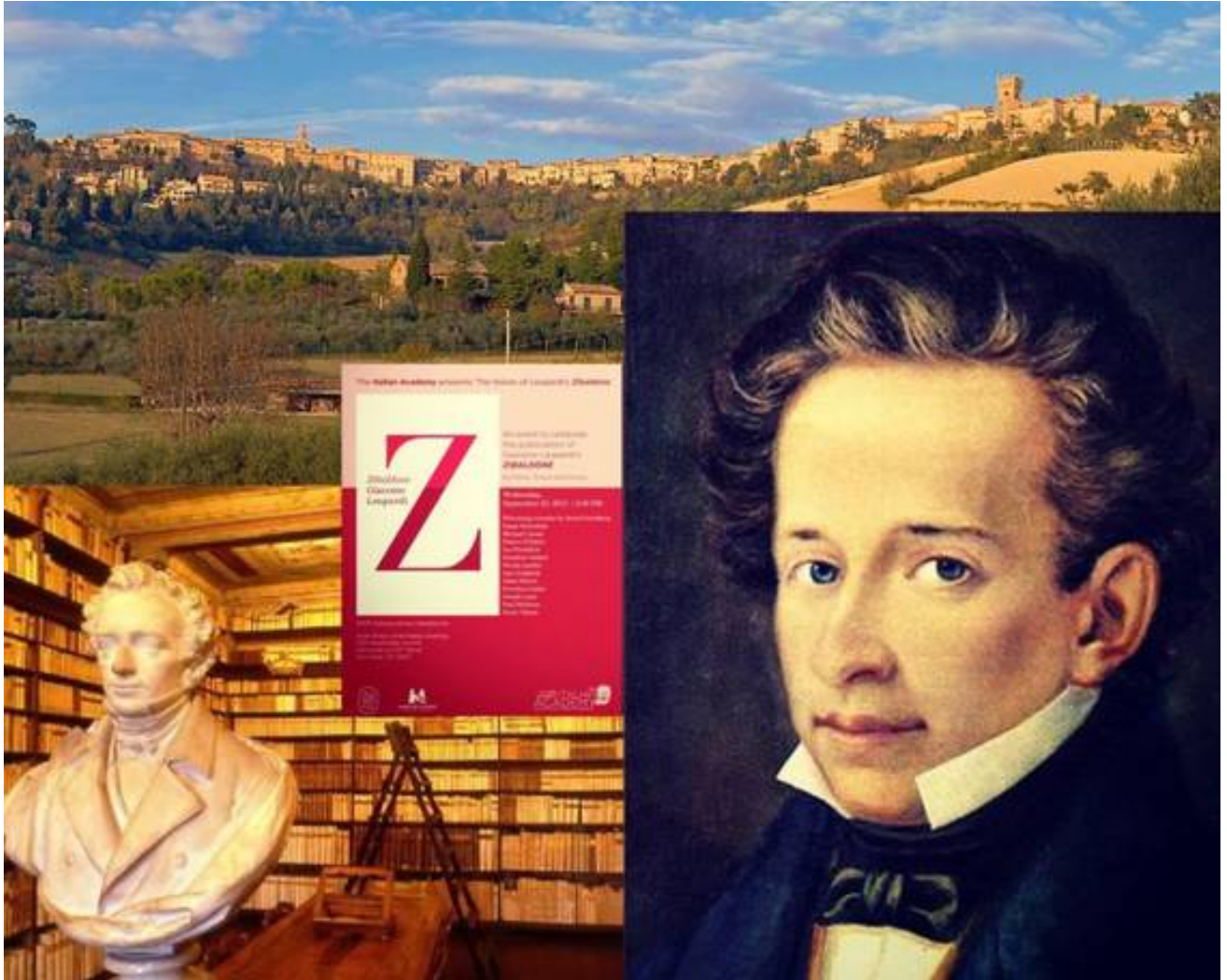


## The Voice's of Leopardi at Columbia University

Natasha Lardera (September 29, 2013)



Zibaldone amasses the unprecedented brilliance of Giacomo Leopardi into one groundbreaking, 2,500-page text. Widely regarded as Italy's finest modern lyric poet, Leopardi spent years cultivating and refining his radical and incisive analyses of religion, philosophy, language, history, anthropology, translation, the natural sciences, literature, poetry, and love in his Zibaldone.

