

Narrative cartography

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As an offshoot of an area of investigation variably known as geocriticism, geopoetics, or literary geography, narrative cartography covers a territory as broad and as diversified as the relations between the imagination and the real world. As a topic in humanistic geography, the field of narrative cartography has grown in recent years with the rise of interest in the geohumanities, spatial humanities, and literary geography. In a literal conception of map, narrative cartography is the graphic representation of the spatial configuration of the world represented by the text. Literary authors create textual worlds out of multiple sources of inspiration: personal experience and memories, which originate in, but reshape, the real world; cultural tradition and familiarity with other literary texts; and the faculty of invention, which situates textual worlds and their geographies at variable distances from the real world. Mapping literary territory will thus range from situating the setting of texts on real-world maps, to augmenting real-world maps with fictional toponyms, to drawing maps entirely based on textual data in the case of purely imaginary storyworlds such as those of fairy tales and fantasy. Alternatively, if we opt for a metaphorical interpretation of the notion of map that extends it beyond graphic images, this notion could be applied to texts that attempt to cover a territory through specialized narrative techniques, so that certain themes or modes

of description would fall within the scope of narrative cartography.

Narrative cartography as annotation of real-world maps

The systematic study of how the plots of fictional narratives relate to real places has been pioneered by such works as the *Atlas of Literature* edited by Malcolm Bradbury (1998), by Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (1998), and more recently by the research project *A Literary Atlas of Europe*, conducted between 2006 and 2014 at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) Zurich in collaboration with the Georg August University of Göttingen and the Charles University of Prague (Piatti 2017).

Through their use of toponyms with real-world reference, the maps produced by these projects conflict with the non-referential or self-referential conceptions of literature that dominated literary theory in the second half of the twentieth century. Schools such as New Criticism and deconstruction would regard the Dublin of James Joyce as an imaginative creation unique to the text that cannot be located on the map of Ireland. The non-referential conception of literature is belied, however, by the behavior of those readers who choose literary works on the basis of their real-world setting, as well as by the developing industry of literary tourism, which takes people to the location of their favorite novels. Why would people be interested in retracing the itinerary of Leopold Bloom in Dublin if the city bears no relation to the Dublin of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)? Joyce famously said that he wanted to give in *Ulysses*

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“a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed from [his] book” (Bulson 2006, 68). While literary authors can produce highly personal representations of real-world locations, and even modify them at will (most frequently by populating them with fictional individuals), the use of real-world toponyms creates relations between real-world and fictional locations that enable readers to project their knowledge of real-world places on their fictional counterparts. Conversely, knowledge gathered from fiction can color our representation of real-world places. It is this bidirectionality of the imagination that motivates readers to visit the real-world setting of their favorite fictional narratives.

What is the purpose of locating fictions on real-world maps? Some examples will be useful. One map in Moretti’s *Atlas* traces the itineraries of several heroes of Spanish picaresque novels on a map of Spain. Another one superposes the location of the beginnings and endings of all of Jane Austen’s novels on the map of England. These maps do not show how literature represents real-world places (only textual analysis can do that); rather, they show which real-world places are integrated into fictional worlds. Another literary-cartographic project, the abovementioned *Literary Atlas of Europe* (under the direction of Barbara Piatti), connects hundreds of literary texts to European locations. The relevant corpus is so huge that the project must be narrowed down to some specific areas: special attention is given to two regions, the Saint Gotthard area in central Switzerland and North Friesland in Germany. Piatti (2017) shows that the Saint Gotthard area is particularly rich in literary works and inspired many foreign writers, while North Friesland is a sparsely populated region in terms of literary representation, and authors using it as a narrative setting are overwhelmingly (if not exclusively) native to

the province. By superposing several narratives, these maps do not aim at a better understanding of individual texts, but rather at capturing the importance of certain places for the collective imagination. In the geography that emerges from these projects, zones of intense activity contrast with neglected territories.

Producing a map of the literary-geographical imagination is a big data project that calls for what Moretti calls “distant reading,” or even for an automated machine reading that breaks with the close-reading tradition of literary criticism and its concern for aesthetics. Yet machine reading has its limitations. Given a list of real-world toponyms, a computer can identify them in literary texts, but without extensive interpretive abilities that seem still out of reach for artificial intelligence, it cannot make a finer distinction between locations that serve as narrative setting and locations that occur only in the thoughts of characters. As Piatti shows, strictly regional narratives – such as those located in North Friesland – can weave a web of “projected spaces,” as she calls them (Piatti 2017, 52), that spans the entire world.

