



UNDERSTANDING LITERARY NARRATIVE TEXTS THROUGH DIGITAL MAPPING

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Abstract

Cartography and Literature is not a novel theme to the connoisseurs of literature. Cartography helps the readers of literary texts to understand the geographical space by integrating visualization into fiction. It is a strengthening and a complementary relationship as they help in comprehending and analyzing their respective domains. Digital Mapping, an outcome of Digitalization, helps to map literary imaginative world to a digital atlas. It is a tool which enables to comprehend the mappability of narrative structures in literature texts. Digital Mapping tools help to analyze the literary texts with data like maps or figures, thereby providing a spatial form of the text. The aim of the paper is to understand and analyze how emerging digital cartographies have helped in comprehending and analyzing selected literary narratives (literary texts).

Key words: cartography and literature, digital mapping, digital cartographies

Digitalization and globalization has brought tremendous growth and advancement in pedagogy in the twenty first century. This has been enabled by the rapid development of software tools and devices which help in understanding narrative texts with the support of graphics, visual aids, 3D to 4DX technology. This is envisioned even in popular art and culture.

Cartography and Literature is not a novel theme to the connoisseurs of literature. The avid lovers of literature have witnessed how writers in their flights of fantasy create and re-create fictional worlds like a luring Utopia or a wonderland for the dreamy-eyed Alice. Cartography helps the readers of literary texts to understand the geographical space by integrating visualization into fiction. It is a strengthening and a complementary relationship as they help in comprehending and analyzing their respective domains. Digital Mapping, an outcome of Digitalization, helps to map literary imaginative world to a digital atlas. It is a tool which enables to comprehend the

mappability of narrative structures in literary texts. Digital Mapping tools help to analyze the literary texts with data like maps or figures, thereby providing a spatial form of the text.

The aim of the paper is to understand and analyze how emerging digital cartographies have helped in comprehending and analyzing selected literary narratives (literary texts). Digital Mapping answers the pre-dominant questions as to whether literature is unmappable and how one could map the space in a novel.

If we trace the origin of the classics in literature, we find that even the classics were grounded on historical and geographical facts. Cartographers depended on travelogues and historical evidences to re-create maps and locations especially during the absence of geographical facts. This shows how literature and cartography share a unique relationship, where they depended on each other. Digitalization helped in formulating maps with the help of technological tools and devices. This opened new avenues in the field of humanities, thereby creating the emergence of digital humanities.

Researchers have helped in understanding literature through Graphical Information Systems (GIS) and with the help of specialized tools, thereby formulating the method of 'Digital Mapping'.

Though literary atlas began in the early nineteenth century, literary cartography started much later. Anne Katherine Reuschel and Hurni in their blog 'Mapping Literature' mentions about the two methodological approaches to literary mapping which

“depict individual texts in order to get a deeper analytical insight into the spatial structure of the story” or “they may focus on a group of features to draw out the literary geographies of an author, genre, motif or epoch” (293)

Maps were most often cartographic readings which helped in understanding the broader patterns of the text. Marko Juvans rightly called it 'meta-maps' which required a careful analysis of the geographical data on the works in which they were based.(89-90)

Prof. Sally Bushell in her research blog Literary Mapping in the Digital Space talks about how she started working on five different spatio-temporal forms in literature as seen in Russian theorist Mikhael Bakhtin's account of the chronotype as the central element in the literary genre.

The five different types of texts are:

- ❖ Texts that correspond to a real place in the world as London in *Oliver Twist*
- ❖ Texts that integrate real and imaginary place as in Hardy's Wessex
- ❖ Texts that have no direct point of reference in reality, but creates a fictional alternate universe (*Middle Earth; Gormenghast; Earthsea*)
- ❖ Bridged texts that start in a real place but move into the imaginary as in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights Trilogy*

- ❖ Texts that say about places that once existed, but no longer do so, as the Marshal Sea in *Little Dorrit*

