

Geografías fabuladas. Trece miradas al espacio en la última narrativa de Castilla y León. Edición de María Pilar Celma Valero y Carmen Morán Rodríguez. Madrid: Iberoamericana/Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert. 2010. 262 pp.

The task set by this collection of thirteen chapters, each by a different contributor, is a daunting one, though very ably explained in the introduction by the editors: it seeks to examine the presence and treatment of space in the narrative of writers from Castile and León between the years 1980 and 2006 (7). At times, though, these parameters are not strictly adhered to, particularly regarding dates, with some contributors looking at later work. In any case, it is an analysis that sits very well within contemporary criticism that highlights the use of space as much more than a backdrop against which to focus on plot, a point made by all of the contributors in various ways. The variety of texts examined proves the rich source available, with chapters dedicated to work by Elena Santiago, José María Merino, Jesús Torbado, José Jiménez Lozano, Luis Mateo Diez, Gustavo Martín Garzo, J. A. González and Julio Llamazares. The edition is attractive and the standard of writing is high with a clear range of experience on offer. The bibliographies will certainly provide a rich source for further academic investigation on the use of narrated space in general, and within the specific geography indicated in particular.

For several contributors, space becomes a symbol of the psychology of the characters and their behaviour. Such is the case for Natalia Álvarez Méndez, in her detailed description of Elena Santiago's work (13), the first analysis to appear after the introduction. It is followed by three chapters that examine the work of José María Merino. First, *La sima* (2009), according to Antonio Candau, may seem to share common ground with stories that are placed at a crossroads between history and fiction (46), a most notable example being Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina*. However, of concern here is the gap in criticism whereby the division between real and imagined spaces (topographies and toponymia) has not been adequately explored (35). Similarity is seen between *La sima* and another of Merino's stories, *El lugar sin culpa* (2007) whereby certain spaces are privileged (41) and utopian visions provide tension for the characters, leading to what Candau sees as an 'auténtica novela de tesis' (49), referring both to fictional thesis and the author's own, found by Candau to be closer to literature than to history or document (52). An earlier story by Merino, *El heredero* (2003), provides the focus for Cheng Chan Lee's analysis which uses the three phases in rites of passage identified by Victor Turner (i.e. separation; liminal; reaggregation described in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* [New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995]) as a basis to view the relationship of characters with their environment, with the liminal stage seen as most significant (67). For Teresa Gómez Trueba, on the other hand, space and non-space are of interest when talking of Merino's work. She sees that the space used in his earlier work (León) changes, with

vanishing reality being transplanted by an artificial, false copy, the replica, the virtual reality of science fiction (90), due to postmodern alienation (92).

Jesús Torbado's *Tierra mal bautizada*, first published in 1968, provides Asunción Castro with evidence that the travelogue, documenting a journey made by Torbado in 1966, illustrates the confrontation between an heroic past and a ruined present (98). Deteriorated places, whether monasteries converted into hencoops, dilapidated churches, crumbled walls etc., demythify the past (98). Memory collides with present evidence (103) giving a subjective, descriptive, personal account of a circular journey through 'una tierra para morir' (104). A similar concern may be found in José Ramón González's investigation of *Volver al mundo* (2003) by J. A. González Sainz where place, non-place and nostalgia are elements that gain attention. As the title suggests, the theme of returning occupies the characters in this novel, with the central theme being the impossibility of recovering the anthropological space illustrated. Nostalgia for place is seen as an incurable illness (225).

In his discussion of the collection of short stories, *El grano de maíz rojo* (1999), by José Jiménez Lozano, Fernando Romero Galán looks at the dividing line between autobiography and fiction (109). Denouncing oppression as a means to modernity is seen as the basis of Lozano's work with space being the witness to victimization (121). Several stories are used (such as 'El balneario', 'La huida', 'El arreglo de boda', 'El silencio') to provide evidence of the connection between Space/Place and identity and the mismatch between modern humanity and the natural world which, in turn, leads to a lack of balance (125).

