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INTRODUCTION

POETRY FOR CLIMATE/CLIMATE FOR POETRY

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Over the past two years, the four of us have had a series of intriguing conversations on the state of Italian Studies in North America and its future in the context of an increasing number of calls for transdisciplinarity. Prompted by Jeffrey Schnapp’s 2017 reflection on this topic, we began wondering how we could remain rooted in Italian Studies – with an important concentration on textual analysis – and use our positioning as a space of encounter and exchange with other disciplines, while avoiding the risk of “drifting away from our field of expertise”¹. In our opinion, the solution to this question lies in centering our work around texts, namely beginning with language and the written word. Poetry, more than any other literary genre, allows for a deep exploration of texts and for a use of language that challenges the typical boundaries of textuality and everyday communication. We also brought into the conversation our shared interest in ecocriticism and were curious about how poetry could fit into the ecocritical framework and participate in the current environmental discourse, and whether it could provide a unique lens to reading the world. Our discussion of the role of Italian poetry as a forum for environmental reflection became the premise for this issue of *Rivista di studi italiani*, which we consider the starting point of a broader conversation in the context of a growing interest in transdisciplinarity. We hope

¹ Jeffrey Schnapp, “On Disciplinary Finitude”, *PAMLA*, Vol. 132, no. 3 (2017), pp. 505-512.

that our work will generate new ideas and perspectives, and add its voice to the rich debate about the future of Italian Studies in Italy and North America.

In *La poesia degli alberi*, Mino Petazzini states that “the alliance of poetry and nature may be (or may return to being?) something formidable”². Marco Armiero and Stefania Barca argue in *Storia dell’ambiente* that “what is at the center of the world is not man, but the world itself”³. Similarly, what is at the center of poetry is not the human, but humanity’s struggle to comprehend the world. By expressing this process of decentering the Anthropos and re-centering our shared need for co-habitation, poetry can help build new possible alliances between human and nonhuman life. At the core of this never-ending inquiry lies the great potential of poetry in dealing with issues that impact the planet. As Armiero and Barca write, the other side of progress and comfort has been the “complete alienation of people from the natural world” and “the devaluation of the creative power of nature, perceived solely as inert matter and, even, devoid of intrinsic value”⁴. Indeed, one of the themes that we set out to explore in this issue is how poetry can become a vehicle to see another possible side, in order to “reconsider nature, reintroduce its presence into history after it ha[s] been removed, and thus contribute to a change in the mental (and practical) structures with which [the world] looks at nature and uses it”⁵.

This issue is also a manifestation of a certain apprehension we inevitably feel for both the academic life of poetry and the planet. Hence, the chiasmus of our title – “Poetry for Climate/Climate for Poetry” – which points, on the one hand, to the use of poetry as an ecological tool, and on the other hand to the conditions under which poetry can illuminate our ways of inhabiting the world.

Interestingly, the “habitat” of poetry has frequently evoked the natural environment: we might think of the ancient *topos* of poetry as a flower – which recalls the verses of Baudelaire and Pascoli (to mention two notable examples) – and of the etymologies of the words “anthology” and “florilegium”, or, more

² “L’alleanza tra poesia e natura forse potrebbe essere (tornare a essere?) qualcosa di formidabile”. Mino Petazzini, *La poesia degli alberi. Un’antologia di testi su alberi, arbusti e qualche rampicante*, Loreto (AN): Luca Sossella Editore, 2020, p. 20.

³ “Al centro del mondo non c’è l’uomo [...] ma il mondo medesimo”. Marco Armiero and Stefania Barca, *Storia dell’ambiente. Una introduzione*, Roma: Carocci, 2004, p. 115.

⁴ “L’alienazione totale della gente comune dal mondo naturale” e “la svalutazione del potere creativo della natura, assunta come materia inerte e, per giunta, senza valore proprio.” *Storia dell’ambiente*, cit., pp. 123, 127.

