15 Mapping Literature: Towards a Geography of Fiction

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Abstract

Modern cartography has the ability to map almost any phenomenon for which spatial relationships are of primary relevance. While existing cartographic products cover already an enormous variety of topics, the visualisation of 'other' geographies gains more and more attention. These other geographies may not accord to the 'normal' spaces usually mapped, hence cartography is both challenged and forced to find uncommon solutions. Literature and its fictional spaces might serve as a fine example (but one could also think of soundscapes or emotions). Doubtlessly, the realm of fiction is defined by different 'rules' to the geography that cartography customarily addresses. This paper deals with two main questions: Firstly, how to map narratives and their complex spatial structure? Secondly, what do we achieve by mapping literature? By searching for some (provisional) answers, the horizon of a promising interdisciplinary research field – a future literary geography – becomes visible.

15.1 Introduction

Under the terms of literary theory a fictional or narrated world is made of three components: 1. characters , 2. plot/timeline, and 3. space. While characters and plot have been and are subject to countless philological studies, the topic of space and place in literature is rather neglected. Nevertheless, territorial and topographical aspects of literature have received renewed academic attention within the last decades (also labeled as the 'spatial turn' in humanities) – but so far no convincing

definition of the research area, no concise glossary, no methods or tools have been developed in order to approach these matters in a systematic way.

The main focus of a future 'literary geography' are the manifold interactions between real and imaginary geographies in various literary genres. What happens when the 'literary world' and the real world meet or intersect? Which boundaries should be shown: one, both, or a hybrid real world / literature world demarcation?

This chapter aims to present some thoughts, occurring problems, and elements of a theory *(Section 15.2)* and points out that this emerging field demands for a genuinely interdisciplinary approach. It then moves on towards first cartographic renderings of fictional spaces *(Section 15.3)* and discusses the tools and techniques to prepare the texts for mapping *(Section 15.4)*. Finally *(Section 15.5),* the paper outlines a larger research project that is currently entitled a 'Literary Atlas of Europe' (www.atlas-of-literature.eu).

15.2 Cartography and Literary Studies – A Meeting of Disciplines

It all starts with a surprisingly simple question: Where is fiction set? This question – as well as the variety of answers to it – leads quickly into 'a fugitive field' (Stableford 2003, xxxv), more precisely into a research area labeled as 'literary geography', but so far only established in its rudiments.

According to our own reading experience we know perfectly well that each literary work takes place somewhere. Moreover, it's impossible to even think literature without any spatial context. In many cases writers choose settings for their stories which have a 'realworld counterpart' – and they design these settings in a rather realistic way, sometimes even that realistic that one could as well use the novels in question as guidebooks to the described region or city. But literature has infinite options to deal with space (which makes it apparently so hard to map it in a sensible way). Of course, a setting doesn't have to be sketched realistically at all. It 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).

15.2.1 The Tradition of Literary Geography

Mapping literary spaces seems like a simple idea – but in fact it's a challenge for both critics and cartographers, a task which can be solved only in an interdisciplinary approach.

This becomes evident especially while looking at former stages of literary geography. Serving as an example of early literary geography is William Sharp's map from 1904.

The map displays Scotland and – in dark grey shade – the zone of action for several novels written by Walter Scott (among them the famous *Waverley*). In other words: As a map user you're able to see immediately where real and fictional space overlap. There is a rather long tradition of literary geography, dating back to the beginning of the 20th Century, with promising attempts in Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland and France. But the history of that (international) research field hasn't been written yet (for a draft and some map samples see Piatti 2008b). However, in the first stages of literary geography, scholars succeeded to visualise a couple of important aspects like the distribution of fictional settings ('gravity centres' vs. 'unwritten regions'). Nevertheless it has to be put on record, that most of these experiments remain on the

