

The Geographical Imagination in Early Twentieth-Century Latvian Novels

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The article explores the geographical imagination in Latvian novels published during the early twentieth century. We first focus on our experience and preliminary results of the literary mapping, then we turn towards representations of neighboring countries of Latvia as well as selected continents in these novels as case studies. The early twentieth century as a period of extensive migration and growing awareness of global events in Latvian society provides a rich variety of representations of foreign geographical places. By discussing the advantages and limits of literary mapping, we argue that the interpretations of Latvian novels within the perspective of the geographical imagination provide valuable knowledge for the social history of literature. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the research of geographical diversity in novels refers not only to real mobility, but also to stereotypes, therefore the acquired information might be productively used in imagological analyses.

Keywords: Latvian literature / Latvian novel / twentieth century / literary geography / literary mapping / imagology

The aim of this paper is to provide insight into an ongoing investigation of the geographical imagination in early twentieth-century Latvian novels, giving an overview of the preliminary results of this research as well as charting territory for potential further studies.¹ Building on the outcomes of investigations carried out by Franco Moretti and Barbara Piatti, who propose linking literary geography and digital humanities (Moretti, *Atlas*; Moretti, *Graphs*; Piatti, *Die Geographie*) and corresponding to Stephen

¹ The present research has been carried out within the project “Empowering knowledge society: Interdisciplinary perspectives on public involvement in the production of digital cultural heritage” at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, Riga (ERAF project Nr. 1.1.1.1/16/A/040). The digital mapping within the project was carried out by senior scholars Pauls Daija and Benedikts Kalnačs and by research assistants Madara Eversone, Signe Raudive, and Artis Ostups.

Greenblatt's call for mobility studies (as quoted in: Pressner and Shepard 208), we are interested in determining to what extent important period changes in Latvian society such as ongoing urbanization, refugee movement after the unsuccessful uprising in tsarist Russia in 1905, workers' mobility beyond the borders of present-day Latvia, and growing openness to foreign influences were reflected in early twentieth century Latvian letters. By exploring literary sources from this point of view, it would be possible to ascertain whether Latvian novels provide a substantial contribution to social history, enabling the understanding of real and discursive transformations in the geographical imagination of the period (see further: Daija, Kalnačs, "Exploring"). Following Mimi Urbanc and Marko Juvan, we understand geographical imagination as a field that is "founded on cultural representations that have both emotional and ideological import" and explores the "imagination [that] helps form people's identities, their understanding of the world, and the world itself" (Urbanc and Juvan 319). Accordingly, it is a part of humanist geography that concerns itself "with what gives places a peculiar color, how places enter human consciousness, and how the way consciousness interprets space then influences the formation of places" (Urbanc and Juvan 319).

In the theoretical part of this paper, we characterize our sources and discuss the concept of distant cartographic reading important for the present research (Juvan 91). The following two case studies cast more light on the methods and results of the ongoing research by tackling specific segments of the established text corpus. First, we focus on the representation of borderlands (Estonia and Lithuania) in early twentieth-century Latvian novels; secondly, we tackle the representation of "exotic" locations in novels. The paper concludes with a brief appraisal of potential directions for future research.

Description of the sources and distant cartographic reading

In the twentieth century, literary mapping was mostly linked to the creation of biographical maps that displayed authors' birthplaces and charted other important locations linked to their lives. In most cases, this visual material was used as an illustration of research results achieved by an implementation of more traditional scholarly methods. In the late twentieth century, following new impulses provided by the so-called spatial turn, the field of research has been substantially enlarged, and literary mapping is increasingly placed within a broader context of digital humanities:

Since the late 19th century, literary maps had been employed in literary geography, schools, and tourism to illustrate living places of famous authors, spaces represented in literary texts, the diffusion of literary currents, regional differences in productivity within a national literature, and the like ... pioneering maps of literature have appeared since the 19th century in connection with literary tourism, pilgrimages to writers' houses, and visiting the "original" scenes described in poetry and fiction ... [First maps] expressed a tendency to transcend a merely illustrative role and serve analytical purposes, although often based on outlived positivist assumptions or even questionable nationalist ideology. (Juvan 88)

Accordingly, the understanding of literary mapping has also changed, and this approach is now being considered as not only playing a subordinate role but also acquiring an analytical potential in literary scholarship that opens up new perspectives in the field. The opposition to such an approach predominantly points toward the inevitably experimental character of any research that at this stage makes use of literary mapping as well as of distant reading (Döring 139–149). As Todd Pressner and David Shepard note, "[m]aps and models are never static representations or accurate reflections of a past reality; instead, they function as arguments and propositions that betray a state of knowledge" (207). At the same time, when dealing with prose fiction, one needs to keep in mind that, in the words of Christian Jacob, the map "is a problematic mixture, where the transparency of a referential illusion coexists with the opacity of a medium that materializes this image" (quoted in Bray 282).

