

Chalupský, Petr

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PETR CHALUPSKÝ

“SOMETHING ODD AND BEAUTIFUL”: LITERARY CARTOGRAPHY IN JIM CRACE’S *HARVEST*

Abstract

Jim Crace is a unique representative of contemporary British fiction whose novels are characterised by a distinct narrative style and diction, compelling parable-like stories, and an exceptional sense of space. The settings of his novels, no matter how diverse in terms of geographic location and historical time, evince certain idiosyncratic features which make them both other and familiar for readers. Referring to himself as a “landscape writer”, Crace always explores the close interconnectedness, physical as well as mental, between his protagonists and the places they inhabit. His 2013 novel, *Harvest*, is even more complex in this regard as it also includes the theme of the map-making of its imaginary landscapes. Using a variety of geocritical approaches, this article attempts to show that the novel is a remarkable example of literary cartography in that it combines subjectivist and objectivist approaches to textual representation of space.

Key words

Jim Crace; Harvest; landscape; geocriticism; mapping narrative; literary cartography

Introduction – Craceland

Although Jim Crace (b. 1946) is not as widely and internationally renowned as some of the other British writers from the strong generation born after the Second World War, such as Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Graham Swift and Kazuo Ishiguro, his books have enjoyed considerable popularity with both readers and critics ever since his 1986 debut novel, *Continent*. He has twice been shortlisted for the (Man) Booker prize and has been awarded

a number of prestigious prizes not only in Britain, but also in the United States¹. His successful career is remarkable given that he has never engaged, perhaps with the exception of *Being Dead* (1999), in the playful and often experimental post-modern narrative techniques, particularly those questioning narrative authority and the credibility of the narration itself, which have featured so significantly in the work of his peers. Rather than employing such destabilising devices as unreliable and/or multiple-perspective narrators, intertextuality, metafictional twists, the mixing of fact and fiction, parody and pastiche, Crace has always professed what he calls “traditional” writing, in the sense of folk storytelling – myths, legends and fables – conveyed in a conventionally structured narrative. What he enjoys about this mode of storytelling is its narrative impersonality as “the character of the storyteller is completely absent”, and the fact that he can lose himself “in the realms of pure invention” (Begley 2002). At the same time, he distances himself from realistic, or “conventional” as he terms it, writing that is temporally and geographically anchored in reality. His fiction, instead, “dislocate[s] the issues of the real world and place[s] them elsewhere” (Begley 2002), yet still makes these issues, and their characters and locations along with them, plausible and intelligible for the reader.

It is precisely the combination of his unrestrained imagination and his “talent for making invented places and events feel here-and-now real” (Begley 2002) that makes Crace’s novels inventive, ambiguous and even disquieting on the one hand, while somewhat comforting and ultimately humane on the other: human beings and their relationships are always at the centre of their attention. A key role in this must be attributed to Crace’s talent for creating highly ingenious and captivating places to which he “dislocates” his stories, places which are essentially fictitious yet which possess a considerable degree of verisimilitude thanks to his exceptionally vivid narration in which “beautifully rhythmic language” (Lawless) is full of evocative and often unusual sounding figurative expressions taking turns with detailed particularities. That is why, although he claims all his stories are wholly products of his imagination, a “careless reader will mistake the make-believe for realist detail” (Begley 2003). Indeed, as a keen amateur natural historian (bookgroup.info 2007), he revels in rendering his settings in “obsessive detail” which shows his mastery of geography, geology, botany and anthropology (Kermode 1998). Moreover, he not only infuses his descriptions with specialised terms for animals, plants and rocks unknown to most laypersons, but also likes to confuse his readers by inventing his own terms.

These milieux, which appear uncanny yet turn out to be identifiable and not disorienting after all, thus by far transcend the function of mere background setting and become crucial means of plot construction and character development. Crace likes to see himself as a “landscape writer” who makes up “alternate landscapes to fill with invented people and invented narratives” (Begley 2003), and in each of his novels he constructs a distinct environment in terms of history and geography, including, for instance, a Late Neolithic village, the Judean desert of Christ’s time, an early Victorian seaside town and a modern city. This idiosyn-

crasy has led critics to coin the term “Craceland”² to refer to his ability to make up places that are simultaneously recognisable and other, “a somewhere familiar, but not quite here” (Sansom 2001), “a world proportioned to reality, and yet largely a system within itself” (Tew 2006: 4). Such fictional worlds then possess within themselves a potential to fuse the poetic with the spatial, social and political.

