

# Humans and Wolves: Geo-Literary Reflections from a Children's Novel

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays the return of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Italy is a fact. Scientific studies and media reports testify that this predator has returned to conquer woodland areas. Their presence is no longer scarce and limited to the remote Apennine valleys where the last packs miraculously survived during most of the twentieth century. In recent decades wolves have begun to find habitats in ever larger areas.

The abandonment of farmland in the high altitude Apennine regions and the depopulation of the middle and lower valleys have interrupted centuries of human dominance in these lands, freeing up spaces for the wolves. Some individuals left the Sibillini Mountains (on the border between Marche and Umbria) and began to cross into regions in the northern Apennines, slowly forming consolidated families along the border between Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria. From there they have moved westwards, reaching the Alps and populating the lands on the border between Italy and France. They have found, in these protected nature reserves, an ideal context in which to live and play a role in the ecosystems.

These protected areas were created by humans in previous decades with the purpose of preserving nature and have, in many cases, been responsible for excluding human communities from these territories, thus indirectly creating a precondition for the wolves' resettlement. In recent years some individuals have begun travelling to the north and the east, reaching the Valle d'Aosta and the central Alps. Because of this process, the existence of wolves in the mountains of Northern Italy is now a reality, although the presence of consolidated families is not demonstrated in every region.

In recent years there has been a new phenomenon as wolves have begun to descend towards the plains. By following safe pathways within protected areas or through agricultural regions where rural settlements have been abandoned owing to urbanisation, wolves are also descending into the densely populated Po Valley. This highlights the urgency of resolving old issues related to the relationship between humans and wolves. We cannot minimise the fact that no one is indifferent to the wolf. On the one hand we find the romantic

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perspective of those who see the opportunity for man to reconcile with nature and to rediscover values of purity that supposedly belong to a lost era of harmony with nature; on the other, we see the pragmatic point of view of those who still work the land and view the presence of the wolf as a threat to their agro-pastoral activities. Both points of view contain valid arguments, but at the same time they are based on ideological values and not on facts and both contain fundamental and irreconcilable issues. If, in fact, the wolf embodies a sort of cultural archetype where its presence is inevitably associated with a universe of meanings closely related to the interpretation of nature, it is also true that the return of the wolf, relative to the abandonment of agropastoral and forestry activities and the consequent rural depopulation, urges a deep reflection on the values ascribed to both rural and the natural areas.

The presence of the wolf in Italy poses problems that are not only ecological or ethological, but are also territorial, social and cultural. From a socio-territorial point of view, it entails a rethinking of the environmental politics related to forests and rural areas. The return of large carnivores like the wolf limits the usage of those spaces and generates conflicts over land use, owing to the conflicting demands of man's primary economic needs and the hunting activity of wolves. From the cultural point of view (which will be the main focus of this paper), the return of the wolf requires us to rethink the whole system of values that we attribute to nature, particularly in a context steeped in ancient history like the Italian one. The presence of wildlife able to compete with humans for the control of the territory obliges us to reassess the meaning of the boundary between natural and rural, assessing whether and how the presence of non-humans can be tolerated.

The study of these themes is particularly interesting for cultural geography which aims to investigate the mechanism of representation and self-representation of local communities with reference to the places where they live. An effective strategy for driving the research in this direction may be to take a geo-literary approach, which allows us to investigate how places are presented in cultural imagination, which is included in the original cognitive structure of each individual and which is also part of a collective heritage, shared by all members of a community (Scaramellini, 2009).

## 2. *Geo-Literary Approaches*

A geographical work dedicated to the wolf and based on a geo-literary approach may seem unorthodox, so a brief methodological note is necessary to clarify how and why we can use a narrative source in order to study changes in the meaning attributed to nature induced by the return of the wolf in Italy.

The geo-literary approach derives from humanistic geographies (Tuan, 1976; Pocock, 1981; Porteous, 1985; Brosseau, 1994) and from literary criticism connected to the so-called spatial-turn (Bachelard, 1957; Jakob, 2005). From a geographical point of view, the attention to literature originates in the pioneering works of John Wright (1947) and Eric Dardel (1952), even if it is primarily since the 1990s (Brosseau, 1994) that the idea of the geo-literary approach has been consolidated and structured as a specific field of research (Marengo, 2016).

Nowadays, a basic methodology could be achieved via geo-criticism, that «probes the human spaces that the mimetic arts arrange through, and in, texts, the image, and cultural interactions related to them» (Westphal, 2009, p. 13). The consequent idea is to explore not only the geography of the texts, but also the geography through the texts, hence the focus is on the place, much more than on the author. The study is focused (in a post-structural perspective) on the role of the subjective perception of places, which generates representations and narratives of the world (in a post-modern perspective). But geo-literary approaches are also much more, as they propose to study geo-literary landscapes as results of the emotional bond through subjects and places, but also as the tangible effects of mankind's activity for the creation of space.