Within our research, a corpus of texts that consisted of all novels published in the Latvian language between 1900 and 1914 (forty-six in total) had been created, and the entire material was digitized. We have selected the text corpus according to the Index of Latvian novels, published by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia. (Briedis and Rožkalne 119–123) We did not include unfinished novels of the period and translated novels. A database of geographical place names, containing 3367 units (this number includes geographical place names repeatedly encountered in literary texts) that was complemented by relevant text excerpts and information regarding the time the novel narratives unfold, was established. The overall aim was to gather material available for quantitative analysis and distant reading in order to strengthen the knowledge of social transformations in early twentieth-century Latvian literature thus far predominantly dealt with by other research methods (see Kalnačs, Daija, Eglāja-Kristšone and Vērdiņš).

In our approach we focused on the presence of place names that referred to specific geographical localities as well as ones that reflected the horizon of expectations of both novel characters and their readers. Places that were referred to implicitly were also considered. All place names were included into the database together with text excerpts as well as meta-data referring to the narrated time and the date of publication of the novel. Compiling these data made it possible to gather information that enabled an understanding of the variety of geographical space encountered in the novel narratives as well as to get insight into the dynamics of the appearance of certain cities, states, and regions in the novel corpus. The acquired knowledge can be further exploited both in an analytical fashion to define the main selection principles and provide theoretical data analysis from various perspectives as well as for illustrative purposes, such as gathering quantitative information on geographical place names or adapting the research for tourist guidebooks.

The tasks of our research included, first, the analysis of the geographic diversity of represented spaces as well as the transformations in representation of such universal categories as the country and the city, the centre and the periphery, the native land and foreign places; secondly, the visualization of data through the development of specific digital platforms that made it possible to provide graphic models using local maps of Latvia or world maps. In the process of the creation of the corpus it was observed that all but one of the novels contain specific place names. The investigation then focused on the remaining forty-five novels that for research purposes were subdivided into two main groups. The first of these included what might roughly be called elite or “serious” literature (realist, naturalist, and modernist novels, twenty-four in total), and the other group consisting of popular literature (twenty-one novels), including such subgenres as sentimental, picaresque, and detective novels.²

Only five novels had their main narrative action set outside the borders of present-day Latvia. These locations included cities in Western Europe and the US (in novels *Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes* and *Stiprinieku karalis Zigfrīds*),³ in the Balkan region (*Karš un mīlestība* and *Krusts un pūsmēness*), and in Siberia (*Starp Sibīriju un Indiju*). All these texts belong to popular literature. Nineteen nov-

² On the interactions between elite and popular literature as well as the principles according to which one level is to be distinguished from the other, see Daija and Kalnačs, “Nineteenth-Century” 162–172.

³ See Attachment for the full list of novels, their authors, title translations and publication data.

els predominantly feature the Latvian countryside and minor towns, focusing on two historical regions, Vidzeme (Livland) and Kurzeme (Kurland). Thirteen novels featured the main city of the region, Riga, as the primary location where the narrative unfolds. There was almost a parity between elite novels (*Zvaigžņotās nakts*, *Zem saules*, *Patrioti*, *Nolādētais*, *Bursaki*, *Sieviete* and *Zelts*) and popular literature dealing with the city (*Gods un apziņa*, *Dēmona slāpes*, *Uz mākslas spārnieniem*, *Mantu, asinis, dzīvību uz Tēvijas altāra!* and *Tumša ēna jeb Dvēseles sāpju mocekļi*). Situated between these different groups there are nine novels of the corpus; seven of those juxtapose the countryside and Riga, including both elite novels (*Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi*, *Tilti un pārigājēji*, *Jauni avoti* and *Pēdējais latvietis*) and popular novels (*Skaistā cietēja Milda*, *Skaistā Adelīna jeb Mīlestība un briesmas* and *Dzelzpiere Briesmīgais un viņa varoņa darbi*). In two further cases a juxtaposition between the Latvian countryside and a foreign land was provided where certain parts of the narrative are focused on events that occur in the Russian cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, in one case (*Rīta blāzmā*); and in Istanbul, Turkey, in the other (*Noslēpumainais gredzens*). Most texts focus on events that are close to the moment of their publication on a time scale (including the late nineteenth century); five novels feature earlier decades of the nineteenth century (*Patrioti*, *Baltā grāmata*, *Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes*, *Starp Sibīriju un Indiju* and *Ūdens burbuļi*), while two texts deal with the sixteenth-century (*Kad mēness dilst*) and seventeenth-century (*Pa tumšām tekām*) history of the region, respectively.