At this point the term “landscape” should be clarified. While space is a general concept, place is a localised, concretised segment of the indeterminate space which its dwellers endow with experience and comprehension, to which they attribute meanings and interpretations, to which they are “emotionally and culturally attached” (Altman and Low 1992: 5), and which therefore represents “a particular constellation of social relations” (Massey 1994: 154). These multiple meanings and interpretations can often be contradictory and their struggle composes “the contestatory or dialogical dimension of place” (Prieto 2012: 14). As such, place proves to be much more determining than space in terms of the individual’s identity and sense of being in the world. Landscape, then, can be understood as a middle-term between space and place as it “typically consists of several places, and yet it is linked to an area, a region, in a way space is not” (de Lange *et al.* 2008: xv-xvi). A person can closely experience and relate to landscape statically via long-term occupancy, or in motion via journeying through it. It is a larger unit than place, in terms of both geography and meaning, yet one which still retains the defining properties of place.

The term that most aptly characterises the thematic framework of Crace’s stories is transition, as they always deal with the sudden need to face up to an imminent change and adapt rather quickly to new circumstances. They depict the turbulent and frustrating process during which the traditional and habitual is challenged and undermined by the modern and unfamiliar. In some of his novels, such as *Being Dead, Six* (2003), *All That Follows* (2010) and *The Melody* (2018), this transition is individual and personal, in others it concerns whole communities, though metonymically portrayed through the fates of a few protagonists. The power of his narratives rests in how he interweaves the actual environments with these transitional events and their impacts on the characters’ physical and mental lives. Therefore, they provide suitable material for an in-depth geocritical analysis. Crace’s 2013 novel, *Harvest*, is a complex example of the above typical aspects of its author’s writing: it is set in an elaborately conceived landscape and explores a painful transition, both individual and communal. Moreover, the interconnectedness between the space and its dwellers’ psyches is reinforced by the motif and theme of mapping and map-making. Using different geocritical perspectives, this paper argues that the novel represents a unique mapping narrative whose fictional space-time is constructed not only through description, but also by means of figurative topography, which reconciles in itself the subjectivist and objectivist approaches to textual representation of space.³

Geocriticism and literary cartography

Space has become one of the primary objects of interest of literary theory and criticism ever since the rise of post-structuralism and postmodernism, gradually assuming the position of “central metaphor and *topos* in literature” (Peraldo 2016: 1) that had previously been reserved for time and temporality. This shift of interest stems from the premise that the spaces/places we inhabit prove crucially formative in terms of both our individual and collective identities. This relationship is reciprocal: not only do the spatial properties of our existence shape who we are and how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, our perception and interpretation of space, be it in the form of mental projections, scientific delineation or artistic representation, also determine the character and significance of our living environments. Their temporal and spatial coordinates are therefore complemented with a social one as we try to make them intelligible by (self-) projecting meanings onto them. These meanings endow spaces with new layers of meaningfulness, both private and public, which combine and interact, appropriating them discursively and thus allowing them to get narrativised. Studying textual representations of space is thus one of the ways in which we can better understand not only the spaces in question, but also our own spatial, and possibly even social, experience.

This spatial turn has given rise to a number of critical approaches, such as psychogeography – the practice of strolling around and artistically recording the disappearing, derelict and forgotten areas of urban spaces, the “[l]andscapes of id” (Sinclair 2003: 306), geopoetics – a particular fusion of poetry, aesthetics and geography⁴, and ecocriticism, which, unlike geopoetics, overtly ties the artistic representation to “a ‘green’ moral and political agenda” (Garrard 2011: 3). All of them are intrinsically interdisciplinary, complementing literary studies and poetics with an insight from other disciplines such as psychology, cultural anthropology, ecology and geography. However, the most comprehensive and universally applicable theory-practice in this regard has proved to be geocriticism, “an exploratory practice, or set of practices, whereby readers, scholars, and critics engage with the spaces that make life, through lived experience and through imaginary projections, meaningful” (Tally 2011b: xii). Broadly speaking, it explores the various interconnections and interactions between physical spaces and their literary rendering, between geographic entities and their textual representations. Like Lefebvre’s *Spaces of Representation* and Soja’s *Thirdspace*, it is based on the premise that all lived spaces are, at the same time, “real-and-imagined” (Soja 1996: 11) in that they exist both as geographic locations and their their imaginary projections. As a result, our approach to spaces always comprises processing the factual as well as the invented, which is why being familiar with the imaginary representations may allow us to better understand their “actual” referents, and vice versa.

