls for the entanglement of human and more-than-human worlds, unsettling Enlightenment thinking, which considers nature as separate from culture, considered as the realm of human activity.[615] 'Natureculture' offers an approach that allows us to decentre humans from our ontological, ethical-political and cultural stories. It reminds us of the imperative to think about non-human matter in ethical-political terms, which is fuelled by the environmental calamities currently facing the Earth and it is inspired by the recognition that some of the fundamental precepts of western thought must be put into question, in order to reconsider the various ways in which humans and non-humans are intimately bound.[616]

Haraway describes assemblances that are composed of significant others, such as weeds, insects, fungi and animals as 'companion species.'[617] For her, co-constitutive relationships between species, such as dogs, like her own 'Cayenne Pepper', encourage us to narrate co-histories. She points out that dogs are species unto themselves, and highlights that our relationships with them are full of multiplicity. They involve waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, loss, intelligence and play, and teach us about co-constitutive relationships and contingent mutability.[618] In her work, which she wrote in the introduction to *The Haraway Reader* (2002), feels like the same paper written twenty times, Haraway strives for the implosion of nature and culture as distinct categories and calls instead for stories that interpellate us into their structures and show us something

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[613] Haraway, D. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Vol. 1. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 6-8.
[614] Robinson, C., & Remis, M. (2014). Entangled Realms: Hunters and Hunted in the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Reserve (APDS), Central African Republic. *Anthropological Quarterly, 87*(3), 613-636. Retrieved 18/01/2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43653024. 614.
[615] Johnson, L., Lobo, M., & Kelly, D. (2019). 'Encountering naturecultures in the urban Anthropocene.' Geoforum. 359.
[616] Hawkins, G. and Potter, E. "Naturecultures: Introduction." Australian Humanities Review. 46 (2009).
[617] Haraway, D (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Vol. 1. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 5.
[618] Haraway, 12.

important about companion species living in 'naturecultures'.[619] In this effort, her work is markedly different to that of Leopardi, who doesn't think in such terms.

The term 'natureculture' rejects the notion of a divide between nature and culture that allows Haraway to avoid the groundwork of human exceptionalism. Her theory emerges in place of the human, enabling her to illuminate new ways of thinking about agency and power, and difference and sociality. While the term has no single definition, it represents a vibrant spectrum of transdisciplinary approaches which share the drive to attend to worlds that are more than human, which requires changing the methods and apparatuses of study. As Joanna Latimer notes in her reading of *Manifestly Haraway* (2016), which unites *The Companion Species Manifesto* and *Companions in Conversation (with Cary Wolfe)*, Haraway helps us to pay attention to how all the boundaries that we have put in place in our lives serve to hide how our connectivity, interdependency and relationality are connected.[620] For Haraway, 'natureculture' indicates how we are entangled with other species, and it encourages a way of thinking about humans and non-humans as co-constituting each other from the outset. For example, our metabolisms, and the way in which we process our energy in our bodies allows us to see our closeness to ecosystems.[621]

Haraway's notion of 'natureculture' re-evaluates the fundamental precepts of western thought that Leopardi's work was unable to escape. Whilst we have seen that Leopardi's thinking does the work of dismantling and critiquing narratives of progress and human exceptionalism, when reading him today, we find that Leopardi does not go far enough, because the establishment of his ethics relies upon our opposition with nature, which reinforces the very dichotomy we ought to seek to evade. As J.H Whitfield wrote in his reading of Leopardi: 'never does Leopardi come to a more moral conclusion than in (t)his meditation on the destroying force of Nature'.[622] While we are realising that we have to immediately grasp a new understanding of ourselves and our place in the world, the

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[619] Haraway, The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness. 65. and Haraway, D. (2004). The Haraway Reader. New York, NY etc: Routledge. 2.
[620] Latimer J. Review: Donna J Haraway, 'Manifestly Haraway: The Cyborg Manifesto, The Companion Species Manifesto, Companions in Conversation (with Cary Wolfe)'. Theory, Culture & Society. 2017;34(7-8): 245-252. doi:10.1177/0263276417735160. 3.
[621] Haraway, The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness. 31.
[622] Whitfield, J. H. (1954) *Giacomo Leopardi.* Basil Blackwell. Oxford. 255.

impact of Haraway's celebration of the 'muck' is that the boundary between nature and people, on which Leopardi's later philosophical fabulation was founded becomes blurred. Today, theorists conceptualise this interconnection between life through Lovelock's concept of Gaia, which Haraway's own concept of the Chthulucene arose from.[623]

623 Lovelock, J. (2019) Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence. Penguin Books Limited. 12.

Conclusion to Part Two – An Earthly, Generative Practice of Fabulation

Uneasy with the human exceptionalism inherent in the term Anthropocentrism, Haraway's conception of flourishing in the world often accompanies images of humous and compost. Her theory in the mud insists on generative joy and collective thinking.[624] It arises out of the catastrophe, which for Haraway has been the result of spectacularly damaging narratives having been heeded for too long. Haraway's speculative fabulation is her endeavour to transcend what Le Guin names as 'the killer story', and instead to seek the untold story, the 'life story'. Whilst Leopardi comes up against a self-inflicted obstruction in his thinking when he replaces warfare between humans to that between humans and nature, Haraway surpasses this. She achieves this by throwing into question boundaries themselves, thereby avoiding Leopardi's occasionally dualistic thinking. Her willingness to 'revel in the mud' makes it easy for her to theorise within a society in which the very notion of nature becomes unstable, blurred at its boundaries. Moreover, similarly to Calder's claim the fable brings the human of the epic 'down to earth', the philosophical fable brings our attention back from the sky and encourages a new conceptualisation of ourselves as 'earthlings' in the hope that the broader scope of the subject involved in our collective crisis might facilitate a new way of thinking and being that might assuage the destructive impact of the geological era of the Anthropocene, making it, as Haraway wishes, as short as possible.

