

Brigitte LE JUEZ, Bill RICHARDSON (Eds.), *Spaces of Longing and Belonging. Territoriality, Ideology and Creative Identity in Literature and Film*. Brill/Rodopi, 2019, ISBN 978-90-04-40292-8, 287 p.

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As the exalted model of modernity is challenged by supermodernity (Marc Augé) with its unsettling excess of information and space, scholars have to find their footing in a world where neither time nor space offer themselves as common sense categories to be inhabited. Where dromology (Paul Virilio) seemed to be the law of the land in the accelerated world of free movement and instant transfers, a single event can shift the terms of experience into those of life at a standstill, frustratingly or even painfully immobilised in non-sustainable patterns. Between impassionate rejections of social and political insularity, contested allegiances and the threat of ecological collapse, geocriticism lends itself to a renewed sense of urgency.

The present collection of essays is a striking response to such a time out of joint, covering a diversity of critical approaches in the hands of authors ranging from young career academics to established senior researchers, most of which gathered in Dublin and Galway in August 2015 at the 6th Biennial Congress organised by the European Network for Comparative Literary Studies. The volume can be read both as a standalone (trans)spatial exploration coupled with a planetary awareness and as a companion to the previously published proceedings of the aforementioned congress, namely three special issues also edited by Brigitte Le Juez, the former general coordinator of the European Network for Comparative Literary Studies and current member of the executive committee of the European Society of Comparative Literature, alongside *(Re)Writing Without Borders. Contemporary Intermedial Perspectives on Literature and the Visual Arts* (2018). Whereas the 2018 volume focused on intergeneric and intermedial niches to reveal criticism of and from their respective interpretative communities, this volume problematizes human spatiality in conjunction with the relationship between cultural products and the ideological positions where they emerged. Its aim is to challenge the stability of our Kantian

(pre)conceptions and offer models that develop our spatial literacy as readers. These models are structured into three sections: the first part, *In-between Territories*, delves into the constructedness of topologies, followed by *Ideological Sites of Belonging*, which tackles inclusion and exclusion as processes tangled in the (re)distribution of power, while the last section, *Space, Affect and Identity*, offers ground level views of contested sites of memory.

Even as the contributors from Africa, Asia, Europe or the Middle East look at (non-)places close to their own or continents apart, they all answer to the critiques levied against the scholarship of the spatial turn, such as its supposed indeterminacy, absence of methodology in ecocriticism (Terry Gifford) or of theory (Dana Phillips), in effect a radical flexibility coupled with a pluralism of both methodologies and theoretical approaches. The editors are quick to prevent such accusations, covering their shared ground and carefully tracing the study of space from Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to Bertrand Westphal's brand of literary spatiality, expanded upon in the following chapter by Westphal himself. Along the way, they give a nod to contributions such as Juri Lotman's hybridizing model in a shared hope for an emerging space beyond the divisive mechanisms underpinning grand theories, showing an appreciation for points of contact with reception studies from Michael Issacharoff onward, for Gaston Bachelard's attention for the role of affect in transforming spaces, as well as for Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre articulating the everyday effects of socially produced abnormal spaces or Pierre Nora defining sites of memory.

Westphal's "Belonging to the Periphery of the Planet" is a solid theoretical investigation that sets the terms and the tone of the volume, highlighting the ideological stakes of works presumed apolitical, moving beyond the reformism of World Literature towards revealing the intimate connection between belonging as affect and notions of property and identity. Taking into account culturally specific framings of belonging such as the Swedish *längtan*, it anticipates some of the idiosyncrasies illustrated in the chapter on Swedish language Finnish literature, as well as the differing associations clustered in the Welsh term *hiraeth* or the Turkish term *hüzün* unwrapped in the last section of the volume. The West-centric homogenising image of the globe is criticised, as the "West" is revealed to be the world's greatest gated community, clumsily equated with the global North, an equally spatial conceptualisation disguising economic and social inequality. It is then

substituted by the decentralised planetary image emphasizing solidarity and rootedness, as the tension between de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation is resolved into trans-territorialisation.

