Waymarking Italy's Influence on the American Environmental Imagination While on Pilgrimage to Assisi

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For Rob

Mille Grazie

“If we believe that writers are influenced by places as well as texts, it makes sense that a careful scholar, as a matter of credibility and authority, should check those sources, making use of what Simon Schama calls, [in *Landscape and Memory*], ‘the archive of the feet.’”

—Ian Marshall, *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail* (1998)

“For the wayfarer in the landscape, as in the…text, particular sites marked by recognizable features would serve as place holders for…characters and stories… By visiting these sites one would recall the stories and meet the characters as though they were alive and present, harnessing their wisdom and power to the task of crafting one’s own thought and experience, and of giving it sense and direction.”

—Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011)

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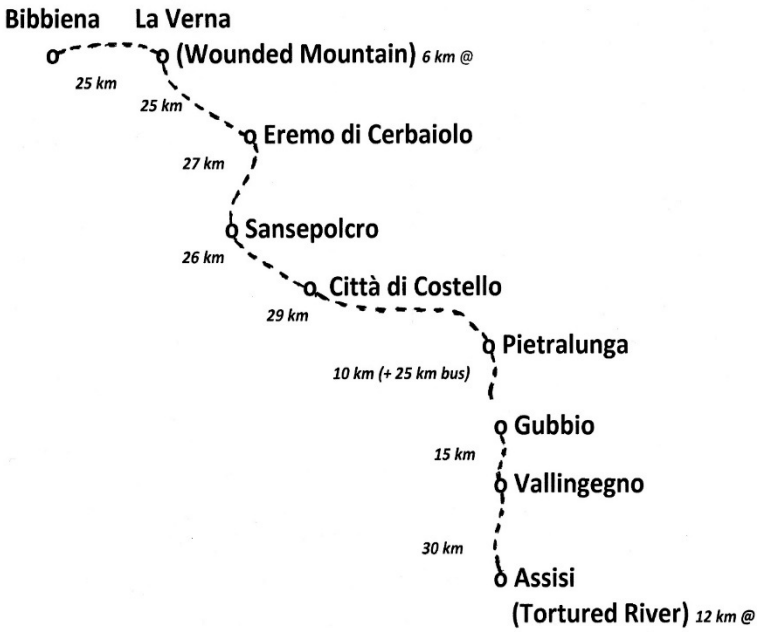
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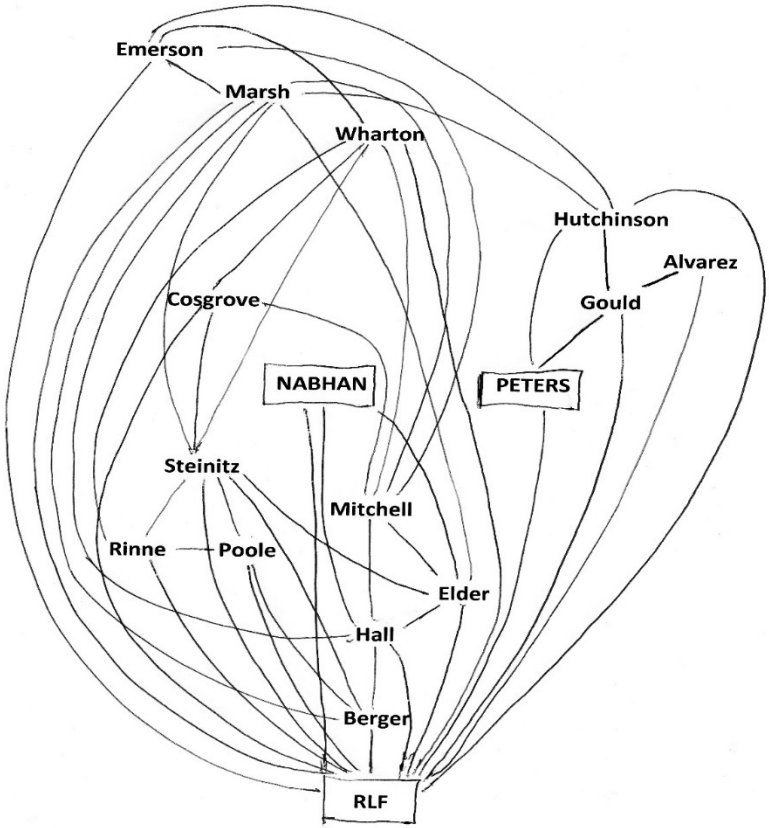
Emerson
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PHOTOGRAPH DESCRIPTION KEY

Cover: Country lane in Umbria.

Epigraph page: Statue of Francis and his companion falcon on the Wounded Mountain; Statue of Francis and birds beside the Tortured River; Trail along the way.