By displaying simultaneously to the viewer textual information that quickly disappears from episodic memory in the temporal flow of reading, the mapping of literary texts on real-world maps can attract attention to textual features that would remain otherwise unnoticed, thereby fulfilling a hermeneutic function. Literary maps can also reveal contradictions in the representation of space, such as allowing a character to travel from point A to point B in a time that would be impossible in the real world. But in many cases – and this observation is valid for both referential maps and maps of completely imaginary fictional worlds – literary mapping is a self-rewarding, autotelic labor of love that combines a fascination for maps with a desire to deepen immersion in a favorite narrative.

Narrative cartography as mapping of imaginary worlds

This form of narrative cartography can focus either on worlds that are entirely invented, such as Thomas Moore's Utopia, or on imaginary enclaves within fictional worlds that overlap with real geography, such as Flaubert's Yonville, which cohabits in *Madame Bovary* (1857) with the real Rouen, Paris, and Tostes. As Stockhammer (2007, 63) observes, four types of genetic relations between texts and maps of imaginary worlds can be distinguished.

- 1 The map precedes the text. A classic example of this rather rare situation is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), which grew out of a painting the author made to kill time during a rainy day. Stevenson later explained in the preface to the novel that the map does not illustrate the story; rather, the story grew out of the map. When a map is created before the writing of the text, it shares the performative power, or declarative authority, of the fictional use of language. An author who writes in a novel that a character did something creates a fact that cannot be contested for the fictional world: it would make no sense to deny that Emma Bovary committed suicide; similarly, an author who draws a map of a fictional world creates *eo ipso* the geography of this world, and unlike real-world maps, this map cannot be inaccurate with respect to the represented territory. Yet the map of *Treasure Island* is not only constitutive of the fictional world; it also corresponds to an intradiegetic object – an object that exists within the fictional world – for it is the discovery of this map that launches an expedition to find the treasure on the island. In this second role, the map no longer creates a world

but represents an independently existing territory, and it becomes unreliable. On the map of *Treasure Island*, which is shown as a frontispiece to the novel, an X marks the location of a treasure, but nothing is found there. (There is indeed a treasure on the island, but it is located elsewhere.)

- 2 The map is drawn during writing. To ensure the coherence of fictional worlds, especially of very large worlds, authors use tools that may or may not be included in the final product: timelines for events, genealogies for characters, and maps for setting. As Stevenson observed, the drawing of a map can save authors from embarrassing mistakes, such as having the sun set in the east. J.R.R. Tolkien drew multiple maps of Middle Earth while writing *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) to assist the process of creation, and William Faulkner created a map of Yoknapatawpha county after he had written a number of novels taking place in the same imaginary territory, but both authors relied on language alone to present their fictional worlds. (Faulkner's map appears at the end of one of his novels, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).)
- 3 A map created by an illustrator is inserted by the publisher in a second or third edition or in a translation. An example of this practice is Alain Robbe-Grillet's experimental novel *La Jalousie* (*Jealousy*; 1957), which focuses so closely on spatial relations that it reads like instructions for drawing a map. In contrast to the French original, which has no map, the English translation does indeed include a plan of the house that functions as setting, sparing readers the effort of sketching it themselves. Whether graphic maps appear in the first or in a later edition, they promote immersion in fictional worlds by facilitating the mental simulation of the movements of characters, enabling visualizations, and giving readers the

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reassuring feeling of knowing where they are in a space deprived of familiar landmarks.

- 4 Maps are drawn by readers as an interpretation of the text. Literary texts may urge readers to grab paper and pencil for a variety of reasons: understanding the logic of the plot, developing a comprehensive vision of the storyworld, following characters in their travels, supporting personal interpretations, solving enigmas, testing the spatial coherence of the text, and as noted above, the pure pleasure of map-making. An example of cartographic obsession is Vladimir Nabokov, who could not dissociate the act of reading from the act of diagramming. His *Lectures on Literature* (1980) contain sketches of nearly everything that can be graphically represented: itineraries, floor plans, objects, real and imaginary settings and street maps. He attempted to draw the plan of the village of Combray from Marcel Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*; 1913–1927), but he did not get very far, because the text is very poor in spatial information. In many cases, the mapping activity goes far beyond the representation of spatial relations required for the understanding of the text. To map literary territory – like mapping the real world – is to conquer it, to master it, to tease out its secrets.