⁵ “Rimettere in gioco la natura, ricollocare dentro la storia la sua presenza sinora rimossa, e contribuire così al cambiamento delle strutture mentali (e delle pratiche) con cui [il mondo] guarda alla natura e la usa”. *Storia dell’ambiente*, cit., p. 80.

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broadly, of the classic image of the garden. We often envision the role of the poet as searching for an opening in the hedge or in the wall that separates us from the metaphorical garden where significance, comprehension, and the overcoming of the “this vs. that” or “us vs. them” binary divisions lie. This special issue of *Rivista di studi italiani* marks a significant step in the direction of conjoining the two practices of poetry and environmentalism – practices that until very recently have not been paired except in the work of a few Italian scholars and artists.

The main questions we aim to explore in this issue are the following:

1. How can poetry contribute to setting new parameters for the discourse about climate change, about the relationships between humans and the natural world, and about the humanities?
2. How have environmental preoccupations permeated Italian poetry?
3. How can poetry shape the debate about the modes and strategies we can employ to respond to the ever-changing conditions of our habitats?

Or, to put it differently, we might summarize everything in one all-encompassing question: “Why poetry and climate?”

In exploring the ways in which this versatile genre has adapted to its environment, the contributions collected here display an admirable variety of topics, approaches, and methodologies, while spanning the entire length of Italy’s literary history, from Dante to the 21st century. The essays have been grouped into three main categories: “Framing the Issue”, “Early Modern/Modern Authors”, and “Contemporary Poets”. In spite of all this diversity, at a close examination, we can trace a few main threads that emerge as crisscrossing this special issue. First, the Italian declination of the ecocritical approach often leads to a reassessment of classical texts or age-old issues of hermeneutics and scholarship, through a different lens, as it were, leading invariably to remarkable, new insights. See, for example, the essays here devoted to Dante, Petrarca, and Tasso: as canonical as they come, and yet even the most consummate specialist will come away having looked at those familiar lines with fresh eyes. Second, there seems to be a shared effort, across scholars, to ponder the philosophical, political, and sociological responsibilities that poetry has in matters of climatic change and adaptation. Indeed, all the essays included in the section “Framing the Issue” are concerned precisely with this problem, although it is a preoccupation that runs through all the various discussions of contemporary authors as well as their verse. Finally, a third theme that clearly emerges is the radical reassessment of *poiesis* as a creative practice that strives to become ever more inclusive (especially of the nonhuman; see Zuliani as well as Marchese), ever more focused on processes rather than products, a form of liquid praxis that is never still, that keeps adapting to circumstances, actors, and containers (see, for instance, Nardi’s reflections on Anedda, or Brotto’s and Welle’s musings on Zanzotto, or

Belletti's emphasis on the performative aspects of poetic writing in recent poetry).

These contributions denote an appreciation of poetry as oriented towards the future and rooted in hope, an approach that is constructive rather than antagonistic, and that can build on the critical and hermeneutic tools developed by literary studies over the course of 1,600 years of activity, if we take Saint Jerome as the honorary founder (and patron saint) of the discipline. Throughout the articles gathered in this volume it will become apparent how the ecological lens is a very apt tool to focus on a number of different issues that could seem disparate but are actually strictly interrelated: repositioning poetic language beyond the realm of human words, rethinking the Italian literary tradition as the origin of an evolving discourse on nature, and digging into the unpleasant reality of climate change through the beauty of poetic verses.

In an effort to make this special issue as useful a tool as possible, we have provided a brief overview of all the articles featured in the volume.