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PREFACE

Paces and Pages: From the Wounded Mountain to the Tortured River—Ecocritical Narrative Scholarship and the Italian Ecocultural Debt

The modern resurgence and growth in popularity of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has been remarkable, leading to a flurry of books and development of its own cultural zeitgeist (France, 2014). Ignoring the fact that in medieval times repeat visits to any single shrine were regarded as bad taste at best, and hubris at worst, there is a constant stream of returning pilgrims slouching toward Santiago, suffering from what might be called "Caminophilia" (*sensu* France, 2014). However, others bitten by the often life-altering pilgrimage bug, and perhaps being of a more adventurous spirit or curious mindset, have looked elsewhere to conjoin soles and soul for their next experience in traversing the network of Europe's historic pilgrimage routes. Thankfully, as displayed through emotive prose and evocative photographs in books (e.g. Bradley, 2009; Brabbs, 2017), there is certainly no shortage of worthy destinations from which to choose, as for example, Canterbury, Nidaros, Lindau, Croagh Patrick, Rocamadour, and in Italy, Rome and Assisi (Westwood, 1997).

Present-day pilgrims walk to religious shrines for reasons that range from the spiritual to the sportive (France, 2014). Often motivations to engage in such undertakings reflect major life challenges and changes. The Camino Francés across northern Spain is sometimes referred to as *la ruta de la terapia*, the therapy route, providing a famous novel with its title (Lodge, 1995). "My life was a shambles, I felt exhausted by work, my marriage was floundering," – so begins the opening lines in the very first pilgrim narrative I ever read (Stanton, 1994:1). As I wrote in my review of the Camino literature (France, 2014:56-57): "It is not uncommon to meet the walking wounded along the Way; those who have lost a friend, a family member…a job, or those who are hoping to lose something, such as an unhealthy relationship with a substance or perhaps an individual." And so it was that the spring of 2008 found me, my position as a professor at Harvard University recently terminated due to general university policy, walking the Franciscan Way from the "wounded mountain" of La Verna to the "tortured river" near the town of Assisi. One significant part of my professional life now being over, with an uncertain future lying ahead, I thought this to be the ideal time to set out on a therapeutic pilgrimage walk. My desire was to reminisce about the past decade's work-related tribulations and accomplishments—for do not the words "travel" and "travail" share a common root?—as well as to reflect back upon my life given that I had just

reached a significant round-numbered age where even by the most optimistic of measures means that more sunrises and sunsets have been, than will be, seen. In this regard, pilgrimage, as many have found (as reviewed in France, 2014), has the remarkable ability to make use of space as a means in which to transcend time: every physical step forward through the landscape providing a parallel opportunity to conceptually bend time's arrow backward through traversing the mindscape of one's life experiences. In consequence, I also planned to capitalize on this pilgrimage gift by reviewing, as others have done (e.g. Luard, 1998; Egan, 2004), the important role of a specific individual in my life, one whose loss was, a decade on at the time, sorely felt (as it is still today).

Canadian *limnologist* (i.e. one whom studies lakes) Robert Henry Peters (1946-1996) was one of the world's leading ecologists, whose influence on environmental science was profound (e.g. Kalff, 1996). Because many of his writings—numbering four books and more than one hundred and eighty articles—arose from time he spent in Italy (Guilizzoni, 1996), a country he deeply loved and to which he frequently returned, it was there where I decided to venture forth as a pilgrim. The twelve years since Peters' death had been a hectic time, as one would expect for a professor at a leading academic institution such as Harvard. In consequence, given that I owed that professional positon to some of what I learned from Peters, both as mentor and friend, in addition to not feeling that I had taken sufficient time to mark his passing in a meaningful way, I looked upon this pilgrimage as a sort of walking memorial. In doing so, I would carry with me, not his ashes, but his ideas. Although not himself demonstrably religious, Peters shared with the majority of those raised Christian today, a favorite canonized individual: namely the Little Poor Man of Assisi, Francesco Bernadone, Francis, Italy's national saint.

That was the personal purpose for this undertaking, about which my reflections during the walk will remain private. For public sharing, the general purpose of the present book resulting from that pilgrimage is twofold:

(1) To provide a detailed narrative of the day-to-day particulars of walking the Franciscan Way, given the dearth of published information existing in this regard;
(2) To undertake a survey of how time spent in Italy influenced a particular group of American environmental scholars, given that contrasting cross-Atlantic differences may exist between perspectives regarding nature and culture.

The intended audience for the first endeavor are those individuals whom, having successfully completed the Camino Francés to Santiago de Compostela, are looking for another pilgrimage destination toward which to walk. The target audience for the second endeavor are scholars involved in the fields of ecocriticism and of Italian-American studies. In terms of satisfying both objectives, I look upon this pilgrimage product as a sequel to the influential 1993 book *Songbirds, Truffles, and Wolves: An American Naturalist in Italy*, by Gary Paul Nabhan, in whose ahead-of-its-time steps, both as physical paces and as conceptual pages, I, a fellow environmental scholar, followed from La Verna to Assisi.

