

Atlas of the European novel

1800-1900

Franco Moretti



VERSO

London • New York

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First published by Verso 1998
 © Franco Moretti 1998
 Paperback edition first published by Verso 1999
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 First published as *Atlante del romanzo europeo 1800-1900*
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Verso
 UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR
 US: 180 Varick Street, New York NY 10014-4606

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN 1-85984-224-0

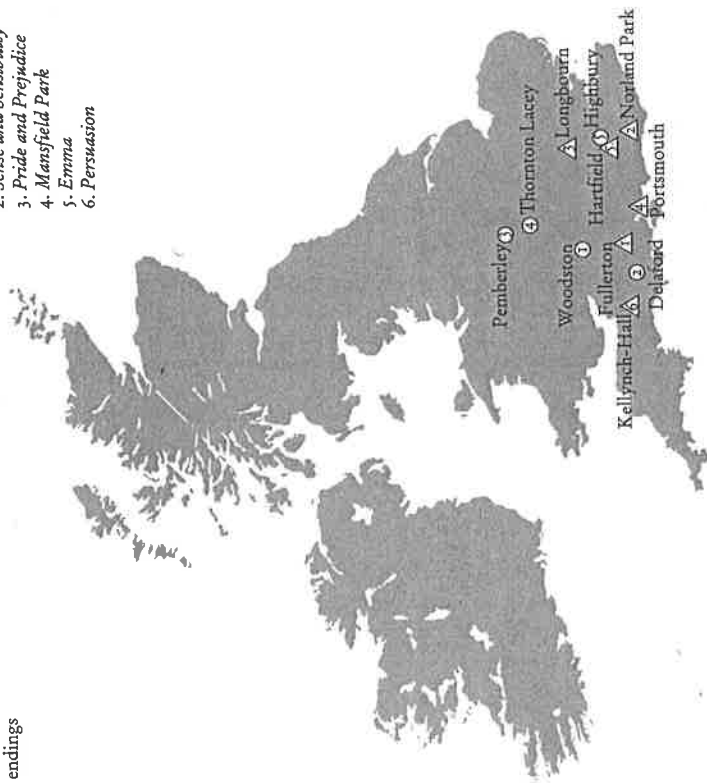
British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
 A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
 A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Designed and typeset by
 The Running Head Limited, London and Cambridge
 Printed by Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

1. Jane Austen's Britain

- △ beginnings
- endings

- 1. *Northanger Abbey*
- 2. *Sense and Sensibility*
- 3. *Pride and Prejudice*
- 4. *Mansfield Park*
- 5. *Emma*
- 6. *Persuasion*



Neighbours in Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby, who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen. To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class [...]. The country [...] becomes real only as it relates to the houses which are the real nodes.

RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *The Country and the City*

1. Home-land

Let me begin with a map of very well-known novels: figure 1, which shows the places where Jane Austen's plots (or more exactly, their central thread, the heroine's story) begin and end. *Northanger Abbey*, for instance, begins at Fullerton and ends at Woodston; *Sense and Sensibility*, at Norland Park and at Delaford; and so on for the others (except *Persuasion*, whose endpoint is left rather vague). Please take a few moments to look at the figure, because in the end this is what literary geography is all about: you select a textual feature (here, beginnings and endings), find the data, put them on paper – and then you look at the map. In the hope that the visual construct will be more than the sum of its parts: that it will show a shape, a pattern that may *add* something to the information that went into making it.

And a pattern does indeed emerge here: of exclusion, first of all. No Ireland; no Scotland; no Wales; no Cornwall. No 'Celtic fringe', as Michael Hechter has called it;¹ only England: a much smaller space than the United Kingdom as a whole. And not even all of England: Lancashire, the North, the industrial revolution – all missing. Instead, we have here the much older England celebrated by the 'estate poems' of topographical poetry: hills, parks, country houses ... (figure 2). It's a first instance of what literary geography may tell us: two things at once: what *could* be in a novel – and what *actually is*

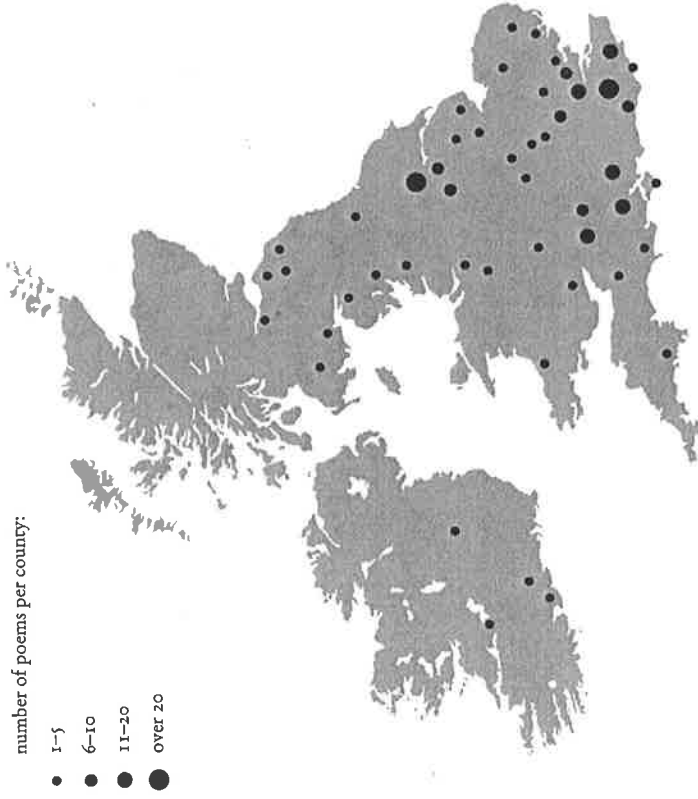
¹ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1836–1966*, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1975.

there. On the one hand, the industrializing 'Great' Britain of Austen's years; on the other, the small, homogeneous England of Austen's novels.

A small England, I have said. Smaller than the United Kingdom, to be sure; and small for us, now. Less so, however, at the turn of the eighteenth century, when the places on the map were separated by a day, or more, of very uncomfortable travel. And since these places coincide with the residences of the heroine (the beginning), and that of her husband-to-be (the ending), the distance between them means that Austen's plots join together – 'marry' – people *who belong to*

2. 'Estate poems' 1650–1850

Estate poems – which describe and celebrate a country estate – are most frequent in the southern counties of England where Austen's novels typically take place, while the 'Celtic periphery' is again virtually absent.



different counties. Which is new, and significant: it means that these novels try to represent what social historians refer to as the 'National Marriage Market': a mechanism that crystallized in the course of the eighteenth century, which demands of human beings (and especially of women) a new mobility: physical, and even more so *spiritual* mobility. Because it is clear that a large marriage market can only work if women feel 'at home' – in figure 1, many of the names indicate homes – not only in the small enclave of their birth, but in a much wider territory.² If they can feel the nation-state as a true home-land – and if not the nation-state as a whole, at least its 'core area', as social geography calls it: the wealthiest, most populated area (and the safest one, where a young woman may move around without fear). *Northanger Abbey*:

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and the Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the south of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities [the Celtic Fringe!]. But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manner of the age . . .
Northanger Abbey, 25³

But in the central part of England . . . There is no better title for the map of Austen's novels. And as for Radcliffe's imitators, figure 3 (on the following page) shows the wide gulf separating the world of the Gothic from that of Catherine Morland.

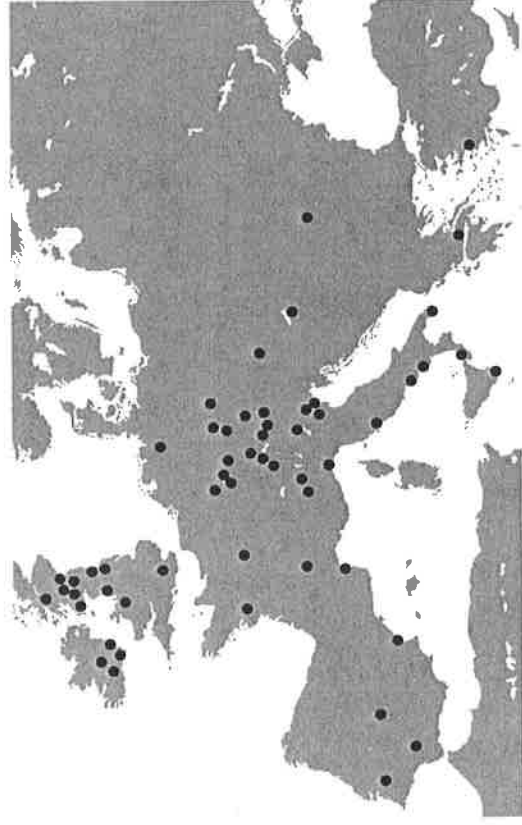
² Austen's space is of course too obviously *English* to be truly representative of the *British* nation. In this respect, Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812), or Ferrier's *Marriage* (1818), that deal with Ireland and Scotland as well as England, provide a more complete geographical setting (although in the end Edgeworth and Ferrier return to the idea of the nation within the nation, relinquishing the corruption of England for Ireland and Scotland respectively). The point is that England has long enjoyed an ambiguous and privileged position within the United Kingdom: *part* of it (like Scotland, Ireland, Wales) – but a *dominant* part, that claims the right to stand in for the whole. Austen's geo-narrative system is an extremely successful version of this opaque overlap of England and Britain.

³ Narrative passages are identified by the title of the text, followed by the number of the chapter.

Literary sociology has long insisted, as we know, on the relationship between the novel and capitalism. But Austen's space suggests an equally strong affinity (first pointed out by Benedict Anderson,

3. British Gothic tales 1770–1840

In this sample of nearly sixty texts, the highest concentration of Gothic tales is to be found in the triangle comprised between the Rhine, the Black Forest, and the Harz (the region of the pact with the Devil): a geographical distribution that was probably influenced by the enormous number of Gothic texts written in German. In general, Gothic stories were initially set in Italy and France; moved north, to Germany, around 1800; and then north again, to Scotland, after 1820. Except for one tale located in Renaissance London, no other story takes place inside Austen's English space.



not shown:

- Lebanon
- Ceylon

Reginald, sole heir of the illustrious family of Di Venoni, was remarkable, from his earliest infancy, for a wild enthusiastic disposition [...]. The gloomy château in which he resided was situated in Swabia on the borders of the Black Forest. It was a wild isolated mansion, built after the fashion of the day in the gloomiest style of Gothic architecture. At a distance rose the ruins of the once celebrated Castle of Rudstein, of which at present but a mouldering tower remained; and, beyond, the landscape was terminated by the deep shades and impenetrable recesses of the Black Forest...

ANONYMOUS, *The Astrologer's Prediction or The Maniac's Fate* (1826)

in *Imagined Communities*) between the novel and the geo-political reality of the nation-state. A modern reality, the nation-state – and a curiously elusive one. Because human beings can directly grasp most of their habitats: they can embrace their village, or valley, with a single glance; the same with the court, or the city (especially early on, when cities are small and have walls); or even the universe – a starry sky, after all, is not a bad image of it. But the nation-state? 'Where' is it? What does it look like? How can one see it? And again: village, court, city, valley, universe can all be visually represented – in paintings, for instance: but the nation-state? Well, the nation-state... found the novel. And viceversa: the novel found the nation-state. And being the only symbolic form that could represent it, it became an essential component of our modern culture.

Some nation-states (notably England/Britain and France) already existed, of course, long before the rise of the novel: but as 'potential' states, I would say, rather than actual ones. They had a court at the center, a dynasty, a navy, some kind of taxation – but they were hardly integrated systems: they were still fragmented into several local circuits, where the strictly *national* element had not yet affected everyday existence. But towards the end of the eighteenth century a number of processes come into being (the final surge in rural enclosures; the industrial take-off; vastly improved communications; the unification of the national market; mass conscription) that literally drag human beings out of the local dimension, and throw them into a much larger one. Charles Tilly speaks of a new value for this period – 'national loyalty' – that the state tries to force above and against 'local loyalties'.⁴ He is right, I believe, and the clash of old and new loyalty shows also how much of a *problem* the nation-state initially was: an unexpected coercion, quite unlike previous power relations; a wider, more abstract, more enigmatic dominion – *that needed a new symbolic form in order to be understood*.

