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## INTRODUCTION

# FROM REGIONALIST LITERATURE TO LITERATURE OF THE REGIONALITY

MAURICETTE FOURNIER

*The region is then a topos, a place for argumentation from which the  
discourse of regionalism — the anamnesis of a traumatic loss — can begin*

—Roberto Maria Dainotto

A sign of the contemporary porosity of the social sciences and humanities, researchers of various nationalities, from two main disciplinary fields, geography and literature, have contributed to the present book, centered on the writing and representations of the rural space and regionality. This interdisciplinary dialogue is a continuation of the epistemological Spatial Turn generated by postmodern criticism which, since the years 1960-1970, has endeavored to rehabilitate the place, on the one hand of narratives, on the other hand of space. Globalization and the awareness of the spatial transformation of the world has led the human and social sciences, like literary studies, since the 1980s especially, to carry out a "Spatial Turn" (Soja, 1989; Lévy, 1999) and to consider that space is fundamentally a component of the complexity of the social. At the same time, the geography, discipline of space, made a "cultural turn", which led it to take an interest in literature, individual and collective representations of the world or spatial imaginaries, first in the Anglo-Saxon world (Tuan, 1978; Pocok, 1988), before extending to Francophone research (Lévy, 1989; Brosseau, 1996; Dupuy, 2009).

This "geographical turn" has had an impact on the outlines of the different academic disciplines, as well as on their reciprocal relations. The general interest in spatiality has allowed for rapprochement, a dialogue between geography and literature (Brosseau and Cambron, 2003; Bédard and Lahaie, 2008). Thus, for twenty years, a new literary geography has emerged, diffused by the works of Franco Moretti (2000 and 2008), Bertrand Westphal (2007 and 2011), Michel Collot (2011). This is further

illustrated by the increase in collective publications (Lévy, 2006; Tissier, 2007; Rosemberg, 2007; Dupuy and Puyo, 2014 and 2015; Madoeuf and Cattedra, 2012; Fournier, 2016 ; Peraldo, 2016).

Literature and geography are therefore linked. The novel in particular appears as an instrument of knowledge allowing by the detour of fiction to explore the real. At this prism, literary geography has often chosen to observe the urban universe (Madoeuf and Cattedra, 2012) according to the preferences of the writers of the last century. Although, corollary of urbanization, many artists (writers, painters...) seized, as early as the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century, the city as object and scene of their reflection on a world under construction, it has not been the same for rural areas.

It is clear that, with some exceptions, until recently the countryside's representations have been shaped by the writings of a ruling class (Bergounioux, 2014). Thus the production conditions explain largely the symbolic appropriation of rural areas by various ideologies. The regionalist literature, with a predominantly ruralist coloring, was important in France during the Third and Fourth Republics (with authors like Henry Pourrat, Jean Giono, Marcel Pagnol filmography), but also well represented in other countries (e.g. José Maria de Pereda in Spain, or Patrice Lacombe in Canada, or Verga and Federigo Tozzi in Italy). "*Regionalism* [writes Francis Langevin (2010)] *sought to reorganize the system of attribution of authority between a region considered peripheral (to the global marginal influence), and a center (with overdetermined global influence)*". Anne-Marie Thiesse (1991 and 1993) showed how these literary demonstrations were, in France, skillfully recovered for various purposes by political discourse: it was a question of repatriating, into the national "central" imagination, the peripheral regions, whose symbolic attachment remained fragile for historical reasons.

In recent decades, however, beside the "country novels" or "terroir novels" that follow in line with the rustic trend initiated in the nineteenth century and meet real popular success given the importance of printing, more demanding productions have emerged. These writings often fed by a sense of loss and the end of a certain agricultural lifestyle also explore the contemporary reconstructions of rural areas, little publicized. They redefine a new "regionality" (or a new "provinciality") a term recently used by Francis Langevin (2010), as less militant and certainly less connoted in its nostalgic links to the land. Various researchers have begun to analyze the expressions of this new "regionality": Sylviane Coyault (2002) for France, Stuart Taberner (2004) for Germany, Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Manet van Montfrans (2002) in the Netherlands, etc. As a

follow-up to this research this book proposes to revisit the rural areas and their representations in contemporary writings, in popular and legitimate cultures, in order to draw a global landscape of current countrysides and new regionality.

By "writings" we mean literature in all its forms - novels, autobiographies, tales (chapter 10), songs (chapters 5 and 11) - but also audio-visual productions (chapters 9, 13, 14, 15 and 16). The book is divided into four parts. The first has for object to present an overview of the new literary expressions, in connection with the transformations of rural areas in various parts of the world. The following two parts illustrate two particular geographical areas, the French Massif Central and the Francophone America (Quebec, Acadia), concerned both by the same problems of contemporary representations of a new regionality, sobering to identity issues, authenticity, transmission of the memory and values in a globalized context. The last part focuses on it more in a particular genre, detective stories, in novels and on screen, investing more and more rural areas (here from Italy, Outer Hebrides, Russia, Québec) to give them new representations.