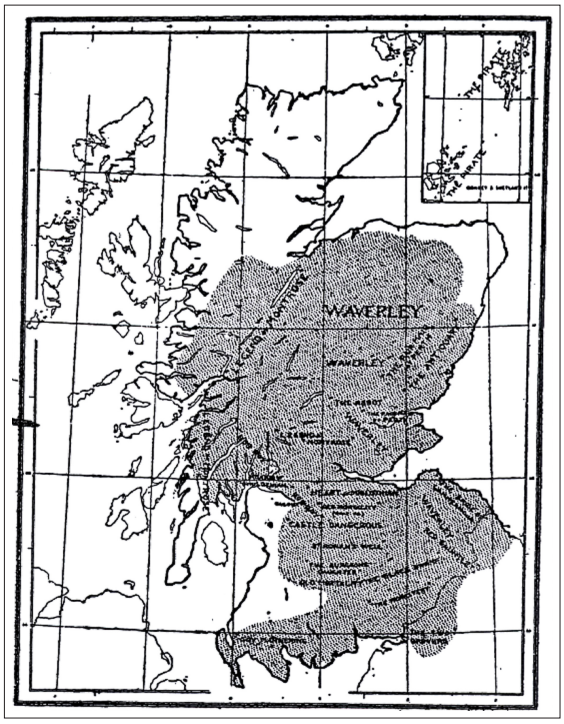

Fig. 15.1. Chief localities of Walter Scott's novels (Sharp 1904)

rudimentary level of an illustrative literary geography (that means: they basically support a written text without having a weight of their own).

Only with Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998) the beginning of a new era in literary geography is marked, where maps become truly tools of interpretation, allowing to see something which hasn't been evident before.

What is on display is a map of some of Jane Austen's most famous novels (like *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*); Moretti mapped the places, where the narration does start (triangles), and those where the plot comes to a happy or unhappy end (circles). You see again immediately that Austen could have had a whole lot more space on her disposal – but she didn't make use of this option. Writing her novels, she did deliberately not introduce colourful settings like London, the Lake District, or the Highlands in Scotland, and she neither turns west, to the "green Island" Ireland, nor east, to the continental geography. Her space, which supplies her with settings for many stories is quite narrow – it embraces only the pittoresque south of England, a peaceful area with fields and meadows, mansions and little villages, which are thoughtfully arranged in Austen's fictional worlds. Just think by comparison of plots with a significantly bigger geographical radius – like Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the latter with settings situated in various European countries and a showdown located in the arctic regions. Moretti himself comments on this first map in his *Atlas*, that it already contains all the secrets of literary geography: You read books, focussing on spatial aspects, then you design a map – finally, you have a look at that map, and hopefully you discover things you didn't know before: New insights which are generated by that map.

Fig. 15.2. Jane Austen's England (Moretti 1998)

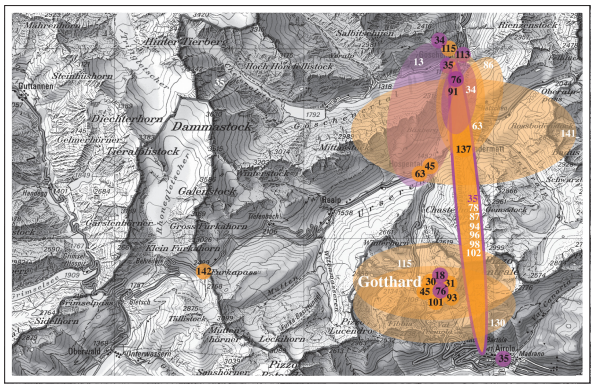

Fig. 15.3. Literary settings in the Gotthard region, Switzerland (Piatti 2008b)

Based on Moretti and developing his ideas further, Barbara Piatti wrote a monography about the exciting perspectives of literary geography, though still being restricted to static maps (Piatti 2008b).