Multispecies Flourishing and Leopardi's 'Plurality of Worlds'

If we are to maintain any hope for resisting the acceleration of environmental catastrophe, we would do well to consider the importance of concepts that denote the broad spectrum of life at risk in the Sixth Extinction event, which both Leopardi and Haraway do in their philosophical work on fables. Leopardi, as we saw through examining the *Operette*, dramatized Kant's insight in *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) that the 'countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature', and provided philosophical examples of the positive values and characteristic which we might adopt to guide our judgement, and counteract the pitfalls which he examined we have

[624] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 31.

historically succumbed to in the *Operette*.[625] We saw that he highlighted, in his fables concerning Galileo and Copernicus in particular, our history of rising to this challenge does not show us to be sufficiently ready and prepared for this challenge. Nonetheless, as Le Guin perceived, and Haraway and others take up, we urgently have to establish new blueprints, for which we need radically new stories. We can turn to thinkers like Leopardi and Haraway as guides for this endeavour, each of whom have strengths in different areas. Leopardi's strengths lie in the degree to which he appreciates the warnings set forth by the ancients, and Haraway's reside in her appreciation of the need to establish new stories, and her willingness to fully embrace the challenge this entails. Haraway's concept of 'multispecies flourishing' exemplifies the generative extension of the underlining of the importance of community which takes place in Leopardi's late, philosophical, fabulation. The clear distinction between how Haraway and Leopardi undertake this project is shown in Haraway's concept of the recomposition of kin'. Explaining how she intends to use the ancient tool to enhance kin-making, which her work relates to the environmental damage of population explosion, she writes:

> Surely, as we face the immense challenges of human numbers and densities in all their political, economic, ecological, and cultural diversity in the next decades, storytelling will be among our most valuable practices for coming to imagine and to know what is to be done. Composing persons and peoples through story telling is rich kin making. The Storied Ones are powerful affines, not by marriage but by pattern-making transformation… The recomposition of kin acknowledges that all earthlings are relatives with affines, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time).[626]

Haraway explicitly encompasses nonhumans in her storytelling, which she understands to harbour facilitative potential for coming to know what is to be done. She conceives of storytelling as central to the challenge at the heart of required ecological thinking, namely that of coming to understand how we can find ways to celebrate and support personal, intimate decisions to make flourishing and generous lives.[627] Similarly to Deleuze, who speaks of fabulation as an aspect of inventing people to come, Haraway's fabulation is driven by an appreciation of the requirement to imagine new futures for ourselves.[628] Like Deleuze, Haraway believes that the telling of stories is central to human nature. In the

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[625] Kant, I., Gregor, M. and Reath, A. (2015) *Kant: Critique of Practical Reason.* Cambridge University Press. 5: 162.
[626] Clarke, A.E and Haraway, D. (2018) *Making Kin Not Population.* Prickly Paradigm Press. 93-4.
[627] Ibid. 94.
[628] Bogue, R. (2010) *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History.* Edinburgh University Press. 9.

article ‘Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth’ (2018), Aline Wiame helps us see the connection with fables more specifically, through highlighting that Haraway’s reading of Le Guin underpins her endeavour to question how storytelling can grow with and beyond its literary origin to become a political and heuristic tool.[629] Wiame points to Haraway’s employment of Deleuze’s take on ‘fabulation’ to address this challenge caused by our specific geologic epoch, which requires the renewal of the means of expression of the old tool of storytelling, so that it becomes a human and nonhuman process.

[629] Wiame, A. (2018). Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth. *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, *12*(4), 525-540.

Conclusion

Throughout this research, I attempted to answer the question ‘what is the philosophical fable? Through my case studies have shown that both Leopardi and Haraway share the understanding that the philosophical fable guides the cultivation of a capacity to think for oneself. However, the difference of the philosophical fable in the work of these thinkers, despite some similarities, helps us arrive at the consideration that the form is less a form and more a method, a practice, and therefore that the term ‘philosophical fabulation’ may be preferable to ‘the philosophical fable.’ Having seen how both Leopardi and Haraway set out their admiration for the fable to contribute to thinking, particularly to addressing the weaknesses in philosophy, we have seen that these can ultimately move in two different directions.

Leopardi and Haraway’s basis was shared, which helps us to deduce from their theoretical and experimental work that an appropriate definition of the philosophical fable, which may be taken up and used in different contexts, is that method of thinking and expression that attends to a hesitancy to develop the courage to confront our situation head on, with a willingness to relinquish our desire to control which readies us for becoming more comfortable in uncertainty and more humble in our understanding of our place in the universe. Such a stance, instantiated in the go-cart of the Broom in ‘La Ginestra’ and in the ‘Camille Stories’ of Donna Haraway, is urgently required today, as we face the option to acknowledge and act upon, in a way that far exceeds any historical example of fully heeding a paradigm shift, the extent of our need for adequate ecological thinking, equipped to respond to environmental catastrophe. I have found that philosophical fabulation is that which retrieves from the fable’s form its positive components, its imaginative and communicative nature, that which can draw subjects together to establish the strong communities needed within today’s catastrophic times, putting them to use in a carefully situated context.

My case studies have revealed that philosophical fables can vary. Although these may be nostalgic or generative, I have shown that they nonetheless they share an appreciation of the power of storytelling for creating new narratives to drive social, and in turn,

ecological, change. As such, ultimately, they move beyond Bergsonian and Hegelian conceptions of the fable as a tool for perpetuating closed societies or cloaking the truth.

Philosophical fables recognise and employs the strong history of fables as being a tool for resistance, utilising it to encourage the self-reflection that has hindered our judgement and led us to our current immersion in climate catastrophe. My work on Haraway allowed me to find moreover, that we might do well to think more about the practice of philosophical fabulation, in which new ways to flourish and improve our judgement may be found.

In Part One, I examined the study of fables and development of this into the philosophical fable of the 'untimely' Italian poet-philosopher, Leopardi. I demonstrated the extent to which we refuse to acknowledge our vulnerability in the face of nature, utilising the genre to mock and challenge human exceptionalism. I revealed that Leopardi encourages us to consider the philosophical necessity of appreciating our lack of power to counteract nature's cyclical rhythms once they have been initiated, demonstrating that the fate of the city of Pompeii following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius should serve as a warning that, despite our infrastructures, we nonetheless remain defenceless. Building on Antonio Negri's reading of Leopardi, I suggested we can draw ethical consequences from him, such as the importance of living collaboratively and the need to formulate appropriate embodiments of humility. My reading of the *Operette* addressed an issue that is absent from both genre theory and current analyses of Leopardi's work, namely the relationship between his earlier conception of fables, including their ability to convey the limits of human life, which instantiated the development of fables in his thinking, which aided his turn to philosophy, and finally led to his philosophical fabulation. In my examination of Leopardi, I revealed how a renewed consideration of the poet philosopher, specifically through the lens of the role of the fable, has the potential to not only reveal the influence he had on the European philosophical tradition, for example, serving as a model for Nietzsche and reference for Benjamin, but also show how he informed the Italian literary tradition, in Italo Svevo and Italo Calvino's work.

