

## **Literary Landscapes of Time**

# **Latin American Literatures in the World**

# **Literaturas Latinoamericanas en el Mundo**

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Edited by / Editado por  
Gesine Müller

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## **Volume 15 / Volumen 15**

# Literary Landscapes of Time

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Multiple Temporalities and Spaces in Latin  
American and Caribbean Literatures

Edited by  
Jobst Welge and Juliane Tauchnitz

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María del Pilar Blanco

## **“Children, Butterflies, and Latin American Literary Landscapes.” Introductory Essay**

The figure of the child, much like the figure of the ghost or spectre, holds a peculiar place across literary landscapes from the nineteenth century to the present. The Latin American literary sphere is no exception. Lurking and moving through the spaces and edges of adult existence, the child is at once the figure that is often seen but not heard and the cipher on which whole societies pin their hopes of progress. In this sense, we could say that children represent two forms of spectrality, one literal and another figurative: like the ghosts of lore, they haunt and witness the events of adult life, which, in turn, is repeatedly read as the focal point of a story. On a second level, and especially since the nineteenth century, the child becomes a repository of anxieties about the future and an embodiment for that complex, strained, and elusive term “progress.” Put differently, the nineteenth-century Western world consumed and relished the idea of progress as possible and proximate. Within this grand narrative, which moves across time into the present day, the child appears as the ever-changing figure onto whom all dreams of genealogical and educational success, as well as fears of failure, are pinned. Their expected, future health and virtuous development expected, but not givens, children are the spectres of other temporalities that the adult imagination wishes to, but cannot, divine. What does it mean to read children and spectres together, or children as spectres, as we navigate the literary landscapes of the Americas?

In *La Edad de Oro* (1889), his short-lived magazine for children, José Martí reflects the nineteenth-century mentality I describe above when he writes:

La juventud es la edad del crecimiento y del desarrollo, de la actividad y la viveza, de la imaginación y el ímpetu. . . Cada ser humano lleva en sí un hombre ideal, lo mismo que cada trozo de mármol contiene en bruto una estatua tan bella como la que el griego Praxiteles hizo del dios Apolo. La educación empieza con la vida, y no acaba sino con la muerte. El cuerpo es siempre el mismo, y decae con la edad; la mente cambia sin cesar, y se enriquece y perfecciona con los años. Pero las cualidades esenciales del carácter, lo original y enérgico de cada hombre, se deja ver desde la infancia en un acto, en una idea, en una mirada.<sup>1</sup>

[Youth is the time of growth and development, of activity and vivacity, of imagination and vigour. . . Each human being holds within him an ideal man, just as each block of marble contains within it a statue as beautiful as the one that the Greek sculptor Praxiteles made

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<sup>1</sup> José Martí, “Músicos, poetas y pintores,” *La Edad de Oro* 1.2 (August 1889), 57–64; 57.

of Apollo. Education starts with life, and concludes at the time of death. The body is always the same and decays with age; the mind is always changing, enriching and perfecting itself across time. But the essential qualities of a person's character, that which is original and energetic in each man is perceptible from childhood in an act, an idea, a look.]

Martí emphasizes, in masculine overtones, the metaphoric potential of children: they are moulds, or vessels for the “hombre[s] ideal[es]” of a future time. At the same time, however, he completes (and complicates) this thought with a reflection about the way in which a child may reveal, in a flash or *Augenblick*, a vision of the future. We could think of the “acto,” “idea,” and “mirada” that in Martí foretells the future in conversation with the Benjaminian notion of the “true picture of the past” that “can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.”<sup>2</sup> The child's future relevance, their messianism is, in Martí's figuration, a momentarily uncoded secret that is uncannily hidden within the folds of their otherwise unknown existence, if we recall Rousseau's reflection in *Émile* on the matter of childhood.<sup>3</sup>

