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Patrick M. Bray, *The Novel Map: Space and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2013. xiv + 271 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8101-2866-8.

Review by Jonathan Strauss, Miami University.

Patrick Bray offers a genealogy of how five crucial--indeed monumental--French novelists negotiated the tensions between life and writing to organize their experiences into a "self." In so doing, he has introduced a seductive new expression into the lexicon of literary criticism--the "novel map" is part of that small club of striking formulations, such as "digital humanities," that promise to resolve important problems even before you know what they mean. Bray defines the term as "any device in a narrative text that simulates a holistic image of the self occupying multiple times and multiple spaces. The novel map inscribes the writing subject in the spaces of the text, placing the subject simultaneously in the fictional world of the narrative, in the material world of the reader as a graphic representation on a page, and in the real-world places, such as Paris, referred to in the map-novel. For the geographer and historian of cartography Christian Jacob, all maps present the contradiction of materiality and representation" (p. 13).

These novel maps articulate the relation between two incompatible forms of experience, whose nature varies over the course of the book. Treated in the introduction as a "contradiction of materiality and representation," that relation will become in the reading of Stendhal "the reduction of the self to language" (p. 22). In the analysis of Zola, it is the conflict between the visual and the textual. Put in the broadest terms, the novel map represents the tension between the textual and the non-textual and, more pointedly, the anxiety that this tension produces in a writer who decides, for one reason or another, to organize his or her experiences textually, in a more or less autobiographical form. This organization becomes the subjectivity of the writer, but it is a subjectivity structured around an insuperable conflict--insuperable because, on the one hand, the two terms are of irreconcilably different natures and, on the other, because a resolution in favor of one would entail the intolerable loss of the other. The author sacrifices the plenitude of lived experience, the visual world, and materiality if the textual self prevails, coherence and meaning if it yields.

In this way, Bray is taking up a problem--the negative relation between language and what it represents--that has been exhaustively studied by poets such as Stéphane Mallarmé, literary scholars such as Maurice Blanchot, philosophers such as G.W.F. Hegel, and psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan. And in writing about the complexities inherent in the circular project of representing the relation between representation and its other(s), Bray finds himself in the theoretical territory that was long a focus of deconstructive philosophers and critics.

Bray takes as his starting point actual maps, which are incorporated in one way or another into many of these works, describing them as "screens" that "conceal" other, more complex cartographic forms (p. 229). The concept of a map is, however, fluid and shifts over the course of the book. In the earlier

analyses, the actual maps that offer access to the novel maps are visual representations of space—plans of rooms, published road and topographical maps—but they yield in later chapters to more complex constructions. By the time Bray reaches his reading of Nerval, the actual map is a genealogical diagram, then, in Zola, becomes the archive of research materials the novelist created as he wrote, and in Proust the use of place names and descriptions.

Indeed, the expression novel map is so fluid that it functions more as an aspiration than a coherent concept. For instance, if it is, as Bray writes, a “holistic image of the self occupying multiple times and multiple spaces” (p. 13), it is hard to see what it adds to the concept of subjectivity besides the idea of “image.” But if it is an image, then it would seem to resolve the contradiction between textual and visual representation, which defines the novel map, in favor of the visual. Conversely, by using “maps” to refer both literally and metaphorically to visual representations—by understanding verbal descriptions to be maps that can then be opposed to text—Bray reduces the visual to the textual or proto-textual. In short, his use of the term “novel map” regularly contradicts its definition. This incoherence in the most crucial element in the book’s conceptual organization does not prevent the author from offering some very fine analyses of individual French novels, but it does undermine any overall argument or theoretical contribution.

As Bray demonstrates through readings of five chronologically ordered authors, each of whom is accorded two chapters and a brief introduction, different novelists negotiated the contradiction inherent in the novel map in different ways and to varying ends, thereby revealing the creative potential inherent in the original tension between text and non-text. In the first of these readings, Bray argues that for Stendhal “the cartographic inscription of the subject occurs through the reduction of the self to language, the transformation of the personal to the universal ... The only recourse is to textuality, the control of meaning through the play of signifiers” (p. 22). This frightening “reduction” is compensated, Bray argues, through “another model of cartography, what I call the novel map, ... which counters chronological time, layers Brulard’s [i.e., Stendhal’s] past and present, and embraces the ambiguity of the novel subject” (p. 22). In other words, to resolve the incompatibility between textual and non-textual experience and preserve the self from “reduction,” the novelist embraces the very complexity or “ambiguity” of the relation between those two experiences. He does this, Bray argues, by including visual diagrams and map-like descriptions into his autobiographical works, thereby acknowledging, accentuating, and organizing the incompatibility between the visual and textual registers.

In his chapters on Gérard de Nerval, Bray identifies an initial situation similar to Stendhal’s “reduction of the self to language.” With Nerval, “the narrator will, from now on, be written with and into the text, until he will eventually become indistinguishable from it” (p. 73). Bray argues that unlike Stendhal, Nerval embraced the possibilities and lability of that rhetorically complex textual self but that the result is “a labyrinthine world in which the subject can no longer distinguish inside from outside, past from present, self from other” (p. 99). The madness for which Nerval became famous and which led him to take his own (material) life, seems, for Bray, to have been the price for his embracing a purely textual self. This is a seductive argument, which would seem to indicate some of the dangers of self-textualization or what one might call extreme autobiography, but it reduces the complexity of Nerval’s relations to writing and his own madness, both of which he analyzed at length. Nerval may have been lost in the worlds of his own invention, as he argued in various places, but he was also painfully aware of the difference between self and other, inside and outside. Someone capable of describing himself as “abandonné jusque-là au cercle monotone de mes sensations ou de mes souffrances morales,” as he does in the final pages of *Aurélia*, may feel incapable of reaching the external world, but he manifests an awareness that it exists and is different from him.