In recent years geography and literature have generated different geo-literary approaches and methodologies: based on monographic or comparative (in the literary or geographical direction) approaches or on specific literary genres, paying attention to particular elements of physical or human geography, focusing on specific places and studying broad concepts related to the geographical imaginary (Papotti, 2011, p. 256). The possibilities are abundant, because through artistic mediation it's possible to initiate a geographical reflection on new themes and literary texts adding to the scientific geographical work «the art that many of our geographers lack» (Le Lannou, 1967, p. 36; cit. in Marengo, 2016, p. 14). The focus is on questioning the imaginary construction of places to provide a new insight into real geography (Luchetta, 2019). The idea is therefore to move between text and context, between narration and reality, to try to understand cultural phenomena that originate from territorial processes and that, at the same time, in turn, build on the narratives that define their meanings.

Literary works can be considered as evidence of cultural roots and links between society and territory, and therefore of ethnic-territorial consciousness (Lando, 1993). From this point of view, the narrative text can be analysed and interpreted in its territorial dimension through language's ability to define, in places and landscapes, meanings that can be identified as useful tools for the representation of facts and symbols. In addition it can be seen as a social instrument through which to interpret territorial knowledge and awareness of societies (Magnoli, Morri, 2009). With the mediation of literature, the landscape can be presented as a place of living, with a specific vocation for identity (Maggioli, Morri, 2009). So the analysis of novels published in recent years with the wolf as their subject can be useful for the geographical inquiry on the cultural values attributed to nature, on which the representation and self-representation of local communities in the Italian rural regions depends.

In this paper a monographic approach is adopted analysing a children's novel entitled *La luna è dei lupi* (the title can be translated as *The moon belongs to the wolves*), by Giuseppe Festa. The aim of this paper is to explore the creative potential of literature, even in scientific works, in offering a reflection on the significance that has recently been attributed socially and culturally to rural and natural spaces in Italy. In particular, by analysing the novel, we reflect on the cultural significance of the return of the wolf in Italy, leading us to re-evaluate the relationship between humans and other animals. Indeed

«there is a need to investigate these ignored geographies of the non-human world and the fragmented unethical practices which abound there» (Jones, 2000, p. 286).

It is obvious that a study like this cannot claim to be relevant overall, nor be assumed to be a complete investigation which should instead be articulated in various directions to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, we think that the analysis presented in this paper could be a useful starting point to stimulate the research «to discern the many ways in which animals are ‘placed’ by human societies in their local physical places (settlements, fields, farms, factories, and so on), as well as in a host of fictional, literary, psychological and even virtual spaces» (Philo, Wilbert, 2000, p. 5).

Taking into account specific imaginary and literary aspects, the novel we analyse is relevant for three main reasons:

- a) the book is not a one-off case in contemporary Italian literature; it is part of a huge literary movement that proposes a new way of thinking regarding mountains and the cultural values attributed to natural and rural spaces (Zanolin, 2019);
- b) children’s literature plays an educational role on young generations (Lombello, Soffiato, 2014), so novels such as this may produce, in readers, a different imaginary on nature;
- c) children’s books are read by young people, but are bought by adults or proposed by teachers; so the success of a children’s novel is the result of a general social interest (Spinazzola 1997).

The novel we analyse is both the driving force and the result of a cultural movement. For this reason it is possible to use it to reflect on the significance that is generally attributed to nature in Italy.

Before proceeding with the specific analysis of the novel, some theoretical reflections on nature and a background preliminary reflection are required.

### 3. *Nature and Society: a Brief Theoretical Reflection*

Nature is probably the most underestimated among the key concepts of human geography. This does not mean that its study is excluded from the field of epistemological disciplinary interests, but that it is often not recognized as having a central role. The reasons for this subalternity derive largely from the fact that there is a tendency to confuse the knowledge produced about an object (nature) with the object itself (Castree, 2005). In many cases nature is considered as a sort of substratum which constitutes a basis for processes involving highly structured anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic relationships, and where complex dynamics are played out. In this way, the territorial character of most natural contexts is ignored (Turco, 2010).