T

Undertaking a walking pilgrimage to Assisi was more of a challenge in the spring of 2008 than would be the case today. Back then, there was only a single guidebook describing the two hundred-kilometre Franciscan Way from La Verna southward to Assisi: Anglea Maria Seracchioli's *Di Qui Passo Francesco*, published two years prior. I hired an Italian-American student to translate sections pertaining to route-finding directions, and even there, as will be seen in the subsequent narrative, these were occasionally either insufficiently or inaccurately described. Today's pilgrims now have a variety of guidebook options. These include an updated and route-corrected 2013 English language version of Seracchioli's seminal book, in addition to an equally valuable (Brown, 2017) and a remarkably poor (Merrill, 2012) offering, both in English, as well as an alternative edition in Italian (Giulietti and Bettin, 2012). Today, given the rise in popularity of the Franciscan Way pilgrimage (when I undertook the week-long walk in 2008 I encountered only two fellow pilgrims), a variety of itineraries exist, with more information provided on their respective websites: the *Via Francigena di San Francesco*, *Cammino di Assisi*, *Di qui Passò San Francesco*, *Cammino di Francesco*, *Via di Roma*, *Sentiero Francescano*, and *Der Franziskusweg*.

Guidebooks, although useful—or, given the confusing plethora of waymark signage along Italian hiking trails and the general lack of detailed maps available for the country on a scale comparable to that existing for France or the United Kingdom—essential for finding one's way to Assisi, are short on details about the day-to-day experiences. In 2008 there were few places to obtain a glimpse of what was in store through English language narratives of pilgrims walking the Franciscan Way. Francke (2005), in the best modern description of visiting Franciscan sites, walked for only five kilometres north of Assisi. Erlich (2002), in a brief article,

describes her one-day walk from Asissi to Gubbio. In order to get a flavour of what lay in store, I found it necessary to seek out much earlier narratives from a time when walking was not the unorthodox act that it has become today. Jorgensen (1908), Goad (1926), and Raymond (1939), each walked short distances to various Franciscan sites. The only real source to turn to for insights about the idiosyncrasies and challenges of the entire pilgrimage was Nabhan's book. But the problem is that Nabhan's focus was really to investigate the naturalness (or lack thereof) of the Italian landscape and its history of agro-food production and harvesting. In consequence, details about the pilgrimage walk itself, as well as the cultural artifacts passed along the Way, are often given short shrift. And although this was to be expected given the corresponding absence of the words "Francis," "Assisi," or "pilgrimage" in the book's title, I could not help but be a little disappointed by the brevity of narrative description, even though I recognized that providing such had not been Nabhan's intended purpose for his book. Previously, I have written critically about the lack of focus on architecture and history in many (actually, most) of the generally superficial and pedestrian (pun intended) narratives about the Spanish *Camino,* many of which, for reasons which some become obvious, are self-published (France, 2014).

Somewhat remarkably given the dramatic rise in European pilgrimage and the long-standing popularity of Francis as everyone's favorite saint, there is still little for today's pilgrims to read before heading out on their own Franciscan walks. *Giovanni and the Camino of St. Francis* (Tyman, 2019) describes a pilgrim walking from La Verna to Assisi accompanied by the saint himself as a spiritual (both figurative and literal) guide. But almost no details of the route itself are provided in this didactic New Age novel. While preparing the present manuscript I was excited to find and order a book entitled *Living as a Pilgrim: Walking the Camino St. Francis,* but upon its arrival found out that it was about the Spanish *Camino Francés* (i.e. those coming from France) and not about the Italian *Cammino* of Saint Francis (i.e. Francesco of Assisi). And therein lies the problem with self-published efforts by unknowledgeable authors. And so, even today, with the exception of Nabhan's book of almost three decades ago, there is an absence of information available for the would-be pilgrim intent upon walking to Assisi. It is hoped that the present effort will help fill that gap.

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Not surprisingly, those walking the *Camino Francés* to Saint Iago's shrine in Compostela have had much to say about the physical actions and ensuing

benefits of engaging in such pilgrimages (reviewed in France, 2014). That one's feet should be intimately connected to one's mind has long been recognized. The idea that the bodily rhythms of walking mimic mental processes, as epitomized by Socrates, was born in Plato's *Phaedrus* and reached its apogee in Aristotle's Peripatetic School. Other walking philosophers include the likes of Aquinas, Hobbes, Kant, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. Walking for Wordsworth was not a mere mode of travel, but rather a way of being, undertaken by using his legs as instruments of philosophy (Solnit, 2000). For Ingold (2011), bipedalism has been just as important for human evolution as were opposing fingers and big brains.

