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Serenella Iovino, *Ecologia Letteraria. Una Strategia di Sopravvivenza* with a preface by Cheryll Glotfelty, and a dedicated essay by Scott Slovic (Milan: Edizioni Ambiente, 2006), 157 pp.

Serenella Iovino's expressed aims in writing *Ecologia Letteraria. Una Strategia di Sopravvivenza (Literary Ecology. A Strategy for Survival)* are to introduce Italian readers to ecocriticism and to promote international and interdisciplinary critical debate on literary ecology as an integral part of a wider ethical-cultural project (19). Not only does the author succeed in fulfilling both goals, but her argumentation also flows in an "organic" fashion that makes of the essay itself an ecological piece of impeccable academic writing.

Extremely well referenced, *Ecologia Letteraria* is divided in two parts, one theoretical, and the other practical in nature. The first section, "Un'etica della cultura ambientale" ("The Ethics of Environmental Culture"), opens with a familiar setting for contemporary readers: a postmodern landscape in which the garden coexists with waste (*il giardino e la discarica*). Iovino's choice of an image is a powerful one since it sets the tone for the argument that follows, which stresses the connection between the ecological crisis and the postmodern condition, the emergence of environmental culture thus being, necessarily, an expression of the postmodern sensibility. Just as postmodernism discards great, central, dominant, all-explaining mythologies – which simply serve to reinforce the powers that be – ecological culture attempts to bring to the foreground narratives traditionally perceived as peripheral, in order to establish a dialogical relationship between centre and margins, colonist and colonised, dominant and dominated. Iovino takes the reader through the key philosophical points of reference that inform ecocritical praxes (among others, environmental ethics and deep ecology, ecofeminism, ecosocialism, bioregionalism and globalisation studies), all of which conform to a new cultural paradigm which consciously evolves towards a "non-anthropocentric humanism" (21), one that includes the nonhuman as a moral subject that, in its turn, redefines the human. This first part attests to Iovino's capacity for synthesis and powerful argumentation since, in less than fifty pages, she manages to provide her readers with the necessary background to plunge into the second part of the book, "Quattro Letture Ecocritiche" ("Four Ecocritical Readings"), in which she applies the theoretical framework developed in the first section to the analysis of works by Anna Maria Ortese, Clarice Lispector, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jean Giono.

Iovino's selection of texts and the different ecocritical lenses chosen to approach them provide yet another strong point of the book. By not choosing overtly environmental writing, she proves that any text is susceptible of being studied from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on the way the selected artefact

explores the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. Hence, read from an ecofeminist perspective, Italian writer Anna Maria Ortese's *The Iguana* (1965) brings to the fore an instance of the other which is marked as inferior on the grounds of class, gender and species. Brazilian author Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964) redefines the concept of the divine by dehumanizing it through the narrator's observation of a dying cockroach, which, in its turn, begs for a redefinition of the notions of "transcendence" and "the human".

Because of his multifaceted personality and cultural versatility, the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini provides the best example of what Iovino calls "ecology of difference". Her analysis of Pasolini's work reveals an artist always keen on celebrating the diversity that is indispensable for the existence of the whole. In Pasolini's poetics of diversity it is essential that the work of art displays a non-homogeneous landscape – nature and culture, centre and periphery, "the house of the peasant next to the cathedral and the palace (107), tradition and renewal, normative language and dialect [...] – because homogeneity implies loss of identity, of that difference which is key to make up an authentic, complete landscape.

Finally, Iovino's analysis of French writer Jean Giono's *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1953) establishes important parallels with the land ethics of Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* (1949) and brings the book to its closure with a vindication of the original meaning – and importance – of "tree-hugging" in the Chipko Movement. Given that the survival of all species depends entirely on the health of the earth that sustains them, tree-hugging – here Iovino quotes Deane W. Curtin – "is as much a defense of culture and future generations as it is a defense of nature."<sup>1</sup>

In stating that the ecological crisis is, in essence, a cultural crisis, Serenella Iovino echoes Donald Worster's suggestion that the origin of our current global predicament is not to be found in the way ecosystems work but in how our ethical systems function. Notwithstanding the need to become aware of our impact on nature, in Worster's words, "as precisely as possible" if we want to get through the crisis, he considers that it is more important to understand those ethical systems and use that understanding to reform them. Here resides the importance he accords to the task of "historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists and philosophers" since, even if they are not in a position to reform these ethical systems, "they can help with the understanding."<sup>2</sup> Serenella Iovino's *Ecologia Letteraria* certainly provides that kind of help.

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<sup>1</sup> Diane W. Curtin, *Chinnagounder's Challenge: The Question of Ecological Citizenship* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 79; qtd. in Iovino, 133.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Worster. *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27.