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Realms of Illusion and Oblivion: Space, Place, and Allegory in Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman"

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Abstract: Allegory is inherently spatial, for the establishment of an “other” meaning for a given text will involve matters of place and displacement, dislocation, and dispersal, as well as hierarchies of meaning that may be imagined in architectural or topographical terms. In this article, Robert T. Tally Jr. discusses the significance of allegory for spatial literary studies, broadly speaking. Drawing on the work of Fredric Jameson, Tally examines the ways that literary texts serve as cognitive maps that not only figuratively chart the social spaces represented, but also offer inherently spatial allegories by which to make sense of their world. The spaces in question are not necessarily geographical, but are often established as relations (e.g., interior-exterior, public-private, high-low, here-there, and so on). Tally will look at Lu Xun’s 1918 short story “Diary of a Madman,” as well as Jameson’s discussion of it, in order to illustrate these connections.

Keywords: space; allegory; place; mapping; narrative

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标题: 幻觉之境与遗忘之境：鲁迅《狂人日记》中的空间、地方与寓言

摘要: 寓言本质上具有空间属性。特定文本衍生出“他义”的过程，必然牵涉地方、移位、错位与流散等问题，以及可借助建筑或地形术语加以想象的意义层级结构。在本文中，罗伯特·塔利从宏观层

面探讨寓言之于空间文学研究的价值意蕴。基于弗雷德里克·詹姆逊的研究，作者考察了文学文本如何作为认知地图发挥作用：它们不仅象征性地呈现社会空间，更在本质上提供了一种空间性寓言，帮助人们理解自身所处的世界。此类空间并不局限于真实的地理空间，而常常被构建为各种二元关系，如内与外、公共与私人、高与低、此处与彼处等。文章以鲁迅 1918 年的短篇小说《狂人日记》及詹姆逊对该作品的评述切入，阐明寓言与文学空间研究之间的内在关联。

关键词：空间；寓言；地方；绘图；叙事

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Introduction: The Concrete Situation

I have always thought of allegory as being somewhat spatial. Allegory fundamentally means a story that tells another story, but in establishing an “other” meaning for a given text, allegory necessarily involves matters of place and displacement, location and dislocation, here and there, and the dispersal of concepts or meanings over some conceivable range that may be imagined in hierarchical, architectural, topographical, or geographical ways. To the extent that storytelling itself is a key way in which humans make sense of their world, we might also wish to emphasize the epistemological aspects of allegory. That is, we “know” the world or our experience of it, at least in part, through storytelling, yet these tales can never be entirely *literal*. Because language itself is both referential and slippery, with meanings multiplying even as they are identified, all stories are to some degree, more or less *allegorical*. Every story tells an-other story. As it happens, one might assert, every place is also to be understood in terms of an-other place as well, and thus spatiality is itself bound upon in what we might think of as an allegorical system or systems.

The brilliant critic ZHANG Longxi, in his book *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West*, has emphasized the “situatedness and circumstantiality” of our apprehension of the world and our place in it. Citing a humorous conversation between ancient Chinese philosophers Zhaungzi (369?-286? B.C.E.) and Huizi, ZHANG notes that “‘all knowing is relative to viewpoint,’ namely, acquired at a particular locale in one’s lived world, relative to the circumscribed whole of one’s ‘concrete situation’” (2005, pp. 2-3). This particular locality of viewpoint, very much in line with existentialism’s insistence on what Fredric Jameson has called the “logic of the situation” (2007, p.194), ensures that our knowledge is placed “in a real, specific, and historical context,” as ZHANG puts it (2005, p. 3), but also that it remains in a geographical or more broadly spatial context as well. While we are sometimes more attuned to our temporal or historical conditions, often noting the mutability of our situation over time or the ruses of history that affect our senses of past, present, and future, we are also inevitably conditioned by space and place, by entire orders of spatiality, which serve as frames of reference and of meaning itself. These too are subject to interpretation, hence to the sort of textual analysis designed to elicit meanings, which in turn often prove to be themselves multiple, even contradictory, as they are subject to their own forms of allegoresis.