The map (see Fig. 15.3) presents a small extract of a famous and dense literary landscape: Mount Gotthard, situated in the middle of Switzerland. As a background in a variety of grey shades you see a topographical map of the Gotthard and its surroundings. Silhouetted in coloured ellipses and single dots the socalled literary metaspace becomes visible (ellipses = settings which can be indicated *vaguely*, as a zone; dots = settings which can be localised *precisely*). The prominent narrow, long shape symbolises the Gotthard tunnel. What we're able to spot immediately are the unwritten regions, covering distant valleys and mountain peaks, and the wealth of literature around Mount Gotthard, above and below ground. While the orange colour has been chosen for settings of fictional texts written by Swiss authors, the violet indicates settings described by foreign authors, among them Friedrich Schiller and August Strindberg. Although this last example offers a distinction between vague and precise localisation (ellipses vs. dots), and it also contains additional information about the settings (written by Swiss vs. foreign writers), it is obvious that literary geography needs refined, more flexible mapping solutions. It's also worth notifying that the majority of former approaches in the field of literary geography are made by non-mapmakers – surprisingly enough cooperation between critics and cartographers hasn't been established so far.

15.2.2 Towards a New Literary Geography

Moving to the next level means to work with interactive tools and mapping solutions. Moreover, a new literary geography should first of all follow some essential thoughts, which outline something like a philosophy of this emerging field. There

are at least three aspects that make fictional spaces so unique – and consequently so difficult to map.

First of all, there must be an agreement about referentiality between geospace and textual spaces. That means: Fictional spaces don't have to, but can feature references towards the geospace (first space, actual space). Moreover, it's a fact, that both writers and readers are tempted by the option of anchoring texts somehow in the(ir) real world. On the other hand, authors also indulge in creating entirely new worlds with totally imaginary settings. These options – both faint and strong correspondences between geospace and textual space, as well as various connections that can be discovered to exist somewhere inbetween – have to be taken into account.

Second, narrated spaces don't have definite borders (with some very rare exceptions). Usually, cartography works with hard boundaries to show the edges of phenomenon mapped. A place, or the limits of one element mapped can be accurately described. But, when mapping literature, a 'soft' boundary might be more appropriate, whereby less accurate definitions about where exactly the 'edge' of a world of a particular piece of literature ends.

Finally (and connected with the two other aspects discussed above), fiction is sometimes hard to localise, whereby settings are located 'somewhere', with no precise correspondences to a given section of the geospace. This forms a problem for cartographers – where to locate settings when there are no geographic 'hooks' on which to 'hang' these elements of literature. Cartographers will need to hunt for clues about location, follow inferred routes and demarcate boundaries which refuse to accord to 'traditional' cartographic rules.

In short: The geography of fiction must be characterised as a rather *imprecise* geography. Additionally, it has to be pointed out, that there are virtually unlimited possibilities in literature – in literature you can create any space, hence there's the necessity to break these possibilities down into a coherent system. If you do so, be prepared to lose something – the complexity of a fictional text you encounter while performing a close reading (we lose style, vocabulary, psychology to name just a few elements) – but you also gain new insights (see *Sections 15.3* and *15.4*). The explicit goal is to visibly render the specific geography of literature, but in a most sensible way, by paying respect to the logic of fictional space. In doing so, some parts of the geography of literature may prove to be unmappable. This is a different geography to map, requiring the exploration and development of different mapping techniques.

In order to design such an imprecise geography, visualisation models for single texts as well as for huge amounts of texts (statistical approach) have to be developed. In both cases literary geography should be much more than mere cartographic illustration or a support to scholarly literature in which everything is already said. Quite the contrary literary maps are meant to be tools of interpretation, powerful analytical instruments.

15.3 Imprecise Geography: Mapping Solutions for Single Texts

To map a fictional space, first of all the text (i.e. a novel, a novella, a short story) has to be read and prepared carefully, by breaking down the spatial structure into single elements and their respective functions. There are, according to our newly developed system, five main categories of which a fictional space consists. The following table offers an overview with some explications:

Table 15.1. Spatial elements of a fictional text

category	explication/definition
setting	where the action takes place (i.e. a house, a village)
zone of action	several settings combined (i.e. a whole city, a region)
projected space	characters are not present there, but are dreaming of, remembering, longing for a specific place
marker	a place which is mentioned, but not part of the categories above; markers indicate the geographical range and horizon of a fictional space
route	along which characters are moving: by foot, by train, on horseback etc.

