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Petr Chalupský and Tereza Topolovská, 2024. *Of Spaces and Ideas: The Novels of Jim Crace and Simon Mawer* (Prague: Karolinum Press)

The "spatial turn" in the contemporary humanities − a term coined by Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) – marks an interdisciplinary approach to the multifarious connections and interactions between humans and the geographical, material and social features of the places and spaces that they inhabit. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Soja claims that "we are becoming increasingly aware that we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities" (1996, 1). Ina Habermann and Daniela Keller, the editors of *English Topographies in Literature and Culture: Space, Place, and Identity*, highlight the numerous critical perspectives afforded by the spatial turn in literary studies: "Space […] emerges as the common denominator which allows us to study seemingly diverse topics in conjunction: social practices such as gardening, engaging in literary tourism, or watching television, artistic depictions or textual negotiations of landscapes or cityscapes, responses to planning and building, which add up to a distinct cultural topography" (2016, 2).

The monograph *Of Spaces and Ideas: The Novels of Jim Crace and Simon Mawer* (2024), jointly authored by Petr Chalupský and Tereza Topolovská, draws on current spatial studies with a view to closely examining the treatment of space in selected novels by two contemporary British authors, Jim Crace and Simon Mawer. Of the two, Crace enjoys more critical recognition. Besides Chalupský and Topolovská's study, two monographs on his fiction have been published: *Jim Crace* by Philip Tew (2006) and *Jim Crace: Into the Wilderness*, edited by Katy Shaw and Kate Aughterson (2018). Neither of them, however, focuses specifically on the writer's representation of space. Simon Mawer has published fourteen novels to date, two of which, *The Fall* (2003) and *The Glassroom* (2009), have been nominated for the Man Booker Prize. His Second World War novel *Tightrope* (2015) won the Walter Scott Historical Fiction Prize. Nevertheless, Mawer, although quite well recognised, has attracted little sustained critical attention so far.

One of the objectives of Chalupský and Topolovská's book is to make up for this deficiency by offering an extensive analysis of each author, with a special interest in how places and spaces are represented in their fiction and what role they play in the plots, character construction and, as the authors put it in the Conclusion, the writers' contemplation of "human spatial experience" (249). Whereas the content of *Of Spaces and Ideas* has been determined by its preoccupation with spatiality and the selection of novels has been made accordingly, the book is in fact a comprehensive double monograph on Crace and Mawer, with the wide-ranging analysis highlighting characteristic features of their fiction. As a result, especially in the case of Mawer, the scope of the discussion extends far beyond the question of space. *Of Spaces and Ideas* consists of two fairly autonomous parts, devoted to Crace and Mawer respectively. Each part begins with its own introductory chapter on the given author, in which his biographical background and writing career are outlined and an overview of his fiction is presented.

An obvious challenge that Chalupský and Topolovská faced in writing this monograph was to justify the grounds for their comparative analysis of these particular novelists. The authors address this problem in the Introduction, claiming that while there is no question of collaboration or mutual influence, Crace and Mawer share a number of thematic and aesthetic preoccupations, especially their interest in places and spaces. Hence, the starting assumption is that spatial representation is "a productive instrument of their narratives" (9).

The theoretical framework of the monograph is constituted by several concepts widely used in debates about the question of space in fiction. The first, introductory chapter entitled "After the Spatial Turn" presents an overview of the main theoretical approaches, affirming that the study of space became a prominent trend in critical theory and practice in the second half the twentieth century and continues to inspire literary criticism. This chapter is well researched, supported by numerous references and demonstrates the authors' competence in the chosen field. The concept of psychogeography, Yi-Fu Tuan's distinction between place and space, Betrand Westphal's geocriticism, Robert T. Tally's notion of literary cartography and Eric Prieto's *entre-deux* places are highlighted as being especially relevant in the subsequent analyses of particular novels. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the significance of space in Crace's and Mawer's fiction, emphasising the combination of the issue of space and the trope of transition (however, as can be seen in the analytical chapters, this trope appears more pertinent in the study of Crace's works than in Mawer's).

The main part of Chalupský and Topolovská's book is a detailed discussion of selected novels by Jim Crace and Simon Mawer. In the first half of their study, which comprises chapters 3-6, Chalupský and Topolovská analyse seven books by Crace (and make a brief reference to an eighth). Each chapter is subdivided, but the authors have eschewed mechanical parallelism in the structure of particular chapters by choosing to distinguish several aspects in the writer's representation of space, each of which is illustrated by two novels and discussed on its own terms. In Chapter 3, *Continent* and *The Gift of Stones* are read as narratives exploring both "imaginary landscapes," defined by the authors as "the spaces produced by the author's, and his characters', imagination" and "landscapes of the imagination," which refer to the structure of the characters' imagination and the impact of their experience of space on their "imaginative creativity" (44). The latter category is convincingly exemplified in the analysis of *The Gift of Stones*, in which the seascape provides the narrator both with material for his stories and with a story-telling impulse. The function of landscapes as correlatives of the transition experienced by the prehistoric community is emphasised.

