PAULS DAIJA, BENEDIKTS KALNAČS

Exploring Space and Place in Literature: Towards Digital Analysis and Literary Mapping in the Context of Latvian Cultural History[1]

Annotation: This paper focuses on the digital analysis of Latvian novels (46 in total) published between 1900 and 1914. By elaborating this corpus of texts and detecting and scrutinizing different facets of space representation, we ask questions in regard to the possibilities, as well as potential predicaments of the use of the methodology of digital humanities when applied to the interpretation of literary texts. We are especially interested in the representations of enlargement of geographical space in the novels and the ways in which the literary representations are linked to historical and social events. In the final part, , we discuss how the outcomes of digital analysis play a part in the process of canon-building in Latvian literature, and what similarities and differences prevail in texts included in the literary canon and in those remaining on the periphery. The conclusion further relates these issues to the nation-building process of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latvia.

Keywords: Latvian novel, literary canon, literary cartography, literary geography, nation-building.

Introduction: The corpus and the most important research questions

The paper explores preliminary conclusions of the research of literary geography of the early twentieth-century Latvian novels.

Our research questions have been stimulated by recent trends in literary studies closely linked to the rise of digital humanities. We take into account and develop ideas that the "imaginative writer functions as a kind of mapmaker," and that "narrative especially operates as a form of mapping."[2] Even though studies of literary geography have already started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,[3] interpretations have acquired new energy and strength in the context of the so-called "spatial turn" in the humanities in the 1980s.[4] In the 1990s, this paved the way for the cartographic approach promoted by Malcolm Bradbury and, especially by Franco Moretti, who explicitly sought "to recast literary mapping as a rich method of academic enquiry."[5] During the last twenty years, the development of digital humanities has in response initiated the advent of new research trends, such as literary geography, literary cartography, and geocriticism.[6]

In our investigation, we focus on the period between 1900 and 1914. We have selected this period because of the high mobility of Latvian population in those years. Furthermore, the events of that time substantially contributed to the transformation of the aesthetic and thematic scope of Latvian literature. Already at the end of the nineteenth century we can observe a growing tendency in the migration of ethnic Latvians to the central regions of imperial Russia due

---

2   Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality*, London/New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 7.

3   For one of the first descriptive approaches see: William Sharp, *Literary Geography*, London: Pall Mall, 1904.

4   The "spatial turn" was discussed in more detail for the first time in: Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Criticial Social Theory*, London: Verso, 1989.

5   Peta Mitchell, "Literary Geography and the Digital: The Emergence of Neogeography," in: Robert T. Tally (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, London/New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 86. See also: Malcolm Bradbury, *The Atlas of Literature*, London: De Agostini Editions, 1996; Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*, London/ New York: Verso, 1998.

6   In developing the methodology of literary geography, cartography, and geocriticism as study disciplines in the humanities, important impulses have been provided by the investigations of Rober T. Tally and Bertrand Westphal. See especially: Robert T. Tally (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*; Bertrand Westphal, *The Plausible World: A Geocritical Approach to Space, Place, and Maps*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. More on the development of the discipline and its current issues see: Emmanuelle Peraldo, "Introduction. The Meeting of Two Practices of Space: Literature and Geography," in: Emmanuelle Peraldo (ed.), *Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space throughout History*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p. 1–16.

to economic reasons. In addition, the consequences of the 1905 uprising in the tsarist state caused the emigration of a number of Latvian intellectuals, who fled to Northern and Western European countries, and even to the USA. Due to these reasons, some of the most important Latvian authors of this period created their literary texts outside Latvia. Characteristic examples are Rainis and Aspazija, who stayed in Switzerland between 1906 and 1920, Ernests Birznieks-Upītis, who lived in the Caucasus (mainly Azerbaijan) from 1893 till 1921, and Jānis Akuraters, who spent two years, 1907 and 1908, as a refugee in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. This situation was not completely unprecedented in Latvian social history, since already in the nineteenth century there were students at the universities abroad, especially in the Estonian town of Tartu, as well as in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The unique characteristic of the early twentieth century is linked to the multidirectional nature of the emigration of ethnic Latvians, who, depending on their circumstances and whether it was voluntary or enforced, went both to the West and to the East. In the second decade, the established migration patterns were expanded by the early World War I refugees.

