Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

Literature, Geography and The Poetics of Space

Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes

Il Sileno Edizioni

Geographies of the Anthropocene

Preface by Charles Travis

Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

Literature, Geography and The Poetics of Space

Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes

Geographies *of the* Anthropocene

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

ISBN - 979-12-80064-75-2

Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 2024)

Geographies of the Anthropocene

Open Access and Peer-Reviewed series

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.

"Geographies of the Anthropocene" encourages proposals that address one or more themes, including case studies, but welcome all volumes related to the interdisciplinary context of the Anthropocene. Published volumes are subject to a review process (**double blind peer review**) to ensure their scientific rigor.

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

The choice of digital Open Access format is coherent with the flexible structure of the series, in order to facilitate the direct accessibility and usability by both authors and readers.

Indice

PART I:

Imagined Worlds: Travel Narratives and the Role of Memory

2. Verbal Semantics and Memory in Shaping Narrative Space: Identity and Recollection in My Name is Asher Lev   *56*

Matteo Bona

PART II

Art, Politics and Literature: the Formation of Identity Landscapes

Silvia Nencetti

Sara Ansaloni

5. (Geo)politics as an Artwork Two Avant-Garde Magazines in Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume 127

Daniele Meregalli

PART III:

Ecologies of Imagination: Fictional Geographies in the Anthropocene

PART III:

Ecologies of Imagination: Fictional Geographies in the Anthropocene

6. Nature and city in fairytale space: an environmental and social concern

Maria Ruggero

Dipartimento di Ricerca e Innovazione Umanistica, University of Bari Aldo Moro, maria.ruggero@uniba.it

Abstract

In my essay I am going to discuss the value of space in fairy tales in relation to the environmental and social changes which started at the end of the eighteenth century. First of all, I will provide a general idea of urban and natural space in the German context. Secondly, I will analyse three different stories, *The Brothers* (1795), *The Reconciliation* (1795) and *Undine* (1811) and I will show how the representation of space follows a specific characterisation: the dichotomy between the two areas, the celebration of nature with a consequent human elevation, the interrelation between natural space and human feelings. The conclusion will confirm the main assumptions of the *Romantic ecology* and will show how the geography of fairy tales tends to absorb and to reflect the initial problems which will reach the climax with the current Anthropocene.

Keywords: *Romantic Ecology; Fairy Tales, Anthropocene; German Literature; Ecocriticism*

1. A spatial overview

The most recent ecocritical *corpus* working upon the era of the Anthropocene has acknowledged a deep and initial connection with the English and German Romantic period, inaugurating the season of the so called *Romantic ecology,* also known as *Green Romanticism, Romantic ecocriticism* or *Enviromanticism.*[1] The main idea which underlies these studies is that the process of industrialisation, which started at the end of the eighteenth century, activated a series of problematizations in the relationship between man and nature and intellectuals perceived a profound sense of disruption and lack of organicity. The rebirth of nature became crucial in the Romantic aesthetics, as Rigby writes:

> If at the end of the twentieth century "nature", or, more specifically, the biosphere of Earth, was seen to be on the brink of catastrophe, at the end of the eighteenth century nature, as a concept, was being reborn. This romantic reconceptualization of nature occurred, moreover, when the processes of environmental destruction that are now so pervasive were just beginning. Some aspects of contemporary ecological understanding and sensibility have their roots in this romantic rethinking of nature. (Rigby, 2004, p. 1)

This resemantization can be interpreted as a reaction to the reconfiguration of urban and natural space, which is considered in relation to a new utilitarian approach. In particular, the technical and scientific modernisation which affected England and Germany transformed «the face of the land and people's experience of place» (Rigby, 2004, p. 70)

---

[1] For the general relationship between the Romantic period and the current ecocriticism, see Kate Rigby, *Dancing with Disaster. Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015; K. Rigby, "Romanticism and Ecocriticism", in T*he Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, (G. Garrard, ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 60-79; G., Ellermann, *Thought's Wilderness Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature*, Redwood City, Stanford UP, 2022; D.W. Hall (ed.), *Romantic ecocriticism: Origins and Legacies*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2016; N. Heringman, "Introduction: Romantic Writing and Ecological Knowledge", in *Studies in Romanticism* 62 (1), 2023, pp. 1-7; T. Menely, "Rewilding with Romanticism", in *Studies in Romanticism* 62 (1), 2023, pp. 9-18

and implied the development of new cognitive and literary parameters.

Germany did not exist at the end of the eighteenth century. It was organized in relation to more than 300 fragmentary and small territories. The factual situation entailed the presence of a suggestive *continuum* between natural and urban space; early 19th century towns lived with and from the surrounding environment; they integrated into the landscape and were not perceived as separate from it. (Frevert, 2000, p. 67). These «Kleinstädte», small towns, dominated the German area; the boundaries between anthropized and non-anthropized space were fluid and could hardly be defined precisely. This bond with nature was expressed not only in the conservation of a wild landscape, since the mountains stood out on the horizon from the provincial view (Thalmann, 1973, p. 3), but also in the active cultivation of areas, for example in the form of gardens, which openly embodied an anthropic sign. On the whole, space appeared as cultivated nature, responding to other needs, such as the opportunity to engage in walking as a social practice.[2] In opposition to it, Vienna and Berlin were the main cities: the latter, which in 1790 had 110,000 inhabitants and a military garrison of 30,000 men, represented a vital center, it assumed the form of a big city and it could be compared to Paris and London. In terms of population, Hamburg followed the previous ones, then, at a considerable distance, it was possible to find Breslau, Dresden, Königsberg, Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich. The capital of the Kingdom of Prussia presented itself according to an increasingly anthropized form, based on specific monuments that represented a crucial cultural symbol. In fact, more generally, the city was «an area of signs: towers, churches, castles, gates, alleyways. It is organised in relation to a casual juxtaposition».[3] (Thalmann, 1967, p. 14). From their windows, people were not able to see forests or mountains, but everything was permeated by a spatial semantics, which was determined by cultural or economic places. The city consistently removed the natural environment to give space to a reality which was almost entirely built by man. From a structural point of view, in particular, roads represented an important aspect:

