Giacomo Leopardi’s *Zibaldone*: hypertext template for scholarly annotation

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Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)

Romantic spirit’s aspiration for the infinite *(autonomy of fragment)*
Enlightenment encyclopedic taxonomies of knowledge *(system)*

↓

the dynamics of relativist thought *(“about-ness””)*

**Zibaldone (Miscellany of thoughts) (1817-1832)**

• 4,526 manuscript pages
  • ca. 960,000 words
• Textual fragments of various length divided by date/occasion of composition
  • Italian, Latin, ancient Greek, French, German, Spanish, English, Hebrew
• Wide thematic range: aesthetic theory, linguistics, literary criticism, politics, cognition, metaphysics, memoirs, psychology of affects, social anthropology...
• Ideological matrix of Leopardi’s published prose and poetry
Manuscript Editions

- Author-annotated 19th c. fragmentary manuscript and analytical index
- Print critical and thematic editions
- Facsimile edition
- Digital transcriptions
- CD-Rom (text + facsimile)
- European *Zibaldone*: multilingual hypertext
  - Translations: French (2003), English (2011/2012), Spanish (underway), Chinese (prelim stage)

- Problem neither of these activates the functions of the complex annotation structure
- Consequences
  - difficult to navigate
  - ideological layers and latent theories buried in the form
  - vast critical bibliography which replicates original fragmentation
  - no comprehensive studies even of major themes
  - contradictory ideological interpretations
- Demand web-based edition
The *Zibaldone*: an annotation gone wild or the expansion of hierarchical argumentation?

“Imagine a text that became nothing but footnotes and marginalia referring to one another”

-- D. Kolb, *Socrates in the Labyrinth*

- commentary on readings (**external references**) → scholarly treatises or philosophical fiction (**data gathering**)

- commentary on its own commentary (**internal references**) → not an added dimension to the text but its generative force (**re-reading, expansion, association**)
  - multiplication + expansion of annotations
    - obscures the traditional subordinate relationship of **body** to **target/source**
      - body > target
      - body = target of other bodies
      - target = body of other targets
    - generates fragmentation
      ↔ simultaneity of perception = figurative level of conceptualization translated into language

- semantic indexing (**tagging at paragraph level of Index; 7 long treatise lists**) → “Philosophical Dictionary” (1827) (**formalization, synthesis**)

- impasse: interconnectedness/simultaneity of fragment themes
  - the intermediate structure of the fragment-system dialectic is blocked by the medium
Annotation Segmentation

- author’s divisions by date of composition
- a page with a specific location on the page [the link on p. 3488 refers back to the margin of 2928-2;] variations: end or beginning / number of lines
- specific page-paragraph number [extensively used in Index and adopted throughout document for the anchors]
- single page number [p. 2020]
- a range of pages [p. 2886-87]
- page number with unspecified number of following pages (i.e. to the extent of the date range) [p. 2813 ff.]
- pages which are adjacent but not continuous, even if written on the same date [p. 3284 and p. 3283]
- several pages which are distant but mentioned together [p. 2826 and the following thought, i.e. 2931]
- reference to an index or a treatise theme or a theory, which sometimes is expounded in a cluster of continuous pages; [theory of continuous verbs]
annotation typologies

LOCATION * SEMANTIC * AUTHORSHIP *

ORTHOGRAPHIC (2d)

• (...) parentheses
• [...] = page-paragraph number [edit.]
• {...} interlinear additions and emendations
• {+ ...} marginal comments
  – with a plus or a cross sign pointing to a specific location; [p.2929]
  – without any marking on the side of the paragraph or lines it refers to; [for now also assigned a plus sign and inserted in line of text according to print edition][p.2928, 2930]
• footnotes (bottom of the page or bottom of date range)
  – footnotes’ function may overlap with marginal or interlinear comment or refer to a whole page without a specific location on the page;
  – footnotes may also derive from a marginal comment, i.e. the footnote on p. 2929 is referring to the second marginal comment on that page which already contains another reference, and the footnote itself points to subsequent pages.
• underlining of foreign words
• underlining for emphasis [sem.]
Hyper-LINKS

• external reference [auth.]
  – citations from or full bibliographical references to the original texts to which the Zibaldone is often the annotation (virtual catalogue of Leopardi’s library/Google Books)
  – brief references to texts to support a theoretical argument
  – reference material (dictionaries)
  – Leopardi’s other works; [auth. + edit.]