Still finding itself in the process of accumulating knowledge and experience, the Latvian literary culture was open to different impressions that substantially contributed to the rapid development on a scale that has not been matched by any other historical period. It was due to this intense accumulation of experience that early twentieth-century Latvian literature consisted of "a glittering constellation of authors [...] who, overcoming earlier feelings of lagging behind other European nations and literatures, mirrored contemporary aesthetic developments, a process enriched by the variety of topical issues represented through the prism of ethnic Latvian mentality."[7]

---

7   Inese Treimane, "Dzeja," in: Viktors Hausmanis (ed.), *Latviešu literatūras vēsture. 1. sējums. No rakstītā vārda sākumiem līdz 1918. gadam,* Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1998, p. 253. Translations from the Latvian language sources are by the authors of the paper. Approach based on quantitative analysis and mapping enlarges the scope of interpretations of this rich and colourful period of literary development. It has been our special interest to detect the mutual interaction between the mentioned developments, which include travel and better acquaintance with different European literatures, and changes, as well as transformations of the represented literary space; the relation between the canonical literary texts of the time and publications related to the sphere of mass culture. We opt to create a preliminary basis for further investigations, aiming at a detailed analysis of literary and geographical space represented in canonical, as well as marginal literary texts. Our sources are Latvian novels

I. Literary cartography: methodological principles

Literary cartography presupposes a quantitative gathering and elaboration of data creating a new corpus of information that can also raise additional questions. Moretti underlines that literary maps "are a good way to prepare a text for analysis. You choose a unit – walks, lawsuits, luxury goods, whatever – find its occurrences, place them in space... or in other words: you *reduce* the text to a few elements, and *abstract* them from the narrative flow, and construct a new, *artificial* object like the maps. [...] these maps will be *more than the sum of their parts*: they will possess 'emerging' qualities, which were not visible at the lower level."[8]

The first step in our approach was marked by an identification of all places encountered in the texts. Through this process, a large body of data was collected, and small text samples linked to each of the identified locations. The events were thus contextualized in terms of space, supplied by relevant information with regard to chronological co-ordinates, such as the period, when the plot unfolds and the time, when the particular novel was written and published.

The approach that identifies all places encountered in the novels opens up possibilities for an analysis of a variety of geographical locations, as well as the changes in geographical approaches towards literary fiction during the early twentieth century. For example, it has been possible to link the available data about the migration processes, including the wave of emigration following the 1905 uprising, to the trends of space representation. A corresponding dynamics has been detected, when the statistics of geographical data are grouped according to the publication data of the novels. This information can be supplemented by linking the periods of emigration of particular writers to the texts published during this time. Another interesting facet has opened up through the juxtaposition of the representation of space in historical novels and the novels in which

---

(46 in total) published between 1900 and 1914. The selection of data has been carried out in co-operation with specialists in digital humanities, who worked on the tools applicable to the digital mapping of the novels. Through this process, the information about geographical locations was visualized, and the methodology for the classification of these locations based on their function in the text was developed.

8   Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, London/New York: Verso, 2007, p. 53. Moretti's emphasis.

the action takes place in the time of their publishing. In all these cases, quantitative and statistical analysis supplements the observations gathered through a close reading of the novels based on the interpretation of thematic patterns.[9]

Such investigations will potentially give results comparable to similar projects already carried out on a broader scale. The projects that have settled a path to follow include, for example, *Viennavigator*,[10] *Authorial London*,[11] and *Mapping St. Petersburg*.[12] Thus, the employed methodology presupposes the analysis on both macro- and micro-levels.

The contextualization of places creates the background for an analysis of the social geography of literary texts.[13] When employing this perspective, it is also important to take into account descriptions that are not linked to particular places but rather to generalized categories, such as streets, squares, restaurants as the markers of urban space, and paths, meadows, and nature objects in rural space.