This overview makes it clear that in all types of novels there are certain similarities with regard to the main geographical locations where the action unfolds. The differences between elite and popular literature are to be traced in other and more specific aspects of representation, as we demonstrate in the continuation of the paper. Another important characteristic is linked to the preserved domination of the countryside in early twentieth-century Latvian novels. However, there was a certain challenge to this tradition on the rise, and the representation of urban space in Latvia also played a substantial role in literary texts, while foreign locations gradually started to acquire importance. Such aspects as the migration from the country to the city, especially to Riga, and other potential directions, including even moves beyond the borders of a particular region that are linked to attempts to secure prospects for a better life might be singled out.

In addition to an aesthetic analysis of literary texts, the research of the novel corpus opens up new perspectives on the historical and social

conditions represented in early twentieth century Latvian literature. Three aspects become highly important here. First, in the novel corpus we encounter certain locations that are described in detail and suggest a high level of familiarity on the part of the readers of the time; however, from the present-day point of view these localities often remain rather obscure. This includes the names of popular hotels, restaurants, and other social establishments of the early twentieth century whose mapping requires an additional inquiry. Without further investigation, it is relatively often impossible to grasp whether the author mentions real or imagined places in these cases; and on a number of occasions this will never be possible to establish with a sufficient level of certainty. As specific architectural sites (important buildings, bridges etc.) also belonged to the corpus of the registered place names, in a number of cases they were attributed to the category of lost places. In addition, research was also needed with regard to real or imagined places only referred to in a vague form (such as a capital letter indicating a particular place name etc.). An attempt was made to ascertain whether it is possible to establish the real location. However, it was recognized that fictional place names might be considered a topic worthy of separate investigation that would potentially point towards literary mechanisms participating in the creation of an imaginary nationscape by emphasizing typical features instead of particularities.

Secondly, from the perspective of cultural history, it is also important to pay attention to place names that refer to historical regions. The early twentieth century indicated changes in the geographical imaginary of the Latvian people gradually moving away from the focus on local particularities towards a more inclusive understanding of regional identity. The idea of political autonomy of the Latvian-speaking regions was also on the rise, and therefore, besides the traditional regions of Vidzeme, Kurzeme and Latgale, geographical names like *Latvija* (Latvia) and *Baltija* (the Baltics) start to appear more often. They were linked to and at the same time also opposed to such categories as *Eiropa* (Europe) and *Krievija* (Russia).

Thirdly, foreign settings provide an especially productive field for research both in terms of the social history of literature and the geographical imagination of the Latvian reading public during the early twentieth century. At this time, the development of new technologies and media enabled a much swifter acquisition of information about foreign locations that also entered the colloquial speech of the population. The naming of these locations may be referred to simply in passing and remain without any importance for the plot development,

while at the same time they serve the purposes of revealing important features of the geographical imagination of society.

It becomes obvious that not all place names encountered in the novels acquire an equal level of importance. Some of these place names refer to locations that are substantial for novel narratives. However, there appear to be a number of place names that do not have a direct link to the unfolding events. These place names enter the text through the stories or memories of some of the protagonists who refer either to their past activities or future plans, or, sometimes, demonstrate their awareness of well-known facts or topical issues discussed in society. Finally, a separate segment in the variety of place names is formed by those namings that have no importance for the plot development, but indicate established values or contain certain cultural reminiscences. For these reasons, the material was structured according to three principal categories: first, important settings; secondly, projected spaces and places; thirdly, topographical markers or those places which, even if mentioned in texts, have no direct relationship to the unfolding narratives. Here we follow the model established by the *Literary Atlas of Europe* (Piatti, "Mapping" 92).

By gathering a substantial amount of information on these issues, important to make such an inquiry reliable, and by creating graphic models of gradually developing trends in these representations, that tend to change during the period under investigation, new perspectives in textual interpretation also open up for further research.

In the following we provide two case studies that specify the application of the above strategies to the analysis of the novel corpus by paying attention to the dynamics of changes in social history that are reflected by literary texts where space is "understood as socially produced, constructed, segmented, and given meaning" (Juvan 82).

Representations of Estonia and Lithuania in the context of social mobility

In the context of the political history, the Latvian-speaking regions of Vidzeme and Kurzeme had closer ties to Estonia, and the northern part of contemporary Latvia (Vidzeme, or Livland) even formed a joint territorial unit with Southern Estonia in the Russian Empire. Even if these ties still preserved their importance especially due to the German-speaking university tradition in the Estonian town of Tartu (then also subject to Russification), the late nineteenth and early twen-

tieth century marked a considerable rise of interest in Lithuanian lands. This move was stimulated by the ideology of national romanticism that searched for common historical and ethnic roots of the two nations (Lithuanian and Latvian) which belong to the same group of Baltic languages. From this perspective it is interesting to compare the contexts in which Estonian and Lithuanian territories are represented in early twentieth-century Latvian fiction.

