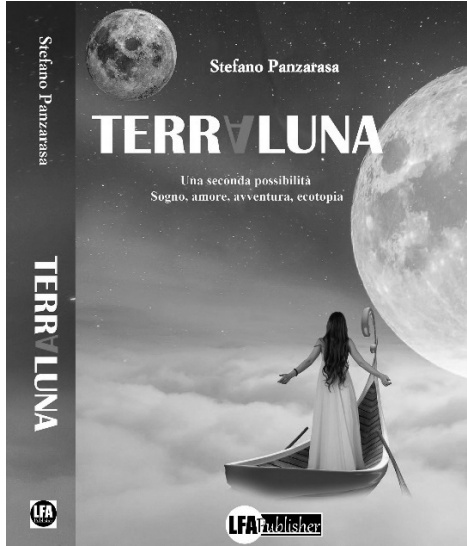


TERRALUNA – AN ECOZOIC NOVEL

By Stefano Panzarasa

*We need writers who remember freedom . . .
poets and visionaries, realists of a greater reality.*

—Ursula K. Le Guin



In 1996, as a member of the Italian Bioregional Network, I had the good fortune to personally meet and listen to Thomas Berry when he spoke in Assisi on ecological spirituality. From that day on, I was deeply attached to his vision of the Ecozoic era and to his ideas of bioregional practice. At that time, my ideas about spirituality were very limited. I was the father of a young son and felt a responsibility to pass on good ecological and spiritual values to him.

In the years that followed, I have always kept in mind the teachings of Thomas Berry. I have practiced daily ecology, worked in a nature park, written essays on the preservation of nature and environmental education, and composed, sang, and recorded eco-pacifist songs. I have written and recently published a novel called *Terraluna*, which was inspired by Thomas's ideas of the Ecozoic era, and that is what I am going to write about now. So far as I know, it is the first ecozoic novel!

Here is a brief synopsis of the book, followed by excerpts in which I speak of Berry, of ecozoic thought, of the Great Work, of the history of

the universe as a sacred history, of integral ecology, of bioregionalism, and even of ecozoic cuisine.

Terraluna

A second chance: dream, love, adventure, ecotopia

Silvia lives on Earth. She is a good mother and is generally happy but is saddened by all the current environmental and social problems and by her seeming inability to address them meaningfully.

Crass lives on the planet Flux, the planet of the two moons and ecological awareness. Like others of his world, he is a dreamer. He travels the whole universe bringing help where it is needed, and now gives special attention to the planet Earth.

The Great Circle of the Elders of Flux devised an important project based on chaos theory to try to save Earth from catastrophe. This project and a small ceramic object loaded with a special power unite Silvia and Crass in the dream leading them to live an adventure in a parallel world and in particular in the school of the Terraluna ecovillage where Thomas Berry's ideas and bioempathy are taught and lived. Luce will be born in Terraluna. She will be given the dream of a better world based on peace, solidarity, sharing, equality, love, and respect for nature, a world without violence and oppression.

Terraluna covers a time span of about 60 years. In the novel, fantasy, eco-pacifism, and hope are intertwined. The characters reflect on the meaning of life, its sacredness, and the fact that if it is not possible to cure the wounds of the past, one can still believe, even by engaging personally, in a better future, in the realization of an ecotopia, the Ecozoic era.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead

Excerpts from *Terraluna*

Dana, the leader of the school of Terraluna, speaks about synergistic agriculture and then ecozoic nutrition.

“We are pacifists. Following this way, we have no need to fight any war against parasites. The soil and the plants are no longer exploited, they live on their own in an anarchic, natural way. The results are excellent, and, in the end, everyone is happy

. . . and I really mean everyone in an ecologically profound sense. As ecotheologian Thomas Berry said, “*The universe is a communion of subjects and not a collection of objects*,” and “In the universe everything, human and non-human, is connected!”

She continued, “I love this school. We have the right books, no grades or exams, no competition, and so much daily practice. Here people learn to be really free and ecologically aware. In homage to Thomas Berry, we call our work in this school the Great Work.” (p. 172)

“Here in Terraluna all people have a great respect for animals and so thanks to Maria (the name of the protagonist in the parallel dimension), we serve vegan, raw, and fruity cuisine, we call them courses of *Cuisine Ecozoic*. We prepare the meals in the kitchen of a new era of ecological awareness, Thomas Berry’s Ecozoic era.