The first section includes essays that lay the foundations of our theoretical and literary discourse about poetry and the natural environment. Maria Borio's contribution, "Autenticità e natura", argues that in the 21st century, the field of ecology is faced with a question that sounds rather "poetic": "What is the meaning of life?" By analyzing representatives of the French (Charles Baudelaire), Anglo-American (William Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson), and Italian (Andrea Zanzotto, Giacomo Leopardi) poetic tradition, Borio shows a common use of embodied images and experiences rather than universal and abstract tenets. In the work of these poets, the essence of nature is intrinsically relational. Retracing Zanzotto's evolution from *Dietro il paesaggio* (1951) to *Conglomerati* (2009), Borio contends that in his early production Zanzotto found authenticity within things, ideas, and language, while the later poems suggest a belief that the authentic meaning of life can only be grasped in the relationships between these foundational elements. Borio retraces how nature changed from an aesthetic and epistemic experience in Baudelaire and Dickinson, to a "dialectical horizon" in Leopardi and Zanzotto, who formulated a dialectic of N/nature, or a mixture of human actions and biological events. The research for authenticity, then, can only come from a thinking-with or a relational thinking (a unison between conscience and nature). The distinction between a Romantic view of nature and the modern Zanzottian view, Borio argues, lies in the increased complexity of the individual's involvement in and awareness of nature's inherent dialectical character.

In "Poesia come strumento ecologico", Ferrando enquires about the potential of poetry to inspire new modes of living on the planet. The author acknowledges that poetry occupies a peripheral space even in academia, but reminds readers that margins can represent productive spaces of openness, resistance, and creativity. The essay develops a fascinating meditation on poetry's role as an ecological tool, which delves into the slippery territories of

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the liminal and the marginal. Drawing on Gilles Clément's theory of the "Third Landscape", Ferrando argues that the peripheral space inhabited by poetry is a shared territory "expressing neither power nor submission to power", a territory in which it is possible to cultivate horizontal relationships with other forms of life and experience diversity as a meshing of languages, cultures, and species. The author exemplifies the potential of this poetic grammar of the encounter in her reflection on the Italian word, *verso*. The term occupies a blurry territory of intersections as its signifier creates an unexpected close proximity between human and other-than-human realities: *verso* simultaneously designates the poetic verse, the animal sound, and the potentiality of moving towards new directions, towards new symbiotic spaces that might bridge human and other forms of life.

To examine this possible trajectory – this act of moving towards a third space of cohabitation – Ferrando engages with a few texts by Daria Menicanti, a poet who occupies a rather unexplored landscape in the Italian literary canon. Her analysis shows how Menicanti's verses enable readers to access a possible space of encounter with creatures, like weeds and insects, that are revealed to be an integral part of human experiences and geographies. The language of poetry, through its verses that encompass and trespass human boundaries, marks the possibility to overcome human communication and embrace an ecological discourse that "foster[s] multispecies relations [...] rooted in coming together rather than pulling away", in moving towards the margin to rethink new positionings for a shared, rather than individualist, center.

Rizzo's "'Dalla parte della vita': Poesia e Ecocritica" closes the first section by investigating what role (if any) poetry can play in understanding and influencing the political forces that shape our environment, our discussions of the climate crisis, and our role and responsibilities in it. Drawing on Jameson's discussion of a "narrative *pensée sauvage*", Rizzo looks at poetry to point out its potential for activating resistance on a rhetorical, symbolic, and political terrain. Poets and scholars should explore language and narrative structures, to detect those rhetorical mechanisms that perpetuate the *status quo* and contribute to the maintenance of dominant power structures. Rizzo examines excerpts from Italian avant-garde poetry (Celli, Manganelli, Majorino) that subvert the metaphor of the river as a natural representation of time, inevitably directed toward progress. Another problematic issue embedded in the representation of history as a movement towards progress hinges on which community is considered the protagonist of such a teleological narrative. Rizzo concludes his analysis by adopting environmental humanities concepts – in particular the notions of "sympoiesis" and "symbiocene" – to suggest how literary strategies, including Harolde de Campos' "transcreation" and "cannibal translation", can provide new decolonized ways of understanding identity, authorship, agency, and the relationship with tradition.