Across Latin American nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary landscapes, the child is an overflowing symbol of desires for future advancement and, conversely, a repository for anxieties of genealogical and genetic breakdown. We may consider, for instance, the character of young Andrea in Eugenio Cambaceres's *Sin rumbo* (1885), the daughter whose innocence and humanity manages to purify the nihilistic existence of a father (Andrés), and who in the narrative symbolizes a momentary reconciliation of the division between country and city, the barbaric and the civilized. Largely undeveloped as a character in herself, the child as *deus ex machina* remains a powerful motif in this and other narratives of the nineteenth century. In the case of Cambaceres's novel, the male protagonist's salvation comes, again, in a flash before darkness and death settle permanently in the narrative until it reaches its gruesome end (Andrés eviscerates himself). Throughout *Sin rumbo*, readers suspect that Andrea's survival is somehow imperilled by her father's wayward past. A more extreme story of genetic paranoia, or an “aterradora descendencia,” is Horacio Quiroga's “La gallina degollada” from *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (1917), in which the first four children in the Mazzini household are all born healthy until the same illness befalls them, leaving them incapacitated and,

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253–64; 255.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth remembering Martí's indebtedness to Rousseau's theorization of the natural man in the Cuban's own formulation of the “hombre natural” in “Nuestra América” (1891), an essay that was in the works while the Cuban writer edited and wrote *La Edad de Oro*.



following the degenerationist theories in vogue at the time, exemplary of an incurable atavism.<sup>4</sup> Read together as signs of thwarted progress, the children in these narratives survive in our imagination as static, though excessive vessels for a period's collective disquiet around ideas of science, nation, and modernity.

If for Cambaceres, the child is a powerful, though quiet, symbol of potential national redemption, when we look at the work of another Argentine writer, this time Silvina Ocampo, we recognize a dramatic change of tack in the representation of children. In Ocampo's dazzlingly disturbing stories, children are willing holders of secrets; they are inscrutable and often reflect what Sarah Thomas, writing about Spanish film during the transition period, calls the "mutually adversarial relationship" between children and adults.<sup>5</sup> In Ocampo's "Los funámbulos" from *Viaje olvidado* (1937), for instance, two young brothers, Cipriano and Valerio, thrive on the imaginary world of circus spectacles they have concocted for themselves, despite and in spite of their deaf mother Clodomira, a domestic worker in an urban home. We are told that their lives transpired in the darkness of "cold corridors" ("Vivían en la obscuridad de corredores fríos,") through which the mother's calls to her children flow with the wind currents.<sup>6</sup> These calls, however, are not reciprocated with a response:

La planchadora Clodomira rociaba la ropa blanca con su mano en flor de regadera y de vez en cuando se asomaba sobre el patio para ver jugar a los muchachos que ostentaban posturas extraordinarias en los marcos de las ventanas. Nunca sabía de qué estaban hablando y cuando interrogaba los labios una inmovilidad de cera se implantaba en las bocas móviles de sus hijos. (22)

[Clodomira, the ironing woman, sprayed the white clothing, her hand like a watering can, and from time to time she would look over at the patio to see the boys playing and assuming extraordinary poses on the window frames. She never knew what they were talking about, and when she tried to read their lips a wax-like stiffness covered her children's moving mouths.]

Moving acrobatically along the edges of domestic spaces, Ocampo's children are reminiscent of Miles and Flora in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and, back to twentieth-century urban Argentina, the murderous young siblings in Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's film *La caída* (1959), based on the novel by

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4 Horacio Quiroga, "La gallina degollada," *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1954), 46–54; 49.

5 Sarah Thomas, *Inhabiting the In-Between: Childhood and Cinema in Spain's Long Transition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 7.

6 Silvina Ocampo, "Los funámbulos," *Cuentos completos I* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1999), 21–22; 22. These are my own translations.

Beatriz Guido, who co-wrote the screenplay with Torre Nilsson. These young figures warn us of universes, conversations, and schemes that are out of bounds for older intruders. In turn, the adult looks on, baffled, finding intransigence where they imagined they could find innocence, resistance where they figured they would be able to enforce control. Here again, children assume roles akin to those of spectres in a narrative, as they embody an unspoken present, not to mention of an undisclosed future. The secrecy of Ocampo's *funámbulos* also lends these characters an unsettling air of being outside of normative time, their reticence being somehow too knowing, and certainly well beyond their years.