The foundations of geocriticism were laid down by Bertrand Westphal and later formulated in his 2007 study, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (*La*

Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace). His approach is strictly geo-centered in that he suggests that the real-life spatial referent is the major focus for the comparative analysis of its textual representations, rather than the human participants and their perception and construction of fictitious spaces. Westphal is primarily interested in spaces of heterogeneity, in what Deleuze and Guattari call smooth spaces, which are characterised by nomadic free action as opposed to the systematic workings of the State apparatus in striated spaces, organised around points rather than lines and directioned in open rather than closed intervals. As a result, they evince a strong tendency towards deterritorialisation (2000: 480). Similarly, Westphal's geocriticism is based on three fundamental concepts: first, spatiotemporality stresses the fact that in spatialised time the dynamic of the linear line gave way to the dynamic of the point(s), resulting in a profusion of forking time-lines. The state of such a system is that of disorder and non-equilibrium, which can most aptly be expressed by the metaphor of entropy. This entropy, however, must be viewed positively as its points of instability generate energies that propel the system to evolve into a new stage, and as such it contains a very complex story, as opposed to the equilibrium which, deprived of history, is equivalent to nonstory. Second, transgressivity points out that though always subject to homogenising pressures, contemporary space is unstable, with an increasing capacity for movement and oscillation between centre and periphery. This space is so frequently inclined to various forms of transgression, boundary and norm crossings that it becomes a state – transgressivity, which characterises the deterritorialising forces continually acting upon heterogeneous spaces. Third, referentiality refers to the relationship between the spatial referent and its representation being also subject to constant movement and oscillation. An orderly arrangement of words or images does not correspond directly to transgressive reality and cannot reproduce the referent. It is a construction, a discourse that establishes the space and therefore it reproduces an experience of the real rather than the real itself, which is why the distinction between the real and the represented gets blurred (Westphal 2011: 8–10).

Other practitioners of geocriticism, however, move it away from Westphal's strictly geo-centred focus towards the other, ego-centred, pole, which is represented by the phenomenological approach. This stresses the subjective, experiential properties of space and explores the interrelation between the physical environment and the inhabitant's mental processes, focusing on "the impact that the environmental constraints of place have on the human psyche", and perceiving place as "a manifestation of the dynamic interpretation of consciousness and world" (Prieto 2011: 25). Drawing on Westphal, Robert T. Tally Jr. has developed the concept of "literary cartography". It stems from the premise that spatial criticism should examine "literary representations not only of places themselves, but also of the experience of place and of displacement, while exploring the interrelations between lived experience and a more abstract or unrepresentable spatial network that subtly or directly shapes it" (2014a: x). In other words, his geocriticism concerns not only spaces that readers get to know through textual representation,

but also their mental reflections, through which it “can examine how the ways in which we are situated in space determine the nature and quality of our existence in the world” (2011a: 8). Tally speaks of so-called “mapping narratives” which attempt to map the real-and-imagined spaces of human existence, and which are an expression of a “productive ambiguity” – something that maps while, simultaneously, is something to be mapped (2014b: 3). Such a narrative provides a textual cartography of actual and/or fictitious spaces, but is also “mapped” by the readers’ interpretation and the interpretative framework and socio-spatial contexts in which they situate them and which make them meaningful to these readers. The mapping narratives thus “make possible novel spaces” (2014a: 12) and the geocritical explorations of these literary cartographies can help us better understand our own spatial experience.

A related perspective is espoused by Eric Prieto who proposes focusing the geocritical inquiry “on place as a manifestation of the dynamic interpretation of consciousness and world” (2011: 25). His aim is to bring together the two seemingly opposing methodological approaches to the study of place – the subjectivist, from the inside, and the objectivist, from the outside. The first is associated especially with artistic or imaginative representation and “gives precedence to the density, complexity and qualitative aspects of place experience” (2012: 187), while the latter works with scientifically relevant, that is quantifiable and measurable, data and relies on “the analytic abstraction and decentred perspective associated with maps” (2012: 187). The main reason for this reconciliation, Prieto argues, is the fact that we live in a transitional era dominated by unprecedentedly rapid technological and, in consequence, social and cultural evolutionary changes which result, among other things, in the disappearance of some kinds of places, and the emergence of others based on new modes of socio-spatial organisation. By means of these transformative forces, homogeneous places get heterogenised into what he terms *entre-deux* or in-between places. These other – border, liminal and interstitial – territories, though generally perceived as “defective variants of more-established, better understood places”, possess a substantial productive potential which tends to be largely overlooked and underappreciated, but which makes them “unexpectedly resourceful loci of innovation and development” (2012: 1). As such, they naturally attract imaginative appropriation, including literary representation. They appositely reflect the transitional moment of history in which we live and thus prove a particularly useful object of geocritical study. By depicting a community in transition, Crace’s *Harvest* reveals precisely such transitory, in-between places which he shows to be integral parts of their inhabitants’ identity.