My distinct examination of the role and development of the fable enabled me to situate him within the current context of environmental crisis arising from anthropogenic change. I introduced his critique of anthropocentrism, demonstrating that it marks a significant

contribution to ecological thinking as a dramatisation of the problems with our mindsets. This examination also revealed how the understanding of his readers, like Negri, might be more influenced by their own assessment of fables and fabulation than they might recognise, which I tried to show by highlighting the conversation which occurred between Deleuze and Negri concerning the benefits of imbuing fables with political context and the relation between fables and considering the time to come.

In Part Two, having recognised that the strengths of Leopardi's philosophical fable was limited by the opposition he constructed between humanity and nature, I examined the second philosophical fabulist of my research, Haraway, who draws on feminist theory to question how we can bring radically new and ecologically responsible ways of thinking to bear on our philosophical frameworks, avoiding those bound up in problematic oppositions between humans and nature, thereby attending to this weakness in Leopardi's thought. My case studies take into account that the history of European philosophy has charted the development of deeply anthropocentric ideals, celebrating frameworks like the great chain of being that support the delineation of our species from others, based on our use of reason and capacity for political organisation. With the 'environmental catastrophe' and the ecological thought it necessitates forming the focal point of the research, because of its representation of extremity, highlighting the depths of our present crisis, I examine the theme's role within the context of Leopardi and Haraway's works, considering how this informs their understanding of how the fable can be used to practice philosophy. Through these examinations, I endeavour to distil some pertinent features of the philosophical fable, suggesting a characterisation of the genre that can help it gain greater recognition, on which future scholars can build.

Through closely reading Leopardi, I showed how there are two senses in which the philosophical fable can be understood: in the first, the fable is conceptualised in largely negative terms, and Leopardi experiments with it to suggest that the foundations of Western civilisation are thrown into question. This expands on negative understandings of fables, espoused by those like Bergson and Hegel, as myth-making, of perpetuating falsities, creating illusions and voluntary hallucinations, or cloaking the truth. In the *Operette*, Leopardi draws on these aspects and connotations of fables to issue a severe critique to Enlightenment thought and ideals. The second sense concerns Leopardi's transcendence of this fiction, in which he reclaims and remodels of the genre,

transforming it into something radical: a philosophical fable, which presents guidance for attaining wisdom and judgement, helping philosophy fulfil its original promise through the use of examples. In this sense, he may be read as extending what Deleuze suggested we might attempt when he discussed with Negri how we might give Bergson's notion of fabulation a political meaning by producing a 'materialist project of solidarity.[630] This work constituted his philosophical fable, which I argued 'La Ginestra' was, but it was, nonetheless, bound by the hangover of the dualistic patterns of thinking that underpin the Western tradition. Despite Leopardi's astute perception, and recognition of the degree to which we are holding ourselves back from enjoying the vitality that life may have to offer, ultimately, the insights that he can offer to our particular moment of environmental crisis today is hindered the dualism he commits to when considering the relationship between humanity and nature.

Having reached an impasse in Leopardi's philosophical fabulation, I was led to consider a contemporary theorist, who, like Leopardi, builds upon the role that fabulation can play in her work, attending to the philosophical roots of our environmental problems, which in turn informs her conceptualisation of catastrophe. By turning to examine Haraway's work, I showed that we are able to draw the benefits from the philosophical fable - which the previous case study revealed is particularly powerful for its exemplary nature – by relinquishing our need for oppositionary thinking and allowing the boundaries between humanity and nature to blur. This appeared to underpin Haraway's interest in Lovelock's Gaia theory, and reflects her ability to embrace complex and nuanced thinking in the absence of the authority provided by structures such as religion. In turn, this brought us back to Kant, and to his 1784 essay, "Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?", which allowed me to suggest that Haraway's speculative fabulation rests upon a responsibility to embrace the need to bravely face the need to think for ourselves in the absence of external authorities. Reading Haraway's fabulation as existing in an intricate web with the idea of flourishing, allowed us to see how it amplifies the fable's positive features, thereby fulfilling Aristotle's understanding, set out in his *Nicomachean Ethics* of 'doing and living well', of achieving eudaimonia, which considered to be the aim of practical philosophy.

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[630] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. xxxii.

Through my reading of Leopardi, I showed that the philosophical fable is something that transcends the fabulous story of the West, which is shown to be weakened by its reliance on human exceptionalism, but also a narrative which has a strong hold on us, ultimately hindering us. The philosophical fable's author notes the fable's power, retrieves this, and uses it for their own purposes. For Leopardi that purpose was to reacquaint life with its natural roots, to return the exiled body to the realm of life, and to help nurture the judgement and wisdom that philosophy needs, through which we saw that his work can be read as an exemplification of what Kant calls for when he speaks of the 'go-cart of judgement', examining the significance in relation to this of Severino's understanding of 'works of genius' in Leopardi.

Through drawing on Timpanaro's reading of ethics in Leopardi, I tried to bring out a way of examining Leopardi that credits him with the insights into how we might live well. Leopardi deserves more acknowledgment for this contribution, and his ideas offer a resource that we would benefit from taking heed of in our contemporary times, ridden as they are by ecological crises. These critics' analyses help us to see Leopardi's powerful insistence that it is only in uniting in a system outside all hypocrisy and foolish pride that will help us to acknowledge that humans 'are no more than a tiny part of the universe', and prompt us to live our lives in a more authentic and valuable manner.[631] As we have seen through looking at Leopardi's depiction of how humans relate to each other and death in dialogues in the *Operette,* 'La Ginestra' can be read as a work where Leopardi transcends these ideas and emphasises the importance of humility, community and compassion. In doing so, he gives us an aid for bringing vitality to our lives by referring to a gentle desert flower living with resilience in challenging conditions to suggest how humanity might learn to love light rather than darkness. With the flower as a central figure, I argued that Leopardi brings together ideas from his early thought, giving them a focus that is often overlooked, despite its contemporary resonance.

By failing to view Leopardi as a thinker who offers us constructive tools for living well, we risk limiting ourselves, furthering the crises of life he decries throughout the *Operette*

[631] Timpanaro, S. (1975) *On Materialism.* trans. Garner, L. London: NLB. 20.

while we could be directing our energy toward building communities of greater strength and learning to cultivate a sense of dignified pride that we might combine with being more compassionate with others in whose pain we might share. More work needs to be done in this area if we are to avoid regretting, or repeating, our past mistakes, but rather take the opportunity that Leopardi gives us to forge a better future. I demonstrated how Leopardi's thinking was ecological in nature, and highlighted the way in which Leopardi's philosophical fable, 'La Ginestra', presented an alternative to the human exceptionalism, folly, rank pride and other questionable features underpinning the tradition of the West and offered to replace these with a new type of ethics: a model, based not foremost on human life, but rather that of plants and animals, that reminds us of the value of measure, nobility, human solidarity, humility and capacity for community and familial love.

