

CITY / NON-CITY: A PREFACE

Acroyd's London, Dreiser's Chicago, Dos Passos's New York, Joyce's Dublin, Pynchon's Los Angeles, T. S. Eliot's Unreal City... This random list provides merely a handful of examples that come to the reader's mind when we think of the city as a setting for action or as a space for the peregrinations of a sensitive mind, and of how this setting is represented in works of literature in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, it suggests a division of the literary-urban space into two basic categories – i.e., the historical/actual and the imaginary/symbolic.

This contrast between these two kinds of cities can be taken together with the strategies of representation. On the one hand there is objectivity, based on the acute-and-synthesizing observations of the omniscient narrator(s), which turns into a careful description. On the other pole of the spectrum is situated a radical subjectivity manifesting itself in interior monologue and similar Modernist techniques that demonstrate the workings of individual consciousness. The extension of the latter is the postmodern approach, in which the presented world is generated by the human mind or created *by* language itself (a “virus from outer space”, to use William S. Burroughs' metaphor), rather than reflected *in* the former or reproduced through the latter. Such juxtapositions may be produced *ad infinitum*: the realistic versus the fantastic, the historical versus the imaginary, the material versus the impressionistic, showing versus telling. Still, it is quite possible to challenge such easy-way-out options and look at the urban space as a hybrid, realistic-cum-fantastic organism with potential / in the process of a permanent metamorphosis: from the perfectly designed labyrinth (albeit possibly without a center) to amorphism and chaos embodied in its “nature”, from a historical city to metaphor, from an urban scene as a disciplined totality to fragmentariness and incompleteness of individual perceptions. This is the case since, as Robert E. Park says:

[T]he city and the urban environment represent [humanity's] most consistent and, on the whole, [its] most successful attempt to remake the world [it] lives in more after [its] heart's desire. But if the city is the world which [humans] created, it is the world in which [they are] henceforth condemned to live.

Thus the city as a natural environment for humans has its inhabitants, characters who merge with the urban landscape following their vital pursuits and their desires for

social recognition and success whose trappings may be – roughly speaking – affluence, fame, and sex; or, as it happens, trying to satisfy some morbid pleasures – committing crimes or demonstrating other kinds of anti-social behavior. This may be regarded as a constant in the history of the city in literature – as Kevin R. McNamara observes, there are “social, economic, and cultural continuities between ancient, early modern, and contemporary cities.”

And, perhaps it is the reason why the city is a topos which has been present in literature ever since. In fact, it is as old a literary motif as literature itself. Think of *Gilgamesh* where “the wall of Uruk-Heaven” was built, Homer’s *Iliad* and the siege of Troy, Virgil’s establishing of Rome in the *Aeneid*, and also, to focus on the epics of later cultural periods, of Heorot in *Beowulf*, of Heaven in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the latter quite rightly classified by Patrick Parrinder as a “work of absolute realism”, in which the Mediterranean Sea from the *Odyssey* undergoes a city-change to become the modern Dublin. What all these narratives have in common is that they establish a *polis*, whereas outside the non-human, hybrid – i.e., deformed and corrupt – monsters live: the “fatherless creatures”, the Cyclops, Lucifer, the Sirens.

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The six articles in this special issue of “Crossroads” are on works published in the late 20th / early 21st centuries. To give justice to fluidity of the contemporary literary phenomena, the articles are arranged alphabetically - in the order dictated by the names of the authors. The issue opens with a “negotiated reading” of Mark Mason’s *Walk the Lines. The London Underground, Overground*, in which Dorota Guzowska focuses on London as a human zoo, and draws parallels between this metaphor and ethnic exhibitions popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Julia Kula follows with a discussion on postmodern New York in Paul Auster’s *Ghosts* to demonstrate how the dominating chronotope affects the investigation, which results in a typically postmodern anti-detective novel. Magdalena Łapińska explores emotional geographies of Zelda Lockhart’s duology (*Fifth Born* and *Fifth Born II: The Hundredth Turtle*) set in New York, St. Louis and rural Mississippi, and explores a variety of expressions of (mostly) sexual violence within a black community. The theme of crime is overtly discussed in the article on Jack Womack’s *Random Acts of Senseless Violence*. Drawing on the ecological school of criminology, Klara Mednis demonstrates a strict connection that exists between social disorganization and the high risk of brutal crime in the novel. Jan Moryń employs Derrida’s concept of hauntology for the purpose of reading the gap that exists between life in the present moment and dreams of the bright future in William Gibson’s “The Gernsback Continuum,” a short story set in 1930s in the cities of the American Southwest. The last article in the issue is a reading of Lisa Jarrot’s poetic sequence entitled *Heliopolis*;

here the mythical Sun City becomes a scene of bizarre human actions performed by animals. Mark Tardi examines the ethical and social implications of the poet's vision, also demonstrating how her stylistic strategies challenge the concept of spatio-temporal boundaries.

The city gates are open. Welcome home.

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