And here, Austen's novelistic geography shows all its intelligence. In a striking instance of the problem-solving vocation of

⁴ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, Blackwell, Cambridge-Oxford 1990, p. 107.

literature, her plots take the painful reality of territorial uprooting – when her stories open, the family abode is usually on the verge of being lost – and rewrite it as a seductive journey: prompted by desire, and crowned by happiness. They take a *local* gentry, like the Bennets of *Pride and Prejudice*, and join it to the *national* elite of Darcy and his ilk.⁵ They take the strange, harsh novelty of the modern state – and turn it into a large, exquisite home.

2. *England and its double*

Marriage market, then. Like every other market, this also must take place somewhere, and figure 4 shows where: London, Bath, the seaside. Here people meet to complete their transactions, and here is also where all the trouble of Austen's universe occurs: infatuations, scandals, slanders, seductions, elopements – disgrace. And all of this happens because the marriage market (again, like every other market) has produced its own brand of swindlers: shady relatives, social climbers, speculators, seducers, déclassé aristocrats...

It makes sense, then, that this figure should be the inverse of figure 1. Look at them: the former is an introverted, rural England: an island within an island. The latter opens up to the sea, the great mix of Bath, and London, the busiest city in the world. In one, a scattered distribution of independent estates: in the other, an ellipse with one focus in London, and the other in Bath. There, homes; here, cities: and cities that are all real, whereas those homes were all fictional: an asymmetry of the real and the imaginary – of geography, and literature – that will recur throughout the present research.⁶

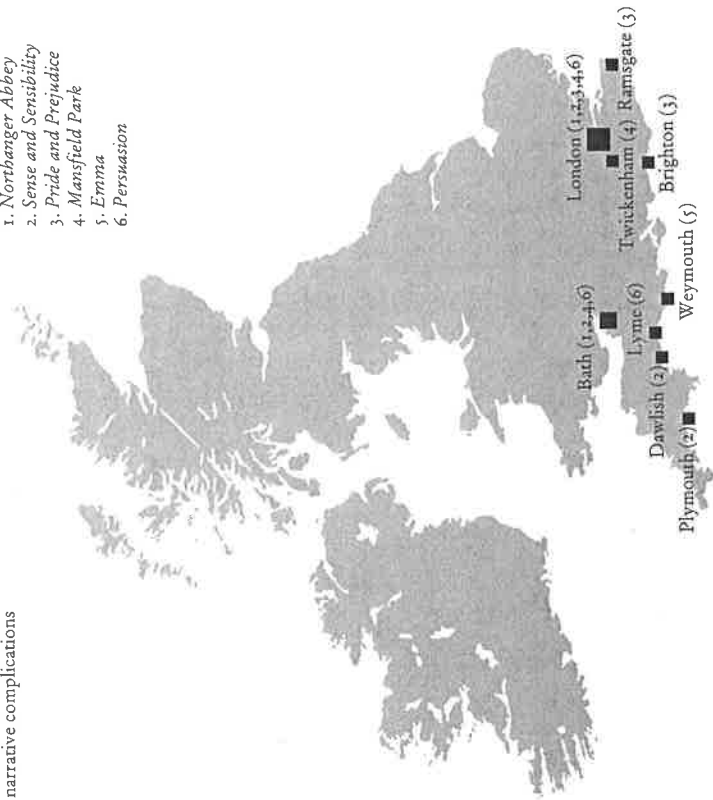
⁵ On the two gentries, see Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880*, Oxford University Press, 1986, passim.

⁶ Why do novels so often mix real geographical sites and imaginary locations? Are the latter needed for some *specific* narrative function? Are there, in other words, events that tend to happen in real spaces – and others that 'prefer' fictional ones? It is early to give a definitive answer, but Austen's novels certainly suggest that fictional spaces are particularly suited to happy endings, and the wish-fulfillment they usually embody. By contrast, the more pessimistic a narrative structure becomes, the more infrequent are its imaginary spaces.

4. Jane Austen's Britain

■ narrative complications

1. *Northanger Abbey*
2. *Sense and Sensibility*
3. *Pride and Prejudice*
4. *Mansfield Park*
5. *Emma*
6. *Persuasion*



About a year ago, [my sister] was taken from school, and an establishment formed for her in London; and last summer she went with the lady who presided over it, to Ramsgate; and thither also went Mr Wickham, undoubtedly by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance between him and Mrs Younge, in whose character were most unhappily deceived; and by her connivance and aid, he so far recommended himself to Georgiana, whose affectionate heart retained a strong impression of his kindness to her as a child, that she was persuaded to believe herself in love, and to consent to an elopement. She was then but fifteen ...

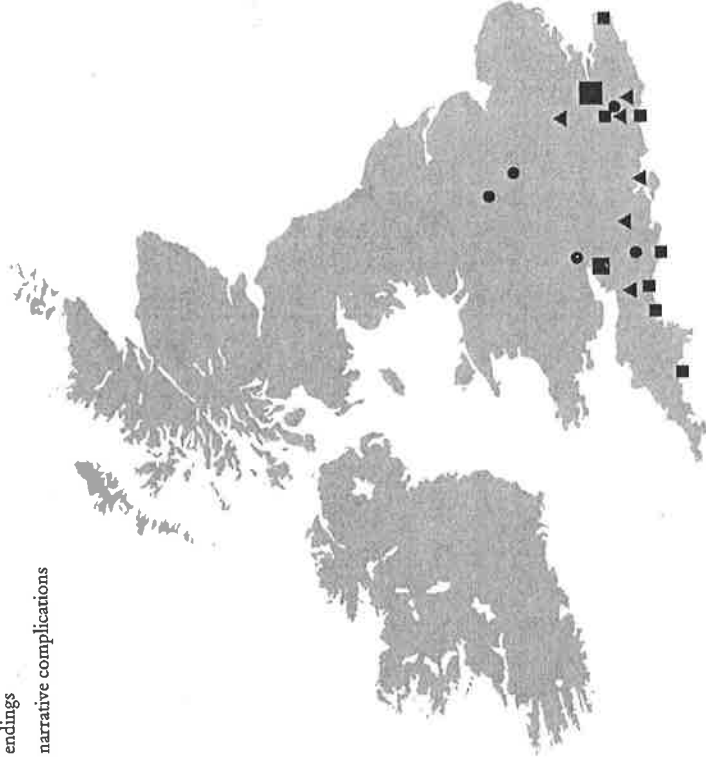
JANE AUSTEN, *Pride and Prejudice*, 35

Two Englands, where different narrative and axiological functions are literally 'attached' to different spaces (figure 5): and which one will prevail? The élite that has preserved its rural and local roots – or the mobile, urbanized group of seducers? In the language of the age: Land, or Money? We know Austen's answer: Land (preferably, with plenty of Money). But more significant than the final choice between the two spaces is the preliminary fact that Austen's England *is not one*. The novel functions as the symbolic form of the nation-state, I said earlier: and it's a form that (unlike an anthem, or a monument) not only does not conceal the nation's internal divisions, *but manages to turn them into a story*. Think of the two Englands of figure 5: they form a field of narrative forces, whose reiterated interplay defines the nation *as the sum of all its possible stories*: London, or the painful complications of life; the countryside, or the peace of closure; the seaside, and illicit emotions; Scotland, for secret lovers; Ireland and the Highlands, who knows, perhaps lands of the Gothic...

Austen's England; what an invention. And I say invention deliberately, because today the spatial scope of her novels may strike us as obvious, but historically it wasn't obvious at all. Readers needed a symbolic form capable of making sense of the nation-state, I have often repeated; they needed it, yes – but, before Austen, no one had really come up with it. Look at figure 6: the travels of the heroine and the other main characters in Amelie Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*. Space, here, is so stretched as to be almost shapeless: in one novel, the heroine and the other characters travel as much as in Austen's six novels taken together (figure 7) – a choice which has its own *raison d'être* (a woman who defies current morality will suffer an endless *via crucis*: in Lisbon, in Perpignan, in Richmond, in London...), but that certainly cannot turn the nation into a symbolic 'home'. Or again, look at figure 8: the 'excellent tale of *Manouvring*', as Scott calls it in the preface to *Ivanhoe*. Here, we have the opposite configuration to Opie's: the two heroines are motionless, in Devon, inside two neighbouring estates – while their men sail all over the world. A very simple, very clear division of the narrative universe: women at home, and men abroad (while the nation is again lost from sight).

5. Jane Austen's Britain

- ▲ beginnings
- endings
- narrative complications



All late-eighteenth-century moralists of whatever colouring prefer the country to the town, but Jane Austen's Fanny does so as a typical conservative: because she associates it with a community, in which individuals have well-defined duties towards the group, and because physically it reminds her of the wider ordered universe to which the lesser community belongs. Urban life, on the other hand, has given Mary selfish values: she betrays her egotism when she laughs at the farmers who will not let her have a wagon to move her harp...

MARILYN BUTLER, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*

Austen's geography is really different: it's a middle-sized world, much larger than Edgeworth's estate, and much smaller than Opie's Atlantic. It is the typically *intermediate* space of the nation-state, 'large enough to survive and to sharpen its claws on its neighbors, but small enough to be organized from one center and to feel itself as an entity', as Kiernan once put it.⁷ A contingent, intermediate construct (large enough . . . small enough . . .): and perhaps, it is also because she saw this new space that Austen is still read today, unlike so many of her rivals.

In Austen's middle-sized world, the notion of 'distance' acquires in its turn a new meaning. In Opie, or Edgeworth (or Susannah Gunning, Mary Charlton, Barbara Hofland, Selina Davenport: in fact, in most sentimental fiction), distance is an absolute, ontological category: the loved one is Here – or Away. At Home, or in the Wide World. Present, or Absent (and probably Dead). It's still the atmosphere of Greek romances: space as a mythical force, against whose power of separation human beings (and especially women, from whose viewpoint the story is told) have only one weapon: constancy. They must remain what they are, despite all distance; they must remain loyal, patient – *faithful*.

Against this veritable ideology of space, Austen's heroines discover concrete, Relative Distance. Willoughby, Darcy, are twenty miles away, forty, sixty; so is London, or Portsmouth. Maybe there will be a visit, maybe not, because it takes time and effort to travel forty miles. But this moderate uncertainty shows that distance has been brought down to earth: it can be measured, understood; it is no

⁷ V.G. Kiernan, 'State and Nation in Western Europe', *Past and Present*, July 1965, p. 35.

6–8. Britain and the world

In early nineteenth-century sentimental novels the international (and especially Atlantic) space takes the form of long retrospective narratives that focus on the (predominantly male) subplots: wars at sea, long-distance trade, Indian nabobs, West Indian planters . . .

Compared to her contemporaries, Austen markedly increases the central (and 'English') axis of the plot, so that the significance of the international subplot is accordingly reduced.



6)



7)



8)

Honoured Parents,
I write this from the sea, lat. N. 44. 15 – long. W. 9. 45 – wind NNE – to let you know you will not see me so soon as I said in my last, of the 16th. Yesterday, P.M. two o'clock, some despatches were brought to my good captain, by the Pickle sloop, which will tomorrow, wind and weather permitting, alter our destination. What the nature of them is I cannot impart to you [. . .] For my own part, I long for an opportunity of fighting the French . . .

H.M.S. l'Ambuscade

MARIA EDGEWORTH, *Manowaring*

longer a function of Fate, but of sentiment. It is one more way to attach a meaning to the national space, by literally 'projecting' emotions upon it. When Darcy, who should be in London, shows up at Longbourn, 'a smile of delight added lustre to [Elizabeth's] eyes' (*Pride and Prejudice*, 53). If he has come this far ...

