

THE LAND ETHIC REFRAMED: AN ECO-TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF PERITEXTUAL VOICES IN THE ITALIAN EDITIONS OF ALDO LEOPOLD'S *A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC*

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Abstract: This paper examines the paratextual reframing of conservation discourse in the three Italian editions of Aldo Leopold's classical environmental work, *A Sand County Almanac*, and *Sketches Here and There* (1949). The aim is to reflect on the agency exercised by peritextual voices in the translation product (Jansen and Wegener 2013), in particular in relation to the attitude towards engagement or disengagement. The editions considered diverge in various important respects, starting with the title and the cover image, and are introduced by authors with quite different approaches and backgrounds: the secretary general of WWF Italy, a French academic and a contemporary Italian novelist. An analysis inspired by the principles of eco-translation, comparing the original and the most recent OUP editions with the Italian editions, will help to identify the different conservation discourses and voices instantiated by the book in the English-language and Italian cultural systems, and, consequently, at the pragmatic level, the different emotional reactions (Mackenzie and Alba-Juez 2019) evoked in the relevant target communities, particularly with regard to the possibility for environmental action.

Keywords: eco-translation; paratext; reframing; editorial voices; Aldo Leopold; *A Sand County Almanac*.

1. Introduction

This paper¹ intends to explore the peritextual voices that accompany the hitherto neglected three Italian editions of the book *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (1949) by Aldo Leopold, a classic nonfiction work in American conservation and environmentalism. To this end a “voices framework” is adopted, whereby the concept of “voice” acquires a Bakhtinian metaphorical meaning, indicating those “marks of the tangle of subjectivities involved in textual processes” (Alvstad *et al.* 2017: 6) which constitute the conditions of textuality itself, shaping both texts in general and translations in particular. This approach stems from the belief, shared with Cecilia Alvstad and Alexandra Assis Rosa, that “both diachronically and synchronically produced retranslations are a particularly fertile ground for the study of voice”, since in these texts, and related paratexts, “the voices of a multiplicity of agents may surface” (Alvstad and Assis Rosa 2015: 3).

This study will concentrate on a particular kind of contextual voices (Alvstad *et al.* 2017), specifically the voices of the agents engaged in constructing, commenting on, or otherwise mediating the textual voices through their prefaces. The aim is to offer a comparison between the original and the most recent Oxford University Press editions on the one hand, and, on the other, all the editions of the two Italian translations of Leopold’s conservation classic, in order to assess the kind and level of engagement inscribed through different interpretative critical framings.

Before focusing on this particular case study, I think it is worth reflecting briefly on what Arran Stibbe refers to as a change arising from “a general ecological turn with the humanities and social science” (2018: 497), an ecocritical shift which encouraged Translation Studies to explore the ethical considerations for translation of reexamining humans’ relationship with nature (Taivalkoski-Shilov and Poncharal 2020). Overall, the literature on this new trend confirms the importance of reconceptualising translation to include non-human and human communication and, more pertinently, to sketch out the contours of a new, ecocritical translation practice. Despite such encouraging theoretical perspectives, ecological approaches to translation are “a belated and embarrassingly recent addition to the discipline of Translation Studies” (Shread 2023: 115). Few scholars, Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov and Bruno Poncharal noticed, have studied “how and why the voices of nature are erased or misrepresented in translation, and what strategies could be adopted to redress the situation” (Taivalkoski-Shilov 2020: 3).

My angle of observation is that of multiple translatorship (Jansen and Wegener 2013), i.e., the multiple ways in which the translator’s agency is intertwined with that of other parties in the process of bringing the translation

¹ The present paper is an extended elaboration of my contribution “Call for action (or inaction) in the Italian editions of Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*”, presented at the DIS-4Change International Conference *Engaging Communities in Environmental and Climate In/Action: Narratives, Discursive Practices, and Transdisciplinary Approaches* (University of Bari Aldo Moro, 23-25 June 2025). A preliminary note on terminology is perhaps necessary: I will consider “retranslation” as a product, defined as “a second or later translation of a single source text into the same target language” (Koskinen and Paloposki 2010: 294).

into the world. Indeed, thanks to the work of thinkers such as Niklas Luhmann (1995), Pierre Bourdieu (1996) and Bruno Latour (2005), the concept of the translator has gradually been redefined as a “social conglomerate” (Ciorogar 2021: 314), encompassing not only the translator per se but also the original author, the editor and other cultural agents. My aim is to explore, in particular, multiple translatorship in the translation product (Jansen and Wegener 2013), to trace possible influences in paratext.

A key starting point for the present analysis is Gérard Genette’s pivotal theorization (1997), where paratext encompasses a range of liminal devices that occupy the threshold space between a book’s principal text(s) and its readership. These elements function as mediating frameworks, orienting readers and facilitating their access to the text, thereby shaping the conditions of its reception (a notion reflected in the original title of Genette’s 1987 work, *Seuils*², meaning “thresholds” or “vestibules”).

More recently Genette’s foundational work for the study of paratext was revisited by Birte Bös and Matti Peikola (2020), who emphasised the dynamic relations of texts and their contextualising elements, drawing particularly on the notions of paratext, metadiscourse and framing. Moreover, they addressed the question of how the concept of paratext, originally developed for literary studies, can be fruitfully applied to non-fictional texts and in a linguistic perspective (Bös and Peikola 2020: 5).