Lithuania is mentioned in thirteen novels of the corpus (*Aija, Kad mēness dilst, Patrioti, Baltā grāmata, Dīvaina mīlestība, Vīriešu krietnums un sieviešu untums, Degoša sala, Bursaki, Pēdējais latvietis, Pa tumšām tekām, Zelts un mīlestība, Zelts and Zem saules*), while Estonia is featured in eleven novels (*Kad mēness dilst, Patrioti, Caurie ziedi, Iedzīmtais grēks, Bursaki, Pa tumšām tekām, Sieviete, Ūdens burbuļi, Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi, Tilti un pārigājēji and Zem saules*). Five of the above texts contain both Lithuanian and Estonian place names. On closer inspection it might be argued that Lithuania is represented with more diversity. It is possible to separate two groups of Lithuania-related references in the novels. The first one points towards two-way mobility by describing Lithuanian immigrants in Latvia and Latvian subjects who go to Lithuania mostly for commercial reasons. Action in one novel (*Baltā grāmata*) is set close to the Latvian and Lithuanian border, where the protagonists remember their stay in Vilnius on various occasions as well as travels to this city. Alongside such principal Lithuanian sites as Vilnius, and also Kaunas, minor places, such as Pandėlys, Ratkūnai, and Suvainiškis, are mentioned as well. In the novels we often encounter secondary characters who either had been born, or lived and worked in Lithuania. The specific place names include Vilnius (*Zelts un mīlestība*), the Kaunas region (*Vīriešu krietnums un sieviešu untums*), Joniškėlis, Martiniškės, and Žagarė (*Aija, Dīvaina mīlestība, Zem saules, Patrioti*). The constant presence of Lithuania in the geographical imagination of the Latvian population is also revealed through such details as the arrival of a physician from Vilnius (*Zelts*); students trying to escape to Western Europe and being arrested in Kaunas (*Bursaki*); business deals made in Lithuania (*Pēdējais latvietis*); an opinion, expressed by a traveling Jewish merchant, that there are better opportunities for small-scale trade in Šiauliai and Žagarė than in Riga (*Patrioti*). The second group contains historical references, where Lithuania is mentioned in a historical perspective as one of the most important European powers in the sixteenth century (*Kad mēness dilst*) and a major centre of Catholicism (*Patrioti*); as a shelter of refugees from Kurzeme in the seventeenth century (*Pa tumšām tekām*); and in

the context of such an important event as the publication of the first Latvian language texts in Vilnius.

Besides these two groups, Lithuania has been depicted in one novel as a mystical and unattainable part of the landscape for those living close to the border. The text here repeatedly refers to “Lithuanian forests” visible in the distance that provide a substantial element of the landscape encountered by the protagonist, and partly also serves as a projection of his dreams:

There, in the south toward Lithuania, the black line of the pine forest is like a fallen desire ... And he named some unfamiliar place. That must be deep in the Lithuanian countryside ... The ripe summer slumbers in a blue haze, and the Lithuanian woodlands are drowning in smoke, just as they did back then ... And he goes outside and looks across the lake toward the Lithuanians’ bluish conifer forests. ... There lies the black Lithuanian forest, barely visible, like a bow that has been released into a shallow curve. ... Rūtiņa will be taken away to the Lithuanian forests. ... The Lithuanian woodlands lie in blue curves and are mute and motionless, as in fairy tales. ... The blue Lithuanian forests lay like a motionless rampart, full of the myth and longing of that, which is remote ... The scorching wind blowing through the branches of the apple trees, and the calm blue-ing of the Lithuanian forest on the horizon at the southern edge of the sky made his heart grow heavy. ... Beyond the lake, like the stroke of a painter’s brush, like a wooden slat arrow shot into a shallow bend, slumbered the Lithuanian woodlands... (Akuraters 28–29, 33, 42, 96, 99, 103, 104, 112)⁴

In a rather more restricted sense, in the novel corpus Estonia is most frequently referenced in the context of the university town of Tartu. Discussed in the texts are protagonists who either have already entered the university or relish plans to begin their studies there (*Iedzimtais grēks*, *Bursaki*, *Ūdens burbuļi*, *Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi*, *Tilti un pārīgājēji*, *Zem saules*, *Patrioti*). In one case this choice is abandoned because the character is looking for better options provided by the universities of Moscow or Warsaw (*Zem saules*). There are also critical remarks with regard to the frivolity of student corporations in Tartu (*Tilti un pārīgājēji*); however, in another novel by the same author student life in Tartu is characterized as exemplary (*Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi*), referencing the quality of the university library that even includes the book collection and refers to the design of the book shelves. One novel also mentions scholarships for Latvian students at the University of Tartu (*Patrioti*).

⁴ Here and further all quotations from Latvian are translated by Anna Reynolds.