In my Introduction, I highlighted that the fable may be very broadly defined but also that very few of the wide variety of definitions adequately accounted for the genre's capacity to contribute to the goals of philosophy. The aim of my case study of Leopardi was to examine a work of notable philosophical importance that could be shown to be explicitly formed and shaped by its author's interest in the fable to see if, through doing so one could distil some characteristics of a 'philosophical fable'. I found that the fable was the area in which Leopardi could be seen to be at his most philosophical. Examining Leopardi through the lens of the fable allowed me to develop and strengthen Negri's argument that Leopardi is a philosopher, thereby illustrating an important yet unexamined connection between the fable and philosophy.

Examining Leopardi through the lens of the fable involved analysing his writings with greater regard for his appreciation of the form drawn from the ancients and assessing how his own dwellings on fables of the ancients' fables, which he saw as a resource that could be modified to suit contemporary purposes, increasingly informed his work. It involved moving away from the readings presented by Antoni Negri, Michael Caesar and Patrick Creagh, which lack to varying degrees accounts of the strength and significance of his later work. Questioning at what point the fable and philosophy intertwined for Leopardi also revealed that his understanding of what the philosopher does – 'Now this is the philosopher through and through: the faculty of discovering and recognizing relations, of binding particulars together, and of generalizing' - overlaps with genre theorists'

understandings of what the fable does. By referring to how Leopardi understood philosophy, I tried to demonstrate that Ginestra may be read as an effort by Leopardi to enact a philosophical project of tearing down our illusions while remaining comfortable in the wilderness that we are left inhabiting as a result. Moreover, the wilderness of the desert that Leopardi situates this work in is an environment that depicts with vivid imagery a metaphor for the status of our intellectual and cultural lives, much of which we have inherited from Enlightenment projects.

Throughout Part One, I argued that the fable is integral to the development of the philosophical maturity of Leopardi's thought. I sought to establish links between Leopardi's initial critiques and the way these evolve to take on the characteristics which he found to be compelling in the storytelling tradition of the ancients. In doing so I have challenged the typical understanding of Leopardi as a nihilist with no room for hope in his thought by seeking to bring to the surface how his complex relationship with the Enlightenment is shaped by his reverence for the lives of the ancients, whose state of lives he did not seek to return to, but rather, whose closeness to nature, in the period when he was most influenced by Rousseau in particular, and lack of alienation from their own lives we can at least remind ourselves of in our efforts to forge a path forwards that is not as destructive as it might otherwise be.

Previously, I showed that a number of attributes can be distilled from the surplus of definitions of the fable that one can draw from. The key characteristics that I underlined were the fable's allegorical nature, its capacity to adapt to be suited at times for children and at others for adults, its roots in ancient storytelling traditions and its situation within the broader group of folklore. It also became clear from scanning definitions provided by critics of various schools that protagonists of fables may be non-rational things, such as concepts or living but non-rational beings such as plants, which given what are usually thought of as human characteristics such as a capacity for rational thought and verbal communication. The form creates a stage on which a concept can be imaginatively played out, oftentimes in a satirical or humourous manner, which allows its internal mechanisms to be exposed and scrutinised, and in most cases a specified theory is conveyed, which could be ethical or political in nature, which the audience is intentionally left with.

I illustrated that Leopardi's work has yet to attain the recognition it deserves within European philosophy and sought to provide some context into the situation of his work in relation to this tradition, with recourse to a range of contemporary scholars. I have sought to show that Leopardi's vision is disenchanted, accepting the world's conditions and weight, while continuing to struggle in crisis. This ongoing commitment is one of the characteristics that makes his work so powerful. However, when critics such as Negri assert that he goes 'beyond any sort of synthesis' they miss precisely the source of Leopardi's force, the way in which his vision traverses the world. Leopardi creates a work that contains within it a multitude; on the dry flank of Vesuvius, he recomposes the singularities of the *Operette*. When Negri articulates that, in 'La Ginestra,' Leopardi gives us our task today by expressing clearly the project of 'making the multitude', of resisting domination via a movement of the 'recomposition of singularities' he misses a vital opportunity to examine how his this composition was made possible by the groundwork laid out in the *Operette*.[632] Moreover, the form which it embodied - the philosophical fable – is what made the piece so powerful, since it served as the author's 'mechanism of truth'. What Negri misses is that the themes that Leopardi introduced the *Operette* are all brought together and developed in one tightly bound piece of philosophical writing with 'La ginestra'. Negri fails to see that the philosophical fable is Leopardi's mechanism of truth. By missing this, he misses Leopardi's greatest contribution to philosophy, which in turn prevents Negri from making a sufficiently compelling argument concerning what makes Leopardi a poet who should also be thought of as a philosopher.

The contemporary significance of Leopardi's ecological thinking is evident in the work of thinkers today, such as in Lovelock's concerns, which he expressed in 'The Edge of Extinction' that the ongoingness of our species is unquestionably at stake. As Nietzsche crudely asserts of such an image, and as Ray Brassier evaluates in his book chapter 'The Truth of Extinction' in *Nihil Unbound*: *Enlightenment and Extinction* (2007): 'And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened.'[633] Leopardi understood, as I showed that critics like Esposito, Timpanaro and Severino examine, that

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[632] Negri, A. and Murphy, T. S. (2015) *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology.* State University of New York Press. xxi.
[633] Nietzsche, F. W. and Breazeale, D. (1993) *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebook*s of *the Early 1870's.* Humanity Books. 79. and Brassier, R. (2007) *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction.* Palgrave Macmillan UK. 205.

we were at increasingly being led by our hubris, rather than our intelligence, which we must learn to improve, as Kant argues, with the improvement of our capacity for judgement. I showed how the numerous examples of how we consider ourselves the most important worldly inhabitants, driven by a hope to instigate in us a recognition that this must be acknowledged with care, was expressed in a manner that was indebted to the ancients and fabulists. Examining the impact of his scientific proficiency, I also highlighted Leopardi's stress on our fragility and efforts to remind us of the multitude of living inhabitants we share the earth with. These aspects of his thought, I argued, corresponded to the conceptualisation of the fable that informed Leopardi's earlier thought, which considered the genre to be a means of ridicule, a way to highlight the folly of a position. I described how this related to Bergson's similarly negative perception of the fable, but then went on to show how this view progressed with the development of Leopardi's oeuvre. Using 'La Ginestra' as a case study within the *Canti*, I illustrated that Leopardi later stretched the boundaries of the fable, imputing it with philosophical meaning by using poignant images, examples of the relations between things, and a balance of consolation and commitment to our state, thereby moving beyond his alignment of fables with falsity, and claiming and fostering within it its constitutive nature, which irredeemably captures the imagination of his audience.