Delusive idyll

Harvest presents a very homogeneous milieu at the beginning of the story: a small agrarian English village of some sixty people, which in reality is a large

homestead owned and governed by the landowner, Master Kent, on whose land the villagers live and in whose fields they work throughout the year. It is a remote place – a three-day ride on horseback to the nearest market town – and it is also a strongly autonomous unit as it has no magistrate, constable or clergyman to assist the landowner with administration, guidance and surveillance. The village is, in effect, self-sufficient and sealed off: it produces just enough crops to feed its people, and the people produce just enough offspring to keep their numbers more or less stable. With the exception of the landowner, the inhabitants do not leave the boundaries of their village, living in and for their community, their existence fully conducted and measured by the events and requirements of the year's natural circle.

As a result, there is virtually no contact between the villagers and the world outside as they do not partake in trade and feel no need to welcome and accept newcomers. Walter Thirsk, the narrator and main protagonist of the novel, was the last newcomer to settle in the village, and that was twelve years earlier. Moreover, he was not a true outsider asking to be let in as he was brought in by Master Kent as his clerk, and only later, by marrying a local woman, was he gradually accepted as one of the peasants. The community, "ditched and fenced against the outside world" (*Harvest*⁵ 21), is unused to hospitality, suspicious of and prejudiced against all forms of otherness, other people in particular. Any reminder of the world beyond the limits of their familiar territory is unnerving and potentially threatening for them. They believe that by keeping troublesome strangers *ante portas* they can preserve the status quo, but they are too blinded by their xenophobic narrow-mindedness to notice that the intruding elements are already *in portis*.

Having been sealed off from larger socio-economic changes, the villagers cannot see that they are about to face up to forces of modernity too mighty to be fended off. A family tragedy – that Master Kent's wife dies while giving birth to their child, which also dies – triggers consequences that far transcend the limits of the serene pastoral seclusion. The manor house and the land ownership is not passed on to the widower but to the wife's kin, her cousin Edmund Jordan who becomes the single heir of the property. Unlike Kent, Jordan has no personal interest in the place and its community and, being a man with business instincts, intends to transform the self-sustained settlement into one generating profit. Following an Enclosure Act, the cousin decides to fence the common lands in and around the village – the fields, the meadows and the woods – to make pastures for sheep as marketable sheep farming is to replace the existing unproductive tillage. To this end, "economies" will be made, that is the number of hands needs to be reduced, which is why Jordan and his crew arrive to "persuade" some of the villagers, by any means necessary, to leave their homes and seek their fortune elsewhere. However, a few days before Jordan and his cohorts appear, some other disturbing harbingers of impending changes appear in the village. The first is Philip Earle, or Mr Quill as he is nicknamed by the villagers, the chartmaker whose task is to make a map of Jordan's new property. His arrival is soon followed by that of three strangers who build a provisional hut with an open fire on the outskirts of

the village estates. As Mr Earle is officially appointed by Master Jordan the villagers have to put up with his presence, though unwillingly, and so they all the more strongly vent their unease and confusion on the nameless vagrants by driving them away by force.

Although the new, capitalist forces are portrayed rather negatively, especially when personified by Edmund Jordan, as ones that value pragmatic materialism over elementary humanity and age-old values and traditions, the deluded and hypocritical villagers are also not spared critical treatment. The central irony is that the three newcomers that the villagers assault, capture and torture by placing in the pillory, the young man with his wife and his father, are in fact “fugitives from sheep” (*H* 228) from another part of the country, which makes the villagers’ acts a sinister foreshadowing of the harsh treatment they themselves may suffer in the near future when looking for a new place to live. Moreover, they accuse the strangers of crimes they know they did not commit only because at that moment the end justifies the means, but the end soon turns against them when the young man’s wife slaughters Master Kent’s beloved horse. Jordan believes such an act could have only been carried out by a man, which is why an investigation is started, houses are searched, interrogations carried out, charges brought, including those of witchcraft, as a result of which the community, governed by fear and mistrust, disintegrates and one by one the villagers flee their homeland to avoid further persecution. The despised and mocked Mr Quill is the person who, in spite of his physical defect of a stiff left arm, repeatedly shows the most bravery, fairness, composure and kindness: he is the one who prevents physical violence between the villagers and the fugitives, who secretly attends to the men in the pillory, and who publicly opposes Jordan’s harsh measures. For his moral superiority he “deserves” nothing else than being falsely reported as being the true disseminator of witchcraft, a pretext for Jordan to get rid of this inconvenient individual.