Walking blurs the boundaries between inner and outer worlds, often by bringing the past to the present (Robinson, 2006). Meditative walking has often been championed. Dorothy Wordsworth, for example, referred to walking as also being "an ambulation of the mind." Nietzsche believed that important ideas need to be formed by movement in the open air. And Rousseau intoned that "there is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens" one's thoughts. For Rousseau, far from empting the mind, walking filled it with a sense of purpose. For him, walking was method (Gros, 2014). In this regard, Ingold (2011) aptly refers to perceiving the world through the feet as "mind-walking."

Walking is directly connected to creativity (Coverley, 2012) by being linked to writing as a form of wayfaring (Ingold, 2011). Physical ground traversed often provokes reflections on literary forms journeyed through. In this way, literature is frequently born from the landscape. Mindful walking, matching the rhythms of one's feet and thinking while traversing through what Solnit (2000) refers to as "headlands," blends self with place. Exploring the world through pedestrianism, she states, "is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, [because] walking travels both terrains" (p. 13). Others have called for walking to become *de rigueur* to an expanded methodology in experiential ecology and phenomenological geography (Tilley, 2004; Heneghan, 2018).

Many have used their legs or "shanks' ponies" (*sensu* Marples, 1959) in such a manner, as if they were straws capable of sucking up the spirit of place and sending it for processing through head and heart, before its essence travels down the arms and fingers, to emerge onto the page. Gros (2014:85) believes walking to be the best way to understand one's surroundings: "The body becomes steeped in the earth it treads. And thus, gradually, it stops being in the landscape: it *becomes* the landscape." This

type of walking absorption is especially true for those whom write about the human place in the natural world, be they poet, naturalist, or scientist. Walking in the footsteps of these giants, as for example, near Wordsworth's cottage on the shores of Grasmere, through the riparian forest beside Thoreau's Walden Pond, or along the pathways in Darwin's garden at Down House in Kent, is to physically experience the inspiration behind the words. Solint (2000:6) notes the parallelism existing in passing through a series of scenes and of thoughts, creating in the process "an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making. And so one aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete—for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can." Ingold (2011:202) concurs that writing and walking are irreparably linked, for "to walk is to journey in the mind as much as on the land; it is a deeply meditative practice. And to read is to journey on the page as much as in the mind. Far from being rigidly partitioned, there is a constant traffic between these terrains, respectively mental and material, through the gateways of the senses."

Several of the writers whose works I examine in this book have likewise commented upon the links between walking and thinking. For example, in her ecocritical study of Italian cinema, Past (2019) explores the tradition of first-person narrative stories. She believes such scholarship works best if approached at the speed of walking, and heralds the idea of thinking while on foot. And, as a further inspiration for my own peripatetic undertaking in Italy, Elder (2006:26) states his wish being to "open up and walk around in certain key passages from his [i.e. George Perkin Marsh's] book [*Man and Nature*]." He declares his belief that added insights arise through perambulation, such that walking helps "to burnish the experience of reading" (pg. 168). This is a concept that I whole-heartedly embrace, reflected in the structure of the present peregrination of interlinked pedestrianism and prose. "Reading too can be an act of leaving," Elder explains, continuing "Within the texts to which we abandon ourselves we can also rediscover ourselves in the little figure of a traveler. Turning the pages, we step forward to dwell in the story like pilgrims" (pg. 187).

T

Several books served as the model for the type of experiential scholarship I was endeavoring to undertake herein. The first was Nabhan's *Songbirds, Truffles, and Wolves,* wherein he alternates between narrating his walk and reflecting on the state of Italians' relationship to nature. A second was Ian

Marshall's 1998 *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail*, a book which remains a hallmark in the development of the scholarly field of *ecocriticism*. Broadly defined, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, specifically focusing on the interconnections between nature and culture. Despite much ado made by ecocritics about how the field was born in the late 1970s with the publication of an essay that first introduced the term "ecocriticism," and then emerging as a recognized discipline during the 1990s (e.g. Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996), clearly there are many earlier books that might be regarded as being such without necessarily using the specific appellation. Walk into the office of a well-rounded environmental scholar and it is possible to come across such seminal works as *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967), *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American Culture* (1964), *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959), etc., including and germane to the present project, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic. The Derivation and Significance of the Nature Stories in the Franciscan Legend* (1973). And of course the study of nature in poetic criticism extends back more than a century. Also, as shown by the works of a handful of past and present Harvard professors, one by no means has to include the word "ecocriticism" in the title of a book (e.g. Schama, 1995; Buell, 1996, 2003, 2005; France, 2001, 2003a,b, 2007; Thornber, 2012), for it to fall within that bailiwick.