In this article I discuss the significance of place and allegory for spatial literary studies, broadly speaking. I draw upon Jameson’s work in order to examine the ways that texts serve as cognitive maps that not only figuratively chart the social spaces represented, but also evoke inherently spatial allegories by which we, as writers and readers, hope to make sense of the world. As I want to emphasize, the spaces in question are not

necessarily geographical, at least not in a narrow sense, but are often established as spatial relations (for example, interior-exterior, public-private, high-low, here-there, and so on) that highlight the degree to which we are situated in space but also subject to ever-changing situations. I will look at Lu Xun's (周树人; ZHOU Shuren) 1918 short story "Diary of a Madman," as an exemplary text, for it seems to embody a certain historical moment well, but also figures forth a sort of spatial allegory. It is no accident that Jameson himself found the representation power of Lu Xun's tale to be an exemplary text to use in illustrating his concept of "national allegory," and as I have discussed in my own reading of Jameson's work, national allegory is probably far closer to his concept of cognitive mapping than many people recognize. In both cases, they are crucial figures for understanding the individual and collective subjects' *situation* in relation to a broader social totality, and both necessarily involve spatial allegory as the means by which we may develop a sense of that situation. In the situation of the diary and its reading, Lu Xun's tale evokes different aspects of spatial allegory, which in turn suggest multiple pathways for literary cartography and its study.

I also feel compelled to offer a brief caveat, which I hope will be understood as a matter of diffidence rather than any sort of false humility. My own scholarly formation lies in rather Eurocentric traditions (and even there, they are mostly French, German, and British), and I am essentially an Americanist in my literary studies, with a focus on nineteenth-century U.S. narrative, particularly the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville. As such, I confess to my amateur status in discussing Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman" in the presence of readers with expertise in Chinese languages or even in "Luxunology," which according to MA Xiaolu "has become a substantial subdiscipline with the study of modern Chinese literature" (2025, p. 2), among others who are undoubtedly far more knowledgeable about this author and text than I will ever be. Before turning to "Diary of a Madman," however, I would like to offer a brief *précis* of my understanding of these ideas, partly as I developed them in my work in spatial literary studies. Hopefully, my use of terms like *literary cartography*, *geocriticism*, or *topophrenia* will be helpful, but in any case they might offer points of reference for other work to be done.

From Literary Cartography to Geocriticism

For whatever reasons, I have always had some interest in space, place, and mapping, but not so much in the strictly geographical sense as in a more philosophical or literary mode. I was interested in how we exist in the world, how we are situated but also how we situate ourselves in relation to here and there, to near and far, to one point relative to another, and in so doing we think in terms of maps (literal or otherwise). It also occurred to me early on that telling stories was a fundamental way of establishing the points on these imaginary maps, of marking features or points of reference, of laying the foundations for other stories to come. My interests were historical, but I was also trying to imagine the spatiality of history, as it were; that is, to imagine how history, itself understood through narrative, was fundamentally conditioned by space and place, while exhibiting a spatializing manner of thinking that brought the past into direct connection with the present. I did not know these figures at the time, of course, but this would later help to explain my affinity for the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze, among others, as I moved from being a philosophy major and reader of critical theory to then, in graduate school, becoming a scholar of American literature.

My first book, *Melville, Mapping, and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer*, combined many of these ideas, but it is probably only in *Spatiality* that I was able to lay out some of these concepts in a more systematic way, although even in that book there is much room for interpretation. In truth, *Spatiality* reflected my interest in critical theory and in the practice of literature as a form of mapping. I