Undeniably, it is easier to apply ecocritical perspectives to texts that either explicitly raise awareness of environmental concerns or in a more nuanced way reflect how the ecological discourse has contributed to shaping the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. But if analyzing medieval and early-modern poetry through an ecocritical lens might be a less obvious (or even controversial) approach, the articles collected in the second section demonstrate how this contemporary perspective can open new paths for reinterpreting the Italian poetic canon, highlighting lesser-known aspects of the tradition, and creating transcultural bridges between the past and the present.

An effective example of this ecocritical look into acclaimed poetry from the past is Giulia Andreoni's analysis of Tasso's romance epic poem, *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581). By engaging with frameworks in the environmental humanities, including new materialism, material ecocriticism, and biosemiotics, Andreoni focuses on a popular vegetal motif – trees – in selected cantos of Tasso's work. Andreoni shows how even a text that is typically discussed in relation to the Catholic counter reformation and its impositions can surprisingly become a venue to voice critiques of anthropocentric and androcentric views of society. The essay demonstrates how authors of all epochs have used poetry as a language that can enable the human to express, and reflect upon, more-than-human communication, by acknowledging that “nonhuman organisms are sentient, display agency, communicate through signs, and participate in the creative process”. What is particularly compelling in Andreoni's contemporary reading of Tasso's epic is that, while connecting a 16th century text with contemporary theories in the environmental humanities, her analysis remains rooted in a historical assessment of Tasso's work. She references ancient texts and myths to argue that “writing about and with all of nature affected not only readers from [Tasso's] time, but continues to have impact on contemporary readers”.

In “The Sensibility of Stone in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*”, Caroline Dormor adopts a material ecocritical and new materialist perspective to analyze three episodes of geological displacement in the *Divine Comedy*: the fall of Lucifer, the earthquake following Christ's crucifixion, and the mountainquake following Statius' release from penance. In these three events, Dormor argues, “the boundaries between the lithic and the human are blurred and [...] geological and human narratives intertwine”. Dormor observes that Dante makes stone lively in accordance with medieval beliefs that it was a “sensitive material”. “Dante's turn toward the lithic”, in fact, can be traced to medieval legends that viewed gemstones as “formed, like clay, from water and earth” as Adam was created by God breathing on a block of clay. Naturally, in the religious context of the *Commedia*, the rocky topographical markers of Dante's pilgrimage have obvious moral and allegorical implications, but Dante's representation of stone is noteworthy to Dormor since it represents an invitation to reconsider “hierarchical categories of being which divide the human from the

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nonhuman forms of living and from inanimate matter”. In the first of the three episodes, which recounts the creation of Purgatory in *Inferno* XXXIV, the stone retreats in horror from Lucifer during his fall from Heaven. Similarly, the innate recoiling from sin of the lithic embedded in humans marks the road to salvation. In the second episode, in *Inferno* XII, the rock of Hell shakes the moment Christ dies on the cross and landslides and broken bridges remain as “stony stigmata” from the event. Lastly, the mountainquake in *Purgatorio* XXI marks the earth’s rejoicing with the other souls for Statius’ final purification and advancement to Paradise. In this “ontological blurring of the human soul and the mountain”, writes Dormor, the rock’s responses to events are anthropomorphized. However, rather than a myopic representation of the nonhuman, anthropomorphizing is employed here as a strategy to blur “the boundaries between the human and the lithic” and extend “the possibility of agency to non-human matter”.

Traditional literary criticism has often looked at Petrarca’s climb of Monte Ventoso as a moment in which the modern opposition of subject vs. nature was established for the first time. This would make Petrarca the first “alpinist”. Lollini argues against this critical trope on two different fronts. First, he shows how there has been a tradition, since classical times, of narrating a climb to a high vantage point in the landscape in order to gain a view of the surroundings but also as a way of gaining a spiritual insight. A number of philosophers of the past considered mountaineering as a physical, philosophical, and spiritual exercise that was necessary for experiencing the sublime. This is what happens to Petrarca when he climbs up Monte Ventoso. Reading and walking the landscape are both activities that are also indispensable for writing poetry. Nature is where a more-than-human sensibility can be accessed. There is a feeling of “rapture” that occurs in natural landscapes and is necessary for writing poetry. The mind, nourished by the act of reading, meets the landscape and this interaction leads to composing poetry. Lollini presents this as a dialogue with nature, one that finds echoes in contemporary American literature.