Marshall's book, which he regards as a form of "literary geography," balances out a description of his long distance walk interspersed with an examination of the contributions made to American nature writing by such distinguished personages as William Bartram, Annie Dillard, Walt Whiteman, Robert Frost, and Henry David Thoreau. For Marshall, the benefits of this approach is that it puts into practice the ecological principle of interconnectedness by establishing "an ecology of reading" (pg. 8). Citing a 1994 lecture by prominent ecocritic Scott Slovic, this approach can be referred to "narrative scholarship" in which "literary criticism [is] enlivened by stories [as a way to] encounter the world and literature together, then report about the conjunctions" (pg. 7).

There are other works that blend a travel guide and personal narrative with commentary about such subjects as landscape aesthetics and attitudes toward nature and conservation (e.g. Vale and Vale, 1998; Leff, 2009). I myself helped to bring to publication two such books (Huber, 2005; Smith,

2011). But closer in spirit to the ecocritical narrative scholarship of Marshall's and my own endeavors, is Corey Lee Lewis' 2005 *Reading the Trail: Exploring the Literature and Natural History of the California Crest*. Considering ecocriticism to be compromised due to its overreliance upon traditional methodologies of literary criticism, Lewis suggests the discipline needs to "move beyond the text" (pg. 15) by adopting field-based approaches such as used in environmental science. It is through the extra-textural engagement with the natural world—"reading with one's feet" to use Solnit's (2000:70) apt phrase—that we can best investigate and understand environmental writing. According to Lewis, because text and trails are related, one can use a long-distance walk as a form of "literary field study" in which to retrace the physical and intellectual journeys of those environmental writers whom one is following. Iconoclast Tim Ingold (2011) is of like mind to Lewis, in that he calls for anthropology to free itself from the straightjacket of traditional scholarship. For him, an acknowledgement section that mentions books read and processed but not ground walked over, is a story only half told.

As noted by some, another problem with much of ecocriticism is that, despite its muchly hyped opinion of itself as being interdisciplinary, this is often far from the truth. Part of the problem is the lingering confusion among humanities scholars about scientifically defined terms. In particular, this is due to frequent confounding between the words and concepts pertaining to the science of "ecology" as practiced by professionals, and the ideal of "environment" as a symbol for ameliorative activism by laypersons. In point of fact, though there are instances when both terms can apply to the same individual, I know plenty of ecologists whom proudly state that their underlying motivations and resultant actions have nothing to do with environmentalism, which they dismiss as "eco-la-la," and I am continually disheartened by the legion of arm-waving environmentalists whom operate in a complete vacuum of basic ecological knowledge. "Environment" of course also pertains to a much broader physical entity than does "ecology."

This confusion in terms and concepts began right from ecocriticism's get-go. William Rueckert's paradigm-establishing essay in 1978 sets out as its purpose "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature….by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature." He goes on to refer to the works of "serious and thoughtful ecologists (such as Aldo Leopold, Ian McHarg, Barry Commoner, and Garret Hardin)," ignoring that none of these individuals were traditionally practicing ecologists. Later, Rueckert states that the legal protection of the rights of nature "is one of the most marvelous and

characteristic parts of the ecological vision," ignoring the fact that ecology as a science is *not* practiced within a courtroom. Replace the word "ecologists" with "environmentalists"' in the first quotation, and the word "ecological" with "environmental" in the second quote, and Rueckert would be correct. However, this would still leave behind his forced ecological metaphors, such as characterizing green plants "as nature's poets" and poems as "green plants among us," something which Heise (1997) correctly considers to be "problematic." William Howarth began his 1996 essay with the provocative statement that "Ecocriticism is a name that implies more ecological literacy than its advocates now possess." So far, so good. Later, however, he becomes lost in a flurry of prose about the role of ethics in science, making the erroneous statement that during the 1960s ecology advanced from description to advocacy. Yes, increased environmental awareness spawned by the publication of such classic books as *Silent Spring* arose at that time, but the most important contemporaneous developments in the science of ecology occurred independently.

In their seminal gathering of landmark ecocriticism papers, Glotfelty and Fromm (1996: xx) reflect on the moniker "ecocriticism":

> [Some scholars] favor *eco-* over *enviro-* because, analogous to the science of ecology, ecocriticism studies relationships between things, in this case, between human culture and the physical world. Furthermore, in its connotations, *enviro-* is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans area at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment. *Eco-*, in contrast, implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts.