### **Rural textuality: permanence and transformation of peripheral areas**

The first part of this book concerns the rural textuality, the continuities and transformations that affect peripheral areas, which are increasingly often described by contemporary writers. The first chapter starts on an observation: scholars of the social sciences and literati, who have focused their research on the geo-literary approach, often contrast "high" literature with the popular terroir novel. This contrast continues to be very topical, particularly in the French context. **Marina Marengo** does not propose to demonstrate the supremacy of the neorural novel over the terroir novel, or indeed the opposite. Instead, she attempts to understand how two very different literary forms have contributed to building the spatial imaginary of rural France (whether in terms of peasants and rural society of the past or right up to the present) which underlies current European agricultural policies and/or the promotion of French rural heritage.

As in France, in the last decade, several Iberian writers have dedicated part of their literary production to the representation of the rural space and their writings reflect the deep changes that have transformed the land during the 20th century. **Maria Dasca** shows that writers such as Francesc Serés (1972), Ramon Erra (1966) and Joan Todó (1977) have developed a critical view of the present rural milieu by which they overcome the

traditional ideological opposition between rural and urban space. The goal of her paper is to examine the representation of these contemporary marginal spaces, some of which were troubled by the Spanish Civil War or the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe. She focuses on the role of memory in the creation of emotional realities related to personal and collective identity.

The study of the literary representation of rural Spain continues with the contribution of **Joan Tort Donada** and **Rosa Català Marticella** who seek to provide an overall vision of the idea of rural in the works of Josep Pla, generally considered to be the writer that has made the widest and most meaningful contribution to Catalan contemporary literature. Josep Pla defined himself as a farmer, because of his own family background. In fact, the works of Josep Pla suggest two directions explored in this essay. They appear on the one hand, as a key for discovering the contemporary meaning of the countryside and the rural world, not only in Catalonia and Spain, but also in the European context, and, on the other hand, as a tool for tackling, in a creative manner, the great questions and challenges the rural world must face in the second decade of the twenty-first century – that is to say, in the era of globalization.

This part is concluded with an article devoted to Lebanon from the study of the novel *Poste restante* by Hanan El-Sheikh. Although the work of this author is an ode to the city of Beirut, the presence of the campaign, embodied by the Bekaa, holds a special place. Even plagued by drug trafficking – it is a haven of peace, opposed in all respects to the danger of the constantly bombarded Lebanese capital. The writing of the author reinforces the sensitive dimension compared to rural areas, dimension that **Nora Semmoud** and **Florence Troin** try to highlight, especially via the translation by the narrative maps. The novel thus reflects a particular relationship to war-torn areas. They are the extreme images of some socio-spatial concepts discussed by geography (fragmentation, border) and – of particular interest to us – the marginalized spaces. The underlying idea of this paper about "Poste restante" is that the war exacerbates the emotional relationship to space. The work, thus forcing the trait of the dimensions of the lived and perceived spaces, gives special light on this input of geography.

To conclude, **Mauricette Fournier** proposes a reflection on the contribution of literature to the territorial sciences (in particular geography and anthropology). She is based mainly on two stories, *Espèces d'espaces* by Georges Perec and *Miette* by Pierre Bergounioux, to show how these writers participate in redefining spatiality and regionality.

## **New expression of regionality in the French Massif Central: literary revival in search of authenticity**

This section, dedicated to the French Massif Central, starts on a paper by **Antoine Marty** and **Mauricette Fournier** who study the setting diachronic perspective representations of the Ardèche mountains in the song “La Montagne” (The Mountain ) written by the French singer Jean Ferrat in 1964 and the current website of the Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park. They want to highlight the relations between geographical imaginary and the territorialization process of space and mutual co-construction between representations and dynamics animating the territory. The comparison of the geographical imaginary carried by the two media (song and website) can highlight the systemic evolution of space: from the end of the rural society and the rural exodus to a development of tourism and recreational, to an idealization of the past which gives back an attractiveness to the territory and capitalizes on a territorial identity perceived as strong and rich.

The three following contributors have chosen to analyze *Pays Perdu*, by Pierre Jourde, a book published in 2003 that became “known” for its poor reception, and more widely the work of its author on the issue of authenticity. This short narrative has been nurtured by his knowledge of his family’s land, in Lussaud, a hamlet in Auvergne, where about twenty peasants reside, an ageing population that lives modestly from traditional farming, a tradition on the verge of extinction. Pierre Jourde’s text presents the reader with not only a series of portraits, but also with anecdotes and reflections on peasant life, its roughness and beauty. Jourde’s tribute was not appreciated by all the inhabitants, and some felt contempt and indiscretion. Therefore, in 2005, they greeted him with insults, threats and blows. Ten years after the publication that severed the author’s relationship with his former neighbors, Pierre Jourde published a text with a biblical title, *La première pierre* (2013). In this essay, the Parisian iconoclastic critic expresses his self-criticism partly questioning his writing, partly convincing his reader of the legitimacy of his pictorial ode to the “lost country”.