From a functional standpoint, the idea is that this framing³ or reframing of the text can have an interpretative, guiding and controlling function. Whereas the voices framework upon which I am delving in this study has a wide scope, in that it encompasses all kinds of materials related to a specific translation (Alvstad *et al.* 2017: 8), I have chosen to circumscribe the perimeter of my research by focusing exclusively on what I will call peritextual voices, and specifically on prefaces and illustrations of the Italian editions of Leopold’s book, which, following Genette’s above-mentioned categorisation of paratext (1997: 8-9), on the basis of their location in relation to the text can be considered part of its peritext, namely “those liminal devices and conventions” within the book “that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords” (Genette 1997: xviii; see also Elefante 2012). If we establish the appearance of the text as our temporal point of reference, the peritexts of Leopold’s English-language editions and translations are all posthumous, since the book was first published after the author’s death. The peritext’s substantial status is both textual, being a verbal realisation, and iconic, including nonverbal, visual realisations such as illustrations – two prototypical modes that, in practice, operate together (Bös and Peikola 2020: 14). As regards its pragmatic status, vis-à-vis the elements of the communicative situation, the peritext of *A Sand County*

² Translated in English as *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation* by J.E. Lewin (1997).

³ I adopt Wolf’s definition of framings as “codings of abstract cognitive frames that exist or are formed within, or on the margins and in the immediate context of, the framed situation or phenomenon and – like the corresponding frames – have an interpretative, guiding and controlling function with reference to it” (Wolf 2006: 6). For a recent examination of the most productive critical models of framing, see Catenaccio *et al.* (2023).

Almanac's Italian translations can be classified as allographic, i.e. a preface written by an addresser who is not the author or the publisher, but a third party; it's also a public peritext, addressed to the general public, and an official peritext, given that its authors assumed responsibility for it. A reflection on what Genette drawing on the work of J.L. Austin and John Searle, called the "illocutionary force" (1991: 268) of the message, whether it provides pure information or expresses intention and interpretation through a framing or reframing of the text, will be offered in the final section.

As anticipated above, Bös and Peikola (2020) considered the further dimension of linguistic levels, adding a linguistic perspective to the characterisation of paratext. Focusing on this dimension, in order to examine the strategies that these texts enact to achieve community engagement (or disengagement) and intersubjective meaning, I will adopt a dialogistic perspective (Bakhtin 1981), following J.R. Martin and P.R.R. White's appraisal theory (2005) to systematically classify the resources which construe evaluative meaning, thereby determining the positioning of the agents involved in framing Aldo Leopold's book for an Italian audience. I will seek to identify those locutions which provide the means for the authorial voice to position itself with respect to, and hence to engage with, the other voices and alternative positions in the communicative context of the book editions. This, in turn, will prefigure the kind of "envisaged", 'imagined' or 'ideal' reader" (Martin and White 2005: 95) constructed by these texts, and the degree of alignment or disalignment between the writer and this addressee, thus exploring the intersubjective meaning of the author's stance.

Since I am interested in studying, at the pragmatic level, the different emotional reactions (Mackenzie and Alba-Juez 2019) evoked by the book's framing in the relevant target communities, particularly with regard to the possibility for environmental action, I will circumscribe my analysis to Martin and White's system of attitude, with particular attention to the subsystem of affect, which deals with "resources for construing emotional reactions" (Martin and White 2005: 35), including both "the means by which speakers/writers overtly encode what they present as their own attitudes" and "those means by which they more indirectly activate evaluative stances and position readers/listeners to supply their own assessments" (*ibid.*: 2). Taking into account some recent reassessments of Martin and White's model (Alba-Juez and Thompson 2014; Thompson 2015; Alba-Juez 2018; Alba-Juez and Mackenzie 2019), showing that emotion permeates not only the affect subsystem but also the other two subsystems of attitude (judgement and appreciation), as well as the two other main systems or domains of appraisal (in particular, engagement), I will make occasional forays into these other regions of feeling to investigate, at the pragmatic level, the different emotional reactions evoked in the relevant target communities, particularly with regard to the possibility for environmental action.

2. A Sand County Almanac in the USA (1949-2024)

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948)⁴ is considered by many the father of wildlife ecology and modern conservation: a forester, philosopher, educator, writer and outdoor enthusiast, he was the founder of the discipline of wildlife management and cofounder of the Wilderness Society. His most notable work, the posthumous *A Sand County Almanac*, originally published by Oxford University Press in 1949, has achieved the status of a landmark text in conservation, with over two million copies sold globally and translations into at least fifteen languages.⁵ The collection reflects years of careful composition, encouraging readers both to grasp the functioning of the natural world and to cultivate care for its wild inhabitants. Shaped by Leopold's evolving ecological philosophy and his family's work on the land around "The Shack" – a worn-out farm outside Baraboo, Wisconsin, which they restored, planting tens of thousands of trees – the essays ultimately call for an ethical commitment to the environment.

The book reaches its climax in the capstone piece, "The Land Ethic", where "Science, 'poetry', and philosophy all coalesce" (Callicott 1987: 8). This "nomothetic essay" (*ibid.*: 10) explores the concept of land as a community, which Leopold believes to be no less than "the basic concept of ecology" (Leopold 2020: xxii), thus enlarging the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, which he calls, collectively, "the land".

The first edition of the book features a *Foreword* by Leopold dated 4 March 1948, which J. Baird Callicott judges as "a wonderfully understated lyrical account of Leopold's own understanding of the principal burden and argument of his book" (1987: 12). Less than three pages long, this authorial anthumous peritext opens with a memorable oft-quoted paragraph: "There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot" (Leopold 2020: xxi). Even more interesting, for the purposes of the present study, are the following two paragraphs, where Leopold twice employs a first-person pronoun to declare himself part of a minority ("For us the minority", "We of the minority", *ibid.*) of people who love wild things as opposed to a majority ("our opponents", *ibid.*) who single-mindedly endorse progress at all costs. Leopold's published "forward"⁶ ends with the timid hope that a "shift of values" can be achieved "by reappraising things natural, tame, and confined in terms of things natural, wild, and free" (*ibid.*: xxiii).