The reality, however, is not so simple. For much of its history, ecology has been the study of the interrelations among species in areas where human influence was believed to be minimal. The discipline has been slow to embrace the idea that humans are very much a part of nature. In consequence, the development of applied sub-disciplines such as urban ecology or restoration ecology has occurred comparatively recently. Today, many ecologists still persist in going out of their way to travel to ever more remote locations in which to study what they imagine to be untouched, or at least, *relatively* untouched, ecosystems. Increasingly, however, the reality has set in that with recognition that our current epoch has increasingly come to be referred to as *The Anthropocene*, concepts such as "ecosystems" should, in many cases, be replaced by the more accurate term "social-ecological systems," or SESs. Unlike "ecology," the term "environment" has always included humans in the picture. For example, the study of past repercussions of humans on nature is referred to as "environmental," not

"ecological" history. Lawrence Buell (2005) recognizes these distinctions and in consequence purposely eschews use of the term "ecocriticism." Because the term implies in many people's eyes commentary about the state of nature free of human influence, he prefers the term "environmental criticism," as it is more inclusive in dealing with both the natural and built, pristine and impacted, environments.

Buell (2005) also makes the point, echoing Heise's (1997) earlier comments, that the "eco" in ecocriticism has largely been represented by aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical, rather than scientific, criticism. Perhaps only half-jokingly, he remarks that his personal aversion to the word "ecocriticism" arises because "it invokes in some quarters the cartoon image of a club of intellectually shallow nature worshippers" (Buell 2005:viii). For its first few decades, ecocriticism certainly *did* focus on the low-hanging fruit, in terms of targeting as subjects the most notable literati in the field of nature writing and poetry. I, too, have been culpable in this regard, publishing several books about Thoreau's relationship with water. Today, however, eco- or environmental criticism has purposely moved beyond what might pejoratively and jokingly be called its earlier "I wondered looney as a clod" phase. Contrastingly, the present book concludes with overviews of how Italian scholars are leading the charge in expanding the subject matter of ecocriticism beyond its traditional roots (see Chapter 11).

Others have commented upon the failure of ecocriticism to include scientific perspectives. Evernden (1996) notes with irony that humanists, by studying humans apart from their environment, are often just as reductionist as the scientists they jump to criticize for the same reason. This, both Heise (1997) and Love (2003) believe, is due to their general coolness, and sometimes outright hostility, toward the sciences. Despite assertions otherwise, C. P. Snow's "two cultures" appear to be as rigidly defined as ever. As someone who was moved back-and-forth between the two camps, each group of scholars questioning why I am wasting my time with the other, I liken such ideological misunderstandings to the inherent differences through which dogs and cats use their tails to communicate; i.e. a dog wags its tail to show happiness and affection, whereas a cat twitches its tail to show apprehension and displeasure.

While there have been books about what might be called true ecological criticism, i.e. pertaining to the science of ecology, most of these have assumed a broad-brushed historical perspective (e.g. Worster, 1977; Brennan, 1988). Rarer are those that drill down deep to provide detailed

critical analysis on par with Robert Peters' (1991) seminal *A Critique for Ecology*. On the other hand, it might be argued that because scientific research is itself an iterative process—as the old adage has it, with present-day scientists standing upon the shoulders of their predecessors—every new paper is, by its inherent nature, stepped in criticism through its belief that the last publication on the subject was neither as complete nor as meritorious as the new offering.

Often calls for adopting scientific approaches to the study of literature (e.g. Carroll, 1965; Howarth, 1996; Love, 2003), come across as being too forced, like the equivalent of a shotgun wedding between disciplines. The most interesting and iconoclastic writing on the subject is Dana Phillips' boldly titled *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (2003). For Phillips, ecocriticism is sorely lacking in interdisciplinarity due to being "lamentably under-informed by science studies, philosophy of science, environmental history, and ecology" (pg. ix), subjects about which he believes "ecocritics cannot afford to ignore for reasons that should be obvious." Instead ecocriticism seems reticent to move beyond its salad days steeped in sentimentalism and nostalgia for the primitivism of the pastoral ideal and belief in the piety of the pristine. In particular, he is bothered by how ecocritics have inappropriately seized upon ecology to bolster their environmental discourse. For example, one of the touchstone texts championed by ecocritics, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* by Donald Worster (1977), is lambasted by Phillips for its author's romantic version of ecology in which "all kinds of things…can be counted as 'ecological' even if they have no bearing whatsoever on our scientific understanding of the natural world" (pg. 50). Ecology, Phillips astutely clarifies, has been confusingly misinterpreted by many ecocritics as a point of view rather than an analytical science that "sparks debates about environmental issues, [but] doesn't settle them" (pg. 45). In his quest to redefine ecocriticism, Phillips advises the discipline to focus more on the picaresque and less on the picturesque.