From this perspective it is important to distinguish between literary geography and literary cartography that constitute "two distinct yet interrelated

---

9 In the process of further elaboration of the acquired information, we indicate the following areas of investigation: 1) with the focus on the localities, where the specific events unfold it is possible to reflect on the juxtaposition of such fundamental categories as the countryside and the city, or the native and foreign lands (home and the wider world); 2) the analysis of places encountered in the texts and their contextualization allows for detecting the changing patterns of relations between the literary and empirical space; 3) an emphasis on the dynamics of movement as revealed in spatial terms helps to indicate both real and imagined travels of the protagonists; and 4) statistical analysis of places allows for drawing conclusions about the expansion or narrowing down of the geographical space at a particular time. Special attention can be paid to the regions canonized through the representations in the most highly valued literary texts, and to the close connectivity in the relations between these representations and empirical reality. In addition to the quantitative analysis applied to the whole corpus that allows speculations in regard to more specific dynamics in the rise and fall of the popularity of certain geographical areas, the acquired data enable a more detailed characterization of the geographical space dealt with in particular novels. This can be achieved either through the creation of digital maps of the respective texts, or by scrutinizing specific locations in different novels.

10 http://viennavigator.metaspots.net/front/desktop [Last accessed May 7, 2018]

11 https://authorial.stanford.edu/#0 [Last accessed May 7, 2018]

12 http://www.mappingpetersburg.org/site/?page_id=20 [Last accessed May 7, 2018]

13 Here it is possible to use the example provided by Moretti (*Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 44). In his comparison of the contrasting descriptions of London and rural areas of England, Moretti points towards specific associations linked to particular places or groups of places.

areas of enquiry."[14] While literary geography – the term established as early as in 1904[15] – "is generally concerned with the geographical analysis of literary works,"[16] the focus of literary cartography as a subfield of the former is focused on the creation of maps, abstract symbols and diagrams, and oriented towards quantitative methods of investigation.[17] Contemporary research projects and their preliminary results suggest that the conclusions that can be drawn from this study subfield can be divided into several categories. Some of these serve to confirm the knowledge acquired in the process of analysing the literary texts, but without the specific use of mapping tools are best used for illustrative purposes. Some suggest new issues and questions that are to be addressed at a later stage of investigation.[18] Still another category consists of a substantial expansion of a previous understanding of the text either based on the application of quantitative methods, or one acquired through the process of so-called distant reading that "allows the literary scholar to see and analyze latent spatio-temporal, spatio-cultural, and socio-spatial patterns in and across literary texts."[19]

Several restrictions should also be taken into account. They are linked to both the historical specificity of particular cultures, as well as to literary conventions. Research carried out in the field often separates texts that suit the aims of literary cartography in varying degrees. One such division, for example, is made between realist and postmodernist novels.[20] We should also keep in mind

---

14 Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," in: *Literary Mapping in the Digital Age*, ed. by David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson, and Patricia Murrieta-Flores, London/New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 88.

15 See footnote 3.

16 Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," p. 89.

17 On the genesis and development of literary cartography, see: David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson and Patricia Murrieta-Flores, "Introduction. Rethinking Literary Mapping," in: David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson, Patricia Murrieta-Flores (eds.), *Literary Mapping in the Digital Age*, London/New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 7.

18 On the issue of 'further questions' consult Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," p. 94.

19 Peta Mitchell, "Literary Geography and the Digital: The Emergence of Neogeography," p. 86. In several of his publications, Moretti explains both the concept of "distant reading," as well as the idea of knowledge, otherwise inaccessible to critical inquiry.

20 "When considering the development of literary cartography, it becomes apparent that certain types of literary works are more amenable to spatial representation than others. For instance, whereas the mapping of nineteenth-century realist novels provides in most cases,

that the representation of literary space in early twentieth-century texts often has different levels of suitability, when it comes to the issue of defining specific locations. For example, it is a widespread convention that a specific location in a novel is only marked by the initial letter of the place. Frequently spaces described in the texts are not real but rather imagined locations.