The above-mentioned foreword, thoroughly analysed by John Tallmadge (1987: 114), offers a significant insight into the author's underlying intentions. The sketches of Part I, written predominantly in the present tense, portray the

⁴ When not otherwise specified, the information about Leopold's life and works comes from the website <https://www.aldoleopold.org>, run by the Aldo Leopold Foundation. A number of biographies were published to celebrate the centennial of Leopold's birth, the most comprehensive of which is Meine (1988).

⁵ An enlarged edition of *A Sand County Almanac*, including essays from a second book by Leopold edited by his son Luna, was published by OUP in 1966. In the present essay I will refer either to the original 1949 edition or to the most recent 2020 edition, based on the 1949 text.

⁶ An unpublished, more conventional, "Foreword" discovered among the Leopold Papers in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, dated July 31, 1947, can now be read in Callicott (1987: 281-288).

life that Leopold and his family led at the time of writing at the “Shack”, along the Wisconsin River. This life is presented as appealing, not only because it is purposeful – centred on the work of rebuilding what has been lost elsewhere – but also because it offers spiritual sustenance. The sketches substantiate such claims, depicting a mode of existence characterised by wisdom, vitality and intimate joy, the sort of life that readers of nature writing might wish to emulate. Part II, by contrast, employs autobiographical episodes, largely narrated in the past tense, to chart the narrator’s transformation from an ignorant, insensitive, and restless figure into the perceptive, contemplative and serene observer presented in Part I. In its structure and thematic arc, Part II functions as a conversion narrative, inviting readers to undergo a similar transformation. Consequently, by the time readers arrive at the more abstract and programmatic essays of Part III, they are already primed to receive and engage with the text’s arguments. The book’s tripartite structure, therefore, appears intentionally designed to cultivate a receptive disposition in its audience, thereby facilitating their acceptance of Leopold’s doctrine of “Land Ethic”, now a registered service mark of the Aldo Leopold Foundation. Its key idea is powerfully summarised by Leopold thus: “That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics” (Leopold 2020: xxii). In the Aldo Leopold Foundation’s formulation, “The Land Ethic is more than just a concept – it’s a call to action, urging us to intertwine our care for humanity with our care for the land”.

The original cover displays one of the illustrations included in the body text, black-and-white sketches featuring the natural world, by the American wildlife artist Charles W. Schwartz, who collaborated with Leopold until the latter’s sudden death in 1948.⁷ Leopold submitted his manuscript together with some illustrations to prospective publishers, and when Oxford University Press accepted it for publication, they agreed to publish the book, then still called “Great Possessions”, with Schwartz’s illustrations.

The book initially attracted limited attention; however, it experienced renewed significance during the environmental awakening of the 1970s (Meadows 1999), when the 1968 OUP paperback unexpectedly became a bestseller. By the late 1970s, Leopold’s concept of a land ethic had firmly directed the focus of philosophers and political theorists toward environmental issues (Brennan and Lo 2024; Gallitelli 2025). Of subsequent editions the commemorative edition which appeared in 1987, a century after Leopold’s birth, is perhaps the most important, featuring an introduction by the American nature essayist Robert Finch. A completely redesigned and lavishly illustrated gift edition was then published by Oxford University Press in 2001 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, with over one hundred photographs by Michael Sewell and an introduction by the American environmental writer Kenneth Brower.

⁷ From the correspondence between Leopold and Schwartz we learn that the author sent the illustrator a phenology paper as well as some photographs for background research to aid in the development of his sketches for the book (Zekor 2025).

The most recent edition (2020) includes an introduction by the American author Barbara Kingsolver and was reprinted in 2024 as the 75th Anniversary Edition. With her books adopted into the core literature curriculum in high schools and colleges throughout the United States, and reviews and articles that have appeared in most major national newspapers and magazines, Barbara Kingsolver is a household name in the States. She has been weaving her concern about the environment into her books since she started writing novels in 1988. In 2000 she received the National Humanities Medal, American highest honour for service through the arts; in 2011 the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for the body of her work; in 2023 the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Brought up in rural Kentucky, in 2004 she moved to a farm in Virginia, where she and her family remodelled a 100-year-old farmhouse, renovated fields and orchards, and established flocks of poultry and Icelandic sheep. She calls herself “a literary writer trained as a biologist; a rural, agrarian advocate working in an overwhelmingly urban-based, urban-representative field” who tries to be “a useful ambassador between disparate worlds.”⁸

Her introduction to *A Sand County Almanac* expresses the mistrust she sensed between urban and rural communities in the USA, something all the more unsettling for her since she “could identify with all sides: the mobile, highly educated, and those prioritizing family roots and respect for manual labor. Devotees of science and innovation, and those trusting tradition and spiritual practice” (*ibid.*). Her ten introductory pages tackle the one issue which preoccupied her especially, climate change, leveraging on a strategic use of personal deixis, in particular through several varieties of the “inclusive we” (Yule 1996: 11), to create communion between the two opposing parties, while at the same time averting the risk that a voice like Leopold’s might well get cancelled in the heat of modern culture wars (Gallitelli 2025). Her introduction is a call to reconciliation between humans and land.

The new special commemorative paperback edition (2020), reworked for Earth Day 50 and reprinted in 2024 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the book, features a cover and illustrations very similar to those of the first hardcover edition. The cover displays three geese in the bottom left corner against a cream-coloured background, honking to a flock of migrating fellows to proclaim the spring season in March. This black-and-white line drawing also accompanies the piece “The Geese Return” in Part I, “A Sand County Almanac”. Charles W. Schwartz’s delicate sketches, in some cases full-page illustrations, enhance the book’s connection to the natural world. As we know from the Leopold-Schwartz correspondence, the author and his family were full of admiration for these drawings (Zekor 2025).

⁸ This quotation comes from Barbara Kingsolver’s official website: <https://barbarakingsolver.com/autobiography/>.

3. A Sand County Almanac in Italy (1997-2023)⁹

A Sand County Almanac first arrived in Italy in 1997, almost fifty years after the original American edition. Two other editions followed in 2019 and 2023, both by the same publisher, based on the same retranslation.