begin with the assumption that, to the extent that human beings are political animals, as Aristotle defined them, we are also necessarily mapmaking animals. I do not mean this in a technical sense, for my use of mapping is partly figurative, but human subjectivity is fundamentally spatial (as well as temporal), and thus orienting oneself with respect to space and place (and, again, also time) is an essential aspect of our Being. Later, in *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination* (2019), I use the term *topophrenia* to indicate this fundamental “place-mindedness” that characterizes our comportment to the world in which we find ourselves situated. In the introduction to *Spatiality*, I drew upon the well-known notation on the map, “You are here,” to stand as a figure for this topophrenic sensibility, and using Dante’s famous opening image from his *Commedia*, I also note the degree to which our most urgent anxieties may be figured forth in the experience of being, or imagining ourselves to be, lost in space. The existential condition thus underlies the desire for some sort of representation, which I argue is generated most often in the form of narrative and which in turn serves as a kind of figurative map, allowing individual and collective subjects to achieve a sense of place with respect to a larger, often imperceptible and potentially unrepresentable spatial and social formation. There is a temporal aspect to this as well, as one attempts to situate oneself in relation to various temporal registers of history—a day, a year, a lifetime, an epoch, a geological age, and ultimately, History itself—but even this attempt to map one’s position in time is often figured in spatial terms, as with a chronological timeline, for example. I affirm that, just as we are by nature storytellers, we are also, broadly speaking and inescapably, mapmakers. The term *literary cartography* combines these elements, for we make sense of or give form to our world and our experiences by creating narratives that themselves serve as maps.

My conception of *literary cartography* is based in large part on Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping, but focused on the written narratives or texts rather than on the scene of an individual subject on the ground in a perplexing or unfamiliar space. As it happens, of course, that broader meaning of cognitive mapping in relation to narrative was also what Jameson had in mind, for he has noted that, once you grasped the idea he was trying to get at, you were supposed to banish from your minds anything so simple as an actual map (Jameson, 1991, p. 409). As my own readers have pointed out, none of my books contain actual maps whatsoever. It is not just a preference for text over image, of course; my point with “literary” cartography is that the narrative itself does the mapping, so to add another figural map would be either redundant or supplementary, and may even cause undue confusion. I suppose I was also registering the implicit rivalry between mimetic forms, where text and image compete for attention and relevance; although the two frequently complement each other in generally beneficial ways, the verbal and the pictorial registers might also be said to offer distinctive, and sometimes opposing, representations of the subject in question. I use the term *literary cartography* to indicate the ways that a writer—usually but not always a creative writer and producer of narrative—figuratively maps the world depicted in the text.

If literary cartography is understood as an activity performed by writers, then *literary geography* as I have employed this term refers to the territories mapped and the ways in which they are mapped by the writers. I recognize that this is not what many others mean by “literary geography,” and the fact that there is disagreement as to what constitutes literary geography is, as Neal Alexander has suggested, a sign of the vitality of the research currently being undertaken in its name (2015, p. 5). In *Spatiality*’s chapter on “Literary Geography,” I was especially concerned with reading, as opposed to the previous chapter’s emphasis on writing, and thus I used *literary geography* to refer to the sort of work being done by literary and cultural critics when they analyze the “maps” produced by the literary cartographers. A paradigmatic example of that is Raymond Williams’s influential 1973 study, *The Country and the City*. I do not mean to say that all reading is by definition a form of literary geography, but I do think that the attention paid to space, place, and mapping by the critics discussed in that chapter offers models for more spatially oriented ways of reading.

Along those lines, what I was calling *geocriticism* involves the literary-critical approach to texts, which in turn was connected to a broader “theory” or constellations of theory that I had earlier referred to using the label *cartographics*, a term which, somewhat like Louis Marin’s *utopiques*, would signify the theory-as-mapping principle accompanying the approach to texts and to social spaces in criticism. As such, I wanted to look at a variety of spatially oriented literary theories, including the geocentric approach advocated by the French critic Bertrand Westphal (2011), but which, in my use of the term, extends well beyond it. I prefer to think of geocriticism as a broader category, one which would encompass a number of different forms of criticism associated with spatial literary studies.

My conclusion to *Spatiality*, which points the way toward fantasy and utopia, is intended to highlight once again the existential basis for these literary practices. Quite understandably, mapping is frequently associated with realism, and maps are excellent tools for helping us make sense of the real spaces and places that constitute our world. But people do not tell stories or make maps in order only to represent their world as it exists; they also imagine alternatives. Part of the point in that chapter is to observe that all maps and all narratives are figurative, and that elements of fantasy are therefore integral to even the most realistically mimetic representations of the so-called “real world.” But beyond that, I also wanted to show how, in our attempts to make sense and give form to the world, we necessarily project other worlds. In making space available in our critical practices for the fantastic, we open ourselves up to the possibility of new spaces. In this respect, my subsequent work on utopia, dystopia, fantasy, and other forms of the literature of alterity is closely connected to my theories of topophobia and the cartographic imperative, literary cartography, geocriticism, and so on.

