

Literary Politics and Geopolitics

Today's global political situation is characterised by wars, increasingly overt imperialist ambitions and rivalries, power struggles, and hegemonic conflicts over new spheres of influence. Colonial dependencies have also been revived, often manifesting as access to raw materials and licences for their unhindered extraction. The idea of a “new world order” based on globalisation, which was promoted until recently, has given way to a new combination of isolationism and imperialism. This brings us to the inevitable, and perhaps somewhat naïve, question: What role can literature play in this situation, which is admittedly painted in somewhat dystopian terms? Can it (still) serve as a register, a medium for recording and processing global conditions and interactions? Or do these ultimately transcend the scope of literature? Is it possible to record conditions in such a way that they can be perceived as changeable? Can the achievements of political novels be simply scaled up to a global framework? To put it bluntly: In our project, we assume that there is such a thing as contemporary political literature—but is there also such a thing as geopolitical literature?

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Literary Politics and Geopolitics: An Introduction

Working Paper

Literary Politics and Geopolitics: An Introduction

By: Ivana Perica, Aurore Peyroles, Patrick Eiden-Offe

Korbinian Lindel: Geopolitical Aesthetics

This article examines the aesthetic dimension of classical geopolitics in the early twentieth century. Contrary to the assumption that literary and fictional devices were incorporated into geopolitical discourse only retrospectively, it argues that they were intrinsic to it from the outset. Drawing on Karl Haushofer, Adolf Grabowsky, Ewald Banse, Robert Müller, and Samuel P. Huntington, it identifies three interconnected strategies: the sensory and affective representation of geopolitical space, the imaginative projection of future world orders, and the aesthetic popularisation of geopolitical knowledge. Metaphors, speculative scenarios, and “expressionist” maps and diagrams were designed not merely to inform, but to shape perception and political action. Geopolitics thus emerges as a genuinely literary-aesthetic discourse whose persuasive force depends substantially on forms of aesthetic evidence. A literary analysis is therefore not only possible but essential to understanding geopolitical thought.

Working Paper

Geopolitical Aesthetics

By: Korbinian Lindel

Marina Sivak: Mapping the Sublime: Travel Writing and the Geopolitics of the Soviet Pamirs

This paper examines Nikolaj Krylenko’s *Through the Unexplored Pamirs* (1929), based on his participation in the Soviet-German Alay-Pamir Expedition of 1928. It asks how travel writing, geopolitics, and early Soviet tourism intersect in the representation of the Pamirs. I argue that Krylenko transforms the sublime from an aesthetic experience into a practical and ideological ethos of disciplined tourism. His narrative maps the region as a strategic corridor toward Afghanistan, India, and China, while reducing its landscape to routes, resources, and previously “blank” spaces awaiting epistemic and territorial incorporation. At the same time, the arduous experience of climbing becomes a form of self-education and physical discipline. The Pamirs gradually lose their exceptional status and become athletic objectives and spaces prepared for future tourists. Krylenko’s travelogue thus participates in the Soviet production of geopolitical space by linking cartographic knowledge, bodily endurance, and the transformation of the sublime into sport.

Working Paper

Mapping the Sublime: Travel Writing and the Geopolitics of the Soviet Pamirs

By: Marina Sivak

Max Roehl: The Power of the Weak. Imperialism and Resistance in Anna Seghers' Der Führer

Using Seghers' novella *Der Führer* as a case study, the article demonstrates how literature can model geopolitical dynamics. It argues that the text transforms the asymmetry between imperial power and local resistance into a literary model of the limits of geopolitics. Set during Fascist Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, the Italian geologists' pursuit of territory and mineral resources in the novella reflects an imperial logic based on spatial control and exploitation. Yet the landscape itself becomes a weapon: guided by the Ethiopian Ato, the conquerors' technological and military superiority is undermined by their ignorance of the local environment. Through the novella's interplay of space, religion, beauty, and sacrifice, Seghers confronts abstract geopolitical strategies with material and cultural realities. *Der Führer* thus presents literature as a form of political theory that reveals how power depends on context – and how apparently powerless actors can turn the conditions of imperial domination against their conquerors.

Working Paper

The Power of the Weak. Imperialism and Resistance in Anna Seghers' "Der Führer"

By: Max Roehl

Ekaterina Vassilieva: Political Fictionality and the Authorship of Power: Vladislav Surkov between Literature and Geopolitics

This paper develops the concept of "political fictionality" to examine the relationship between literature, ideology, and geopolitical power in the work of Vladislav Surkov, published under the pseudonym Natan Dubovitskii. Focusing on *The Imitation of Homer* (2019), it argues that fiction functions not primarily as a vehicle for ideological propaganda, but as a laboratory in which political narratives, contradictions, and models of territorial power can be tested. The novel's depiction of the Donbas war oscillates between competing geopolitical, existential, and dystopian frames, ultimately revealing the instability of political meaning itself. Surkov's literary and political authorship converge in a practice of "shadow ideology": the controlled circulation of alternative narratives that accommodate ambiguity and uncertainty without undermining the broader ideological framework. Literature thus becomes a technology of political imagination, blurring the boundary between representing geopolitical reality and actively shaping its conditions of intelligibility.

Working Paper

Political Fictionality and the Authorship of Power: Vladislav Surkov between Literature and Geopolitics

By: Ekaterina Vassilieva