According to Noel Castree (2001), the result of the long epistemological journey of geography related to nature can be summarised in three main schools of thought: the people and environment perspective; the eco-centric approach; the social approach. The first two are the current expression of the geographical thinking founded in the criticism of the 1970s and provide the

theoretical and methodological tools for the analysis of problems resulting from man's impact on natural resources, environments and organisms. It leads to a radical critique of the policies for the management of ecosystems and of their relationship with social and economic systems. The social approach differs in part from the other two. The basic idea is that nature is inevitably social:

the argument is that nature is defined, delimited, and even physically reconstituted by different societies, often in order to serve specific, and usually dominant, social interests. In other words, the social and the natural are seen to intertwine in ways that make their separation – in either thought or practice – impossible (Castree, 2001, p. 3).

The change in perspective is evident: with the social nature a new paradigm is proposed. It originates from an awareness of the complexity of nature, avoiding static and monolithic visions in favour of an idea based on the fact that there are no natural processes from which humans can be excluded.

While humans are a part of nature, they determine at the same time the meaning of nature: nature is a social construction (Demeritt, 2002). Therefore the social approach attributes a new meaning to the study of nature by putting forth a two-fold change in perspective: on the one hand, it affirms that nature and society are intrinsically connected, that they are one part of the other; on the other, it underlines how all claims about nature are discursively mediated (Moeckli, Braun, 2001).

The social approach is therefore a form of critical thinking that aims to strengthen the awareness that knowledge of nature

frequently express social power relations and [...] that this knowledge has material effects, insofar as people may believe and act according to them. 'Deconstructing' this knowledge therefore entails 'denaturalizing' it: that is, showing it to be a social product arising in particular contexts and serving specific social or ecological ends that ought to be questioned (Castree, 2001, p. 13).

By stating that nature and society are intrinsically connected and that meanings attributed to nature are not given as an absolute, we underline the need for human societies to assume responsibility by virtue of a greater awareness of their role in nature. To reach this aim, a change of paradigm is necessary, opening to hybrid geographies to «work to invigorate the repertoire of practices and poetics that keep the promise of the Geographical craft alive to the creative presence of creatures and devices among us and the corporeal sensibilities of our diverse human being» (Whatmore, 2002, p. 7). In this perspective several ethical geographies are proposed to underline that

human-non-human relations are inevitably embedded in the complex spatialities of the world. The myriad encounters which make up human-non-human relations shape and are shaped by this spatiality in an incredibly rich (in ontological terms) series of "spatial formations" (Jones, 2000, p. 267).

From this perspective, useful insights are offered by Animal Geographies (Wolch and Emel 1998; Philo and Wilbert 2000) and by Environmental Humanities (Rose, 2012), where studies dedicated to cultural representations of animals and of human and non-human hybrids have also found a precise niche in recent years (Johnston, 2008; Buller, 2014; Hovorka, 2018; Lorimer, 2019).

All these considerations are necessary to gain a better understanding of why it is useful to conduct studies like the one presented in this paper, focused on novels as specific instruments for the social construction of nature.

#### 4. *Humans and Wolves in Italy*

More than any other animal, the wolf and the bear, represent the real and symbolic meaning of nature. Their physical presence in the woodland areas of a region is usually used to testify the «naturalness» of nature. But it is not the presence of the animals themselves that encourages this feeling. They are considered as archetypes of nature, because of the fundamental role played by the collective imagination and stratified through millennia of human history (Scaramellini, 2009).

The return of the wolf in Italy did not occur by any deliberate choice, but as an indirect consequence of the socio-economic changes that took place there after World War II. Industrialization and development of the service sector caused the abandonment of agricultural and pastoral activities in the high lands and the consequent gradual depopulation of vast mountain regions. The result is a substantial process of reforestation which, in recent decades, has completely transformed the landscape of many Italian «inner» areas.

Those who visit the mountain regions of Central Italy find it hard to recognize traces of a millennia-old intensive exploitation of the land. The transformation of the pre-human natural landscape began in Italy a long time ago. In prehistoric times, pastoral and forestry activities began transforming the woods by the selection of tree varieties and the use of fire to fertilise the soil (Agnoletti, 2018). However, the Italian agrarian landscape has been stratified since the time of the Greek colonization and the Etruscans (Sereni, 1967). Later, in Roman times, the forest landscape of the peninsula was heavily transformed even before the definitive intensive exploitation of the late Middle Ages right up until modern times. During this period agricultural, pastoral and forestry activities radically transformed the Italian landscape from a natural one to a rural one (Agnoletti, 2018). From the 12th century onwards, a huge process of deforestation and farming of mountain regions began, in order to provide the resources necessary for the economic boom that took place at the end of the Middle Ages (Rao, 2015; Wickham, 2018). It was precisely during this time that a collective imagery of the wolf began to develop, so it is not by chance that today, as people abandon these territories and reforestation increases, the wolf's return to the woods gives rise to a debate on its cultural value.