Every topographical or geographical notion within the narrative belongs to one of these categories. This is already part of the preparation: The process of designing visualisations that depict geographies of literature is a process of translation. One set of symbols – text – is translated to another set of symbols – map symbols.

In the following a selected narrative will shortly be presented. It will serve as an example of how literary space might be visualised (with the exception of routes for which no symbolisation has been developed yet).

The exemplary text being analysed is Ernst Zahn's historical novel *Albin Indergand*, published in 1901 (Zahn 1981), set in the rocky regions and steep valleys at the north side of Mount Gotthard, Switzerland. The narrated events take place between 1789 und 1798, it's a rather simple story about the friendship between a devoted priest in a poor mountain farmer's village and an outcast, Albin, who struggles to find the right way in his life. During that process Albin has to deal with psychic (including a disastrous, tornamenting love affair) as well as physical catastrophes (landslide, war). But in the end he marries the love he had already met in his childhood, becomes the head of the village and lives happily ever after.

The map shown here (see *Figure 15.4)* makes use of visual information separation. The background consists of a topographical base map, reduced to a grey scale image. On top of the base map, thematic information from the analysed texts is superimposed and symbolised.

15.3.1 Topographic Markers

The large number of visually highlighted place names might strike the map reader first. These names are pointing to places that have been mentioned in the text but do not play otherwise a prominent role. Graphically, they imitate a highlighter whose fluorescent colours are occasionally used to visually mark important words or phrases in a text. They help a reader to reduce a lengthy text to a few key words and enable him or her to improve orientation or retrieve a text passage. Similarly, topographic markers assist a mapreader to visually grasp the geographic horizon of the analysed text. Typically, they are directly transferred from a text.

Topographic markers are commonly occurring and often surround the locations where actions take place and thus delimit the geographic space that is taken by a text. Considering specific collections of texts, the distribution of topographic markers will provide an idea of the geography of an author, a genre of literature, or a certain time period. This method might be appropriate for a relatively small number of texts but cannot be applied to large text corpora, since too many symbols would impair the readability of a map. For such cases, statistical methods would be more appropriate as will be alluded to in *Section 15.4.*

Colour is used to further categorise the geographic elements of a text and their relation to the geospace. The prevalent maroon colour tells that an existing place from the real world has been *imported* into a text. If a place (and/or its name) has been *transformed,* that is, it has been altered or renamed, the maroon colour changes to an orange shade, whereas completely invented settings will turn to a yellow colouring. As will be shown below, a colour coding scheme has been worked out to further categorise settings from literary texts.

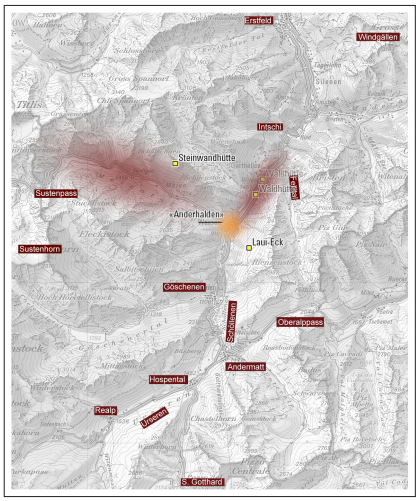

Fig. 15.4. The geography of Zahn's novel *Albin Indergand*

15.3.2 Fuzzy Shapes

The gesture that is related to topographic markers is that of pointing to a specific location. In many cases, however, there is much more uncertainty about the 'real' geography in literature. The blurred, diffuse and fuzzy coloured shapes on the map shown in *Figure 15.4* are intended to portray places, which are only vaguely known in their spatial dimensions. To put it in other words: A specific feature of a literary space is its numerous gaps – all you can detect on the spatial level is reduced, incomplete information. You have to imagine a fictional space – as presented in a text – as a foggy zone, with a few key elements, but often enough with no precise spatial relations between single settings and with no precise borders. These fuzzy shapes graphically express a typical gesture for imprecision, a circular or elliptical motion that forms a rather smudged shape. Size and proportion reflect the possible extent of the area of imprecision. For cartographical presentation, this gesture has been graphically translated to homogenous, smooth, and symmetrical shapes that avoid distinct borders. They do not force map editors to draw distinct lines and prevent mapreaders from measuring exact distances between, to, or from such shapes.