“In our school no rules of life are imposed, people come to their own understandings of the right choices. At the canteen, the children eat organic seasonal products of our synergistic vegetable garden; and, when these are not enough, the children eat produce from the common gardens managed by the families of the ecovillage. During the week, we alternate healthy fruit, vegetables, cereals, seeds, legumes, raw, and cooked foods. At times we add products from other ecovillages and bioregions near and far, land and sea, such as lentils, algae, and avocados. Out of respect for animals, we do not eat meat, eggs, milk, and cheese. (pp. 173–74.)

Stria (a co-star of the novel) visits a Terraluna classroom. A student and her teacher speak.

“What do all of these things on the table represent?” asked curious Stria, “and what should we have brought?”

“Dear one, this is our Altar of Nature,” explained the red-haired little girl. “It serves to remind us how close we humans are to plants and animals. Whoever comes to visit us usually brings an offering that is dedicated to Mother Earth, an offering linked to the territory of Terraluna and the seasonal cycles. Now that we are in autumn, you could bring us a maple leaf or a berry, maybe even a poem about autumn.” And then she added wisely, “But of course, you are new here, you couldn’t have known. This is the classroom where we come to study sacred history.”

“Do you mean this is your religious classroom where you study the Bible?” asked Stria.

“No, here we study the history of the universe and the planet. For us this is the Holy History, the rest interests us little.”

“This seems right to me.”

“We want to grow free people,” the teacher explained. “We agree with Thomas Berry. His innovative ideas about the Ecozoic era have greatly influenced us. According to him, priests, gurus, and shamans are now inadequate figures in our times. We would do better to replace them with what he called integral ecologists, people capable of reconnecting humans with nature, the cycles of life, the planet, and the universe.”

“Integral ecologists,” Dana continued, “could be the new spiritual and practical guides of humanity. Our entire education system needs to go in this direction.” (p. 179)

At this point the teacher went to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk and began to write the most important and significant words of the ecozoic language: *harmony, sobriety, balance, cycles, sharing, gift, empathy, reciprocity*, and more. He then asked his pupils to copy the words in their notebooks and write some comments next to them or maybe make drawings to illustrate them. . . .

“Here at Terraluna we try to create a society oriented to creativity, wildness, and compassion for all beings, and not to economic development, efficiency, and productivity. The only development in which we are interested is the growth of ecological consciousness and character.”

With this, the teacher finished his lesson. (p. 183)

Maria and Marco (the names of the two protagonists in the parallel dimension), explain how people live in the ecovillage of Terraluna.

“We are a small peaceful and supportive community,” said Maria. “Every day we do what we can. We know that we are not alone because we are in a network with many other communities similar to ours, many ecovillages and many people. Some are even more isolated than we are. As true bioregionalists, they support us and do their part in their own places. In the cycles of life, there are moments of destruction and moments of rebirth. We feel we are part of rebirth. For now, we are resisters and dissidents. There are only a few of us, but later the tide will turn.”

“I am sure that those on Mother Earth’s side will prevail!” exclaimed Stria.

“Then I see that we agree,” Marco continued. “We think the same way. We do what we believe is right for the sake of our children. We move toward the Ecozoic era that will replace the present technozoic period of capitalism, fascism, the destruction of nature, and violence of all kinds. At Terraluna, we are part of the beginning of this new era.” (p. 192)

Luce, a child born in Terraluna, is now a young woman. She has received the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her ecological and social activities.

Luce was convinced that the human species had to be reinvented in order to avoid extinction. History had to be re-examined to restore the parts that had been neglected, such as Earth, the body, the feminine, and the unconscious. Ecozoic thought was needed and the wisdom of women. Civilization could no longer require the sacrifice of the many for the well-being and profit of the few and for the interests of multinationals and the military. As she had said many times when she was young, no one has the right to steal the future from others.

Finally, Luce had also begun to rethink the concept of the state and the laws it imposes, both those that are just and unjust. She was convinced that a new kind of governance was needed. There needed to be new methods of civil coexistence. She looked to the wisdom of Indigenous people both ancient and contemporary, to Neolithic matriarchal societies, and to bioregional and anarchist thought. (p. 209)