3. 'The recent losses in the West India estate'

England, Great Britain, the national marriage market, London, Bath, the Celtic fringe ... And the colonies? Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire':

In *Mansfield Park*, [...] references to Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas possessions are threaded through; they give him his wealth, occasion his absences, fix his social status at home and abroad, and make possible his values [...]

What sustains this life materially is the Bertram estate in Antigua [...] no matter how isolated and insulated the English place (e.g., *Mansfield Park*), it requires overseas sustenance [...]. The Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar, and the colonial planter class.⁸

The Bertrams could not have been possible ... I like the directness of the claim, but disagree with it. I disagree, that is, not with the fact that the British colonies were very profitable, and very ruthlessly run: but with the idea that the English ruling class would 'not have been possible' without them. Take Antigua away, suggests Said, and Sir Bertram disappears: no 'wealth', no 'social status at home and abroad', no 'values', no 'material support', no 'sustenance'. But is this truly the case?

The argument, here, has clearly two sides: the economic role of the British empire – and its fictional representation. On the former, which is far from my field of work, I can only say that I have been convinced by those historians for whom the colonies played certainly a significant, but not an *indispensable* role in British economic

⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Knopf, New York 1993, pp. 62, 85, 89, 94.

life.⁹ And this is even truer for the gentry of Northamptonshire (the county of *Mansfield Park*), which according to Stone and Stone, between 1600 and 1800 engaged in business activities (including colonial investment) in a percentage that oscillated *between one and two percent*:

The degree to which local landed elites were composed of men enriched in any way by business activities was always negligible. [...] Evidence of infiltration, interaction, marriage, entrepreneurship, and other kinds of intermingling were fairly low up to 1879.¹⁰

⁹ In general, the key historical question (somewhat removed from *Mansfield Park* itself) is whether colonial profits financed the industrial revolution or not: and whether, as a consequence, the take-off of European capitalism would have been at all possible without colonial possessions. On this point, the arguments I have found most persuasive are those by Patrick K. O'Brien ('The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism', *Past and Present*, 120, 1988), V.G. Kiernan (*Imperialism and its Contradictions*, Routledge, New York–London 1995), and Paul Bairoch (*Economics and World History*, Chicago University Press, 1993); although Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery. From the Baroque to the Modern* (Verso, London 1997), which I read when this book had already been finished, made me reconsider several things.

Kiernan (who is, of course, a vitriolic critic of British imperialism) argues for instance that 'the spoils of Bengal [...] may have percolated by devious channels into Lancashire mills, but not quite as promptly [as to start the industrial revolution]': and he then proceeds to point out that if early industrialists 'had little access to the big money, they had, however [given the modest financial needs of the industrial take-off] equally little need of it' (pp. 34–5). As for Paul Bairoch, the thesis that the exploitation of the Third World financed the industrial revolution is for him one of the 'myths' of economic history, and his own conclusions turn the argument on its head: 'during the 18th and 19th centuries colonization was primarily a result of industrial development and not vice versa' (p. 82). As Bairoch himself explains at length, however, the myth is so widely accepted because 'if the West did not gain much from colonialism, it does not mean that the Third World did not lose much' (p. 83). In other words, although the Third World did not contribute much to the industrial revolution, the latter, by contrast, had catastrophic effects on the Third World itself (as in the case of de-industrialization, to which Bairoch devotes an entire chapter of his book).

For his part, Blackburn shows in great detail the exceptional profits arising out of West Indian slave plantations, and summarizes his findings in the following way: 'We have seen that the pace of capitalist industrialization in Britain was decisively advanced by its success in creating a regime of extended primitive accumulation and battenning upon the super-exploitation of slaves in the Americas. Such a conclusion certainly does not imply that Britain followed some optimum path of accumulation in this period [...] nor does our survey lead to the conclusion that New World slavery produced capitalism. What it does show is that exchanges with the slave plantations helped British capitalism to make a breakthrough to industrialism and global economy ahead of its rivals' (p. 572).

¹⁰ Stone and Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite?* pp. 141, 189. See also the chart on p. 141.

Thus economic history. And if we then turn to *Mansfield Park* itself, Said's thesis becomes even more dubious. Early in the novel, when Bertram's older son runs into debt, his gambling 'robs Edmund for ten, twenty, thirty years, perhaps for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his' (*Mansfield Park*, 3). On the other hand, the 'recent losses in the West India estate', that are mentioned in the very same page, leave no trace on the life at Mansfield Park: losses or not, everything remains exactly the same. Perhaps that estate was not so indispensable after all? And then, here is Bertram, back from Antigua:

It was a busy morning with him. Conversation with any of them occupied but a small part of it. He had to reinstate himself in all the wanted concerns of his Mansfield life, to see his steward and his bailiff – to examine and compute – and, in the intervals of business, to walk into his stables and his gardens, and nearest plantations.

Mansfield Park, 20

To examine and compute, to walk into stables and plantations, to meet the steward and the bailiff (who are in charge of managing the estate, of collecting rents, and of financial affairs in general) . . . All signs of large economic interests in *Britain*, and most likely near Mansfield Park itself. Said's picture seems exactly reversed: modest colonial profits – and large national ones. And yet, when all is said, Bertram *does* indeed leave for Antigua, and stays away for a very long time. If Antigua is not essential to his finances – why on earth does he go?

He goes, not because he needs the money, but because Austen needs him out of the way. Too strong a figure of authority, he intimidates the rest of the cast, stifling narrative energy, and leaving Austen without a story to tell: for the sake of the plot, he must go. It is the difference, as Russian Formalists would say, between the 'function' and the 'motivation' of a narrative episode: between the *consequences* of Bertram's absence (the play, the flirt between Edmund and Mary, Maria's adultery: in short, *virtually the entire plot of the novel*), and its premises: which are far less important, because (as in Freudian 'rationalization', which is a very similar

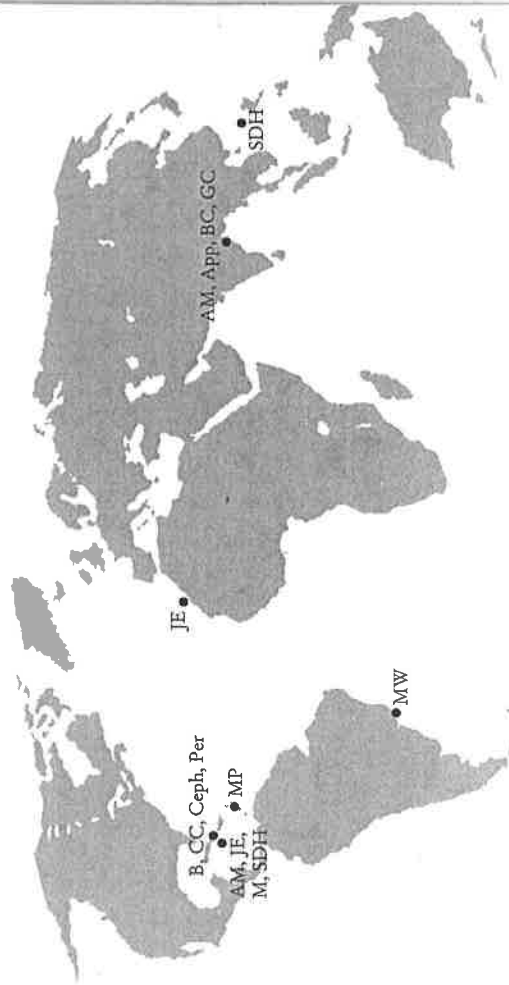
concept) one 'reason' can always be replaced by another without much difficulty.

Bertram goes to Antigua, then, not because he must go *there* – but because *he must leave Mansfield Park*. But it's nevertheless to Antigua that he goes, and I must still account for Austen's specific motivation of her plot. And then, in sentimental novels at the turn of the century, the colonies are a truly ubiquitous presence: they are mentioned in two novels out of three, and overseas fortunes add up to one third, if not more, of the wealth in these texts (figure 9). Why this insistence? Could it be a 'realistic' feature of nineteenth-century narrative, as Said suggests for Jane Austen?

Possibly. But, frankly, these fictional fortunes are so out of proportion to economic history that I suspect them to be there not so much because of reality, but for strictly *symbolic* reasons. Because Jamaica, or Bengal, remove the production of wealth to faraway worlds, in whose effective reality most nineteenth-century readers were probably not 'at all interested' (like Fanny's cousins: see *Mansfield Park*, 21).¹¹ The way in which colonial fortunes are introduced – a few hasty commonplaces, period – is itself a good clue to the real state of affairs; and as for the colonies themselves, *not one of the thirteen novels of figure 9 represents them directly*; at most, we get a retrospective (and dubious) tale like Rochester's in *Jane Eyre*. This is the mythic geography – *pecunia ex machina* – of a wealth that is not really produced (nothing is ever said of work in the colonies), but magically 'found' overseas whenever a novel needs it. And so, among other things, the link between the wealth of the élite and the 'multitude of labouring poor' of contemporary England can be easily severed: the élite is cleared, innocent. Which is a wonderful thing to know, for heroines that want to marry into it – and even better, of course, in the decades of the harshest class struggle of modern British history.

¹¹ Around 1800, *The Lady's Magazine* devotes hundreds of pages to tales and 'anecdotes' of the colonial world – but provides only a couple of genuine news items (see below, figures 22–25).

9. Colonial wealth in British sentimental novels



Novels included:

AM	Amelie Opie	<i>Adeline Mowbray</i>	JE	Charlotte Brontë	<i>Jane Eyre</i>
App	Amelie Opie	<i>Appearance Was Against Her</i>	M	Maria Edgeworth	<i>Manovering</i>
B	Maria Edgeworth	<i>Belinda</i>	MP	Jane Austen	<i>Mansfield Park</i>
BC	Mrs Ross	<i>The Balance of Comfort</i>	MW	Barbara Hofland	<i>The Merchant's Widow</i>
CC	anonymous	<i>The Castle on the Cliff</i>	Per	Jane Austen	<i>Persuasion</i>
Ceph	anonymous	<i>Cephisa</i>	SDH	Emily Eden	<i>The Semi-Detached House</i>
GC	Susannah Gunning	<i>The Gypsy Countess</i>			

I have received a letter [. . .] from my father-in-law, in Jamaica, authorizing me to draw on his banker for 900L., and inviting me to come over to him; as he feels himself declining, and wishes to give me the care of his estate, and of my son, to whom all fortune will descend; and of whose interest, he properly thinks, no one can be so likely to take good care as his own father.

AMELIE OPIE, *Adeline Mowbray*

Disavowal: this is the true meaning of figure 9. It is not economic history that explains it, but ideology: an ideology that *projects*, literally, an uncomfortable reality away from Britain. And indeed . . .

4. *Geography of ideas*

. . . indeed, something else is often located abroad, in British novels: villains (figure 10). But the horizon has narrowed: from the Caribbean and Bengal, to France: an enemy just a few miles away, in full view – and so much more effective. This is the strictly nationalistic aspect of British fiction. Perry Anderson:

The sense of national community, systematically orchestrated by the State, may well have been a greater reality in the Napoleonic epoch than at any time in the previous century [. . .] The prime weapon in the ideological arsenal [of the British ancien régime], after twenty years of victorious fighting against the French revolution and its successor regimes, was a counter-revolutionary nationalism.¹²

And thus Linda Colley, in *Britons*:

We can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties.