This attentiveness or comportment toward alterity is also part of the fundamental allegoresis of this project and ones related to it. Representation of a given thing necessarily implies representation of another, and in any case, even the most mimetic or realistic representations conjure forth interpretive possibilities that often far exceed the bounds of one’s sense of a “literal” meaning. Needless to say, perhaps, but “literal” meanings also require interpretive practices in order to be identified, which raises the question of whether even the literal may partake of a foundational sense of allegory. All stories tell other stories, after all.

Mapping the Diary of a Madman

Turning now to Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman,” I might note the degree to which it too operates as part of the “literature of alterity.” This is not to say that it lacks realism (although that is certainly an element of its charm), or that the presence of a “mad” narrator automatically makes this a sort of *otherworldly* story (although that could be argued as well). What I mean is that it highlights *estrangement*, perhaps in the Brechtian sense of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (i.e. the alienation or estrangement effect), in ways that surely strike the first-time readers and that stay with the longtime re-reader.

My reading of Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman” relies heavily upon a truly insightful article by the great scholar of Chinese modernism TANG Xiaobing, now the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the Chinese University

of Hong Kong, where he also serves as the Sin Wai Kin Professor of Chinese Humanities and Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies.¹

Many readers are probably familiar with the story already, but it may be useful to begin with a brief summary of “Diary of a Madman.” The tale opens with something of an introduction or preface before giving readers the “diary” itself. An unnamed narrator starts by mentioning two brothers who had been good friends of his in school, but with whom he had lost touch over the years. He had heard that the younger brother had experienced severe health problems, and so he decided to check in with them during his travels back to his old village. (Note, he does not say where he lives now or what he does, but his return “home” involved traveling “a long way.”) The older sibling informs him that his brother “recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post,” but he delivers to this unnamed narrator two volumes of his formerly “mad” brother’s diaries. The narrator then explains that he copied a portion of the entries “to serve a subject of medical research,” while also revealing that the title of his tale is that given by the diarist himself after his recovery (Lu Xun, 1972, para. 1-2).

The diary itself is a sort of “spatial form”—in Joseph Frank’s sense, from “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1945)—for the narrator had already observed that the diarist neglected to provide dates, and so the order of events or perceptions is not entirely clear. Unlike Nikolai Gogol’s 1835 “Diary of a Madman,” in which it is made clear that the diarist is progressively becoming more and more insane, Lu Xun offers a madman who may be just as insane while writing the first entry as he is while writing the “last” entry, not to mention the fact that we have already learned that this “madman” recovered from his mental illness prior to our gaining access to the diary at all.

What follows are the entries of the “Diary of a Madman,” which exhibit signs of what this unnamed narrator calls a “persecution complex,” beginning with a somewhat disjointed and paranoid observations—for example, the diarist claims not to have seen the moon for thirty years, but also notes that the neighbor’s dog is giving him suspicious looks—which then evolve into a more elaborate and almost systematic sense of the community’s pervasive cannibalism, as it seems to the diarist that his brother, himself, and everyone in the village are eaters of human flesh. The Madman is especially worried about being eaten himself, naturally, but he eventually finds, to his horror, that his countrymen (and perhaps all men) have been eating humans for over four thousand years. In the final entry, he wonders if there are perhaps at least *some* children who have not yet tasted human flesh, offering as his (and the story’s) final words: “Save the children . . .” (Lu Xun, 1972, XIII, para. 1).

Needless to say, perhaps, but my reading of the tale is predicated upon the good will and good fortune of translation, which is always risky, since we know that even a keen, thorough knowledge of the language a given text is written in can yield wildly disparate interpretations and analyses, words themselves being so semantically rich and unstable even within their own Saussurean categories of *langue* or *parole*, not to mention Jameson’s caveat, citing Talleyrand in *The Political Unconscious*, that language is the very medium of