My reading of Haraway alongside Leopardi revealed the common basis of their critique of anthropocentricsm in our inability to adequately respond to shifts in scientific thinking, which makes both their projects central to the theoretical work we must undertake today. I sought to show that her work is marked by an interest in reworking relationships on earth, from the ground up, in building from the muck of history, rather than relating to ourselves from a universal perspective that takes the scale of the cosmos, indicated by references to celestial objects, like stars, as a starting point for considering our situation. Describing the destruction embedded in our contemporary world, Haraway explains that irreversible destruction is in progress, for myriads of other creatures in addition to the 11 billion or so people who will be on earth near the end of the twenty-first century: 'The edge of extinction is not just a metaphor; system collapse is not a thriller.'[634] Demonstrating a greater sympathy than Leopardi that the past she intends to reinvigorate

[634] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 102.

was only ever positive for a select and privileged subset of humanity, whose sustenance often depended on the subordination of excluded groups, Haraway's fabulation takes 'so far', as its starting point. Her work is driven by a sense that more promising futures are lying dormant awaiting their awakening via the activation of our imaginations. Her fables are forward driven – they strive to bring into being kinships and companionships which have not yet existed or been acknowledged. In doing so, her fabulation and opens up a new space in which some yet to be imagined futures may be awakened.[635]

Overall, my case studies of two philosophical fables revealed a previously unregistered connection between the ideas of Leopardi and Haraway, who are tied together in their shared engagement with strengths of 'fabulation' in response to environmental, philosophical, social and political catastrophes. In doing so, it drew back the cloak covering the hidden history of fabulation, as picked up by theorists including Deleuze, Bergson and Derrida. This enabled me to conduct a comparison of two fabulists of the Anthropocene whose work I found to be - despite shared origins, concerns and tools - propelled in radically different directions. Whilst Leopardi's work is nostalgic and seeks to reclaim some of the ancient wisdom he sees us as having lost with the development of the Enlightenment, Haraway looks to using fabulation to build new, less fragile, futures from the compost, as such her work is generative. Undertaking a closer examination of the trajectory of the appreciation of the ability of storytelling, especially fables, to engage with problems associated with challenging philosophical questions has allowed me to see the difference within these appreciations and allowed me to discern a sense of the philosophical fable's present trajectory. Recent works like Patricia MacCormack's *The Ahuman Manifesto Activism for the End of the Anthropocene* (2020) and Kathryn Yusoff 's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018) testify, for example, testify to a trend in subjecting the narrative, not only of the Anthropocene, but crucially the human

635 Whilst the connections between Haraway's speculative fabulation and trickster narratives, such as those of the coyote of Southwest Indian culture, have been examined by Jacob Glazier in 'Only A Trickster Can Save Us: Hypercommandeering Queer Identity Positions,' the trickster figure of Anansi, particularly given the character's tentacular nature, would also be a beneficial area for consideration in Haraway's thought. Haraway notes a Frog and Coyote story taught today in the Utah Indian Curriculum Guide "The Goshutes" is part of indigenous America not disappearing, 'but traveling in tongues to unexpected places to reopen questions for ongoingness, accountability, and lived storying.' Ibid. 203. Glazier, J. W. (2014) 'Only A Trickster Can Save Us: Hypercommandeering Queer Identity Positions'.

within it, which it relies upon, to critique.[636] It has shown how theorists of oppression and resistance are increasingly bringing the significance of storytelling to the heart of their analyses and analysing the various forms of storytelling that oppressed subjects have used as means to generate their own power. The present resurgence of interest in Le Guin's Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction testifies to this, which is beginning to surface debates of the role of fabulation within philosophy and must continue to be applied to the present climate crisis.[637]

My work questioning the characteristics of philosophical fables has opened up space for enquiry of the key differences such fables can produce, enabling me to establish that whilst Leopardi's philosophical fabulation is nostalgic, Haraway's is generative and joyous. Despite their shared analyses of the dearth of our lives, their approaches are distinguishable in how they respond to this. By looking forwards for Haraway and looking backwards for Leopardi, as we saw in his efforts to take the lead from Jean-François Marmontel and Lorenzo Pignotti when adopting and adapting Lucian and Aesop's ancient methods for modern audiences. Throughout my examination of Haraway, I have shown she strives to build connections that honour the stories that regularly go untold through the establishment of kinship. It is important to note the elements of her philosophical fabulation, her speculative fabulation, that makes her fabulation different to that of Leopardi. She describes kin-making as an assembling word, and questions how kin might generate kin. Her storytelling is fundamentally world building and constructive in this sense.

Haraway, as we have seen, refuses the dominion that humans are given over their fellow creatures and unpacks it ethical ramifications, advocating for responsible co-living with other species. Joyously celebrating the critters in the soil and of the mud, her 'littermates' replace the gods of the sky, whose image humans were supposed to have been made in.[638] She is quite happy for everything that has come 'so far' to be confined to the thriving

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[636] Yusoff, K. (2018) *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None.* University of Minnesota Press. and MacCormack, P. (2020) *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the End of the Anthropocene.* Bloomsbury Publishing.
[637] For example, see: Wiame, A. (2018) 'Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth', *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 12(4), pp. 525-540.
[638] Midson, S. (2018) 'Humus and Sky Gods: Partnership and Post/Humans in Genesis 2 and the Chthulucene', *Sophia*.

compost heap of history. In *Staying with the Trouble*, she insists that, in line with, Le Guin, 'the story *must* change.'[639] Le Guin's insight, considered in the context of a comparison between Leopardi's fabulation, and Haraway's, allows us to see that Leopardi's storytelling concerned the 'killer story', the one that has finished, and which threatens to finish us. Leopardi's story unravels anthropocentrism, species hierarchy, senseless pride, and inimical relationships between neighbours. It considers the shaky groundwork on which humankind developed and it examines the threat these ideas ultimately finishing us. On the contrary, Haraway's fabulation emerges from agreement with Le Guin that we seek the nature, subject, words of the other, the untold, life story, the story that nurtures becoming.[640]