Outlining this disjointed temporality, the children-as-future trope aligns with another reading of the ghostly, this time Abraham and Torok's theorization in *L'Écorce et le noyau* (1978) of the phantom as a "liar" whose "effects," as Colin Davis explains, "are designed to mislead the haunted subject and to ensure that its secret remains shrouded in mystery."<sup>7</sup> The children across the different narratives mentioned here impede any recurrence to coaxing, let alone antidotes of tenderness, care, and gentle indoctrination. This affective dimension succeeds in heightening readers' frustrations about figures we imagined to be under narrative, generational and sociocultural control. In this sense, they thwart the stories that we have repeatedly told ourselves about progress, development, and the value of sentimental educations. Existing outside of the normative times of discipline, they are haunting aporias that mark the otherwise recognizable, private spaces within urban landscapes.

While the children in Ocampo's and Guido's/Torre Nilsson's narratives inhabit distinct domestic spheres, skirting thus any form of formalized education, the contemporary writer Samanta Schweblin transports the inscrutable silence and mystery of children to the institutionalized space of the school. In the micro-story "Mariposas," published in *Pájaros en la boca* (2009), two parents, Gorriti and Calderón, converse about their children (their small feet, the shedding of baby teeth) outside a school while they "esperan ansiosos la salida de sus hijos" (waiting anxiously for their children to be let out).<sup>8</sup> The reader begins to be put on alert when we're told that "En cualquier momento se abren las puertas y los chicos salen disparados, riendo a gritos en un tumulto de colores, a veces manchados de témpera, o de chocolate. Pero por alguna razón, el timbre se retrasa" (27) [The doors will open any second now and the children will

<sup>7</sup> Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," *French Studies* 59, 3 (2005), 373–79; 374.

<sup>8</sup> Samanta Schweblin, "Mariposas," *Pájaros en la boca y otros cuentos* (New York: Literatura Random House, 2008), 27–28; 27. English version from Schweblin, "Butterflies," *Mouthful of Birds*, trans. Megan McDowell (London: OneWorld, 2019), 25–27; 25.

burst out, laughing and shouting in a tumult of colors, some spotted with paint or chocolate. But for some reason the bell is delayed (26)]. The next part of the story focuses on a butterfly that lands on chatty Calderón's arm, which he proceeds to trap and, in so doing, fatally harms it. As he steps on the moribund butterfly,

. . . advierte que algo extraño sucede. Mira hacia las puertas y entonces, como si un viento repentino hubiese violado las cerraduras, las puertas se abren, y cientos de mariposas de todos los colores y tamaños se abalanzan sobre los padres que esperan. (28)

[. . . he realizes something strange is happening. He looks towards the doors and then, as if a sudden wind had breached the locks, the doors open and hundreds of butterflies of every color and size rush out toward the waiting parents.] (27)

This image of butterflies bursting out of school doors is at once beautiful as it is disturbing, for we have been forewarned that "algo raro," out of the ordinary, is indeed happening. While we witness Calderón's anxiety – "[p]iensas si irán a atacarlo, tal vez piensa que va a morir" (28) [He thinks they might attack him; maybe he thinks he's going to die (27) – the other parents are slower to panic as the butterflies stream outside of the school until the last one comes out.

To my mind, Schweblin's micro-story would remain in the realms of fantastical, metaphoric beauty – a tale of children transmogrified into butterflies – if it weren't for the events recounted in the final lines. It is here (at the very end of the narrative, to be exact) that we encounter Calderón's realization that the butterfly he crushed in his fingers could be his own child. For me, the more disturbing lines are those that precede this inevitable realization:

Calderón se queda mirando las puertas abiertas, y tras los vidrios del hall central, las salas silenciosas. Algunos padres todavía se amontonan frente a las puertas y gritan los nombres de sus hijos. Entonces las mariposas, todas ellas en pocos segundos, se alejan volando en distintas direcciones. Los padres intentan atraparlas. (28)

[Calderón stands looking at the open doors and through the windows of the main hall, at the silent classrooms. Some parents are still crowding in front of the doors and shouting the names of their children. Then the butterflies, all of them in just a few seconds, fly off in different directions. The parents try to catch them.] (27)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Schweblin's translator, Megan McDowell, opted to separate the narrative in "Butterflies" using paragraphs and caesuras, whereas Schweblin's story in Spanish is one uninterrupted paragraph. The paragraph cited here stands alone in the English version.

If the runaway butterflies signal the colonization of the story by the fantastic genre, the scene of parents crowding around the doors of a school waiting for children that will never emerge places readers within a scene of horror that is both familiar and universal: the move of expected arrival turned into emptiness, the all-too-sudden shift from presence to absence. In other words, a tale of metamorphosis sits uncomfortably, and unbearably, with one about disappearance. This shift is dramatized powerfully by Schweblin's depiction of the empty and silent school building that, in the end, is inhabited only by the parents' shouting of their children's names.