A change of emphasis is marked by Carlos Javier García when looking at Luis Mateo Díez's *El reino de Celama* (2003). Here, a real inscription on a Roman 'lápida' or stone featured in the epigraph to the novel is seen to reflect the ideas within and allows both reader and character to be situated in the same spatial plane, both being readers of that inscription which is seen, therefore, as both the foundation stone of Celama and of the novel (136). It forms a counterpoint to the distant while also serving as a reminder that words separate us from what is real. The stone reinforces the identity of the place and its people while, at the same time, it destabilizes that same identity by highlighting the gap between reality and illusion, history and fiction, art and life (135). The connection between memory and space is also of interest in Mercedes Rodríguez Pequeño's analysis of microstories, linked in her introduction to short stories, lyric or prose poetry and other so-called gnomic literature (139–42). In particular, Luis Mateo Díez's 'En el mar', occupying just eight lines of text, offers an insight into what can be achieved in this relatively new narrative genre. Through repetition of motifs, intertextuality, emphasis on character and the use of space as a frame of action and geographic position (148), though condensed in form, powerful memories are evoked.

Five novels by Gustavo Martín Garzo, published between 1993 and 2000, are chosen for analysis by Carmen Morán Rodríguez from which to illustrate the great variety of spatial frames used and the meanings they acquire (159). Fantasy, myth, legend, symbol, linked with particular spaces such as a wardrobe (184; 186), a garden (184), a bathroom (188), a river (193) gain meaning due to symbolic connotation (195). For instance, intimate spaces particular to females become areas where men are allowed only if they sacrifice that which makes them male. As such, space is not a mere setting or backdrop but is charged with meaning, particularly expressing the opposition of the male/female worlds (195). The same author occupies Li-Jung Tseng's attention, though this time it is *La soñadora* (2002), a later novel, that provides the interest. Set in Valladolid, other locations such as Madrid, Barcelona and San Sebastián are also significant. This novel is seen to be different from Martín Garzo's previous work due to the greater richness of detail regarding description of scene (201), to such an extent that space becomes a character in its own right (203) though it is also symbolic (206), as previously argued by Morán Rodríguez, giving the text a coherence and acting in a metaphoric and metonymic way to reflect the interior state of the characters (209).

Work by Julio Llamazares occupies the final two contributions by Alejandro Alonso Nogueira and Juan Varo Zafra. The former looks in detail at *El río del olvido* (2006) while the

latter is interested primarily in *Luna de lobos* (1985) and *La lluvia amarilla* (1988). Alonso Noguiera applies Javier Maderuelo's five semantic 'strata' and concludes that landscape only exists as an interpretation and is thus subjective, with time and memory imposing change. As indicated before in Ramón González's work, failure is implicit when attempting to return to previously occupied space (241). Interestingly, Varo Zafra places Llamazares in the fourth generation of Leonese writers, having been born after 1950 and first published in the 1980s (245). A paradox of landscape is explored here. Landscape is a human construct (247) and what is constructed by Llamazares is likened to the American Gothic due to the presence of several elements: madness or fanaticism; cultural/economic backwardness; isolation; symbolism; corruption of buildings due to the invasion of a hostile, if not evil nature (252). As such, these first two books by Llamazares may be classed as 'gótico hispano' in so far as they speak of the natural world (257).

The challenge of any edition of collected essays is to form a coherent unit while allowing the individual interests of the contributors to shine through. So it is with this collection of thirteen papers. Some articles struggle to put space at the centre, understandable since there is often considerable overlap with considerations of time and character. At times too, the arguments are interrupted with excessively long quotes, again understandable since there is a sense that contributors believe the texts being discussed are likely to be unknown and, as such, there is a desire to provide the reader with as much information as possible. This reader, though, is left with several unanswered questions at the end such as: Is there a unifying use/effect of space in the latest narrative coming from Castile and León? Is such unity to be found cross generation? Do other authors outside of this district view Castile and León as a setting for their narrative? If so, do their views differ? What of authors from Castile and León who do not set their stories within their home district? Perhaps, to address such questions, another volume is called for.