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Anna Re, *Americana Verde* (Milano: Edizioni Ambiente, 2009), 351 pp.

Americana Verde. Letteratura e ambiente negli Stati Uniti is an anthology of American environmental literature; the selections from each author are preceded by an introductory essay of two to five pages. It serves not only as an overview to American literature and ecocriticism for the Italian readership, but also as a useful reminder of the relevance that American literature held in the middle of the past century in Italy. On the one hand, Anna Re provides an introduction to American literature, stressing the fundamental role of the human-nature relationship which forms a common thread connecting the origins of American culture to a present characterized by environmental crisis. On the other hand, she pays homage to Elio Vittorini's *Americana*, the renowned Italian anthology of American literature which played a significant role in the Italian anti-fascist movement; in 1941 the fascist ministry of Popular Culture forbade the publication of *Americana*, and the unabridged version went to press only in 1968. With the initial epigraph from Vittorini's work, Anna Re underlines the importance of the land in American literature from its origins on. In her preface, Fernanda Pivano recalls the years of the fascist regime, when Cesare Pavese urged her to read Vittorini's anthology as a message of freedom. In other words, as the title itself reveals, this volume is intended to create a link between American and Italian culture. In fact, American literature, as Fernanda Pivano writes in her preface to this book, enjoyed considerable attention in Italy from the 1930s onwards, thanks to intellectuals like Cesare Pavese, Elio Vittorini and Pivano herself, all of whom shared both a passion for America and a strong reaction against fascism. *Americana Verde* invigorates this tradition of leftist politics in the light of the environmental crisis, linking two areas of interest, literature and environment, that are still often perceived as separate. Furthermore, Anna Re provides a preliminary introduction to ecocriticism, which has received very little attention in Italian academia and is almost unknown to a general readership.

The table of contents is organized in ten sections: the preface by Fernanda Pivano; six chapters, which contain an introduction to the authors and a selection of texts; two *Intermezzi* dedicated to Yosemite and Big Sur; and an appendix, followed by a useful and detailed bibliography, the acknowledgements and the references for texts and pictures (there are several pictures of emblematic 'wild' places in the anthology, such as Walden Pond, Yosemite Valley, Yellowstone National Park, and Big Sur).

In the first chapter, which consists of four sections, Anna Re outlines the scope and purpose of the anthology. Firstly, she explains her choice of the title, underlining that both Vittorini's *Americana* and her own *Americana Verde* share the same longing

for freedom. In fact, just as the ideology of racial supremacy embraced by Fascism and Nazism precipitated the catastrophe of WWII and the holocaust, so the ideology of human supremacy over nature has now led us into an environmental crisis. However, in this latter case the perpetrators could themselves turn into victims (13). Literature has to play an important social and political role with regard to these issues because, as Calvino wrote in 1980, it “gives a voice to what does not have a voice, [...] it gives a name to what does not have a name yet, and especially to what the political (and cultural) language excludes or tries to exclude” (Calvino qtd. in Re 14; my translation). Given that the environmental crisis is above all a cultural crisis, literature can help to shape a renewed ethical system (14-15). Secondly, Anna Re writes about her experience at the University of Nevada, one of the seedbeds of ecocritical scholarship in the US, where she received her MA and Ph.D in “English with an emphasis in Literature and the Environment”. She provides an overview of the field of ecocriticism, drawing on Glotfelty’s developmental schema (itself borrowed from Elaine Showalter’s model of the three stages of feminist criticism) (19-20): the study of representations (“how nature is represented in literature”), the recovery of a distinct literary tradition (“to recuperate the hitherto neglected genre of nature writing”), and the theoretical phase (“drawing on a wide range of theories to raise fundamental questions about the symbolic construction of [species] within literary discourse”) (Glotfelty xxii-xxiv). Thirdly, the author argues that the “abstract anxiety” (Slovic qtd. in Re 21) caused by the environmental crisis can be faced by focusing on everyday life, which is one of the main interests of environmental literature and nature writing. In fact, nature writing is an attempt to overcome the polarization of scientific and humanistic culture, foregrounding the continuity and correspondence of the human and the non-human (22). The genre differs from scientific discourse in that the voice of the author reflects upon his or her connections with the environment and the sense of belonging with the natural world (23). Recent studies in cognitive psychology demonstrate that narratives are appealing because they involve the interaction of rationality, experience, and affectivity, and permit a better perception of reality through the interaction of the *rational* and the *experiential system* (23). In her definition of environmental literature, Re follows Scott Slovic, proposing that the term should be used to refer to non-fiction nature writing, poetry, fiction, drama, and every text that explores the meaning of nature, the relationship between nature and culture, and personal experience in the physical world (26). In the fourth and last section of the first chapter, the author sketches her own ethical approach, based on the interconnectedness and interdependence of human and non-human beings and rejecting a holistic point of view: the “self” and the “other” are in a relationship of continuity, but as distinct entities (28).