While the references to the University of Tartu build up a substantial part of the Estonian-related place names, two further groups can also be singled out. One of them, similar to the Lithuanian references, indicates historical events. In the historical novels of the corpus Tallinn and Narva are places where certain battles occur in the seventeenth and eighteenth century (*Pa tumšām tekām*), or where the Swedes gather in the sixteenth century (*Kad mēness dīlst*). Some other historical events include famine in Estonia and Finland in the mid-nineteenth century (*Patrioti*), and the impact of socialist ideas on particular restrictive decisions made by the Estonian clergy (*Skolotāji Kalēja piedzīvojumi*). The second group contains various Estonian towns that are mentioned as a part of travels and almost exclusively not as destination points; Estonian locations remain temporary shelters for the protagonists during their prolonged journeys. One of the characters arrives in Latvia from Russia taking the road via Narva (*Sieviete*); another one departs from Tartu in order to go to Tallinn (*Iedzimtais grēks*). In addition, one novel mentions Estonia as an important health resort and a place suitable for the summer vacations of wealthy middle-class citizens alongside such locations as the Crimea, Finland, and Jūrmala (an important sea resort in Latvia).

This analysis suggests several important aspects of how literary mapping can offer important data to social history. First of all, it becomes clear that particular locations mentioned in the novels often do not have a direct relation to the narrative development, but rather serve as signals of mental mapping of the perceived or experienced spaces. Therefore, an important aspect in these representations is provided by an apparent matching of place names to the expectations of the novel readers already familiar with a specific set of places.

An analysis of these namings offers interesting ground for inquiries with regard to imagological perspectives on Lithuania and Estonia in early twentieth-century Latvian society. However, to get results that are representative enough, it would be important to enlarge this set of data. Our preliminary observations indicate that on the level of everyday communication in early twentieth-century Latvia there are closer ties to Lithuania than to Estonia. Estonia is primarily associated with university studies in Tartu, while contacts with Lithuania also tend to include trade, travel, and short-term stays in various minor places as well as visits to Vilnius and Kaunas as major economic and cultural centers.

“Exotic” locations: metaphors and places of action

The development of a geographical imagination is also closely linked to the gradually growing presence of other continents as demonstrated by the novel corpus. The representation of foreign lands (both in the East and in the West) is still ruled by certain stereotypes to a considerable extent. So-called exotic locations are especially important in texts that were classified as popular literature. This can be more closely observed through the comparison of two continents, Africa and America, and their representation in the novel corpus.

Both continents remain almost equally unexplored for the Latvian population during this period, but their representations reveal different attitudes toward these faraway lands. While there is no information provided with regard to the colonies in Africa, the growing migration to America forms a part of the social mobility of the Latvian population, and at that time small communities of Latvian immigrants are already established there.

Africa is mentioned in eleven novels of the corpus (*Patrioti, Dēmona slāpes, Vīriešu krietnums un sieviešu untums, Iedzimtais grēks, Krusts un pūsmēnesis, Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes, Bursaki, Stiprinieku karalis Zigfrīds, Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi, Tilti un pārigājēji* and *Zem Saules*), while America appears in eighteen of them (*Zīda tīklā, Patrioti, Dīvaina mīlestība, Vīriešu krietnums un sieviešu untums, Iedzimtais grēks, Krusts un pūsmēnesis, Leons Vesers: Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes, Mantu, asinis, dzīvību uz Tēvijas altāra!, Bursaki, Pēdējais latvietis, Plūdi, Stiprinieku karalis Zigfrīds jeb Vīra spēks un sievietes sirds, Vēja ziedi, Rīta blāzmā, Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi, Tilti un pārigājēji, Zem dzimtenes debesīm* and *Zem saules*). A closer look at the namings reveals that America is more often represented as a place of narrative action or the final destination of the protagonists. At the same time, Africa is usually involved in a metaphorical sense.

The references to Africa can be subdivided into three groups. The first one includes historical events and contemporary political conflicts. To this part belong references to the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa, and Napoleon's exile to the island of St. Helena (*Vīriešu krietnums un sieviešu untums*), the rivalry between France and Germany with regard to Morocco (*Iedzimtais grēks*), and the popular appeal of the library of Alexandria in Egypt (*Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi*). The second group contains references related to the colonial imagination. The colonial contexts are detectable in the figure of a slave who has been brought to America from Africa at the beginning of

the nineteenth century (*Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes*); in the discussion of the colonial wealth that has been brought to Europe from Africa (*Tilti un pārigājēji*); and in the attempt of the population of Vidzeme to raise money for a charity mission in Africa (*Patrioti*). Only one novel, where the action takes place in Serbia (*Krusts un pūsmēness*), features a real encounter with Africa. The protagonist of this novel has returned from this distant continent, but its representations remain on the level of stereotypes that involve bright sunshine, deep forests, wild beasts, and black beauties. The third group includes very general and metaphoric features that refer to life and experience in Africa, such as great heat, physical pain, unknown directions, or unexpected experiences:

You see, for the Ganges, whom I call the emancipated loner, love does not have a smiling nature, it is not a blossoming mountain of flowers, not a hallelujah, not a day of celebration, not a velvety green birch grove – rather it is a sweltering ache, it manifests the heat of the noonday sun, it is a sun-baked African cliff in an ebbing sea of sand. (Jēkabsons 265)