The return of the wolf has been, and is still, accompanied by intense scientific research (Gilio *et al.*, 2004; Dondina *et al.*, 2014; Imbert *et al.*, 2016).

Thanks to the intense pioneering fieldwork of some researchers, we have more knowledge about wolves today than at any time in the past (Boitani *et al.*, 2003). We have gained knowledge about the territories and the behaviour of wolf families that are based on the monogamous bond of the alpha couple (around which the pack is structured, based mainly on genetic bonds, even if occasionally wolves from other packs are allowed in). Today we also know the dynamics that occasionally lead some wolves to abandon their family of origin to try to build a new pack (the so-called «lone wolves»).

It is now clear that the wolf does not pose a threat to human communities. Very rarely do wolves attack livestock, and even more rarely do they decide to approach human settlements. However, the wolf still has many enemies, especially among the traditional livestock farmers of the Alps. It is inevitable that wolves will attack flocks that live close to the pack's habitat. Techniques have been developed to overcome these problems: electrified barriers and properly trained guard dogs can be extremely effective. However, this does not detract from the fact that the freedom of the farmers is restricted by the presence of wolves: if the wolf is the essence of nature, it seems inevitable that its return will be in conflict with some economic activities.

This becomes even more evident if we try to analyse the wolf's cultural value, highlighting how this has developed around a set of social behaviours. The wolf is one of the oldest narratives in mankind's history; it is undoubtedly one of the oldest subjects used to promote a given worldview. In part these worldviews are derived from historical or environmental conditions, but often they are the reflection of cultural attitudes. The facts that are used to gain knowledge of the past (built and stratified over the centuries) are conditioned by the culture of those who produced them and tell first and foremost about the filters and ways of perceiving reality, rather than reality itself (Rao, 2018).

Over the centuries, our positive perception of the wolf's cultural significance has changed to a negative one. In many ancient cultures it was used to express the strength and wisdom that can result from an intimate connection with nature. What has changed over time is the meaning given to this bond. During the Middle Ages, the wolf began to be despised because it was in competition for the land with humans: it was from the Carolingian era that edicts against wolves began to be issued in order to preserve the forest fauna in the royal hunting grounds. After that, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the unequal struggle between humans and wolves took on a radical dimension and the wolf became a metaphor for extra-human nature, an antithesis to development (Rao, 2018). In contrast to what we might think, the wolf as a negative symbol does not arise from its presumed aggressiveness, but from humans who, by increasing their impact on nature, gradually took away space from the wolves, pushing them to the margins of society and consequently into the dark corners of culture.

Unfortunately the image of the big bad wolf is part of a strong narrative and difficult to dislodge. For this reason it is interesting to study novels that propose new narratives, in order to present different points of view about what is natural and what is rural.

5. *The Moon Belongs to the Wolves*

The novel by Giuseppe Festa titled *La luna è dei lupi* (the title can be translated as *The Moon Belongs to the Wolves*) was published in 2016 by Salani, a leading publisher in Italy specialising in children's literature. The book has already been reprinted eight times. According to the idea of literary modernity (Spinazzola, 2005), it is possible attribute to this book a significant literary value by virtue of its editorial success, and by having received several literary awards<sup>1</sup>. Children's fiction can be considered as one of the most important expressions of the literary modernity. Written for children, the genre features young people as the heroes of the stories, but knowing that parents will choose them for their offspring, they must be appreciated by grown-ups and children alike (Spinazzola, 1997). For these reasons it is particularly interesting to use this kind of novel to interpret specific cultural tendencies, and the popular success of the themes proposed can be seen as a validation of their worth.

The specific interest of this novel is due to the ability of the story to involve the readers emotionally, taking them inside the heads of a pack of wolves of the Apennines and in contact with the surroundings in which they move. But this is not all. In addition to the wolves, the book features two other main characters, a boy and a girl (Lorenzo, a university student and Greta, a volunteer), and considerations on nature and on the wolves are channelled through them. In the pages devoted to Lorenzo most of the topics implied in the parts devoted to the wolves become evident. The reader is led to identify in turn with the alpha male (Rio, the real protagonist of the story), the alpha female (Lama), the black wolf (Scuro, a half-breed resulting from the mating of dog and wolf) and the two young humans who track the pack, study it and finally save it.