It was an invention forged above all by war. Time and time again, war with France brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England, into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other, and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it.¹³

A hostile Other as the source of collective identity. Words that bring to mind another narrative form in which a threatening foreign presence plays a very large role: the Russian novel of ideas. Or better, as figure 11 suggests, the Russian novel of *European*, and indeed *western-European* ideas. Natural science, political theory, philosophy of history, economic utilitarianism: as in Raskolnikov's article in *Crime and Punishment*, which combines Napoleon, Hegel, and Carlyle, modern culture emerges here from only three countries:

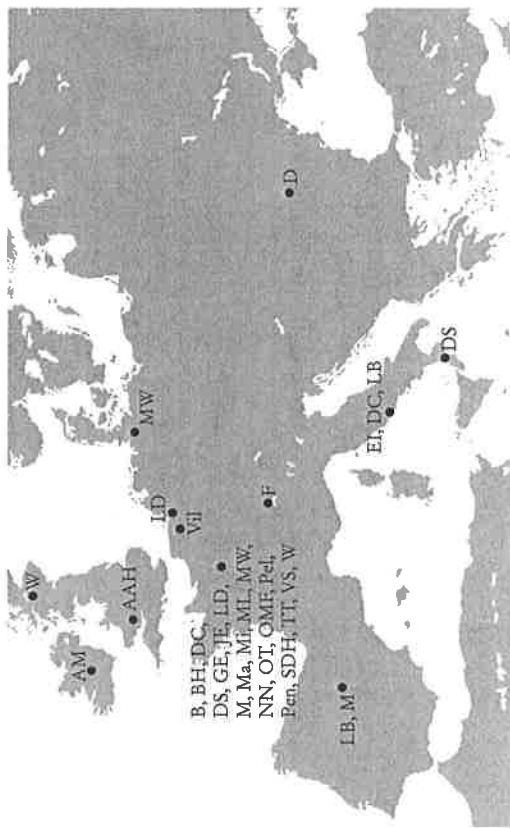
¹² Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within British Marxism*, Verso, London 1980, pp. 37–8.

¹³ Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 5.

10. Villains

The map indicates the origin or destination of some nineteenth-century villains, and the location of major narrative disasters. Although France is clearly the epicenter of the world's evils, the map actually under-represents its symbolic role, in part because France is not always explicitly mentioned (as in the 'foreign country' of Maria Bertram's exile) and in part because anti-French sentiments are conveyed through other means, such as language (villains love to speak French; and Carker, in *Dombey and Son*, 'speaks it like an angel'), or character description.

Significantly, all the 'wrong' erotic choices of the British *Bildungsroman* involve a woman who is either French (Céline Varens in *Jane Eyre*, Laure in *Middlemarch*), or has received a French education (Flora McIvor in *Waverley*, Blanche Amory in *Pendennis*, Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield*, Estella in *Great Expectations*). Withstanding Parisian seduction becomes thus one of the decisive passage rites of a young Englishman.



not shown: ● Goa: AAH ● West Indies: B ● Jamaica: AM, JE

Novels included:

AAH	Amelie Opie	<i>Appearance Was Against Her</i>	Ma	Susan Ferrier	<i>Marriage</i>
AM	Amelie Opie	<i>Adeline Mowbray</i>	Mi	George Eliot	<i>Middlemarch</i>
B	Maria Edgeworth	<i>Belinda</i>	ML	G. P. Reynolds	<i>The Mysteries of London</i>
BH	Charles Dickens	<i>Bleak House</i>	MW	Barbara Hofland	<i>The Merchant's Widow</i>
D	Bram Stoker	<i>Dracula</i>	NN	Charles Dickens	<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>
DC	Charles Dickens	<i>David Copperfield</i>	OMF	Charles Dickens	<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>
DS	Charles Dickens	<i>Dombey and Son</i>	OT	Charles Dickens	<i>Oliver Twist</i>
El	Lord Normanby	<i>The English in Italy</i>	Pel	Edward Bulwer-Lytton	<i>Pelham</i>
F	Mary Shelley	<i>Frankenstein</i>	Pen	William Thackeray	<i>Pendennis</i>
GE	Charles Dickens	<i>Great Expectations</i>	SDH	Emily Eden	<i>The Semi-Detached House</i>
JE	Charlotte Brontë	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	TT	Charles Dickens	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>
LB	Georgiana Fullerton	<i>Lady-Bird</i>	Vil	Charlotte Brontë	<i>Villette</i>
LD	Charles Dickens	<i>Little Dorrit</i>	VS	Lady Blessington	<i>The Victims of Society</i>
M	Maria Edgeworth	<i>Manowarring</i>	W	Walter Scott	<i>Waverley</i>

11. Russian novels of ideas



Novels included:

B	Fyodor Dostoevsky	<i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	I	Fyodor Dostoevsky	<i>The Idiot</i>
C	Fyodor Dostoevsky	<i>Crime and Punishment</i>	W	Nikolai Chernichevsky	<i>What is to be Done?</i>
D	Fyodor Dostoevsky	<i>The Devils</i>	WB	Alexander Herzen	<i>Who is to Blame?</i>
F	Ivan Turgenev	<i>Fathers and Sons</i>			

The eighteenth century began with the assertion that the new 'Enlightener' of the Russian land must make a pilgrimage to the West: Peter's 'Great Embassy'. Later, a man acquired the character of a pilgrimage to holy places. Correspondingly, the opponents of Westernization saw such journeys as the primary source of evil. Communion with the Enlightenment [. . .] was accomplished by a simple movement in space.

JURII M. LOTMAN AND BORIS A. USPENSKII, *Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the End of the Eighteenth Century)*

France, Germany, Britain.¹⁴ And as ideas move eastwards from this 'advanced' Europe, they acquire symbolic momentum, becoming extreme, intransigent: 'what is only a hypothesis in Europe', says Ivan in *Brothers Karamazov*, 'becomes at once an axiom with a Russian boy' (V.3); and Porfiry, in *Crime and Punishment*: 'This is a case that involves dreams derived from books, sir; a heart that has been overstimulated by theories' (VI.2).

A murder derived from dreams and books... In Russia, European ideas are not just ideas: they are 'overstimulated' forces, that lead people to action – and crime. Like the French villains of figure 10, European ideas are therefore treated as a genuine threat to all that is most deeply Russian: the religious faith (and folly) of the eastern margin of figure 11, completed east of the Urals in Raskolnikov's religious rebirth on the banks of the Irtysh. And yet, these writers never really rescind their connection with Europe; not even Dostoevsky, despite all his ambivalence. For them, Western ideas embody the cynicism of modernity, but also its greatness: ideas as lucid and fearless as their spokesmen – Bazarov, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov. Great characters, all of them, and great because *divided*: because the clash between Russia and the West has entered their minds, and resounds in every excited speech, in every unpredictable act (and in all the 'whys?' that retrospectively chase it, in search of its meaning). It's Bakhtin's 'dialogism': every issue opens up to opposite viewpoints, even in the same person. And it's also an instance of how geography may, if not exactly determine, at least *encourage morphological change*: because only a country that was both inside and outside Europe – i.e., only Russia – could call into question modern Western culture, and subject it (with Dostoevsky) to genuine 'experiments'. And indeed only Russia realized the great formal shift of the novel of ideas.

¹⁴ More precisely, figure 11 reveals a sort of European division of labour, that recalls the well-known account of the sources of Marxism: from Britain comes political economy, with its ruthless (a) moral consequences; from France, political utopia, and the violence that often accompanies it; from Germany, scientific-philosophical atheism. The great exception to this geography of ideas is Ivan Karamazov's parable of the Great Inquisitor, which is set in Seville (but was almost certainly inspired by Schiller's *Don Carlos*).

5. *Far from the center*

Sentimental novels. Novels of ideas. And now, the most successful form of the century: the historical novel, for which figure 12 – that mixes a few classic texts, and others which have long been forgotten – maps out the main areas of action.¹⁵

Now, we have long ago agreed to call historical novels 'historical' to emphasize their peculiar relationship to time. But this map suggests that their spatial component is just as striking as their temporal one. In a negative way, first of all: because this form seems to flourish only *away from the center*. Think of Austen's world: everything within a circle centering on London (a day, a day-and-a-half away). Well, historical novels show the opposite pattern: a weak centripetal pull, with the story running immediately away from the national capital. The young hero of *The Captain's Daughter*, for instance, who dreams of going to Petersburg, is promptly dispatched in the opposite direction, to the eastern periphery of the Czarist empire. In *Waverley*, Charles Stewart never completes his march towards London: he lands in the North-West of Scotland, raises the Standard of Rebellion in the middle of the Highlands, crosses the Highland line, reaches Edinburgh, crosses the Anglo-Scottish border, reaches Derby – and then stops. He stops, in other words, exactly *where Austen's England begins* (Pemberley, the northernmost locality 'seen' in her novels, is also in Derbyshire). And that Scott's world should end exactly where Austen's begins, and Austen's end where Scott's begins... such a perfect fit, of course, is only a (beautiful) coincidence. But behind the coincidence lies a solid reality: namely,

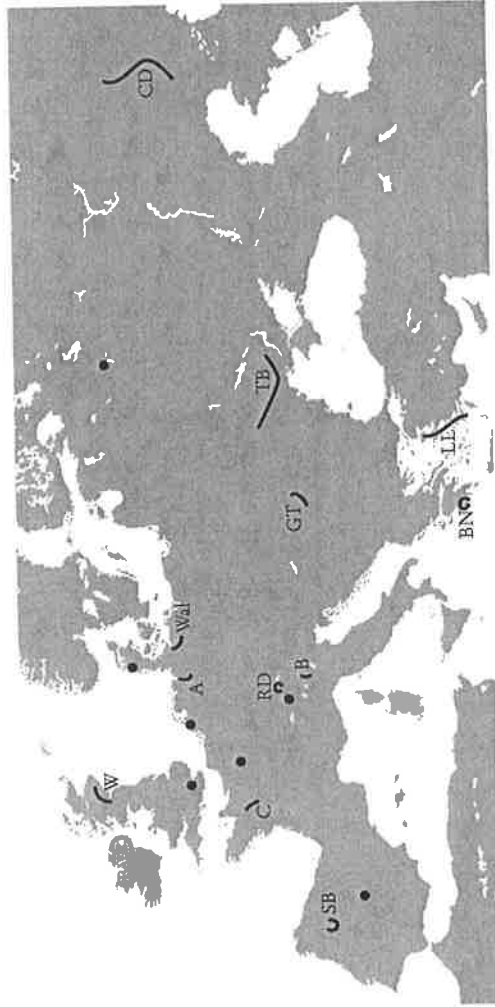
¹⁵ The main areas of action... A premise that differs from the one used for Austen (with its emphasis on beginning, middle, and ending), or for novels of ideas (with their focus on the paradigmatic opposition of European and Russian ideas). But different forms have different narrative dominants, and the junctures that are crucial in sentimental novels – and therefore also in their *cartographic representation* – are not so in historical, or picaresque, or colonial novels. And then, no map can include everything: to make sense, it must limit itself to a finite number of factors. In the course of the book I have therefore attempted a (geographical) elaboration of those (narrative) elements that seemed most relevant to each given form; in this respect, my geography is inseparable from a morphology.

that different forms inhabit different spaces. Paul Zumthor, *La Mesure du monde*:

Each of the various narrative genres active between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries possesses its own poetic space, and seems to direct its gaze towards a specific horizon. The amiable French *fabliau* limits itself to a 'here' (the home, the city) whose shadows it investigates with amusement (and at times with some rage); romances, in France and Germany, move by

12. Historical novels

Unlike sentimental novels, historical novels are usually located in the proximity of major natural barriers: forests (*The Chouans*), hardly accessible coastlines (*Loukis Laras*, *The Boyne Water*), wide expanses of territory (*The Captain's Daughter*, *Taras Bulba*), and especially mountains (*Waverley*, *El señor de Benibibre*, *The Rose of Disentis*, *The Golden Age of Transylvania*). Places 'whose history consists in not having one, and remain at the margins of the great currents of civilization' (Braudel), mountains allow historical novels to move quickly and dramatically into the most distant past.



