



Carmen Concilio,  
and Alberto Baracco, editors.  
*Reframing Souths: Ecological Perspectives on  
the South in Literature, Film, and New Media*

(Milano, Milano University Press, 2025, 404 pp. ISBN 979-12-5510-266-3)

by Elena Past

In a brief section in *Reframing Souths: Ecological Perspectives on the South in Literature, Film, and New Media* titled "About this book," editors Carmen Concilio and Alberto Baracco note that they left the choice of whether to use lowercase or uppercase for "south," "global south," and "souths" to their many authors: "In light of the themes of de-westernization, decentralization, and denationalization that underpin this volume, we have opted not to codify our perspectives on the south(s) in a rigid, marked form" (XV). This editorial gesture, equally gentle and provocative, welcomes readers into a space that is eclectic, curious, and plurivocal, one in which scholars of diverse backgrounds cross disciplines and national boundaries in order to think through the importance of "south(s)" from contemporary, ecocritical points of view.

The twenty-first century has been characterized by hardened and contested borders, forced migrations, and the rise of plutocrats. It has also witnessed the rise of movements consolidating global solidarities around anti-racism, labor movements, and



climate justice, to name just a few. In this complex landscape, the world's plural souths come perpetually to the fore, and are in perpetual need of reframing.

In their wide-ranging introduction, Concilio and Baracco examine various approaches to the notion of "south(s)," beginning with an expressed resistance to the neoliberal, capitalist formulation of the concept of the Global South. Offering examples such as J.M. Coetzee's work to evade the "cultural gate-keepers of the metropolises of the North" (Coetzee qtd. in Concilio and Baracco, 3), or anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff who propose (à la Franco Cassano) a thinking from the south, they work through a series of diverse critical and theoretical lenses for viewing reality that—in non-homogenous ways—circumvent or upend hegemonic northern and Western models. Centering, briefly, the Mediterranean, they consider lessons from the region that is geographically their "closest south": lessons about the cruelties of European borders, deadly migratory paths across deserts and seas, and endless wars and armed conflicts. A quote from Edward Said provides the call to action that motivates the volume: in the face of these injustices, Said argues, intellectuals have the responsibility to serve as "lookouts," defining contemporaneity and foregrounding the work of those engaged in struggles to change it (9).

The volume is divided into two sections, with Part 1 dedicated to Literary, Ecocritical, Decolonial, and Comparative Readings and Part 2 to Images, Representations, and Visual Cultures. The book's twenty chapters cover an impressive array of theoretical approaches, aesthetic objects, and media. Concilio and Baracco argue that their book proposes a "constellation" of perspectives—an interactive, dialogical assemblage of studies which complement and challenge one another (13).

Across the collection's pages, we travel from North America to the Caribbean to Africa to the South Pacific to Europe, in a series of essays that reflect the diverse disciplines and linguistic fields of the authors. The genres and canons assembled are heterogenous, ranging from Goethe to TikTok. Some focus on "souths" primarily as an epistemological tool for understanding hegemonies and alterities (Mattana writing about Tobias Smollett and Scotland in the eighteenth century, for example, or García's intersectional approach to examining the Neapolitan figure of the *femminiello*), whereas in other cases the geographically specific political and aesthetic construction (or deconstruction) of the south is at the fore (Baracco theorizing the powerfully agentic qualities of Henry Cartier-Bresson's images of Lucania, or Torti considering the status of Sicily in works by Giorgio Vasta and Elio Vittorini). A number of the essays are particularly focused on close readings of texts (like in Vescovi's analysis of Amitav Ghosh's environmental fable *The Living Mountain*), while others take comparative approaches to a broader canon of texts (see the complex networks of literary and ecological thought emerging in Concilio's essay about Monarch butterfly migrations, or Della Valle's lyrical examination of transmedia environmental poetry from the Pacific).

