

## Literary Cartography and Architecture

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“Spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of any spatial image are deciphered, there the basis of social reality presents itself” (Kracauer 57). ‘A man’s life and character formations are influenced largely by his surrounding environment’ is a perception accepted in almost all academic circles and philosophical thoughts and hence substantiating Kracauer’s statement would not be a tough task. However, the phrase ‘spatial image,’ in the given context, demands a detailed analysis. The spatial images associated with the environment are in plenty but to understand the human predicament better, one should be analysing the spatial images that are beyond the ones provided by nature. The role of architecture in deciphering and expanding concepts like *non-lieux* and ‘third space’ is critical. This paper is an attempt to analyse the possibilities and necessities of employing architecture as a key locus in spatiality studies, especially in studies that focus upon literary cartography.

### Literary Cartography and Architecture

George William Hegel had referred to architecture as the first form of art in his Berlin Lectures of 1802 as he considered the main task of architecture is to be an external reflection of the content it beholds. This eventually became a key argument raised in the field of architectural studies, which had limited the importance of architecture to the external factor, dwelling, as a means of controlling the entire phenomena. The same may be said about the art of cartography; while architecture was portrayed as a product of a human’s necessity of a shelter, the act of mapping was often related to the discovery of new lands and resources for survival. With due respect to the fact that these two art forms played a significant role in the evolution of humans as a supreme race, this paper is an attempt to unravel how these two art forms are connected to each other in the context of modern literature and what are their roles in shaping concepts related to modernity.

Cartography or mapping is as much a mental activity as it is physical. The nomadic groups were known to have kept mental maps of geographical locations so that they may be accessed at a later point in time. These kinds of mental maps were transferred to the subsequent generations orally. This method was followed much before any of the known forms of physical maps came into existence. This kind of a literary cartography, something that is purely based on its utility value and much different from the way we conceive it in the present day, was existing among humans from the time they started living in groups.

The modern day cartography has developed immensely, and it is simultaneously an art form as well as an area of scientific study now. It has turned out to be an essential tool in any field of research that deals with the comprehension of spatial phenomena, both culturally and scientifically. The interdisciplinary nature of the field made itself felt in the area of literature from the very beginning – after all, how can any piece of writing exist without a proper setting? Though our understanding of the concepts of literary cartography and literary geography is a product of the so-called ‘spatial turn’ of the 1970’s and 1980’s, the presence of maps and geographical locations were always inherent in literary works, and cartography and literature had always remained mutually complementary.

Considering the fact that a well-written work of literature, be it prose or poem, gives a fairly good description of the place, the landscape, the dwelling styles of people, the locations with varying population density, etc., one may safely say that the work of a writer and a mapmaker are similar to a great extent. With due respect to the argument that the literary maps are metaphorical and a product of linguistic and imaginative activity of writing, they are bound to each other through the narrative inherent in them. While in classical Greek era, maps of Odysseus' journey were based on the narrative given by Homer, the modern day maps say their own stories – say, for example, the re-drawn map of India that separated India into India and Pakistan in 1947.

So where do we mark the difference between a mapmaker and a writer? Robert T. Tally points out a possibility, “the writer, not unlike the cartographer, must determine what elements to include in the story or map” (84). His observation is direct and points towards the selective omissions made by the writer. A cartographer makes omissions as well, but those are not readily available options for him/her, rather, the exercise takes place at a defined objective level. For example, a writer is free to skip the description of a particular lane of a street in his narrative while the cartographer is bound to include every possible cuts and turns in his map.