Whilst the catastrophe is deliberately dramatic and 'spectacular' in Leopardi, captured in the image of vibrant yellow broom spread over the plains of Mount Vesuvius, looming over Pompeii, in Haraway's thought, the catastrophe is slower and more difficult to discern. In this sense, Haraway's association with the catastrophe is more aligned with contemporary theory examining the theme, where critics argue spectacular visuals are unnecessary, albeit whilst dramatic environmental events are increasingly frequent as a result of runaway climate change.[641] More importantly, whilst Leopardi's philosophical fabulation retains a component of the closed society of Bergson's fabulation by holding on to an 'us versus them' mentality, Haraway's fabulation utilises the concepts such as assemblages, kinship, and collectives to do away with the need for oppositionary frameworks. When one reads Leopardi alongside Haraway, a lack of readiness in Leopardi is revealed, whereby he fails to recognise we cannot delegate to a higher unified authority to make choices in our stead, namely, an oppositionary framework.

Whilst Leopardi's fables may be aligned with Bergon's understanding, Haraway's, is more closely associated with that of Deleuze. As Bogue defines in the *Deleuze Dictionary*, fabulation is 'the artistic practice of fostering the invention of a people to

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[639] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 40.
[640] Haraway, D. (2020) 'Introduction: Receiving Three Mochilas in Colombia: Carrier Bags for Staying with the Trouble Together', *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. UK: Terra Ignota. 11.
[641] Morton, T. (2012) *"Romantic Disaster Ecology: Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth"*. Romantic Circles: University of Colorado Boulder. Retrieved on 23/10/2019 from: https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/disaster/HTML/praxis.2012.morton.html.

come'. [642] This is precisely what Haraway describes to be our role, when she asserts that we must 'cultivate with each other in every imaginable way epochs to come that can replenish refuge'. For Deleuze and Guattari, as they elucidate in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), when artists like Kafka create genuine art, it is collective, and oriented toward the invention of people of the future.[643] When Kafka, for example, writes, he does so as a component of a 'collective assemblage', which Bogue outlines for Deleuze is created via the process of fabulation. Whilst Leopardi takes this up with the exposition of the benefits of community and solidarity he gives in 'La Ginestra', Haraway creates a similar assemblage through her notion of 'kinship'. Indeed, Bogue's description of Deleuze's understanding of Kafka's fabulation may equally apply to Haraway's SF practice:

> The goal of fabulation is to break the continuities of received stories and deterministic histories, and at the same time to fashion images that are free of the entangling associations of conventional narratives and open to unspecified elaboration in the construction of a new mode of collective agency.[644]

Haraway's work frees itself from conventional, often violent, narratives. It is driven by the cosmopolitical question she draws from Stengers: 'what kinds of attention can foster a more liveable breathable world?'[645] Like Socrates, who Erasmus remarked 'brought philosophy down from heaven to earth', Haraway brings speculative fabulation, her contribution to the tradition of the philosophical fable, from the 'starry heavens' down to the earthly muck.[646] Moreover, her work, like Leopardi's develops a Kantian insight, namely that of our requirement for independent thinking, which overcomes the restrictive dualistic thinking that restricted Leopardi's thought. This drove the movement of her work, which joyed in the muck of the environmental catastrophe of the Sixth Extinction event, which she framed as a 'game of living and dying well'.[647]

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[642] Parr, A. (2010) *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition.* Edinburgh University Press. 99.
[643]Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1986) *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature.* University of Minnesota Press. 21.
[644] Bogue, R. (2006) 'Fabulation, Narration and the People to Come', in Boundas, C. (ed.) *Deleuze and Philosophy*: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 202-224. 221.
[645] Kenney, M. (2013) *Fables of attention: Wonder in feminist theory and scientific practice.* UC Santa Cruz. vi.
[646] Calder, A. (2001) *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth.* Droz. 43.
[647] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices Durham: Duke University Press.* 29.

With its strength in discerning our problematic ways of thinking and living long before their full effects were immediately visible, does Leopardi's restorative approach, which seeks to bring ancient wisdom to bear on modernity, bear sufficient potential to face and respond to today's challenges? Or is his project underscored by too narrow an understanding of the human, like that of the highly exclusionary basis of Athenian democracy, to be able to contend with the complexity of today's challenges?[648] If we deem his ideas to be too restrictive in this sense, are there ways in which reading him alongside Haraway can help us bring out the best of his ideas, those which illustrate the dearth of our present while allowing us to recuperate some hope for our future through the establishment of human solidarity. This work has sought to reveal that Haraway can help in this regard, since her ideas help us to expand the human, and beyond the human, amongst whom we need to cultivate the solidarity that Leopardi pleads us to establish and invites us to critically assess our understanding of nature, so it is less restricted by oppositionary thinking which perpetuates unnecessary violence. The question now, having seen a glimpse at the extent of our lack of awareness of the history of the philosophical fable, is what might we next do with this insight? How can we deploy the power of the philosophical fable within our current climate crisis?

[648] Held, D. (2006) *Models of Democracy*. Wiley. 20.

Philosophical Fables of Starry Heavens and Earthly Muck

> Two things fill the mind with ever increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the ground below our feet.
>
> Howard Caygill
> 'Preface' to *Technologies of Romance*

If Leopardi's philosophical fabulation questions how the starry heavens above impact way we understand ourselves, and the countless multitude of worlds that annihilates our creaturely importance, then Haraway's questions how we should respond to the already being within the process of giving back to the planet the matter from which we came. Whilst Leopardi's thought and work is cosmological, Haraway's philosophical fabulation is earthly, and embroiled 'in the muck'.[649] Moreover, whilst the theorists share an appreciation of the depths of the trouble of our crisis, which puts at risk non-human species, our own race, and life as we know it on Earth, both choose to confront this, recognising the problems that stem from choosing, out of fear or pain, to ignore our crises, their responses differ radically. Additionally, their approach to the fable is the point at which this differentiation becomes the most explicit. Leopardi's work evokes a lost pass that he seeks to recuperate, which informs his fabulation, and rests on his appreciation of the ancients and lost ways of life. Inversely, Haraway's work establishes a forward driven approach that seeks to include those lives on whose oppression the idyllic past that Leopardi mourns rested, establishing and developing a theory of kinship suitable to our times in its readiness to encompass 'reproductive justice', the voices and representation of indigenous peoples and the practices of storytelling often intertwined with experiences of womanhood. Examining the philosophical fabulation of Leopardi in comparison to that of Haraway has helped me exemplify the way in which the lack of scholarship addressing the existence of the philosophical fable has had the result of causing the variation within these practices, which benefit our current times, to be overlooked.