On that ascent, Lollini recalls, Petrarca brings along St. Augustin’s *Confessions*, to read once he reaches the top. In this context, nature is not simply a background, but an agent that activates a process of spiritual growth. The mountain is a landscape that universally can inspire the experience of the sublime, which is not an appreciation of beauty, but rather a disquieting and overwhelming feeling. In exploring Petrarca’s relationship with nature, Lollini also mentions that Petrarca was a skilled gardener, inasmuch that, in his letters, he describes a system of two gardens, which he created in all the houses where he lived. One garden is open to the wild; it is shady, meant for work and study, and consecrated to Apollo, the god of poetry. The other is closer to the house, is more cultivated, and it is meant for Bacchus, the god of wine and pleasure. This system mirrors Petrarca’s poetic vision: rhetoric and tradition on the one

hand, and the fascination with the wild experience of the sublime, on the other. Lollini concludes by observing that this vision informs “Chiare, fresche et dolci acque”, in which both the poetic subject and the object described by the poet (Laura) are entities intertwined with nature. Like in the description of the climb of Monte Ventoso, the natural environment in this text functions as an activator: it enables the poet to access lost memories – the remembrance of that experience of the sublime that he had when he saw Laura in the landscape.

Moving on to the contemporary poetry *milieu*, the third and last section opens with Belletti’s essay, “Poetiche per l’ambiente: Un fare tra *ópsis e oikos*”. Here the author investigates the visual (*ópsis*) and performative components of contemporary experimental poetry, extending his observations to what he calls “environmental poetics”.

Consistent with its etymological implications, a poesis of *oikos* (eco) is a “making of place” that Belletti retraces both inside the poetic language, understood as a space made of words, and outside language. This kind of writing goes beyond linear poetry and involves practices of performance and co-creation. A few examples discussed by Belletti are: Tonino Guerra’s use of notes and small billboards, posted throughout Valmarecchia as a way to help raise awareness about pollution within his community; Danilo Dolci’s understanding of poetry as an educational means toward environmental activism; and Ruggero Maggi’s deployment of Mail Art as a means to protect the Amazon Forest. Beside their shared ecological themes and interests in activism, these texts display an authorial structure that is radically different from the lyrical subject of mainstream linear poetry. Drawing from Serenella Iovino (and her idea of “individuo diffuso”) and Stuart Cooke (who follows the Indigenous Australian and South American contemporary poetry scene), Belletti shows how, in contemporary environmental poetics, the concept of authorship is changing and has come to embrace a collective voice (*coralità*) shared with animals, who participate with their “doing” in the process of poesis. Belletti mentions a few examples of this shared voice: in *Airone* (1988), Antonio Porta enlisted the help of a bird in his writing process, by observing its movements in space. Earlier on, in the 1960s, Luisella Cattetta used observations in place as a creative practice, staring at the landscape from the point of view of animals and plants. Adriano Spatola was a pioneer of performative naturalism, when he used his body as a creative instrument. Belletti’s analysis engages with several other poets and artists (Carlo Belloli, Arrigo Lora Totino, Giovanni Fontana, Chiara Mulas, Joan Jonas), whose experiences rely on both the *ópsis* element and the performance, in order to give a body and a place (*oikos*), an ecosystem if you will, to the poems, causing them to reflect the environment while simultaneously influencing it.