One element these three editions share is the small size and peripheral nature of their publishers, all specialised, as we will see, in particular genres and themes, and based in provincial Italian cities, thus far from the cultural mainstream and relatively autonomous in their editorial choices, founded by dedicated young intellectuals with very clear missions and goals.

3.1. The first Italian translation and edition (1997) by Red Edizioni

The first Italian edition of *A Sand County Almanac* appeared in 1997 in the catalogue of Red Edizioni, a small publisher based in Como, dedicated to alternative medicine, religions and mythology. The book was published under the title *Almanacco di un mondo semplice. Il racconto della natura* (Almanac of a simple world. The story of nature) in a series called “Le radici del future” (The roots of the future), directed by the founder of the publishing house, Maurizio Rosenberg Colorni, and dedicated to “living in an ‘ecological way’”¹⁰. Essentially, the series collects texts from different cultural domains which reflect critically on the present to promote a future where the tensions between man and nature, human beings, mind and body are reconciled. The body text of *Almanacco* is actually a selection taken from the original 1949 OUP edition, as declared in the copyright page. In the second part, for example, only two stories, “Thinking Like a Mountain” and “Guacamaja”, were preserved, while the whole sections on Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa, Oregon and Utah, and Manitoba were removed.¹¹ The front matter contains a short biography of Leopold, and, at the bottom of the page, in small print, the names of the translators, Giovanni Arca and Mario Maglietti; the author of the “presentation”, Gianfranco Bologna; and the editor, Giovanni Arca.

This edition includes some original illustrations by Charles W. Schwartz. The cover features one of them, not the one chosen for the first edition’s cover but the jumping rabbit which accompanies the piece “Home range” in the chapter called “December” in Part I, against a light green background. The author’s name is in yellow, the title in fuchsia, while the subtitle is inserted in a bright blue ten-pointed star. All these colours give the overall impression of a light-hearted book, confirmed by the word “simple” in the title which qualifies the world of Leopold’s book as somehow naïve and fantastic.

⁹ All English translations of the Italian paratext passages cited in this essay are mine.

¹⁰ Among the texts published for the first time in Italian in this series are Bunyard and Goldsmith, *Gaia: The Thesis, the Mechanisms and the Implications* (*L’ipotesi Gaia*, 1992); Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (*Nel mondo selvaggio*, 1992); Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosofy* (*Ecosofia*, 1994, translated from the English).

¹¹ The omitted sections, as remarked by Franco Zunino, secretary of the Italian Wilderness Association, were those revolving around hunting. The Italian environmentalists, mostly against hunting, interpreted Leopold’s idea in their own way (see Zunino 2011).

The back cover foregrounds a promotional tagline in bold, saying “Quattro stagioni nell’incanto della natura selvaggia”, thus highlighting the phenological nature of the book. Comparing Leopold’s work with David Thoreau’s and Rachel Carson’s, the blurb connects it to American nature writing. His “evocative prose”, “images and metaphors” are said to “speak” (in inverted commas in the text) to far and different generations. The book is praised for including “an extraordinary and moving description of the transformations undergone by nature over a year”, where nature includes vegetation and animals. Then Leopold’s nature-related observations and his reflection on the human-nature relationship are said to outline his original “biocentric perspective” combining ecologic understanding with ethics and aesthetics, a perspective that has had a decisive impact on contemporary environmental philosophy.

The framing of Leopold as “writer-ecologist” is hijacked if not contradicted by the most prominent peritextual voice in this edition, that of the author of the preface, Gianfranco Bologna, at the time General Secretary of WWF Italy. In fact, Bologna has been engaged for many years in scientific communication, education and project work on topics related to nature conservation and sustainability. Among his many appointments, since 1988 he has been the editor of the Italian edition of the *State of the World* report by the Worldwatch Institute (Bologna 1997: 13).

Bologna starts his preface by expressing appreciation (Martin and White 2005: 56-58) for the book and its author: “Finally, *the most renowned book* by Aldo Leopold – *a highly important and influential figure* in international ecological and environmental culture – has been translated and presented to the Italian public. *A delightful work* that, even today, remains *the most widely read book* in the environmental field in the United States” (Bologna 1997: 7, my emphasis). Such high praise is followed by what Martin and White call “proclaim”, consisting in a series of endorsements, i.e., “formulations by which propositions sourced to external sources are construed by the authorial voice as correct, valid, undeniable or otherwise maximally warrantable” (2005: 126). In these formulations, beginning with a long passage by Donald Worster, professor of Environmental History at the University of Kansas, the prefatorial voice enters into a dialogic relationship of alignment with his sources, which simultaneously construe a dialogistic backdrop for the text of other voices and other value positions, and exclude certain dialogic alternatives from any subsequent communicative interaction.

Worster speaks of undertaking a sort of pilgrimage to Leopold’s country house, where “some of the key concepts in the history of environmental ideas were elaborated, such as the land ethic” (Bologna 1997: 7).¹² In the following paragraphs, mentioning the biographer Susan Flader, Bologna frames Leopold’s career as a conversion from a firm belief in Gifford Pinchot’s progressive environmentalism affirming man’s control over nature, expressed in Leopold’s book *Game management*, to a “faith in self-regulation as the best foundation for

¹² The passage quoted by Bologna comes from the beginning of chapter 14, “Restoring a Natural Order”, of Worster (1993). The book was published in Italy in 1994 as *Storia delle idee ecologiche* by Il Mulino.

what he came to define as nature or ecosystem health” (*ibid.*: 10). To support this interpretation of the evolution of Leopold’s position on the environment, Bologna ascribes it to the environmental ethics philosopher Eugene Hargrove, and reinforces it with direct quotes from Leopold’s “beautiful essay ‘The Land Ethic’” (*ibid.*) and from *Round River*.¹³

Another long quote from the already mentioned essay by Worster underscores the importance of Leopold’s idea of a “land ethic”, acknowledged as “one of the most important anyone has put forward in the twentieth century”, so much so that if observed consistently “not one of our institutions, philosophies, systems of knowledge, or modes of life would remain the same. Something bigger than pines would come up out of the Wisconsin sand” (Worster 1993: 183).

