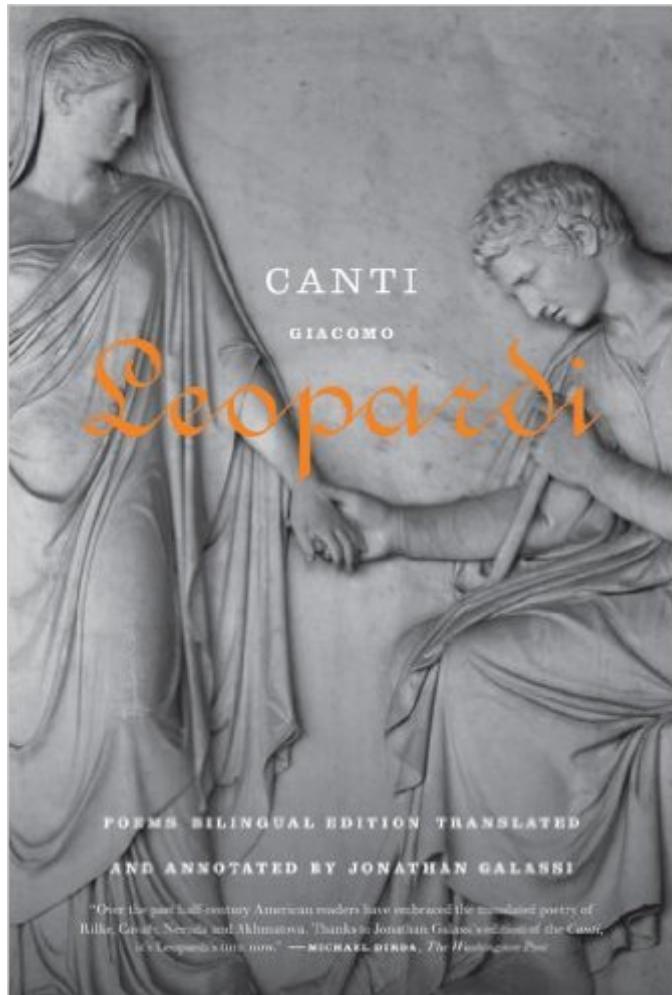


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Canti: Poems / A Bilingual Edition (Italian Edition)



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book for 2011 Giacomo Leopardi is Italy's greatest modern poet, the first European writer to portray and examine the self in a way that feels familiar to us today. A great classical scholar and patriot, he explored metaphysical loneliness in entirely original ways. Though he died young, his influence was enormous, and it is no exaggeration to say that all modern poetry, not only in Italian, derives in some way from his work. Leopardi's poetry is notoriously difficult to translate, and he has been less well known to English-language readers than his central significance for his own culture might suggest. Now Jonathan Galassi, whose translations of Eugenio Montale have been widely acclaimed, has produced a strong, fresh, direct version of this great poet that offers English-language readers a new approach to Leopardi. Galassi has contributed an informative introduction and notes that provide a sense of Leopardi's sources and ideas. This is an essential book for anyone who wants to understand the roots of modern lyric poetry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After reading this collection, I find it difficult to believe that such a monumental work has not been translated with such care before. Jonathan Galassi has done an extraordinary job of making Leopardi's 19th century Italian verse feel both timeless and essential. Not only this, his introduction,

chronology and notes provide the perfect context into which the non-Italian reader can gently and ably approach the great and long-suffering poet. For those that have read *Pensieri* (Thoughts) by Leopardi, this book will provide a suitable compliment as the *Canti* is like the *Pensieri*, only in verse as opposed to prose. The *Canti*, like Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, like Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, much be read with re-reading in mind as there is so much here to absorb and fall in love with. One thing is certain Giacomo Leopardi is quite melancholic and at times sardonic. Though he is a contemporary of Keats and the two share a fondness for the moon and nature, there is nothing of the love of beauty, more the disgust and longing that haunt the Italian's pessimistic poetry. Arthur Schopenhauer, I feel, is the best in summarizing the poet and his work: "everywhere his theme is the mockery and wretchedness of this existence. He presents it on every page of his works, yet in such a multiplicity of forms and application, with such a wealth of imagery, that he never wearies us, but, on the contrary, has a diverting and stimulating effect." I suggest reading this book cover to cover first then going back and reading your personal favourites. But also, a re-reading of *La ginestra* ("The Broom") is necessary.

Eugenio Montale translator Jonathan Galassi has undertaken a task of formidable challenges and one that has been deemed too daunting by many previous poets. However to his credit, and to FSG's excellence in publications, we now have a complete bi-lingual edition of the *Canti* in English (the Italian original is adjacent each translation). The work has been enthusiastically endorsed by Richard Howard, Walter Kaiser and W.S. Merwin, praising the style and packaging alike. Kaiser correctly cautions that "on one level, Leopardi, like Pindar, or Mallarme or Celan, will always be untranslatable because his haunting music and idiosyncratic language cannot be transported" only to add that "in other respects, Galassi's splendid new achievement will, for the non-Italian reader, provide an entry into the incomparable world to one of the greatest lyric poets of the nineteenth century." It is true indeed. Galassi's work reads more like a transliteration than a version of the poem attuned to satisfy the demands of mood and tone - Leopardi's sublime nuances that within the lyrical composition haunt the reader with a staccato too profound to absorb and too obvious to ignore. The reasons for the usual vogue of branding Leopardi a pessimist come to the surface of the lyrical depth, and gracefully the ethics and the dignity of Leopardi are always given its due by Galassi, as much as the intimations of mortality that foreshadow in a consummate imponderable nihilism Leopardi's poetry - thus the warped scepticism that disenchants passionately the simple joys of living and the classical wisdom of civilized ideals alike is in plain view here. Ultimately Galassi gives us a fair and noble lyricism that hints at the tone and clearly reproduces the themes

and its imagery.

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