The narrator is not spared critical treatment either. Though once a townspeople like Mr Earle, Walter Thirsk is now much more like his fellow country people and feels like one of them. Ironically, they have never accepted him completely and after his wife’s death he is once again perceived as a semi-naturalised outsider closer to the manorial men about town than to the earthy peasantry. Although we see most of the action through his perspective, it is often hard to sympathise and identify with him as he is a person prone to a number of vices, such as cowardice, self-deception, vanity, egotism, jealousy and envy. He is comfortable and dependable when part of a crowd, but rather untrustworthy and erratic when he acts on his own, particularly in critical situations. In many respects he functions as a counterpart to the man of integrity, Mr Earle: when the chartmaker is trying to make peace in the heated atmosphere between the villagers and the fugitives the narrator is trying to find excuses to avoid taking part in what he knows is going to be an unpleasant encounter; when the crowd falsely accuses the strangers of arson he connives in it though he knows that in reality they are all “conspirators” with “good cause to blame” themselves (*H* 33, 87); while Mr Earle speaks

his mind in front of Edmund Jordan, Walter Thirsk nods at anything the cousin says to avoid the aggressive whims of his temper; when Earle is looking for Mrs Bedlam to offer her shelter on a stormy night Thirsk is ridiculously consumed with jealousy that the two are making love somewhere in the dark; and when he eventually sets the young man free from the pillory to join his wife he feels self-pityingly wronged that the couple, who not only have lost their father and father-in-law but who have also been deprived of their freedom and dignity, do not show enough gratitude to him by asking him to join them for dinner.

The narrator

No matter how fallible and weak-minded Walter Thirsk may be, he is an ideal guide to the space and place he inhabits. This is in part due to his exceptionally observant nature, and in part because as an outsider who spent most of his life in a completely different environment he is much more sensitive to the particularities of the landscape of and around the settlement than its natives. This is made apparent from the very beginning of the story when he reports the two alarming events that violate the habitual practices of the village – the ominous arrival of the strangers and the fire in the manor barn – through their immediate impact on its landscape:

Our land is topped and tailed with flames. Beyond the frontier ditches of our fields and in the shelter of our woods, on common ground [...] some newcomers [...] have put up their hut – four rough and ready walls, a bit of roof – and lit the more outlying of these fires. [...] It rises in a column that hardly bends or thins until it clears the canopies. (*H* 1)

Due to his spatial sensitivity and perceptiveness, Walter always associates people and their interpersonal relationships with the physical environment they inhabit, and he often demonstrates deep understanding for the intrinsic interconnectedness of the social and spatial coordinates of human existence. He presents his own twelve-year residence in the village as inseparable from its landscape: how as a townish cub he was mesmerised by the paradisaical scenery, liberty and scope of “such giving land” (*H* 63); how he soon found out that it is like that only for a passing visitor and that in reality the countryside is “argumentative, inflexible, stern and impatient” (*H* 63, 75) in that it keeps requiring unceasing and strenuous labour from those who want to live off it; how he grew to like even these hardships after he fell in love with his wife to be, yet how he felt more and more alienated from it again after her sudden death.

The loss of his wife makes Walter realise how much infused with social and emotional meanings the landscape of his recent life has been. Without her he becomes aware that he has in fact never been “woven to the fabric of the place” as he is “not a product of these commons but just a visitor who’s stayed” (*H* 63). More and more frequently he experiences moments when he misses the greater

world of his past, all the more so as his neighbours let him know that under the current troublesome circumstances they see him as a master's man who is hard to trust. Philip Earle, with his townsman's appearance, his politeness and pleasant manners, his body "not well suited to the balks and bumpy edges of a field" (*H* 5), and his innocent excitement about the place's natural beauties, thus reminds him of his younger and by now lost self. At the same time, he feels relaxed – respected and appreciated – in Earle's company and cherishes a dream of resuming the once abandoned city life should he "escape the fleecy prospects of our fields by leaving here in his employ" (*H* 124). It is only when assisting Earle in the topographic measurements that he finally utilises his liminal status: on the one hand, he can boast of possessing almost intimate familiarity with the landscape, like the old residents, while, on the other hand, he can display his ability to assume the detached and objective perspective of a worldly person, complacently enjoying the knowledgeable authority of someone who can name local places and plants to an uninformed outsider, though at times he must invent some of the names to cover up his own ignorance.