T

The Edenic myth of a pristine North American landscape has exerted a strong influence on attitudes regarding its wilderness and resident biota (e.g. Nash, 1967; Merchant, 2003; Johnson, 2018; France, 2019). Because of this, Americans have always held a dichotomous belief system with respect to how they regard nature and culture. As will be subsequently examined, Nabhan (1993) has been criticized for transposing such American attitudes to his pilgrimage walk in Italy; specifically, for his failing to recognize and

appreciate the history and extent of trans-Atlantic differences that exist about these concepts. "Nature" has been called the most difficult word in the English language (Collingswood, 1945). My own interest in exploring the culture of nature (and its reciprocal) grew out of work on restoration design (France, 2008, 2010), which in turn arose from several conferences I organized while a professor in the Landscape Architecture Department at the Harvard Design School. Eventually this led to me teaching a campus-wide Freshman Seminar entitled "The Invention of Nature," wherein questions concerning the social construction of nature were examined through reading prominent writings on the subject, including Wilson (1991), Evernden (1992), Cronon (1996), and Turner (1996).

The second purpose of my pilgrimage walk was to provide a philology of how Italians have conceived and managed their natural environment. Significantly, this was something absent in Nabhan's earlier book, leading him to level criticism about Italian attitudes and actions toward nature. And it is this criticism, as we will see, that some, such as Hall (2005), have considered to be inappropriate at best, or made in ignorance at worst.

That there should be an attraction to Italy held by North Americans is not surprising, for, with its deep font of history, abundant works of art, and sublime scenery, Italy has always exerted a hard-to-resist allure for the educated classes. Because of this, visiting the country was deemed essential for undertaking the Grand Tour (Chaney, 1991; Wilton and Bignamini, 1996), nowhere perhaps more evocatively expressed than in E.M. Forester's 1908 novel and Merchant-Ivory's 1985 film *A Room with a View*. Travelling for such cultural education and foreign experience was *de rigueur* for polishing the development of young gentlefolk for their intended future standing. Interestingly, the Italian countryside held little distraction for early grand tourists in the eighteenth century. Armed with their trusty Baedekers in hand, the landscape was mostly something to rush through to get to the next major city in the quest for viewing Classical antiquity, Renaissance art and architecture, and Baroque culture (Black, 2003). Only by the beginning of the nineteenth century did visiting rural areas grow in popularity. Such lingering in the gentle bosom of Italian nature, bathed as it often was in the warm glow of Mediterranean sunshine, occurred at a time coincident with the ecocultural triptych of (a) Romanticism's appreciation of landscape aesthetics and the cult of the sublime, (b) exciting discoveries of archeological ruins, and (c) a mania for natural history (Macaulay, 1953; Barber, 1980; France, 2001, 2019). In their portmanteaus, copies of Goethe would now be accompanied by those of Gilpin, and likewise Byron by Burke. Travelers now purposely sought out prospects and the picturesque,

arranging paintings to be made of themselves in classically-inspired settings as "selfies" of their day. For the first time, the Italian landscape became a commodity in which to be visually consumed (Bailey, 2018). Travelers began to reflect upon how different and interesting the plants, volcanoes, and lagoons were compared to the vegetation and landscapes back at home (Black, 2003).

European writers and poets, such as Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats flocked to Italy for inspiration, passing along the way, Italianate influences, vis-à-vis architecture and garden design, that were migrating northward. Americans were certainly not immune to the lure of Italy during this period. As well as being enthusiastic participants in the Grand Tour (Baker, 1964; Bailey, 2018), a remarkable number of writers and artists, such as Hawthorne, Henry James, Margaret Fuller, Washington Irving, Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, Longfellow, Fenimore Cooper, Melville, Sargent, Whistler, John Singleton Copley, Frederick Church, and Thomas Cole, followed in the footsteps of their European cultural heroes (Brooks, 1958; Wright, 1965; Martin and Person, 2002). Whereas novelists largely focused on urbanites, painters frequently succumbed to the Arcadian mytho-poetics of the Italian landscape (Eldridge, 1972; Stebbins et al., 1992; Myers et al., 2017; Anon., 2018). And, as so often occurs in mindful travel, the net result of all this was that when Americans returned home they viewed their own country through fresh eyes (Buonomo, 1996). Cole's paintings and Cooper's novels, grown from their time spent in Italy, did much to shape the American identity (Bailey, 2018). Italy also played a role in growing American nationalism due to the perception of the European country's technological, political, and religious backwardness. Italy therefore became infused with a nostalgia for the quaint and old-fashioned ways that America had left behind in the eighteenth century; it became romanticized as a place where time stood still; a sort of big museum in which, for some, refuge could be sought from modernity's mad rush in the rapidly developing America back home (Buonomo, 1996). But it is the influence of the Italian landscape upon American imagination during this period that is most germane to the present enterprise.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, traveling geologists and naturalists began to rub shoulders with painters, sculptors, and writers in the Anglo-American expat colony in Italy (Buonomo, 1996). The perception developed that, more so than any other country, it was Italy, through its rocks, plants, and morphology, which was imbued with history. Much of this was overly romanticized, the countryside being viewed as "possessing an oneiric, visionary quality" (pg. 18), occupied by people who seemed to

