

# Captioned Landscapes

Intermedial Combinations Beyond the Human

Volume 2: Representations

Edited by

**Marco Maggi**

Università della Svizzera italiana

**Curating and Interpreting Culture**



**VERNON PRESS**

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[www.vernonpress.com](http://www.vernonpress.com)

*In the Americas:*

Vernon Press  
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200  
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801  
United States

*In the rest of the world:*

Vernon Press  
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,  
Malaga, 29006  
Spain

Curating and Interpreting Culture

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026937035

ISBN: 979-8-2616-0029-9

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# Acknowledgments

At the end of January 2024, I received an email from Sonia Costa of Vernon Press. Somehow, through channels known only to publishing house editors, Sonia had learned about a panel entitled “Subtitled Gardens” that I had organised the previous summer at the Iawis/Aiarti conference in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The message proposed publishing a book on the subject. I immediately activated my academic network, gathering many more contributions than I could have imagined. I returned to Sonia with a list of authors and titles that was clearly too long, but without batting an eyelid, she suggested publishing a two-volume work. I owe Sonia and Vernon Press a debt of gratitude for encouraging me to embark on this venture and for their unfailing support and impeccable collaboration throughout its realisation. The insightful comments of the anonymous reviewers also contributed significantly to the refinement of the work. Special thanks to Hannimari Heino for granting permission to publish the images appearing on the covers of the two volumes.

Over the months, the title of the Belo Horizonte panel was changed, but I owe my colleagues and friends at Iawis/Aiarti and the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais for their initial acceptance of the panel. I am particularly grateful to Liliane Louvel and Márcia Arbex-Enrico, and with them the panel speakers Sophie Aymes and Divya Kumar-Dumas. The evolution of the project was made possible by the always intense and productive discussions with the authors and by the invitation to present its progress on multiple occasions: in Lausanne with Ute Heidmann and the members of CLE; as part of the Society of Emblem Studies’ *Road to Vienna* series; at the conference *Tesaurus e le arti* organised by Clara Gorla and Andrea Merlotti at Venaria Reale; in Palermo as part of the PhD programme in Visual Culture, with Michele Cometa, Roberta Coglitore, Valeria Cammarata, Alessandra Buccheri and all the members of the Doctoral College; at the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio as part of the series *Fable, Rebus, Emblem*; *Source, Material, Image* organised by Giuditta Cirmigliaro; at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome at the invitation of Leo Impett and Claudia Cieri Via; with Erik Erlanson and members of the “green cluster” of the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies; at the Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages of Stanford University at the invitation of Giacomo Berchi. An important intermediate stage of the project was the workshop *Paesaggi con didascalie*, which I organised in April 2025 in my

University, with the participation of Michele Cometa, Yolaine Escande, Giuditta Cirnigliaro and Vega Tescari.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Simona and my son Justin, whose love of nature in and beyond the human is a constant source of inspiration to me.

Lugano-Stanford, Autumn 2025

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awarded the Pozzale Luigi Russo Prize for the book *Perché le storie ci aiutano a vivere*. In 2019, he was awarded the Winckelmann-Medaille of the City of Stendal. His most recent publications include *Goethe e i Siciliani. Il dialogo delle affinità* (2019); *Cultura visuale. Una genealogia* (2020); *La svolta ecomediale. La mediazione come forma di vita* (2023); *Paleoestetica. Alle origini della cultura visuale* (2024).

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# Editor's General Introduction

## (Reprinted from Volume 1)

### Historical overview

"Since at least the Romans," writes an author of reference for both garden and landscape history and word and image studies, "inscriptions have played a variety of roles in landscape design and experience."<sup>1</sup> In Pliny the Younger's letters (v, 6, 35), we read that gardeners of antiquity delighted in writing their lord's name, or their own, on boxwood hedges or in flower beds. The custom is reported by Leon Battista Alberti in *De re ædificatoria* (ix, 4) and modernised in the Roman humanist circles. The land acquired by Pomponio Leto near the Quirinale in 1474 to host the gatherings of the Accademia Romana was adorned with poetic inscriptions that, through the artifice of prosopopoeia, gave voice to the statues placed in the garden. The compositions in honour of St Anne by Johannes Goritz's humanist friends, some of which were published in 1524 in a collection entitled *Coryciana*, were instead hung on the trees in his garden near the basilica of Maxentius and Constantine, modelled on the epigrams placed on Plato's tomb in the garden of the Academy. The fountains were also decorated with poetic verses carved on cartouches, often dedicated to the sleeping nymph, as in the Nymphaeum of Villa Giulia.<sup>2</sup>