The emotional involvement of the reader is therefore a key element of the novel. We can capture at least three fundamental elements from the point of view of the narrative and formal structure of the novel. Firstly, the structure of the tale contains two parallel stories: one with wolves as its main characters, the other centred on the story of the two young humans. In this way the author proposes a continuous switch between the life of the pack and the (partly scientific, partly emotional) reflections of Lorenzo and Greta. The reader thus participates in the wild and untamed life of the pack, but at the same time may also reflect on it from a detached point of view, where, by identifying with the two human protagonists, he may share their experiences in parallel, thereby rationalising the sense of action gained by chasing the pack through the mountains. A second formal and very important aspect is inherent in the plot, which is essentially told as an adventure, a classic device in children's literature used to activate, in young readers, a process of identification with the characters. The adventure thus takes on a role as a formative and character-building experience and also fosters knowledge of nature (as demonstrated by a vast and varied case history ranging from Jack London's *White Fang* to Stephen King's *The Body*, on which the film *Stand By Me* was based). A final aspect of fundamental

<sup>1</sup> Winner of the following literary awards: "International award by Portus Foundation"; "Sceglibro, 2017"; "60° award Selezione Bancarellino".

importance for triggering the reader's emotional involvement concerns the particular status attributed to wolves. Indeed, they talk to each other as if they were human, but at the same time they do not lose their own distinctiveness as wild animals, nor do they stop adopting ethically correct behaviours. The text does not therefore lapse into a fairytale, which would risk flattening the animal onto man; on the contrary, it maintains a realistic slant<sup>2</sup>, despite the dialogue between the animals, which serves to encourage the reader's inclusion and identification with the pack. The latter is led to enter into the wolf's head and adopt his point of view to live a series of experiences in the mountains and to reflect on nature and its relationship with human beings. All these storytelling expedients favour the novel's ability to transmit a precise message about the relationship between man and nature in Italy's inland areas.

The author does not need high-sounding words to demonstrate that the return of the wolf to the Apennines does not pose a threat to humans: the expressive power of the literary text effectively achieves this result. Obviously there are moments of conflict between the wolves and the local communities. The aim of the text is not to represent a good wolf in opposition to the bad wolf of fairy tales; rather, wolves are represented as realistically as possible. It is precisely in this authenticity that the strength of the novel and its educational usefulness lies: if the author had created perfect wolves, idealising them as a symbol of purity, he would have fallen back into the trap of a whimsical narrative, pitting the good wolf against the bad wolf. Instead, what is represented here are simply real wolves in their environment.

By reading the novel it is possible to learn quite a lot about wolves and their natural surroundings. It is also possible to learn some local geography and to acquire competences about rural landscape and natural spaces in central Italy (see table 1 – quote 1). The spaces in which the pack moves correspond to the area in which the largest number of wolves is concentrated: the Sibillini Mountains National Park, the Natural Reserve Alpe della Luna and the Natural Reserve Sasso Fratino in the Casentinesi Forests, Monte Falterona and the Campigna National Park. These are some of the most important unspoilt natural areas of Italy, but they are also distinctive parts of an anthropical region with an ancient rural and agricultural history, stratified in the territory.

The wolf of the novel is not only a real wolf, but also a character who lives in a specific territory that the reader is encouraged to explore through the novel. The geographical exploration which the novel portrays further stimulates the emotional involvement of the readers, who feel like they are actually walking along the paths described in the book. These paths do not remain abstract lines on a map, but become real through the mediation of the narrative text. Identification in the wolf, identification in nature, emotional involvement in the discovering of the real behaviour of the pack: these are the basic ingredients of a novel whose value we can fully understand thanks to the in-

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<sup>2</sup> The novel contains numerous references to scientific data of an ethological and ecological nature and there are also many mentions of factual occurrences. For example, the scene described in quote 6 is explicitly inspired by the rescue, in 2012, of the wolf Navarre: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPSq0RhloPE>.

terpretative tools offered by John Dewey through his conceptualisation of the aesthetics of experience, in particular when he states that art is an experimental device used for education (Dewey, 2014). The aesthetic experience therefore fosters the development of skills in the domains of technical knowledge and interaction with objects, activating technical learning processes, teaching awareness to experiment with new ways of interacting with the world (Cecchi, 2014). The aesthetic experience mediated by the narrative text obviously does not replace the practical experience in the field, but rather completes and enriches it, thus making it more effective. It is impossible for everyone to have deep experiences in nature, for this reason literary mediation is so important in building cultural sensibility about these topics: the literary medium enables the sensitive and interactive experience of many places to become possible. It goes without saying that this power is not intrinsic to literature in general but really limited only to a few literary works.