---

[2] In relation to this social aspect, see M. Gudrun König, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Spazierganges: Spuren einer bürgerlichen Praktik 1780 - 1850,* Wien, Köln, Weimar, Böhlau, 1996.

[3] The translation is mine, the original quotation is as follows «ist ein Ort der Zeichen: Türme, Denkmäler, Schlösser, Tore, Alleen. Sie lebt von Zufall des Nebeneinander».

Urban streets were traffic axes, lifelines, streams of movement; they connected people with one another and allowed them to perceive and overcome distances. They were places of freedom, but also of social mixing: people of all social classes met here, peddlers as well as merchants, soldiers as well as scholars, maids as well as prostitutes or middle-class women. Even if not everyone was allowed to walk every street at every time and at any speed, it was fundamentally a public place, a place of chance encounters as well as of conscious staging.[4] (Frevert, 2000, p. 70)

Streets were not only perceived as networks of overlapping realities, but «they are paths on which one never stands still, which require haste and speed and lead from the comprehensible to the incomprehensible»[5] (Thalmann, 1965, p. 35). The topography of the city and these mobile games, which are implicit in the construction of roads and which are marked by tortuous labyrinthine contradictions, caused a certain variety on an experiential and cognitive level, dissolving the calm and the uniformity of the German *Land,* countryside. What Thalmann defines, in relation to the urban space, «a reign of contradictions» (Thalmann, 1973, p. 5), provoked an ambivalent perception; it presented negative and positive aspects, it scared and, at the same time, it fascinated:

The city appeared magnificent and intoxicating, but also monstrous and chaotic. It threw the viewer into confusion, whirled him around, robbed him of his familiar certainties and roots. It brought the hidden into the light and exposed the individual, freed him from familiar social contexts, made him indifferent and anonymous. It triggered fear - and yet at the same time exerted a great fascination on the viewer.[6] (Frevert, 2000, p. 77)

---

[4] «Städtische Straßen - das waren Verkehrsachsen, Lebensadern, Bewegungsströme; sie verbanden Menschen miteinander und erlaubten ihnen, Distanzen gleichermaßen wahrzunehmen und zu überwinden. Sie waren Orte der Freiheit, aber auch der sozialen Mischung: Hier trafen sich Menschen aller sozialen Klassen, Hausierer ebenso wie Kaufleute, Soldaten ebenso wie Gelehrte, Dienstmädchen ebenso wie Prostituierte oder Bürgerfrauen. Auch wenn nicht alle Menschen zu jeder Zeit jede Straße in jeder Geschwindigkeit begehen durften, war sie doch grundsätzlich ein öffentlicher Ort, ein Ort der zufälligen Begegnung ebenso wie der bewußten Inszenierung».

[5] «Es sind Wege, auf denen man nie stillesteht, die Hast und Eile brauchen und aus dem Verstehbaren ins Unverständliche führen».

[6] «Die Stadt erschien als großartig und berauschend, aber auch als ungeheuerlich und chaotisch. Sie stürzte den Betrachter in Verwirrung, wirbelte ihn umher, raubte ihm die gewohnten Gewißheiten und Wurzeln. Sie zog das Verborgene ans Licht und stellte das Individuum bloß,

The bigness of the city with its condensation of fertile possibilities, which the life of the small province was not able to provide, translated itself into ferment, freedom, mixture, frenetic movement, but, at the same time, it also produced anonymity, confusion and incoherence. From a cognitive point of view, urban spaces completely changed the perceptions of nature and they entailed a radicalization and a relativization of the main questions of existence. Moreover, they opened to the current idea of city:

> Such a concentration produced, on the one hand, narrowness and conflicts, but, on the other hand, also distances, discrepancies, differences and thus the conditions for individual processes that were inextricably linked to the experience of modernity in the "Sattelzeit".[7] (Frevert, 2000, pp. 74-75)

The late eighteenth century city developed in an embryonal form all those characteristics which are now part of a metropolis, thus confirming the main assumptions of the *Romantic ecology*. Moreover, this environment developed itself *in relation to* the countryside. This spatial differentiation has always been part of the literary and cultural system as a *Leitmotiv* starting from Greek literature with Theocritus, which elaborated the opposition between an idyllic scenario and an urban one (Curtius, 1992, p. 212). The same contrast was in the Romantic period re-signified in relation to the new proto-industrial and, consequently, experiential changes: the regularity and tranquility of country life found opposition in the crowd, in the grotesque, in skepticism and in the cognitive revisitation of one's own certainties. Therefore, this dichotomy between spaces and lifestyles expressed itself in a more social way, causing a decisive re-semanticization. Urban space was perceived according to fluidity, while some romantic intellectuals, including Wackenroder and Tieck, focused their attention on nature to trace a sense of sublimity, «eine Erhabenheit» (Frevert, 2000, p. 67).