The fuzzy shapes in the maps above inform the mapreader about settings and zones of action that can only vaguely be located and whose extent is unclear. Again, the maroon colour tells that the geographic place is imported in the text. The orange coloured fuzzy shape points out that the place is renamed but that there is an agreement about the real existing place it stands for. The map from Zahn's text reveals the setting of the village of Wassen as being renamed to "Anderhalden". The crossed out and the newly placed name label indicates this place name transformation. While a set of warm colours ranging from red to yellow is used to show areas where action takes place, a different set of rather cold colours ranging from violet to cyan is used to denote projected spaces, a character thinks of, remembers, is longing for or imagines but is neither present nor acting at these places:

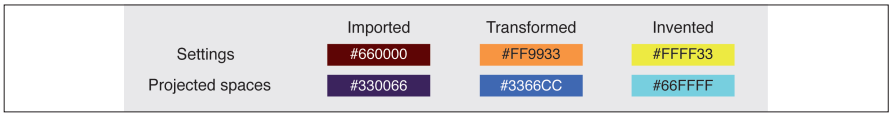

Fig. 15.5. Colour coding scheme

Imprecision with regard to geographic places is commonly found in literature. From a cartographic point of view it would not be appropriate to more precisely locate and symbolise such places in a map than what is known. Ideally, imprecision should be shown as precisely as possible such that it provides the most appropriate impression of imprecision. Traditionally, cartography has not worried much about imprecision. Precision and accuracy has been regarded as a state, that could never be reached but at least aimed for.

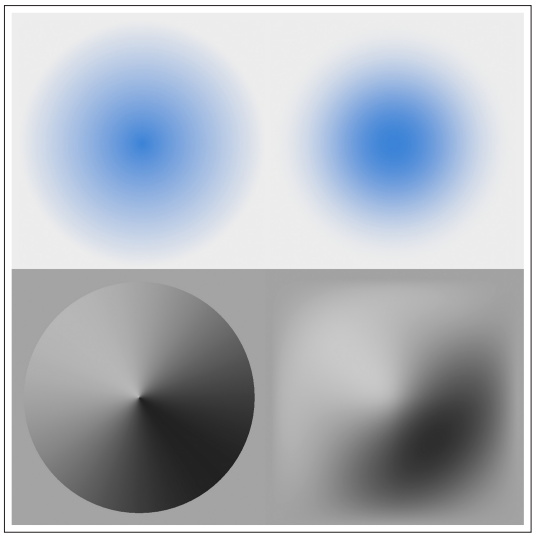

Fig. 15.6. The construction of fuzzy shapes. Upper row: fuzzy shapes, bottom row: shaded display (left column: linear function, right column: Bézier surface)

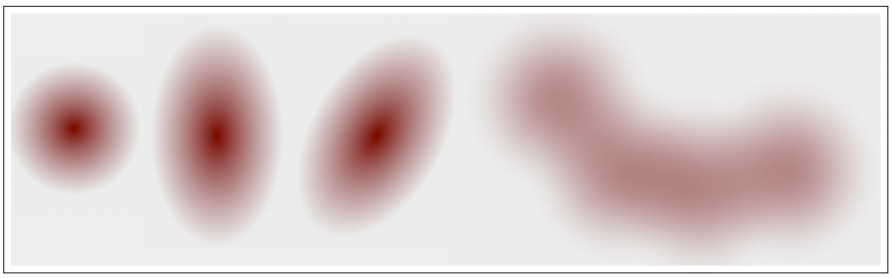

Fig. 15.7. Adaptation of fuzzy shapes. From left to right: Circular, elliptical, rotated, and multipart shape

The approach followed in the map example uses a shape that continuously reduces the opacity from the centre to the peripheral. A first attempt using a linear function reveals that the most intense part is a rather small area and a border can still be detected (see *Figure 15.6)*. Geometrically, this function describes the surface of a cone and is discontinuous at the centre and at the peripheral. This becomes evident when a shading is applied to the surface of the body. A more appropriate surface that avoids these shortcomings would be a rotated period of a sine wave or a Bézier surface with tangents laying on a horizontal plane. A Bézier surface also allows a variable flattening of the central part.