The coastal sand has grown so hot in the sun that the soles of feet are burning. This does not seem like Latvia, but rather like a corner of the African Sahara – beneath the very Equator ... (Skuju 43)

“That is one of Egypt’s torments!” Rutkis complained, rubbing the places where it hurt. “How would it be if I ground in some grass, too?” “Let him feel shame before the world!” Old Rasa yelled in anger from the garden. Truly like the torments of Egypt. He could no longer lie down nor even really sit because of the pain.” (Gruzna 1374)

It has pulled us forward quickly and now we are heading to Africa with express mail! (Rozentāls 145)

Who persuaded them to flee? No one. They decided to do it themselves, for scientific purposes. Just like Stanley in Africa, or Przewalski in Central Asia. (Gruzna 484)

Along with the colonial references they are characteristic of the contemporaneous European imagination of Africa in terms of “suspended reality” and “imperialist ethnographies” bringing the theme of adventures into the foreground (Riesz 79–82). What is more important, in these references we witness that those authors who describe Africa do not have direct knowledge of the continent, and rely on information obtained from books and newspapers.

In this regard, there are certain similarities in the representation of America, as some of the characteristics that refer to this continent remain on the same level of stereotypes. The first group of references is related to travel where America is often involved as a metaphoric image for an upcoming long and hazardous journey:

“To Liepāja...” “Or even to America – what does it matter to us!” (Upīts, *Zīda* 183)

They had wanted to cross the border at Virbaļi. And then go on, even as far as America. (Gruzna 484)

Minna began blubbering loudly. “What’s all this caterwauling? I won’t be going to America. You know how to read, you could bring yourself to write too, now and again.” (Upīts, *Plūdi* 346)

Bravo! Mother doesn’t want to send me to the swamps of Misi Sipi to toughen up – she’s found a place for me right here, nearby.” (Jaunsudrabiņš No. 247, 2)

A trip to America even comes into question as a substitute for an attempted suicide when there are unpayable debts, or it contains a more or less unrealistic future dream:

Your credit is finished, ganz aus. You want to get away to America, or put a string around your neck? (Kalniņš 74)

Gentlemen, but what are the rest of us to do, those who won’t be getting ministers’ portfolios? “Let us be envoys, consuls and other such men.” “I am going to Paris in any event!” “And I – to Constantinople!” “I – to Peking!” “I – to Rome!” “I – to the United States, or to Brazil, whichever I like best!” (Skuju 19)

There are, however, also cases when a real journey to America is involved. In one novel the protagonist decides to try his luck as a Gold digger (*Iedzimtais grēks*); while in another one, in the aftermath of a successful participation in the gold rush in Alaska, the protagonist establishes himself as a farmer in Mexico (*Stiprinieku karalis Zigfrīds*). Agents also appear that pretend to help people to move to either America or Siberia in a search of a better life (*Plūdi*); and Lithuanian casual workers overseas are said to get better payments than professors in Germany (*Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi*). A Latvian teacher decides to follow her pupils’ family to America (*Zem dzimtenes debesīm*); and it is also maintained that there are more scientists of Latvian origin in Buenos Aires,

Berlin, and Vladivostok than in Latvia (*Rīta blāzmā*). These examples point toward the second group of references, connected to the popular image of the United States of America as a land of extraordinary wealth that becomes visible in references to the Gold Rush in Alaska, or the USA as a place where wealth can be acquired almost at once. America is considered to be the land of millionaires (*Zem saules*); and two novels deal with an inheritance left by a relative living in the US (*Plūdi* and *Vīriešu krietnums*). The third group of America-related references relates to the perception of the continent as an “altogether different” place, including contemporaneous political trends (cf. Firchow 90–94). Compared to Europe, America has different laws (*Tilti un pārigājēji*). America is also involved as a progressive example in the context of the emancipation of women (*Vīriešu krietnums* and *Pēdējais latvietis*) or the discussion of other socially radical ideas. It is mentioned that a Latvian language newspaper had published a paper that was sent by a compatriot in the United States (*Bursaki*). Sensationalism surrounds a novel that features a meeting in Philadelphia with a physician who turns out to be a serial killer (*Mantu, asinis, dzīvību*). The fourth group includes historical events that are mentioned rather seldom; references to the nineteenth-century civil war (*Patrioti, Brīvības karotāji*; in the latter case, also a location in Mexico is involved) as well as the late nineteenth-century Spanish-American war are rare examples (*Vīriešu krietnums*). A number of specific places that cover a wide geographical area also occur. One novel (*Spēkavīru karalis Zigfrīds*) involves numerous locations in Europe as well as in the US, and among the place names involved one finds Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Washington. In addition, more specific locations are also indicated, among them Central Park in New York, the White House in Washington, and the Montgomery Hotel in San Francisco.