In Chapter 4 the authors' interest shifts to the role of landscape in character construction. Places and spaces are meaningful in both *Signals of Distress* and *Quarantine* since their protagonists experience displacement, and it is claimed that the landscapes depicted in both novels mediate between the characters' minds and the external world. While the settings in Crace's fiction may have realistic features, they also acquire "a larger symbolic or even mythic dimension" (81-82). The analysis of *Quarantine* repeatedly foregrounds the correlations between physical and mental topographies, but, intriguingly, also puts forward the claim that landscape is additionally endowed with the role of a moral agent.

The cityscape of *Arcadia*, one of Crace's best known novels, is the subject of analysis in Chapter 5. The authors again indicate the transitory nature of the depicted space, which is linked here to the tension between the urban and the rural. Yet, rather than being opposed, the two milieux are shown to be inextricably interrelated, making the resultant space unstable and

changeable. Departing from postmodern readings of the novel, the authors suggest that it is illustrative of the transmodern paradigm shift. Like Crace's other fiction, *Arcadia* manifests a serious concern with ethical issues, such as human relationships, encounters with the other-than-human and the environment, while also engaging with a critique of certain aspects of globalisation and capitalism. The extensive discussion of *Arcadia* is supplemented by a − disappointingly brief − section on *The Melody* as another urban novel. Instead, the reader is referred to Chalupský's article for an in-depth interpretation of this book.

The last chapter on Jim Crace deals with the "literary cartography" of *The Pesthouse* and *Harvest*. The latter novel stands out in Crace's fiction because, in addition to the processes of mapping real and imaginary places, it portrays a literal cartographic project, which, as the authors argue, leads to the destabilisation and transformation of a space that was initially strictly homogenous. Hence *Harvest* portrays yet another community in a state of transition, affected by historical changes which are imprinted, among other things, on the space that it inhabits. Physical, mental and emotional mapping also takes place in *The Pesthouse*, set in a dystopian American landscape marked by "entropic disorder" (127). Since the plot of the novel is based on the characters' journey and subsequent encounters with different environments, *The Pesthouse* is categorised as a multilayered "mapping narrative" (135).

The first part of the monograph is an impressive in-depth analysis of the chosen novels, offering their detailed and thorough interpretations. The shared focus on places and spaces in Crace's fiction inevitably results in a certain overlap in the readings; nevertheless, it is to the authors' credit that they managed to offer a variety of approaches.

The second part, devoted to Simon Mawer's fiction, is also based on a selection of novels with a focus on the role that spatial elements play in them. Two of Mawer's World War Two books, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* and *Tightrope* are discussed in one chapter; otherwise, each chapter revolves around one novel: *Chimera*, *Mendel's Dwarf*, *The Glass Room* and *Prague Spring*, respectively. In comparison with Crace's fiction, the places depicted in Mawer's books are realistic rather than imaginary. Whereas "transition" is one of the key concepts in the Jim Crace part of the book, the authors foreground the notion of liminality as a defining element of Mawer's stories (152); however, the application of this concept in the actual analysis of particular novels is limited.

The Glass Room (2009), which remains Mawer's most successful novel, is perhaps the most obvious example of the writer's interest in space. Underlain by the conceit of narrating history through the story of a house – which is manifestly modelled on the famous Tugendhat House in Brno – *The Glass Room* becomes a prime example of what Chalupský and Topolovská term Mawer's spatial poetics. This, in fact, tends to be intertwined with the temporal aspect. All the novels by Mawer chosen for analysis may be categorised as historical fiction, which arguably makes time in his stories just as important as space. Therefore, even in the interpretation of *The Glass Room* and *Chimera* (which depicts the palimpsestic landscape of an archaeological site), the authors could not fail to include a detailed examination of the role that time and history, in addition to space, play in the respective narratives. Indeed, in *Prague Spring* (discussed in Chapter 11), the historical component appears to overshadow the spatial poetics of the novel. The section on mapping in the relevant chapter employs the idea of mapping in a metaphorical sense, but has little to do with geographical space. Also, the short chapter on *Mandel's Dwarf* prioritises the issue of science rather than space. The section on "The Space of Central Europe" which concludes this chapter does little to expound on the importance of this

space in the novel. Generally, the blurring of the expected focus on space in the second part of the monograph is a reflection of the fact that Mawer's preoccupation with spatiality is less prominent and less consistent than that of Crace. As a result, the chapters on particular novels in the second part offer comprehensive, almost all-inclusive analyses, at the cost of a clear focus on spatiality. This, however, may be an advantage from the point of view of a reader who looks for an overall, wide-ranging introduction to Mawer's fiction. An added value is the competence that the scholars bring to the discussion of the three novels by Mawer with Czech settings: *Mendel's Dwarf*, *The Glass Room* and *Prague Spring*.

In the Conclusion, the authors sum up their main findings. The actual comparative component is relatively short but earlier, in the analyses of particular narratives, the authors occasionally highlight shared elements and as well as contrasting aspects in the two writers' representations of space. The monograph also includes an impressive bibliography. Chalupský and Topolovská's monograph will be of interest to scholars researching the treatment of space in contemporary English fiction. It provides new insights into the criticism on Jim Crace, and makes a pioneering contribution to the analysis of Simon Mawer's work.