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Alessandro Macilenti, *Characterising the Anthropocene: Ecological Degradation in Italian Twenty-First-Century Literary Writing* (Berlin: Peter Lang), 2018, 209 pp.

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Alessandro Macilenti's *Characterising the Anthropocene: Ecological Degradation in Italian Twenty-First Century Literary Writing* significantly contributes to expanding the growing field of ecocritical studies focusing on contemporary Italian literature. Analysing fiction and non-fiction works published in Italy between 2000 and 2010, Macilenti demonstrates how Italian authors have committed to raising awareness about and provoking an emotive response to the current environmental crisis. His study concerns how literature may contribute to solve this crisis and literary authors propose alternative approaches to the environment.

The book is organized around three thematic clusters: the representation of polluted environments (chapter 2); transformation and degradation in processes of land-use (chapter 3); and ecological degradation on a translocal level (chapter 4). Macilenti analyses the literary corpus from a transdisciplinary perspective creating a synergy between literary analysis and data from environmental sciences. This synergy is a cornerstone of the book, as it aims to demonstrate that literature is able to make readers see what numbers and statistics in environmental reports often struggle to convey. The book also includes interviews to three authors whose works the monograph analyses: Jadel Andreetto (Kai Zen collective), Laura Pugno and Wu Ming 2. The interviews account for these authors' creative approach to and ethical standpoint toward the environmental crisis, yet the structure of Macilenti's argument is at times too informed by what they say in this and other occasions.

Macilenti's methodologies, presented in chapter 1, are grounded in a tripartite theoretical framework combining contemporary theories of material ecocriticism (Iovino and Oppermann); the concept of slow violence (Nixon); and the notion of hyperobject (Morton). Macilenti uses material ecocritical theories to argue that literary texts are not detached from the material environment that produces them, but are rather forms of interventions that both shape and are shaped by it. Macilenti then wonders how forms of slow violence—violence that operates in timeframes difficult to grasp from an anthropocentric perspective—could be represented. An answer to this question, according to the author, is to engage in the representation of hyperobjects: ramified (non)human networks of intertwined and co-implicated entities that undermine any form of anthropocentrism and are therefore fundamental for understanding the relational

dimension of the human. For Macilenti, the tripartite methodology is functional to understand how literature proposes an alternative to the two theoretical problems of contemporary environmental activism: the individual's perception of powerlessness against overwhelming issues and the "commons dilemmas"—that is the fact that "all actors have an interest in continuing to behave in a way that is detrimental to the community" (23). The literary texts included in the corpus tackle these issues by fostering the development of critical awareness and empathetic sensitivity.

Chapter 2 focuses on local forms of pollution and how Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra* (2006), Kai Zen's *Delta Blues* (2010) and Wu Ming's *Previsioni del tempo* (2008) can expose and oppose them. Macilenti argues that these three novels differently contaminate reality with imagination in order to make complex environmental issues visible. Saviano makes the understanding of statistical data about southern Italy more emotively engaging by embedding it in human characters' conversations and life stories (47). The articulation of multiple perspectives in Kai Zen's narrative about oil extraction in the Niger delta problematizes the distinction between capitalist colonizers and the colonized locals, while also penetrating the interwoven network of economic, social and political forces causing exploitation. In *Previsioni del tempo*, the stylistically elaborated points of view of criminals involved in waste trafficking produce an understanding of how their purely capitalist, unethical and profit-driven minds work.

Chapter 3 fosters this understanding looking at how, in 20th century Italy, land-use practices (legal and illegal) changed, from the overbuilding of the 1950s to the vicious circle that links tourism with land exploitation. For Macilenti, Simona Vinci's *Rovina* (2007), Giancarlo de Cataldo's *Fuoco!* (2007) and *Gomorra* aim to increase readers' awareness of these phenomena and ultimately promote forms of civil resistance. What forms this resistance shall take in the material world, however, is not clear, both from the novels (Vinci's is perhaps the only exception) and Macilenti's analysis. These authors use autofiction to instil awareness and emotive response in the reader, yet the question concerning how awareness and emotions are to be used outside of the text, after the reading, is not sufficiently explored. If literary forms of environmental interventions and ecosystems are co-implicated, as Macilenti's approach maintains, then perhaps the study of the former and environmental actions in the latter should be pursued within and without the text, seamlessly.

In the last chapter, Macilenti shifts from local concerns to translocal representations of environmental issues. These portrayals create narratives of climate change in order to transcend human perspectives and frame human agency within vast (non)human networks. The narratives of Laura Pugno's *Sirene* (2007) and Alessandra Montrucchio's *E poi la sete* (2010) contaminate what sounds familiar to 21st century readers—global warming, rising sea levels, water crisis—with "uncanny" phenomena (140): a new species of mermaids in *Sirene*; a multisensorial, materialist language and the absence of a linear, teleological and fundamentally humanist conception of time in *E poi la sete*. For Macilenti, it is the presence of this uncanny that questions readers' conceptions, makes them feel strange about the world they live in and ultimately causes critical reflection and an emotive response.

Macilenti's book is a captivating account that bridges the interests of scholars working in Italian Literary Studies, ecocriticism, and the Environmental Humanities. His theoretical framework and methodology is effective because it steps out of the literary field to include concepts emerging from environmental movements' agendas and ecological studies. Yet, Macilenti's research questions do not embody the transdisciplinary character of his methodology, as they essentially relate to the literary domain. How do these books encourage readers to embody and carry out environmental actions? Critical awareness and empathetic sensitivity are the ground on which these actions are to be built, but perhaps more ambitious incursions into Italian authors' "extra-textual" activism—Wu Ming's is the most obvious example—may strengthen the results of this excellent research and the scholarship it addresses.

Works Cited

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