These examples allow for certain conclusions regarding the representations of foreign and exotic locations. The abundance of stereotypes reveals that in most cases the inclusion of these place names serves as a reference to the already known rather than pointing toward the strange or unfamiliar. A general observation can also be made that America as a place for the narrative action is used solely in those novels that can be attributed to popular literature. While it is hard to find examples where national or colonial stereotyping has not been involved, it is worth mentioning that some of the stereotypes do not appear in Latvian novels—for instance, one does not find the image of America as a “melting pot,” nor does one witness an interpretation of America in terms of the American Revolution or utopian vs. dystopian views on America

(cf. Firchow 90–94). On some occasions we can find references to real mobility of the Latvian population to America, while on the whole the representation of both Africa and America can be productively used in imagological research by turning attention to the different ways national and colonial stereotypes were established in Latvian letters.

The images of the foreign that excite readers also follow certain models of translated fiction that predominantly portray characters against some kind of background that remains exotic for the Latvian population, while at the same time it is adapted to serve their knowledge and expectations. It is also possible to trace the appearance of facts already familiar to readers from newspapers. This also confirms that popular fiction most often recycles information available in other sources. In this process, persistent stereotypes emerge that influence the geographical imagination of a substantial part of the Latvian population for a long time to come.

Concluding remarks

A digital analysis of all Latvian novels published between 1900 and 1914, and the research opportunities it provides, allows for both theoretical observations and case studies. As becomes visible in the examples dealt with in this paper, the interpretations of Latvian novels within the perspective of the geographical imagination provide knowledge that would be harder and more difficult to obtain by using conventional methods of literary analysis. At the current stage of research, it is already possible to draw a few provisional conclusions.

The novels as sources of social history demonstrate not only real mobility, but also stereotypes and attitudes, and it might even be argued that the second level of information is more useful and productive for purposes of research. In this regard, we have to reject the idea of “mimetic illusion” (Piatti, *Die Geographie* 27) and to accept that not all places depicted in the novels match their real-life counterparts, especially when the authors have not been directly acquainted with the locations they describe. In further research, significant attention should thus be paid to the divide between fictional and real geography (Piatti, *Die Geographie* 24–26). By exploring fictional geography, the research might be fruitfully developed through a dialogue with imagological studies. Secondly, we anticipate that literary maps might be used as a significant research instrument, even though we are well aware that they would not serve in this capacity on all occasions. To increase the analytical capacity of literary maps, it would be productive to combine

them with other kinds of maps—e.g., biographical maps depicting the mobility of writers themselves or historical maps depicting the routes of professional or educational migration of the Latvian population—which would provide an analysis of the impact social changes had on the geographical imagination, or aspects when the social developments were inconsistent to what was imagined. Similarly, as revealed by our case studies, the historical level in literary maps should be separated from the contemporaneous one, as we witness a high level of literarization of some regions that had been depicted based on what had been read about them instead of what had directly been experienced. It is important to compare this material with specific historical sources also in order not to overemphasize certain presumptions and add more interpretative space to the gathered material that uncovers assumptions and attitudes shared by authors and reading public of the time. The data corpus thus provides a substantial basis for the social history of literature.

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Appendix: Corpus of Latvian Novels (1900–1914)

Author	Title (in Latvian)	Title (in English)	Year
Ernests Dinsbergs	<i>Vīriešu krietnums un sieviešu untums</i>	<i>Male Virtue and Female Caprice</i>	1900
Zeiboltu Jēkabs	<i>Ūdens burbuļi</i>	<i>Bubbles in the Water</i>	1900
Kārlis Kalniņš	<i>Noslēpumainais gredzens</i>	<i>The Mysterious Ring</i>	1901
Viktors Eglītis	<i>Rīta blāzmā</i>	<i>At Dawn</i>	1901
Zemzarītis	<i>Tumša ēna jeb Dvēseles sāpju mocekļi</i>	<i>A Dark Shadow, or Martyrs of Spiritual Pain</i>	1902
Andrievs Niedra	<i>Kad mēness dilst</i>	<i>When the Moon is on the Wane</i>	1902
Viktors Eglītis	<i>Tilti un pāri gājēji</i>	<i>Bridges and Those Who Cross Them</i>	1902
Kārlis Cilinskis	<i>Skaistā cietēja Milda</i>	<i>The Sufferings of Beautiful Milda</i>	1903
Andrejs Upīts	<i>Plūdi</i>	<i>The Flood</i>	1903
Kārlis Cilinskis	<i>Skaistā Adelīna jeb Mīlestība un briesmas</i>	<i>Beautiful Adeline, or Love and Danger</i>	1904