1. A sidenote: The first time I met Fredric Jameson, in fact, was when I was a sophomore taking an introductory literature course taught by him in 1989; TANG was the Teaching Assistant assigned for my section, which meant that he led our discussions of the reading materials and of Jameson’s lectures each week. I believe that he met Jameson when TANG himself was a student at Peking University and during Jameson’s famous visit to China in 1985. As it happens, it was during that visit that Jameson first presented to a Chinese audience materials on postmodernism, which themselves are connected to his 1986 essay on “national allegory,” which, of course, also includes a discussion on Lu Xun’s story. (For an insightful analysis of the relationship between that visit to Peking University, that essay, and “Chinese Jamesonism,” please see LIU, Kang (2018). A (meta) commentary on Western literary theories in China: The case of Jameson and Chinese Jamesonism. *Modern Language Quarterly*, 79(3), 323-340. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-6910785>) TANG Xiaobing then came to study in Jameson’s newly formed Graduate Program in Literature at Duke University, which is where I met him. I am grateful for all these improbable but dialectically interconnected encounters that have made my work, including this article, possible. The essay by TANG is titled “Lu Xun’s ‘Diary of a Madman’ and a Chinese Modernism,” published in the prestigious journal PMLA in 1992.

mystification (1981, pp. 60-61). If the question of interpretation is already quite vexed among fluent speakers of the language, how much more complicated does it become when one must *rely* on translation?

TANG Xiaobing observes that the Chinese title *Kuangren riji* carries with it semantic possibilities not necessarily apparent in the English phrase “Diary of a Madman.” For example, TANG notes that Lu Xun’s brother ZHOU Zuoren, in a 1923 article, had made reference to the great Russian writer Gogol’s predecessor tale, also titled “Diary of a Madman,” but in doing so rendered that story’s title as *Fengren riji*. As TANG points out,

Zhou Zuoren was obviously making a point of underscoring the difference between *fengren* and the *kuangren* of Lu Xun’s “Kuangren riji.” Lu Xun himself was no less aware of the semantic difference between *kuang* and *feng*. In his earlier youthful essay “On the Power of Mara Poets” (1907), he postulates *kuang* as a Nietzschean self-affirmation that provides an essential regenerative energy for any thriving civilization. The word also characterizes talented individuals who contemptuously oppose themselves to a stagnant society and whose actions exceed the public’s comprehension. (1992, p. 1226)

Hence the very title of “Diary of a Madman,” even before the reader enters into the tale proper, implies a sort of schism between the “madman” and the public that can—and frequently does—take on distinctively spatial qualities, such as the obvious separation between the unique (because abnormal) individual and the community itself, whose “space” would thus be coded normal in its own right. The Nietzschean figure that stands athwart this crowd, a figure Nietzsche also called the “madman” (for example, in his famous parable in which the declaration of the Death of God appears in *The Gay Science* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*]), occupies a space apart from that inhabited by the greater part of the public or the society as a whole.

TANG elaborates the significance of the Chinese title further by analyzing the roots of the words involved, thus offering a sort of deconstructive approach to the concepts that can also inform our reading. As TANG writes,

Etymologically *kuang* describes a hound gone wild and assaulting indifferently its master and its master’s guests. On the basis of this signification, it has acquired over time a rich texture of meanings, including “madness,” “the ecstatic,” and “a wildly unrestrained person.” As an adjective—a usage that dates back to *The Book of Songs* (11–6 BC)—*kuang* is equivalent to “unrestrainedly outgoing, wildly defiant.” In Confucius’s *Analects*, it also occurs as a verb meaning to progress or aggress. *Feng*, an ideogramic word of much more recent origin, was initially a pathological term denoting the mad, the neurotic, the insensible, or the sheerly stupid; its two compounding parts tell of a severe migraine attacking a person rapidly and mysteriously like a gusting wind. *Kuang* is the archetypal metaphor for an explosive ecstasy (ex-stasis), a jumping off the right track, a transgressive crossing of the boundary—in short, a return to the primal or instinctual drive. It captures, to a certain extent, the inner experience of the alterity of reason, of what has to be repressed and marginalized as irrational. In contrast, *feng* registers both an externalized, distancing knowledge of madness and a simultaneous containment of the eruptive forces through classification and categorization, if not indeed dismissal. (1992, p. 1226)

Both visions of madness, *kuang* and *feng*, have spatial resonances, for they mark the boundaries between sane and insane in ways that lend themselves well to spatial metaphors. But they also suggest rather different approaches to this, which might be likened in Deleuzian terms to deterritorialization and reterritorializations, as well as to Foucault’s analyses of the historical constitution of the abnormal and the normal, which themselves became subject to a spatialized array of power-knowledge relations.