American kids in school are often asked to memorize *The Raven*, by the great writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe. Italian kids, instead, are asked to study *A Silvia*, a poem by one Italy's greatest, Giacomo Leopardi ((1798-1837). Italians consider him one of their greatest minds, but 19th-century poet and



philosopher remains somewhat unknown abroad.

After seven years of toil involving a team of translators in three different countries, a collection of the writer's ideas, observations and thoughts, written over the course of 15 years, *Zibaldone*, that was published in Italy at the turn of the 20th century, decades after its author's premature death, has finally been put, for the first time in its entirety, into English.

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To commemorate this extraordinary, epochal publication, a panel of experts and admirers gathered at the Italian Academy, Columbia University, to read selections and represent the different voices of Leopardi in *Zibaldone* on stage, including Jonathan Galassi (President and publisher of Farrar, Straus and Giroux), Michael Caesar (Emeritus Professor of Italian Studies, University of Birmingham), Franco D'Intino (Director of the Leopardi Center, University of Birmingham), Ann Goldstein (translator and editor at *The New Yorker*), Joseph Luzzi (Professor of Italian, Bard), Paul Muldoon (Poetry Editor, *The New Yorker*; winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry), Adam Kirsch (poet and literary critic), Lee Froehlich (Managing Editor of *Playboy*), Dorothea Lasky (poet and Professor of Writing, Columbia), Nicola Gardini (novelist and Lecturer in Italian Studies, Oxford), Susan Bernofsky (Professor of Writing, Columbia and Director of LTAC) and Paolo Valesio (poet and Emeritus Professor, Italian, Columbia).

The celebration began with an introduction by David Freedberg, Director of the Italian Academy. "*Zibaldone*", by Giacomo Leopardi was edited by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino; translated from the Italian by Kathleen Baldwin, Richard Dixon, David Gibbons, Ann Goldstein, Gerard Slowey, Martin Thom, Pamela Williams and published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

"It has been very, very challenging because it's a very long text – huge, full of quotations in Greek Latin, French, Spanish, English," said co-editor Franco D'Intino.

"Prolific writer, translator, and thinker Giacomo Leopardi was born in the small provincial town of Recanati, during a time of political upheaval and unrest in Europe created by the French Revolution. Although his aristocratic family was affected by the instability of the region, Leopardi was tutored extensively under private priests from an early age, showing a remarkable talent and thirst for knowledge. As a sickly adolescent who was often confined to the household, Leopardi spent most of his time in his father's extraordinary library, immersing himself in classical and philological knowledge.

Within years of independent study, Leopardi became fluent in reading and writing Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, while he began translating various classical texts including Horace and Homer. At the age of fourteen he wrote *Pompeo in Egitto* (Pompey in Egypt) an anti-Caesarean manifesto, and went onto writing various philological works until 1816, which marked a turning point in Leopardi's life which he called "the passage from erudition to the beautiful."

Leopardi wrote *L'appressamento della morte* (The Approach of Death), a poem in terza rima which was heavily influenced by Petrarch and Dante, as well as *Inno a Nettuno* (Hymn to Neptune), and *Le rimembranze* (Memories). After this, Leopardi abandoned other types of work and concentrated on lyric poetry, including his book *Canti* (Songs) and *Canzoniere* (Songbook), as well as many more. Leopardi frequently focuses on the patriotic, idyllic scenes, unrequited love, childhood, and classical themes and references."

([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org) [2])

There definitely is something heroic about the English publication of *Zibaldone*: this landmark publication is a real gift from the nineteenth century of pure literature, dark melancholy, insightful philosophy and pure emotion.



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