Zemzarītis	<i>Mantu, asinis, dzīvību uz Tēvijas altāra!</i>	<i>Possessions, Blood, and Life on the Altar of the Fatherland!</i>	1904
Haralds Eldgasts	<i>Zvaigžņotās nakts</i>	<i>Starlit Nights</i>	1905
Zemzarītis	<i>Uz mākslas spārniem</i>	<i>On the Wings of Art</i>	1905
Reinis Dievkociņš	<i>Gods un apziņa</i>	<i>Honour and Conscience</i>	1905
Andrievs Niedra	<i>Sikspārnis</i>	<i>The Bat</i>	1905
Kārlis Jēkabsons	<i>Dēmona slāpes</i>	<i>Demon's Thirst</i>	1907
Valdis Lesiņš	<i>Slimā dvēsele</i>	<i>The Sick Soul</i>	1907
Antons Birkerts	<i>Pedagoģi</i>	<i>The Pedagogues</i>	1907
Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš	<i>Vēja ziedi</i>	<i>Blossoms of the Wind</i>	1907
Dīženajo Bernhards	<i>Dzelzpiere Briesmīgais un viņa varoņa darbi</i>	<i>Ironhead the Terrible and His Exploits</i>	1908
Andrejs Upīts	<i>Jauni avoti</i>	<i>New Springs</i>	1908
Leons Vesperis	<i>Starp Sibīriju un Indiju jeb Tuksnešu varoņi</i>	<i>Between Siberia and India, or Heroes of the Desert</i>	1909
Andrejs Upīts	<i>Sieviete</i>	<i>Woman</i>	1910
Antons Birkerts	<i>Nolādētais</i>	<i>The Damned</i>	1910
Leons Vesperis	<i>Brīvības karotāji pie Sarkanās upes</i>	<i>Freedom Fighters on the Shores of the Red River</i>	1910
Tirzmaliete	<i>Zem dzimtenes debesīm</i>	<i>Beneath My Native Sky</i>	1911
Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš	<i>Aija</i>	<i>Aija</i>	1911
Skuju Frīdis	<i>Zem saules</i>	<i>Beneath the Sun</i>	1912
Andrejs Upīts	<i>Zīda tīklā</i>	<i>In the Silken Web</i>	1912
Jānis Akuraters	<i>Deģoša sala</i>	<i>Burning Island</i>	1912
Augusts Deglavs	<i>Patrioti</i>	<i>The Patriots</i>	1912
M. Kalniņš	<i>Dīvaina mīlestība</i>	<i>Strange Love</i>	1912
Zemzarītis	<i>Krusts un pusmēness</i>	<i>The Cross and the Crescent</i>	1912
Andrejs Upīts	<i>Pēdējais latvietis</i>	<i>The Last Latvian</i>	1912
Ivande Kaija	<i>Iedzimtais grēks</i>	<i>Ancestral Sin</i>	1913
Jānis Kārstenis	<i>Kā sacēlās vētra</i>	<i>How the Storm Arose</i>	1913
Zeiboltu Jēkabs	<i>Caurie ziedi</i>	<i>Empty Blossoms</i>	1913
Čiekurs	<i>Žurku krodziņš</i>	<i>Rat Tavern</i>	1914
Roberts Klaustiņš	<i>Pa tumšām tekām</i>	<i>Walking along Shadowy Trails</i>	1914
Viktors Eglītis	<i>Skolotāja Kalēja piedzīvojumi</i>	<i>The Adventures of Teacher Kalējs</i>	1914
Andrejs Upīts	<i>Zelts</i>	<i>Gold</i>	1914
Leopolds Rozentāls	<i>Stiprinieku karalis Zigfrīds</i>	<i>Zigfried, King of the Mighty</i>	1914
Pāvils Gruzna	<i>Bursaki</i>	<i>The Students</i>	1914
Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš	<i>Baltā grāmata</i>	<i>The White Book</i>	1914
Anonīms	<i>Zelts un mīlestība</i>	<i>Love and Gold</i>	1914
Zeltenietis	<i>Karš un mīlestība</i>	<i>Love and War</i>	1914

Geografska imaginacija v latvijskih romanih zgodnjega 20. stoletja

Ključne besede: latvijska književnost / latvijski roman / 20. stoletje / literarna geografija / literarno kartiranje / imagologija

V prispevku raziskujeva geografsko imaginacijo v latvijskih romanih, objavljenih na začetku 20. stoletja. Najprej podava lastne izkušnje in preliminarnе rezultate projekta literarnega mapiranja, nato se posvetiva študijskim primerom: reprezentacijam držav, ki so sosede Latvije, in posameznih izbranih kontinentov v navedenih romanih. Zgodnje 20. stoletje kot obdobje množičnih migracij in vse večjega zavedanja globalnih dogajanj postreže z izjemno raznolikimi reprezentacijami tujih geografskih prostorov v latvijski družbi. Ob hkratnem razpravljanju o prednostih in omejitvah literarnih preslikav zagovarjava stališče, da so interpretacije latvijskih romanov v perspektivi geografske imaginacije vir dragocenega védenja za socialno zgodovino literature.

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