Close to cities and cultivated areas, a purely wild landscape stood out, characterised by lakes, rivers, valleys, mountains and forests. From a factual

---

befreite es aus vertrauten sozialen Zusammenhängen, machte es gleichgültig und anomisch. Sie löste Angst aus - und übte doch zugleich eine große Faszination auf den Betrachter aus».
[7] «Eine solche Zusammenballung produzierte einerseits Enge und Konflikte, andererseits aber auch Distanzen, Diskretionen, Differenzen und damit die Bedingung für Individuierungsprozesse, die unauflöslich zur Modernitätserfahrung der "Sattelzeit" dazugehörten».

perspective, many of these spaces, which are culturally part of the German area, had already suffered the consequences of a strong anthropization. In particular, the *Wald*, the forest, had no more the original dimensions, «the Ercynian forest had more or less vanished» since starting from the sixteenth century «the road and the city had largely dismembered the primeval forest» (Wood, 1993, p. 128). Deforestation had then been exacerbated by the wars of the following century; moreover the German wild landscape had suffered, since the mid-seventeenth century, from other forms of environmental exploitation, due to vagabonds, marauders and fires (Schama, 1997, p. 102). In the eighteenth century the situation had worsened because of the incessant demand for wood. The forest started to become a victim of forms of utilitarianism and destruction carried out by foreign people as well. Solutions about environmental sustainability were soon proposed. The first remedies to the devastation that was affecting not only German forests, but also those of Central Europe, were being put forward in particular by means of the reforestation and the elaboration of the principle of a sustainable economy, which was introduced in 1713 by the Saxon mining captain Ha(n)ns Carl von Carlowitz (Breymayer, 2001, p. 17).[8]

On the whole, the natural and urban geography of the late eighteenth century presented a problematic situation between territorial devastation, urban anthropization that led to new forms of knowledge and the reality of the *Land* that opened to the sublime and to a more profound sense of nature *in relation to* the human being. It is unavoidable to trace in this geography embryonal forms of the current Anthropocene.

This factual context was connected to a specific German *humus*: *das Märchen,* the fairy tale, assumed a relevant importance as it was seen as an active part of Romantic literary poetics. It was conceived as fundamental in the process of formation of a sound cultural identity since «by recovering ancient mythologems, it preserves the memory of an Edenic past, and, in doing so, activates hope in a salvific future». Configured as the «residual oracular space reserved for the modern man, capable of revealing his anamnesis and his authentic path to completeness» (Schuhmacher, 1996, p. 16), the *Märchen* magically connected the lost and disoriented man with the primordial and atavistic forces and, for this reason, in a period of *general* problematization, it was identified as the canon of the poetry. Intellectuals provided a Romantic construction of space (Larcati, 2011, p. 70): as form of art, fairy tale space

[8] In relation to this principle see also H. Küster, *Geschichte des Waldes: von der Urzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, München, Verlag, 1998, in particular chapter 19, "Die nachhaltige Bewirtschaftung und die Neuanlage von Wäldern".

recalled a plurality of symbolic realities, atavistic, universal dimensions and contingent, historical ones, characterized by a multiple semantic value, «symbols of the soul and of history, of the finite and the infinite, of desire and anguish» (Venturi, 1998, p. 132). They were artistically built on the basis of a new perception of the external environment that always emerged from the comparison with factual reality:

> How do young European poets recognize themselves? Within the cognitive process that deals with the creative process, the thought of the first romantics focuses mainly on the relationship with space: with the labyrinth of the city that oppresses them and with the image of nature that has moved away from them. They are both problematic. (Thalmann, 1967, p. 25)[9]

The spatial construction responded, therefore, to the concrete situation, to the disorientation of the citizen, which was translated into the artistic expression of orders that are labyrinthine. At the same time, intellectuals tried to dominate the unstable world with aesthetic means, in order to advance from the uncertain to the sublime (Thalmann, 1967, p. 12). From this, the need to return to a non-anthropized and natural space arose.

If compared with the literary tradition, it is possible to trace an element of discontinuity and Romantic peculiarity. This fairy tale space is indeed centered on the value of the sign, of the symbol that contributes to combine atavistic *topoi*- rivers, valleys, mountains, deserts are archetypes of space (Thalmann, 1967, p. 63) - with the historical, romantic concepts- the research of unity and sublime because of a problematic context.

---

[9] «Woran erkennen sich die jungen Dichter Europas? Innerhalb des Erkenntnisprozesses, der sich um den schöpferischen Vorgang bemüht, konzentriert sich das Denken der Frühromantiker in erster Linie auf das Verhältnis zum Raum: zum Labyrinth der Stadt, das sie bedrängt, und zum Naturbild, das von ihnen zurückgewichen ist. Problematisch ist das eine wie das andere».

2. Perceptions in fairy tales

Considering the spatial overview and considering the role played by fairy tales in the German romantic *humus*, the question that fuels this essay and in general my research is: how is space declined in the narration in social and environmental terms? Does it convey a specific message apart from being the chosen setting of an action? In order to answer these two questions, I am going to consider and analyse some Romantic fairy tales.

