

Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

Literature, Geography and The Poetics of Space

Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes



Preface by Charles Travis

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Geographies
of the
Anthropocene

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SERIES

IL Sileno
Edizioni

ISSN 2611-3171

*Literature, Geography and The Poetics of Space:
Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes*

Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

is a collective volume of the Open Access and peer-reviewed series “Geographies
of the Anthropocene” (Il Sileno Edizioni),
www.ilsileno.it/



Cover: Image created with AI

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International Scientific Publisher, VAT 03716380781
Via Piave, 3/A, 87035 - Lago (CS), Italy, e-mail: ilsilenoedizioni@gmail.com

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ISBN - 979-12-80064-75-2

Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 2024)



Geographies of the Anthropocene

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PEER-REVIEWED
SERIES

ISSN 2611-3171

Geographies of the Anthropocene

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The book series “Geographies of the Anthropocene” edited by the Scientific International Publisher “Il Sileno” (Il Sileno Edizioni) will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and humanists, intersecting disciplines of Geosciences, Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

The book series “Geographies of the Anthropocene” publishes online volumes, both collective volumes and monographs, which are set in the perspective of providing reflections, work materials and experimentation in the fields of research and education about the new geographies of the Anthropocene.

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The volume proposals can be presented in English, Italian, French or Spanish.

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Introduction

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In 2004, the Royal Geographical Society conference featured a groundbreaking interdisciplinary session titled “*Textual Spaces, Spatial Texts*,” which brought together geographers and literary scholars to explore the intersections of narrative and spatiality. Papers presented during the session were published in *New Formations* in 2005, marking a pivotal moment in the evolution of literary geography. This event showcased a significant shift toward interdisciplinarity, underscoring its transformative potential in bridging literature and geography.

In the period prior to this turn, literary geography, an integral branch of human geography, mainly addressed issues of description and representation. Yet, the 2000s marked a paradigm shift, introducing a narrative-driven perspective on the production of place and space. This evolution was influenced by a broader reconceptualization of space in geography, transitioning from a static framework of external coordinates to an understanding of space as dynamic and relational. At the heart of this development were the profound changes in spatial thinking that occurred during the late 20th century. This shift redefined the boundaries between literary geography and narratological approaches to literary space while fostering stronger connections with textual theories. By viewing literary space as a network of intertextual relations, this transformation emphasized the increasing interdisciplinarity of the field, setting the stage for its growth in the early 21st century.

The interdisciplinary domain of literary geography has undergone significant evolution since its inception. Rooted in the interplay between literature and geography, the field has historically engaged with diverse paradigms, from regionalism and humanism to radicalism and quantitativism. Emerging initially as a critique of quantitative dominance in geographical

studies, literary geography sought to prioritize the experiential and interpretive dimensions of space and place, challenging static conceptions of spatiality.

The 1970s marked a pivotal turn with an increasing focus on subjective and cultural understandings of landscapes. This “humanistic turn” emphasized dynamic and relational conceptualizations of place, positioning literature as a medium for generating and transforming spatial meanings. In this context, notable works such as Brosseau’s seminal 1994 essay in *Progress in Human Geography* not only internationalized literary geography but introduced a narrative-driven approach to spatial analysis. Brosseau argued that narratives do not merely reflect but actively construct spatial realities, thus providing a critical framework for interdisciplinary exchange. This period also saw the emergence of concepts like “topophilia,” popularized by Yi-fu Tuan in his 1974 book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Tuan described topophilia as the human being’s affective ties with the material environment. Similarly, Gaston Bachelard’s (1964) *The Poetics of Space* offered a methodological perspective on poetic images of “felicitous space,” emphasizing the value of spaces that can be loved and defended, further underscoring the profound significance of space during this transformative era.

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a significant enrichment of the field, marked by the “spatial turn” in cultural studies and the “cultural turn” in geography. Foundational theories by Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*, 1974), Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980), and Michel Foucault (1966; 1969; 1972; 1975) emphasized the multiplicity of spatial practices and representations, paving the way for innovative dialogues between geography and literary studies. Edward Soja’s 1989 articulation of the spatial turn in *Postmodern Geographies* framed space as central to social and cultural analysis, further solidifying its role as a critical concept in the humanities.

Throughout this period, literary geography expanded its focus to encompass both realist descriptions and imagined spaces, as exemplified by the 2002 collection *Lost in Space* (Kitchin and Kneale) and Westphal’s 2007 *Geocriticism*, which explored the textual production of fictional worlds. Thematic influences such as postcolonialism, feminist geographies, and identity studies enriched the discipline, prompting new questions about power, positionality, and the production of space in literature.