Such an approach is often used in the portrayal of rural areas. The representation of literary space may vary considerably; for example, we may encounter abstract generalizations in cases, when the events unfold in an unnamed nearby parish while in contrast, distant places (such as big cities or continents) are characterized by the use of their real names. It also frequently happens that the authors mention locations that are well-known to the readers, but which may not have any real importance in the plot development. A tendency involving only passing mention of the place, where the events unfold, as juxtaposed to the elaborate characteristics of locations peripheral in the plot is also quite widespread. This might contribute to an inquiry of the relations between the representations of the local and the global in literary geography. An investigation of the frequency of the appearance of different locations in literary texts certainly deserves a more detailed investigation.

Due to these reasons, it is important to follow the model set by the *Literary Atlas of Europe*[21] that proposes the classification of places into several categories: (a) the setting of the events; (b) projected spaces and places; and (c) topographical markers or locations with no significant role in the plot development.[22]

Whereas the first and the second levels point to the links between the literary representation and empirical reality (for example, in cases when the population migration from rural areas to towns and industrial cities, especially Riga, can be detected, or movements lead to other more distant locations for the purposes of profit or education), the third level suggests the possibilities for more abstract generalizations. These may include speculations with regard to the changing perception of space in the early twentieth century due to the development

---

convincing and valuable results, the mapping of much postmodern fiction is far more challenging and poses far more questions and problems than solutions." Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," p. 89.

21 http://www.literaturatlas.eu/en/ [Last accessed May 7, 2018]

22 Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," p. 92.

of technologies and various media that enable a better acquaintance, even if often only from hearsay of more distant lands and places.[23] These observations are closely linked to the social history of literature, and literary geography is well suited for the purposes of studies of the history of mentality.[24]

2. Literary geography

The material obtained from the corpus of Latvian novels opens up possibilities not only for innovative interpretations of the aesthetic qualities of literary texts, but also suggests links to research that is more interdisciplinary in nature. It has been emphasized that "literary geography is not always as simple as the registration of 'real' social spaces in an 'imaginary' textual world,"[25] and that "this body of research is grappling with theoretical, methodological, and political questions thrown up by geovisualisation."[26] This provides material for a dialogue among

---

23 We might hypothetically presume that most of the geographical allusions in nineteenth-century texts were linked to the places encountered in the Old Testament. A fascinating research topic is suggested by the idea to follow the changes in literary representations through which biblical imagery is being replaced by a contemporary and secular one.

24 On mentalities, see further: Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 42. All mentioned aspects presuppose and suggest not only a quantitative and static analysis of the novel corpus, but a dynamic interpretation that pays particular attention to the specificity of functions allocated to each of the described categories.

In future, the proposed typology should be extended in order to include other potential levels of investigation as already suggested by current research in the field. Thus, attention has been paid to such categories as (a) the zone of action, specified in order to account for narratives that combine several different settings, and (b) paths and routes, created in order to account for the movement of characters between different locations. (Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," p. 92-93) This development also presupposes not only the gathering of data extracted from the corpus, but also a thematically focused analysis of literary texts. (See further: Barbara Piatti, Anne-Kathrin Reuschel, Hans Rudolf Bär, William Cartwright and Lorenz Hurni, "Mapping Literature: Towards a Geography of Fiction," in: William Cartwright, Georg Gartner and Antje Lehn (eds.), *Cartography and Art, Lecture Notes in Geoinformation and Cartography*, Heidelberg: Springer, 2009, p. 177–192)

25 Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality*, p. 8.

26 Peta Mitchell, "Literary Geography and the Digital: The Emergence of Neogeography," p. 91.

such disciplines as social history (including the history of migration), literary history, and geography (landscape studies). The acquired knowledge might be of substantial importance in the process of communication within society that could involve the tourism industry, thus raising the appeal of the topic for the general public. It is however, also reasonable to keep in mind the potential risks of trivializing the knowledge, if it becomes more narrowly and pragmatically oriented.[27]

One of the main aspects of inquiry, determined by the historical specificity of the early twentieth century is connected to the modernization of society and the growing tension between the national and cosmopolitan models of reality perception. There is a direct link to the concepts of the centre and the periphery that undergo substantial changes at the beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, we may observe a change in the status of rural space, in previous decades almost unanimously considered the cradle of the nation. This status is constantly confirmed by nineteenth-century Latvian literature. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century processes of migration however, introduced substantial changes in this status quo, indicating the growing importance of modern cities that relocated Latvian peasant manors and even minor towns to the periphery of novel plots. This was a painful, but presumably inevitable process, in which the creation of an imagined community of a modern, educated, and urban Latvian society played a crucial role. The corpus makes it clear that by the early twentieth-century rural space had already lost its monopoly of the centre. This process had developed rapidly in the decade and a half that preceded WWI.