The Brothers was written in 1795 by Ludwig Tieck. It deals with a dispute between Omar and Mahmoud that ends with a final reconciliation, the setting is an Oriental one, near Baghdad. Mahmoud helps his brother to improve his financial situation, but when he himself needs and asks for help, Omar does not return the favor back. Although the tale is set in a foreign city, it is interesting to notice how the spatial context is described and how it conveys a human state of disappointment. After being betrayed, Mahmoud comes back home:

> Mahmoud's heart was deeply touched, and he left his ungrateful brother. "And is it then true," cried he, "that covetousness only is the soul of men? Their own selves are their first and last thought! For money they barter truth and love; do violence to the most beautiful feelings, to gain possession of the sordid metal that fetters us to the grovelling earth in its disgraceful chains! Self-interest is the rock on which all friendship is shivered. Men are an abandoned race. I have never known a friend nor a brother; and my only intercourse has been with men of trade. Fool that I was to speak to them of love and friendship! Only money can be exchanged with each other." Returning home, he took a circuitous path, in order to let his painful emotions subside. He wept at the sight of the noisy market-throng; every one was as busy as an ant in carrying stores into his dingy dwelling; no one cared for the other, unless induced by a sense of profit; all were hurrying this way and that, as insensible as ciphers. He went home disconsolate.[10] (Tieck, 1828, pp. 250-251)

---

[10] The pages refer to the original quotation, «Machmud verließ mit tiefgerührtem Herzen seinen undankbaren Bruder. – So ist es denn wahr, rief er aus, daß nur Gewinnsucht die Seele des Menschen ist! – Nur sie selbst sind ihr erster und letzter Gedanke! für Geld verkaufen sie Treue und Liebe, stoßen die schönsten Gefühle von sich weg, um das nichtswürdige Metall zu besitzen, das uns mit schändlichen Fesseln an diese schmuzige Erde kettet! – Eigennutz ist die Klippe, an der jede Freundschaft zerschellt, – die Menschen sind ein verworfenes

In that period Baghdad was seen as the centre of nevralgic economic and commercial exchanges. Ludwig Tieck describes this urban environment in relation to a «noisy market throng» where everyone runs and exclusively thinks, in a utilitarian perspective, about money and about the advantages deriving from interpersonal relationships. People are compared to frenzied ants whose scope is merely to get as much as possible. The city conveys a strongly negative meaning, as it is seen only in relation to economic concerns and to the lack of empathy, people do not know anything about «the most beautiful feelings», but they only focus on money and social opportunism. As it is possible to notice, this urban representation reverberates those social elements which have been previously considered: tumult, chaos, confusion, cognitive and human reorganization. During this period Tieck was, indeed, in Berlin, after studying in Halle, Göttingen and Erlangen - where he met Wackenroder -, and he probably was experiencing the strong changes of the city, reflecting them into the text. In other words, Tieck depicts an Oriental city both in relation to the generally shared imagination and values of that place, but also in relation to his personal perception of a capital city.

In the fairy tale, this spatial representation is immediately and significantly connected to another place. Mahmud decides to leave Baghdad in order to move towards the Persian boundary; he leaves behind the tumult of the city with its consequent lack of empathy, of corruption and of sense of immorality, he reaches a natural environment, which is presented in opposite terms. He is now upon a grassy hill, which becomes the setting for an important encounter, since here he meets a beggar, asking for help:

> Seized with a sudden impulse of compassion, he took his last pieces of silver out of his pocket, and gave them to the beggar, who, after a mute expression of thanks, pursued his way.Omar now felt extraordinarily light-hearted and cheerful; the Deity had, for his instruction, held a picture as it were before him of the misery to which man may sink. He now felt power enough within

Geschlecht! – Ich habe keine Freunde und keinen Bruder gekannt, nur mit Kaufleuten bin ich umgegangen. Ich Thor, daß ich von Liebe und Menschenfreundlichkeit zu ihnen sprach! nur Geldstücke muß man ihnen wechseln! Er machte einen Umweg, ehe er nach Hause ging, um seinen Schmerz etwas erkalten zu lassen. Er weinte, als er das tobende Marktgewühl sah, wie jedermann gleich den Ameisen beschäftigt war, in seine dumpfe Wohnung einzutragen, wie keiner sich um den Andern kümmerte, als nur wenn er mit seinem Gewinn zusammenhing, alle durch einander laufend, so empfindungslos, wie Zahlen. – Er ging trostlos nach Hause».

him to bear with poverty, or by activity to cast it off. He made plans for his sustenance, and only wished he could at once have an opportunity of showing how industrious he could be. Since his noble-minded compassion for the beggar, and the generosity with which he had sacrificed to him his whole remaining stock of money, he had had sensations such as he had never known before. A steep rock abutted on the road, and Omar ascended it with a light heart, to take a view of the country, made still more lovely by the setting sun. Here he saw, lying at his feet, the beautiful world, with its green plains and majestic hills, its dark forests, and brightly-blushing rivers, the sunset of the evening; and he felt like a prince who ruled over the whole, and put forth his power over hill, and wood, and stream. He continued sitting on the peak of the rock, absorbed in the contemplation of the landscape. He resolved to await there the rising of the moon, and then to continue his journey.[11]

If the urban space is related to a utilitarian perspective, the natural environment opens to the expression of those «most beautiful feelings» that the city had dried up. Actually, it is his «noble-minded compassion» which activates another view on the «beautiful world». Empathy and compassion, with a consequent reconfiguration of the interiority, nourish not only a strong humanization and a spiritual elevation, but, at the same time, they find a correspondence with the external environment. This gesture gives the character the opportunity to see this wonderful world, to contemplate the grandiosity

