

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Sarah Wylie Krotz (2018) *Mapping with Words: Anglo-Canadian Literary Cartographies, 1789-1916*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. xiii + 272 pp. (hardback), €63.00, ISBN 978-1-4426-5012-1.

Maps connect us to the world. Literature is also a mapping of the world. Creative writers often incorporate maps into their work to situate the reader in unfamiliar terrain, either to make their imagined geographies navigable and plausible or to indicate where significant events in the narrative will take place.

Sarah Wylie Krotz's monograph *Mapping With Words* begins with a quote from Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush: Or, Life in Canada* (1852) in which Moodie describes a visit from 'Indian friends', local Mississauga Anishinaabe people who expressed great interest in a large map of Canada: 'In a moment they recognised every bay and headland in Ontario, and almost screamed with delight when, following the course of the Trent with their fingers, they came to their own lake' (3). They ask to have the map but Moodie is unable to part with it given its immense usefulness to the family. It is the difference between success and failure, life and death: 'I felt sorry that I was unable to gratify his wishes but the map had cost upwards of six dollars, and was daily consulted by my husband, in reference to the names and situations of localities in the neighbourhood' (3).

This is a complex situation which reveals a shared delight in the deciphering of maps despite vast cultural differences and uneven power relations. As in the settler colony of Australia, where I'm writing from, Canadian history is characterised by metanarratives of conquering empty space or 'terra nullius'. The British attempted to over-write the territories they encountered, ignoring the First Peoples and their investments in place. *Mapping with Words* is a book which is steeped in the specificities of Canadian history yet there are recognisable themes which recur in all literary histories of settler colonial countries. Krotz examines Canadian colonial texts productively through the lens of literary geography, arguing that Canadian spatiality is more nuanced and troubling than dominant narratives would suggest.

She is centrally concerned with the cartographic legacies of the nineteenth century, which were generated by a desire for symmetry, order and visibility in the colony of Canada. Settler colonial Canadian literature, Krotz observes, is marked by preoccupation with orientation and emplacement – in other words, with not getting lost (153). She contends that literary maps effectively worked to create a new spatial imaginary in order to colonise the landscape while usually disavowing – and sometimes acknowledging – the existence of indigenous sovereignties. William Arthur Deacon's *Literary Map of Canada* (1936) was the first attempt to map out Canadian literature and it is reflective of a particular moment in Canada's literary history. The map demonstrates Deacon's belief that Canadian literature had a holy mission in the building of Canada and that the printed word could actually change the

world. David Macfarlane and Morris Wolfe published a revised version in 1979, indicating its value for national identity. As Krotz points out in an essay for the *Literary Review of Canada*, these are the only two mapping projects up to this point which attempt to represent Canada in its entirety (Krotz 2017).

The range of texts and the depth of analysis in *Mapping With Words* is impressive. They include George Monro Grant's *Ocean to Ocean* (1873) and the aforementioned Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852), as well as her sister Catherine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836). Some of these literary figures would be familiar to the Canadian reader but may be less known to others residing elsewhere. Krotz foregrounds poetry through an examination of Thomas Cary's 'Abram's Plains' (1789) and Adam Hood Burwell's 'Talbot Road' (1818), two long poems which shaped views of the country and heralded the growth of an Anglophone literary tradition in eighteenth-century Canada. She also considers Duncan Campbell Scott's 'The Height of the Land' (1916), a lyric poem that meditates on metaphysical concerns. She performs a literary-geographic reading of 'The Height of the Land' which reveals the extent to which the desires and fears that accompanied Canada's poetic re-inscription of northwestern Ontario. Scott contributed to a conception of the 'lonely north' as vacant and uninhabited despite evidence to the contrary. Though she was writing about a sparsely populated region, Scott nonetheless downplayed the role of the people who had lived there for tens of thousands of years, enabling a poetic appropriation. As Krotz puts it: 'The Height of the Land' makes this terrain into 'one of those socially empty spaces that are among the cartographers most harmful fictions' (141). These fictions enabled settlers to justify their claims on land which was already inhabited.