The wolf in the novel is not just a large carnivore that moves in a boundless natural environment without limits or barriers (quote 2). On the contrary, it is a realistic animal with its own sensibilities and concrete survival needs. He realizes that in order to live within the territory in which he moves he has to alternate between free spaces and spaces in which he is forced to adapt to the rules imposed by the humans who have transformed the landscape (quote 2). The novel tells a story of a journey in search of new lands in which to live. During the journey the wolves face a series of tests that teach them about their relationship with humans, discovering that it is only thanks to them that the areas suited to their needs exist (quote 5). During what we might call a training course, they go through moments of discomfort (quote 3), moments in which they risk losing themselves (quote 4) and moments of despair in which they even risk death (quote 6). In every occasion their redemption comes from the discovery that humans are not only elements of disturbance, on the contrary, in some cases they act in their favour (quote 7). The wolves discover that they are part of an anthropic context and that the protected areas in which they live are part of it. However, this is not a problem, living with humans is not only necessary, but also useful for the well-being of the pack: the world cannot be «only for the wolves» (quote 8). The same training course is experienced by the readers, who are encouraged to read the reflections of the wolves as in a mirror. They realise that protected areas are not spaces separated from reality (quote 5), but areas with relevant natural values integrated into a historically stratified rural landscape (quote 2). They also understand the importance of their role in the ecosystems, as a safeguard to ecological balances, of which they are part (quotes 6 and 7). They learn to deconstruct idealised visions of nature, by attributing an actual tangible value and discovering that large carnivores are not supernatural creatures, but living animals with emotions and practical needs (quotes 3 and 4). Together with the wolf, the reader comes to understand that the world cannot be «only for humans» (quote 8).

The text that is presented is devoted to the appreciation of natural values, but the message that is conveyed with greater force is linked to the mutual discovery of the importance of the interaction between man and nature in the Italian territory. Humans understand that they can be active protagonists in

natural processes and wolves understand that their independence and survival depends on the protection policies, essential to preserve the necessary ecosystems for them. The values of these ecosystems does not lie in their «natural nature», but in their essence as part of a social nature. In this perspective, nature can be integrated into the rural landscape as a specific expression of an anthropic action for protection and enhancement of cultural values stratified through centuries of practices of land use. This seems to be the most important lesson that can be learned from this novel.

Tab. 1 – Quotations from Festa G., *La luna è dei lupi*, Salani, Milan, 2016. Translations by the author.