After this, Bologna identifies two central reflections in Leopold’s thought: the ethical issue of nature’s value and the balance of nature as a fundamental law of natural existence. He offers a positive evaluation of the first issue, tempered by some hedging: “there now seems to be growing awareness that nature, beyond having a utilitarian value [...], also possesses intrinsic value – that is, it is valuable in and of itself [...] a broader cultural vision increasingly seems to be gaining ground in the Western world, enriched by influences from other cultures” (Bologna 1997: 12).

Conversely, Bologna’s second conclusion on nature’s equilibrium appears to qualify Leopold’s ideas through distancing formulations that are “dialogically expansive” (Martin and White 2005: 103), in that they open up the dialogic space for alternative positions. This distancing is achieved through repetitions of words referring to contemporary positions, such as the adjective “recenti” (“recent”) and the adverb “recentemente” (“recently”), to highlight how old, and old-fashioned, Leopold’s ideas are at a distance of almost fifty year from the *Almanac*’s first edition. Bologna refers to the “most recent ecological research” that “by now has openly challenged [Leopold’s] concept”, adding that “recently, the application of the sciences of chaos to biological systems has further contributed to reflect on the fact that nature follows [the behaviour of] chaotic systems” (1997: 12-13).¹⁴ He quotes the ecologist Robert May in support of this position, and it is precisely this quote that reveals the meaning of the title chosen for this first Italian edition of Leopold’s book: “The message that I urged more than 10 years ago is even more true today: not only in biological research, but also in the everyday world of politics and economics, we all would be better off if more people realized that *simple* nonlinear systems do not necessarily possess *simple* dynamical properties” (May 1989: 41, my emphasis). Then Bologna invokes two other ecologists, Daniel Botkin and Stuart Pimm, who “have strongly challenged” the stability of ecosystems “mentioned by Leopold”, in support of this thesis. In the last paragraph of his preface, the Italian environmentalist restates his perplexity vis-à-vis Leopold’s position (“However one chooses to

¹³ *Round River* (Leopold 1953) is included in the Italian collection *Tutto ciò che è libero e selvaggio* (Leopold 2022).

¹⁴ The same “hidden strategic moves” were detected by Taivalkoski-Shilov (2020: 136-140) in the third edition of Pertti Jotuni’s Finnish translation (1970) of Rachel Carson’s environmental science book *Silent Spring* (1962), where the voice of an authoritative commentator, Teuvo Suominen, was added. Suominen simultaneously praises and belittles Carson by making her book seem outdated.

analyse it”), distancing himself from a work that, while a “milestone in the growth of environmental and ecological conscience of this century” (Bologna 1997: 13), is now superseded by new theoretical developments.

From these final remarks historicising Leopold’s position as a “simple” (read naïve) conception of nature, now judged outdated, the title of the Italian edition acquires a new meaning. With a subtle criticism emerging from the evaluative prosody (Martin and White 2005: 152) set up across the final part of the preface, Leopold is implicitly accused of not recognising the complexity of nature as a chaotic system.

In Bologna’s preface the first and the second part of the book, more descriptive and lyrical the first, more autobiographic the second, are never discussed. This implies that the innovative tripartite structure and the nature of the book as artistic object (Tallmadge 1987: 110-111) are not acknowledged. The subtle argumentation developed in the preface chooses the Land Ethic as its target to criticise it as oversimplified and old-fashioned in the light of new research. This partial view of the book, together with the choice of a trivialising title and the omission of important chapters of the original, have the effect of reframing Leopold’s work as a monument that deserves praise but needn’t be taken too seriously.

3.2. The retranslation and second Italian edition (2019) by Piano B Edizioni

The only other translation of *A Sand County Almanac* was published by Piano B Edizioni, a small independent publishing house based in Prato, founded in 2008 by Alessandro Miliotti e Andrea Guarducci. The two friends, who had recently graduated at Università degli Studi di Firenze in philosophy and art history respectively (Franchi 2019) were “guided by the pursuit of an original perspective: we turn our attention to forgotten classics, giving them new translations and eye-catching designs, while at the same time being deeply engaged with the spirit of our time and its storytellers.”¹⁵

They chose a new title for their edition: *Pensare come una montagna* (Thinking like a mountain). Although completely different from the original title, it is not arbitrary, philologically speaking, because it is taken from the heading of one of the essays included in the second part of the book. Furthermore, thanks to Dennis Ribbens, we know that Leopold once considered that essay, certainly one of his most memorable, for his title piece. Ribbens commends this provisional title as “personal, experimental, humble, even confessional” (1987: 98).¹⁶

Given how difficult it would be for an Italian reader to locate Leopold’s Sand County on a map, the publishers decided to commission for the cover a graphic rendering of an 1856 map specifically of that area, modelled with three-dimensional effects by the American designer, Scott Reinhard.¹⁷ Although in

¹⁵ This quotation comes from the publishing house’s website, <https://www.pianobedizioni.com/la-casa-editrice/>.

¹⁶ Leopold announces the decision to adopt this title in a letter written dated June 6, 1944. His previous working title was “Marshland Elegy – and Other Essay”, while the title chosen for the 1947 manuscript was *Great Possessions*, after the essay he thought was his best (Ribbens 1987: 105).

¹⁷ Guarducci gives this explanation about the 2019 book cover in Franchi (2019).

Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar (2006: 50) a map is considered an abstract image and a conceptual, analytical text, iconically it does what the original title does verbally, situating Leopold's book in his territory. This is the only image of this text, which does not include illustrations.