This trend may also be linked to the interplay of the Nordic, Germanic, and Slavic vectors of influence, as indicated by recent research.[28] We suggest that the tendency of the growing self-reflectivity manifested in literary texts[29] can also be observed and documented with the support of digital humanities, and more specifically, literary geography and cartography, while expanding of the locations

27 Barbara Piatti, "Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography," p. 96.
28 Maija Burima, "Pašidentifikācijas un modernitātes projekcija 19. un 20. gadsimta mijas latviešu literatūrā," *Letonica* 25 (2013), p. 23–59.
29 On self-reflexivity, see further: Benedikts Kalnačs, "Nācijas kartēšana un kultūras atmiņa 19. un 20. gadsimta mijas latviešu literatūrā," in: Benedikts Kalnačs, Pauls Daija, Eva Eglāja-Kristsone, Kārlis Vērdiņš, *Fin de siècle literārā kultūra Latvijā,* Rīga: LU Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, 2017, p. 17–95.

that attract the attention of authors point in a similar direction. Through the inclusion of the topographical level, the suggestions with regard to the growing cosmopolitan nature of Latvian literature acquire more stable ground.

We also place an emphasis on the distinction between familiar/local and unfamiliar/foreign space. The results of an investigation into this topic can be supported by the cataloguing of associations and stereotypes that are present in the excerpts gathered during the process of reading of the corpus. It might be noticed that, for example, an association with a familiar place in the Baltic region is often linked to the locations, where the protagonists of literary works (or the authors) have acquired first-hand knowledge during their study years or due to professional activities. A paradigmatic case in this sense might be that of the Estonian town of Tartu, the seat of the second oldest university on the Baltic coast. At the same time, foreign space is associated with the geography of more or less distant places that do not provide any personal associations, and are predominantly mentioned in the context of arrivals and/or departures.

More specific trends within these processes can best be detected by the use of the methods of literary geography, contrasting specific localities in accordance with previously set criteria that include the juxtaposition of places of action and projected spaces.

At this stage of investigation, it is already possible to argue that the early twentieth-century novels mirror the expansion of the world, including a substantially more diverse portrayal of distant locations that quite often set the stage for action in literary texts. Thus, beside rural places that tend to dominate previous periods of Latvian literature, and urban localities on the Baltic coast, there is a growing importance of places situated beyond the borders of ethnically Latvian areas. This trend has been already suggested by the thematic analysis of literary texts, and it can be both supported and specified with the use of the tools of digital humanities. The transformation of public space plays a crucial role in the process. This refers to the popularity and variety of translated texts closely linked to the expansion of printed media and news coverage that contributes to the steady flow of exotic locations into the literary production of Latvian authors.

It is however, possible to speculate that the relations between the national and cosmopolitan levels of representation do not develop along the lines of constant progression, but rather emerge in the process of complicated and at times self-

contradictory interaction. This means that both levels co-exist throughout the period of modernization and serve as markers of the changing role of the centre and the periphery in literary production. Instead of the centrality of rural places, characteristic of nineteenth-century Latvian literature, the corpus under consideration demonstrates the changing positionality of the centre that is being transferred to urban areas. Cities located on the Baltic coast and beyond become the new centres, while pushing rural societies and milieus into a peripheral position. This corresponds to a landmark change in the social history of the Latvian nation. The description of the periphery is defined not by what it possesses, but by what it lacks. It is important to develop these observations and suggestions further by following the various strategies of representation of the centre as encountered in the early twentieth-century Latvian novels. Interestingly enough, while literary texts usually attributed to the canon more often assign the centrality to cities and towns on the Baltic coast, popular culture more often chooses exotic locations (the Americas, India etc.). This difference also provides a vital clue for the distinction between the canon and the periphery within the literary output.