---

[11] «Von einem plötzlichen Mitleiden ergriffen, zog er die letzten Silbermünzen aus seiner Tasche und gab sie dem Bettler, der nach einem stummen Danke seinen Weg fortsetzte. *Omar* fühlte sich jetzt außerordentlich leicht und froh, die Gottheit hatte ihm gleichsam ein Bild vorgehalten, wie elend der Mensch sein könne, um ihn zu belehren. Er fühlte jetzt Kraft in sich, die Armuth zu erdulden und durch seine Thätigkeit wieder abzuwerfen. Er machte Plane, wie er sich ernähren wolle, und wünschte nur gleich eine Gelegenheit herbei, um zu zeigen wie fleißig er sein könne. Er hatte nach seinem edeln Mitleiden gegen den Bettler, nach der Freigebigkeit, mit der er ihm sein ganzes übriges Vermögen hingegeben hatte, eine Empfindung, wie er sie bis dahin noch nicht gekannt hatte. Ein steiler Fels stand an der Seite, und *Omar* bestieg ihn mit leichtem Herzen, um die Gegend zu überschauen, die der Untergang der Sonne verschönerte. Er sich hier zu seinen Füßen gelagert die schöne Welt mit ihren frischen Ebenen und majestätischen Bergen, mit den dunkeln Wäldern und rothglänzenden Strömen, über alles das goldene Netz des Abendroths ausgespannt; und er fühlte sich wie ein Fürst, der alles dies beherrsche, und den Bergen, Wäldern und Strömen gebiete. Er saß oben auf der Felsenspitze in dem Anschaun der Gegend versunken. Er beschloß hier den Aufgang des Mondes abzuwarten und dann seine Reise fortzusetzen».

of nature with its hills, forests, rivers and it implies the active participation of the subject as he feels «as a prince».

Previously it has been said that some Romantic writers saw nature in relation to the idea of the sublime, as a reaction to urban disorder. In 1792, three years before this fairy tale, Ludwig Tieck wrote *Über das Erhabene,* where he described these feelings which are activated by the external natural environment:

> If I enter a beautiful region, adorned with every charm of attraction, I shall feel, memories and dreams will surround me, everything will tear me away from my ordinary feelings - but if I stand on a cliff that bends far out over the sea, with infinity before me, and nothing but immeasurable abysses below, then the soul will feel elevated, great sublime thoughts will develop from my feelings, I will lose myself in the great mass, and a thousand thoughts of eternity and infinity will dig themselves deep into my inner being.[12]
> (Zeydel, 1935, p. 544)

Tieck describes a sense of sublime that arises from the natural landscape and that this dimension can provoke in the spectator, celebrating the beauty of nature which causes a different number of profound feelings and «great sublime thoughts». At the end of the manuscript he also writes some notes:

> Man is in two states, he is either «passionless» or «passionate.» Longinus teaches that «Pathos (=passion)» can enhance the sublime. Only great passions are capable of sublimity. The more a person transforms his animal powers into soul powers, the nobler he becomes himself. The more animal

---

[12] The original quotation is as follows, «Wenn ich in eine schöne Gegend trete, die mit allem Zauber des Reizes geschmückt ist, so werde ich empfinden, Erinnerungen und Träume werden mich umgeben, alles wird mich aus meinen gewöhnlichen Gefühlen heraus reißen,-aber wenn ich auf einer Klippe stehe, die sich weit übers Meer hinaus bückt, die Unendlichkeit vor mir, unten nur unermessliche Abgründe, da wird die Seele sich erhoben fühlen, aus meinen Gefühlen werden sich große erhabene Gedanken entwickeln, ich werde mich selbst in der großen Masse verliehren, und tausend Gedanken von Ewigkeit und Unendlichkeit werden sich tief in mein Inneres graben».

antipathy becomes an idea, and animal sympathy becomes love, the higher a person stands. Passions have three levels: benevolence, tenderness, love, anger, rage, cowardice, fear, anxiety, grief, despair, self-obscurity, self-love, pride. Mere beauty lies in the middle.[13] (Zeydel, 1935, p. 548)

Tieck creates a connection between human interiority and the external environment. By considering Longinus he agrees with him about the fact that only great passions, for example compassion and empathy, can activate a sense of sublimity which reflects itself on the external environment and which entails a profound sense of organicity between the human being and the natural dimension. Actually, the most striking aspect of the fairy tale representation is that the spatial dichotomy implies two different views of life in relation to the perception of the environment surrounding the character. While the anthropized space is seen in relation to corruption and immorality, as it freezes the beautiful interior values - human beings are compared to animals, to ants -, the natural space determines a strong connection evoking a great sublimity, implying an intimate relationship with the external environment, - the human being is now compared to a prince. Space conveys the level of humanity or inhumanity, elevation or reduction.

The story ends with a positive portrait: the reconciliation of the two brothers.

On the same semantic level, *The Reconciliation* is the title of another fairy tale written by Tieck during that year, in 1795. It is about a committed crime and the absolution of the sin. As it is possible to notice both fairytales deal with the concept of peace, forgiveness and, as the very title suggests, reconciliation that is always conveyed by the external and natural environment, letting us figure out how nature is perceived and what kind of celebrative portrait the author wants to provide *in relation to* the human being. In this fairy tale, the environment is described in two different terms, as interrelation between the subjectivity of the protagonist and the external setting, which is a literary *topos,* and as expression of the final reconciliation by means of its sacredness.