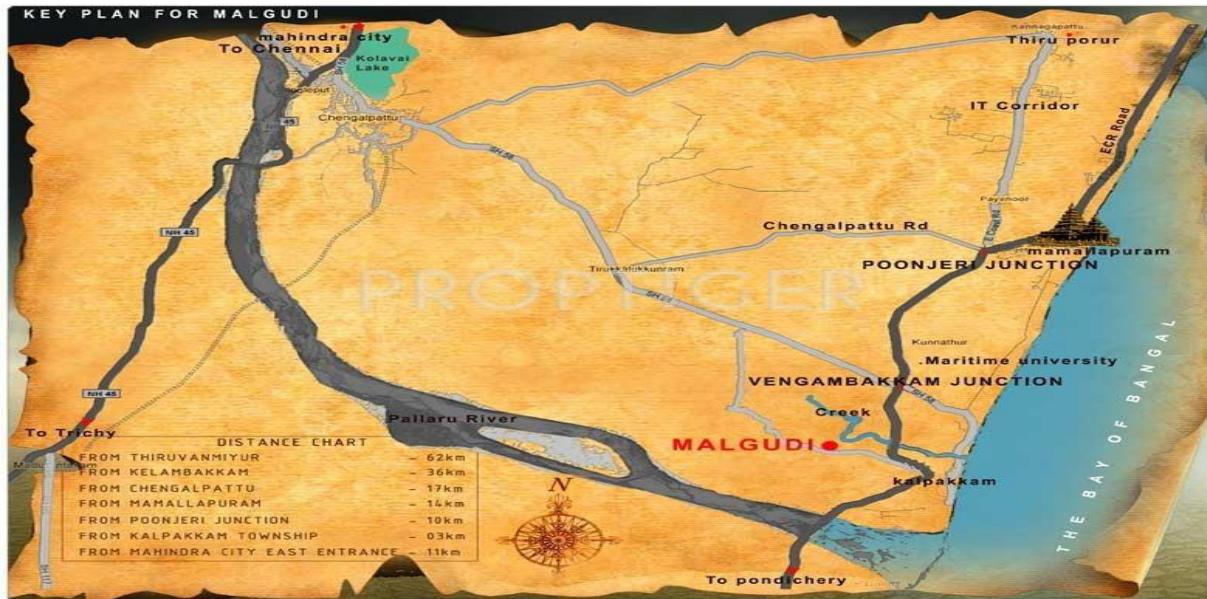
Recent studies in literature and cartography involved a new study on spatial humanities, where the texts were mapped and associated with hermeneutics, as it was more related to human experiences. GIS helps in identifying the exact location of the place in maps as it enables the readers to understand the topography, the climate and the location of a particular place and the historical time frame in which an author wrote a particular novel or a narrative. Geo-space on the other hand, enabled digital mapping to define quantifiable places with the help of technology.

Sally Bushell however, identifies the 'slipperiness' of GIS enabled maps as they use lines, polygons and other geometrical figures to represent the 'geospace'. The GIS enabled maps which are mostly akin to Euclidean geometry, loosens the link of the textual locations thereby disrupting the ontology of the text.

Digitalization helps to capture the diversity of the literary texts by giving a graphical dimension to the locale and settings as seen in the text. Graphics and sound effects helped in providing realism to the narratives. Studies in spatial humanities and digital mapping focus mostly on the 'spatialization' of the text through digital imagination. Maps are studied with the help of technology and are re-constructed to create geo-spatial technologies thereby enabling the textual data to merge with the topography of space.

Researchers have proved how latest trends in technology have helped in the cognitive mapping of literary texts through mind mapping and how this enables the readers to get a clear idea of the subtle and underlying aspects of a literary text. Narratological cartographers who have been working in narratives analyze how the spatial form of the text, the characters and the themes can be understood through a mind mapping of the literary text. Thereby, cartography enabled with digital technologies has helped readers to create imaginary spaces and to analyze real and fictional settings in literature.