Zanzotto’s poetry has inspired countless ecocritical studies. Brotto’s essay, “Relitti divenuti reliquie. Il paesaggio di Andrea Zanzotto attraverso l’esperienza del film *Logos Zanzotto*” proves that, despite the rich scholarship

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on Zanzotto's ecopoetry, there is still much to be said about this Italian poet of nature, who spent his entire life in a small village in Veneto, Pieve di Soligo. Brotto directed the documentary film *Logos Zanzotto* (2021), which recounts Zanzotto's life and poetic production by marrying artistic creation and academic research. The documentary visually evokes the multifaceted meaning that the landscape had in Zanzotto's work. The poet always conceived of his native land as a lens for observing and interpreting social and historical changes. In this context, the ruins are all those abandoned places that testify to the beliefs and hopes in imminent growth and wealth, which fueled the creation of several industrial complexes in Northeastern Italy. Now, these ruins mark the passage of time and the destruction of the landscape, while their decay also reflects the change in our language. Zanzotto's verses in his native dialect express the vulnerability of the bond between people and places. Indeed, the gradual disappearance of dialects is closely linked to the crisis of contemporary society.

Brotto's essay takes a position on behalf of Zanzotto: poetry is profoundly connected to nature, one being an expression of the other. They almost overlap, since both are capable of opening spaces of possibility. In this sense, ruins could become "vestiges" as nature allows life to begin again within them – connections are re-established, in a broader dynamic of place-making. If poetry expands the possibilities of reality, in *Logos Zanzotto* Brotto elaborates on his strategy to repurpose what Zanzotto did with his texts: the filmed images are slightly altered by the superimposition of handwritten words taken from the poems themselves. The juxtaposition creates a dynamic emotional superstratum that interacts with the landscape and the images on display. Brotto recreates an emotional landscape, giving the reader a complex portrait of the poet in the round (enhanced in the documentary by footage from Zanzotto's family private archive) so that the entire essay seems to clarify what Zanzotto's geographer and friend Eugenio Turri meant by "landscape" as opposed to "territory" – the former highlighting the affective ground that binds people to their surrounding spaces.

Marchese's essay, "Ecologie favolose nella poesia siciliana contemporanea (1967-1985): Lucio Piccolo e Vincenzo Consolo", delves into Sicilian literature, investigating the ecological tension at the heart of Lucio Piccolo's *L'esequie della Luna* and Vincenzo Consolo's *Lunaria*. As the author argues, these texts allow us to broaden the idea of "environment" beyond a strictly naturalistic conception. Looking up to the sky offers an unusual path within "traditional" ecocritical readings and provides examples of how astronomical conceptualization and representation can reveal alternative relationships between humans and the other-than-human.

Drawing from the philosopher of science Toulmin (a student of Wittgenstein) and his studies on cosmology, Marchese shows in detail how science presupposes and shapes the human "feeling of time". Fantasy and

literary imagination, Marchese argues, are means of putting into words what we are calling cosmology. The examples from the texts show how the human position within cosmological structures loses power over time in response to scientific progress and the deconstruction of anthropocentrism. From Dante to Leopardi, the sky (the Universe and its celestial components) is both a spatial and an existential referent; Leopardi, in this sense, is a notable example that neither Piccolo nor Consolo could ignore because of the prominent role the moon plays in his reflections. In the same way as astronomy, poetry can be considered a space of possibilities, where scenarios other than reality find their place.

Marchese's analysis discusses in detail the convergences and divergences between Piccolo and Consolo's texts. Although *Lunaria* is a rewriting of Piccolo's *L'esequie della Luna*, Consolo distances himself from his direct source not only because his work is more politically and socially engaged, but also because, in Marchese's words, Consolo intends to "re-signify the [motif of the] fall of the moon as a preparatory step for a collective rebirth, for a possibility of liberation for the community of the tale". In this regard, Consolo recalls that Piccolo wrote *L'esequie della Luna* in 1967, at the height of the Cold War race to the moon. Within this historical-political framework, Marchese proposes to read the astronomical deflagration in *L'esequie della Luna* as a symbolic representation of the growing distrust of the potential of poetry, which reduces nature to a mere cover for the vacuity of life.