TANG's highlighting of the distinction also plays out in the tale itself. By titling his "diary" *Kuangren riji*, the diarist himself emphasizes his own perspective of his mental or existential condition as *kuang*. (Our original narrator, the one who is visiting his old village to pay a call on these brothers, reports that the elder brother of the madman had told him that the name of the document was given by the younger brother, the erstwhile madman, himself.) Yet within the diary, there is recorded a scene in which the younger addresses his older brother—the same person who will later give the diary to our original narrator—and grows angry at the idea that he (the younger brother) is being labeled as "mad," using the word *fengzi*. After his older brother shouts at the onlookers, "Get out of here, all of you! What is the point of looking at a madman [*fengzi*]?" the diarist makes the following realization: "Then I realized part of their cunning. They would never be willing to change their stand, and their plans were all laid; they had stigmatized me as a madman [*fengzi*]. In future when I was eaten, not only would there be no trouble, but people would probably be grateful to them" (Lu Xun, 1972, X, para. 9-10). In other words, the self-described *kuang*-madman is concerned about being labeled a *feng*-madman, particularly given the foreseen consequences of such categorization.

As TANG asserts, citing this moment in the text, "*Kuang*, unlike *feng*, is not an aphasic absence of signification but, on the contrary, a discursive energy that erupts and interrupts the normal and normalizing system of meaning" (1992, p. 1226). TANG affirms that the *kuang* of Lu Xun's Madman "indicates a return of that which has been excluded or obliterated from the horizon of allowed or conceivable experience. It represents a transgressive discourse not only because it goads the self-conscious subject to challenge the given boundaries but also because it drives the subject himself to all the limits, all the frontiers, of experience" (1992, p. 1226).

Perhaps related to this *kuang* sense of the Madman's madness, the diary frequently features apparent reversals of values. For example, when he decides to look into the matter of anthropophagy in more detail, the Madman endeavors to do more research through reading, but as he says, "my history has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: 'Virtue and Morality.' Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words—'Eat people'" (Lu Xun, 1972, III, para. 10). Almost with a sort of Nietzschean revaluation of all values, the Madman finds that the hidden message behind Virtue and Morality is this cannibalistic drive, the imperative to "eat people." Later, believing the fish he had been served is actually human flesh, the Madman receives a visit from a doctor, who proceeds to examine him. The Madman "sees through" this pretense, however, noting that "[h]e simply used the pretext of feeling my pulse to see how fat I was; for by so doing he would receive a share of my flesh" (1972, IV, para. 7), before also imagining that the community wishes to fatten him up in preparation for eating "more" of him thereafter. Here, the standard procedures of healthcare (e.g., taking one's pulse) become methods for preparing and eating human flesh. The healthy constitution becomes merely a forbear to the destruction and consumption of the body.

The distinctively spatial or allegorical aspects of this may not be apparent, but I suspect this is where a more allegorical reading can be found, since the linguistic and conceptual distinction between forms of madness may also suggest different levels of society and spaces within it.

National Allegory and Cognitive Mapping

In his essay on "Third-World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism," Jameson offers the astonishingly sweeping hypothesis: "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-*

world culture and society.” (1986, p. 69).¹ The boldness of Jameson’s claim contributed to the controversies this article engendered, as a number of critics, most notably Aijaz Ahmad (1987/1992), took Jameson to task for his apparent overgeneralizations, but see Neil Lazarus’s (2011) discussion of the controversy for an alternative perspective. Following his provocative statement, Jameson seeks to illustrate his claim with a reading of Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman.” In his analysis, Jameson writes that the

representational power of Lu Xun’s text cannot be appreciated properly without some sense of what I have called its allegorical resonance. For it should be clear that the cannibalism literally apprehended by the sufferer in the attitudes and bearing of his family and neighbors is at one and the same time being attributed by Lu Xun himself to Chinese society as a whole: and if this attribution is to be called “figural,” it is indeed a figure more powerful and “literal” than the “literal” level of the text. Lu Xun’s proposition is that the people of this great maimed and retarded, disintegrating China of the late and post-imperial period, his fellow citizens, are “literally” cannibals: in their desperation, disguised and indeed intensified by the most traditional forms and procedures of Chinese culture, they must devour one another ruthlessly to stay alive. This occurs at all levels of that exceedingly hierarchical society, from lumpens and peasants all the way to the most privileged elite positions in the mandarin bureaucracy. (1986, p. 71)