Among the properties of the proposed shapes are radial symmetry which makes the shapes independent of orientation, its smoothness and its simple parameterisation which takes automatic generation into account. If unequally scaled the presentation

of imprecision can be oriented in the space. Furthermore, due to the smoothness, single shapes can be combined to build more complex areas. Last, but not least, such shapes can be drawn sufficiently fast.

15.3.3 Animated Symbols

If settings denote a specific location rather than an area, fuzzy shapes are no longer an appropriate means of representation. The gesture that is related to present such settings is that of successively pointing at different locations. Or, to put it differently, it is a series of snapshots of the gesture of imprecision. Whereas the village of Anderhalden is shown as a fuzzy shape, the settings with the huts in the Reuss valley and the region of the Susten Pass are presented by animated symbols. The yellow colour of the point symbols suggest that these settings are invented locations and do not refer to existing real places.

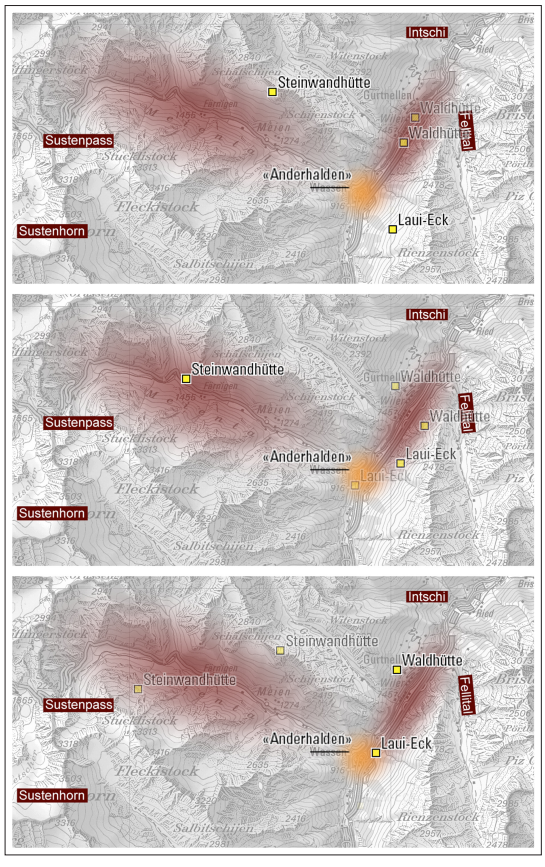

Fig. 15.8. Animated symbols from Zahn's novel shown as a series of snapshots

The animated symbols pop up equally distributed at random locations within a given area. This is mainly to express that there are different possible locations rather a movement or a dislocation of the setting (not a mobile setting). The place name is shown simultaneously with the symbol and uses a mask to enhance the contrast to the background map. In order not to overemphasise the meaning of such settings and to give them the appropriate visual weight a number of measures have been taken. Firstly, the animation period has been increased to up to eight seconds. Secondly, in order not to loose focus, the symbol softly fades in and out and thirdly, the animated symbols partly overlap such that the symbol at the new location appears before the previous symbol completely vanishes. Furthermore, to express the independency of the settings, the animations use slightly different period lengths. The smooth blending is achieved by a sine wave that modulates the transparency of the symbols.

15.3.4 Alternative Mapping Solutions

For some elements and aspects of the literary space conventional mapping clearly meets its limits. How to map journeys of the characters if the only information the text delivers are some indications about stopovers or intermediate stations – while the rest of the route stays literally in the dark? The structure of literary settings is (as discussed above) fragmentary. This does apply even more for dynamic elements within the narrated space like routes and paths. For one character's strolling through a city there are dozens of options, especially if the only hint the text offers is a vague direction (i.e. from the outskirts of a town towards the centre). Obviously it can't be the idea to reconstruct and map such a way in a pseudo-precise manner (this would clearly work against the intention of the text). Another major problem is caused by the category of completely imaginary settings without any references to the geospace. If there's no option at all to use a background map, only some schematic relations between the settings, arranged on a white surface, might be indicated.