RK Narayan through his novels introduced a fictional South Indian village called Malgudi. The writer succeeded in creating an imaginary perception of space in the minds of his readers. Though the author does not provide a map of Malgudi, the graphic and picturesque narratives evoked mental imagination in the readers. Even after many years, with the help of digital mapping cartographers succeeded in creating the map of the nostalgic village of Malgudi. They proved how the author's spatial experiences could be meaningfully defined and qualified through quantitative data.



The map shows the cartographic representation of Malgudi. The graphic representation of the fictitious Indian village gives an idea about the places, the maritime records and the nearest port locations of Malgudi. This helps to capture the diversity of the textual narrative and enhances the reader's visual imagination.

Maps also help to understand the scientific, religious, colonial and military contexts in which the narratives were written.

Ander Engberg in his book *Literature and Cartography: Theories, Histories, Genres* states how literature and cartography often challenge and interfere with each other. He explains the harmonious relationship between the text and the map by stating:

“When Laurence Sterne, for example, in his famous novel ‘The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman’ has his protagonist draw a map of the digressive course of the plot in the first four volumes, his cartographic satire puts on display the incongruity between the singularity of an unforeseeable narrative’s chaotic movements and the abstract, static order of conventional cartography. And this incongruity raises a number of questions. For what makes Sterne’s plot map a map? The authority of the signature? The fact that the narrator insists that it is a map? And what do the axis indicate? Geographical or emotional movements or both? How does the plot of the novel deviate from its cartographic representation? Or is it simply impossible to visualize plot meaningfully in two dimensions as Sterne’s satire seems to suggest? A hundred years later, Robert Louis Stevenson famously developed the narrative of *Treasure Island* from a map, but Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* claimed that the home of Queequeg, the imaginary island of Rokovoko, was not in any map, because as he insisted, ‘true places never are’ ”.

Digital Mapping helps not only in understanding the geographical locations of a narrative, but is also well- equipped with tools which can generate charts, maps, images , videos which help in understanding and analyzing the complex narrative techniques as seen in a literary text.

William Fenton in his article *5 Digital Mapping Projects that Visualize Literature* discusses some of the new cartographic techniques which assist in Digital Mapping and thereby helps in understanding narrative texts.

- ❖ **Visual Eyes-** is a web based platform evolved by the University of Virginia to formulate data, maps, charts, images and videos using historical visualizations.
- ❖ **Mapping Texts-**is a tool developed by the Stanford University and the University of North Texas, where language patterns can be mapped to view timeframes, locations and entities.



TIME IN SPACE
Representing Time in Maps

A Conference at the David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford University

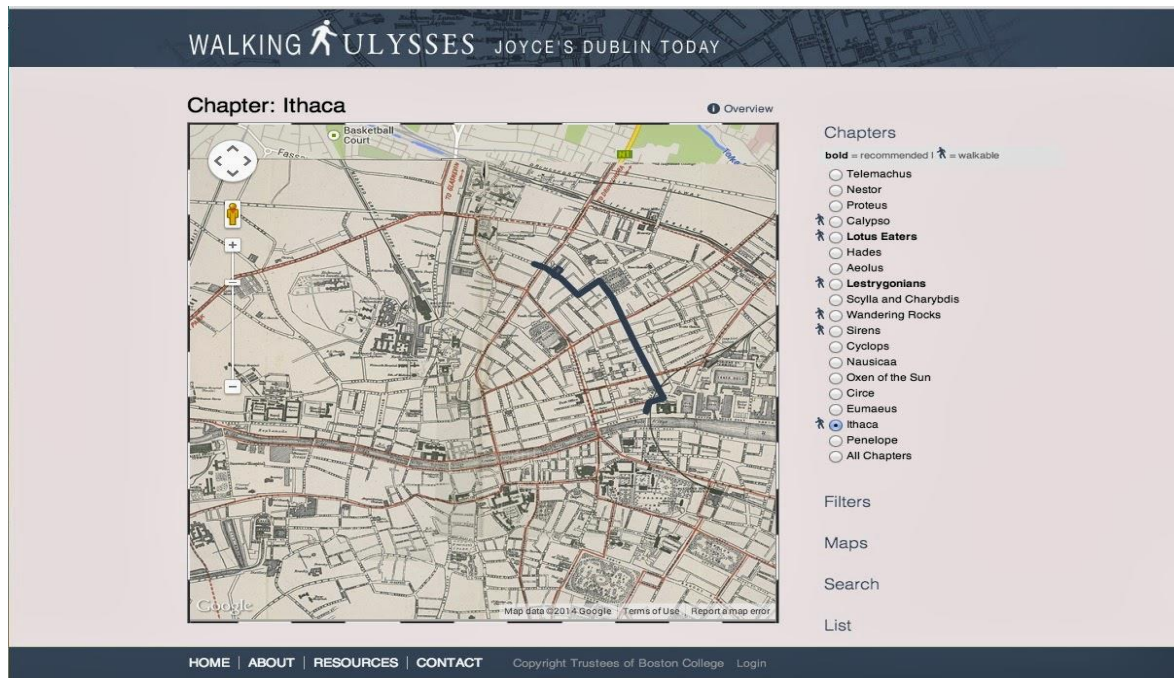
Friday, November 10, 1:15-4:30: Free and open to the public
Saturday, November 11: By invitation only

