

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Mapping the Imagination: Literary Geography

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Mapping the Imagination: Literary Geography originates from a conference I organized at the University of Salerno (Italy) in March 2014. I am very grateful to all the participants. Thanks to their work, the conference was a success, and a stimulus for me to carry this project to the next level.¹ The seven articles in this special issue of *Literary Geographies* deal with British, U.S. and Canadian Literature from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. The issue begins with the work of Italian Canadian poet and novelist Mary di Michele in 'Landscape: Language, Landscape and Memory, the Origins of a Poetics'. This article explores the nuances of her double belonging, and her connection to her place of birth in Abruzzo and to the Italian language. The articles move on to examine the treatment of space through a variety of texts and approaches, but all consider space and landscape to function as metonyms. In the articles, space serves important, even though often under-explored narrative roles: it can constitute the center of attention, a carrier of symbolic meaning, an object of emotional investment, a means of calculated planning, and a source of organization. The essays here show how 'narratology and geography can gain from cross-fertilization,' and the product could be an encompassing theory of space in which 'space and narrative intersect not at a single point, but rather converge around ... interrelated issues' (Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu 2016: 3).

The articles are part of a renewed conceptualization and analysis of the notions of space in works of literature and poetry, and build upon theories of space and place that made up what was known as the 'Spatial Turn' in the 1980s and 1990s. In a general sense, 'space' is the dimensional, physical extent occupied by human beings (OED). In contrast, 'place' is space that we know and 'endow with value' (Tuan 1977: 6). The process of turning 'space' into 'place,' this form of personal and psychological

appropriation of space, which expands and diversifies into perception, desire, affect, vision, and memory, underlies the primary texts of study in this issue.

The Turn to Space

Mapping the Imagination: Literary Geographies looks at the nuances in the texts' treatment of space, and it foregrounds how space interacts and influences the characters in the choices they make. It regards space as contested and unstable. It also considers how homes and landscapes can modify a character's perception of them, in ways that foster new readings and new appreciations of the complexity and subtlety of the texts at hand. It aims to approach space and place both socially, culturally and poetically, looking at numerous aspects of travel, exploration, mapping space/place, the urban *vis-à-vis* the rural, and pays special attention to the many characters who feel alienated or rejected, who are 'out of place,' or outsiders who try desperately to fit in.

A short story author who stresses the crucial role of place and location in fictional narratives is Eudora Welty. In her essay 'Place in Fiction,' Welty emphasizes the paramount significance of place in fictional narrative which 'from the start has been bound up with the local, the "real," the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience' (Welty 1970: 117). As Welty elaborates, 'Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place' (112). The treatment of place here is as sedimented layers of meaning, since more often than not the writing shows the awareness of the 'accumulation over time of the events and actions that have happened in a particular space,' as historian David J. Bodenhamer observes in another context (Bodenhamer, Corrigan and Harris 2015: 22). In Welty's words, 'Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course' (Welty 1977: 128). For Welty, the author sees place in a frame. 'Not an empty frame, a brimming one. ... It is an instrument—one of intensification; it acts, it behaves, it is temperamental' (124).

When thinking about movements across space, it may be useful to remember the spatial origin of the word 'transgress,' which derives from the Latin *transgredi*. It is linked to crossing a river, or to the other side of a boundary, or to moving from one topic to another. The Romans gave priority to its spatial meaning: 'to transgress means, through *hubris*, to step outside one's own space and enter a foreign one,' but '[t]he *transgressio* could also be an infraction: one does not cross a boundary without departing from the norm' (OED). Bertrand Westphal, the creator of what is now called the geocritical approach in literary studies, noted in his key study on the relation between geography and literature, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, that 'transgression is coextensive with mobility' (Westphal 2011: 45). It involves those who reject the static and the sedentary. In literature, the effects of this transgressivity are very often reflected in minority discourse. The field changes depending on the approach: for Yuri Lotman (1984), it is 'semiosphere'; for Deleuze and Guattari (1972), 'territory'; for Anzaldúa (1987) feminist

and Chicana activist, it is the borderland or *la frontera*. Nevertheless, Westphal remarks, 'in all cases instability is the distinctive feature'. Transgression is a process that accompanies movement and motive. In this perspective, space becomes fluid and blended: 'Transgression corresponds to the crossing of a boundary beyond which stretches a marginal space of freedom' (Westphal 2011: 47).

Robert Tally in his Foreword to Westphal's 2016 work, *The Plausible World: A Geocritical Approach to Space, Place and Maps*, stresses that 'geocriticism maintains a comportment towards the world that embraces the entirety of special and social relations, which in turn constitute the literary cartography produce[d] in these multifarious ways of making sense of, or giving shape to, that world.' Therefore, he adds, 'geocriticism approaches texts as literary maps that, regardless of the ostensible role or imagined space depicted, help us to understand our world' (Tally 2016: xv).