Literary texts as maps

The “spatial turn” that is widely considered to have taken place in the humanities (concurrently with a “narrative turn”) has prompted a proliferation of mapping metaphors, both in literary theory and in other disciplines. In a charming book that freely combines map history with literary reflection, creative writing teacher Peter Turchi (2004) develops the metaphor of “the

writer as cartographer.” But metaphors are like maps: the more territory they embrace, the less closely and reliably they represent it. If all literary works are “mappings,” then some are certainly more deserving of the label than others.

A “cartographic novel” could be one that relies on what Mikhail Bakhtin (1973) called the chronotope of the road. As its name suggests, the notion of chronotope expresses the inseparability of space and time. A novel that implements the chronotope of the road focuses on the journey of a hero and his or her adventures in a world full of danger, letting the geography of the fictional world unfold dynamically in the readers' minds as they follow the hero's movements. According to this conception, the prototypical manifestation of a cartographic novel is the genre of the picaresque. The adventures of the hero of these novels can be compared to the travels of the explorers whose observations provided the basis for the creation of maps back in the days when the world was still partially unknown.

Another interpretation of cartographic writing relies on Linde and Labov's (1975) well-known distinction between “map view” and a “tour view.” This distinction, originally made on the basis of how people describe their apartment, captures two ways of representing space through language. In the tour strategy, informants move mentally through their apartment, describing the rooms as they encounter them during their walk-through. As an exploration of space that takes place in time, the tour is a perfect example of chronotope. The map strategy, by contrast, presupposes a point of view external to both time and to the space to be described. The apartment is looked at from above, and the description follows a systematic logical order, such as viewing the apartment as a rectangle and describing it corner by corner. The tour strategy is the most dominant one, both in Linde and Labov's corpus and in literature (cf. adventure stories

and picaresque novels), but some experimental texts adhere to a map strategy that could be regarded as cartographic writing. For instance, in *PrairyErth* (1991), William Least Heat-Moon aims to provide a “deep map” of Chase county in Kansas. He does so by dividing the territory, map like, into quadrants and exploring the fauna, flora, history, economy, and social life of each quadrant according to a rigid order (top to bottom, right to left) that leaves no area uncovered. The map like strategy can also appear on the micro-level of individual descriptions, as is the case in Robbe-Grillet’s *La Jalousie*.

A third way to conceive cartographic writing relies on the importance of forming a mental map (or for certain readers, of drawing a graphic map) of the storyworld. The temporal nature of language makes it very difficult to convey to the reader a comprehensive, map like vision of narrative space, and with most narratives this is not necessary. Readers can form very vivid mental representations of the setting of certain scenes, without being able to situate these locations with respect to each other. A narrative could, however, be considered cartographic when a global representation of a spatial environment becomes necessary to its proper understanding, as is often the case with murder mysteries.

Last but not least is the thematization of cartography, a theme that has become very prominent in narratives that deal with the phenomenon of globalization, as well as in postcolonial literature because of the importance of map-making as an instrument of colonization. Authors who have dealt with cartographic issues since the 1980s include Brian Friel (*Translations*, 1981), Michael Ondaatje (*Running in the Family*, 1982), Thomas Pynchon (*Mason and Dixon*, 1997), James Cowan (*A Mapmaker’s Dream*, 1996), Andrea Barrett (*Servants of the Map*, 2002), Reif Larsen (*The Complete works of T.S. Spivet*, 2009), and Michel Houellebecq (*La carte et le territoire*

(*The Map and the Territory*), 2010). The number of these novels suggests that critical cartography has gone full circle, starting with the reading of maps as texts through methods inspired by literary criticism, and ending up inspiring the literary imagination.

Narrative cartography as decorative art

Some literary maps belong to the tradition of pictorial or artistic maps. An example is a map found on the Internet (Kowalczyk, 2017), on which every country is represented by a book that uses it as a setting: *War and Peace* for Russia, *Don Quixote* for Spain, *Ulysses* for Ireland, *Heidi* for Switzerland, and, in a rather controversial choice, *The Count of Monte Cristo* for France. (Serious literary scholars would probably select Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* or Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*). This map shows how great literary works can define national identity, but the limitation of one text per country prevents it from achieving more than an anecdotal status. Another kind of literary map represents cities through a word cloud of titles and quotations located in the approximative area where the stories take place. A map for London can be found on the website Run for the Hills (n.d.). One can imagine a professor hanging this map on her or his office wall to demonstrate a passion for British literature, but the value of this kind of image is more decorative than informative.

Conclusion

Drawing maps of literary texts is not an end in itself; it needs to be complemented and justified by further investigations that include the following.