The book, published in the series "Fuoricollana" (literally "standalones"), was translated by Andrea Roveda, who later translated other works by important ecologists such as *The Selected Works of Arne Naess (Siamo l'aria che respiriamo: saggi di ecologia profonda, 2021)*; selected pages from John Muir's diaries, books and letters (*The Mountains Are Calling: Essays on Wilderness, in Italian Le montagne mi chiamano: meditazioni sulla natura selvaggia, 2022*); and *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir (John delle montagne: i diari inediti, vol. 1, 2024)*.

The peritextual voice in the preface is that of David Jérôme, faculty member of Philosophy at the Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, where he completed his PhD thesis on Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone* under the supervision of Bruno Pinchard. His essay "Pensare come una montagna": Aldo Leopold, L'Almanacco di una contea di sabbia" ('Thinking like a mountain': *Aldo Leopold, The Sand County Almanac*) had already been included in the collection *Ecosistemi letterari. Luoghi e paesaggi nella finzione novecentesca* (Turi 2016). In this epitext, Leopold's nonfiction masterpiece was canonised as a literary book; indeed, the title of the Piano B edition appears to be taken directly from Jérôme's book chapter, originally written in Italian.

The prefatorial essay opens with some factual data about Leopold and the book, in particular dates: of Leopold's birth and death, and of the posthumous publication of the *Almanac*, which is immediately placed alongside Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* as "one of the milestones in American thought on unspoiled or wild nature: the *wilderness*" (Jérôme 2019: 5). The word "wilderness" is left in English in the Italian preface, emphasised by italics. After an explanation of the "why" – the book is a classic – the "when" and the "what" (Alvstad and Assis Rosa 2015: 9-16) of the retranslation are clearly stated: "Exactly seventy years after its initial publication, it at last appears in an unabridged Italian edition" (Jérôme 2019: 5). This temporal gap is not accidental: in Italy the copyright for original works lasts for the author's lifetime plus seventy years after their death. Following this period, the work enters the public domain, allowing for free use and publication. It is understandable that a niche publisher may have chosen this title partly on the basis of its free availability.

In the second paragraph of Jérôme's preface, the critic introduces the word "environment" ("ambiente" in Italian):

Leopold develops the themes introduced by Thoreau with an awareness of the natural and 'environment' [footnote 2 in the original] sciences, then in their infancy. (*ibid.*)

The meanings of the word "environment", whose denominal abstract noun "environmentalism" was metaphorically¹⁸ defined as "a civic hand grenade" by

¹⁸ Drawing on the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4-6 and *passim*), environmentalism, not in itself but as a word, is defined as a civic bomb, which creates

Barbara Kingsolver (2020: xi-xii) in her preface, are explained in a footnote by Jérôme through “two possible translations in French: *milieu* and *environnement*” (Jérôme 2019: 5), which appear entirely out of context in a peritext addressed to an Italian readership.

The definition of “*milieu*” alludes to the title of the previous Italian edition of the book in an intertextual dialogue or heteroglossia, and attempts to contradict it: “The first [term] refers to a living territory, not at all simple but rather complex [...]. This is Leopold’s *land* and the true meaning of the environment” (*ibid.*).¹⁹

The French word “*environnement*”, on the other hand, in Jérôme’s view “refers to an economic and political fabrication of the new green capitalism, as if the world we inhabit and that runs through us could be an *environnement*, that is, literally, that which surrounds us (ce qui nous ‘environne’), like an external backdrop” (*ibid.*). In short, the voice of the prefatorial author suddenly becomes confrontational, as can be argued in particular from the use of the word “fabrication”, which attributes evil intentions to an abstract entity, “the new green capitalism” (*ibid.*), with its economic and global political power. This accusation, coming at the beginning of his essay, expresses what Martin and White call a “judgement of sanction”, which has to do with “veracity” (how truthful someone is) and “propriety” (how ethical someone is) (2005: 52).

The footnote ends with a recommendation to the readers: “On this point, readers may wish to consult ‘Sixth Circle’, in *The Coming Insurrection*²⁰ [link to the Italian free pdf edition] (Comité Invisible, *L’insurrection qui vient*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2007)”. This might appear to be a dispassionate invitation to expand on this topic by reading a specialised book, but it is actually more than that. In the original 2016 essay included in the academic collection *Ecosistemi letterari*, this footnote contained a 26-line quotation in small print from the pamphlet *L’insurrection qui vient*, which is the framing lens through which the *Almanac* was read by his French academic commentator. The twenty-four footnotes of the original version of Jérôme’s essay, of which a trace remains in footnote 2 of his preface, are a verbatim transcription of the whole ‘Sixth Circle’ section of *The Coming Insurrection*, entitled “The environment is an industrial challenge”²¹.

This reference deserves further explanation. *The Coming Insurrection*²² is a radical left-wing, anarchist manifesto originating in France and attributed to The Invisible Committee, a collective pseudonym employed by an anonymous author or group of authors. The text advances the thesis of an impending collapse of capitalist culture. The American edition begins with a disclaimer: “The book you hold in your hands has become the principal piece of evidence in an anti-terrorism case in France [...]” (The Invisible Committee 2009: 3). Nine people were arrested on November 11, 2008, and accused of the sabotage of overhead

division among citizens. Kingsolver depicts the scene with cinematic details, adding other expressions from the war domain in the following paragraphs.

¹⁹ Towards the end of his essay, Jérôme returns to this concept of the land as complex entity: “Perhaps the world discussed by Leopold, the *land* [...] is not such a *simple* world. A *Sand County Almanac* is the almanac of a world literally *complicated*” (2019: 12, emphasis in the original).

²⁰ All the quotes are from the American edition (The Invisible Committee 2009).

²¹ This chapter titles evoke another external voice: Dante’s circles of Hell.