In the second chapter, Anna Re gives a concise introduction to Transcendentalism, and in particular to the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry

David Thoreau. She provides an explanatory guide to Emerson's masterpiece *Nature*, and his vision of nature as a sacred and mystical counterpart of humanity. This is followed by a selection from the "Introduction" of *Nature*, in which Emerson underlines the need for direct contact with nature as a prerequisite for human creativity (40). Whereas Emerson stresses the key points of self-reliance, correspondence of nature and spirit, and the belief that natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts, Thoreau is much more interested in developing themes like the scientific approach to wilderness, passive resistance, the overcoming of the wilderness/civilization dualism, and the poet's ability to join "science" and "conscience" (53). The three extracts from *Walden*, *The Maine Woods*, and "Walking", are selected so as to show how Thoreau's thinking evolved towards a less and less anthropocentric view.

"Green Eden: omaggio a Yosemite" (homage to Yosemite) is the first "intermezzo," in which the author gives an overview of the impressions which the famous national park made on such personalities as John Muir, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Roosevelt, Frederick Law Olmsted, Joseph LeConte, Albert Bierstadt, Mark Twain, Ansel Adams, and Ann Zwinger. The protagonists here, however, are the American wilderness itself and the movement for its preservation. Anna Re emphasizes Muir's political activism in the campaign for the foundation of the Yosemite National Park and his movement from Christian anthropocentrism to biocentric pantheism. In the third chapter, "In Vittorini", a new reading of some of the authors collected in Vittorini's *Americana* focuses on their ability to articulate universal themes, like the longing for freedom and the rebellion against oppressions of any sort, and shows how these themes were interwoven with the representation of the American landscape. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Willa Cather, Jack London, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, John Steinbeck: the selections from their work reveal the bond that unites American literature and the land. In a similar vein, the fourth chapter offers texts by Sarah Orne Jewett, D. H. Lawrence, and Jack Kerouac.

The second "intermezzo" is an homage to Big Sur, the region on the Californian coast famous for having inspired numerous artists and writers with an ecological vision, among them Mary Austin, Jack London, Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, Robinson Jeffers, Lilian Ross, Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Richard Brautigan, Hunter S. Thompson, and Margaret Owings. In the fifth chapter, Re shifts her focus to figures who played a central role in the formation of the environmental movement: Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Edward Abbey all stressed the political urgency of the environmental crisis. Leopold's "Thinking like a Mountain," from *A Sand County Almanac*, is presented as a narrative explanation of his famous "land ethic." Re talks about Rachel Carson's commitment to end the excessive use of DDT and her plea for the preservation of biodiversity, and she includes the opening

pages of Carson's groundbreaking novel, *Silent Spring*. Finally, the section on Edward Abbey illustrates his "rhetoric of anger" and his reflections on anthropomorphism in "Snakes from paradise", an excerpt from *Desert Solitaire*. The last chapter, "The green generation", introduces contemporary authors Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Jane Smiley, Gary Paul Nabhan, Barbara Kingsolver, Terry Tempest Williams, Rick Bass, and Sandra Steingraber - a new generation of nature writers who put the environment front and center in their works. Anna Re here also emphasizes the growth of a global ecocritical community devoted in no small part to the interpretation and popularization of their texts. The appendix "Wilderness Lost" contains the author's reflections upon the meaning of wilderness and two conversations with two leading exponents of ecocriticism, Scott Slovic and Lawrence Buell.

Americana Verde is written in a manner suitable for the general public. For the academic reader, it provides a useful sourcebook, containing many texts that have never before been translated into Italian, and a solid introduction to the field of ecocriticism. While some omissions are perhaps inevitable, given the broad sweep of Re's coverage of American environmental literature, her selection of texts does at times seem capricious (for example, nothing is said about Gary Snyder). Given the goals that Re seems to have set for herself, however, the true measure of this book's success will be its ability to spread an environmental sensibility among the general readership in Italy.

Works Cited

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