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Narratology

Since literary maps rely on textual data, we need a narratological analysis of the kind of spatial information on which the map is based, such as toponyms, static descriptions, reports of character or object movements, or reports of characters' perception of their environment. This kind of analysis is particularly important for the mapping of texts that represent fully imaginary topographies.

Logic of fiction

In the case of textual worlds that combine imaginary and real locations, we need a theory of fictionality; more precisely, we need a theory of fictional reference that allows the import of extratextual geographic information, so that, when a text mentions Paris and London, we can represent these cities on the map as separated by the English channel, even when the channel is not mentioned in the text. While this possibility seems intuitively permissible, it nevertheless requires logical justification. One such justification is the principle of minimal departure (Ryan 1991), which instructs readers to construct the fictional world as the closest possible to the real world and to assume departures from reality only when they are explicitly mentioned in the text.

Thematics

When maps are objects within a storyworld, what role do they play in determining the plot? When literary narratives reflect on the nature of maps, what critical insights do they provide?

Phenomenology of reading

The insertion of graphic maps in literary texts has cognitive implications that deserve to be

empirically investigated, by asking real readers questions such as: How frequently do they consult the map? How does the map contribute to their understanding of the plot? Does a map lead to a greater enjoyment of the text and immersion in the storyworld, compared with reading the same text without a map? By relieving readers of the burden of mentally constructing the spatial configuration of the storyworld, do maps allow them to concentrate on other aspects of literary meaning?

Hermeneutics

The value of reader- or critic-produced maps should be probed by asking what exactly maps contribute to interpretation. It seems clear that maps can expose inconsistencies in texts, help readers follow the movements of characters, assist their understanding of the reasoning of detectives, and reveal the impact of certain real-world places on the collective imagination. But we need more extensive studies to develop this intuitive core of observations into a comprehensive theory of the interpretive benefits of mapping narratives.

Audience studies

Drawing maps of popular storyworlds (such as those of the *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* series) is an important fan activity that raises many questions worthy of scholarly investigation. Among these questions are: What reasons are there for readers and scholars to devote time and effort to such projects? What is the proportion of text-based and fan-invented elements in these maps? When posted on the Internet, how do they take advantage of the affordances of digital technology? Do they invite dialogue and collaboration with other fans?

Graphic design

Mapping literary texts requires graphic decisions. When a fictional world overlaps with real-world geography, what kind of real-world map should be chosen to be annotated: a road map, a topographical map, a modern map, or a map that shows the setting at the time of the story? How should the imaginary places be represented on the map? Inevitably, fictional places will hide actual ones by taking their place on the map; how can this hiding be minimized? In contrast to real-world places, the location of fictional places cannot be precisely specified by latitude and longitude; should they be represented by an arbitrarily chosen point, or by a cloud of possible locations (as does Barbara Piatti)? How should contradictory information about fictional places be dealt with?

Diagrammatology

As a type of diagram, a map is a vertical (or slightly slanted) projection of spatial relations, but the defining property of narrative is the representation of temporal processes that bring changes of state in a world, and that involve agents who are motivated by desires, emotions, goals, and plans. Maps can easily show spatiotemporal phenomena such as itineraries, the progression of fires, or the movements of armies, especially if they are animated and interactive, but how can they represent nonspatial information? Perhaps the best example of cartographic storytelling is Charles Joseph Minard's map of Napoleon's 1912 Russia campaign, which shows six variables: itinerary of the army (specified by two variables, latitude and longitude), direction of movement, rate of progression, size of the army at every position, and temperature; but even so, the information shown on the map must be connected to non-visualized data, such as historical knowledge, to be interpreted as a

story. The resources of maps in the domain of mental life representation remain very limited, and they must be complemented by other types of diagrams, such as flowcharts, trees, networks, or tables, for the visualization of such important narrative features as timelines, genealogies, interpersonal relations, parallel plotlines, symbolic structures, and the properties of participants. The school known as "deep mapping" (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Davis 2015) tries to make maps better suited to narrative meaning by expanding their representational power beyond purely spatial features, with particular emphasis on emotions. Maps can, for instance, show how certain places inspire positive or negative emotions by distinguishing them through the use of color (Pearce 2008). The various types of diagram needed to represent narratives could be interlinked in a digital database, so that the user could easily pass from the maps to the timeline to the text itself, or could get a variety of information from interactive maps. Yet some aspects of meaning will always evade graphic representation, and this is for the better, for otherwise, literary texts would become dispensable.

SEE ALSO: Cartographic design; Critical geography; Cultural studies; Discourse; GeoHumanities; Humanistic geography; Literary geography; Representation; Text and intertextuality

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Further reading

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