<b>Quote 1</b>	The pack's territory was vast. It embraced the Tenna Valley, and the Gola dell'Infernaccio, the Valle del Lago and Mount Sibilla, which gave its name to the massif of the Sibillini Mountains. In the wild heart of the Central Apennines, straddling Umbria and Marche, this mountain range was a spectacular and multifaceted frontier land with immense moorlands, leafy forests and boundless grassy plateaus, all protected in a National Park where several packs of wolves lived (pp. 14-15).
<b>Quote 2</b>	A sense of anguish crossed the pack when the wolves realized that they were now outside the Free Zone. The landscape had changed: the comforting mountains had yielded to a succession of hills and plains. Here and there, country houses and farms dotted an increasingly agricultural territory. Ever more human. The wolves advanced in the dark with the caution of those who move on a minefield, constantly searching for the most hidden paths. The view revealed to them a strange picture of nature, very different from the one they knew. In the fields the trees were arranged geometrically, at regular distances from each other. They were servants, no longer masters. Long straight rows that held the spaces at bay and were lost in the darkness. The pack's march was slow, disrupted by an endless number of obstacles and barriers. [...] What frustrated the pack the most, however, were the walls and fences. They were everywhere; all sorts of wire meshes, barbed wire, gates, wooden fences, rows of metal sheets, concrete walls, stone walls... and they didn't surround just the human's dwellings. The wolves came across them everywhere, even in the middle of the woods, forcing Rio and the others to take long detours to keep their northbound course. The wolves could not understand why man had to divide up the earth like that (pp. 87-88).
<b>Quote 3</b>	In the early afternoon Falco began yawning. He was exhausted. Stress and fatigue prevailed over fear, anxiety and hunger; against all odds, he fell asleep. Rio and Lama also snuggled up and closed their eyes. For the moment that was all they could do. They drifted slowly into sleep, despite the passing cars, the sneezing ducks and the noisy children. If only those mothers had known that three wild and hungry wolves were hiding there, a few steps away from their offspring. Never could they have imagined that those wolves, instead of thinking of how to tear their children to pieces, were dreaming about the gentle breeze on the high grasslands of Mount Sibilla (p. 148).
<b>Quote 4</b>	He called off the others, but realized that the pack was out of control. Falco emerged from a paper mound gnawing at a baby's diaper. When he got to the contents, he spat out the smelly package and rinsed his face in a puddle of gnocchi with sauce. Alba happily polished off the bottom of jam jar, while Gemma was busy freeing Brugo, who had his head stuck in a cereal box. Selva licked melted ice cream from a polystyrene tray, while Lama cleaned off half a roasted sea bass, trying not to let the bones get stuck in his throat (pp. 153-154).
<b>Quote 5</b>	Lama took a running start and voiced an idea that had been buzzing in her head for a while. «Did it ever occur to you that the humans may have created the Free Zones themselves? And that they did it to protect us wolves?» (p. 157).
<b>Quote 6</b>	Greta did not hesitate. She entered the icy water up to her waist and approached the she-wolf. «Be careful not to get too close», shouted Lorenzo following her. [...] She had to do something, but what? [...] She looked up. Across the river, the yellow eyes of a wolf were watching her. [...] Greta bent over the she-wolf, opened the wolf's mouth and pulled out her tongue, which then lay softly on the sand. She placed her open hands on both sides of the she-wolf's mouth, trying to leave a single gap open between the long canines. Lorenzo never forgot what she did next. Greta placed her lips on Lama's and began to blow. Blow. Blow. Endless blows. Finally, a breath. The she-wolf's chest swelled up by itself. Her heart began to beat again. Greta burst into tears. And laughter (pp. 217-218).
<b>Quote 7</b>	One shot. The molossus fell. Motionless, lying on the ground, his jaws tightened a few inches from the wolf's body. Rio did not immediately understand what had happened. Then he focused his eyes on a green outline, beyond the "Inghiottoio". A Park Ranger was holding a smoking gun. His hand was shaking. It had cost him a lot to fire that shot. At home, he had a dog of the same breed as the one he had just killed. A dog he adored and who adored him. He slowly lowered his gun and rested it in the holster. Rio followed those movements with his deep amber eyes. The man was sweating, his expression as tense as a bow. Rio saw in his eyes a deep sadness for what he had done. "Go away!" cried the man with a broad sweep of his arm (p. 242).
<b>Quote 8</b>	He closed his eyes and let out a proud howl. On the wave of that sound that was took over the valley, he again found Scuro, the half wolf who, with an act of great selflessness, had died in return for the freedom of the pack. Then he saw again the man dressed in green, who had sacrificed a dog in order to save a wolf. And finally, on the echo of his howl, flew the gesture of love of that deep-eyed woman, who had breathed life into the mother of his cubs. Here they are, the values worthy of a pack leader: altruism, sacrifice, love. Rio would never have understood this if his world hadn't met the world of humans. Of those humans. Accepting what was different from themselves: this was what the main characters in these stories had done. Rio had found the answer, the only one possible to survive in a world that was not, and would never be, just for the wolves (pp. 244-245).

6. *Discussion*

The novel presents a specific idea of nature, beyond stereotypes. The valleys and the woods are real, the place names are well described and it might be possible to plot the movements of the characters on an actual map, but this is not the most important point. The wolves are both symbols of nature (the readers, through the eyes of the wolf, can ask themselves about the meaning of nature) and instruments to improve scientific competences regarding those animals and environmental politics for the management of natural spaces. Through the power of the novel, the characters become the demonstration of a possible new alliance between nature and humans, not just for the sake of romanticism, but because of the awareness that Italian woodlands are the result of a long-term relation between those two entities.

By analysing the novel, we have the opportunity to investigate the role of human beings within contexts from which they are expected to be excluded in the accepted idea of nature. A wrong idea, unfortunately. In fact, according to the approach of social nature, there are no natural places on earth. In other words there are no places where humans have not had an influence on the ecological processes). The basic idea is that «we create nature, both in a direct ecological sense, and in a wider cultural sense» (Adams, 1996, p. 101). The focus is on how we see ourselves in nature, for this reason the return of the wolf is an occasion to re-interpret the meaning of natural spaces in Italy, perhaps by describing them as rural landscapes. Nature cannot be perceived as a self-contained system: natural spaces are spaces that have been territorialised and so their territorial dimension has been transformed by humans (Turco, 2010). The subjects are not just spectators, but also actors.

For this reason, the standpoint of those who today are advocating the need to replace the principle of the protection of natural spaces with a project to enhance rural landscapes should be supported, including also the vast forest areas of the interior of the Italian peninsula (Agnoletti, 2016). In doing so, a fundamental principle is affirmed, implicitly taking the social nature approach as a guide, by incorporating man into nature. Therefore the so-called natural spaces are thus perceived as rural landscapes. The consequence of this change of paradigm is that protection can no longer be exclusively a consequence of ethical or ecological aims, but also of land use needs. In this perspective, human beings become actors in a process devoted to the integration (Depraz, 2008) of natural and anthropic factors. The conservation of rural/natural landscapes must necessarily pass through the protection of the primary sector's economic activities, updating them and stimulating technical and technological progress in line with the needs of the market, of the environment and the societies at the same time.