Novels included:

A	Jakob van Lennep	<i>An Abduction in the Seventeenth Century</i>	LL	Demetrius Bikelos	<i>Loukis Laras</i>
BN	Henry Moke	<i>The Battle of Navarino</i>	RD	Heinrich Zschoschke	<i>The Rose of Disentis</i>
B	Alessandro Manzoni	<i>The Betrothed</i>	SB	Enrique Gil y Carrasco	<i>El señor de Benibibre</i>
BW	John and Michael Banim	<i>The Boyne Water</i>	TB	Nikolai Gogol	<i>Taras Bulba</i>
CD	Alexander Pushkin	<i>The Captain's Daughter</i>	Wal	B.S. Ingemann	<i>Waldemar</i>
C	Honoré de Balzac	<i>The Chouans</i>	W	Walter Scott	<i>Waverley</i>
GT	Mór Jókai	<i>The Golden Age of Transylvania</i>			

— main areas of action • national capitals at the time of action

contrast towards the 'down there' of an uncertain adventure. The epics that specialized singers are still spreading throughout the West focus on the military opposition between Christianity and 'Pagan' lands.¹⁶

And thus, in more general terms, Mikhail Bakhtin:

The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions.¹⁷

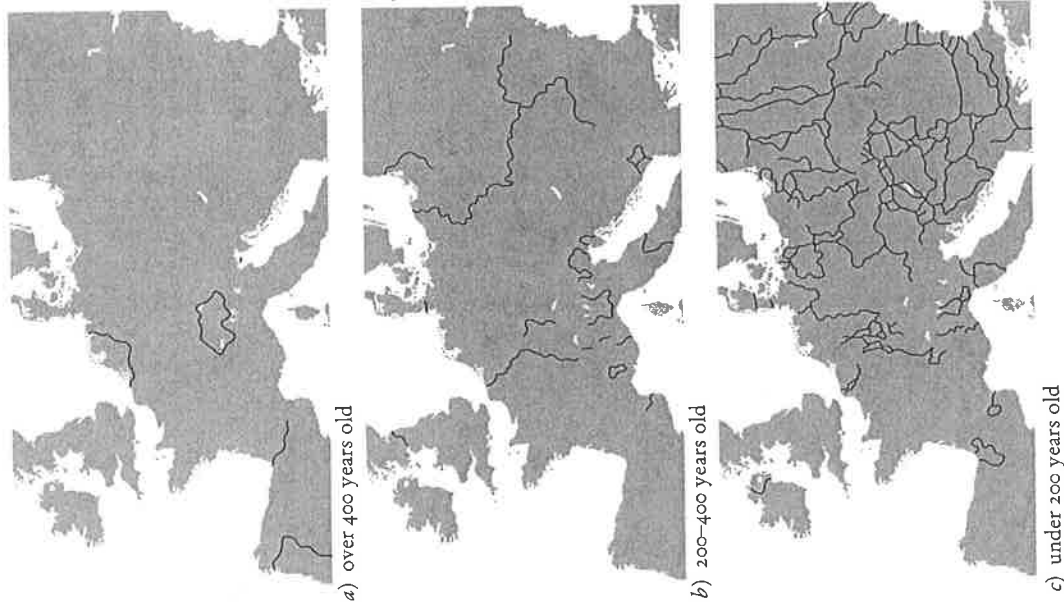
Each genre possesses its own space, then – and each space its own genre: defined by a spatial distribution – by a map – which is unique to it, and which for historical novels suggests: away from the center. And, by reflex, in the proximity of borders: the border between the Dutch Republic and German cities (*An Abduction in the Seventeenth Century*); the Danish kingdom, and the Holy Roman Empire (*Waldemar*); Russians, and Cossacks (*The Captain's Daughter*); Hungarians, and the Ottoman Empire (*The Golden Age of Transylvania*); Greeks, and Turks (*The Battle of Navarino*, *Loukis Laras*); Protestants, and Catholics (*The Boyne Water*). Far from being accidental, this geographical constant is probably a major factor of the exceptional success of historical novels, because it offers nineteenth-century Europe a veritable *phenomenology of the border*. Which is a great thing to do when borders are simultaneously hardening, and being challenged as 'unnatural' by the various nationalist waves (figure 13) – and when, as a consequence, the need to represent the territorial divisions of Europe grows suddenly stronger.

Borders, then. Of which there are two kinds: external ones, between state and state; and internal ones, within a given state. In the first case, the border is the site of *adventure*: one crosses the line, and is face to face with the unknown, often the enemy; the story enters a space of danger, surprises, suspense. It is so with all the lesser-known novels in figure 12: in *An Abduction in the Seventeenth Century*, for instance, we have the whole machinery of the chase, and in *Loukis*

¹⁶ Paul Zumthor, *La Mesure du monde*, Seuil, Paris 1993, p. 382.

¹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', 1937–38, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Texas University Press, Austin 1981, pp. 84–5.

13. The formation of European borders



The idea of the nation, with the ensuing ideology of nationalism, is the result of the establishment of the state within rigorously defined borders, which are as a consequence claimed as such [...] An absolute – and, as a rule, unconditioned – sovereignty is wielded by the state upon this delimited territory.

JULIEN FREUND, *L'Ennemi et le tiers dans l'état*

Laras of the flight. In *Waldemar*, the city of Schwerin, in Mecklenburg, is won and lost a half-dozen times, just like the Swiss village of *The Rose of Disentis*. In *The Golden Age of Transylvania*, mysterious knights; in *The Battle of Navarino*, mysterious captives. And so on, and so on.

External frontiers, in other words, easily generate narrative – but in an elementary way: they take two opposite fields, and make them collide. *Internal* borders work differently, and focus on a theme which is far less flamboyant than adventure, but much more disturbing: *treason*. Waverley, Taras Bulba's younger son, Balzac's and Pushkin's heroes, Alvaro de Bembibre, Renzo ('Stay there, you accursed country!'): all traitors. They all have their reasons, of course, and their treason may well be unintentional, or due to entirely unpolitical reasons (curiosity, in Scott and Manzoni; love, in Balzac and Gogol). Still, in one guise or another, treason is there in all great historical novels: as the hero reaches the internal border, he immediately joins the Rebel, the Riot, the Pretender, the *gars*, the heretics. Rebelliousness? I doubt it, these are 'insipid' young men (as Scott says of his Waverley), and their actions show rather *how weak national identity still is*, in nineteenth-century Europe. A struggle between national and local loyalties, writes Tilly of these years: true, and treason shows the bitterness of the conflict, which keeps the hero's soul long suspended – Waverley, wavering – between nation and region.¹⁸

Scott's internal border (or Balzac's, or Pushkin's) has yet another peculiarity: it is not so much a politico-military demarcation, as an *anthropological* one. When Waverley leaves his regiment to visit Tully-Veolan, and then Glennaquoich, in the Highlands, his movement in space is also, and in fact above all, the movement in *time*

¹⁸ This dual allegiance is personified in the compromise formation of the Noble Traitor – Fergus, Alvaro de Bembibre, the Marquis de Montauran – with its precarious balance of adjective and noun. On the one hand, these characters are all enemies of the new centralized power of the state, and the novel, obediently, sentences them to death; but on the other hand it presents them as generous, young, brave, passionate – 'noble' – thus allowing itself a parting homage to the old ruling class.

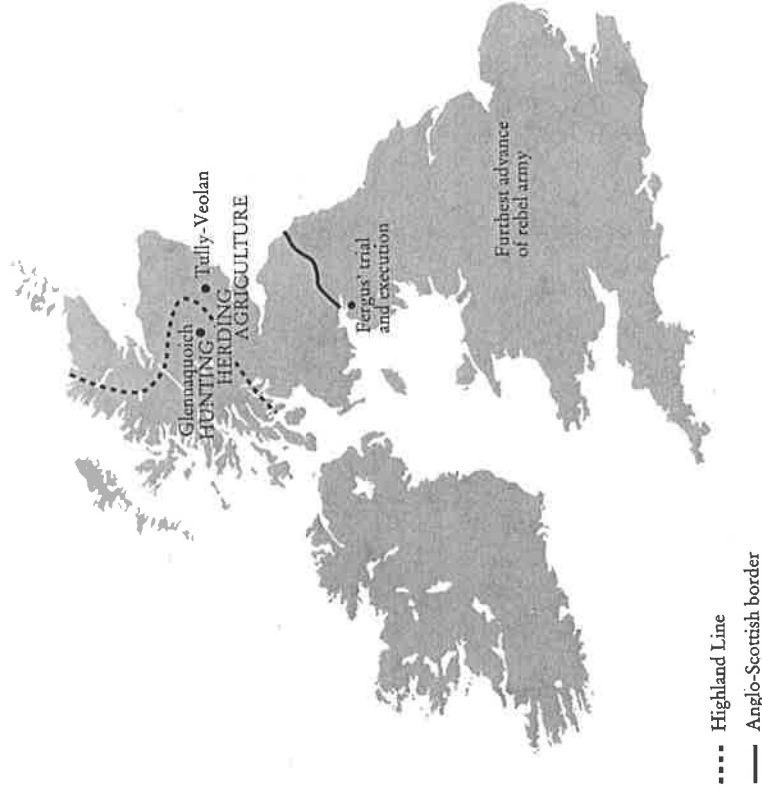
visualized in figure 14. He travels backwards through the various stages of social development described by the Scottish Enlightenment: the age of Trade, of Agriculture, of Herding (the pretext for seeing the Highlands is a cattle raid), and finally of Hunting (the essence of Highland culture is embodied in Fergus' ritualized hunting party – which also coincides with the beginning of the rebellion).¹⁹

Scott's 'ability to read time in space', as Bakhtin put it in his essay on the *Bildungsroman*,²⁰ is of course a well-known fact – obvious, perhaps. Not obvious, however, is the fact that space does not become time just anywhere, in historical novels, but *only in the proximity of the internal border*. Only there it becomes possible to 'see' a journey into the past – and thus to *imagine the very form of the historical novel, which is itself a journey into the past*. After all, the 'historical' theme was already present in the first draft of *Waverley*, in 1805 (and also in many earlier novels): but without the space of the border something was missing, and 'I threw aside the work I had commenced', writes Scott in the General Preface, 'without either reluctance or remonstrance'. Ten years later he turns to geography, sends his young man to the Highlands – and invents the key genre of the century.

Geography as the foundation of narrative form; the internal border as the on/off switch of the historical novel. And it makes sense, because the internal border is the space where the non-contemporaneity of European countries (and especially of those where trade and industry have advanced more quickly, like France and Great Britain) becomes inescapably visible: a distance of just

¹⁹ The opening chapter of *The Golden Age of Transylvania* is entitled 'A Hunt in the year 1666'; elsewhere, anthropological regression is metonymically conveyed by garments of animal skin: *The Chouans'* Marche-à-terre wears goatskins and tree barks; when Pugachev first appears, in *The Captain's Daughter*, he has just lost his sheepskin; and when the hero of *The Rose of Disenit*, Florian Prevost, decides to reclaim his Swiss identity, the first thing he does is to dress as a chamois-hunter. Cooper's hero, needless to say, is also a hunter, nicknamed Leatherstocking.

²⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism', in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays*, Texas University Press, 1986, p. 53.

14. Walter Scott, *Waverley*

There is no European nation, which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745, – the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs, – the abolition of the heritable jurisdiction of the Lowland nobility and barons, – the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and costumes, – commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time.

WALTER SCOTT, 'A Postscript', *Waverley*

a few miles, and people belong to different epochs. Internal borders define modern states as composite structures, then, made of many temporal layers: as *historical* states – that need historical novels.

But need them to do what? To represent internal unevenness, no doubt; and then, to *abolish* it. Historical novels are not just stories ‘of’ the border, but of its erasure, and of the incorporation of the internal periphery into the larger unit of the state: a process that mixes consent and coercion – Love, and War; Nation, and State – as David Lipscomb points out in his discussion of Scott’s ‘three estates’ (figure 15). Love, between the man from England and the woman from the Lowlands estate: a miniature of a national union based on the agreement, the mutual desire of the more ‘civilized’ spaces. But war (and no prisoners), against the still ‘savage’ space, so that the state may finally achieve Weber’s ‘monopoly of legitimate violence’, crushing once and for all Pugacev and Fergus and Bonnie Prince Charlie, don Rodrigo and the Signora and the Unnamed, the Chouans and the Cossacks and the Knights of the Temple. State building requires *streamlining*, historical novels tell us: the blotting out of regional borders (Scott, Balzac, Pushkin), and the submission of the Gothic strongholds of old feudal privilege. In *The Betrothed*, Manzoni’s divided plot charts both processes at once, moving now towards the future and now towards the past: and while Renzo proceeds to encounter the urban revolt, and the proto-industrial production on the other side of the Adda; Lucia, in her much shorter journey, is the last victim of the convents and towers of old local power (figure 16).