From Rome, the custom of placing inscriptions in natural environments spread to the rest of the peninsula, starting with Paolo Giovio's villa in Como, built from 1537 onwards; as attested by a painting from the following century, made a few years before the site was demolished, the garden on the lakeshore was adorned with inscriptions.<sup>3</sup> The Sacred Wood of Bomarzo, inaugurated in

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<sup>1</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Denis Ribouillault, "Hortus academicus: les académies de la Renaissance et le jardin," in *Des jardins & des livres. Catalogue d'exposition (Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cologny [Genève], 28 avril – 9 septembre 2018)*, ed. by Michael Jakob (MétisPresses, 2018), 28-30; Id., "Introduction: 'Atque inter silvas Academi quaerere verum' – Early Modern Gardens and the Academic Ideal," in *Gardens and Academies in Early Modern Italy and Beyond*, ed. by Denis Ribouillault (Brill, 2025), 13-15. See also Claudia Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden* (Yale University Press, 1990), ad vocem 'Imprese in gardens'.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eugenio Battisti, *Iconologia ed ecologia del giardino e del paesaggio*, edited by Giuseppa Saccaro Del Buffa (Olschki, 2004), 9-10 footnote 6.

1547, still partly preserves, carved on its fantastic architecture, the quotations of literary figures such as Dante, Francesco Petrarca and Ludovico Ariosto, among others.<sup>4</sup> Outside Italy, in Königsberg, present-day Kaliningrad, in the 1630s the composer Heinrich Albert founded the Kürbishütte, an academy named after the custom of engraving poetic compositions on the gourds (*Kürbis* in German) that grew in the founder's garden.<sup>5</sup>

With the advent of André Le Nôtre and the diffusion of the French garden model, the attribution of meaning to gardens is mainly accomplished, as Eric T. Haskell has written, through an "iconographical voicing," i.e., the elaboration of iconographic programmes that tend to banish the use of inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> The latter return in the English gardens of the eighteenth century, from that of Alexander Pope at Twickenham to that of the Marquis de Girardin at Ermenonville, studded with quotations from Rousseau, crossing the watershed between the "emblematic gardening" of the beginning of the century and the "expressive gardening" that characterises the decades after 1740.<sup>7</sup>

Once again excluded from Capability Brown's projects,<sup>8</sup> nature inscriptions, a genre illustrated in the eighteenth century by Mark Akenside, William Shenstone (creator of the Leasowes garden) and Thomas Wharton, are taken up

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Horst Bredekamp, *Vicino Orsini e il Bosco Sacro di Bomarzo. Un principe artista ed anarchico*, original photographs by Wolfram Janzer (Edizioni dell'elefante, 1989); Anatole Tchikine, ed., "Bomarzo between history and myth," special issue, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 41, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Leonard Forster, "Meditation in a Garden," *German Life and Letters* 31 (1977): 27-29.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eric T. Haskell, "Reading Eden's Riddles: Words in the Landscape, Texts in the Garden," in *Art and Science in Word and Image. Exploration and Discovery*, edited by Keith Williams *et al.* (Brill, 2019), 157.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape. Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). On captioned landscapes in the seventeenth century cf. Monique Mosser, "La Réunion des arts est dans le jardin," in *Le Progrès des Arts réunis 1763-1815. Mythe culturel, des origines de la Révolution à la fin de l'Empire? Actes du Colloque international d'Histoire de l'Art, Bordeaux – Toulouse, 22-26 mai 1989*, edited by Daniel Rabreau and Bruno Tollon (Éditions William Blake & Co., 1992); Ead., "La littérature au miroir d'Hortésie au temps des Lumières," in Jakob, *Des jardins & des livres*; Jean-Louis Haquette, "Le texte dans le paysage. Réflexions sur la pratique de l'inscription dans le jardin paysager du xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Interfaces – Image, texte, langage* 11-12 (1997), [https://www.persee.fr/doc/inter\\_1164-6225\\_1997\\_num\\_11\\_1\\_1098](https://www.persee.fr/doc/inter_1164-6225_1997_num_11_1_1098); Michael Jakob, *Ermenonville* (Éditions de l'imprimeur, 2002); Sophie Lefay, *L'Éloquence des pierres. Usages littéraires de l'inscription au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Classiques Garnier, 2015), 58-65.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape*, 220.

by the Romantic poets: famous in this regard are William Wordsworth's *Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree*. In the hands of the Lake Poets, however, the naturalistic epigram evolves into an autonomous composition, detached from the *genius loci*.<sup>9</sup> Another blow to the presence of inscriptions in natural settings comes from the privilege granted by modernism to media purity,<sup>10</sup> so that we have to wait until the mid-twentieth century for writing to resurface in gardens designed by Ian Hamilton Finlay, among others.<sup>11</sup>