There are two major impulses in cartographical practices through the centuries and across the world: one attempts to achieve scientific accuracy, and the other comprises what Edward Said has called 'imaginative geography' (Said 1995: 49). This special issue will include critical discussions of how creative texts have challenged the totalizing, supposedly authoritative version of world geography that is common in maps of Empire, and more generally in Western cartography. Consideration of how cartography has operated through the ages makes it possible to rethink the way spaces are imaginatively constructed, both locally and globally. Maps chart locations and their relations to one another, providing a spatial and visual understanding of places, events and processes. They may also be used as metaphors to epitomize relations between inner psychological spaces and the outside world. Metaphorically speaking, Peter Turchi suggests, maps tell stories (Turchi 2004). In this light, the writer is a cartographer of sorts.

In order to probe the geography of fiction, we must explore the mutual relations between page and place. Through this critical lens, fiction is keenly cartographical, in that it constantly fashions and refashions the world around us. It makes it simpler for us, or alternatively more complex, and draws our attention to the familiar as well as to the strange. As a result, fiction can be seen as a form of geographical cartography. As Robert Tally argues, '[n]arrative itself is a form of mapping, organizing the data of life into recognizable patterns with it understood that the result is a fiction, a mere representation of space and place, whose function is to help the viewer or mapmaker, like the reader or writer, make sense of the world' (Tally 2011). Storytelling is in itself a type of mapping activity, as Tally has often remarked. It is in this respect that he speaks of 'literary cartography,' since in his view narrative itself is cartographic. 'In other words,' Tally observes, 'maps presuppose narratives, which in turn may function as maps' (Tally 2014: 1).

In *Spatiality* (2013), Robert Tally underscores that attention to place and maps is often associated with a state of persistent confusion and disorientation. Maps are useful when one feels disoriented, and therefore can be a valuable tool; nonetheless, at times, they can be confusing, and as a result, the map-gazer is still lost. Maps can offer only a momentary solution to being misplaced or lost; or worse, they can amplify our spatial

confusion or our cartographic anxiety. This situation illustrates a process that Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle underscore in *Cartographies of the Absolute*, which is the alienation provoked by figurative or real mapping: ‘among the first products of a genuine striving for orientation is disorientation, as proximal coordinates come to be troubled by wider, and at times overwhelming vistas’ (Toscano and Kinkle 2015: 25).

How do characters make sense of the place they are seeking or fleeing? What makes a place a ‘home’? The complexity of the notion of home involves a wide scale: domicile, home, and homeland. House is contiguous with a domestic dwelling construction and homeland addresses one’s sense of national belonging. ‘Home’ as domicile summons geographies of settlement or a residence where a sense of self, place and belonging is shaped, articulated and contested. Madan Sarup (1994) notes that it is usually assumed that a sense of place or belonging gives a person stability. However, to the question, what is it precisely that makes a place home? Sarup and others, suggest that the matter is not so straightforward. As this issue shows, the figurations of home strikingly match the definition of human geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, who suggest that home ‘is neither the dwelling nor the feeling, but the relation between the two’ (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 22). More importantly perhaps is the role they attribute to the imagination in shaping a sense of home, no matter how fragile. Blunt and Dowling stress that ‘home as a place and an imaginary constitutes identities—people’s sense of themselves are related to and produced through lived and imaginative experiences of home’ (24).

Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan was one of the first to stress the necessity to comprehend the particular effects of geographical setting on people’s emotions and behavior. Tuan’s influential *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, proposed to investigate the connectedness and bonds between human feelings and the physical fabric of the landscape. (Tuan 1974). The pairing of the concepts of space and place offers a dialogic way into some of these questions. As Tuan observes, ‘In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. “Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value’ (Tuan 1977: 6). This process of endowing space with value —, which Tally, refers to as the ‘cartographic impulse’—is what we want to examine here in its multiple configurations (Tally 2014: 1).

Contributors to this issue explore, among other matters, the intersections between memory and place, for as Sheila Hones has stressed, space is conceived ‘not as [a] fixed and measurable frame within which action takes place but rather as the product of action; an active dimension of interrelations, intertextualities, and multiplicity’ (Hones 2014: 9). The authors thus investigate how memory, imagination, fantasy, desire, language and myth can re-construct the notion of ‘place.’ They look, for example, at the issue of ‘remembering’ place as a process of re-creation, and at the re-appropriation of the past and of collective myths. They thus illustrate what philosopher Edward Casey has stressed about how human memory and identity become bound to places in different

degrees, so that 'places [can] possess us—in perception, as in memory ... insinuating themselves into our lives' (Casey 2000: 199).

