

## LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Emmanuelle Peraldo, ed. (2016) *Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space throughout History*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 490 pp. £57.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-4438-8548-5.

The reader searching for a detailed periodic approach to the intersections between literature and geography, which the title of this collection implies, may be best to search elsewhere. What Emmanuelle Peraldo's selection of essays offers is a temporally and culturally broad, yet theoretically unified, route into an equally broad multidisciplinary field. Drawn from over one hundred submissions to the conference of the same name, held in Lyon in March 2015, Peraldo has selected twenty six essays, arranged into eight thematic chapters under three section headings, in an attempt to show that 'literature and geography are two practices of space, and that literature, along with geography, [is] perfectly valid to account for space' (3). The thematic and critical thread that runs through the collection rests on the idea of 'accounting' for space, shown through a focus in many chapters on literature's interplay with cartography and the means and consequences of using literature to map space physically and metaphorically.

Peraldo's introduction argues for the place of such a collection within a 'trans-disciplinary global debate' (4), evidenced, she suggests, through the preponderance of books and theses bearing the phrase 'literature and geography'. Her intent seems two-fold. The first is to offer up a space in which academics and practitioners can be brought together from various disciplines to highlight the textual depiction and treatment of real-world 'spatial problematics' across the globe. The second is to seek answers to several questions that the other 'literature and geography' works she mentions don't necessarily address:

Is it legitimate to say that a literary text enables us to work on the object "space", which does not belong to geography only? What does it bring to literary criticism to use geographical tools like cartography or geocritical concepts? Can literary texts be sources for the geographer?

There is a reciprocity inherent in these questions that suggests a possible crisis of confidence and purpose for both the literary and the geographically-minded. The first and third questions are both related to propriety: what is (and isn't) legitimate to use in one's criticism? The second question, meanwhile, offers a common solution that is extensively explored throughout the essays, and also belies a sense of unease about literature's position within the geographical field. The use of maps and mapping offers common ground between literary and geographical practice, in both their generation and representation. But they also suggests a preoccupation with the temporal, of 'accounting' for space and fixing it in place, or resolving spatial problematics by freezing them in

place however temporarily. This sense, while just under the surface in the introduction, doesn't find its way into the subsequent chapters.

One of the great strengths of this collection—and true to its multidisciplinary aim—is the embrace of the generative qualities of space. While this certainly works in both directions, it is strongest in moving from literature towards geography, from word, narrative, and character to space. Peraldo, in reference to Jeanne Schaaf's chapter on the work of David Greig (81), highlights the way in which 'identity is built in interaction with space' (6). Fabrizio Di Pasquale's chapter, 'Cartography and the Contemporary American Novel. Nic Pizzolatto: An Example of Geocritical Analysis' (37), seems to adhere to this idea. In his study of Pizzolatto's crime fiction, he suggests that character's lives are affected by spaces which emerge 'as a constantly unstable battlefield, or as "aporia", a system of tensions' (37). Considering this to be symptomatic of the genre, Di Pasquale implies that this system of tensions stems from the generative qualities of acting within space, as opposed to space simply acting as a backdrop to narrative and time. He appears to argue that the actions of characters are a significant generative force, creating new identities while remaining contingent on the spaces they act within:

The city and the territory acquire a new meaning, showing the gateways and the limits of space through the crumbling of their own internal structures, however producing new identities (38).

Di Pasquale, though, seems to limit the generative quality of literature to the author's own identity, their own perceptions of a space and period, through the creation of a literary map. Arguing that 'Our literary map has a place in a system of knowledge, showing a specific image of the world reflecting the author's point of view and his perception of reality and representing the place where reality and imagination meet' (43), Di Pasquale allows for the idea that this map is followable, traceable, and that for one to follow it would be to recreate that moment of identity and being, to regenerate that image of the world. Perhaps, then, it is fair to say that Di Pasquale highlights the system of tensions between reader and author in the generative process, as well as between narrative and space.

This generative tension moves through the collection into other essays, notably Caroline Rabourdin's '*Walking and Writing: Paul Auster's Map of the Tower of Babel*' (222). Working from a Paul Auster interview with François Busnel entitled "Tout commence avec le corps" ("It all starts with the body"), Rabourdin starts her inquiry 'with the bodily engagement in writing, the necessary, and even generative engagement of the body in writing' (222), and shows the importance of activity within the fields of literature and geography. Di Pasquale's system of tensions takes on a developed focus here, between the act of walking and the act of writing, of participating in a space and of representing it. There is, it seems, a gesture towards a collaborative effort that could, indeed should, sound out to urban and rural landscape activists regarding the documentation and transmission of activity within space. Discussing the interplay between the novel's writer-cum-private investigator and his quarry, Rabourdin suggests the prominence of the written word as representative, rather than the generative act of writing, along with the implication that the transmission of such a

representation—the creation of a textual map—can inspire a retracing of those steps as a generative act in and of itself.

This movement towards an active—even activist—engagement with space becomes apparent again in Joshua Armstrong's essay 'French Psychogeography Today? The Case of Thomas Clerc's *Paris, musée du XXIe siècle, le dixième arrondissement*'. Armstrong's chapter takes an in-depth look into a fascinating project by Thomas Clerc that refocuses the praxis of the Situationist International (SI) from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s into the current urban environment. Armstrong unpacks Clerc's struggle to apply the theories and practices of the Situationists in an environment now dominated by spectacle, arguing that 'As the SI put it, "the lynchpin of spectacle is the planning of happiness", and it is arguably more difficult than ever to break from the role of passive, contented consumer' (324). It is productive to read this essay in conversation with the generative engagement of the body presented in Rabourdin's essay, and to see in it another nod to the activist who desires to change the city through revolutionary activity. But in light of his summation that to escape the role of passive, contented consumer is increasingly difficult, Armstrong tempers the revolutionary zeal of the SI and its unitary urbanism by arguing that the kind of *détournement* needed in the current period is one more passive, of observation: not of making urban space strange, but of noticing, documenting, and transmitting its inherent strangeness:

*Le dixième arrondissement* cannot read like a manifesto, cannot culminate in epiphany, cannot voice a coherent aesthetics or politics: it lets the city do the talking and simply tries to *keep up* via its spatial stream of consciousness (328).

This collection seems to have a tension of its own. Under the surface seems to bubble Edward Soja's idea of spatiality: that acting within space is simultaneously space forming and space contingent. The notion of the generative quality of both literature and geography, culminating in the map, runs through the collection like a thread, and at times the thread becomes more apparent. Peraldo's own defence of the need for such a collection discusses the 'omnipresence of space, place and mapping at the core of...analysis' (2) and her collection, gesturing towards the generative nature inherent in the interplay of her title's two disciplines goes a long way towards showing that each discipline is stronger for being combined.

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