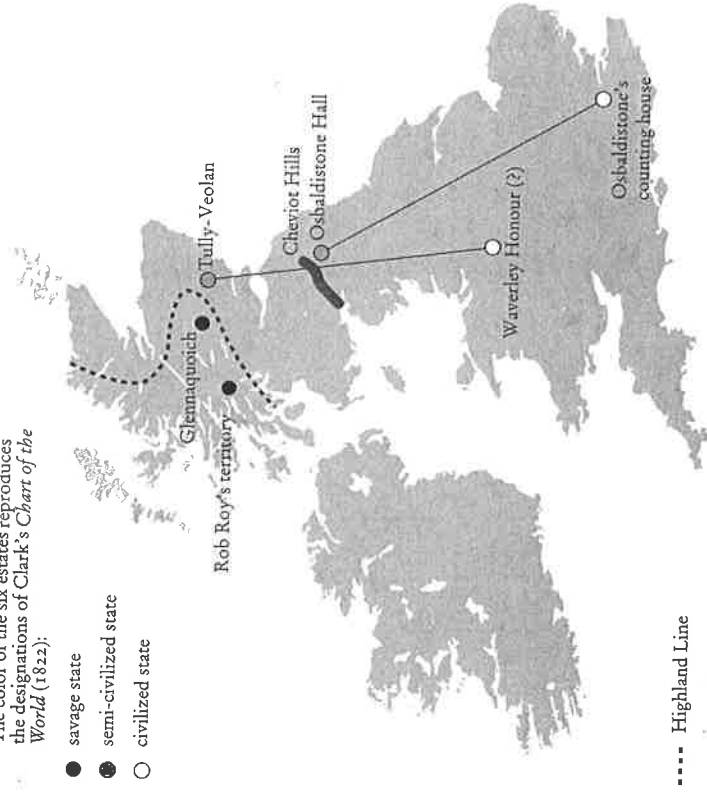
6. Theoretical interlude I. Of space and style

Before leaving the historical novel, a methodological point. In the course of my research, I have thought of literary maps as good tools to analyze plot, but not much else, and certainly not style. When working on historical novels, however, I began to wonder. My starting point was an essay by Enrica Villari on the recurrent presence of

15. The incorporation of the Scottish Lowlands in *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*

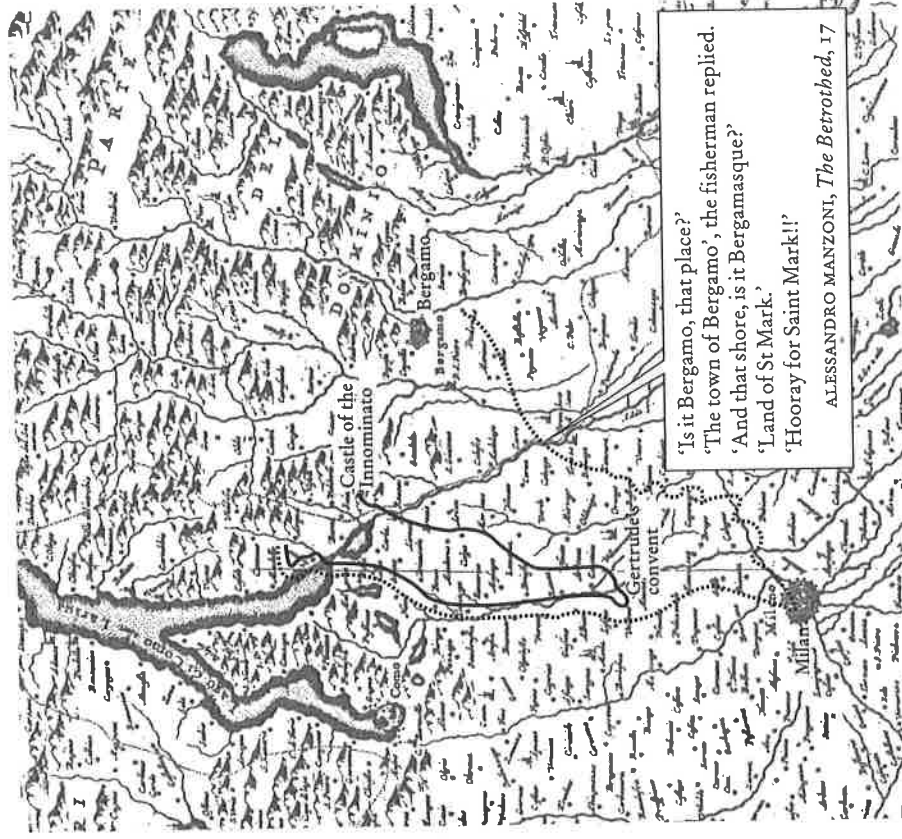
The color of the six estates reproduces the designations of Clark’s *Chart of the World* (1822):

- savage state
- semi-civilized state
- civilized state



In the *Waverley* novels [...] there is a three-estate time-line, running from a civilized estate [...] up the king's highway to a semi-civilized estate (or the 'Lowland estate') at the base of a 'formidable topographical barrier', and finally over the barrier to a fully-feudal estate (or the 'Highland estate', the realm of Fergus, Burley, or Rob Roy) [...]. The final marriage between the *Waverley* hero (who has Hanoverian political ties) and the Jacobite heiress does not cross the novel's topographical barrier. [...] What exactly happens to the Highland space is not entirely clear, but no doubt it has lost the fearsome aspect that it first shows to the *Waverley* hero [...] Scottish culture, in the form of the Lowland estate, is incorporated into the nation, but Scottish political nationalism is left in the past, on the other side of the topographical barrier.

DAVID LIPSCOMB, 'Geographies of Progress'

16. The space of *The Betrothed*

— Lucia's story
 Renzo's story

In *The Betrothed*, the separation of the lovers allows Manzoni to write two very distinct narrative lines which can be read as two different generic modes. The plight of Lucia, for instance, gives him the material for a Gothic novel, in which the feminine victim eludes one trap only to fall into a more agonizing one, confronting villains of ever blacker nature, and providing the narrative apparatus for the development of a semic system of evil and redemption, and for a religious and psychological vision of the fate of the soul. Meanwhile, Renzo wanders through the *grosse Welt* of history and of the displacement of vast armed populations, the realm of the destiny of peoples and vicissitudes of their governments.

FREDRIC JAMESON, *Magical Narratives*

comic and 'tragic-sublime' characters in Scott's world.²¹ It's an idea that applies just as well to Pushkin, or Manzoni, and that includes in its turn a marked spatial component: because, again, these characters are not randomly distributed a bit everywhere in the novel, but are usually found in the proximity of the border.²² But if comic and tragic elements tend to show up near the border, this means that in Scott, or Pushkin, *stylistic choices are determined by a specific geographical position*. Space acts upon style, producing a double deviation (towards tragedy and comedy: towards the 'high' and the 'low') from that average, 'serious', 'realistic' register that is typical of the nineteenth century. Although the novel usually has a very low 'figurality' (as Francesco Orlando would say), near the border *figurality rises*:²³ space and tropes are entwined; rhetoric is dependent upon space. Here, even proper names lose their modern, indexical quality (their 'meaninglessness') and re-acquire a striking semantic intensity: the Son of John the Great, the Deerslayer, the Unnamed, Dead Blood, the Garden of the Devil... Not for nothing, in *The Chouans*, the rationalism of revolutionary Paris tries to banish forever the use of Breton nicknames.

A space-trope continuum. Here is what happens to Scott's descriptions – as a rule, implacably analytical – when Waverley approaches the Highlands:

²¹ Enrica Villari, 'La resistenza alla storia nei romanzi giacobiti di Walter Scott', in *Storie su storie. Indagine sui romanzi storici (1818–1840)*, Neri Pozza, Verona 1985, especially pp. 16–30.

²² They also tend to show up always in the same sequence: before the border comic characters, and beyond it tragic ones. A few miles before the Highlands, Cosmo Bradwardine; beyond the Highland Line, Fergus. Before, Pugacev in the garb of a ridiculous old peasant; beyond, Pugacev as the terrifying rebel. On the square of Notre Dame Quasimodo, the Pope of Fools; inside the cathedral Claude Frollo, the ruthless feudal master. On the road, Don Abbondio; inside their feudal enclaves, the Signora and the Innominato. As is to be expected, comic characters belong usually to those spaces that bow to the new central power without too much struggle; tragic-sublime ones, to the spaces of strongest resistance, which are mercilessly crushed.

²³ Francesco Orlando, *For a Freudian Theory of Literature*, 1973, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1978, especially pp. 164 ff.

The light [...] appeared plainly to be a large fire, but whether kindled upon an island or the main land, Edward could not determine. As he saw it, the red glaring orb seemed to rest on the very surface of the lake itself, and resembled the fiery vehicle in which the Evil Genius of an Oriental tale traverses land and sea [...]. The boat now neared the shore, and Edward could discover that this large fire, amply supplied with branches of pine-wood by two figures who, in the red reflections of its light, appeared like demons, was kindled in the jaws of a lofty cavern...

Waverley, 17

The light appeared *plainly* to be a large fire... But then, plain style is quickly discarded: glaring orb, fiery vehicle, Evil Genius, demons, jaws... The impact with the border has generated a sudden figural leap (much like the 'monsters' of old mapmakers).²⁴ Then, as soon as the border has been passed:

The interior of the cave, which here rose very high, was illuminated by torches made of pine-tree, which emitted a bright and bickering light, attended by a strong though not unpleasant odour. Their light was assisted by the red glare of a large charcoal fire, round which were seated five or six armed Highlanders, while others were indistinctly seen couched on their plaids, in the more remote recesses of the cavern.

Waverley, 17

Torches: and we are told what material they are made of; what kind of light they produce (qualified by two distinct adjectives); what kind of odor (again qualified by an adjective, which is further qualified in its turn). In this careful sequence of causes and effects, metaphors have been completely ousted by analytical predicates.

²⁴ Here are two more instances, drawn from Hugo's urban historical novel (cities have borders, too, as the next chapter will show): 'The poor poet cast his eyes around him. He was actually in that dreaded Cour des Miracles, into which no honest man had ever penetrated at such an hour, a magic circle [...] a hideous wen on the face of Paris; a sewer disgorging every morning and receiving every night that fetid torrent of vice, mendacity, and roguery which always overflows the streets of great capitals; a monstrous hive to which all the drones of the social order retired at night with their booty; the hospital of imposture...' (*Notre Dame de Paris*, II.6). And later, at the opposite pole of Paris: 'It is certain, moreover, that the archdeacon was smitten with a strange passion for the symbolic porch of Notre Dame, that page of conjuration written in stone [...] for its signification, for its myth, for its hidden meaning, for the symbol concealed beneath the sculptures of its facade, like a first text under the second of a palimpsest – in short, for the enigma which it incessantly proposes to the understanding' (*Notre Dame de Paris*, IV.4).

The description is not 'objective', of course (none ever is), but internal, expository: instead of the emotional impact with an unknown reality, its form is that of detailed articulation.

It is an instance of what Ernest Gellner has (metaphorically) called 'single intellectual currency':

By the common or single intellectual currency I mean that all facts are located within a single continuous logical space [...], and so that in principle one single language describes the world and is internally unitary; or on the negative side, that there are no special, privileged, insulated facts or realms, protected from contamination or contradiction by others, and living in insulated independent spaces of their own. Just this was, of course, the most striking trait of pre-modern, pre-rational visions: the coexistence within them of multiple, not properly united, but hierarchically related sub-worlds, and the existence of special privileged facts, sacralized and exempt from ordinary treatment.²⁵

A continuous logical space: like the analytical dominant of Scott's second description. And note Gellner's own extended metaphor: society as a system of language-spaces – *which are being forced open*. State-building requires streamlining, I said earlier: of physical barriers, and of the many jargons and dialects that are irreversibly reduced to a single national language. And the style of nineteenth-century novels – informal, impersonal, 'common' – contributes to this centralization more than any other discourse. In this, too, the novel is truly the symbolic form of the nation-state.²⁶

Near the border, figurality goes up. Beyond the border, it subsides. Geography does indeed act upon style, in historical novels. And in other novels?

