When the rest of the world thinks of Italy, usually cobblestone streets, Venetian canals, Renaissance paintings, and Roman cathedrals come to mind. Maybe one also envisions Ravenna's mosaics or Agrigento's temples, or, to the more discerning, Fellini films, Ferragamo fashions, and fast Ferraris. But rarely do such Italian images include nature. College students flock to Italy each year to study art history and architecture, archaeology and urban design (Florence alone houses more than thirty U.S. study-abroad programs), but "environment" rarely figures into the itineraries of their modern-day Grand Tours. Tuscan hillsides stitched with cypress, Vesuvius reflected in the waters of Capri, alpine villages dwarfed by Dolomite cliffs all surprise first-time visitors searching for last suppers and leaning towers—as do the spewing factories of Milan or the toxic waters of the Tiber. Patrick Barron and Anna Re remind us in their valuable contribution that Italy's culture is inseparable from its nature, and that only by contemplating both can we begin to understand the Italian spirit.

In this selection of late-nineteenth and twentieth-century poems, essays, and activist writings—which compose about a third each of the book—one finds dozens of excellent translations of what might be termed "environmental literature": excerpts of Giovanni Pascoli describing autumn afternoons in the Apennines, of Italo Calvino relating the joys of quixotic urban dwellers who discover mushrooms sprouting near the bus-stop, of Giuseppe Dessì showing how Sardinia's post-war economic miracle obliterated forests as well as ways of life. Also included are sketches by poet, political revolutionary, and daredevil pilot Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose "La Pioggia nel Pineto" ("The Rain in the Pinewood") might be characterized as Robert Frost on steroids. Other surprises include a contribution by Pier Paolo Pasolini, better known as a film director (e.g., *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*), but who also painted vivid word pictures of everyday life in Rome's dingy suburbs. Or we read the entry of one Giuseppe Moretti, an organic farmer in the Po plain who is revitalizing and restoring his land in a practice of the wild inspired by Gary Snyder. Moretti's essay is included in the last section of environmentalist and proto-
environmentalist writings that, among other themes, detail the horrors of the 1976 Seveso dioxin spill (by Laura Conti), the dangers of nuclear energy (by Gianni Mattioli and Massimo Scalia), and the necessity of thinking ecologically (by Giorgio Nebbia). All told, these diverse and creative voices, spanning a century and a half, provide fascinating glimpses into Italy's experiences with its mountains and plains, city and country, landscapes and memories. For the uninitiated enthusiast of Italian nature, this anthology is surely the first best stop. It also offers excellent comparative material for anyone generally curious about how people view nature beyond the English-speaking world, some of whom have never tried on the spectacles offered by Gilbert White or Henry Thoreau.

But the armchair Italophile should also realize that this volume could equally be considered an anthology of "Italian Country Life" or, perhaps, an anthology of "Italy in Transition." These essays make it clear that modern Italians--in their enormously varied regions and landscapes--have repeatedly been confronting displacement, warfare, distant governments, rapid industrial change, and rural out migration. While environment and nature are certainly conspicuous subjects of this collection, it seems unlikely that most Italians would consider Barron and Re's selections to be primarily "nature writing," a genre which has been defined as "personal, reflective essays grounded in appreciation of the natural world and of science."[1] I fear that the very act of identifying and isolating this anthology's particular choices may have left out too much Italian nature, or else, have not sampled it fairly. Absent are contributions from national or regional authors like Guido Piovene, Emilio Sereni or Gian Romolo Bignami, for example, who have each written memorably about the human place in the natural world. Likewise, this anthology includes essays that might be better placed in other collections. Carlo Levi's masterful description of daily affairs in an isolated village in Lucania is just that, a masterful de-

scription of southern Italian peasant life in the 1930s, and it is only someone else's decision to suggest Christ Stopped at Eboli is primarily environmental. But to the editors' credit, they include writings of Antonio Cederna, a leading member of the powerful ItaliaNostra, which began in the 1950s as a city preservation group before enlarging its focus to include the countryside. That much of Italy's environmental movement grew out of concerns to save old buildings and piazzas may be surprising, at least to Americans, who still make clean distinctions between historic preservation and nature protection.

This anthology's immediate contribution, then, may be to remind those of us searching for Italian John Muirs and John Burroughs, Italian Rachel Carson and Annie Dillards that these figures cannot really exist. The literary descendants of Dante, Boccaccio, Foscolo, Leopardi and Carducci speak revealingly of nature, but this nature is not often wild, endangered or disfigured, and so those used to such themes must be prepared for subjects engaging the pastoral, communal, sexual and ephemeral. The editors point out that it is not easy to describe a foreign nature: "in Italy there is plenty of beautiful 'wilderness,' but in the Italian language there is no equivalent of the word" (p. xxv). As a window into Italian culture, this book should also be supplemented with a bit of history and a lot of travel--all the while keeping in mind Giuseppe Prezzolini's 1933 warnings (in How Americans Discovered Italy) that "travelers ignorant of a country's language and customs only foster greater international misunderstanding."[2]

Very helpful are the thumbnail sketches of each of the forty contributors, and their place in Italy's literary pantheon or environmental movement. There are also ample suggestions for further reading whenever a piece catches the imagination. The editors' fine introduction provides further context by placing this anthology within the growing academic field of literature and the environment. I especially appreciated the high
quality of the translations, with the added feature
that all poems are mirrored by the original lan-
guage at each turn of the page. Readers of any
Italian proficiency will therefore benefit by glanc-
ing back and forth between the original and its
English equivalent to come closer to the poet’s in-
tended meaning. There will certainly be purists
who will quibble over the choice of translated
words or over the proposed word ordering—or
who will scoff that dense literary forms simply
cannot be translated. And I agree that translating
poems can be like painting Caravaggios by num-
ers. It is telling that poet Daria Menicanti chose
an excerpt of Keats—untranslated—as an epigram
to her own poem (p. 86). It is also telling that
when Italians seek inspiration from American en-
environmental literature, they can pick up their
own copy of Aldo Leopold’s *Almanacco di un mondo semplice* ("Almanac of a Simple World").[3]

Still, conscientious translating can open up
brave new worlds, and Barron and Re’s anthology
goes a long way in demonstrating that translation
is itself a high art form. The numerous splendid
results produced by the teamwork of the editors,
as well as by their decision to reprint the best ef-
forts of other translators (such as William Weaver
and Francis Frenaye) mean that English readers
have in one handy volume access to an amazing
variety and depth of Italy’s best and brightest liter-
ary voices. Whether or not such voices be
demed environmental is for readers to decide.

Notes

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[3]. Aldo Leopold, *Almanacco di un mondo semplice* (*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches
Here and There* [1949]), trans. Giovanni Arca and
Mario Maglietti (Como: Red Edizioni, 1997).
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