---

[13] «Der Mensch ist in zwei Zustanden, he is either «leidenschaftslos» or «in Leidenschaft.» Longinus teaches that «Pathos (=Leidenschaft)» can enhance the sublime. «Nur große Leidenschaften sind der Erhabenheit fahig.-Je mehr der Mensch seine thierischen Kräfte in Seelenkräfte verwandelt, je edler wird er selbst-je mehr die thierische Antipathie zur Idee, die thierische Sympathie Liebe wird, je höher steht der Mensch. Leidenschaften haben drei Stufen: Wohlwollen, Zärtlichkeit, Liebe - Haß, Zorn, Wuth- Feigheit, Furcht, Angst-Kummer, Gram, Verzweiflung- Selbstdünkel, Selbst- liebe, Stolz. Das bloß Schöne liegt in der Mitte».

First of all, the story begins with a specific and emblematic space-time setting: it is almost evening and a young knight is walking through «a lonely valley». The description of the surrounding landscape immediately reveals a symbiosis, a connection with the character's state of mind:

> The clouds gradually grew darker, the evening glow became paler, a small stream murmured softly, hidden under the overhanging bushes of the mountain. [...] The sound of the small stream grew louder, the hoofbeats thundered through the solitude, the shadows grew thicker, the ruins of an old castle lay wonderfully on the slope of the opposite mountain [...] The knight sighed and gave himself over to his thoughts [...] The knight became more and more absorbed in his thoughts, he stared fixedly out into the darkness.[14]
> (Tieck, 1828, p. 111)

This gothic atmosphere immediately creates a relationship between man and nature, between his thoughts and the landscape with its darkness, determining the *incipit* of the fairy tale. The knight meets an hermit, who tells him about his brother's story: he killed Clara, the woman he was in love with. After that, he continues:

> My heart was broken, but my life was now meant to comfort him; we left the castle and laid aside our knight's clothing, a holy robe covered us, and I made a pilgrimage with my brother through forests and over lonely fields until finally this cave took us in. He often stood for days on end by that river and stared into the waves, even at night he was sometimes there and sat on a broken piece of rock, his tears running into the river, my consolation was in vain.[15] (Tieck, 1828, p. 121)

---

[14] «Die Wolken wurden nach und nach dunkler, der Schein des Abends ward bleicher, ein kleiner Bach murmelte leise, unter den überhängenden Gebüschen des Berges versteckt.[...] Das Geräusch des kleinen Baches ward lauter, der Huftritt dröhnte durch die Einsamkeit, die Schatten wurden dichter, die Ruinen einer alten Burg lagen wunderbar auf dem Abhange des gegenüberstehenden Berges [...] Der Ritter seufzte und überließ sich seinen Gedanken [...] Der Ritter vertiefte sich immer mehr in seinen Gedanken, er sahe starr in die Dunkelheit hinaus».
[15] «Mein Herz war gebrochen, aber mein Leben war jetzt dazu bestimmt, ihn zu trösten; wir verließen die Burg und legten die Ritterkleidung ab, ein heiliges Gewand bedeckte uns, so wallfahrtete ich mit meinem Bruder durch Wälder und über einsame Fluren, bis uns endlich diese Höhle aufnahm. Er stand oft Tage lang an jenem Strom und sahe starr in die Wellen hinein, selbst in der Nacht war er zuweilen dort, und saß auf einem abgerissenen Felsenstück, seine Thränen rannen in den Fluß, mein Trost war vergebens».

From a spatial point of view we can find a dichotomy between the castle, the anthropized space, with a specific social organisation and the natural space, forests, fields and the cave, which implies a holy sense of human connection. It seems that it conveys a disclosure in the interiority, offering the opportunity to think about mistakes and experience a process of maturation which only a pilgrimage provides. The natural setting becomes the place of the elaboration of the sin, it is not a case that Tieck chooses a cave, as a chthonic terrestrial environment, as the place for this human *iter*.

This interrelation between space and humanity is confirmed in the final scene when the reconciliation occurs. Both characters find out that they are relatives:

> They left the cave. – Clouds hung in front of the moon, a holy silence had spread over the world, they entered the lonely forest as if into a temple. – Karl knelt on his father's grave mound. [...] There was a whisper in the treetops like the echo of a soft flute, two shining apparitions sank down, entwined in each other. They came closer. – We are reconciled! blew an unearthly voice, two hands stretched it out over the kneeling man, the words flew over him like a gentle wind: Be honest! – A cloud retreated in front of the moon, the apparitions dissolved into the bright silver shine. – The two mortals watched them for a long time in joyful astonishment. [16] (Tieck, 1828, pp. 123-124)

They get out from the cave and they reach the forest which is now regarded as a temple. As seen before, the German *Wald* had been experiencing for two centuries a process of deforestation and a current following attempt to conserve and preserve it. The link between factual reforestation, fueled by a sustainable ethics, and the literary link is such that:

---

[16] «Sie verließen die Höhle. – Wolken hingen vor dem Monde, eine heilige Stille war über die Welt ausgegossen, sie traten wie in einen Tempel in den einsamen Wald. – Karl kniete auf den Grabhügel seines Vaters. Wie der Wiederhall einer leisen Flöte flüsterte es in den Wipfeln, zwei glänzende Erscheinungen sanken herab, in einander geschlungen. Sie kamen näher. – Wir sind versöhnt! wehte eine überirdische Stimme, zwei Hände streckten sie über den Knieenden, wie ein sanfter Wind flogen die Worte über ihn hin: Sei bieder! –Eine Wolke trat vor dem Monde zurück, die Erscheinungen zerflossen in den hellen Silberglanz. – Mit frohem Erstaunen sahen ihnen lange die beiden Sterblichen nach. –».