The eerily silent hall and corridors of the school in "Mariposas" bears an uncanny resemblance to the cold corridors in Ocampo's story. In this sense, both narratives share interesting sonic and spatial configurations that, also similarly, signal breakdowns in reciprocal communication and the haunting silences that absence leaves in its wake. The difference between the two stories lies in the way that Ocampo particularizes the contained, and ultimately tragic silence that separates Clodomira from Cipriano and Valerio, while Schweblin transforms that silence into a mass event. The institutional setting of Schweblin's story forces us to think afresh about spaces of education and their supposed safety, and of the indoctrinations and often-irreversible transformations that can take place within them (who delayed the opening of the school doors, and who opened them at last?, we ask). Set within such a location, the spectral transformation of the children and the chilling absence of those in charge right at the moment when questions begin to flood in, opens into a critique of institutions as bearers of ideological and biopolitical power, with the ability to make humans disappear.

The ending of Schweblin's story leaves us with the irreconcilability between a reading that admits and accepts the fantastic and another that is disturbing and of our world. The beginning of the story, in which Calderón gushes about his child while noting details about baby teeth and foot size, seemingly settles us into a narration of the normal stages of child development – the kind of tale about children that comforts because it details a form of predictable progress. Schweblin thwarts our readerly expectations by leaving us with the possibility of bodies that have followed another species' stages of development, or of an altogether different form of transformation that lies outside the organic core of those young bodies. Regardless of the way we choose to read Schweblin's story, the figure of the child as interrupted promise, unanswered question, and haunted silence lingers indefinitely.

Writing about the Vietnam War in her reflections on precarious lives, Judith Butler explains that

it was the pictures of the children burning and dying from napalm that brought the US public to a sense of shock, outrage, remorse, and grief. These were precisely pictures we were not supposed to see, and they disrupted the visual field and the entire sense of public identity that was built upon that field. . . . Despite their graphic effectivity, the images pointed somewhere else, beyond themselves, to a life and to a precariousness that they could not show.<sup>10</sup>

As Butler intimates, the image of the child – and especially the suffering child – harbours an immense amount of power, not only in terms of the immediate reactions it beckons, but of that "somewhere else" to which it points, a "beyond" that puts a mirror directly in front of ourselves. The different literary situations pictured in the narratives I discuss here – Martí's universalizing metaphors about the paths from childhood to old age; the innocence that opens itself up to symbolic potentials in Cambaceres; the inscrutable, waxen faces in "Los funámbulos"; and Schweblin's disappeared pupils – are an incomplete inventory of the different ways in which writers have used the figure of the child to comment on human temporality and its potential interruption. They also dwell on the representation of the child as a figure that hinges on an edge between innocence and knowingness, silence and answerability. This is a delicate edge that can ultimately signal the failure of humans and the institutions that they build to secure their continuity as a species. Like the presence of a ghost, then, the child's appearance across our literary and artistic landscapes offers an invitation to pause and reflect on our definitions of human life, and the steps we can take to relate to all generations and forms of that collective life.

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<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 150.



Jobst Welge and Juliane Tauchnitz

## Introduction

Based in large part on the contributions to an international (and, due to the pandemic, digital) conference at Leipzig University (April 2021) this collection of essays is intended to explore the relevance of different or layered temporalities for the literatures of Latin America and the Caribbean. The central starting point is that the literature of these cultural spaces explores connections between landscape, geography and historical or temporal sedimentation, which in turn are reflected at the level of individual and collective experiences as well as global forces and movements. Landscapes and places in the broadest sense often function in Latin American and Caribbean literatures as spaces that reveal traces of violent, traumatic experiences and historical or temporal layers. Based on these observations, the present volume wants to bring a comparative perspective into play and asks about the specific means employed by literary texts to realize the temporal palimpsest and/or the spatial entanglements on the level of the literary form itself.