The first part brings together articles that denaturalise our understanding of points of departure and delights in exploring mediated experiences of liminal places that live on in one's memory but cannot be pinned down. The limits of the homeland no longer coincide with the country's physical borders and the main question the five chapters gravitate towards is how to anchor one's sense of identity when faced with the impossibility of return in the aftermath of realising that the nation is a shared imaginary space. Polo Moji's "Home/Land: Diasporic Space and Topologies of Relation in Nimrod's *L'Or des rivières* (2010)" offers a nuanced portrait of the diasporic condition understood as errantry rather than (self-)exile or nomadism, drawing on the different embodiments of mother/fatherland to problematise filiation and affiliation. At the same time, it examines minority status through religion (Protestant) and ethnicity (in France as Chadian and in Chad as an ethnic Kim), all the more complicated when moving between a former colony and a former colonial power. If grief complicates the past/present divide, the volatility of the within/without divide is a fixture of life in transit (Donald Pascoe). Moving from an airport in one country to another virtually identical airport in a different one, connecting flights expose travellers to the immateriality and constructedness of borders, which are the focus of Sanna Nyqvist's "Poetics of the Shipping Forecast," one of the most pleasant surprises of this volume. Nyqvist looks at shipping radio programmes in maritime countries such as Ireland, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Finland to show how, through repetition, the functional broadcast gained incantatory powers, summoning the shadowy image of the dangerous national waters to be contrasted with the safe home where a child might have first encountered it. The insularity of these cultures leads to exaggerated claims of unique intermedial engagement, even as each of them generates an intertextual national literature which, through its intimacy with the standardised shipping programme, ends sharing conventions across languages and territories, addressing similar concerns with (in)stability, (in)substantiality, time(lessness), pleasure and danger, centrality and marginality.

Another take on the interstitial that can be dissolved into nostalgia, Ivan Kenny's article, "*That Other Unreality: Place, Non-Place and the Fantastic in Julio Cortázar's 'La isla a mediodía' (1966)*" is a well-rounded appraisal of the discrete

fantastic elements to show how a “non-place” can collide with the disturbing “sense of place” of the vibrant island and result in a breakdown of the reality/unreality divide. Xiros, as the invasive element, is treated less as the passive land that fascinates Marini and more as an agent in its own right which can disturb spatial perception. In “Longing and Belonging in Contemporary Finland-Swedish Literature,” Kaisa Kurikka, Hanna Lahdenperä, Kristina Malmio and Julia Tidigs discuss the conflictual literary representations of the Swedish language minority in Finland, bringing to the fore a different type of exclusion than that which made the subject of Moji’s chapter, although no less critical of the “affective knot” of one’s mother tongue, engaged with multilingualism and adopted languages. In this case, it is a minoritarian identity which benefits from economic privilege but is cut off from the possibility of solidarity. Significantly, they turn to a female perspective on this middle-class isolation, following how Virginia Woolf’s “room of one’s one” morphed into the Scandinavian “narrow room” bursting with potentiality and eccentricity challenging the religious community outside it. This section’s involvement with heterotopias is rounded off by Rodger Williamson’s “The Longing of Lafcadio Hearn for His Own Japan.” After an upbringing exposing him to the culture of his Greek mother and the folklore of his Irish father with the help of a Connacht nurse, Hearn became a journalist and travel writer. Having gained entry into Japan as an English teacher, he gradually retreated from engagement with a rapidly modernising society in a pursuit of an idealised past. His writings on Japan, as well as his letters to William Butler Yeats indicated a yearning for a pre-industrial space to be recovered, weaving together threads as different as discrimination, emigration, orientalism, assimilation into the adopted culture, protectionism in relation with a traditional culture other than one’s own, as well as reclaiming a paradoxical third position across the racial divide.

The desire to secure space so as to fight against alienation gives way to concerns with spatial justice in the second section. Bill Richardson’s contribution, “Spatial Patterns in Literary Fiction: The Case of Delibes’s *The Holy Innocents*,” makes use of a fine-tuned ecological consciousness, as well as of the tripartite model elaborated by Natalia Álvarez Méndez, discerning between discourse space, chronotopic space and story-space, to read (on every level) against Miguel Delibes’s claim that the novel lacked political content. The labourers are brought closer to nature precisely because of their shared exploitation by the landowners. Verticality and horizontality become operational metaphors necessary to make legible the imprints of social injustice on the