Conventionally, time has preceded space in importance. The industrial revolution encapsulated time and progression into one single sphere, and the progression of time accorded with progress itself. In the words of Westphal, time 'contained progress, and time was enslaved to progress. Consequently, space became an empty container, merely a backdrop for time, through which the god Progress would reveal itself. ... Space only mattered insofar as the "homogeneous flow" of time had to happen somewhere' (2011: 10). In contrast to this, recent developments in literary geography have shown, as Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni put it, that geography 'never becomes a simple backdrop within the fiction; the different settings in the quarters have almost protagonistic qualities' (Piatti and Hurni 2009: 340). Place and space thus surface as more than solely a 'background complication' for literary geography (Soja 2010: 19). Instead, locations turn into actors themselves, both underwriting the story, and playing their part on the page. The geographical plot thus propels the fictional plot (Anderson 2014).

This issue intends to re-read the texts as objects of analysis in light of these spatial theories. The 'spatial turn' that has emerged in the social sciences and the humanities takes into consideration geographical theory with the aim of further comprehending the role of place in our lives. The geographer Edward Soja generally regarded as the initiator of the spatial turn played a major role in showing the crucial relevance of the geographical dimension in contemporary lives. As he stresses, the geographical element in our lives 'has never been of greater practical and political significance' (Soja 1996: 4). Certainly, the spatial turn contributed in a significant manner to shedding light on how human identity and culture are correlative with the places and spaces around us. Soja's work has demonstrated how we are defined, to a varying extent, by those places and how in turn we draw these geographies. In brief, as Soja reminds us, the spatial turn has highlighted that 'human life is ... spatial, temporal and social simultaneously and interactively real and imagined. As intrinsically spatial beings ... we are at all times engaged and enmeshed in shaping our socialized spatialities and, simultaneously, being shaped by them' (Soja 2010: 18).

The spatial perspective thus becomes a window that allows for transdisciplinary links that cross the borders of traditional academic disciplines. The spatial turn presents itself as one of a series of turns that characterized the twentieth century, including the linguistic, the cultural and the postmodern turns. Soja, however, emphasizes its connection with the 'postcolonial turn,' theorized by critics like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai. These theorists were in fact able to extend spatial thinking and link it to comparative literary studies, anthropology, history and philosophy.

The 'spatial imagination' removes geography from the subordinate role to which it had been confined in the nineteenth century. Space is now no longer 'a mere passive reflection of social and cultural tendency' (Soja 2009: 10). On the contrary, it has become constitutive of society and culture. Soja maintains that space is a vital force that shapes

our lives. In *Thirdspace* (1996) and *Postmetropolis* (2000), Soja develops the analysis he had begun in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), stressing that not only do social processes forge and explain geographies, but that geographies, to a greater extent, forge those processes and the social actions themselves (See Soja 2000).

One of the most influential human geographers since the mid-1970s is Doreen Massey. According to her, 'far from being the realm of stasis, space and the spatial are implicated ... in the production of history.' As an absolute dimension, space does not exist: space and time are 'inextricably interwoven' (Massey 1998: 254, 261). To summarize the main points in Massey's argument about space and place, we should stress that, firstly, space is the product of interrelations, constituted through interactions. Secondly, space is the 'sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (Massey 2007: 9). That is to say, space is grounded in the plural. Thirdly, space is 'always under construction ...; always in the process of being made ...; never finished; never closed' (9). Radical geographers such as Massey speak of space / time and consider their dimensions indissolubly intertwined. Space, they argue, should not be conceptualized in terms of absence or lack. In their positive definition, both space and time are interrelational: 'space is not absolute, it is relational.' In this perspective, space becomes, as Russell West-Pavlov stresses, 'the perfectly obvious, manifest fabric of social existence, not its mysterious underside' (West-Pavlov 2009: 23).

In thinking about the relation between place and experience, J. E. Malpas remarks: 'The crucial point about the connection between place and experience is not ... that place is properly something only encountered 'in' experience, but rather that place *is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience*' (Malpas 1999: 30-1 emphasis in the original). Within literary theory, the groundbreaking work of Gaston Bachelard in the 1940s and 1950s alerted scholars to the crucial significance of setting in art that ranged from painting to poetry, fiction and autobiography. I want to focus on Edward Said's reading of Bachelard's seminal text, *The Poetics of Space* (1957), since Said puts the accent on the vital importance of the perception people have of places. What Said emphasizes is how the interior of a house provides a sense of intimacy, privacy, secrecy, safety—whether justified by reality or not—because of the experiences we link to it. The objective spaces of a house (its rooms, first, but also its corners, corridors, stairs and niches) are far less important if we compare this to what is attributed to them in poetic form. A house can be haunted; it can be cozy or it can even be perceived as a prison. As Said remarks, 'space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here' (Said 1995: 54), indicating the potency of the imaginary in the constitution of a broader conception of space in all its workings.