## Interrelating Spaces and Temporalities

A recent, highly self-reflexive (and transnational) example for such intersections in contemporary literature is the novel *Lost Children Archive* (2019) by the Mexican-US-American author Valeria Luiselli, about the Mexican-North American border region. The novel is structured along the lines of a family road trip (and the model of the American road novel). The family's use of a polaroid camera leads the narrator to reflect about Man Ray's "rayographs" as traces of absent objects. Those photographs/rayographs are said to be "like the ghostly traces of objects no longer there, like visual echoes, or like footprints left in the mud by someone who'd passed by long ago" (Luiselli 2019: 56). Aside from this sense of the past haunting the present, the narrator also reflects on the "visual echoes" of American cultural and photographic history as they underlie her own perception of the landscape:

I know, as we drive through the long, lonely roads of this country – a landscape that I am seeing for the first time – that what I see is not quite what I see. What I see is what others

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have already documented: Ilf and Petrov, Robert Frank, Robert Adams, Walker Evans, Stephen Shore – the first road photographers and their pictures of road signs, stretches of vacant land, cars, motels, diners, industrial repetition, all the ruins of early capitalism now engulfed by future ruins of later capitalism. (Luiselli 2019: 102)

Luiselli's novel, then, envisions landscape as historically layered, haunted, marked by material ruins, and filtered through previous cultural representations or literary models (Welge 2021).

The need to critically approach literature from a spatiotemporal perspective is not in itself surprising, since literary works are arguably always situated in relationship to temporal and spatial frameworks. However, as Adam Barrows has pointed out, the onset of the so-called spatial turn in the humanities since the 1990s, and its concomitant tendency to largely bracket questions of temporality, can only be explained as a reaction to a situation that had for a long time been dominated by a temporal paradigm, exemplified by the significance of Henri Bergson's theory for the interpretation of canonical modernist literature (Barrows 2016: 3). In her pioneering work, the geographer Doreen Massey has noted that often the categories of space and time had been artificially kept apart and even seen as oppositional: "With Time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics, and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space, on the other hand, are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, (simple) reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body" (Massey 1993: 148).

Recent critical approaches, however, have increasingly taken on the challenge to interrelate spatial and temporal paradigms. Thus, literary criticism after the spatial turn has recognized that the category of place needs to be further elaborated and amplified in a relational and multi-directional sense, including dimensions of temporality, migration, global circulation, and so forth (Prieto 2012; cf. Dünne/Günzel 2006). As the subtitle of our volume makes clear, we propose that not only is there a need to interrelate space and time, but also to pay due attention to the presence of *multiple* temporalities in works of fiction. For instance, in a recent volume on travel writing Paula Henrikson and Christina Kullberg have invoked François Hartog's notion of "regimes of historicity" to highlight the plurality of times, as well as the fact that conceptualizations of time are not given but culturally produced, and they have pointed to broader implications and consequences: "Temporalities can be distinguished as certain articulations of time; they refer to larger concepts of pasts, presents, and futures" (Henrikson/Kullberg 2021: 3).

For us, a central, inspirational point for this focus on multiple spaces and temporalities was the work of María del Pilar Blanco, especially her book *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* (2012), which has fastened on the characteristic



obsession with supernatural or Gothic themes in the literature of the Americas (both North and South America). These various phenomena are theorized by Blanco with recourse to the concept of *haunting*, a phenomenon she defines as a “disquieting experience of sensing a collision of temporalities or spaces” in both urban and desert regions of the Americas (Blanco 2012: 182). For instance, Blanco has credited the Mexican Juan Rulfo’s landmark novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) – significantly also invoked by Luiselli’s novel – with emblemizing a central trait of the modern Latin American novel, namely its “increasing awareness of simultaneous landscapes and simultaneous others living within unseen, diverse spaces in the progressively complicated political and cultural networks of hemispheric modernization” (Blanco 2012: 7). In her book, Blanco understands the phenomenon of haunting as a subjective disposition or experience of doubt, a crisis of perception that fastens on landscapes marked by different temporal experiences, where certain things are felt but not actually seen. This idea shows itself to be highly productive when dealing with the different kinds of reality that impact on specifically “American landscapes affected by ongoing modernization” (Blanco 2012: 25). To approach the cultural study of landscape via the phenomenon of haunting is particularly suggestive because it helps us to understand how diverging perspectives may envision and condition the relationship between different temporalities and/or places: “We often think of simultaneity in temporal terms, but we should also look at it as an event in which two spatialities are confronted with each other” (Blanco 2012: 26). María del Pilar Blanco has participated in the conference with many acute and inspiring observations and comments, and we are most grateful that she has agreed to contribute to this volume with a special, introductory essay that reconsiders the themes and conceptual discussions from a new perspective, namely the figure of the child as it symbolically dramatizes human temporality as well as literary landscapes in Latin America, from the nineteenth century until today.