Most of the events and reflections in the diary take place in a small, presumably rural village, but by the end of “Diary of a Madman,” or perhaps I should say, at the beginning of the tale, we learn that the madman in question has recovered and found a place for himself within the country’s bureaucracy.

Jameson’s conception of national allegory—along with Jameson’s earlier consideration of narrative as a means by which individual experience and a broader social totality may be somehow represented and reconciled, if only through a kind of figuration—prefigures Jameson’s well-known conception of *cognitive mapping*, which I take to represent the core of the entire Jamesonian project (see Tally, 2014). Cognitive mapping accrues its notorious reputation only after being named as the political vocation of postmodern art in the essay “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984; reprinted with slight revision as the first chapter in Jameson 1991), but the phrase also appears, after a fashion, in *The Political Unconscious*, where it is directly associated with realism, albeit only parenthetically. Jameson writes that realism has been “traditionally in one form or another the central model of Marxist aesthetics as a narrative discourse which unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive, mapping, or well-nigh ‘scientific’ perspective” (1981, p. 104). Jameson’s consideration of narrative realism and the crisis of representation anticipates his analysis in his writings on postmodernism of that spatial anxiety endemic to the postmodern condition. Here, in fact, the “cognitive, mapping, or well-nigh ‘scientific’” aspects of realism are productively contrasted with the more mythic or metaphysical cartographies associated with the genre, or generic mode, of romance.

If Marxism itself unfolds as a sort of romantic philosophical discourse, as Jameson suggests that it does, that does not mean that it sheds its more properly “realistic” mapping project. Rather, it indicates the degree to which any apparently realistic mapping project must partake of the figural or allegorical projections normally associated with romance or fantasy literature, such as that of the imaginary plenum of a distinct, perhaps inaccessible past—as in, for instance, Georg Lukács’s idea of the integrated or closed civilization in the age of the epic—or that of an anticipatory illumination of some alternative space, which gives form to the utopian impulse. Whereas high realism seems to reproduce the iron cage of modern capitalism in a narrative

1. Please note: The discourse surrounding so-called first, second, and third “worlds” emerged in the aftermath of World War II as an attempt to frame the geopolitical order during the Cold War. It gained influence, but it was also widely criticized for being overly simplistic and misleading, and by the 1990s scholars and critics, including Jameson himself, began to abandon this formulation.

form, the apparently outmoded form of romance offers a potentially utopian vision. Later, the stylistic experiments and free play of modernist and postmodernist art may be found to exhibit a similarly utopian impulse, while also necessarily maintaining their own ideological functions.

In a sense, then, the argument of the national allegory essay is tied in directly to work Jameson had been engaged in for many years. Indeed, in his conceptions of national allegory and cognitive mapping, Jameson attempted to articulate a process for narrative figuration that he had elaborated in *The Political Unconscious*, but largely with respect to European literature. The *political unconscious* and *cognitive mapping* represent two distinct sides of the coin, which is perhaps most clearly understood when considering that the one refers mostly to reading or to the critic's activity, whereas the other refers to a program engaged in by the writer or producer of the aesthetic work itself. Ironically, perhaps, Jameson's sense that so-called "third world" literature produces a national allegory out of the individual or private narrative is an attempt to illustrate the need for cognitive mapping on a global scale, in which the "worlds" are subsumed within a capitalist world system that would later come to be characterized in terms of globalization. In his essay "Getting to World Literature," for example, Jonathan Arac has observed that "Jameson was trying out the Marxist idea that the collective investments of Third World literature offered an important alternative to the subjectivity structures of late capitalism" (2017, p. 335).