3. Changes in representation: within the canon and beyond

With the process of emancipation of Latvian literature a growing number of texts within the context of canon-building emerges.[30] Novels that belong to our corpus can be attributed both to this category, as well as to the opposite camp that consists of mass literature. While we are well aware of the terminological conditionality in regard of category of 'literary canon,' as discussed during the 'canon wars' in the 1980s and 1990s,[31] we find it productive to juxtapose the body of texts canonized in Latvian literary history to the other literary works that have fallen into oblivion because of their perceived lack of aesthetic or ideological sophistication. In this regard, exactly the interpretation of place and geographical imagination might serve as a valuable tool in order to re-evaluate this division.

---

30 Vera Vāvere, "Proza," in: Viktors Hausmanis (ed.), *Latviešu literatūras vēsture. 1. sējums. No rakstītā vārda sākumiem līdz 1918. Gadam*, Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1998, p. 288.

31 Lise Jaillant, *Modernism, middlebrow and the literary canon: the modern library series, 1917–1955*, London/New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 6–9.

Further subdivision is also possible within these two main groups. Thus, the contributions that are included in the literary canon contain both realist and naturalist novels, as well as early modernist, predominantly impressionist and symbolist, texts that substantially differ from each other in terms of literary geography. The latter ones certainly have a lesser degree of elaboration of particular locations. Within the large body of mass production, on the other hand, distinct features are to be found in adventure novels that often follow foreign examples and place events in faraway lands.

A broad perspective that cuts across spaces encountered in the novels (Latvia – the Baltic region – the Russian empire – Western Europe – the world) provides an insight into the quantitative distinctions among the locations in the corpus of early twentieth-century Latvian novels. The preliminary conclusions of our investigation strongly suggest that the differences between elitist and mass culture, as well as the literary canon and the periphery can be discussed not only in thematic but also in spatial terms.[32]

This phenomenon has thus far been mostly dealt within the context of the link between urban locations and their impact on modernist literary techniques. However, following the assumption that "the writing of space is never purely aesthetic, but always ideological or political,"[33] we have noticed a close interaction between the social and the political transformations of early twentieth-century Latvian society and the innovative features of space representation. In the context of nation-building as the main goal towards which the society is striving, it is important to specify two important trends of literary representations. The first one is marked by the rapid globalization of geographical imagery encountered in Latvian literary texts. Another, not less important, trend is linked to the changing role of the centre and the periphery in Latvian literature. Whereas in nineteenth-century texts rural areas have been perceived as the vital centre, especially in the context of nation-building, the early twentieth-century novels reveal that in the eyes of the rapidly developing Latvian urban commu-

---

32 For an earlier proposal to tackle the distinction between elitist and mass culture from a contemporary theoretical perspective see: Pauls Daija, Benedikts Kalnačs, "19th Century Sentimental and Popular Trends and their Transformation in *Fin-de-siècle* Latvian Literature," *Interlitteraria*, 23/1 (2018), p. 162–172.

33 Emmanuelle Peraldo, "Introduction. The Meeting of Two Practices of Space: Literature and Geography," p. 11.

nity the countryside is ascribed a marginal and peripheral role when opposed to the city. The tendency to push rural milieus into the periphery of perception, while associating them with either unfamiliar or nostalgic and thus to a considerable extent lost space, has been treated as a characteristic feature of the narratives of modernity.[34] With the help of digital humanities, the juxtaposition of rural and urban spaces can provide new insights, while contemporary theoretical approaches can be also combined with the outcomes of earlier research.[35]

Our investigations into this phenomenon had come to the conclusion that at the beginning of the twentieth century the peasant identity was not abandoned or denied. Its exclusiveness is however, dramatically challenged. By this time the Latvians had already appreciated themselves as a modern nation, including all strata of society. Thus, in a number of literary texts rural space acquires nostalgic connotations oriented towards the past. Contemporary problems, on the other hand, are mostly played out and discussed against the background of either urban or cosmopolitan locations. The latter ones can be present only as markers of space without specific value for the narrative, or rather as indicators of modernity that includes a changing perception of social geography.