In other novels, yes and no. Yes, because there too style changes according to space. But no, because it changes with *space* – not with

²⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1983, p. 21.

²⁶ In general, the novel has not stimulated social polyphony (as Bakhtin would have it), but rather reduced it (as I have tried to show here and there in *The Way of the World and Modern Epic*). The undeniable polyphony of the Russian novel of ideas is in this respect the exception, not the rule, of novelistic evolution: not by chance generated, as we have seen in figure 11, by a *European*, not a national frame.

geography. Although metaphors still increase near the border, the latter is only seldom a geographical entity: usually, it belongs to a scale of experience for which the term 'geography' is wholly inappropriate. The staircase of the Gothic, the window in *Wuthering Heights*, the threshold in Dostoevsky, the pit in *Germinal*: here are some 'frontiers' of great metaphorical intensity – none of which is however a geographical border.

But there is more. As style is indeed correlated to space, so *space is correlated to plot*: from Propp to Lotman, the crossing of a spatial border is usually also the decisive event of the narrative structure. The relationship, here, is a triangular one: tropes, space, and plot. And the triangle poses a further question. Tropes increase near the border, fine. But why?

It is not easy to find answers in the existing theories of metaphor, because they usually focus on 'what' a metaphor is – whereas I am asking 'when' it is, or 'where'. *The Rule of Metaphor*, however, in a chapter on 'the intersection of the spheres of discourse' (another spatial metaphor . . .), offers a promising beginning. Metaphors become indispensable, Ricœur writes, when we must 'explore a referential field that is not directly accessible'; and he goes on:

The second meaning [. . .] relates to a referential field for which there is no direct characterization, for which we consequently are unable to make identifying descriptions by means of appropriate predicates.

Unable to fall back upon the interplay between reference and predication, the semantic aim has recourse to a network of predicates that already function in a familiar field of reference. This already constituted meaning is raised from its anchorage in an initial field of reference and cast into the new referential field which it will then work to delineate.²⁷

A *network* raised from its *anchorage* and *cast* into a new *field* . . . Like Waverley, or Pierre Gringoire, Ricœur finds himself in uncharted territory, and uses one metaphor after another (including Novalis' wonderful one – 'theories are nets: only he who casts will catch' – that forms the epigraph of Popper's *Logic of Scientific*

²⁷ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 1975, Toronto University Press, 1979, pp. 298–9.

Discovery). And this is indeed the point: in an unknown space, we need an immediate 'semantic sketch' of our surroundings (Ricœur again), *and only metaphors know how to do it*. Only metaphors, I mean, can simultaneously *express* the unknown we must face, and yet also *contain* it. They express it, they 'say' it, via the strangeness of their predication – demons in a monster's jaws, court of miracles, palimpsest of stone – that sounds like a sort of alarm bell (something is very baffling, here). But since metaphors use a 'familiar field of reference', they also *give form* to the unknown: they contain it, and keep it somehow under control.²⁸

This is why metaphors are so frequent near the border, then – and so infrequent, by contrast, once the latter is passed. Beyond the border, they are no longer indispensable: they can be replaced by analytical, 'appropriate' predicates. And since most novels spend most of their time inside this or that space, rather than on the border between them, it becomes equally clear why metaphors play in novels such a marginal role. I was taught to read novels, a Cambridge student once told me, by turning the pages, and waiting for the damned metaphors. And they never, ever showed up.

7. Taking the high road

Jane Austen, and the 'core' of the nation-state. Historical novels, and borders. In the next chapter, urban novels (and in the next book, who knows, regional ones). The novel and the nation-state, reads this

²⁸ Following Ricœur, I am confining myself to the cognitive role of metaphors: but their *emotional* function is clearly just as relevant (after all, describing people like demons, or alleys like sewers, is hardly a passionless sketch). The point was unforgettably made by Arnaud and Nicole in the *Logique de Port-Royal*: 'Figural expressions signify, besides the main thing, the movement and passion of the speaker, and impress therefore on our spirit the one and the other, whereas simple expressions indicate the naked truth only' (Antoine Arnaud and Pierre Nicole, *La Logique ou l'art de penser*, 1662–83, part one, chapter 14). The emotional function of metaphor is itself closely correlated to space: on the brink of an unknown field, our semantic sketch must suggest not only what the unknown is – but what it is *for us*. 'We don't judge things for what they are in themselves', write Arnaud and Nicole, 'but for what they are in respect to us: and truth and utility are for us one and the same thing' (ibid., part three, chapter 20).

chapter's title: and it's like putting together a puzzle, one piece, one space at a time. And now, with a leap backwards to the very beginning of the modern European novel – roads (figure 17).

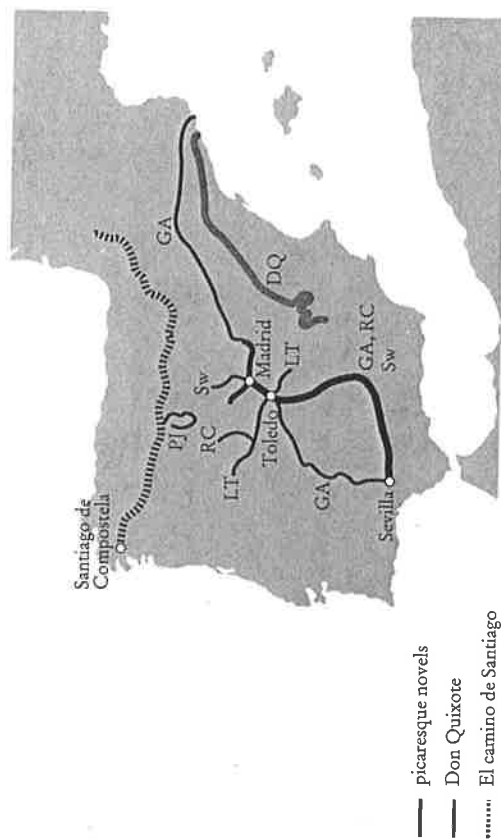
Everything was sliding South, writes Pierre Chaunu of sixteenth-century Spain, and the picaresque certainly agrees. Castile works here as a sort of large funnel, that, between Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares, collects all the main characters and channels them towards Madrid, Toledo, Sevilla (while minor figures sketch out Spain's periphery: Leon, Asturias, Biscayne, Aragon...). These novels turn their back to the pilgrims of the *Camino de Santiago* for roads that are much more worldly, and crowded, and wealthy. 'The victory of the mule, in the sixteenth century, is undeniable', writes Braudel in *The Mediterranean*,²⁹ true, and with this modest and stubborn animal – which is also, remember, Sancho Panza's best friend – European narrative changes forever. Mules against ships, one could say (and against aristocratic steeds): the wonder of the open sea, with its extraordinary adventures, is replaced by a slow and regular progress; daily, tiresome, often banal. *But such is precisely the secret of the modern novel* (of 'realism', if you wish): modest episodes, with a limited narrative value – and yet, never without some kind of value. At the beginning of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, in the first fifteen miles, we read of three inns, two encounters along the road (a mule-driver, two priests), a case of mistaken identity, two interventions by the guards, and three swindles. In fifteen miles...

On the roads, mules; and at regular intervals (the 15–20 miles of a day's journey), inns: where one can find work, sex, gambling, food, religion, petty crime, entertainment. All parts of picaresque Spain thus end up resembling each other (everywhere mule-drivers, innkeepers, guards, priests, whores, young squires, gamblers, thieves...); but they are also always a little different, because the dozen basic characters are reshuffled at every new stop, their combinations change, and the novel can go on without losing interest. And then, the regularity of the pattern is enlivened by the stories one hears on

²⁹ Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, p. 284.

17. Spanish picaresque novels during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

The width of the road corresponds to the frequency with which the picares travel on it. The map also includes the journey of Don Quixote (DQ), who is however looking for chivalric adventures, and therefore never comes close to the prosaic, well-trodden roads of the picaresque. *La pícara Justina*, which is the only one of these novels to have a female protagonist, is confined to a different, smaller space from the rest: spatial limitation which recalls Lucia's short journey in *The Betrothed* (figure 16) and will return in the nineteenth-century European *Bildungsroman* (figure 31).



Encounters in a novel usually take place 'on the road'. The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road ('the high road'), the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most varied fates may collide and interweave with one another.

MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*

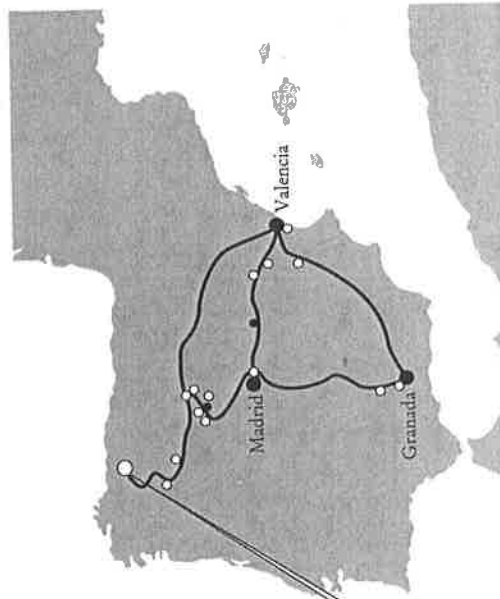
the road, and the swindles that occur along it, in a narrative system that needs very little fuel to spin out its plots. It's the formula of modern success: low cost, and reliable output.

A country of roads: where strangers meet, walk together, tell each other the story of their lives, drink from the same flask, share the

18. *Gil Blas*

As the map indicates, most of the first encounters occur on the road, or in very small towns, while characters run into each other again in a handful of large cities – Valencia, Granada, Madrid – which appear thus as veritable concentrates of the Spanish nation. As a certain amount of time always elapses between first and second encounters, and the mere fact of seeing someone again encourages long narratives of the intervening years, the map supports Benedict Anderson's intuition that the novel may be seen as 'a complex gloss on the word "meanwhile"':

- first encounter
- later encounter



And here I am, just outside Oviedo, on the Peñaflor road, surrounded by the countryside; my own master, and the master of a bad mule as well, forty ducats, and a few reales stolen from my honoured uncle. First of all, I let go of the reins, allowing the mule to do whatever she pleased...

ALAIN-RENÉ LESAGE, *Gil Blas*, I.2

same bed... It's the great symbolic achievement of the picaresque: defining the modern nation as that space where strangers are never entirely strangers – and at any rate don't remain so for long. In *Gil Blas*, a late classic of the genre, the hero's long tour of Spain becomes a veritable relay race, where characters meet and drift apart, meet again, separate again – but always without great emotions (figure 18). Unlike classical agnitions, Lesage's re-encounters are never dramatic: no dying fathers, or girls abducted from their cradle; just friends, or fellow travelers, or occasional lovers. This network of pleasant, unproblematic episodes, defines the nation as the new space of 'familiarity', where human beings re-cognize each other as members of the same wide group. Serenely, and without tragedies.