In these cases a map need not necessarily be the best visualisation. Information graphics may 'paint' a better picture of geography and human movement through it than could maps. Take for instance the London Underground map. Its designer, Harry Beck, made the map more usable and an effective communicator about how to move about London (see Garland 1994). His original design moved away from the concept that the maps had to follow the actual geographical route of the lines. What were critical to Beck's design were connections: the interchanges between the various lines. It is these connections and the simple information graphics that make the map 'work', irrespective of whether the user is a seasoned London commuter or a tourist arriving at the capital for the first time. This example illustrates how reality is sometimes depicted better if non-realistic maps are used in preference to geographically correct maps.

Considering information graphics and their 'relaxed' considerations of geographical accuracy, can this concept be applied to visualising certain aspects of geographies of literature? Does the visualisation need to be faithful to geography? It might be worth investigating to ascertain if design strategies from this discipline area might be employed, particularly in regard to routes/journeys of characters and to completely imaginary settings.

15.4 The Quantitative Approach: A Database for Fictional Spaces

If we're aiming towards a literary atlas of Europe, methods of literary geography must be applicable to huge numbers of texts. So far, focus has been laid on an individual analysis and visualisation of the geographic space of single texts. While this is a valuable means for literary geography, a more systematic approach is envisioned that proceeds from a geography of single texts to a geography of literature as a whole. What is actually needed are consistent criteria for text selections and guidance of how to analyse such texts. A crucial point will be the identification of the type of information that is to store which also allows the application of statistical methods and the answering of questions on an upper level of abstraction.

The working process has to be imagined as a rather complex interplay between text hermeneutics and cartographic rendering. The core of the project and the crossing point of the two disciplines – literary studies and cartography – is a database that stores information about fictional spaces and is moreover the basis for automatically generated maps. As said before, it is necessary to refine topographical and geographical references of fictional texts to a consistent system – by assigning them to the main categories introduced above. But in addition to the function of the elements and their relation to the geospace there are other aspects to consider in each category. Via these so called metadata you will get a detailed, dense description of an individual fictional space. Some examples regarding that additional information:

- *Toponmy:* The place notation in the text might differentiate between actual and historical terms, between renamed and invented as well as paraphrased and nameless settings. This information is used to label the settings.
- *Spatial precision:* Quality indications show how precisely you can localise settings or projected spaces on a map, with the options precise, zonal and indefinite.
- *Function of the space:* This category indicates, if settings fulfil a specific task which goes beyond a simple background. This includes serving as a thematic background, but also the case of a possible protagonistic status of the setting, be it in a physical (i.e. avalanches, landslides, storm tide) or in a poetological sense (i.e. when an urban setting scares the characters, appears like a labyrinth or trap).

- *Special attributes:* If there are clues for a mythic or an allegorical/symbolical layer of meaning, it can be pointed up in this category.

Reading the texts, interpreting them and finally entering the data is defined as the work package of the literary experts. Meanwhile the cartographers are engaged in the next steps of the process: Maps in different scales have to be prepared. On one hand largescale maps are needed for fiction that is taking place at townlevel. It is possible to show important places and buildings, the author introduces for his story and to follow the ways characters are taking through the streets. On the other hand fiction can have a much wider geographic horizon, when acting in different areas, countries or continents. In that case mediumscale and smallscale maps provide an overview of the geographical background of the fiction.

To set up the automatic map generation process, further research has to be done regarding historical changes within the geospace. Firstly, important shifts and changes of political borders have to be taken into account. Secondly, the geospace is continuously subject of physical changes, for instance due to permanent variations in coastal and mountain regions or to the spread of a growing town.

Combining the entered data with the customised symbology and the cartographic material, the system is meant to generate literary maps automatically.