Key methodological advancements in the field include geocriticism (Westphal, 2007), literary cartography (Piatti *et al.*, 2009), and ecocriticism

(Buell, 1995; Garrard, 2004). These approaches share a commitment to interrogating the spatial dimensions of narrative while incorporating insights from philosophy, sociology, and cultural theory. Westphal's concept of "multifocalization," for instance, emphasizes the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and sensory experiences in analyzing spatial representation, whereas ecocritical frameworks explore literature's capacity to foster environmental awareness and address ecological challenges.

Literary geography's interdisciplinary approach draws upon a rich tapestry of theoretical perspectives that illuminate the complex relationships between space, identity, and the environment. By intertwining methodologies from diverse fields, it investigates the shifting dynamics of natural and urban landscapes, the intersections of power and history, and the evolving ethical responsibilities toward the Anthropocene. Chorographies and travel narratives, for instance, provide frameworks for mapping spatial experiences (Vine, 2017), while geopolitical critiques unravel power dynamics and the tensions embedded in historical and territorial conflicts (D'haen, 2024). Bridging geography, poetry, and philosophy, geopoetics explores the relationship between land and consciousness (White, 2003), whereas relationality and geoaesthetics highlight the interplay between place, perception, and artistic representation (Elias and Moraru, 2015). Psychogeography examines the emotional and behavioral effects of spatial environments, offering innovative interpretations of urban and imaginative landscapes (Guy Debord, 1955). Finally, ecocritical perspectives interrogate literature's engagement with ecological crises, promoting ethical responses (Buell, 2005), while imaginary geographies showcase the creative potential of literature to mythologize nature (Buell, 1995).

By navigating real and imagined realms, literary geography reveals the profound social, cultural, and political dimensions of place, producing transformative and performative visions of shared landscapes. Building on its rich theoretical and methodological heritage, the field continues to explore how diverse literary traditions and geographical imaginaries intersect to broaden our understanding of the world. This ongoing inquiry highlights the multifaceted ways in which literature reshapes and critiques spatial dynamics, while geography, in turn, influences storytelling. This dynamic relationship unfolds as a continuous rhizomatic process, generating an ever-evolving spectrum of perspectives.

Expanding on these foundational ideas, the chapters in this volume embody the richness and diversity of themes at the intersection of literature

and geography. Structured into three thematic sections, they engage with distinct yet interconnected dimensions of this interdisciplinary dialogue. Together, these contributions illuminate how literature not only generates and critiques spatial and geographical imaginaries but also reflects their historical and contemporary significance. The result is a multifaceted exploration that underscores the enduring importance of literary geography in understanding the spatial dimensions of human experience.

The first section delves into imaginative landscapes, exploring how travel, memory, and identity are depicted through real and constructed geographies. It examines how literary works engage with the interplay between individual and collective memory, the perception of cultural “otherness,” and the spatial dynamics that shape identity.

Angela Gatto’s chapter, “*Oriental*” *Travel Narratives in French 18th-Century Epistolary Novels*, analyzes how the fascination with “exotic” cultures became a central theme in French 18th-century epistolary literature. By exploring works such as *Mémoires turcs*, *Lettres persanes*, and *Lettres chinoises*, Gatto investigates how Turkish, Persian, Chinese, and Indian characters traveling through Europe reflect geopolitical relationships and cultural perceptions of the time. The chapter traces how literary trends corresponded with France’s historical interactions with these regions, offering a nuanced understanding of the evolving fascination with the “East” in French literary imagination.

In *Verbal Semantics and Memory in Shaping Narrative Space: Identity and Recollection in My Name is Asher Lev*, Matteo Bona examines how memory and identity are constructed through spatial depictions in Chaim Potok’s novel. By employing a linguistic-typological approach, Bona compares Indo-European and Semitic language systems, revealing how memory’s semantic values influence spatial perception and narrative dynamics. The contribution highlights the role of mnemonic discourse in shaping identity within the Hasidic Jewish community, analyzing how memory interacts with narrative *loci* to create a rich geography of personal and collective identity.

Shifting to the political and cultural dimensions of geography, the second section examines how literature and art engage with territorial conflicts, cultural practices and power dynamics, investigating how historical, ecological, and geopolitical transformations shape and are shaped by literary and artistic expression. The chapters explore diverse contexts—ranging from the ancient agricultural traditions of Central Italy to the postcolonial struggles of Morocco

and the avant-garde politics of Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume occupation—showing how spatial and territorial realities are inscribed in cultural memory and creative practices. Through these case studies, the section highlights the active role of literature and art in redefining notions of identity, authority, and resistance, while reflecting on the material and symbolic dimensions of place and territory.

Silvia Nencetti's chapter, *The Etruscan Landscape of the Vite Maritata*, investigates the disappearing agricultural practice of *vite maritata* as a cultural and ecological legacy of ancient Etruscan viticulture. Using a multidisciplinary approach that integrates botany, archaeology, and literary analysis, Nencetti reconstructs the significance of this practice within the historical landscape of Central Italy. The study sheds light on the fragile interconnection between material culture and literary imagination, by examining the symbiotic relationship between agricultural techniques and territorial identity. The loss of *vite maritata* from the Tuscan countryside mirrors a broader erosion of cultural memory and landscape, highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental and cultural transformations.