The subjective aspect of the literary maps raises the question of what kind of narratives are to be chosen for this particular study. Barbara Piatti et al. provides the possible models of narratives that deal with mapping. According to them,

[The setting] can be partly or completely invented (like Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*); it can be a crossfading of two spaces (like in Julio Cortázar's short story *The Other Sky*, in which the setting consists of a confusing combination of two urban topographies, namely Buenos Aires and Paris); it can be an existing and known region combined with fictitious elements (like the Normandy with the towns of Balbec and Illiers in Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu*), it might be a likely place with an invented name, only vaguely localised (like Gottfried Keller's Seldwyla in the novella circle *The People from Seldwyla*) or an existing region remodelled (like Thomas Hardy's Wessex). (178)

Since the study extends itself towards sociological and anthropological concepts, framing the literary space within a Geospace or at least linking these two spaces is a necessary condition. This would eliminate fictitious spaces from the equation, cross fading narratives and narratives that provide remodelled details are also avoided since the study prefers a scenario where not only the literature but also cartography is benefitted through the narrative venture. That cut shorts the list to the narratives on an existing and known region with fictitious elements; within this option, the urban topography is preferred over landscape narratives.

A major reason for avoiding landscape-oriented study can be explained through Robert T. Tally's study of Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Tally successfully points out how Captain Ahab, with his vast experience in the sea, marks various dots on the map in front of him where people had claimed to have seen the white whale. I have no disagreement with Tally when he says, “Melville employs a literary technique that is itself fundamentally a form of mapping” (57), but then it must not be forgotten that Captain Ahab's map-making comes from experience and a normal man lost in the sea would find up and down, right and left as all same. Pi Patel, the protagonist of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, is one such character who could not convey to the world where he was during his 227-day long life at the ocean.

Another reason for discarding landscape narratives is that, at times, it is hard to relate the described location to any corresponding geo-space. A lush green tropical forest in the valley of an uneven mountain can be anywhere on this earth. One can elaborate the description to any extent but, more

often than not, if the name of the region is not mentioned most of the readers might fail to recognise the place meant by the author. Another possibility is that of the writer giving the description of a region and making the claim of it being a different region. One good example of such a situation may be drawn from the Hindi movie *Chennai Express* where the hero and heroine get down at some station and confronts the heroine's father. The claim in the movie is that the location is somewhere in Tamil Nadu and in reality it was shot on the Karnataka-Goa border.

So what makes urban topography a better choice when it comes to cartographic studies? It is architecture. Architecture can provide an authenticity, which the landscape narrative often fails to provide to a literary work. While a setting of a tropical rainforest may be found in multiple locations, a traditional 'nalukettu' in Kerala, a mix of Tamil Nadu and French style of construction found in Pondicherry, or the very obvious case of Egyptian Pyramids cannot be found elsewhere. In an attempt to compose a historical or historiographic metafiction, the authors tend to reproduce the urban life of the period under consideration. The same rule is applicable for most of the science fiction narratives as well. In the process, what they often depend upon is the architecture of the period. Even the critics depend a lot upon the description of architecture to verify the authenticity of the period mentioned in the narrative. Rumiko Handa validates in her study of the role of architecture in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, "Textual and visual depictions of historical buildings helped create the sense of a particular time period" (14).

When I say architecture, I am not referring to the buildings alone. Simon Unwin brings in an interesting reference from musicology, which he has used for his analysis of architecture. He says, "In musicology the architecture of a symphony can be said to be the conceptual organisation of its parts into a whole, its intellectual structure" (13). I will not go to the extent of using an analogy from music, but my understanding of architecture includes the built environment along with the people who interact with this space and how they perceive it. In this sense, I regard the city as a totality that holds multiple architectures together which may begin from a bench at the park, go up the levels through street lamps, alleys, roads, and reach the level of buildings that were made to dwell in. The principal idea behind any building is as Heidegger puts it, "We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former dwelling, as its goal" (95).

The etymological origin of the word 'city' traces back to mid-13<sup>th</sup> century where it was originally used to denote 'any settlement' but was popularly used to refer to 'cathedral town.' Evolving from Latin word *civis/ civitas* which meant citizen/ citizenship, one could easily assume that the word 'city' is associated with both space and people equally. Man's evolution as a social animal is intrinsically connected to the cities he has built. All these cities, both real and imagined, inform us of what humans were and are at specific points in history. For the very same reason, reading cities contributes heavily in the process of measuring human progress.

