

## LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Lorraine Ryan (2104) *Memory and Spatiality in Post-Millennial Spanish Narrative*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited. 240 pp. £85.50 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-4724-3570-5.

The book considers memories of the Spanish civil war and Franco's dictatorship through the correlation between space and memory in narrative fiction. Lorraine Ryan takes this approach to highlight the scholarly neglect of this theme in Spanish memory studies. She has chosen seven Spanish novels to demonstrate the transformation of public spaces and imaginaries of space from 1931 till 2005 in Spanish public spheres. The book aligns memory and space in order to look at 'the representation of interaction between the Republican subject and the dominant space' (2). She argues that an exploration into the forms of subjectivity of protagonists and characters in the chosen texts can reveal the troublesome aspect of the interaction between memory and space.

The book is comprised of seven chronologically ordered chapters, excluding the extensive introduction and the conclusion. Each chapter looks at a different text, paying attention to the Republican experiences of public/private space, memories of civil war and the emergence of resistance and subjectivity. The first chapter detects a metamorphosis of spatiality in a micro-history by following Antonio in Dulce Chacon's *Cielos de Barro*. Ryan follows Antonio to explain her notion of 'dissenting memory' (52) which addresses the prioritisation of personal memories over familial and national narrative. The resistance to 'historical vicissitudes which determine the power structure' (55) are highlighted through the protagonist's notion of space and through changes which space undergoes within the text. Thus, the protagonist's agency can be traced in between resistance and changes in spatial notions. However, Ryan foregoes the emphasis on agency at the end of the chapter and concludes that space, dominated by tyrannical forces, is a 'structural context [with] disabling ... capacities for human agency' (73).

The second chapter looks at Martina, who is the female protagonist in Angeles Lopez's *Martina, la rosa numero trece* to elucidate the relationship of body and space. Ryan points to the influence of socio-political forces over the gendered use of spaces through the story of Martina's investigation of the past. The gendered spaces are found through different manifestations and articulations among the book's characters. For instance, Ryan describes how gendered spaces are found through different manifestations and articulations among the book's characters. She describes how climatic metaphors are used by the author to refer to the city; they stand for 'inhabitants experience [of] high levels of nervousness and anxiety' (82). The metaphors and investigation into the past become the only tactic to resist the regulation of the public by a dictatorship where even 'a modicum of liberty with which to sustain her identity' (98) is not allowed. Ryan asks us to notice the 'required' performances that are a necessary condition of living in these spaces. Engagement with

the past and its memories become the performative requirement to survive public spaces according to Ryan's reading of Lopez's text. Memories maintain their transformative quality from one generation to another, which Lopez uses to her advantage in order to tell a story of pain and sentiment in the city of Madrid.

The third chapter follows the protagonist of Mendez's short stories in *Los girasoles ciegos* by addressing the notions of home. Ryan uses these stories to introduce her take on Foucault's notion of heterotopia. She prepares her argument by looking at the protagonist's experience of public and domestic space as well as how the divide between the two spaces collapses during the story. Public and domestic spaces become heterotopias, worlds which compete with each other, and eventually their overlap causes distress to the individual. However, Ryan aptly comments on the reductionist quality of Mendez's idea of home as 'a private sanctum ... [or] intimate space' (105). She states that this 'spatial bifurcation is evidently reductionist, actually highly delusional' (104). I agree with her statement in essence but she does not show why and how the author's assumption is delusional or reductionist. However, the basic framework of the fictional genre offers the possibility of evading sanity and even projecting 'delusion' as reality.

The fourth chapter tests the spatial dimension within the cognitive boundaries of a child and how he develops spatial perception during the post-war period in Cataluña. Ryan offers her reading of Emili Teixidor's *Pan Negro*, arguing that 'the novel is borne from an ethical desire to portray the moral ramifications of macro-social catastrophes' (117). Ryan analyses the tale of a young boy in order to explore the idea of 'childhood ... [as] a return to innocence' (118). She begins her analysis of children's resilience and agency by drawing from Mariane Hirsch and Naomi Solokoff, concluding that Teixidor produces a world in which children remain in their own universe, 'untroubled by memories of the war' (119). Ryan traces the semiosis of the text to draw our attention to social imaginaries of the post-war Spain and the question of how to interpret 'Republican victimhood'. For instance, she explains how 'pan negro' stands for more than a dietary staple in post war Spain, further implying political associations and the survival of the defeated. This chapter is written with astute attention to child development theories but it would benefit from more detail about the link between space and memory, the theme of the book.