It is even suspected - and here again there is a connection to the increased reforestation that has been taking place since 1800 - that the fairy tales mostly take place in the forest because the real forest hardly existed at the time they were written down.[17] (Breymayer, 2011, p. 20)

From this point of view, on the one hand, this setting entails a cultural and literary reaction to a real problem. On the other hand, Tieck carries out another semantization since he signifies the *Wald* according to ancestral values.[18] In the fourth chapter of Jakob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, under the heading "Tempel", we read, in fact, the reference to the forest as it responds to the concept of *Heiligkeit*, sacredness, for ancient German people (Grimm, 1844, pp. 59-60). Tieck discovers again this atavistic meaning; the *Wald* assumes holy traits to convey the most important and transcendental moment, implying a spiritual and ancient value with a profound human feeling. In this setting the final reconciliation occurs.

The dichotomy between spaces recalling different feelings can be traced in another fairy tale, *Undine,* written by Friedrich De La Motte Fouqué in 1811. The main spatial division is represented by the natural dimension described as a *locus amoenus,* where a fisherman lives, and the anthropized space. In relation to the possibility to move towards the urban space, he admits:

Now the matter somewhat troubled me, as I went along, for this slip of land was dear to me, and I bethought me with a shudder amid the noise and brawls of the city, how it might come to pass that in such a bustle, or in some scene not much quieter, I should have perforce to take up my abode. (De La Motte-Fouqué, 1911, p. 15)

If Baghdad, in the other fairy tale, is described in relation to a constant

---

[17] «Es wird gar vermutet - und auch hier wieder ist eine Verbindung zur seit 1800 verstärkt betriebenen Aufforstung offenbar -, dass die Märchen eben deshalb zumeist im Wald spielen, weil der Realwald zur Zeit ihrer Niederschrift kaum mehr vorhanden war».
[18] For a cultural interpretation of the German forest in other Tieck's fairy tales you can see M. Ruggero, "La foresta nella fiaba romantica tedesca: una lettura storico-culturale ed estetica", in *Echo,* 5, 2023, pp. 95-103.

tumult, also in this case, the city is connected to a sense of unease and to the lack of organicity. The fisherman refers to «noise and brawls» and a «bustle» which reflect those perceptions considered by Thalmann from a theoretical point of view. The city causes a negative reorganization of perceptions and it is seen in contrast to the natural environment. At the very beginning of the tale, indeed, the latter is described in these terms, according to an opposition:

> The part of the country where he lived was right pleasant to behold. The grassy space on which his cottage stood ran far into the lake, and perchance one might well conceive that it was through love of the clear blue waters that the tongue of land had stretched itself among them ; while with embrace as close and as loving the lake sent its arms round the pleasaunce where the flowers bloomed and the trees yielded their grateful shade. It was as though water welcomed land and land welcomed water, and it was this made both so lovely. (De La Motte-Fouqué, 1911, pp. 3-4)

The compenetration between land and water, the focalisation on a flourishing green environment, the positive qualification make this place a real *locus amoenus* where everything lives in a harmonic way. Also throughout the narration the anthropized space is always connected to a problematization among different characters, while the natural one evokes a sense of profound organicity.

3. Conclusion

The literary current of the *Romantic ecology* tends to consider that the first problematizations in the relationship between man and nature can be traced between the end of the eighteenth century and the very beginning of the nineteenth century. In particular, it highlights the rediscovery of nature and its celebration as a reaction to the invasive processes of proto industrialisation.

The analysis of urban and natural space in three different fairy tales tend to confirm the theoretical framework of this current, by providing four crucial results:

1) the clear-cut division between the two spaces,
2) the consideration of the city as the place of tumult and of the problematization also in terms of the plot,
3) the celebration of natural space,
4) the interrelation between man-nature and the narrative actions.

The main scope of the Romantic aesthetics is the research of unity and fairy tales play a crucial role in this specific mission. If the dichotomy between spaces has always existed in different literary *genres,* in this case, the representation of these realities is strongly connected to the attempt to reach a profound sense of *sublime* and organicity, because of a precise historical and cultural fragmentation. It is not a case that above all the first two fairy tales, *The Brothers* and *The Reconciliation,* openly deal with the research of a final and harmonic solution. The literary continuity meets the discontinuity, the atavistic *topos* meets History: the contrast, *tout court*, between spaces is now re-signified in relation to a new contingent context and it underlies a more profound attempt to look for a positive synthesis in a cultural, social and environmental moment of disgregation. From this perspective, spaces maintain the old meaning but they also assume a new one: the German *Wald* and its ancient sacredness is re-discovered as a reaction to the deforestation and to the historical division, the cave becomes the setting of the interiority - whose importance starts to emerge with Romantic intellectuals - by looking for a deeper connection between man and nature, the escape from the city in order to find peace in a bucolic environment is now developed in relation

to the contingent idea of the sublime - which is *par excellence* a Romantic concept. The fairy tale space moves towards this polarity, past and present, the *Leitmotive* express the doubts that the human being has always had, but also those felt now by the Romantic man as it sees the disruption in a more evident way. If some later Danish stories, after the Industrial revolution, will make the problem much more explicit, (Ruggero, 2024, pp. 67-76), between the two centuries the authors were already able to capture a prelude of the current Anthropocene. Looking at the factual and narrative geography of this period is indeed possible to confirm and to reinforce this idea.

References

• Breymayer, U., Ulrich, B. (Eds.), 2011, *Unter Bäumen: die Deutschen und ihr Wald,* Sandstein, Dresden.

• Curtius, E.R., 1992, *Letteratura Europea e Medioevo latino*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze .

• De La Motte-Fouqué, F., 1909, *Undine,* William Heinemann, London.