The philosophical fable, as we have seen via close examinations of Leopardi and Haraway, may be built on shared foundations and ideas but grow in very different

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[649] Haraway, D. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 139.

directions. Whilst Leopardi's fables are referring to the ancients and endeavouring to revive a way of life between human beings in which flourishing was easier, Haraway is prepared to leave behind these nostalgic notions of the past. Haraway's work extends the second aspect of the fable in Leopardi's work, in which it can be used to open up new futures, bringing it to bear on today's circumstances. Whilst Leopardi first considered the form as a way to pull humans from their pedestals from what Danta describes as 'vertical metaphors', where we think of ourselves as above other species of animal, using tactics of mockery and satire, and extended the fable's fictional character. We saw, in Leopardi's later work, that his interest shifted to questioning how the fable can help us to look to the future, by establishing a new ethics amongst humans, how it can help serve as a guide to for the time to come and have a more forward moving aspect to it. Haraway's work propels this extensive of the fable into the future further still, adopting its imaginative abilities and using them to generate new stories that serve our new times. She doesn't try to revive philosophy, as Leopardi does, but creates it anew, this time ensuring that it considers all the creatures it involves. Her thinking crosses boundaries between disciplines and species, leaving the old notions that Leopardi would like to reinvigorate behind to provide nutrients for the new beings in the Terrapolis she occupies. She is liberated by letting go of the understandings of the past and strives to break out from the deadly habits of Euro-American thinking.[650]

Whilst reading Leopardi with Timpanaro highlighted the extend of the enmity between humanity and nature in most of Leopardi's thought, we found that Haraway's work helps us to see the opportunities in his thought to think ecologically, and with nature, which Leopardi himself did not extend. These moments were dormant in his thought, as we find when we consider with Leopardi, the multitude of lives on the side of Mount Vesuvius, and when we acknowledge the focus away from human lives that his work often encourages. Reading Haraway then, helps us to see that there may be potential to retain in Leopardi's legacy both his critique of human exceptionalism and his commitment to encouraging human companionship, support and community. Whilst Haraway's notion of staying with the trouble shares commonality with Leopardi's approach, she extends the arising response of companionship to other species with her concept of kinship,

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[650] Kenney, M. (2017) 'Donna Haraway (2016) Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Durham: Duke University Press. 312 pages. IBSN: 978-0822362241', *Science & Technology Studies*, pp. 73-76. 73.

thereby extending his ideas. Haraway retains Leopardi's conclusion that the catastrophes we face require a radically new set of relationships amongst people yet has a different view of nature, which is not seen by her as inimical. Haraway's conception of companionship is similar to Leopardi's ethics of consolation and community.

In *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People* (2017), Morton argues that we must undertake a thorough deconstruction of the concept of 'nature', which Haraway contributes to by taking up Kant's challenge to dare to know, delighting in the challenge of establishing new ways of thinking for ourselves.[651] By including non-human lives his work initiates the maintenance of a space for nonhumans in political, psychic and philosophical space, which Haraway and similar theorists develop. Like in Leopardi's work, Haraway uses non-human guides, most prominently the pimoa cthulhu spider, which is common to the stumps of redwoods in Haraway's native California, but other tentacular creatures and critters, like pigeons. In my examination of Leopardi's fabulation, I demonstrated that fables are stories that we tell when we need guidance. Leopardi's philosophical fable is an offering that transcends fables that offer immediate consolation, but which do not serve us over time, and instead gives us guidance which can withstand, and even aid, the destructive nature of modern philosophy, and help us to see things of true value in life, so that we can live in closer accordance with them.

My readings led me to the conclusion that, for Leopardi, experimenting with different literary means of expression made way for his creation of an imaginative and speculative space which could allow for a thinking through of the ways in which we may live with our lives with greater vitality. Leopardi's modern and philosophical fable responds to the challenges of contemporary society by building on the ancient form's suitability to point out human hubris, lack of judgement and perspective, to demonstrate the value in an anthropocentric age of a stance of humility, of the acknowledgement of pain and compassion, built upon a gentle acceptance of vulnerability and uncertainty. My examination highlighted that the places where Leopardi's speculation is most prominently displayed are also the points at which his expression is most closely shaped to his earlier thoughts concerning the benefits of fables. This leads me to conclude that

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[651] Morton, T. (2017) *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People.* London ; New York: Verso. 10.

the notion of 'speculative fabulation', including a way the form can arise as a response to the most troublesome of conditions, is worthy of further enquiry.

An aspect that various accounts of the Anthropocene have in general is that, at their basis lies human action. Such action is driven by human understandings, meaning that, in order to alter the direction in which we are pushing the natural world, we must reframe our own basic conceptions of who we are and, importantly, where our power ends. Haraway takes up Le Guin's bag-lady practice of storytelling, drawing on Lovelock's concept of Gaia theory to question what we have provoked.[652] I seek to use Haraway's way of thinking about nature through her concept of speculative fabulation to examine ecological catastrophes within literature in order to take part in configuring a new way of inhabiting the web of life in a less destructive way that balances pride in humanity's story of scientific development with cosmic humility. Creating the necessary conditions to flourish is crucial throughout Haraway work. Haraway extends the tradition of setting out speculative fables, which further philosophy and builds on Leopardi's perception of philosophical fables as narratives that facilitate flourishing.

Leopardi and Haraway share the view that the much of the suffering we inflict on ourselves and other species can be avoided. Whilst Leopardi intuited that we have pursued what Esposito described as a 'wrong pathway', which the lack of moderation of our egos, caused by our lack of judgement, encouraged, Haraway's work is a contemporary example of the way in which the fable can highlight the resonance that 'the established disorder of our times is not necessary.'[653] Rejecting the defeatism that often accompanies comprehension of the dire state of contemporary climate science, Haraway's work grounds itself in an endeavour to forge new, and healthier relationships within the world. In Haraway's work, she considers how we might respond in the best way to the ecological trouble we face without turning away from it or conceding into despair.