The fifth chapter develops further her notions of heterotopia while looking at the detective novel *La sombra del viento* written by the international bestselling author Ruis Zafon. She looks at the heterotopias within Zafon's portrayal of Barcelona. Zafon portrays a heterotopia which enables avenues of resistance against the cultural repression of the Francoist culture. Ryan here investigates spatiality and memory based on the idea that the 'city is an entity at once physical, cultural and spiritual, which materializes in the mindset of its inhabitants' (143). She introduces a brief history of Barcelona in order to clarify the creative use of space by characters in the novel. Furthermore, she compares the perceptions of Barcelona that are projected in the narrative by the two main characters to explain the versatility of urban spaces, which are 'only enlivened by the injection of meaning into them by inhabitants' (156). She identifies these meanings in the form of a hidden transcript within the text. The hidden transcript enables her to highlight the Republican resistance within the alternative spaces which Zafon creates in his text. Ryan suggests Zafon's text avoids assigning any moral superiority to the Republicans and accordingly his narrative of defiance of the Republicans

seems to indicate his commitment to re-inscribing 'Republican memory into the Spanish public terrain' (157).

The sixth chapter explores the idea of how memory travels through modes of remembrance. Ryan tries to explain the workings of globality in the structure of memory by looking at the character of David in Bernardo Atxaga's *El hijo del acordeonista*. David negotiates between two spaces, the space which he remembers and the space where he dwells, beyond the borders of Spain. The character unites these two different worlds while writing his memoirs, a process which 'consolidates his identity and also formulates a coherent memory for his daughters' (174). Ryan attempts to show in her analysis the struggles of an individual with memory, but the link between memory and spatiality is not clearly explained. For instance, she does not explain the rationale behind interpreting David's self-imposed exile to California as an indication of 'a refusal to be bound or defeated by insufficient national memory structure' or why his encounter with someone who fought in the Spanish civil war becomes 'the genesis and evolution of David's memory' (173). The memory appears to be *personal* in David's life and fluctuates during his displacement. Ryan doesn't explain whether displacement is a form of spatiality in her analysis or whether she is trying to explain spatiality as the state of being in one specific space and forging a link with it.

The seventh chapter explores Jose Maria Merino's *La sima*, which is centred around Felix and his struggles with memories of the past. The protagonist belongs to the generation of grandchildren who have found past memories contentious and troublesome. Ryan suggests that the character's troubled relationship with past memories results from his living with two different narratives. She suggests this is the deliberate attempt on the part of the author to write a 'critique of the politicization of memory' (178). Ryan finds that 'shards of memory' overwhelm Felix because the images associated with them unsettle the 'temporal component' of his identity. The past becomes present and Felix's future is built over the unreliable foundations of the past. Therefore, Ryan concludes 'as much as memory is complex, memory work is laborious with no guarantee of a happy ending' (195). She explains Felix's quest to clarify his confused memory through Toni Morrison's notion of 'rememory'. Ryan briefly links memory and spatiality by showing how 'rememory' merges past and present, generating a space 'laden with historical meanings that intersects with, and transforms, the subjectivity of those traversing it' (188).

Ryan explores her theoretical concepts not only within the structure of the chosen texts but also through exploring the mind-set of the authors, by looking at their backgrounds and interviews. Overall, the book maintains a critical reading of the texts with respect to memory and space but Ryan has not maintained consistency in the distribution of the concepts in all chapters. Her exploration of memory, identity and self tend to push space and spatiality toward the sidelines in some chapters. The book raises worthy questions within memory studies and each chapter points to some fundamental theoretical approaches. She specially invites scholars 'to shift from a demographical/geographical approach to an attitudinal one' (198). However, Ryan handicaps non-Spanish speaking readers by leaving many quotes from the authors and quoted passages of the novels untranslated. This interrupts the reading process and reduces the outreach of Ryan's efforts.

Book Reviews 121

Younes Saramifar  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
[y.saramifar@vu.nl](mailto:y.saramifar@vu.nl)