Once working, there will be options to manually adjust the symbology if necessary. These so called 'push-and-pull-tools' should enable the literary researcher to locate the objects more precisely or to change the shape of the symbols, according to the actual information the text is offering.

Besides creating any map automatically on request, working digitally offers other huge advantages, e.g.: The entered metadata and comments can be added as hyperlinks, extra tables or text next to the maps. Using an interactive device, the user is also able to adjust the information the way he or she needs it. Complexe questions might be asked and answered: In the interactive version of the atlas, the geography of a single author, a group of writers, or a particular historical epoch can be called up, as well as the literary geography of a minority or of an entire nation. One could ask: Are there epochspecific settings? Is there a typical Storm and Stress ('Sturm und Drang') landscape, a landscape of Romanticism, is there a site of Expressionism? Some questions could even be answered for the first time: are there works or types of works that are specifically set in imaginary places and others that are better suited for referential settings?

These requests can evaluate a relatively huge number of texts, making statistical methods necessary. Assuming a text corpus of a region might contain hundreds or even thousands of settings, traditional cartographic methods of portraying single settings will fail. Following a statistical approach, the focus of interest will be shifting from single settings to the visualisation of spatial distributions and patterns those settings describe. In order to answer questions as mentioned above it will be necessary to determine and visualise the 'densitiy' of the literary space. Such maps

can be created automatically from database queries and might serve for comparison and animation.

15.5 Outlook: A Prototype of a Literary Atlas of Europe

Within the scope of our current project, entitled "A Literary Atlas of Europe" (www.atlas-of-literature.eu), the potential of such mapping, both for single texts and huge amounts of textual material, will be demonstrated via the example of three differently endowed model regions: a sublime Alpine landscape (Lake Lucerne/Mount Gotthard in Switzerland), a coastal border area, an amphibian landscape between water and land (North Frisia in Germany), and a multilayered urban space, a hot spot of world literature (Prague, Czech Republic). The literary permeation of these three spaces is examined within a time frame of about 250 years, from approx. 1750 to the present. A selection of 200 to 900 texts for each of the three model regions serves as a starting point for the critics. Through the interplay between these materials, the database, the mapping solution, the interpretations and comments a prototype of a literary atlas will be provided. In the end, as a last step, the resulting maps have to be analysed and commented by the literary scholars. In other words: They start to write single chapters of a future literary atlas of Europe. The idea is to develop methods which can be applied to any other geographical region and on any other selection of fictional texts. Once the system runs, the atlas could grow in an additive way: Other researchers and research groups may join the project by mapping selected literary landscapes and cities about which they could provide expert knowledge.

As a matter of fact, methods of literary geography could open a new dimension to literary studies. A literary geography as outlined above is a comparative and quantitative approach. Moreover, a broad range of questions is going to be dealt with, some of them indeed for the first time: Are there still any geographic areas entirely undocumented in literature? How densely settled by fictional works is a particular space? How internationally occupied is it? Or is the space inscribed almost exclusively by native authors? Under which conditions (political-historical not least) does the (imaginary) space of literature contract, and under which does it expand? As stated already above: The geography of a single author, a group of writers, or a particular literary-historical epoch can be called up, as well as the literary geography of a minority or of an entire nation. What comes in sight is Europe's (imaginary) space of literature, which has its own dimensions, which functions according to its own rules, but which is nevertheless anchored in the 'reality' of existing spaces and places. In the process, not only are the literary riches of single regions illuminated, but also, fictionalised landscapes and cities in all of Europe can be examined comparatively, in the sense of a literary-geographical system.

In the end the literary atlas project has more than one beneficial aspect: For the

cartographers it's a new field with an extensive theory, it is both an invitation and a challenge to explore visualisations within the frame of an imprecise geography. For the critics it can be described as a chance to rewrite the histories of literature in a most attractive way as well as an option to combine a huge amount of single studies into an overarching project. For them and other users (e. g. pupils, students, teachers, the community of readers in a whole) it offers a spatially and no longer chronologically organised history of Europe's literary heritage and ongoing production – which does not stop at national or linguistic borders.

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