Another scholar who has recently emphasized the interrelation of multiple temporalities is Kaisa Kaakinen. As a comparatist she has shown that works of modernist and contemporary literature interrelate the time of the present with various dimensions of an historical imaginary. These procedures are analyzed by Kaakinen in light of the contemporary skepticism vis-à-vis the temporal regime of modernity and the concomitant self-awareness of the contemporary as being inherently plural and diversified:

If in the modern temporal regime the present could be conceived as a mere transition, a part of a single posited narrative, the more heightened sense of a heterogeneous contemporaneity demands a different conception of the present as a site in which historical narratives and orientations are constructed, debated, and contested. Instead of a site of transition, the present is increasingly experienced as a site of disjunctions. (Kaakinen 2017: 12)

Arguably, this contemporary concern with asynchronous temporalities as well as “social and cultural multiplicities” (Kaakinen 2017: 12), the coming together of different temporalities, of untimeliness and “posttraumatic temporality,” of “haunting and the uncanny,” not to mention the “copresence of heterogeneous global reading contexts” (Kaakinen 2017: 19), are all elements that apply, *a fortiori*, we might say, to the areas of modern and contemporary “global” Latin American and Caribbean literatures (Welge 2021: 194).

## Landscapes in Latin America and the Caribbean, Present Simultaneities

The literary figuration of landscape has always been central to the formation of Latin American and Caribbean literatures, especially since the time of Romanticism. Notably, the thinker and author Édouard Glissant has insisted on the complex interrelations of space and time in the Caribbean. Space has been theorized by Édouard Glissant as a cultural poetics of *relation*, where multiple histories are shared by a common, archipelagic geography. Caribbean literature is intent on appropriating the multiple fragments of the past, and for Glissant landscape is conceived as the container of this temporal simultaneity; he speaks of “the patience of landscape [. . .] not saturated with a single History but effervescent with intermingled histories, spread around, rushing to fuse without destroying or reducing each other” (Glissant 1997: 154). Painting a broad canvas of Caribbean poetics, Timothy Reiss finds here a “geographical remaking of history,” “remnants retrieved from history through spirit of place, topographical presence, to compose a future” (Reiss 2002: 356; 357). Drawing on the work of Massey, Mary Gallagher writes that “French Caribbean writing involves a uniquely intense confrontation with the intersection of space and time” (Gallagher 2002: 4). We would maintain that this characteristic applies not only to the French area of the Caribbean and is equally true for much of modern and contemporary Latin American writing.

In Latin America, colonial histories and their aftermath, cultural encounters, and civilizational strata have left their traces in regional landscapes and the (imagined) space of the nation, which has encouraged writers to highlight this continued presence of the past (Alcocer 2011; Lazarra/Unruh 2009). Recently, Victoria Saramago, in her book *Fictional Environments* (2021), has rein-vigorated the study of literary landscapes in Latin America, precisely by not only asking how certain regional spaces in Latin America are represented in literature, but also how literature’s portrayal has brought about these landscapes in the imagination of readers and how this has in turn impacted, or predetermined our

understanding of the real, external landscape. The iconic, regional landscapes of Latin America bear witness to a long history of colonial violence and economic exploitation, yet by being *preserved* in literature, they may also, as a consequence of their “progressive” development (and increasingly with historical distance), be tinged by feelings of nostalgia. In any event, Saramago maintains, these landscapes “reveal the presence of the past in the form of a palimpsest – but a palimpsest that mixes idealized and catastrophic narratives perceived through collective imaginaries” (Saramago 2021: 35).