Cosmopolitan space may be approached from different perspectives that are closely related to the genre of each literary text. It can contain informative as well as exotic functions, and it may also be the part of an imagined space that directs reader's attention away from familiar locations. In certain kinds of texts, for example, the adventure novels, such an approach swiftly turns into a convention. It should however also be kept in mind that in the process of literary development, the globalization of space is not so much a sign of the dismissal of national particularities. Rather it indicates a new level of self-awareness and self-positioning that grows out of the belonging to a much greater cultural space.[36]

---

34 Andrew Thacker, *Moving through Modernity,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 6.

35 See: Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1973. Robert T. Tally singles out the distinction between the urban and rural as one of the proofs of the interpretative potential of literary geography, referring to the transformation of "geographical enquiry into historical experience," developed in Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality*, p. 8–9.

36 A question might be posed as to whether there are signs of belonging in the majority of nineteenth-century Latvian literary texts. A more plausible approach would suggest that a generalized sense of belonging certainly does not cross the borders of the Russian empire.

This can be linked to the observation that literary cartography treats "[r]elations among locations as more significant than locations as such."[37] Therefore the tendency to allocate more traditional rural areas to a peripheral status and to provide broader perspectives through the nomination of global spaces is especially important in the context of relations between the different levels of space (the world – native land – province/periphery) it provides.

We suggest that there a close connection between the extensions of space represented by the early twentieth-century Latvian novels and the Latvian society's growing awareness of its existence between different worlds, occupying what we might term as a "frontier space" of multiple belongings, exists. This perspective allows us to detect and interpret important links between the literary representations that perceptively treat new channels through which the community members perceive and experience space, and the formation process of the modern Latvian nation.

4. Minute descriptions of the familiar and generalizations of the unknown

The final part of the paper contains a case study showing the applicability of our methodology. From the very beginning of the project, a conscious choice was made by the project group not to separate elitist literary texts, now considered part of the Latvian literary canon, from the novels belonging to the realm of popular literature. Therefore, we registered place names encountered in all types of texts. This approach allowed us to tackle the important disparity in space representation in different types of fiction. In the following we focus on the varied patterns of the geographical imagination in two novels by Andrejs Upīts,[38] and two novels by Leons Veseris.[39] The case study reveals a certain polarization in the strategy of these authors, and demonstrates the different approaches encountered in elitist and popular fiction.

---

37 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 55.
38 *Sieviete* [Woman], 1910; *Pēdējais latvietis* [The Last Latvian], 1912.
39 *Starp Sibīriju un Indiju jeb Tuksnešu varoņi* [Between Siberia and India, or Heroes of the Desert], 1909; *Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes* [Freedom Fighters on the Shores of the Red River], 1910.

The setting for Upīts's novels in both cases is Riga. The author displays his interest in minute descriptions that allow him to single out a number of objects belonging to specific localities. First, there are places of social gatherings (markets, a railway station, the castle of Riga, the stage of the fifth nationwide Latvian Song Festival, city hospital, and various cemeteries). Secondly, an important segment is marked by the localization of various societies, such as the buildings of the Riga Latvian Society, the Abstinence Society "Auseklis," the Society for Latvian Education, the Latvian Credit Union, and the Cyclist Society. Thirdly, in response to the rising levels of construction in the city, important private rental houses (the Lebedinsky house designed by Mikhail Eisenstein, Pander's house, and the Linde house) are mentioned. Upīts also pays attention to important parks in Riga (Wehrmann's Park and the Esplanade), public buildings and places for trade (the Riga City Museum, the Museum of the Riga Latvian Society, various restaurants, Jānis Brigaders's Bookshop, etc.), hotels and entertainment venues (the Riga German Theatre, i.e., the contemporary Latvian National Opera, the Riga Russian Theatre, the Zoo, public ice rink on the outskirts of the city, and the Hotel Rome), churches (St. Gertrud's Church and the Orthodox Cathedral). On the border between the centre and the periphery, we find specific places near Riga localised, such as Stopiņi, Dreiliņi, Babīte Lake, Bišumuiža, Grīziņkalns, Iļģuciems, and Nordeķi. Urban space that is clearly situated beyond the borders of Riga, ranging from specific locations in nearby Jūrmala, such as Majori, Bulduri, and Sloka, to relatively faraway locations, among them Narva and Moscow, is attributed to the periphery of the geographical imagination represented in the novel. Mentioned only in passing are numerous place names that belong to both Western Europe and Russia, such as Nice, Paris, the Alps, St. Petersburg, and Kostromo. In turn, rural space hardly ever acquires more specific characteristics, and minor towns, for example, Jaunjelgava, Sigulda, and Ikšķile, do not acquire any specified characteristics, thus remaining largely anonymous.