In all of this variety, some intriguing threads weave across the collection. The Mediterranean is certainly a persistent presence in the collection, from an absorbing reading of the magical realist (but scientifically informed) denouement of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* in Concilio's opening essay, to politically engaged images of migrations and resistance in French graphic novels in the chapter by Begliuomini that



closes the volume. J.M. Coetzee's influential writing and advocacy is the subject of two essays (those by Serbu and Albergo) but also surfaces elsewhere as a stimulating guide for thinking alterity. Human, nonhuman, and more-than-human assemblages are protagonists of several lively essays, with bees, beekeepers, and butterflies featuring prominently in the pieces by Concilio, Spadafora, and Zola. Ecotheory, of course, plays an important role in the volume, but here, too, the approaches are as multiple and diverse as the Environmental Humanities: from the semiotic focus of Rizzardi's analysis of watery metaphors in Caribbean poetry and North American short fiction, to Deandrea's comparative ecocritical readings of contemporary African magic realism, to the materially grounded ecomedia inquiry in Spadafora's essay on filmmaking and sustainability. Finally, although Antonio Gramsci's name appears in just a few essays (that of Baracco; Antenucci's essay on Cecilia Mangini's *In viaggio con Cecilia*), the collection has what I might characterize as a Gramscian orientation, foregrounding the critique of north-south power relations and insisting that such critique engage seriously with (popular) culture as a central terrain of hegemonic struggle.

What I have described above as the volume's eclectic contents occasionally feels like unevenness—some of the essays are significantly longer than others; some are decidedly more focused on the question of “south(s)” or on ecocritical or Environmental Humanities analysis, but not on both—but ultimately, this diversity of approach makes for an engaging read. The editors have done an exceptionally good job editing, and they took care to ensure the consistency and clarity of language, clean, consistent formatting, and an excellent, extensive Bibliography, Filmography, and Webliography.

Throughout the volume, authors delve into the nuances of language, image, and (eco)poetics, illustrating how environmental struggle and environmental meaning are negotiated through aesthetics. In an article specifically about language, and teaching the English language, Renna and Taronna call on Walter Mignolo's distinction between “representational” knowledge—hierarchical, fixed, focused on macro-narratives—and “relational” knowledge, a concept emerging from decolonial epistemology. This latter knowledge practice “emphasizes adaptive, generative processes, and prioritizes the creative and contextual responses of individuals and communities to their unique circumstances” (93). For Renna and Taronna, Mignolo's concepts offer a theoretical framework for envisioning a teaching of English that calls out the neutrality of prescriptive approaches, instead re-grounding language as a lived practice that takes migrations and diverse language communities into account. Like the opening affirmation by Baracco and Concilio regarding openness to different typographical choices about “south(s),” the values expressed in this essay also serve as eloquent guideposts for the entire volume. Relational thinking; unique disciplinary and textual circumstances; real, intellectual generative potential: these qualities emerge from the assemblage that is *Reframing Souths*, and these values invite readers to engage with the contents in adaptive, creative ways.

One image kept returning in my imagination after I finished reading the volume: Rolla's elucidation of the lives of eels that appear in Matthieu Duperrex's *Voyages en sol incertain. Enquête dans les deltas du Rhône et du Mississippi*, a collection of thirty-one short stories about the deltas of the Rhône and the Mississippi, or the souths of France



and the United States. In the conclusion of her essay, Rolla explains how eels that swim the Mississippi and eels that travel the Rhône are born and reproduce in the Sargasso Sea, navigating incredible migratory journeys, fresh and saltwater environments, and the toxic, petrochemical sedimentary worlds of global oil. The eels embody connectivity between continents and between souths, and they live the transcorporeal crossings of global capital and petrochemistry. They are “omniscient, clairvoyant” figures whose presence signals “a practice of knowledge and denunciation but also [...] a preservation of memory and a celebration of worlds on the verge of extinction” (84). Slippery, mysterious, resilient, and endangered, they express how south(s) are connected, complex, and vitally important for thinking just ecological futures.

---

**Elena Past**

Wayne State University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2423-7534>

[elenapast@wayne.edu](mailto:elenapast@wayne.edu)

*I raccomandati/Los recomendados/Les recommandés/Highly recommended*

N. 35 – 05/2026

ISSN 2035-7680

CC BY-SA 4.0 License