An equally ancient, but even more continuous story has the presence of writing in gardens in China, which, as Yolaine Escande writes, gives the natural environment "its soul, its meaning, its scope."<sup>12</sup> As proof of the cross-cultural significance of the phenomenon, literature in the Sinhala language, one of Sri Lanka's official idioms, originated with the inscriptions on the Mirror Wall, a mighty rock formation within the Sigiriya site.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning with the *Roman de la Rose*,<sup>14</sup> Western literatures sometimes depict captioned landscapes (we will return to this designation later), even in illustrated form, as in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), which established the canon of Renaissance garden aesthetics. The episode of the loves of Angelica and Medoro in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516) also propagates among painters, as Rensselaer W. Lee has reconstructed,<sup>15</sup> the custom of carving the names of lovers on trees; Thanatos, rather than Eros, is referred to in the other *topos* of writing *en plein air*, the *Et in Arcadia Ego*. In the garden described by Erasmus of Rotterdam in *Convivium religiosum* (1522), the voice of plants is conveyed through inscriptions; like those, taken from the Bible, that appear on the walls of the caves described in Bernard Palissy's *Recepte véritable* (1563).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," in Id., *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958-1970* (Yale University Press, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens*, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Id., *Nature Over Again: The Garden Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Reaktion Books, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Yolaine Escande, "Jardin et écriture en Chine," in Jakob, *Des jardins & des livres*, 19 (unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Divya Kumar-Dumas, "Reading Architecture in Landscape: Visitor Reflections at a Mirror Wall (Sigiriya, Sri Lanka)," in Art, *Architecture, and the Moving Viewer, c. 300-1500 CE: Unfolding Narratives*, ed. by Gillian B. Elliott and Anne Heath (Brill, 2022), 120-121.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Christopher Lucken, *Le Roman de la Rose*, in Jakob, *Des jardins & des livres*, 136.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rensselaer W. Lee, *Names on Trees. Ariosto and the Arts* (Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Koji Kuwakino, *L'architetto sapiente. Giardino, teatro, città come schemi mnemonici tra il XVI e il XVII secolo* (Olschki, 2011), 123-126.

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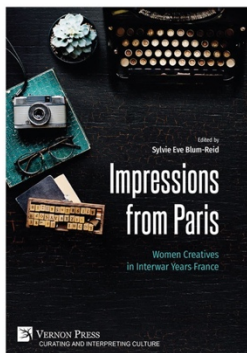
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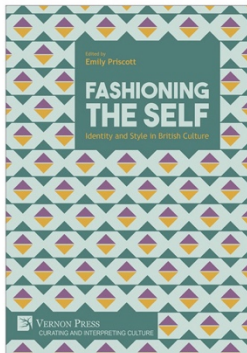
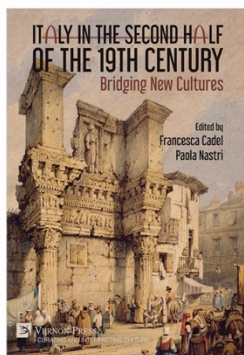
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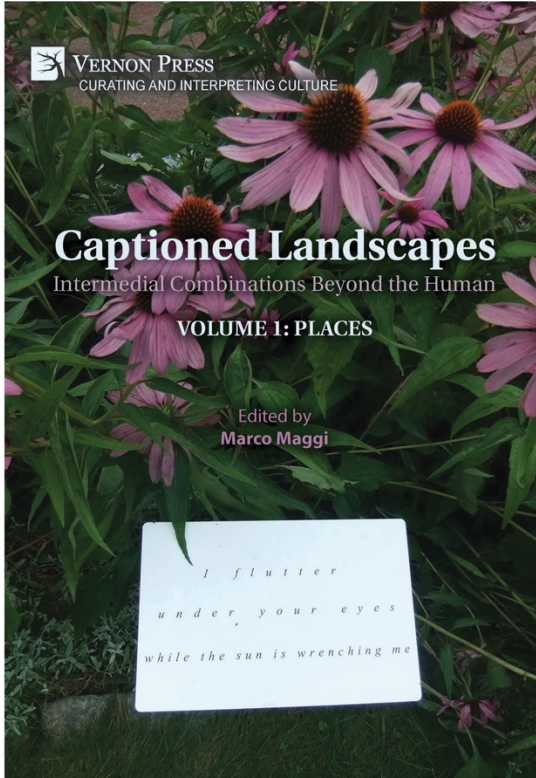
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