James Carol Oates asks, "If the City is a text, how shall we read it?" (11). The fact that a city is as much cultural and imaginary as it is material makes this a crucial question. Building on the idea of space being produced by social practices and not as something that is primordial or naturally existing (Lefebvre), one could point out that a city is born out of ideas, dreams, myths, stories, etc. So reading a city would mean that one is reading all the above-mentioned spatial images, the hieroglyphics of which are to be deciphered in order to understand the social realities presented by them. The key step in this regard would be to analyse a literary text about a city through the lens of the 'third space,' a space where the real and the imaginary merge and thereby enhance the possibilities of employing literary cartography as a methodology to be followed.

Edward Soja formulated his theory of 'third space' from Lefebvre's writings in *The Production of Space* and the idea of concrete abstraction presented by Luis Borges in his short story "The Aleph."

The 'Trialectics of Spatiality' which he conceptualises in the book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* is a Marxist understanding of how social spaces are formed. With 'city' being the text here, the ideas of Soja provide us with new vistas to be explored about our perceptions of the 'city' and the related concepts.

The 'first' space, or the 'real' space, is explained by Soja as "the process of producing the material form of social spatiality, is thus presented as both medium and outcome of human activity, behavior, and experience" (66). This is straightforward, and we can say that here we have the real city with all its roads, streets, and buildings in front of us. We can access the traditional maps prepared by the cartographers or see and understand it through photographs, videos, or may be with our own physical presence. To elucidate and validate the arguments, we might need an example and hence, let us take the city of Dublin, which had appeared in most of the works of James Joyce. Frank Budgen in his work *James Joyce and the making of 'Ulysses,' and other writings* notes that Joyce wrote the chapter "Wandering Rocks" in *Ulysses* "with a map of Dublin before him on which were traced in red ink the paths of the Earl of Dudley and Father Conme" (124-125). In a way, Joyce depended on the available first space material as a raw material for his narrative.

In the 'second' space, or the 'imaginary' space, Joyce employs his artistic skills to demonstrate how people "identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (67). These are the spaces where ideas and ideologies dominate the production of spatial knowledge. In *Ulysses* we find a description about the Nelson's Pillar which goes like this: "Before Nelson's pillar trams slowed, shunted, changed trolley, started for Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey, Clonskea, Rathgar and Terenure, Palmerstown Park and upper Rathmines, Sandymount Green, Rathmines, Ringsend and Sandymount Tower, Harold's Cross" (227). David Spurr observes this as an act where a monument gets displaced from its imperial legacy even after being located at the centre of a metropolis. The overlooking and marginalisation of Nelson's Pillar is a product of people's/ Joyce's perception that got represented in an imaginary space. We would find this pillar getting destroyed in 1966 by the Irish Republican Army; an act that transferred the act of protest from the 'imaginary' to the 'real' space.

Frank Budgen quotes Joyce and tells us the intention Joyce had when he wrote *Ulysses*: "I want ... to give a complete picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth, it could be reconstructed out of my book" (69). This is the point where we meet the 'third' space in Joyce, the 'Aleph' that is impossible to be described. The 'counter-spaces' born through the merging of real and the imaginary are the "spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalised positioning" (Soja 68). Let us keep apart the criticism that has come up against Joyce about this statement as many critics found the descriptions provided by Joyce to be less competent in comparison to what he has given in *Dubliners*. On the contrary, let us analyse why this is 'The Aleph.' The counter-space is marginalised. The time when Joyce wrote the novel, the real space was dominating – Nelson's Pillar was a symbol of the mastery of imperialism over local administration. When the resistance took over, the Pillar itself was destroyed which made the simultaneous existence of the real and imagined, without dominating each other, impossible.

Many critics found Joyce's narrative lacking in descriptive details. Yet, he successfully produced a rhetoric of cartography with a postcolonial gaze, which provides a new challenge to cartographers to explore visualisations beyond geography and for critics to enhance the possibilities of analysing historical and historiographical writing through the analysis of the representation of architecture.

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