• Ellermann, G., 2022, *Thought's Wilderness Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature*, Stanford UP, Redwood City.

• Frevert, U., 2000, Stadtwahrnemungen romantischer Intellektueller in Deutschland. In Von Graevenitz G. (Ed.), *Die Stadt in der Europaïschen Romantik,* Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg.

• Grimm, J., 1844, *Deutsche Mythologie,* Bd 1, Dieterich, Göttingen.

• Hall, D.W. (ed.), 2016, *Romantic ecocriticism: Origins and Legacies*, Lexington Books, Lanham.

• Heringman, N., 2023, "Introduction: Romantic Writing and Ecological Knowledge", *Studies in Romanticism*, 62, 1, 2023, 1-7.

• König, M.G., 1996, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Spazierganges : Spuren einer bürgerlichen Praktik 1780 - 1850,* Böhlau, Wien, Köln, Weimar.

• Küster, H., 1998, *Geschichte des Waldes: von der Urzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, Verlag, München.

• Larcati, A., 2011, "La logica della trasgressione nella rappresentazione del

paesaggio romantico tedesco", in *Nuovi quaderni del CRIER. Il paesaggio romantico,* anno VIII, Edizioni Fiorini, Verona, 69-88.

• Menely, T., 2023, "Rewilding with Romanticism", *Studies in Romanticism,* 62, 1, 9-18.

• Rigby, K., 2015, *Dancing with Disaster. Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville.

• Rigby, K., 2014, Romanticism and Ecocriticism. In Garrard G. (Ed.), T*he Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 60-79.

• Ruggero, M., 2023, "La foresta nella fiaba romantica tedesca: una lettura storico-culturale ed estetica", *Echo,* 5, pp. 95-103.

• _____, 2024, "Il ruolo della fiaba nell'educazione ambientale: il case-study Andersen", *Cross-Media Languages, Applied Research, Digital Tools and Methodologies*, 2, pp. 67-76.

• Schama, S., 1997, *Paesaggio e memoria,* Mondadori, Milano.

• Schuhmacher, H., 1996, *Narciso alla Fonte. La fiaba d'arte romantica,* Versari M. (a cura di), CLUEB, Bologna.

• Thalmann, M., 1965, *Romantiker entdecken die Stadt,* Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, München.

• _____, 1967, *Zeichensprache der Romantik mit 12 Strukturzeichnungen*, Lothar Stiehm Verlag, Heidelberg.

• _____, 1973, "Die horizontale und die vertikale Landschaft", *Neue deutsche Hefte*, 20, 2.

- Tieck, L, 1828, *Ludwig Tieck's Schriften,* Reimer, Berlin.

- Venturi, F., M., 1998, *Giardino e paesaggio dei romantici*, Guerini, Milano.

- Wood, C., 1993, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the origins of landscape*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.

- Zeydel, E.H.,"Tieck's Essay Über Das Erhabene", PMLA, 50, 2, 1935, pp. 537-549.
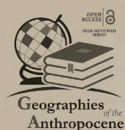
This volume examines the interdisciplinary nexus of literature and geography through a multifaceted lens, blending theories from cultural studies, narratology, and spatial analysis. Beginning with a systemic understanding of literary geography, the chapters explore imaginative, political, and ecological landscapes, emphasizing their relational and dynamic nature. Contributions analyze the production of place and space, highlighting their role in shaping cultural, historical, and environmental narratives.

Key topics include the interplay between memory, identity, and travel in literary geographies, the cultural significance of territorial disputes, and the transformative potential of ecological narratives in the Anthropocene. Methodological frameworks range from geocriticism and literary cartography to ecocritical and geopolitical analyses. Case studies span diverse contexts, such as French 18th-century travel narratives, Etruscan agricultural practices, and Hayao Miyazaki's ethical landscapes. Themes of power, positionality, and environmental responsibility are examined through postcolonial, feminist, and ecological perspectives, illustrating the creative and critical capacities of literature to reshape spatial imaginaries. The volume introduces innovative concepts, including the cultural critique of geopolitics in avant-garde aesthetics, mnemonic geographies in Jewish narratives, and urban-nature dynamics in Romantic fairy tales.

The contributions underscore the ethical and performative dimensions of literary geographies, revealing how storytelling fosters new spatial understandings and responses to global challenges. By reimagining real and fictional spaces this work demonstrates the transformative interplay of literature and geography in shaping our understanding of history, culture, and the environment.

Sara Ansaloni, holds a degree in Modern Languages and Literature and a Master's degree in Global Studies with a focus on Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Turin (Italy). She studied at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne in Amiens and, after conducting fieldwork in Morocco with the support of the University of Casablanca, she published her findings in a book titled Covid-19 as a Syndemic (2022). Currently, she is a PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Graduate Teaching Fellow in French and Francophone Studies. Her research explores the intersection of human geography and the formation of religious and cultural identities, particularly in the Maghreb region. She is also interested in the ecocritical dimensions of Arabic and Maghrebi literature, examining issues of identity, gender, and religion.

Eleonora Gioia, Research Fellow at Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy, specializing in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation, member of the editorial board of the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction (IJDRR) and Marche Region trustee for the Italian Geographic Society (SGI). She collaborated with the Marche Region Civil Protection, the Italian National Research Council (CNR), and the U.S. Geological Survey, contributing to various national and international projects. Her interdisciplinary research fosters geographical collaborations, supporting policymakers and communities with strategies for disaster preparedness and climate risk resilience.

Geographies of the Anthropocene

IL Sileno Edizioni