Mapping the Imagination tackles the complex, lived dimensions of space that combine its psychological and material aspects on an individual level. The essays in this issue also seek to foreground the dynamic and often-contradictory model of space whereby the

individual relates to space as a social place, in a never-ending mapping process; or to quote Ato Quayson how 'space is never just content or measure but the symptom and producer of social relations' (Quayson 2016: 534). Mapping here is ultimately not cartographical but conceptual, an act of unlimited semiosis. Ultimately, mapping is an artistic endeavor.

Islands, Landscapes, Uncanny homes and more

In 'Experiments in Solitude: The Island Fictions of August Strindberg, Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence' Patrick Parrinder draws attention to two features of the imaginative geography of islands: the island as utopia, and the island as hermitage, a place of isolation, solitude and scientific experiment. Maria Teresa Chialant in 'George Gissing, Greece, and the Mediterranean Passion,' discusses how Gissing's novel *Sleeping Fires* engages with the idea of Greece and devotes great attention to the description of the landscapes, which become functional to the development of the plot. In this novel, however, Greece is seen neither as 'mere fairyland,' nor as a sort of 'gospel of Greek delight' (according to H. G. Wells's rather sarcastic label), but as an embodiment of 'health and joy,' and of 'sweetness and light' (in Arnold's definition of Hellenism).

In 'The Space of Literature: Echoes of Blanchot and Beckett's Explorations of Creativity in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*,' Lucia Esposito discusses how, in Danielewski's experimental novel *House of Leaves*, a house contains a dark, hollow labyrinth which exceeds the perimeter of the outside walls. The house soon becomes a terrifying *unheimlich* place, dangerous and inhospitable, instead of a comfortable home. In fact, labyrinthine forms of writing and references to a labyrinth (physical or mental) are what connects the different narrations of all the main characters. The text seems more a chamber of mirrors or echoes of the same irremediably fragmented subjectivity, or the obsessive re-verbalization of the same story, than a narrative governed by a single authoritative voice.

In 'Neural Spaces in J. G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*' Bruna Mancini shows Ballard turning his back on the 'outer space' and substituting it with a surreal 'inner space.' What we are left with is a series of shifting, uncanny imaginative geographies in which the outer world of so-called 'reality' and the inner world of the psyche melt and swap their places. Houses here acquire mysterious powers, as they manage to interact with the protagonists, and influence the choices they make.

Rocco de Leo in 'Reinventing the Self in the Canadian Multicultural Space(s): Frederick Philip Grove's *Search for Identity*' discusses Grove's autobiography *In Search of Myself*. The article shows how a cultivated European immigrant became a well-known Canadian fiction writer exploring Western prairie pioneer life in vibrant multi-cultural communities. In addition, it analyzes the strong relation and continuous influence between the individual and the often-hostile environment he inhabits.

Eleonora Rao's 'Mapping the 'Transnational'' presents a synthesis of different conceptual approaches to the issue of cross-cultural experiences and contact-zones

among cultures and languages, with a special emphasis on the importance of spaces of 'crossing.' The idea of 'navigation' is here a key to working within a framework that simultaneously posits norms of identity and opens national identity up to discontinuity and displacement. The uneasy articulation of multiple figurations of displaced identities is key to the question of crossing linguistic and cultural borders.

This issue hopes to continue the exchange of ideas between geographers and narratologists, a dialogue that, we hope, will inspire future explorations of common interests.

Notes

¹ Many thanks to the speakers who could not send their articles in: Giuseppina Botta (Salerno) Maurizio Calbi (Salerno), David Cooper (Manchester Metropolitan), Dino Gavinelli (Milano), Christine Lorre (Paris 3), Caterina Ricciardi (Roma 3), Alessandra Ruggiero (Teramo), Oriana Palusci (Napoli), Edoardo Sant'Elia (Napoli), Francesco Vitale (Salerno). A special acknowledgment goes to my former colleague at Salerno, Michele Bottalico, who helped me significantly in the earlier stages of this project, and to David Cooper who followed up my idea and introduced the prospect of this issue to the Editorial Board of *Literary Geographies*.

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