estate and its subjects in terms of displacement to the margins. Pilar Vega Rodríguez, in “Romantic Poets and the Legend of the Haunted Cave of Hercules,” turns her eye towards the mythological space of Spain before the Muslim conquest as seen from the distance of the nineteenth century. The cave of Hercules as the central feminised “non-space” to be recuperated becomes crucial in examining across different genres how national myths are gradually forged and rewritten, often at the cost of violence against women. A similar interest in the violence of nation-building underpins “Longing and Belonging: Space, Time and Intertextuality in the Post-Colonial Theatre of Wole Soyinka,” where Rosa Branca Figureido offers a sympathetic reading of the ambivalent Nigerian playwright’s heroes of mixed literary heritage, drawing on ancient Greek tragedy with as much ease as he reaches for Yoruba mythology. Soyinka refuses to reflect an internalised Eurocentric view of the ancestors as noble savages living in pre-colonial innocence, replacing the numinous appeal of the glorious past that would inspire a naive view of the future with a grim awareness of the continuum of human violence marking the land. The lived experience of persecution in a neo-colonial climate is at the centre of “Race and Post-9/11 Arab-American Identity: Contestatory Agency in the Poetic Discourse of Suheir Hammad and Andrea Assaf” by Omar Baz Radwan, where contemporary poets rejects both the need to “pass” internalised by the assimilationist tradition of Arab American writing and the racialisation as Other at home. Different ethnic groups find themselves brought together by a sense of placelessness: these speakers either passively fold into “an ethics of betrayal” (Crystal Parikh) where they attempt to assuage the fears of those whose American citizenship is not questioned by supporting American imperialism or else they loudly push for their agency to be recognised in life-affirming lines whose rhythms are not unlike those of politically charged hip-hop productions.

Spatial freedom takes centre stage in the third section of the volume. Brigitte Le Juez’s “Remaking Creativity: *H* Story, Nobuhiro Suwa’s Transposition of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*” covers differently-situated attempts at extracting the identity of the city in defamiliarizing encounters, questioning the possibility of representing the unrepresentable, the site of memory after a traumatic collective experience of catastrophic proportions. Suwa’s complex docufiction uses Resnais’s cult film as a departing point to develop a way of seeing that which refuses to be recognised, yet finds its own way of bringing past and present together through the combined movements of the pilgrim and of the flaneur without reducing the city to a life-size

memorial. The next chapter is, in a sense, another double-sided tape, as Jennifer Wood's "Signifying the Nation: (In)Communication, Absence and National (Be)Longing in Marc Evans's *Patagonia* (2010)" deals with displaced and alienated Welsh identity as seen through the eyes of two women engaging with transnational communities rather than defining themselves only against Anglocentric hegemonic representations, carving a space for themselves in the otherwise male-centred Welsh imagology and road trip movie convention. The two spatially disconnected narratives parallel each other's difficulty in returning where they feel they belong as the place has, in effect, been erased out of existence, while the mythologised heroism of both Wales and Patagonia is shown to be unsubstantial and unable to sustain them. Andrea Chiurato's "The Outcasts of the Universe: Longing and Belonging in Nathaniel Hawthorne's and Edgar Allan Poe's London Tales" examines how the two authors, despite entertaining radically different concepts of human nature, reacted to the American inferiority complex towards the Old World by overturning the image of London as the "social laboratory," at once "city-as-an-organism" and "city-as-a-machine," for an anxious American audience at the time when human types crowded the literary stage. Their respective alienated protagonists purposefully lose themselves in the anonymity of the crowd in the metropolis as disinterested spectators of their own lives, yet Poe goes one step forward in decisively rejecting imagined communities. If the previous chapter tackled authors writing against their place of origin, Gabriel F.Y. Tsang, in "Place and Representation of the Self: Milan Kundera's Prague and Gu Hua's Hibiscus Town," turns to authors returning their gaze to their place of origin from a geographical and temporal distance to offer up minor histories explicitly going against official accounts of the Prague Spring and of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, emphasizing a desire for individual freedom over an understanding of spatial justice and a rejection of reproducing public space through surveillance. Tomas and Yuyin lose confidence in their identities as the space bends around swift government intervention, unequivocally pushing them to the margins of the emerging politicised worlds. In a rather interesting editorial choice, the volume opened with a post-colonial story of grief and displacement only to end with Aytül Özüm delving into nostalgic accounts about the lost grandeur at the heart of two former empires in "Speaking the Past: Place as Inspiration and Nostalgia in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* and Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*." The hectic rhythm of modern life strips them both of any erstwhile magic but it is precisely this never-ending

movement that allows one to feel as if able to earn an intimate knowledge of the streets and their layered histories, embracing a bright cosmopolitanism and a plurality of voices.

Spaces of Longing and Belonging is a comprehensive look at how human geographies can reproduce injustice or can be reorganised through cross-boundary coalition building. This rather perplexingly hybrid volume offers readers multiple points of entry into spatial thinking, promoting a constructive indiscipline. Geocriticism is proven to be more than flexible: it is plastic, unpredictable in its creative response to conflicts between the disposable and the preserved in space and culture, demonstrating the porosity of a rolling stone that can double as a stepping stone in one's interdisciplinary research or even as a touchstone for other fields.

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