Haraway's idea of 'staying with the trouble', which is about living and dying well together, and accepting our condition with honesty and bravery is similar to Leopardi's

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[652] Haraway, D. (2016a) 'Tentacular thinking: Anthropocene, capitalocene, chthulucene', *e-flux*, 75.
[653] Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. 51.

approach of refusing to turn away from pain and standing firm with nobility.[654] In his consideration works of genius, he emphasises the importance of embracing this approach, commending these works when they:

> …give a perfect likeness of the nullity of things, even when they clearly demonstrate and make us feel the inevitable unhappiness of life, even when they express the most terrible despair, nevertheless to a great soul, that may even find itself in a state of utter prostration, disillusionment, futility, boredom and discouragement with life, or in the harshest and most death-dealing adversities.[655]

Earlier, I described how Severino argues that an important philosophical component of Leopardi's work is its ability to convey the nullity and pain of human existence whilst rekindling enthusiasm through setting forth a remedy to the pain he acknowledges, which Leopardi connected with the works of art that he aspired to create. Haraway's work also fits Leopardi's description of such works, since it shows a proven ability to achieve a delicate balance between hope and despair. Her work, like Leopardi's, serves as a consolation, by 'rekindling enthusiasm' and restoring to life that which it had lost. Haraway uses a similar vocabulary of revival to Leopardi and shares his hesitancy to succumb to the 'lure of Progress', deriving these from her engagement of the work of theorists like Phillippe Pignarre and Stengers:

> A dark bewitched commitment to the lure of Progress (and its polar opposite) lashes us to endless infernal alternatives, as if we had no other ways to reworld, reimagine, relive, and reconnect with each other, in multispecies well-being. This explication does not excuse us from doing many important things better; quite the opposite. Pignarre and Stengers affirm on-the-ground collectives capable of inventing new practices of imagination, resistance, revolt, repair, and mourning, and of living and dying well.[656]

She appreciates and takes her lead from these thinkers, considering the other ways we might reworld, relive, reimagine and reconnect with each other. Striving to convince us to relinquish our attachment to despair, cynicism, optimism and the discourse of progress, Haraway reminds us that our current established disorder is not necessary, and that another world is both possible and urgently needed.[657]

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[654] Haraway, D. J. (2016b) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices* Durham: Duke University Press. 29.
[655] Leopardi, G., Caesar, M., D'Intino, F. and Baldwin, K. (2013) *Zibaldone.* 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Z 259/61).
[656] Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. 51.
[657] Ibid. 51.

Stories for Ahuman Futures

This work has sought to highlight that, although Leopardi's fabulation was philosophical, unlike Haraway's it was largely informed by our situation within the cosmos and his readings of the ancients, particularly Lucian, and was such, of a revitalising character. I showed that the starting point of Haraway's thought is the appreciation that we are deep in the midst of a growing ecological crisis. Haraway, unlike Leopardi, who reflects extensively on the past in his fable writing, is immersed in the present and the future. Whilst the catastrophe reflected Leopardi's interest in the past, becoming most prominent in his consideration of the eruption of Pompeii, in Haraway the catastrophe is part of our present. Other thinkers, like Lovelock and Zalasiewicz, who also form part of the untold story of the reclaiming of the potential of the fable, are propelled forwards in their thinking of environmental catastrophe. Zalasiewicz envisions the world 'many millions of years hence', and Lovelock envisions the next epoch, the Novacene.

Recognising the use of fables by philosophers in the past gives us an opportunity to reconsider the relations we form with each other and the world. By looking at and unveiling how Leopardi influence Nietzsche, for instance, we allow ourselves to consider the insights they intended to portray, which, having been overlooked, particularly in their connection, we have not availed ourselves of previously. Considering philosophical fabulation today, we can ask, what sorts of imaginings and stories can help not only our species, but also those with their own worlds overlapping with ours, and how we might reformulate their connections. We can consider how we can use philosophical fables to inform what Latour calls the New Climate Regime, the life we want to bring about and the new geopolitics that may be more attuned to Gaia, thus opening up the possibility for sustaining, and even enjoying, life on a planet which we can nevertheless acknowledge is damaged and increasingly fragile. Consequently, we can leave bring an awareness of our self-destructiveness to bear on our present and offer new narratives, particularly those that have been silenced, to inform how we reframe the life that still remains available to us. We can then consider that a modern reiteration of Nietzsche's short philosophical fable appears in Lovelock's *Novacene*:

> Our cosmos is 13.8 billion years old. Our planet was formed 4.5 billion years ago and life began 3.7 billion years ago. Our species, *Homo sapiens*, is just over 300,000 years old. Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton appears

> among us only in the last 500 years. For all but a brief moment of its existence the cosmos knew nothing of itself.[658]

Unlike for Nietzsche, in 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', where this period of self-knowledge was 'the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," for Lovelock, this moment represents an awakening in the actualisation of Gaia:

> Only when humanity developed the tools and the ideas to observe and analyse the bewildering spectacle of the clear night sky did the cosmos begin to awaken from its long sleep of ignorance.[659]

For Zalasiewicz, there is hope for us to awaken from this ignorance, as he articulates when he writes:

> …we can imagine other futures too, descending from grand confidence to utter pessimism. We are poisoning the planet, fouling our own earthly nest, causing ecological mayhem, producing an environmental *grande crise* which will not only cause our own extinction, but which will damage all present and future life on Earth beyond repair, and so put a full stop to the four-billion-year-long history of life on this planet.[660]

The significance of philosophical fables today is their potential to play a significant role in imagining other futures, which can prevent us from poisoning the planet and putting a full stop to its four-billion-year-long history of life, in aiding us to awaken from our long sleep of ignorance, and to welcome awe and wonder at the fact that we are living in the brief moment of existence in which the cosmos is gifted with awareness of itself. Theorists like Lovelock and Zalasiewicz pick up the baton left by Leopardi and Nietzsche and, with Haraway, formulate contemporary resolutions to age old questions, drawing on the fable differently to their predecessors in doing so. For Zalasiewicz, the fossils we will leave in the rocks are still ours to determine. We must be aware of the risk we run in allowing our propensity for darkness to expedite the downfall and extinction of species of which we are only one, making ourselves deserving of the ridicule of fabulists over the centuries. The question now is what philosophical fables we wish to think, use, tell, and believe - what futures we wish to imagine.

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[658] Lovelock, J. (2019) *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.* Penguin Books Limited. 1.
[659] Ibid. 3.
[660] Zalasiewicz, 2008, The Earth after us: what legacy will humans leave in the rocks? 2.

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