• specified internal reference [auth.]

• unspecified verbal internal reference [page number provided in parentheses--edit.]

• Page-paragraph number linked to Index theme/sub-theme [edit.]
semantic strength of links: subordination

• subordinate – “to p.####” (written as such)
  – strictly subordinate (“stubs”): no other links [p.3815-2]
    ➢ platform function: bring subordinate paragraphs to their place of reference, while eliminating them from their chronological position in the text.
  – partially autonomous:
    • as the body of multiple targets [3488 is subordinate to 2928-2margin, but it is the body also of 3557-1;]
    • as target of annotations [p.3038]

• reciprocal (established between two existing passages during re-reading); [2826-1, 3037 ↔ 2928]
semantic strength of links: contextual

- semantic extension but not subordinate, nor reciprocal [“in regards to”]
  p.2020 is cited as content of the specific theme which p.2928 continues to
develop. There is no link to 2928 from 2020 [oversight?].

- annotations within the body of fragments indicating reciprocated related
  fragments [p.2813 ff]

- implicit (verbal formulas – edit.) [pp. 2344-45]

- reference to pages referenced in annotation, i.e. explicitly mentioned
  chain annotation
  (p.3060-61 refers to p.3060 paragraph 4, which is a subordinate to p.3058 and in
  turn refers to 5 other instances)

- chained annotations – references twice or more removed from the
  queried target [2821-2 is the body of 2929 and the target of p.3585 and
  p.3625 [twice removed]. P.3585 is a subordinate body to 2821-2 but is the
  target of another annotation p.3637, however at the level of another
  paragraph [more distinctions], etc.
semantic strength of links: index

• overarching theory developed in index theme or treatise list or rarely a page cluster [p.2929 – theory of continuous Latin verbs]

• alphabetical thematic index with sub-themes based on index cards

• 7 long treatise lists of page and paragraph numbers

• thematic tagging at paragraph level [tabulation]

• cross-listings of thematic tags [tabulation]
  – Dante is cross-listed with Ancients, Ariosto, Alfieri, the bible, Boccaccio, Dialects, Elegance in writing, French poetry, Taste, Petrarch, Theory of pleasure, Languages, Freedom in languages, Homer, Imagination, Latin, etc. in a total of 47 themes amounting to over a hundred fragments

• editorial analytical indexes
functions for harvesting and exporting annotations

- harvest and export authorial/editorial annotations
- add, harvest and export custom ones
- select and export annotation chains based on semantic strength of links
- export pages along with the semantic tags of the Indexes;
  - filters of author and editor index
- visualize the relationships between the annotations
  - visualize and be able to link to the critical bibliography related to specific thematic items; granularity level can vary from page number to chapter to article to book;
- combine annotation filters
paradigm proposals and goals

I. Organization of existing annotation structure
   - Research platform for Leopardi scholars
   - Template for working with fragmentary texts
   - Methodological model for semantic tagging and organization of researchers’ desktop archives (signposts)

II. Prototype of digital scholarship: beyond footnotes and endnotes
   - Internal references (embed links to places within document)
   - Embed links to original citations
     - Easy access to full context
     - Allows writing at more abstract structure of argumentation without forsaking the precision of citation
   - Micro (page-level) semantic authorial tagging of digital scholarship
     - Facilitate targeted retrieval during research process and as shared resource
   - Visualizations of syntax structure (mathematical procedures and lists + exhaustive qualifications and relative clauses; zooming in and out – levels of abstraction in argument presentation)

III. Web-based critical apparatus (applicable to texts with large critical bibliography)
   - Need for centralization of critical material (copyright)
   - Field mining to focus interpretative effort
     - Add a tagged draft of research work to scan for these tags in primary text and digitized critical bibliography and retrieve relevant page / chapter / article / book resources