Tragedies occur elsewhere, as in the interpolated narratives of figure 19. There is plenty of Spain, here too: but tilted towards the coast (and towards Portugal); and then the Mediterranean, North Africa, Italy, Greece, three or four islands, a half-dozen ports... This much wider scenario is still ruled – after fifteen centuries! – by the

19. Lesage's Mediterranean



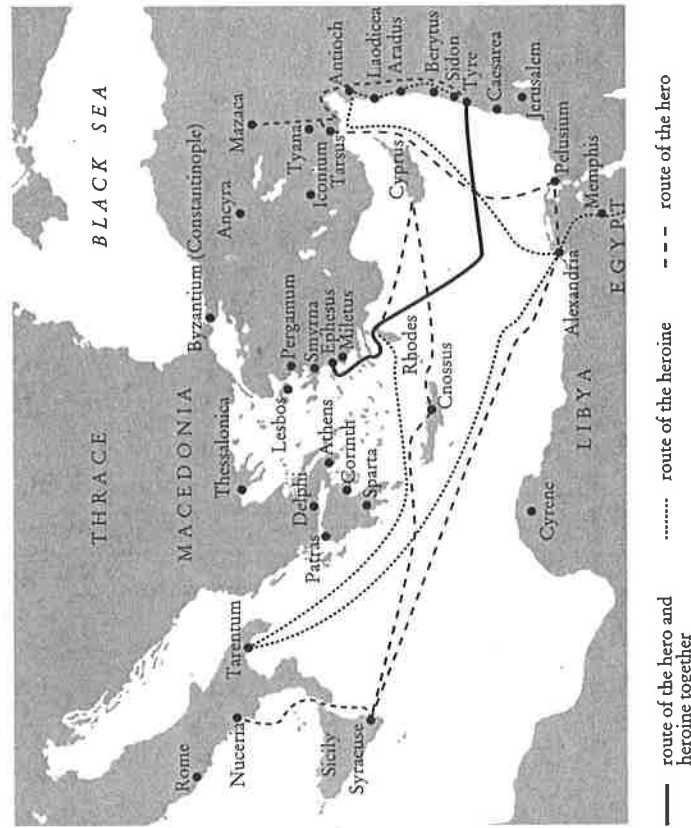
- setting of interpolated narratives

conventions of Hellenistic romances (figure 20): it's a world of storms and shipwrecks; of wars, betrayals, death. Of personal insecurity, especially: where one may be easily enslaved by the enemy – and the freedom of small daily choices, which is so typical of the picaresque road, is crushed by the power of the past.

20. The geographical setting of Hellenistic novels

A map of the Mediterranean region showing the routes of the hero and heroine of a novel inevitably brings to mind the school-bible's map of the travels of St Paul. Here Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale* is mapped. The continuous line (—) indicates the hero and heroine's journey together from Ephesus via Samos and Rhodes to somewhere in the middle of the sea, where their ship is attacked by pirates. From the pirates' headquarters in Tyre the heroine (dotted line:) is taken to Antioch, sold to slave-traders, shipwrecked off the Cilician coast, saved at the last moment from a new marriage in Tarsus, brought back to Alexandria, to Memphis, and up the Nile to the Ethiopian border; then back to Alexandria, and across the sea to a brothel in Tarentum. Meanwhile, the hero (broken line: - - -) is searching desperately for her, sometimes close on her heels, sometimes going totally astray. At last they are reunited on Rhodes and return home to Ephesus.

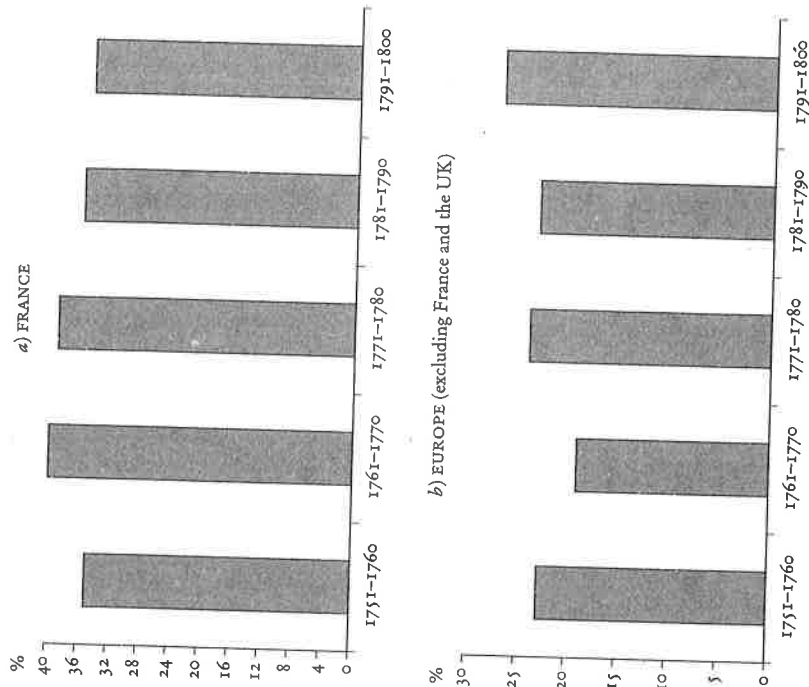
THOMAS HÄGG, *The Novel in Antiquity*

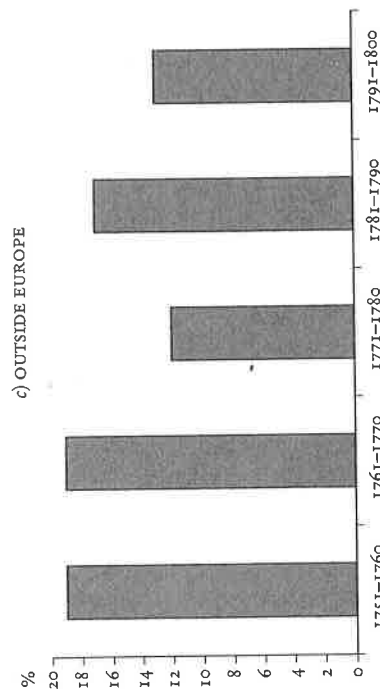


The novel and the nation-state. So be it. But Lesage's 'Mediterranean' interpolations show that their meeting was far from inevitable. The novel didn't simply find the nation as an obvious, pre-formed fictional space: it had to wrest it from other geographical matrixes that were just as capable of generating narrative – and that indeed clashed with each other throughout the eighteenth century.

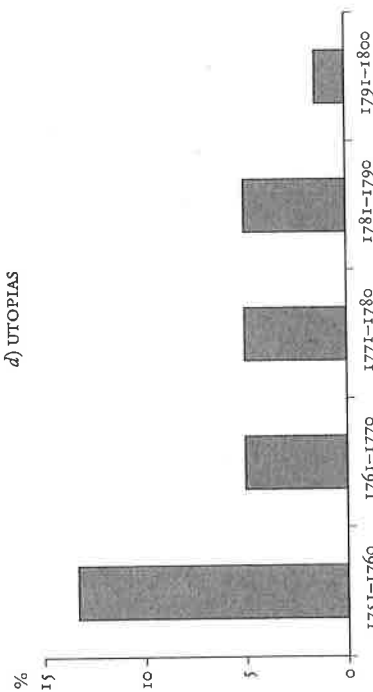
21. Geographical setting of French novels 1750–1800

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the narrative role of France and Europe remains roughly the same, while that of Britain doubles, and that of non-European countries slightly decreases. The most radical change however concerns imaginary and utopian settings, which in fifty years decline from 13 to 2 percent. Taken together, narratives located in France and Britain rise from 45 percent (in 1751–60) to 58 percent (1791–1800), and those located in Europe from 68 to 85 percent: two signs of the progressive contraction of novelistic geography.

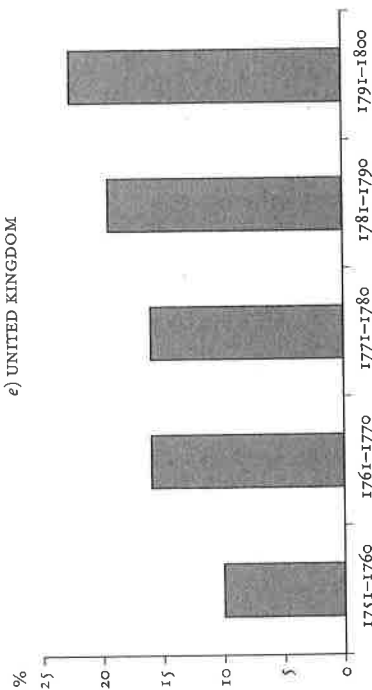




d) UTOPIAS



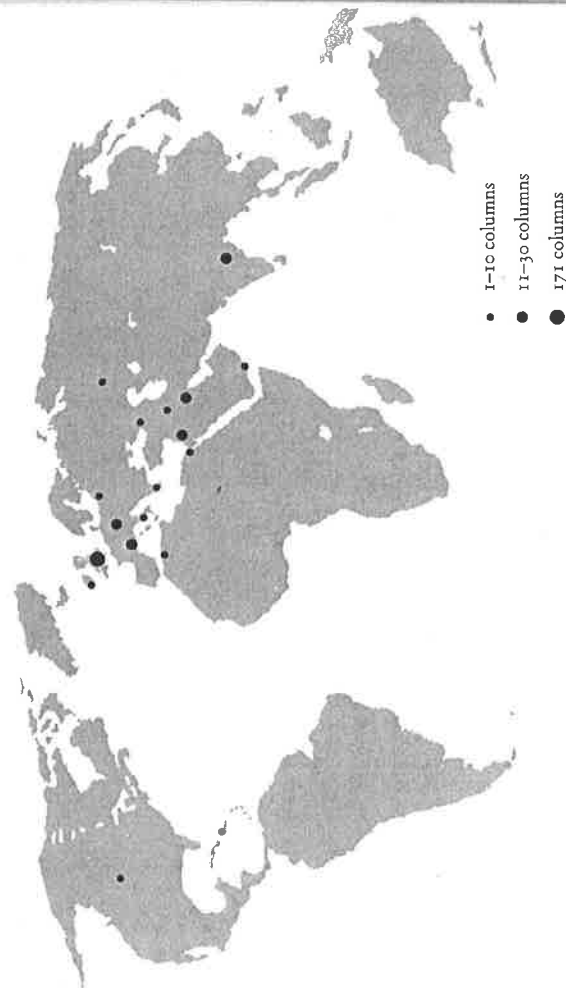
e) UNITED KINGDOM



At one extreme, supra-national genres, like the *Robinsonades*, or the *contes philosophiques*; at the opposite one, local love stories, like *Pamela*, or *Werther*; and in an intermediate, national/cosmopolitan position, most other texts – including, say, *Moll Flanders*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Wilhelm Meister*, and *Gil Blas* itself. According to Angus Martin's research on the French novel, these different spatial options more or less balance each other for quite a long time, and it is only at the very end of the century that the contraction of narrative space becomes finally visible (figure 21).

Visible, in the novel. But short narratives remain largely indifferent to the new symbolic geography, and *Gil Blas*' internal asymmetry ('Spanish' novel, and 'Mediterranean' tales) reappears in the pages of a famous periodical of the late eighteenth century, *The Lady's Magazine*: here, novels are set almost entirely in Europe (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Hungary), whereas short stories and 'anecdotes' are often located in the Middle East, India, China,

22. *The Lady's Magazine* 1798-1802, serialized novels

23. *The Lady's Magazine* 1798–1802, short narratives24. *The Lady's Magazine* 1798–1802, anecdotes

the Americas (figures 22–24).³⁰ As always, morphology is a powerful reason for fictional geography: the novel leans towards the representation of the everyday, and prefers a nearby, well-known reality; short narratives thrive on the strange, the 'unheard-of' (Goethe), and are quite at ease in remote and fabulous lands, where a total lack of genuine information (figure 25) places no fetters on the imagination. And then, this eastward drift is a long-term effect, a late homage to Indian and Arabic culture, and their formative influence on European short stories. I will return to this in the third chapter.

³⁰ The 171 columns located in Britain in figure 23 (usually, in an unspecified 'country-side') are a glaring exception to the pattern just outlined. Almost all of them are uncomplicated sentimental stories (love at first sight, childhood love rekindled in youth, happiness restored by proximity to nature, etc.), and I wonder whether these narrative materials may have anything to do with the geographical setting.

25. *The Lady's Magazine* 1798–1802, 'foreign news'