Traill wrote about eastern forests and clearings, or what she called the 'Wild North Land'. As Krotz notes, she 'sought neither to tame these spaces, nor to push them off the edge of the map' (81). Instead Traill explored the landscape with the curiosity of the field naturalist and produced botanical writings which challenged narrow conceptions of the 'wilderness' and its role in the settler landscape. The term wilderness is very contentious, with many contemporary scholars arguing that wilderness is a human construct. In 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature' William Cronon argues that wilderness 'is not quite what it seems': in the first place, it is not something that exists apart from humankind, but rather 'is quite profoundly a human creation', something we have imagined because we think we need it (Cronon 1995). Even the preservation of wilderness space in the form of national parks and other sanctuaries and reserves, as Tracey Banivanua Mar has argued, symbolises 'a kind of triumph of settler colonial appropriation', manifesting 'converging doctrines of dispossession and notions of wilderness' (Banivanua Mar 2010: 76). Krotz herself recognises that 'wilderness' is a mythologised place (which does not have the same meaning for Indigenous Peoples) but necessarily enters into the consciousness of the writers she discusses. Tragically, the maps made by early surveyors and explorers were the beginning of the end for so-called 'wild' spaces. As in other colonies, maps were a first step towards imperial domination – and genocide in many cases – which means that they are not 'neutral' documents as many people assume.

Traill, who seems well ahead of her time, suggests that wilderness spaces should be gardens in which indigenous species and whole ecosystems may interpenetrate imported ones. The theme of children lost and found in the 'great maze and enigma' of the Canadian forest regularly recurred in her fiction and non fiction, to the extent that critics have argued that she expressed a paranoid and evasive

response to wilderness. Traill felt that emigrant's voice was not the most authentic: in her view, the land's Indigenous inhabitants were its 'true poets' (98). Interestingly, she changed her mind about land clearing over the course of her career. Earlier in her life, she characterised tree-felling as tragic, seeing the forest as a 'noble victim of a tragic end' (102). Later she saw the destruction of wilderness as an unstoppable and necessary force, suggesting that 'such things are among the "must be" of colonial life, and so it is useless to grumble' (102). Even the indomitable Traill became resigned to the march of 'progress' in Canada.

The close readings of these texts challenge the modern conception of Canada as a homogeneous entity. It was never seen this way by its First Peoples, who were usually intimately acquainted with specific areas rather than with the newer construct of the nation. The contemporary nation tends to elide smaller sub-regions but maps can help us to remember the ways in which lands were known and understood in the past, by both settlers and Indigenous Peoples. In her caption for the reproduction of David Thompson's 'Great Map', which was originally drawn with ink made from growths found on apple trees, Krotz observes that it 'transformed the colonial spatial imaginary and anticipated the expansion of the Dominion westward' (190). Thompson also recorded Indigenous Peoples and toponyms on his map which offer the viewer a glimpse of counter-narratives whose origins pre-exist colonisation. This and numerous other beautiful old maps, provided for the reader in the book's appendix, are a highlight, although you need a magnifying glass to see the details.

One of the achievements of Krotz's book is to draw our attention to the instability of historic maps of Canada, through the de-centring of the single story of each map. Krotz opts for a geocritical perspective which offers multiple points of view on each cartographic artefact. Indeed, in the conclusion, 'Maps and Counter-Maps (On Getting Lost)', she suggests that, given the shortcomings of settler maps, Canada might consider adopting new kinds of map-making in future. For me, the most appealing aspect of *Mapping with Words* is that Krotz acknowledges the messiness, terror and labour involved in producing early maps – the result of the efforts not only of the explorers who drew them, but of many others, including voyageurs, Indigenous advisors and guides, women, and even children. Instead of being represented as the product of a white, male, 'heroic' explorer, they are shown to be collective endeavours which sometimes require the suspension of disbelief and the ability to 'dream places into existence' (Krotz 2017).

Works Cited

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