

Literary Landscapes and the National Imaginary - Introduction

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Landscapes arise from portions of soil that have been selected from spaces and transformed by a specific perspective. From the previously undistinguished, an entity emerges that acquires its own characteristics and singular physiognomy. This first cut in space begins by visual selection, forming a landscape in embryonic state, ready to be born, grow, reproduce, and eventually die. Seen through the filter of perspective, such a space has the potential to become a complex landscape once it is observed through the senses of hearing, touch, and smell. The landscape develops greater depth and definition as it passes through the reason and sensibility of an observer who is prepared to communicate his or her own experience of that landscape through language.

Infinite places will never become landscapes. Some places will reach a simple, rudimentary stage defined by sight, some will go further to include smells and sounds, some will be the object of elaborate, artistic attention, and just a few will culminate in creations of great vitality and social and cultural relevance. By their special significance, some places will become landscapes for a person, some for a family, some for a town, a region, or a nation, and some will become universal landscapes.

The image of a rickety wooden fence that opens from an old road to a path leading into a banana plantation just past a towering, fragrant apple tree in full blossom corresponds to a real place that no longer exists, but lives transformed in a personal landscape sentimentally associated with my happy, rural childhood. An orchard, a terrace cultivated with potatoes, and a cornfield are not only places of work, but also icons of a way of life in the history of a particular family or a whole region. Other locations have gone one step further by becoming famous landscapes through their literary representations, for literature has always contributed to piquing its readers' curiosity about these inspiring places.

Tourist spots are an excellent example of places turned into famous landscapes with the assistance of literary impulses. At the turn of the twentieth century, Francisco González Díaz brilliantly reflected on how travel books and poetic descriptions of picturesque landscapes promoted the development of tourism. He observed that “the Romantics brought into literature, and from literature into life, attraction for the exotic [. ...] Chateaubriand and Lamartine traveled to [the] Orient, [...] Dumas [...] seized with his feet all routes of Europe, and it was perhaps Stendhal who used for the first time the term ‘tourist’ in the title of one of his books” (186). From literature, the taste for traveling and “the impetuous current of illustrated and rich bourgeois that go after the picturesque” (186) have emerged. The case of England is quite relevant, for “England created tourism” (202), an inland tourism that, influenced by Walter

Scott's writings, visits "the romantic Scottish lakes, [or that after reading] Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Quincey" (202) wishes to visit the Lake District. Inspired by Shakespeare, tourists go to Stratford on Avon and, drawn to Lord Byron's tomb, they have turned Newstead Abbey into a pilgrimage place. Similarly, Don Quixote calls attention to Spain's La Mancha, "in Altorf people ask for William Tell's arrow," and the Swiss exploit with utilitarian cleverness "the historical scenography" of figures such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Calvino, and Amiel (204).¹

Interested in developing tourism as much as stimulating national identity, González Díaz understood that an intelligent management of landscapes that represent a national imaginary serves both to promote a collective national identity and to stimulate national socioeconomic development. As the nations of the Americas emerged, his homeland had not yet created its own identity. As part of this process, a young nation's people become part of a well-defined community by emotional attachment to the myths that encourage national cohesion. He saw in the notion of Paradise an opportunity for a powerful land myth that would help to grow a national self-consciousness and attract tourists. Ever since the Greek and Roman classics had referred in paradisiacal terms to the Atlantic islands located at the end of the known world, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, a solid link between the Canary Islands and Paradise had become commonplace in literature, history, and geography. Time and again, the Canaries have been called the Elysian Fields, Islands of the Blessed, Fortunate Islands, Hesperides, and Paradise in a variety of classical sources: Hesiod, Virgil, Plato, Estraton de Lampsaco, Hanno the Navigator, and Apollonius of Rhodes.

It is curious to observe that numerous literary landscapes found in national imaginaries coincide with the same landscapes that the tourism industry exploits to attract visitors. From the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, the prestige of the above-mentioned classical myths appears not only in foundational works of Canary Literature such as those of Cairasco de Figueroa (1538-1610) and Antonio de Viana (1578-?), but also in the works of the famous civil engineer Leonardo Torriani (1500-1585), the eminent historians Abreu Galindo (ca. 1535) and Viera y Clavijo (1731-1813), and the founder of modern geography Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). Similarly, various nineteenth-century travelers, such as Olivia M. Stone, meticulously described, day by day, their travels on Canary soil. Doramas's Silver, a laurel forest in the midst of Gran Canaria, was frequently described as a paradise where the aboriginal hero Doramas lived and met his death fighting against Castilian invaders. That national myth is still alive, and the tourists who enjoy long walks in the countryside and in deep ravines can still appreciate the remnants of that forest. Nevertheless, since the 1960s, that paradisiacal

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All translations are my own.

landscape has competed with a second emerging reading of Canarian Paradise, one located on golden sunny beaches, associated with easy sex and partying, that tourist guides exploit and that recent literary works frequently treat, either from a critical or ironic perspective (E. de Andrade, M. Houllébecq, E. Jünger, D. Lodge, J. M. Marrero Henríquez).