Festa's novel tells us a great deal about the cultural substratum on which these principles could be nurtured. The book focuses on wolves, which are, in the collective imagination of western regions, wild animals par excellence. But it should not be interpreted only as a book focused on nature, in reality it reveals much of the potential for mutual recognition and cooperation between man and wolf. It is also a book about nature and society, which exploits the ex-

pressive potential of literature to build a cultural bridge between humans and non-humans. It presents a possible approach through which natural spaces can be reinterpreted as rural landscapes.

## 7. Conclusions

Through the eyes of the wolf, the reader of the novel presented in this work can comprehend many of these themes, achieving a more effective understanding of Italian natural values as social and cultural elements. By identifying with the characters he can develop a sense of belonging to the rural heritage closely linked to Italy's natural areas. At the same time, he can change his perception of the role humans play in nature. When he discovers that the wolf hiding in the bush of an urban park prefers to sleep under shelter, rather than tear apart the children playing near him, the reader can break down an ancestral wall, overcoming the idea that there is something to be feared in nature and opening their eyes to a possible reconciliation with it.

This paper started with a literary form that had a strong evocative force and, using a geo-literary approach, tried to interpret it as a sign of a cultural movement. The author is aware that it is not enough to presume that a social process will have territorial effects. It maybe premature to say so, but even if it is certain that this possibility cannot be asserted, it also cannot be completely denied. An analysis of environmental policies could possibly explore these issues in greater depth, but this should be examined in a possible implementation of the research that this paper has begun. Before proceeding in this direction, we may investigate some other cultural aspects. Here the focus has been on a possible interpretation of natural spaces as rural landscapes. In doing so, natural spaces have been analysed in a broad sense; to further this reflection, we might focus on a more radical idea of nature, that of the wild. In this way the next step will be to understand if, in the Italian context, wilderness landscapes may be described as rural landscapes.

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## *Uomini e lupi: riflessioni geo-letterarie da un romanzo per ragazzi*

L'articolo propone una riflessione relativa al significato sociale e culturale del ritorno del lupo in Italia.

Utilizzando un approccio geo-letterario lo studio si concentra sul romanzo di Giuseppe Festa e intitolato *La luna è dei lupi*, ascrivibile al genere della letteratura per ragazzi. Il romanzo pone al centro della narrazione un branco di lupi che compiono un viaggio attraverso i paesaggi rurali e naturali dell'Appennino centro-settentrionale. Attraverso le vicende narrate si propone di procedere a una riflessione sul rapporto tra naturalità e ruralità degli spazi boscosi, agricoli e urbani tra Marche, Umbria, Toscana ed Emilia-Romagna. Il potere espressivo del testo letterario consente al giovane lettore destinatario dell'opera di immergersi nei boschi e di interpretarne il reale significato, derivante da una secolare stratificazione di pratiche colturali e culturali.

Su queste basi teoriche e metodologiche, l'obiettivo dell'articolo è di proporre una riflessione sulla dimensione sociale della natura nelle aree interne italiane, con lo scopo di interpretarla nella sua dimensione intrinsecamente rurale.

## *Hommes et loups : réflexions géo-littéraires à partir d'un roman pour adolescents*

L'article propose une réflexion sur la signification sociale et culturelle du retour du loup en Italie.

En utilisant une approche géo-littéraire, l'étude se concentre sur le roman de Giuseppe Festa intitulé *La lune est aux loups*, attribuable au genre de la littérature pour adolescents. Le roman place au centre de la narration une meute de loups qui fait un voyage à travers les paysages ruraux et naturels des Apennins du centre-nord. À travers les histoires racontées, l'article propose une réflexion sur la relation entre la naturalité et la ruralité des espaces boisés, agricoles et urbains placés entre Marches, Ombrie, Toscane et Émilie-Romagne. Le pouvoir expressif du texte littéraire permet au jeune lecteur de recevoir l'œuvre pour s'immerger dans les bois et mieux comprendre leurs véritables sens, dérivant d'une stratification séculaire des pratiques agricoles et culturelles.

Sur ces bases théoriques et méthodologiques, l'objet de cet article est de proposer une réflexion sur la dimension sociale de la nature dans les régions intérieures de l'Italie dans le but de l'interpréter dans sa dimension intrinsèquement rurale.