Based on several works of Pierre Jourde, *Pays perdu* (2003) and *La première pierre* (2013) in the first place, but also *Géographies imaginaires* (1991), *La littérature est un sport de combat* (2015), etc., the analysis of **Annie Jouan-Westlund** investigates the various power dynamics at play in the autobiographical work positioning the author as an authority figure over the farmers who inspired his characters. While debating the author’s claim to an “authentic” piece of literature, the study

analyzes the impact of the farming community's social structure and its media coverage on *Pays perdu*'s reception. This exploration of the multiple textual and non-textual fictional representations leading to a misunderstanding of the text, addresses the limits of creative freedom when the expectations of "rural" readers are not fulfilled and the "city" writer, like Pierre Jourde, is considered a traitor.

For his part, **Jérôme Cabot** aims at reconsidering the novel in order to define its aesthetic, anthropological and social dimension, and to study, also, why the inhabitants that it portrays received it badly. He finds that contrary to conventional local color literature, in *Pays perdu*, the description of Lussaud is based on a blurring of space-time landmarks which breaks away from the homotopic consensus and celebrates a "smooth space", complicated with conflicting geographical references, pre-industrial anhistoricity, legends and myths. For the author, the text gives nobility to the little hamlet, in a mock-heroic manner which raises the common everyday life up to epic, turns humble people to heroes, makes prosaicness aesthetic, and gives a metaphysical sense even to the cow dung. This paradoxical eulogy produced an unacceptable text, which exhumes the dead and converts the oral memory, its secrets and its taboos, into written Literature. Thus, *Pays perdu* was intrinsically doomed to offend, trapped by the difficulties of any non-native literary speech.

Finally, **Pierre Couturier**, geographer, addresses the question of the relationship between literature and social sciences from the writings of Pierre Jourde. He finds that in *Pays perdu*, Pierre Jourde binds in a same feeling of loss, beings and places. Subsequently, taking a reflective look at his novel, Pierre Jourde develops the link between the loss and the "sense of place", which leads him to the question of authenticity in literature. Pierre Jourde comes to assimilate the search for authenticity rather than the "typical" that hides the truth. The paper examines to what extent this allows literary viewpoint to inform and enrich the debate within the social sciences between supporters of authenticity as analytical category and those who confined it to a native class.

### **New expression of regionality in francophone America: tensions between memory to transmit and values to share**

This second part with regional character leans on documents highly varied (novels, movies, tales, even toponymical inventions) to explore new expressions of the regionality in francophone America (Quebec and Acadia).

**Marie Pascal** is based on two classic novels – *Séraphin, Un homme et son péché* (Claude-Henri Grignon: 1933) and *Le Survenant* (Germaine Guèvremont : 1945), to study the theme of rurality, enhanced here in two of its main aspects: the Catholic religion on the one hand, and the family on the other. The two literary characters – both eponymous – illustrate the fragility of rurality, however rooted on secular beliefs and habits and are very well adapted for the screen on the edge of a new century and therefore, for a new public. Indeed, the two directors (Charles Binamé: 2002; Éric Canuel: 2005) enhance, develop, and worsen the literary characters' transgressive aspects through several crucial sequences of their filmic adaptations. In doing so however, they but accentuate the implacability of rural life which in the end leads to the failure of the two figures of marginality. The paper proceeds to these questions: how is the rural order represented in the two novels and how do the different types of transgressions – intratextual through the study of marginality and extratextual through the directors' additional scenes – only accentuate the fact that rural life will endure.

**Pierre-Mathieu Le Bel** and **Aurore Mirloup** studied the case of the Municipality of Saint-Élie-de-Caxton, Quebec, interesting by its contemporaneity and its commercial success. This town has seen its destiny change following the success of the work of the storyteller, poet and writer Fred Pellerin. Since the early 2000s, the work of Pellerin served as a lever for development for the municipality. A tourist trail has been created associated to his tales, supported by maps and audio guides on which the visitors hear the author himself narrate traditional myths, historical anecdotes and his own inventions. This author can be considered as creating a link between a secular rural oral memory and the contemporary urban reader. Pellerin's tales become a mediator between locations. The paper studies the narrative processes mobilized by Pellerin to see how texts create a specific geography. Then it explores how the texts content is instrumentalized by local actors as they use literary tales to value isolated rural areas, and which aspects of the socio-spatial representations are adopted by visitors.