The narrator offers a contrary perspective on the nature of his fellow villagers and makes use of spatial tropes to characterise them, calling them his "land-born neighbours" who are "too rooted in their soil, too planced and thicketed" (*H* 21), as argumentative, inflexible and stern as the land on which they live and work. As such, they have difficulties when encountering some form of otherness, especially in human conduct, and so they are all taken aback by the "unwomanly", audacious and impudent behaviour of the young stranger's wife who not only dares to talk back disrespectfully to Master Kent but even spits in contempt on his horse. The velvet shawl around her shoulders is thus not the only object of the onlooking women's envy. Constrained by their patriarchal world, they can hardly believe in a female creature so free-spirited and unbridled. Again, Walter resorts to a spatial simile and parallels their enforced docility to how the males approach their estates: "The local women were like land – fenced in, assigned and spoken for, the freehold of their fathers, then their husbands, then their sons. You could not cross their boundaries, or step beyond your portion" (*H* 29). Bound geographically by the limits of their homeland, the villagers' mindset and responsiveness are shown to be equally confined.

After all the neighbours have fled and Jordan and Kent are also about to leave the village, Walter takes refuge at the top end of the landscape, on a little hillock from which he can see the whole place. He remembers Kent's words that their land "has always been much older than ourselves" but "[n]ot any more" (*H* 196), meaning that the community to come will exploit and have command of the land rather than humbly live in accordance with its demands. Watching the procession of the landowners and the captives fading from sight, Walter no longer sees the hillock as a promising vantage point of opportunity as he used to when he was a newcomer there, but "a friendless place, and capped in cloud" (*H* 202). The prospect of the empty village makes him feel desperate and panicked, and although even after the harvest the land has not "lost its open-handedness", he

knows that the “summer’s in retreat” and the “year is leaving us” (*H* 205). Once again he draws a parallel between himself and the landscape in that no matter how vitalising and giving it might be, without a social dimension it is too foreign and dismal for him to face. All he is capable of is a little personal, and rather harmlessly symbolic, sabotage of the lost land – “a noble and an honest scar” (*H* 229) made by sowing a strip of barley on the future pasture.

Upon his own departure from the village, Walter symptomatically cannot help but return in his thoughts to the landscape. Even though the transformation of the place from a still, secluded and enclosed settlement into one ready for opening itself to dynamic social, economic and spatial changes drives him away, when looking back at it from its edge he realises that even in its seemingly pristine, homogeneous form it was always “too precarious a place” (*H* 270). Having confined everything within its hermetic bounds, the place fostered an illusion of permanence and safety, thus managing to conceal how fragile and prone to disintegration such a socio-spatial system is when challenged by an intrusion that is impossible to deflect by conventional means. And so, rather than making sentimental farewells to the village, Walter turns his hopeful eye to what awaits him, once more metaphorically represented by the land. Although the land appears wild and unpredictable, he somehow subconsciously feels that setting out on a journey through it is the right thing to do:

If anything, the views ahead, beyond our bounds, are more rewarding to the eye. They are more savage, certainly. And more formless and more void. The hedges there have not been cut and trimmed for many years, if ever. They spread across the lane with their great arms as if to send all travellers back, or at best to make their passage forward troublesome. [...] The lane is telling me I should not fear the futures that it holds. (*H* 272–273)

Paradoxically to some extent, the previously unwelcome changeability and heterogeneity fill him with unwonted vigour and mettle “to take this first step out of bounds” (*H* 273) of both the landscape of the irreversible past, but perhaps also of his small-mindedness and complacency.

Mapping and being mapped

The unique achievement of *Harvest* within the body of Crace’s work with regard to literary cartography rests in its theme of map-making, which makes it a kind of meta-mapping narrative that not only maps the real-and-imagined places and their perception, but also enriches this by elaborating on the process of creating an actual map of these territories. The chief role in this regard is assigned to Mr Earle who is hired by Master Kent to map out the village, but his position is tricky from the very beginning: as soon as he embarks on his work – pacing the area, measuring and taking notes – he is being “mapped” by the mistrustful villagers. They watch every step of this unusual and odd-looking disabled gentleman

with his elegant clothes, polite manners, kindness, helpfulness and sociability, as they suspect that what “Mr Quill” is doing will bring them much more harm than good. As a result, the more affability and courage he shows, the more the villagers convince themselves that these are just the cunning ruses of a dangerous person who deserves nothing but hatred, which is further fuelled by the fact that Earle’s principled behaviour highlights their own moral failures. Mr Earle thus plays an ambiguous role within the novel’s plot: he is a likeable character who shows respect and sympathy to the local people, yet the “Domesday” outcome of his activity seals their fate as it is going to serve as the groundwork for Edmund Jordan’s sheep-farming plans.