When speaking about the question of time with regard to the culture of Latin America and other countries of the Global South, many ideology-producing discourses of the nineteenth century (for instance by Euclides da Cunha, as the chapters by Fonseca, Lay Brander, and Welge will discuss in detail) rested on the more or less explicit equation between geographical remoteness and temporal distance. As Stefan Helgesson has pointed out (with da Cunha as one of his prime examples) such an alignment of cultural with temporal difference has also underwritten well-meaning theorizations of post-colonial critics whose formulations of cultural relativism are still undergirded by a binary logic of “different” temporalities, or even by an essentially linear, and hence monolithic conception of the time of modernity. Instead, Helgesson urges us to move toward a much broader understanding of the multiplicity and simultaneity of times:

Time, then, needs to be conceived of as radically multiple in ways that far exceed the evolutionist, colonial, and culturalist paradigms. Radical polytemporality would go further than Braudel’s *durées* and acknowledge all the different modes of time – domestic, national, personal, political, spiritual, geological, technological, agricultural, and so on – that continuously give shape and meaning to human life, and that are impossible to reduce wholesale to concepts such as “culture” or “capitalism”. (Helgesson 2014: 557)

Conversely, if such spatiotemporal compressions and constellations are especially characteristic for the geographical areas discussed in this volume, they also resonate with recent theories and debates about the “deep time” of the Anthropocene as well as cultural criticism about our present historical moment. In fact, it has been argued that the temporal regime of modernity – associated with continuous progress, acceleration and the receding of the past – has come to an end, as it were. Instead, it has been proposed that our time’s experience of temporality can be understood as an unlimited contemporaneity, the limitless availability of the past in a “broad present” (Assmann 2013; Gumbrecht 2014). Arguably, within this undifferentiated realm of the present, novels, literature, or other media and cultural artifacts may take on the function to make visible its heterogeneity, as sedimented and layered in seemingly “empty” landscapes.

This volume, drawing on recent cultural approaches to temporality and spatiality, also aims to contribute to current discussions of World Literature, which have been modified and diversified in terms of paying closer attention to the interrelation between specific locations and questions of global, universal, or trans-national reach (Ekelund 2021). The modern literatures of Latin America and the Caribbean, we maintain, provide an especially fertile ground for the triangulation of (multiple) spaces, temporalities, and nations.

Specifically, the volume provides a panorama of perspectives and approaches that collectively demonstrate how the literatures of these cultural spaces explore the connection between landscape or geographies and historical or temporal palimpsests, as embodied by the specificities and techniques of literary form. The following contributions are dedicated to individual, yet conceptually interconnected studies of multiple, staggered, or non-simultaneous temporalities in modern and contemporary literature. The volume adopts a comparative perspective and intends to provide common perspectives on, and new approaches to, the fields of Latin American and Caribbean literatures, engaging their linguistic variety with literary works written in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English. Therefore, the following overview briefly situates the individual essays with regard to the three different, yet overlapping sections of this book.

## **I Locations and Spatiotemporal Constellations: Lives, Literary Fields**

This section focuses on the question of how literary texts, their production and reception are (dis-)located with regard to national, transnational, or global spaces, and how these spaces are linked to specific regimes of temporality, such as, for instance, the experience of non-contemporaneity, a-synchronized, negated temporalities, or alternative realizations and conceptions of modernity. How does literature propose alternative or conflicting models of temporality and space? How are subjects and literary works moved through, conditioned, or traversed by multiple spaces and times? While the first essay (by Müller) considers a broad panorama of literary texts, the two following essays (by Burnautzki and Brüske) are focused on the analysis of single literary texts. Yet all three essays address broader questions about how the literary works are to be located within the geographical and social field in which the works emerge, and how they position themselves within it. Moreover, these essays are concerned with subjects or individual biographies that are located in, or dislocated from certain places or positions. Bo G. Ekelund has usefully specified this notion

of location as the (momentary) convergence of spatial and temporal coordinates: “A location [. . .] is not a point in space that somehow exists in itself. Rather, the term designates the way that an individual, a group or a cultural object, such as a text, inhabits or claims a place or position at a given time” (Ekelund 2021: 10).

