

Il suon di lei: On the Poetic Ecology of Leopardi's Soundscapes

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Abstract

This essay explores presence and functions of natural (i.e. nonhuman) sounds in Leopardi's work through the frame offered by disciplines such as soundscape ecology, biosemiotics, and environmental philosophy. Given the enormous number of references to the sounds emitted by nature in his whole oeuvre, I will be focusing on those produced by nonhuman animals, particularly by birds.

Although in the Romantic period birds and their songs became in fact metaphors for the poet and poetry respectively, my goal is to display how Leopardi's avifauna do not correspond to the idealistic powers which his anglophone counterparts so often attributed to the creative individual. Rather, his references to birds and their singing evoke a poetic vernacular soundscape meant to counterbalance what he sees as the negative effects of the modernization occurring in Italy at the beginning of the Nineteenth century as well as to reveal the ecological power of poetry to help human communities reimagine their relationships with the physical environment.

Keywords: soundscape; poetic ecology; anthropogenesis; nonhuman voices; modern poetry.