The tourism industry highlights how immediate economic interests are, for good or for bad, interwoven with the goal of political identity and the abstract concept of a national character. To a greater or lesser extent, such is the case of the landscapes studied in the articles of the special section of the present issue of *Ecozon@*: the rich and diverse, but nonetheless rugged and harsh, Spanish natural environment; the Irish landscapes with which mysterious place names and ancient legends are associated; the forest, a founding landscape of the German people; the variety of Iceland's magnificent and uninhabited, volcanic landscapes; and Monsanto, the quintessential Portuguese stone village located in the vast plateau of Idanha-a-Nova.

The article by Ana Isabel Queiroz and Joao Carrilho is, *sensu stricto*, the only study that explicitly focuses on a landscape in which literature, tourism industry, and national political symbolism are intimately interwoven. Exploring the relationship between the village of Monsanto and the national character that Salazar's dictatorship understood it to represent, Queiroz and Carrilho study two readings of the same Monsanto landscape: one by Fernando Namora, a realist writer and medical doctor who lived there, and the second by António de Oliveira Salazar's dictatorship and various writers who supported the regime. Queiroz and Carrilho consider that Monsanto's current tourist development tries to harmonize Fernando Namora's image of the village as a "stone vessel," a metaphor denouncing the hard life of Monsanto's inhabitants, social injustice, and lack of resources, with that of "The Most Portuguese Village," the title awarded to the village in 1938 by Salazar's dictatorship, thereby enthroning it as a symbol of national values: tradition, work, religion. Since the establishment of democracy in 1975, Monsanto has seen a weakening of its nationalist character. In this new political context, maintaining Monsanto's rural landscape entails the complex management of a location whose national interest has turned out to be worthy of a museum.

Santos Casado de Otaola studies how, from approximately 1870 to 1930, Spanish literature, natural science, and politics searched the landscape for a national character as well as a basis for the implementation of reforms necessary to revive a nation whose empire was reaching its end. In 1849, the French geologist Édouard de Verneuil argued that Spain had been much less studied than the rest of Europe. In fact, it was not until 1873 that, under the direction of the engineer Manuel Fernández de Castro, the Commission for the Geological Map of Spain was essentially effective. As part of this same endeavor, Lucas Mallada's work *Los males de la patria* (1890) [*The Ills of the Homeland*] was a strong denouncement of the difficult conditions in Spain that stemmed from ignorance of the nature of its soil and a long history of exhaustive practices. His study would be the basis for the radical nationalism of the

Generation of '98 and for the more optimistic interpretation of the national soil by the writers and scientists of the Generation of 1914 that culminated in Eduardo Hernández-Pacheco's *Síntesis fisiográfica y geológica de España* (1932-1934) [*Physiographic and Geological Synthesis of Spain*]. Critical but optimistic, diverse but also unifying, Hernández-Pacheco's work served as a complete scientific study of Spain's natural landscape, presenting it as an original substratum of the essence of national identity, as had been done in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century.

Exploring the continuing significance of the forms of German national identity at the turn of the twentieth century for the nation's self-understanding after its defeat in World War II, Astrid Mignon Kirchhof looks back at the works of social theorist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, writers such as Ernst Moritz Arndt, and other academicians. She examines the evolution of the role of the forest established in the nineteenth century as a symbol of the German national character in the publications of the nature conservation movement *Schutzgemeinschaft Deutscher Wald* [Association for the Protection of the German Forest], founded in 1947, and in the renaissance of the *Heimatfilms* [Patriotic films] during the 1950s.

Reinhard Hennig also explores the relationship between national literary landscapes, political national identity, and environmental conservatism in Iceland. Recognizing the role of landscape as Iceland's most important national symbol, even before flag and language, Hennig considers how medieval saga literature was used to promote nineteenth-century nationalism, its influence on the contemporary perception of landscape, and above all, the extent that this perception, mediated through literary tradition, has contributed to debates about the development of different industrial and energy-based exploitations of Iceland's natural resources. Most of all, Hennig centers his work on the Kárahnjúkar project and the debate around it after Andri Snær Magnason published *Draumalandið. Sjálfshjálparbók handa hræddri þjóð* in 2006 [*Dreamland. A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation*]. Even if uninhabited, Iceland's landscapes are "cultural," and literary substrata play an important role in the debate about the exploitation of resources and modification of land character and features. Instead of reflecting on the direct relationship between literature and culture and the prevention of industrial intervention in nature, Rosemarie Rowley's article highlights the creative power of language to name places and create poetical landscapes that are in themselves a powerful source for Irish nationalist feelings. Yeats's ideal Irish state, as Rowley explains, is not so much to be found in Irish pastures as in the spiritual and heroic nation founded in the magic of Irish place names that act as a sort of unreal, strange, and mystical landscaping language of Yeats's own mind, capable of nurturing the emergence of an Irish nation.

