

Received: 11 October 2023 Accepted: 25 October 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/joe.v3i2.3160>

Benvegnù, D., and Gilebbi, M. (Eds.). (2022). **Italy and the Ecological Imagination. Ecocritical Theories and Practices.** Vernon Press.

Luca Gambirasio¹

This timely volume begins with an interesting preamble that situates its writing in a significant timeframe of Italian history, when two-third of the parliament proposed – and obtained, few months after - an amendment to article 9 of Italian Constitution, in order to include the “safeguard of the environment, biodiversity, and ecosystems, also in the interest of future generations,” and the regulations of “the methods and means of safeguarding [non-human] animals” (Italian Constitution, art. 9). While the editors do not hide their scepticism about how this important change will be enforced, they stress the importance of this amendment being of an already very significant article that depict the State’s commitment to the support of cultural, scientific, and technical research, and the safeguard of the landscape, and the “historical and artistic heritage of the Nation” (Ibid.).

The importance of the correlation between the country’s landscape, cultural production, and ecocriticism emerges as a common thread connecting all the ten essays that constitute this volume. Two clarifications about the latter sentence are needed. While the scholarly field of *ecocriticism* started as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty, 1996: xix), it now aims to encompass all the fields of cultural production (Garrard 2011), and the editors themselves declare in the introduction their intention to “move beyond the traditional tools of literary criticism” (xi) and to include interdisciplinary methodologies and engage with multifaceted narratives and representations of – and between – human and non-human agents. Despite this admirable statement of disciplinary inclusivity, and the editors’ acknowledgement of the possibilities of ecocritical investigations towards other fields of art and cultural production outside literature, about half of the ten chapters included in this volume explore written works, revealing the importance that ecocriticism still has in investigating the relationships between human and their environment in this means of representation. Films are also significantly represented in three chapters, while other cultural and artistic media that could have contributed to depict the nation’s ecological imagination are somewhat absent or under-represented.

The second clarification is about the book’s structure. While in fact there is a common thread that connects the chapters from the first to the last, there are also multiple sub-threads that connect and relate some chapters to others. In the editors’ words, this book is organised “linearly and dialogically” (xii) to make the reader choose whether to engage with the various essays in a linear progression or to jump between the two main sections, *Theories*, and *Practices*, including corresponding essays. The editors’ aim is to make corresponding essays converse

¹ Luca Gambirasio, PhD Candidate at University College Cork, Ireland. E-mail: 120225287@umail.ucc.ie



“and sometimes to converge” (xii), but the converging point is not always easy to find. For example, the conversation between the third essays of both sections is somehow straightforward: chapter three “*Italian Feminism of Sexual Difference: a Different Ecofeminist Thought?*” by Danila Cannamela, seems to set the ideal theoretical foundations for chapter eight (the third chapter of the *Practice* section), “*Abused Bodies, Abused Landscapes: Narratives of Exploitation and Resistance Across the Mediterranean*” by Jessica Sciubba, where two intense non-fiction books representing cases of abuse and exploitation of female workers and the environment are in-depth presented and discussed. Yet, this connection seems to be less clear – or harder to be found, between other pairs of corresponding chapters. In this sense, the editors remark that the connections organically emerged during the editing process and were not thought of during the planning of the volume.

The first section, *Theories*, includes five chapters framed within a specific theoretical approach to ecocriticism. This section opens with Massimo Lollini’s posthumanist and antispecist interpretation of the philosophy of Giordano Bruno, whose critique of the secular ideology that likely favoured the current ecological crisis can inspire what the author defined as an alternative eco-theology (15). In the second chapter, Serenella Iovino builds on a semantic three-faceted elucidation of the word “resistance” in relation to Primo Levi’s narrative depiction of chewing gums and polyethylene objects to ultimately offer a new materialistic approach to the ever-present problem of waste. Chapter three, by Danila Cannamela, offers an in-depth insight into how Italian eco-feminism raises issues of language and intersectionality in comparison and sometimes in contrast with international eco-feminist tendencies. In chapter four, Alberto Baracco expands on the difficult topic of the relationship between human and non-human animals as represented in contemporary Italian cinema, ultimately focusing on Matteo Garrone’s *Dogman* (2018), to demonstrate effective tools for the expression of ecocentric philosophies. The *theories* section ends with Paolo Saporito investigation around walking intended as an eco-performative act, based on the analysis of three different works, arguing how alternative approaches to walking can inform more sustainable lifestyles.

The second half of the volume is named *Practices*, and it consists of five further essays involved with some sort of materiality or material circumstances. The first case study of this section is Serena Ferrando’s depiction of the remote Liguria’s village of Cravasco, and its environmental history in relation to past and present mining operation and the recent implementation of a new railway network that make this village a case for Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence* (2011). The next essay in this section offers a re-interpretation of Giuseppe Penone art. Penone is an Italian sculptor notorious for his tree arts aimed to represent the connection between humans and the natural world. The author of this chapter, Federico Luisetti, interprets Penone’s artistic outputs in terms of “earth beings,” a term used by anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena to designate certain natural entities in Andean mythology. Jessica Sciubba, in the following chapter, offers an eco-feminist critical comparison between two non-fiction books about women and labour violence and exploitation in South Italy, Marco Armiero’s “*Teresa e le altre*,” and Stefania Prandi’s “*Oro Rosso*.” The fourth chapter of this section takes an unusual but compelling turn. The author, Pietro Marcello, provides film examples that take into consideration the point of view of non-human animals and their cinematographic representation through camera point-of-view techniques in order to provide a less anthropocentric perspective. The last chapter of this section and of the book is the ecocritical reading of Guido Morselli’s novel “*Dissipatio H.G.*” The author of this chapter, Emiliano

Guaraldo Rodrigue, expands from the last-man post-apocalyptic narrative of the novel to critique the present and the current debate concerning the Anthropocene.

In conclusion, while *Italy and the Ecological Imagination* is not exhaustive about Italian artistry and scholarship, it successfully addresses and explores a broad range of artistic and ecocritical dimensions, possibilities that, through the multi-faceted and interdisciplinary approaches taken by the authors, can surely inspire further scholarship, perhaps motivating present and future art and research to address the ongoing ecological crisis.

References

- Garrard, G. (2023). *Ecocriticism*. Routledge.
- Glotfelty, C., and Harold F. (Eds.). (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.