Jameson highlights what he calls "two distinct and incompatible endings" to Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman." The first, which—and perhaps this is fitting for such a dialectical reader as Jameson—is also the last, insofar as it comes in the closing lines of the tale, is the "Save the children" ending. Jameson sees it as "very much a call to the future, in the impossible situation of a well-nigh universal cannibalism" (1986, p. 77). The second comes in the preface, when the supposedly cannibalistic older brother explains to the narrator that his now-recovered, sane younger brother has taken up an official post elsewhere. Jameson thus concludes that, "in advance, the nightmare is annulled; the paranoid visionary, his brief and terrible glimpse of the grisly reality beneath the appearance now vouchsafed, gratefully returns to the realm of illusion and oblivion therein again to take up his place in the space of bureaucratic power and privilege" (1986, p. 77).

I would note that what Jameson here calls "the realm of illusion and oblivion" is our own, all-too-real world, with its "normal" behaviors, its curious neighbors, and its government bureaucracies. It is, in fact, the world of sanity to which the Madman returns only after becoming healthy again, thus all the more well suited to take up an "official post" which happens to be "elsewhere," thus requiring now a displacement from the scene of one's madness, the site from which the Madman had discerned the 4,000-year history of human cannibalism. Hence, "the realm of illusion and oblivion" is the world we live in, complete with its own ideological and state apparatuses. By returning from the apparently less illusory space of mad fancy, the unnamed madman, along with the traveling narrator and the reader of Lu Xun's tale, might descry alternative imaginary orders in which to live. As Jameson puts it—suggestively, but without following up on the suggestions— "it is only at this price, by way of a complex play of simultaneous and antithetical messages, that the narrative text is able to open up a concrete perspective on the real future" (1986, p. 77).

Regarding these two endings, I would only add that the phrase "Save the children" does not refer to saving them from being eaten—that is, from being the victims of cannibalism—but rather refers to saving them from becoming anthropophagites themselves, from eating human flesh. It thus represents a utopian hope of carving out a new space, one distinct from the 4,000-year-old culture of people-eating, where new forms of humanity can thrive. As for the second "ending," I would just emphasize the word *elsewhere* in the phrase "my brother recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." Lu Xun offers

neither causation nor correlation, but the younger brother's paranoia and schizophrenia abate around the moment of his own displacement from his native community, and presumably the "official post" in question is less a site of further cannibalism than a space in which his anti-cannibalistic, hence similarly utopian, impulses can find proper outlets. The narrator of the tale, as another who managed to move far away from this "home," might also figure forth the success to be found in distance, displacement, and removal from the elements that caused such consternation in the first place.

Conclusion: Building the Wall

In his notorious essay on national allegory, Jameson asserts that, "[i]f allegory has once again become somehow congenial for us today, as over against the massive and monumental unifications of an older modernist symbolism or even realism itself, it is because the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol" (1986, p. 73). The return of allegory thus coincides with what Foucault called "the epoch of space," which is to say, our own time:

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. . . . We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (1986, p. 22).

For spatial literary studies, be they pursued under the signs of geocriticism, literary geography, or something else, allegory and space are always intertwined, in one way or another. Mapping involves both, of course, as the very representation of spaces and places on the figured surface of a map call into being so many allegorical processes and forms.

The polysemy of the text, of spaces and allegories in general, befits the scene of Lu Xun's work as well. At almost the exact moment he was completing his "Diary of a Madman," another great modernist on the other side of the world was dabbling in a vaguely Orientalist, Sinological experiment in fabulation, using the building of the Great Wall of China as an allegory for man's fate writ large. In Franz Kafka's "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" (1917, but not published until 1930), which is known in English simply as *The Great Wall of China* but more literally translates "During the Building of the Chinese Wall," Kafka explores the individual and collective investment in a project so spatiotemporally extensive as to exceed the limits of subjective perception, thus requiring a sort of allegorical and speculative mapping to grapple with the sheer enormity of our imagination. The narrator of Kafka's tale thus affirms that "[s]o vast is our land that no fable could do justice to its vastness, the heavens can scarcely span it" (1946, p. 89). Faced with such spatial vastness and such allegorical possibility, narratives cannot help but become maps, attempting, failing, and attempting again to make sense of the places and meanings of that world.

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