Literary landscapes that represent national imaginaries are complex and collective landscapes, and as such, they may succumb to innumerable risks, in particular descent into oblivion. The original landscapes that had once served to sustain their literary interpretations as national imaginaries have been and

always will be subject to change. Literature is able to turn places into immovable correlatives of ideal and eternal concepts at the service of national identities. That ideal fixation has proved useful to prevent environmental destruction of places of great natural and cultural value, be they Iceland's volcanic landscapes and glaciers, German forests, misty Irish pastures, the Castilian Sierra de Gredos, Portugal's region of Idahia Nova, or the Canary subtropical laurel forests. It is also true, however, that ideal landscapes have frequently moved away from the embryonic soil that once was at their origin. On these occasions, landscapes have ended up at the service of strongly oriented ideologies founded on eternal essences that, abstract as they are, emerge with energy in specific historical circumstances in the form of powerful entelechies that are able to survive even upon weak or no material land support at all.

In his *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, Fichte pays special attention to literature's ability to eternalize a land imaginary by transforming it into a communal symbol. Uniformity of thought depends on the social acceptance of a poetical vision of reality and on the development of "the [social] capacity to spontaneously sketch images that are in no way simple copies of reality, but susceptible of being transformed into archetypes of it" (90). Poetry is a powerful weapon to develop "the spiritual education of the people" (149), and a key means to create a common way of thinking, a "spiritual we," a nation.

Fichte's nation is, above all, a shared image of poetic inspiration. Keeping in mind Pestalozzi's pedagogic ideals, he attempts to invigorate his own nation by favoring a uniform society in which everyone, without exception, is taught. New education "should precisely consist of annihilating [individual] freedom of will" (86). Fichte speaks to an ethnic group with its own land and language, but neither the ethnic group nor its location or language are so much realities in space and time as they are essences of an identity conferred by nature that have survived and will survive beyond any circumstantial historical division inflicted upon Germany by foreign countries. He observes that "the first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states are beyond doubt their internal boundaries [... and those] who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds through nature herself [...] and constitute by nature herself a unique and inseparable self" (301).

Seven decades later, on March 11, 1882, in a famous lecture at La Sorbonne, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" Renan states that the real principle of unity in modern nations is the will of the people. Feudal dynasties, races, languages, religions, geographical characteristics, material interests, or military needs do not find by themselves any nation or *patrie*. Although "it is quite true that the majority of modern nations were made by a family of feudal origin, [...] Switzerland and the United States [...] have no dynastic basis. [...] There] is no pure race and [...] to make politics depend upon ethnographic analysis is to surrender to a chimera. The noblest countries, England, France, and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed. [...] Language invites people to unite, but [...] The United States and England, Latin America and Spain, speak the same languages yet do not form single nations. Conversely, Switzerland [...]

numbers three or four languages. [...Religion has no definitive role, for] one can be French, English, or German, and be either Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox Jewish, or else practice no cult at all. Religion has become an individual matter [...] Community of interest brings about [no more than] trade agreements, [...] Geography [...] undoubtedly plays a considerable part in the division of nations [...but] all mountains cannot divide up states” (12-13). After such a variety of considerations, Renan concludes that a nation is “a soul, a spiritual principle [...constituted by] two things [...] One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of heritage that one has received in an undivided form” (19). In Renan’s thought, metaphysical and theological abstractions are driven out of politics, for a nation’s existence is “a daily plebiscite” (19).

Although deeply contradicting each other and responding to different historical circumstances and national interests, Fichte’s “spiritual we” and Renan’s “spiritual principle” share the common risk that any theory of the nation runs: fixing a soul within geographical frontiers. National literary landscapes contribute to the protection of landscapes from environmental devastation and the keeping alive of common memories from the past. At the same time, however, they also tend to erase the real and cultural transformation of landscapes and the multiplicity of “souls” living inside and outside a nation. Like Jean Baudrillard’s hyperreality, literary landscapes of national imaginaries erase the referents and supplant them, and by doing so, may turn into self-sufficient signs that replace reality and find in themselves their own reason to be.

When the global dimension of diminishing biodiversity and climate change is being felt day after day, theory and criticism have powerful reasons to abandon the discourses fully absorbed by the perception of reality as sign and to turn their attention instead to forgotten evidence: that literary landscapes of national imaginaries act not only as literary signs of aesthetic interest, but also seek to impose models for inhabiting the world. The study of the relationship between the transformation of national landscapes and their dominant literary image underlines the critical, aesthetic, and ethical relevance of considering that literary national landscapes should evolve, for evolution is crucial not only to renew literary topics, but also to have literary imaginaries respond to a world in constant change.

Ecological awareness shows a hopeful path to considering new forms of inhabiting the world and leaving behind some of the dangers of nationalism. The eco-cosmopolitan that Ursula Heise proposes, a person who is willing to imagine him or herself inhabiting a diverse planet of human and nonhuman communities, will perceive that limits, whether between beings or nations, are “fuzzy.” As Bart Kosko has explained, “fuzzy thinking” is required for a precise understanding of life’s dynamics. In this way, literary landscapes of “fuzzy” national imaginaries may be able to preserve some of the positive aspects of

nationalism, while avoiding becoming a solipsistic, arrogant mirror for humankind.

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