More information at: <http://shc.stanford.edu/events/maps>

STANFORD HUMANITIES CENTER

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- ❖ **Walking Ulysses-** is a project developed by Boston College to understand and analyze the puzzles and complex situations in James Joyce's abstruse novel *Ulysses*. It re-creates the images visited by the protagonist Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom.



To understand the impact of Digital Mapping on understanding and analyzing literature, the paper further focuses on two classic novels in English literature namely RK Narayan's *Malgudi Days* and RL Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. However the paper does not strive to analyze the plot and the structural aspects of the novel. The study is focused only on understanding the significance of maps and how digital mapping helps to understand and appreciate the novels. Though both the novels were written decades before the advancement of digitalization and technology; the digitalized cartographic versions which later got associated with the texts suggest how it helped in understanding and analyzing the diversity of these narratives.

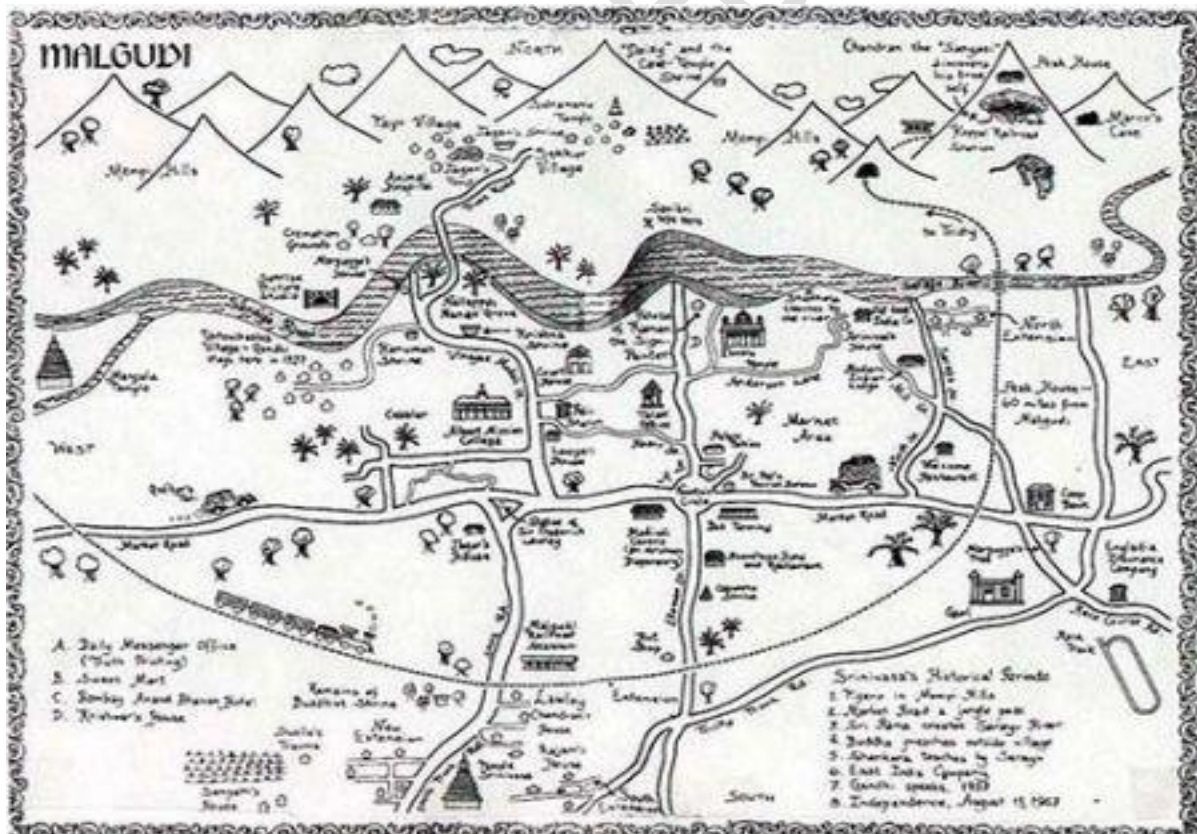
R.K Narayan in his novels created the fictional town of Malgudi which was set in the pre-independent India. His novels mostly reflect the early life and experiences of the author himself. Narayan's fictitious town 'Malgudi' can be compared to the boarder countries of Sir Walter Scott, the Lake District of William Wordsworth, the Wessex of Thomas Hardy and the five towns of Arnold Bennet. The readers walk, laugh, feel, sympathize and empathize with the characters of RK Narayan. The major landmarks of Malgudi include the Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, The Bombay Anand Bhawan, Kabir Street, Lawley Extension, the regal hair cutting salon, the Sarayu river, Mempi hills, Nallapa's groves and so on. As the readers glimpse through Malgudi Days and the other novels of Narayan, one finds that the author gives a graphical picture of the village and its various landmarks.