When Walter, who is not able to take part in the harvesting because of his burnt arm, is asked by Master Kent to assist Mr Earle he is excited by the prospect of having the chance to witness the familiar landscape being charted. As Earle is drawing the preliminary sketches and mixing the appropriate shades of colour, Walter is eager to see how the map is going to “make the story of [their] farm-scape – and our sheepscape – easy to decipher” (*H* 129). While the professional Earle is working on his task, Walter abandons all reserve and tells this stranger the whole story of his life in the village and his engagement and disengagement with its landscape. Absorbed in his own misfortune, the aroused narrator approaches the early draft of the map with misguided and impossible to meet expectations of verisimilitude and narrativeness, which is why his first impressions are ambivalent, viewing the draft as both “odd and beautiful”:

There is no lettering as yet. Just shapes and lines and colouring. I recognise their intrigue and their sorcery. I’ve seen equally compound patterns, no less ineffable than these, when I’ve peeled back bark on dying trees, or torn away the papering on birches. [...] I’ve found these ordinary abstracts in the least expected place hereabouts: I have only to lift a stone, or turn some fallen timber in the wood, or reverse a leaf. [...] But none of these compare for patterned vividness with Mr Quill’s designs. His endeavours are tidier and more wildly colourful [...] than anything that nature can provide. They’re rewarding in themselves. (*H* 133)

Unable to distinguish between the imaginative realism of a landscape painting and the scientific abstraction of a map, Walter foolishly assesses the draft according to how it corresponds with the physical, social and even emotional reality of the settlement. He is fascinated by seeing the shape of the village from a bird’s eye view, which reminds him of “a profile of a brawny-headed man” (*H* 135). But examining the map carefully and looking for where the actual places are graphically represented is rather unsettling for him as he misses many small points of orientation – a solitary tree, a pebblestone gap between fields, a lane of thorns, a short slope – which he considers inherent in and defining of the landscape as he is used to experiencing it. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that beautiful though it looks, it is not “as honest as [Earle] hopes. He’s coloured and he’s flattened us. [...] The land is effortless: a lie. He hasn’t captured time: how long a walk might take; [...] how long the seasons or the nights must last” (*H* 136).

Walter's misapprehension of the map reflects his inability to cut himself loose emotionally from the landscape into which he has projected many personal and intimate meanings so as to make it a coping device to alleviate his feelings of anxiety and frustration⁶.

It is only with Earle's help that the chart starts to make sense to him and he can match its geometrical patterns with their real-life referents. Yet the map still disquiets him, as if its detached matter-of-factness and present-time motionlessness tried to keep from him the naked truth of what is to happen with the village, and himself, in years to come. His anxious mind finds little solace in the conceptual landscape as he feels "[t]here's something in these shapes and lines, in these casual, undirected blues and greens, that, for all their liveliness, seems desolate" (*H* 137), obsessively focusing on what cannot be charted. And so before he leaves the village for good, he decides to burn all the charts, together with the corpse of their maker, as a symbolic gesture of breaking free from the place and all its connotations. At the same time, he keeps one unused vellum for himself, believing it to be "an unmarked sheet" which "could be anywhere" (*H* 271), just like his future and the place where he will eventually settle down. However, the vellum will probably remain blank as, given the narrator's unstable and unprepossessing personality and his difficulties in assuming an emotionally unbiased point of view, it is unlikely that the mental mapping of landscapes he is to encounter will ever transform into a cartographic chart.

Conclusion

Harvest portrays how a strictly homogeneous place gets heterogenised by exterior socio-economic forces so powerful that they overwhelm the place's capacity to fend them off. In Westphal's terms, the village at the beginning of the story is in a state of equilibrium which, in its orderliness and regular, unvarying cyclical-ity, is deprived of history and as such is equivalent to a nonstory. Dynamic and turbulent capitalist forces undermine this state by breaking down the customary timelines and causalities, which throws the system into a disorderly nonequilibrium whose entropy starts to generate energies that allow it to evolve into a new stage, thus possessing the potential for a complex story. The novel shows how the seemingly stable and permanent uninterrupted lines that delineate the existence and functioning of a homogeneous system are in fact fragile and vulnerable to collapsing into disparate points of instability which make it ultimately isotropic. This is true all the more so if the system is deliberately closed off and obstinately insists on its principles and values being the only correct and permissible ones. From their self-absorbed, worm's-eye view the villagers are unable to perceive any larger historical context for their settlement and thus to distinguish between a cause and an effect. Therefore, they mistake a side effect – the arrival of refugees from another village – for a real threat and instead of using the incomers' knowledge and experience to their advantage, they assault and humiliate them.