Sara Ansaloni's exploration of postcolonial Morocco, *The Post-Colonial Identity in Morocco: Geo-linguistic Experimentation in Souffles*, offers a compelling case of how literary and linguistic experimentation can serve as tools to build modern identities. Situating her analysis within the framework of Abdelkebir Khatibi's *pensée-autre* and Derrida's notions of monolingualism and linguistic plurality, Ansaloni examines the avant-garde journal *Souffles* and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's *Soleil arachnide* as expressions of a pluralistic postcolonial identity. This chapter reveals how the cultural and political tensions of Morocco's post-independence period found resonance in innovative linguistic practices, reimagining national identity as a mosaic of competing historical and geographical narratives. Through its focus on geo-linguistic landscapes, the study highlights the power of literature to critique and reconfigure dominant geopolitical imaginaries.

Daniele Meregalli's contribution, *(Geo)politics as an Artwork: Two Avant-Garde Magazines in Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume*, shifts attention to the intersection of geopolitics and avant-garde aesthetics during the Fiume occupation. Meregalli delves into the revolutionary ambitions of the magazines *La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga*, which transformed D'Annunzio's campaign into a laboratory of political and artistic experimentation. By tracing the evolution of *fiumanesimo* as a synthesis of nationalism, syndicalism, and artistic modernism,

this chapter underscores the dynamic interplay between geopolitical disputes and radical cultural movements. Meregalli's analysis demonstrates how territorial conflicts, such as the contested ownership of Fiume, became fertile ground for avant-garde visions of artistic and political renewal. Together, these chapters reveal how cultural landscapes and territorial tensions serve as powerful catalysts for literary and artistic innovation, illustrating the multifaceted ways in which space is contested, reimagined, and inscribed with meaning.

The third and final section moves toward ecological and ethical landscapes, addressing contemporary concerns in the Anthropocene, by examining how fictional geographies engage with the environmental and sociological challenges of this era and offering insights into the human-nature relationship and the ethical frameworks that emerge from it. Through the lens of literature and film, these chapters explore how imagined spaces reflect ecological concerns, ethical dilemmas, and the evolving perception of humanity's role within natural systems. From the Romantic ecologies of German fairy tales to the complex ethical landscapes of Hayao Miyazaki's animated worlds, this section highlights how creative narratives interrogate the boundaries between nature and culture, tradition and modernity, imagination and reality.

Maria Ruggero's *Nature and City in Fairytale Space* focuses on the spatial dynamics in German fairy tales, contextualizing them within the environmental and societal transformations that began at the end of the eighteenth century. Through the analysis of *The Brothers* (1795), *The Reconciliation* (1795), and *Undine* (1811), Ruggero traces the dichotomy between urban and natural spaces, emphasizing how the latter is celebrated as a site of human elevation and emotional resonance. By connecting these Romantic ecologies to broader historical shifts, she reveals how fairy tales anticipate the ecological crises of the Anthropocene, reflecting early tensions between industrial development and the natural world.

Similarly, Aldo Pisano, in *Anthropocene and Ethics of Care: A Narrative Ethics Approach in Hayao Miyazaki's Fictional World*, explores the fictional geographies of Hayao Miyazaki's films through a narrative ethics framework. Pisano examines how Miyazaki's works intertwine historical trauma, ecological sensitivity, and utopian imagination. Themes such as the interplay between nature and technology, as well as the fluid boundaries between historical and timeless landscapes, reveal a deep engagement with the ethical dimensions of the Anthropocene. By portraying characters who embody care for others and for nature, Miyazaki fosters a performative

empathy, encouraging viewers to rethink humanity's interconnectedness with the environment as an ethical imperative in a time of ecological crisis.

This volume underscores the intricate interplay between literature and geography, revealing how creative narratives can act as both mirrors and catalysts for cultural, political, and ecological transformation. By traversing landscapes shaped by historical memory, geopolitical ambitions, and environmental concerns, the chapters collectively demonstrate the enduring role of spatial imagination in framing human experience. Whether uncovering the remnants of ancient viticultural practices, reinterpreting geopolitical experiments as artistic endeavors, or reflecting on the ethical landscapes of fictional worlds, the contributions demonstrate how spaces bear witness to shifting societal values and global challenges. Through these diverse perspectives, the volume invites readers to consider how the spatial and the narrative converge, offering profound insights into the ways humans navigate their place within history, culture, and the environment. The power of storytelling can reshape the worlds we inhabit, forging connections between human and non-human realms, enabling us to reimagine the human condition in an ever-evolving landscape.

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