For her part **Marie-Laure Boudreau** is interested in Acadia, a rural French settlement in the New World that had well-defined borders. Following the "Great Deportation" of 1755, its people have been scattered throughout Europe and the Americas. As a result, its official borders on the map dissolved. Today, people still identify as "Acadians", even if there is no clear geographic boundaries defining Acadia's territory. Where is "Acadia" today? If most people who identify as Acadians live in rural areas, there are also those who live in urban areas. Acadians, who share

cities with antagonistic Anglophone communities (such as Moncton, New Brunswick) or live as "exiles" in other North American cities, often long for a rural home. Drawing on concepts borrowed from Yi-Fu Tuan about conceptual appropriation of a territory, this article explores place names and landscape description in Acadian contemporary songs as an attempt to localize a place called "Acadia".

Finally, **Ekaterina Isaeva** analyses a peculiarity of language: the use of periphrasis for secondary naming of Quebec place names. Periphrasis as a process of language and discourse while accentuating the expression of the text presents a new image of the object as it holds additional information. In the case of place names, the first information about it often falls into oblivion in the collective memory. And the secondary naming is used in the media today, titles and / or signboards. Periphrasis replaces toponym with a pictorial expression containing more words and thus more information. The reason for the creation of a periphrastic toponym is in the desire of individuals identifying themselves with the same language and culture to present an important place's quality shared by everybody. The periphrastic toponyms are not only rich in expression but contain judgments of the world and oneself. In this context, Quebec periphrastic place names represent an undeniable scientific interest in verbal-cultural approach.

## **Noir in the countryside: rural areas in detective novels and crime films**

**Alessandra Bonazzi** recalls that the strategy of the writer Andrea Camilleri for avoiding the so-called "disenchantment with the world" is to construct for one's characters a land made up of different parts, shaping and structuring a land based on reality. But she describes what happened during the nine seasons (from 1999 to 2013) of the televised version of the detective novel series featuring Inspector Montalbano as the progressive voiding and systematic "cleansing" of the "half-made-up places" that form the settings of the novels written by Camilleri. The very human clutter of the "invented land" was transformed into a silent empty landscape. With a sort of hyperbole the landscape established its independence first from the novel and then from the action, becoming a stage whose function was the (global) reconstruction of an imagined Sicilian geography. Thus the paper looks on at the broadcasting of a progressive transformation of the landscape into a geographical imagination irreducible to reality, though quite effective for their very concrete repercussions on reality itself.

In her paper **Oksana Dognon** tries to distinguish the opposition of the rural side to the big city in Russian Mafia cinema, as well as its influence on the viewer. She shows that the influence of the rural appears to be the benefactor to the Russian Criminal protagonist: the rural often turns a hard personality of the criminal into a human being, as is illustrated by the example of the film "Boumer" which shows the representation of the rural and its influence on the evaluation of the four criminal friends. The originality of the Russian mafia cinema genre was, in some cases that it was produced and performed by former criminals: for example Vitaly Demochka, a former criminal, became a producer and an actor, a peculiarity of his story, that he transferred his real life into the movie. Thus, the former members of his criminal group have become actors in his film "Spets" and heroes of his novel "Special".

**Franck Chignier-Riboulon** was interested in the work of Peter May, a Scottish novelist, now living in France. Among his detective stories, the Lewis trilogy takes place in the Outer Hebrides, a far west archipelago, separated from the Scottish Mainland by a dangerous strait, The Minch. Isolated for centuries, Gaelic culture has survived until now in these islands. In his books, Peter May makes comparisons between the 50's and 60's with nowadays. The author shows how May plays with former decades to present changes and continuities, overall in cultural aspects. By showing religious behaviors or the black skies of the archipelago, the writer helps readers to re-discover a world away, a despised territory. Moreover, the paper explains how May has tried to restore the image of Gaelic culture, associated for a long time with under-development and a backward world, and, finally, participated in a renewal movement for a very weak Gaelic culture and a still poor people.

In his paper about *Sous les vents de Neptune* [*Wash this Blood Clean from my Hand*] by Fred Vargas (2004), **Christophe Gelly** focuses on the only novel in which this French detective fiction writer places her recurring investigator, superintendent Adamsberg – a character whose traits are very much indebted to a whole tradition of French crime fiction – in a foreign environment, namely in Ottawa where he is being trained on DNA profiling. The aim of his study is to show how the image of Canada is reconstructed on an imaginary level, noticeably as far as language is concerned, which enables the author to depict her character's investigation and method quite differently from the way they appear in her other novels. In this outlook, Christophe Gelly first examines the issue of realism in the novelistic representation and then focuses on the question of language as a symbol for otherness. These topics are examined according to their specific meaning in the poetics of the genre specific to Fred Vargas.

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