In Chapter 1, Gesine Müller introduces us to the literary field occupied by (early) nineteenth century novels and narratives of the Caribbean, written both in Spanish and in French. Invoking Glissant’s notion of modern Caribbean literature’s ubiquitous *relationalité* as well as its dislocated condition, Müller asks the question what sort of spatiotemporal parameters might apply to the Caribbean novels of the nineteenth century, that is, during a time when the colonial situation conditioned any sense of directionality. In order to address this question in a differentiated way, Müller offers an exceptionally broad, yet succinct panorama of four Caribbean texts. Émeric Bergaud’s *Stella* (1859), the first novel from Haiti, describes the landscape of the colony of Saint-Domingue as spatialized time, as an aestheticized nature that still awaits the nation-building, civilizational work, which appeals to a European value system in a rather unidirectional way. The novel *Outre-mer* (1835) by the Martinican writer Louis de Maynard de Queilhe negotiates between different geographical settings and aims to preserve the old order, also via a mimetic orientation towards literary models from European Romanticism. The Condesa de Merlín’s travelogue from Cuba, *La Havane* (1844), suggests multiple temporal layers in the natural landscape, resulting from a perspective both Cuban and European. The novel *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), by the Puerto Rican writer Eugenio María de Hostos, presents several spatiotemporal thresholds that Müller sees as anticipatory of Glissant’s notion of *Antillanité*, comprising a dense network of historical layers, and which she finally illustrates with an emblematic work of the twentieth century, Maryse Condé’s novel *Traversée de la Mangrove* (1989), distinguished by a synchronic compression of entanglements and interrelated stories.

Chapter 2 explores the idea of location from two interrelated questions. First, what location is claimed by a narrator who speaks from the afterlife, and how does this radically dislocated narrating subject relate to points in time and space? Secondly, how is the literary text itself (dis)located with regard to the trajectory of literary history in a global, spatially differentiated context? In this chapter Sarah Burnautzki presents a pertinent reading of a classic of late nineteenth-century Brazilian literature, Machado de Assis’ *Memórias postumas de Brás Cubas* (The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas, 1881). Taking up Roberto Schwarz’ well-known formula of “misplaced ideas,” Burnautzki pushes this concept to radically interrogate and problematize our very habit to conceive of literary history in terms of time and space, teleological narratives, center and periphery, of being ahead or being belated. Machado’s novel presents a fascinating limit

case within the context of our volume: while virtually devoid of any concrete descriptions of landscape, the eccentric “posthumous” perspective and premise of the *Memoirs* essentially propose the idea of travelling through the protagonist’s own past life – and thus making it present again, in defiance of realist conventions of chronology. In fact, the dead otherworldly narrator is dislocated from the ordinary contexts of both space and time, while his hypertrophic and self-reflexive narration trumps and supersedes the “realist” representation of exterior reality. Burnautzki shows how these peculiar procedures foreground the temporality of the narrative performance itself and distort causal and linear relations within the interior diegesis. The essay argues that these seemingly outlandish devices ultimately problematize the critical rhetoric of “belatedness” and “periphery,” since the categories of space and time are themselves narratively produced and subject to different (spatially bound) perspectives.

Jumping to the contemporary period, Chapter 3, by Anne Brüske, investigates geopolitical imaginaries and social space and time in the Comic Memoir *Adiós mi Habana* (2017) by German-born, US-based artist Anna Veltfort, who lived during her youth for a decade in Cuba. Brüske is interested in the spatial triangulation that existed when the island of Cuba was variously positioned with regard to the Caribbean, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Veltfort’s work, situated by Brüske in a broader context of Cuban-diasporic graphic narratives, is concerned with multiplied spatiotemporal locations and orientations as they emerge from a look back to the time of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. The book is centered on the life of Connie, a German-American who lived in Havana from 1962 to 1972, a figure who stands in as the former self of the author Veltfort. Following French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, Brüske sets out to discuss the “spatial practices” that occur in a palimpsest-like, multi-temporal social space in conjunction with the media-specific realizations of spatiotemporal relations in the material images of graphic narratives. This specific form of the graphic narrative, enriched by intertextual references and intermedial devices (such as the incorporation of historical photographs, elements of journalism), Brüske argues, is especially suited to express Cuban-centered global imaginaries, whereby the past events and political frameworks (internationalism, socialism, Cold War) are relocated and reframed with respect to the present of the author’s diaspora and her readership. The essay shows first how the autobiographical (lesbian) protagonist had been subject to the Revolution’s spatial ordering of the capital city, including its perpetuation of a heteronormative spatial order. Secondly, the essay demonstrates how the intertextual composition of the work produces multi-scalar entanglements and imaginary entryways to the Cuban social space during the 1960s and 70s, as well as to a geopolitical imaginary, for a 21<sup>st</sup>