Francesca Nardi's "Lingua d'acqua. La poetica relazionale di Antonella Anedda tra insularità e tradizione" focuses on the embodied experience of Anedda's writing and her fascination with the element of water, which until now has remained mostly unexplored. The blurring of boundaries produced by water is akin to that generated by Anedda's poetic language in a natural-cultural continuum that Nardi sets out to explore. As both separation and connection, alterity and identity, water is by essence dialogical, decentering, and constantly – but imperceptibly – producing change: a definition that also applies to poetry.

Nardi sees water as "relational matter" and a direct expression of transcorporeality, or the reciprocal openness of human bodies and nonhuman natures. Water (as generative matter) and poetry (as discourse rooted in the environment) layer stratified meanings and bio-geological time. Although Nardi does not propose an (eco)feminist reading of Anedda, she adopts the "watery" diffractive and generative lens of hydrofeminism to counter traditional approaches to water as solely a marketable good.

Anedda's practice of self-translation from Italian into the Sardinian tongue, or *limba*, addresses a need to retrace and resist erasure and to engage in a life-centric activity that is rooted in the geo-historical memory of the island of Sardinia. The local tongue is perceived – like Andrea Zanzotto's views of dialect – as a "geological stratification" and a "deep layering" on which Anedda's writing rests. Through a rich set of examples, Nardi shows Anedda's

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ability to stretch and dig, embracing the complexity of a landscape that is both text (culture) and matter (nature).

The poetry of Zanzotto is at the center of John Welle's essay "Tripping' with Zanzotto: Poetry, Plants and Psychedelics". Zanzotto's demonstrated interest in psychedelic drugs appears to have exerted an influence on his work since his "consistent allusions to hallucinogenic substances", Welle argues, are "a metonymy for the act of writing poetry". With a tripartite concentration on literary experimentalism, vegetal life, and hallucinogenic substances, and the ways in which they intersect in Zanzotto's work, Welle delves into the poet's complex and "trippy" multispecies universe.

Welle cites plant consciousness studies to relate reading Zanzotto's poetry to experiences of drug-mediated communication between people and plants aimed at establishing "symbiotic alliances with humans". Poetry is then a "verbal drug" inducing a high that consists in the blurring, through the poetic creative process, of the evanescent human/more-than-human boundary normally unavailable under other circumstances.

Welle's fascinating web of poetic, vegetal, and medical threads peaks in the close reading of the poem titled "Attraverso l'evento" from *Il Galateo in Bosco* in which "the therapeutic powers of poetry and its mysterious connections to medicine" appear. "Attraverso l'evento" is a complex and densely composed poem that employs typographic symbols as well as hand-drawn signs in the attempt to render the processes occurring in nature (such as the flowering of a peach tree) into poetic language and transcend the limitations of the human body into a higher realm that is also associated with "psychedelic 'trips'".

Welle draws a parallel between the effects of Mexican psychoactive plants such as peyote and psilocybin and those of Zanzotto's visual style, noting that his poems are not just for reading but also for seeing, that is, for introducing the readers to modes of alternative, non-verbal communication such as the vegetal ones. An Appendix showcases five variants of "Attraverso l'evento", two of which are from hard-to-find artists' books. In each of the variants the word "trip" is present to varying degrees. According to Welle, the variants indicate Zanzotto's approach to the poem as an open text that changes over time (as a living organism) and, as such, signals possibilities to exist as life itself.

Luca Alberto Zuliani, in his piece "Poesia antropocentrica, antropocenica, animalier. Animali in versi in tre poeti contemporanei: Marcoaldi, Balzano, Bertoni", proposes a categorization of poetry that focuses on human-animal relationships through the analysis of three fairly recent collections of poems. While acknowledging the obvious limitations of any type of classification, the author asserts that poetry scholars are still responsible for providing critical terminology and interpretative frameworks that can help readers navigate pressing cultural discourses.