This subjective occupation of the contradictions of representation, this lucid self-awareness by a writer whose self is falling apart, this combination of extreme verbal reach and identity collapse all contribute to Nerval’s unique place in literature. But by overlooking that self-awareness, Bray levels the

complexity of Nerval's vertiginous thinking and somewhat disappointingly repeats a critical move that has haunted and discredited Nerval since Jules Janin's 1841 obituary to his sanity. So, when Bray concludes his reading of "Sylvie" by observing that "the narrator is destined to wander the labyrinth of his own illusion" (p. 100), he is more or less repeating comments by Nerval himself (e.g., "j'ai frémé des vaines apparitions de mon sommeil ... [et] entouré de monstres contre lesquels je luttai obscurément, j'ai saisi le fil d'Ariane" from the preface to *Les Filles du feu* [1]). The difference is that for Nerval the discovery of this literary labyrinth was the starting point of subjective analysis, whereas for Bray it marks the ending point. This simplification also does a disservice to Bray's own reading of "Sylvie," which, in an original and intriguing move, shifts the narratorial authority from the author or his ostensible representative to Sylvie herself.

The sections on George Sand and Marcel Proust are the strongest of the book. In the first, Bray draws on feminist criticism and historical background to contextualize Sand's novels within a particular social moment that created very different conditions for female novelists compared to their male peers. The former, Bray shows, were presumed to be writing about themselves, as if they were incapable of objectivity. As a consequence, Bray argues, Sand chose to gain objectivity (and therefore legitimacy as a writer) by emphasizing the contradictory tension inherent in the novel map and by insisting on the incompatibility between life and text. At this point, Bray introduces something new into discussions about the tension between life and literature: while for most canonical writers that tension is a frightening impasse, for other, minority writers it can be used as an access to credibility and, therefore, social impact. I would have liked Bray to explore the ironies of that situation in some more depth (e.g., this suggests that the minority writer can only write by effacing the particularity of her minority status so that there is, in fact, no such thing as a minority writer). Still this is an exemplary reading.

Zola, according to Bray, resolved the conflict inherent in the novel map by dividing his self-representation between two different types of text, one the twenty interconnected novels of his *Rougon-Macquart* series, the other the vast archive of research materials—including diagrams, maps, physical descriptions—that he generated while writing those novels. "Reading Zola's extensive notes for the series ... alongside the novels themselves," Bray writes, "exposes the artificial separation between note and novel, real document and fictional construct, author and text" (p. 148). The claim that the research materials are as important to the reading of the text as the novels themselves is a daring one, but it is justified by Bray's overall approach to textuality, experience, and subjectivity. Still, the reference to "real documents"—like Bray's tendency to forget that maps are not just visual and material artifacts but also symbolic systems—is reflective of a leveling of terms in the Zola chapters that make them less conceptually convincing than the others. Still, these remain original and compelling analyses of Zola's novel series, and I believe that they will continue to interest readers and critics for many years.

In the readings of Proust's multi-volume novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the theoretically most developed and interpretively most insightful of the book's five sections, the tension between textual and non-textual selves is repositioned into the realm of the textual itself through the use of simulacra, proper nouns, and place names. Bray argues that proper nouns play a role in language similar to the specificity of geographical and topological locations. They are unique because they take on some of the spatial qualities that are normally associated with the material and visible. "Proper names," Bray writes, "have the power to capture an essence, and everything contingent with it, because of the illusion that they refer to only one object, as opposed to common words which designate interchangeable objects ... Places, likewise, are supposed to be unique and not interchangeable" (p. 198). Now, the uniqueness of places is a key point in the argument but, like several others, it does not receive the justification or theorization that it demands. One is left wondering if Bray has been spared trips to Starbucks, major airports, or other seemingly interchangeable passage points. Still, one can imagine explanations (perhaps from Kant's transcendental aesthetic), and Bray contends that this spatially textual self is organized around the symbolic laws associated with the father's name, as described by the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan, and this leads to some very fine readings of Proust. Bray

observes that the rhetorical structures involved in naming and the vertiginous use Proust makes of concatenated metaphors destabilize the spatial organization of Proust's language, making it fluid and, in that sense, temporal.

This temporal aspect of language—also visible in the progressive nature of narrative—allows Proust to create a textual practice in which space becomes process. The self that this practice produces thus reconciles the material and the textual by finding analogues for both within writing itself. And that self is endless because of the cyclic structure of Proust's novelistic autobiography, which describes the experiences by which the narrated self becomes the author capable of writing the novelistic autobiography.

This is, as I say, the strongest of the books' five sections, the most densely reasoned and the richest in insight. Its best moments derive from a close reading of Proust's text itself. Bray does draw on several theoretical writers, notably Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau, and Jacques Lacan, but these references tend to muddy the waters. In a puzzling move, for instance, Bray assimilates Lacan's concept of the symbolic with the visual in opposition to language and the textual. But Lacan himself treated the symbolic as a differential sign-system (such as language) and contrasted it to the positive and visual organization of the "imaginary" register. Bray does not explain why he would essentially use Lacan's term backwards. But, again, the book's strengths lie in its engagement with literary texts rather than its larger theoretical claims.

For its originality, insights, and nuanced readings of monumental texts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature, *The Novel Map* marks a valuable contribution to French studies and will certainly inform debates about these works for many years to come.

#### NOTE

[1] Gérard de Nerval, "A Alexandre Dumas" in *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, ed. Jean Guillaume et al. (Paris: Gallimard [Pléiade], 1993), p. 458.

Jonathan Strauss  
Miami University  
[strausja@miamioh.edu](mailto:strausja@miamioh.edu)

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