Veseris's novels, in contrast to Upīts's numerous and precise specifications, are characterized by broad geographical generalizations. Instead of focusing on a detailed description of familiar and local objects, in his narrative he refers to various continents (Africa, America, Asia, and Europe), countries and regions (England, India, Mexico, and Florida). More specified are those place names that refer to locations situated in Russia (such as Altay, Siberia, and Tomsk), and

thus potentially are more easily recognized by his readers. Place names on the American continent (the Red River, Mississippi, and the Brown River) are also used. As a rule, the more exotic the location, the less detailed its representation.

In the latter examples, this approach might be comparable to Upīts's characterizations of the Latvian countryside. However, while Upīts's novels predominantly pay attention to well-recognizable features of city life, popular literature, as demonstrated by the previous examples, in contrast is directed towards the exotic and the unknown. It is therefore important to observe that the anonymity of a place, which in Upīts's case demonstrates his response to the periphery, in popular fiction is a feature of the author's perspective on the principal sites where his narrative unfolds.

These examples not only serve as a marker of substantial differences in the strategies of the representation of the familiar (national) and the unfamiliar (foreign and exotic) spaces in elitist and popular literature, respectively. They also show a tension in the perception of specific and broadly generalized meanings. The expectations of the readership play an important role in this process, while also serving as a reflection of the knowledge base of particular authors.

Conclusions

The observations made in this paper amply demonstrate that the mapping of geographical data is important, because it provides visual characteristics of both expansion and contraction of the narrative space, ranging from a minute description of specific locations to the globalized, even if still rather superficial locations that signal an expansion of the narrative of Latvian novels that in the early twentieth century had already unfolded all over the world.

At this stage of investigation, it is already possible to assert that the early twentieth-century novels mirror the expansion of the world, including a substantially more diverse portrayal of distant locations that quite often set the stage for action in literary texts.

Summary

This paper explores preliminary conclusions of the research of literary geography of the early twentieth-century Latvian novels. It focuses on the period between 1900 and 1914 selected because of the high mobility of Latvian population in those years. Furthermore, the events of that time substantially contributed to the transformation of the aesthetic and thematic scope of Latvian literature. Special interest is paid to the representations of enlargement of geographical space in the novels and the ways in which the literary representations are linked to historical and social events.
The approach that identifies all places encountered in the novels opens up possibilities for an analysis of a variety of geographical locations, as well as the changes in geographical approaches towards literary fiction during the early twentieth century. The development of digital humanities has initiated the advent of new research trends, such as literary geography, literary cartography, and geocriticism that provide the theoretical outline for this investigation. By scrutinizing different facets of space representation, the paper looks into the possibilities of the use of the methodology of digital humanities, when applied to the interpretation of literary texts. One of the main aspects of inquiry, determined by the historical specificity of the early twentieth century, is connected to the modernization of society and the growing tension between the national and cosmopolitan models of reality perception. There is a direct link to the concepts of the centre and the periphery that undergo substantial changes at the beginning of the twentieth century. The paper further relates these issues to the nation-building process of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latvia.

Keywords: Latvian novel, literary canon, literary cartography, literary geography, nation-building.