Narayan himself stated that the town of Malgudi was an imaginary landscape, which was not a real place, but a village where one could find an interesting array of characters throbbing with life

and enthusiasm. RK Narayan at an American Cultural Award function in Delhi reminisces his early impressions on Malgudi thus:

“I didn’t consider too long when I invented this little town. It had just occurred to me. I wanted to be able to put in whatever I liked, and wherever I liked- a little street or school, or a temple or a bungalow or even a slum, a railway line, at any spot, a minor depot in a little world. I began to like my role and I began to be fascinated by its possibilities...its river, its market place and the far off mountain roads and forests acquired a concrete quality, and have imprisoned one within their boundaries, with the result that I am unable to escape from Malgudi, even if I wished to...”(106)

Researchers later succeeded in designing a map of Malgudi and they digitally mapped the nostalgic places and landmarks as seen in Narayan’s novels. This helped the readers to appreciate and understand the novels and thereby adding much clarity to the author’s perspective of Malgudi. M.K Naik in his book *The Iconic Vision* provided a map of Malgudi which supplemented the readers with a cartographic impression of the imaginary world, which had an interesting array of characters and a motley set of crowd as in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha or Hardy’s Wessex. Malgudi thereby became a microcosm of real India; which made it hard for the readers to believe that it was only a figment of the writer’s imagination.