²² For more information about *L’insurrection qui vient* and its global circulation, see Rovito (2010).

electrical lines on France's national railways. The French Interior Minister publically associated those arrested with the emergent threat of an "ultra-left" movement and described *The Coming Insurrection* as a "manual for terrorism" (*ibid.*), which they were accused of authoring.

The negative connotation attached to the word "environment" in Jérôme's essay conditions the reading of Leopold's essay, encouraging the Italian reader to assume an antagonistic position, whereby the natural environment – the *wilderness* – is not something to be preserved with an ethic of love and respect, but a pseudoconcept formulated and disseminated to perpetuate "a relationship to the world based on management, which is to say, on estrangement [...] nothing more than the relationship to the world that is proper to the metropolis, and that projects itself onto everything that would escape it", since "[n]o material habitat has ever deserved the name 'environment,' except perhaps the metropolis of today" (The Invisible Committee 2009: 50).

The sole additional reference cited by Jérôme in the only other footnote retained in his preface, is to *Tiqqun*, a French-Italian post-Marxist philosophical journal whose topics include anti-capitalism, anti-statism and the history of revolutionary movements. One of its contributors, also accused of having written *The Coming Insurrection*, was among those arrested for the sabotage of French railways.

Comparison between the 2016 essay and the 2019 preface, deprived as it is of most of the original footnotes, reveals the hidden argumentation underlying Jérôme's otherwise lucid philosophical presentation of Leopold's book. His covert call to insurrection resurfaces in the final dedication, "Niente di me, *omnia sunt communia*" (2019: 13), which clarifies the ideological implication (Monti 2011) of his framing. The Latin phrase, taken from the Bible, means "all things in common", and became a slogan of the labouring class in the German Peasants' Revolt of 1524-1525, whose leader, Thomas Müntzer, adopted it as war cry, arguing that all things should be distributed as occasion requires, according to the several necessities of all. Contemporary left-wing movements such as autonomist Marxism, the commons movement, and other social movements have adopted the phrase as their motto.

The peritextual voice of the 2019 Italian edition of *A Sand County Almanac* seems to fall into one of the possible attitudes assumed by preface-writers, who, in Genette's words, sometimes take "advantage of the circumstances to go somewhat beyond the supposed subject of [their] discourse and argue in support of a cause that is broader or possibly wholly different" (Genette 1997: 270-271). Described as a "call to arms by a group of French intellectuals that rejects leftist reform and aligns itself with younger, wilder forms of resistance,"²³ *L'insurrection qui vient* sold some 60,000 copies (Carbonell 2018: 249) and also had an extra-commercial circulation since a complete PDF of the text has been freely available for download since the book's initial publication. The same kind of "prescriptive exhortations" (Mulhall 2018: 114) that characterise the Comité Invisible's discourse also occurs in Jérôme's preface, when, towards the end of his text, he

²³ This excerpt comes from the book description on MIT Press website, <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9781584350804/the-coming-insurrection/>.

affirms: “The ethical neutralisation of the relationship with nature in modern Western society, which Leopold identifies in a few remarkable lines as the main reason for the absence of a true ‘land ethic’ in our society, must be turned upside down” (2019: 12). More than a benevolent call to action, Jérôme’s sounds like a call to insurrection, resonant with a passage from *L’insurrection qui vient*: “Everything about the environmentalist’s discourse must be turned upside-down” (The Invisible Committee 2009: 53).

Jérôme makes a remark on the traditionally demotic nature of the almanac as a genre, something he partly ascribes to the popular aesthetics of the illustrations (2019: 7). In the 2016 essay he elaborates on his position: “The form of the almanac is in itself a promotion of perception, as clearly shown by the illustrations of Charles W. Schwartz, embedded in the text, which turn reading into a sensory and intellectual experience: one encounters a chickadee on a stump, a rabbit hopping through the snow, a raccoon, a deer skull on the prairie, a fur trapper’s rifle hoisted up in a tree, its trigger connected to a string, etc.” (Jérôme 2016: 199-200). This paragraph was cut from the 2019 version, where not a single illustration is preserved.

3.3. The third Italian edition (2023) by Piano B Edizioni

The same publisher, Piano B Edizioni, published another edition in 2023, based on the same translation by Andrea Roveda and with the same title of the 2019 edition, *Pensare come una montagna* (Thinking like a mountain). The cover, instead of the crying geese sketched in the original 1949 edition or the vintage Wisconsin Baraboo survey map, displays a silhouette of black wolves in a thick wood on a mountain slope – a long shot, black and white, gloomy and silent.

The most prestigious peritextual voice of this re-edition is that of Paolo Cognetti, who authored the preface. This Italian writer and filmmaker, winner of the 2017 Strega Prize for his novel, *Le otto montagne* (2016; *The Eight Mountains*, 2018), was no doubt chosen for the presumed affinity between his writing topics and Leopold’s, and his experience as a mountaineer. His preface, like Jérôme’s, is called *Pensare come una montagna*, although, while Jérôme is a philosophy scholar, Cognetti is a literary figure with a high degree of symbolic capital and his framing is that of American 20th-century literature.²⁴

Cognetti’s preface starts with a reference to the final sequence of *Great Gatsby*, where F. Scott Fitzgerald evokes the Dutch sailors’ first view of the green forest which was New York in 16th century (though Cognetti mistakenly backdates that voyage to the 15th century), encouraging “the greatest and most extreme of human dreams” with its whispers. It is the dream, or utopia, of “a wild and boundless country, where no man has ever set foot”, the “primordial American myth” (Cognetti 2023: 5-6).

In the second paragraph he introduces Leopold as a “contemporary” of Fitzgerald, “born not far from the birthplace of another writer, Ernest Hemingway”, who had the same “typical American education” as Leopold (*ibid.*:

²⁴ A few years earlier Cognetti had edited a collection of New York tales by great writers of the twentieth century (see Cognetti 2015).