have stepped out of a painting or were statues come to life. At the same time, the Italian landscape often befuddled Americans in consequence of being a totally foreign experience, one, according to E. Turri in Buonomo (1996: 20), "humanized by a different culture in a different background, that uses and feels the landscape in a different way, even though on the basis of natural functions identical to ours." Italians, if they thought of America at all, imagined it to be either a pristine land untouched by Western Civilization and inhabited for the most part by "savages," or an exciting progressive model of democracy, free from the yoke of foreign meddling (Buonomo, 1996). Such trans-Atlantic differences in mindsets underlie the problem that some (e.g. Hall 2005) have with Nabhan's (1993) opining about Italian nature and culture, the topic that lies at the heart of my present pilgrimage of paces and pages.

T

That Italy has functioned as a well-spring for inspiring visiting Anglo-American artists and poets has long been recognized. Herein, I extend what might be called the "Italian debt" (*sensu* Mitchell 2001) and review how the country has likewise shaped other fields of ecocultural and environmental creativity through influencing visiting, mostly American, scholars. Accompanying me on my ten-day, two hundred-kilometre pilgrimage walk (see map) were sixteen scholars (see flowchart) whose time spent in Italy was integral to forging their ideas, the reviews of which form an integral part of the present book. The selection of which particular scholars I chose to accompany me on the walk was completely idiosyncratic, based as it was for the most part on personal connections. Two of these individuals were omnipresent throughout the pilgrimage: ethnobotanist and nature writer, Gary Nabhan, whose book *Songbirds, Truffles, and Wolves: An American Naturalist in Italy*, served as the model for the present "paces-and-pages" walking and writing undertaking, and the late limnologist and philosopher of science, Robert Peters, whose friendship and mentoring would be privately commemorated along the way. The other accompanying scholars included three from the nineteenth century: essayist and environmental philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, diplomat and environmental philologist, George Perkins Marsh, and novelist and garden historian-*cum*-designer, Edith Wharton. Also included were three modern-day scientists: geologist, Walter Alvarez, ecologist, G. Evelyn Hutchinson, and evolutionary biologist, Stephen Jay Gould; two nature writers: naturalist, John Hanson Mitchell, and literature professor, John Elder; two authorities on landscape history and development: cultural geographer, the late Denis Cosgrove, and land-use planner, Carl Steinitz; two experts on water design:

architectural historian, Katherine Rinne, and landscape architect, Kathy Poole; and two academics concerned with restoration, environmental historian Marcus Hall, and landscape and urban designer, Alan Berger. The flowchart diagram shows my rough attempt at a mind-map indicating *some* of the conceptual interconnectivity existing among these scholars (linkages for contemporaries often go in both directions), all of whom have had, in turn, an influence on my own thinking and work. Of interest is that the majority of these individuals have at one time resided in New England. Perhaps this should not be surprising given the region's long-standing love affair with Italy. Today, for example, it is possible, in the largest urban centre therein, to be rowed in an authentic gondola (on the Charles River) to visit a copy of a Venetian *palazzo* (the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) (France, 2011).

It is one thing to set out to plan a work of narrative scholarship in terms of the particular landscape to be traversed and the selection of authors to be examined as intellectual waymarkers *en route*; it is quite another thing altogether to decide on the specific format through which to accommodate the parallel task of traversing the terrains of both distance traveled and ideas cogitated. Accomplished professional writers, such as perhaps a Peter Matthiessen or an Annie Dillard, have the skill to blend the two into a seamless whole of personal story fused with commentary on larger themes; and it is for this reason that we so admire their works. Traditional, full-time academics have a wide range of professional duties, and possibly a self-selected lesser talent for literary wordsmithing, that often impedes honing their writing craft to the same level. In consequence, and well aware of my own limitations in this regard, I had always intended, using Nabhan's book as my model, to partition my writing into alternating and separate sections describing the walk itself and on reflecting on ecocultural themes. But how to go about doing this was a challenge from the start. Nabhan's concept-themed chapters on the Italian history of growing and consuming various plants are not serially linked, either spatially or temporally, but are rather inspired by the vegetation and landscape he encounters by happenstance *en route*. Marshall (1998) examines the writings of prominent East Coast nature writers, doing so for each one sometimes in a separate chapter and sometimes embedded within the chapter describing his hike, in both cases corresponding to the location along the Appalachian Trail that is in the same region inhabited by his subject author. Lewis (2005) adopts a similar approach for his examination of West Coast nature writers during his hike along the California Crest Trail. In both cases, the sequential order of authors examined is dictated by geography, or perhaps more accurately, by chorography, the significance of place.