As a result, the convoluted story triggered by this intrusion soon gets out of their control and is anything but advantageous for them.

Within a few days, the village changes into an in-between, transitory place, no longer secluded land under crops, but not a sheep farming homestead either, with its former values and hierarchies violated and distorted, but with new ones yet not fully established. The rigid and inadaptably villagers, however, find themselves at a loss in such a situation and are not able to grasp the place's subversive potential and look for a way in which they could fit themselves into the newly evolving establishment. They thus lose a chance to affect its final form and are left with no other option than to flee their homes. Though a perceptive observer with a developed sense of space and, moreover, a liminal, in-between character himself, Walter also fails to recognise and take advantage of the transforming landscape's productive potential. The main reason in his case, however, is that his perception of space is always filtered through strong emotionality and therefore is rarely rational or pragmatic, which is exactly what successful appropriation of an in-between place requires above all. Instead, he projects onto it his own feelings and sentiments, mostly negative and weak ones, such as frustration, cowardice, self-pity, envy, hypocrisy and rage, which is why the places he occupies become for him the embodiment of, or at best coping devices for, his troubles and fears rather than means of revising and reasserting his identity. Even when left alone in the deserted village, he cannot bear the pressure of the emotionally soaked landscape and escapes it through voluntary intoxication at first using alcohol and then hallucinogenic fungi.

Ironically, the character who is most at ease with the place and its properties is the townsman Philip Earle. As a man of strong personality and moral credit, he manages to remain amiable and open-minded despite his physical defect, which is also reflected in his spatial perceptiveness. Though a cartographer, the landscape does not represent for him a mere object of mathematical recording but a source of unceasing wonder and enjoyment which he, within given limits, tries to project into the vivid precision of his charts. He is attentive to the changing socio-spatial patterns of the village and, therefore, the only one to potentially understand their impending consequences for its identity. However, as a double-outsider, rejected and scorned by both the villagers and Edmund Jordan, his chances of asserting himself and thus possibly saving at least a bit of the place's "in-betweenness" are too restricted and his futile effort costs him his life. Like most of Crace's works, *Harvest* presents these transitional transformations through the interconnectedness of the characters and the landscape they inhabit. However, the fact that it deals not only with the subjective, experiential dimension of space but also with its analytically objective representation in the form of map making, makes the novel an ingenious example of literary cartography, a narrative that explores the characters' experience of place and their feelings of displacement from a familiar environment, as well as the variable relationship between the lived spatial referent and its abstract cartographic representation.

Notes

- ¹ These awards include the Whitbread Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Award, the International Dublin Literary Award, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize.
- ² This term was first used by Adam Begley in his 2002 article "A pilgrim in Craceland".
- ³ *Harvest* is by no means Crace's only novel that invites geocritical reading and analysis. Various forms of interconnectedness between a fictional landscape/cityscape and its narration (and narrator) can also be found, for instance, in *Continent*, *The Gift of Stones*, *Signals of Distress*, *Arcadia*, and *The Pesthouse*. For an in-depth geocritical analysis of the first and the latter see my articles The imaginary landscapes of Jim Crace's *Continent* and The landscape of trauma, pain and hope in Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse*.
- ⁴ For a detailed outline of the defining principles of geopoetics see Kenneth White's "Element of geopoetics".
- ⁵ In references henceforward abbreviated as *H*.
- ⁶ Walter's mind, however, is never so distorted so as to project into the landscape purely imagined, dreamy or supernatural elements, and as such he does not stop being a relatively credible narrator. In her article "Mystery and Misunderstanding: The Ambiguity of Images, Ideas and Intimations in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*", Kamila Vránková presents the opposite case in the character of Lockwood and demonstrates how his misinterpretations of and imaginative projections into the environment make the novel's landscapes impressive, yet also anticipate his inadequacies as a narrator (65–68).

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PETR CHALUPSKÝ is Associate Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Charles University, where he teaches courses in English Literature, Literary Studies and Literary Theory. His research and publication activities focus on contemporary British fiction. He is the author of the monographs *The Postmodern City of Dreadful Night: The Image of the City in the Works of Martin Amis and Ian McEwan* (2009) and *A Horror and a Beauty: The World of Peter Ackroyd's London Novels* (2016).

Address: Doc. PhDr. Petr Chalupský, Ph.D., Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Charles University, Magdalény Rettigové 4, 116 39, Praha 1, Czech Republic. [petr.chalupsky@pedf.cuni.cz]