In Zuliani's analysis, Marco Balzano's book *Nature umana* (2022) comes to exemplify anthropocentric poetry, a type of poetry that, despite representing

animal lives, is exclusively concerned with the human – with the “contemplation and interrogation of a [human] self” who remains estranged from the state of nature and can only live trapped within (and sheltered by) human-made fabrications.

The second category, which Zuliani, in a nod to the language of fashion, calls “poesia animalier”, strives to express a mimetic relationship between the human and the animal, but falls short when it overtly treats the animal as a piece of clothing that (only) the human has the privilege to remove. Franco Marcoaldi’s *Animali in versi* (2022) illustrates this second strand. In the collection, the attempt to give voice to the animal that inhabits the human turns into a stereotypical use of animals that typify either a “natural” condition of bliss or inhuman degradation. Ultimately, Marcoaldi cannot help but reveal the unfillable gap between humans and animals, along with an abjection for the animal that the poetic voice would like to impersonate, or rather to “dress up as”.

The third category contains anthropocentric poetry, namely, a poetry that has been intimately shaped and suffused by the planetary timeframe of the Anthropocene. Zuliani notes distinctive anthropocenic features in the last section of Alberto Bertoni’s book *L’isola dei topi* (2021), in which the rat comes to symbolize the threat of contagion that the COVID-19 pandemic has made visible and ubiquitous. The rat also serves the function of a poetic device that “erodes the thematic integrity” of the last few pages, which veer towards an “apocalyptic polysemy”. In this contagious poetry the human self is exposed to, and eventually surrenders to, the “gnawing” agency of the environment: Bertoni experiments with a language and expressive paths that are hybrid, infected, and meshed.

In offering a convincing categorization of contemporary poetry that investigates human-animal relationship, Zuliani problematizes the importance of reframing anthropocentric modalities of thinking and communication. However, his contribution is interesting also for the questions that remain unresolved, opening paths for further debate: without resorting to AI, is it actually possible to write non-anthropocentric poetry? Can traditional anthropocentric poetry still succeed in expressing environmental values? Or is anthropomorphism perhaps our best attempt towards envisioning our needs and desires beyond the human, towards a collective space in which humans and other forms of life can have their voices heard and enjoy equal rights? What if moving beyond anthropocentrism entailed inhabiting the blurry space of the poetic conatus, of a movement that aspires (and inspires) to encounter nature, but simultaneously acknowledges that this movement toward must remain endless?

This comprehensive exploration of Italian poetry across different epochs, styles, and ecocritical discourses is definitely not exhaustive but can serve as a compass to venture more deeply into the thick foliage of the poetic “garden”. A

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separate space within the literary environment, this is also a site where authors have found shelter from dominant binary mindsets and have engaged with the poetic language to mend or rethink the relationship between human and nonhuman.

Here the use of the term “compass” is a reference to Johnathan Skinner’s essay “Conceptualizing the field: Some compass points for ecopoetics”. In this 2011 work, Skinner draws (quite literally) the cardinal points of this fast-growing field to retrace past directions and envision possible future trajectories. His analysis conceives of ecopoetics as a multifaceted place linking site-specific concerns with local discourses, a place in which “healthy native plant associations” make room for “planetary gardens of vagabond species, in a necessary coexistence of the place-bound and the nomadic”. In a similar way, our investigation, in bringing together idiosyncratic aspects of Italian language and culture with broader debates about climate change and poetry as discipline in the humanities, is an attempt to cultivate a new ecocritical attention to close reading that resonates with planetary-scale questions.

While suggesting possible modes of investigations and directions for Italian poetry, our compass inevitably points at areas of the “garden” that have remained rather untended. This might include the need to offer new resources to teach Italian poetry in translation – Patrick Barron and Anna Re’s anthology *Italian Environmental Literature* was published more than twenty years ago – , to address critically the current canon of Italian (eco)poetry in light to pressing demands for more inclusive scholarship and pedagogy, and to explore possible areas of crosspollination with Italian and American poetry.