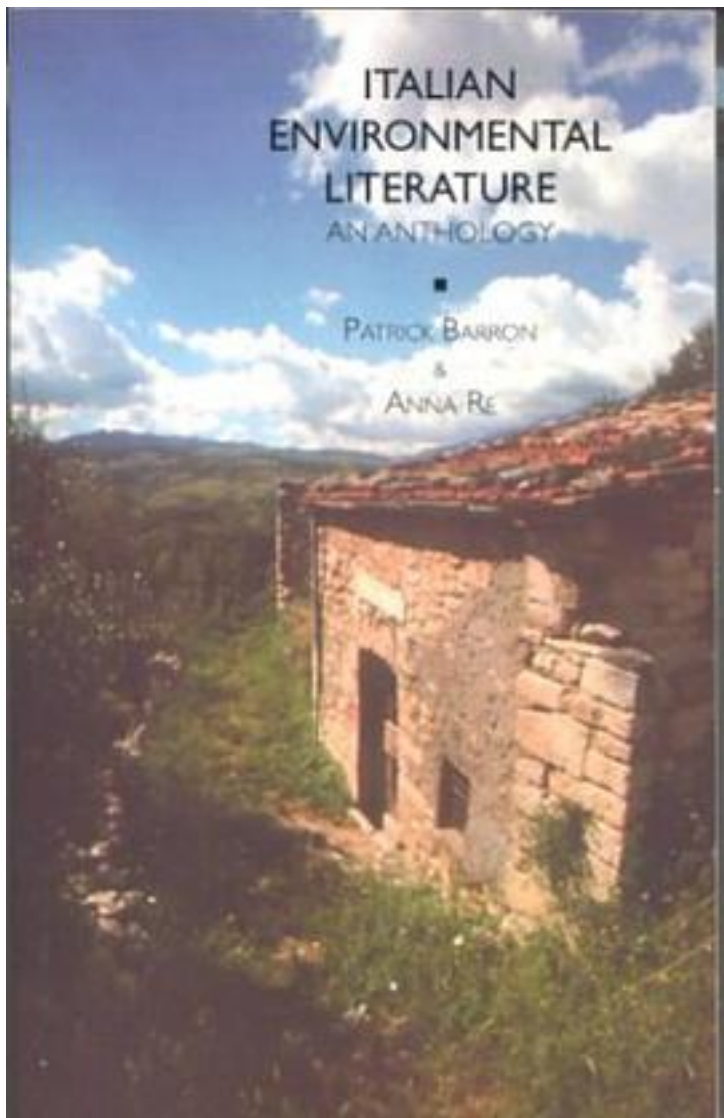


Italian Environmental Literature



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"Italian Environmental Literature" brings together, for the first time - in Italy or for an English-speaking audience - a collection of over 40 authors from the deep and broad tradition of Italian environmental writing. Poetry and prose, the essay, the political and economic tract, and the new visual arts are all represented in this collection.

"Environmental thought and writing in America have long profited from their dialogue with Italy's literature of the earth. From a certain perspective, the modern environmental movement might even be said to have begun in Italy. It was in this ancient land and culture, after all, while serving as Abraham Lincoln's ambassador, that George Perkins Marsh wrote his 1864 masterpiece "Man and Nature." His book, which Lewis Mumford has characterized as 'the fountainhead of the conservation movement,' was the first to argue in a scientifically informed way that human actions could inflict significant, long-lasting damage on natural systems.... "Indeed, one of the gifts Italy offers to American writers and thinkers has always been a deeper and more complex historical vision. In exploring the dialogue of nature and culture, Italian authors frequently look back, not only to past writers such as Lucretius and Virgil, but also to the mythic, pastoral, and agricultural history of the peninsula.... The reverberant, mythic aspect of the past in Italian literature is especially striking in the poetry included here (and in many instances translated so beautifully by Patrick Barron). Not just the animals, but also the trees, the rain, the seasons, the sky, death, rivers, and the poets' own bodies, become conduits for ancient and mysterious powers of the earth. Natural phenomena for these poets can embody history and divinity as well as the laws of physics. In the prose selections here, too, there is often a similar sense of mighty forces immanent in the mundane details of our surroundings. "All of the represented authors have lived and written within the past century and a half. One of the realities of Italian life in this period - extending right up through the decade after World War II - has been the dire poverty of many country people. Living at the edge of starvation may sometimes lend an hallucinatory vividness to sensory perception, as it did so many years earlier for the voluntarily famished St. Francis. In addition, though, the pervasive fact of such deprivation often leads to a heightened concern for social and economic justice in writers like Grazia Deledda and Carlo Levi. "This model of integrating natural landscapes into a broader political discourse can be especially helpful to American environmentalists today, as we try to relate both our wilderness movement and our transcendentalist tradition in nature writing more directly to such historical realities as the Civil War, the Great Depression, and the persistence of racial polarization in our society. An awareness of social conditions that shape both landscapes and the fate of rural communities contributes to the highly sophisticated and strategic rhetoric of the environmentalists with whom this collection ends....

"Through such connections and many more, this remarkable anthology fosters and renews the dialogue between Italian and American literature that has long proven so fruitful, and that has never been more urgent than it is today." - From the Foreword by John Elder, Middlebury College

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