



Narratives in the Anthropocene era

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Eds.)

Italian writers and the Anthropocene

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Abstract

Three Italian writers have used their art to denounce our behaviour towards animals, and more generally towards our planet. Fiction allows them to draw our attention to the dangers posed by our Cartesian desire to make “ourselves the lords and possessors of nature” (Descartes, 1637). Philosophers such as Peter Singer and Jacques Derrida had already invited us to see non-human animals with a careful and respectful look. David Abram goes further by encouraging us to perceive the living in all its sensitivity and free from any utilitarian aim. The man of the Anthropocene would have gradually destroyed what nature offered him. But what is the Anthropocene? Theorized for the first time by Paul Josef Crutzen, Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1995, the Anthropocene etymologically means “The Age of Man”. Crutzen writes:

It seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia. The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784 (Crutzen, 2002, p. 23).

However, this control of man on planet Earth has put it at risk to the point that life is threatened there. Laura Pugno, using science fiction in *Sirene*, introduces us to a planet that has become uninhabitable. Antonio Prete, in *L’ordine animale delle cose*, gives voice to the animals who relearn to be attentive to them. It is part of the tradition of the fable that goes back to Aesop. As for Erri De Luca, in 2009, in *Il Peso della farfalla*, he proposes the story of a fight between the leader of a chamois herd and a seasoned poacher; his story, centred on the poacher and the dominant chamois, sets out by a counterexample what not to do if one wants to live in harmony with nature. Is it still possible to remedy the harms caused by man for nearly two centuries? We will begin, based on the works cited and the Italian press, by trying to define the evils related to the Anthropocene. We will then ask ourselves, based on *L’ordine animale delle cose* and the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, David Abram and Giorgio Agamben, how it is possible to connect with the animal world, of which we are only a part, in a more sensitive way than in the past. Finally, we will try to see how, through *cura* (care), wisdom and art, it is possible to better respect our environment and the beings who live on earth.

Keywords: anthropocene, italian literature, nature, destruction, human being.

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