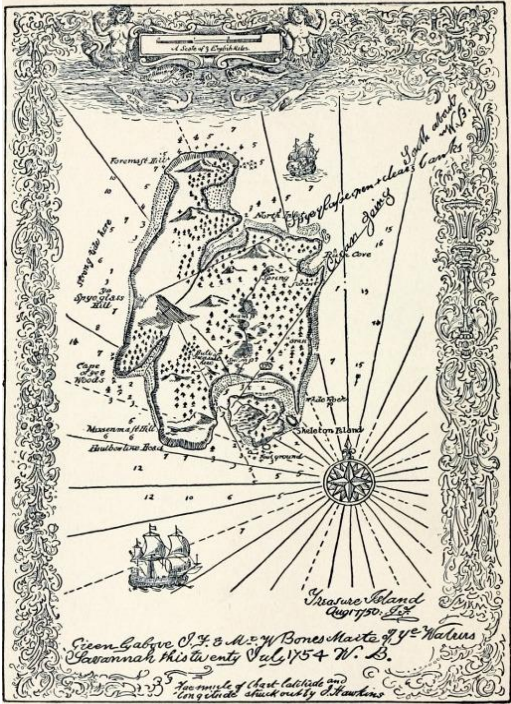


The map is a fine example to show how cartographers have digitally mapped the village of Malgudi. The details were based on the geographical settings provided by the author himself.

R.L. Stevenson's epoch making novel *Treasure Island* is a fine example to indicate how maps and cartographic skills help in understanding and appreciating narrative texts. Though the maps of Malgudi were mostly maps imagined and re-created by cartographers using digital technology; Stevenson's *Treasure Island* was a piece of fiction which originated from a map. The inspiration for *Treasure Island* originated from a map which Stevenson's step-son Lloyd Osborne drew during his stay in a Scottish highland cottage.

Frank James in his article *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Missing Map of the Treasure Island* states how Osborne recalled the origin of the map.

“...busy with a box of paints, I happened to be tinting a map of an island and I had drawn. Stevenson came in as I was finishing it, and with his affectionate interest in everything I was doing, leaned over my shoulder, and was soon elaborating on the map and naming it. I shall never forget the thrill of the Skeleton Island, Spyglass hill, nor the heart –stirring climax of the three red crosses! And the greater climax still when he wrote down the words ‘Treasure Island’ at the top right- hand corner! And he seemed to know so much about it too- the pirates, the buried treasure, the man who had been marooned on the island... ‘Oh, for a story about it’, I exclaimed, in a heaven of enchantment”



The map on the right side suggests a rough sketch of the Treasure Island and the one on the left side was the map which Stevenson himself provided to the publishers while publishing the novel. The map was later retrieved from the Kellschaft Studio. Though the original version of the map

went missing; the subsequent versions of the novel were published with a re-created version of the map.

Lloyd states how he had to re-create and re-work on the compass and redo all the geometrical designs to create a version of the map of Treasure Island.

“I sent in my manuscript, and the map along with it, to Messrs Cassell. The proofs came, they were corrected, but I heard nothing of the map. I wrote and asked; and was told that it never had been received, and sat aghast. It is one thing to draw a map at random, set a scale in one corner of it at a venture, and write up a story and write up to the measurements. It is quite another to have to examine a whole book, make an inventory of all the allusions contained in it, and with a pair of compass painfully design a map to suit the data. I did it; and the map was drawn again in my father’s office with embellishments of blowing whales and sailing ships, and my father himself brought into service a knack he had of various writing, and elaborately FORGED the signature of Captain Flint, and the sailing directions of Billy Bones. But somehow it was never Treasure Island to me”.

R.L Stevenson himself was never much impressed with his own re-created map of the Treasure Island. If we take the case of *Malgudi Days* and *Treasure Island*, we find that both these novels can be understood and appreciated to a greater extent with the help of maps.

Treasure Island till date remains as one of the most popular works of fiction. Google Trek, a software tool enabled by Google Maps formulated a digital version of the novel which was designed to enhance learner’s comprehension and skills while analyzing the novel.

If we are to study the importance of cartography and how digital mapping has helped in analyzing narrative texts; we understand that certain narrative texts especially travelogues and novels which followed a chronological sequence in timeline were better understood with the help of maps. Digitalization has been instrumental in introducing new software tools and devices which enabled in understanding and appreciating literary texts. Digitalization thereby helped in bringing life to the characters (through animations and so in) and maps to a great extent helped understand the complex narrative patterns in literary texts.

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