6). This time frame prompts Cognetti to compare the United States with Europe: Yellowstone was declared a National Park in 1872, fifty years before the Italian Gran Paradiso; France and Germany were also late comers in wildlife conservation. President Roosevelt, mentioned for launching the first national association for the conservation of natural environment, is said to have been inspired by 17th-century natural philosophers such as John Muir, H.D. Thoreau and R.W. Emerson, the latter counting among his followers Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, and Frost, down to the Beat Generation. Cognetti compiles a list of major literary figures of the time and puts them all together in the “same salons, or maybe the same gardens” (*ibid.*: 7) where American literature was born.

Leopold is then implicitly equated with the Dutch settlers for his “pioneering task” (*ibid.*) in the Forest Service. However, in summarising the “conversion” episode of the dying wolf in the short piece “Thinking like a mountain”, Cognetti disqualifies the idea of man taking care of the ecosystem balance. He dismisses the concept of “the man-hunter,²⁵ the man-farmer, the man-ranger as guardian of the harmony of nature” as “another beautiful utopia, when it comes down to it” (*ibid.*: 8). In general Cognetti does not try to hide his disillusion and disappointment with man’s behaviour, evident from his romanticised and idealised vision of a past when there was still faith in the future of humankind as part of nature.

Anchoring his reflection in the “old English word ‘wilderness’”, Cognetti goes back to the “Great Gatsby myth” of “penance, fear and danger on the one hand, but purification on the other” (*ibid.*: 9). In the final lines, his preface strikes a sad note: “I wonder how the thinking of this great naturalist would have evolved today, faced with the evidence of the climate crisis and the irreversible damage man has inflicted on the Earth, as well as with his steadfast refusal to take even a single step back from the anthropization of the planet” (*ibid.*: 10). Instead of including himself – as Barbara Kingsolver did in her preface with the repeated use of the “inclusive we” (Gallitelli 2025) – in his ecological critique, Cognetti dissociates himself from “man” or “mankind”, as if he wasn’t part of the human community. He ends his preface with a bitter remark: “Who knows, perhaps in the twenty-first century Aldo Leopold would conclude that Nature can and must do without such a guardian [man], that in its harmony the only harmful species is our own, and that it will be far better off when it has rid itself of us” (Cognetti 2023: 10). His final line “Enjoy your reading” sounds sarcastic after this grim, apocalyptic outlook. More than a call to action, Cognetti’s sounds like a call to self-extinction, which sooner or later, he seems confident, is bound to happen (he wonders “when”, not “if”).

The message for his readers is darkened by what Martin and White define “dissatisfaction” (2005: 49), a variable encompassed in their typology of affect which covers “emotions concerned with telos (the pursuit of goals)”, e.g., ennui and displeasure, and deals with “our feelings of achievement and frustration in relation to the activities in which we are engaged, including our roles as both

²⁵ Cognetti seems to take for granted that Leopold was not against hunting, even after his “conversion”. Another authoritative mediator of Leopold’s work, Serenella Iovino, in a review of the 2023 Italian edition writes that he “remained throughout his life a staunch and passionate hunter” (2023).

participants and spectators” (*ibid.*: 50). Instead of promoting a land ethic based on the aesthetic perception and appreciation of nature, the author of the most recent preface to Leopold’s masterpiece wishes for our ultimate demise as a species.

4. Conclusions

The three Italian editions of *A Sand County Almanac*, published in a time span of just over twenty-five years, sought to raise awareness among Italian readers of Leopold’s ethical and aesthetic conception of ethics and aesthetics concerning the wilderness. This study has demonstrated that, even with their possibly well-meaning objectives, the particular framings imposed on the editions, due to their distinct agendas, ultimately undermine the impact of the author’s conservationist discourse.

The translator’s agency seems to be very limited in both the translations commissioned by Red Edizioni in the late 1990s and Piano B Edizioni in the late 2010s: the names of Giovanni Arca and Mauro Maglietti for the first translation, and Andrea Roveda for the retranslation, are presented in small print in the front material of the three editions, so little as to be nearly invisible, to recall the title of a celebrated work by Lawrence Venuti (1995).

The focus of this paper on multiple translatorship in the translation product (Jansen and Wegener 2013) has allowed us to recognise the different voices of participants who are “united in the same project but whose viewpoint might diverge” (Buzelin 2007: 141), as shown by this analysis based on Martin and White (2005) appraisal framework. The levels of engagement implied in the peritextual voices depend on the ways in which the preface authors construct their audiences, and society in general. If Gianfranco Bologna seems to affirm “Yes, we can”, when he recognises that “there seems to be growing awareness that nature, beyond having a utilitarian value [...] also possesses intrinsic value” and that a “broader cultural vision increasingly seems to be gaining ground in the Western world” (1997: 12), David Jérôme is more prescriptive and strongly ideological – on the verge of dogmatism – to the point that we can all but hear him saying: “Yes, we must!”: Western society must be turned upside down. On the other hand, Paolo Cognetti’s view of human agency in the present situation of climate change and anthropogenic apocalypse is entirely pessimistic. “No, we can’t”, he has Leopold say from his grave: nature will only survive without us humans.

The analysis of how the different agendas underlying the allographic Italian prefaces framed the reception of *A Sand County Almanac* in the target culture helps to contextualise the way the original text was mediated when introduced into the Italian system. Historicising Leopold’s work in different ways, the Italian editions of the book failed to do justice to the author’s Land Ethic, which comes across, alternatively, as an old-fashioned and naïve fantasy, a call to arms or a

romantic utopia, never as a concrete way of “uniting ecology and ethics by living in community with the land.”²⁶

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²⁶ This is the definition of the Land Ethic[®] given on the Aldo Leopold Foundation website, <https://www.aldoleopold.org/about/the-land-ethic>.

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