

Mapping Autofiction: Young Female in the Post-Soviet Vilnius

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Abstract:

The paper presents a GIS data model and maps of a geographical space in the work of literature. In recent years, the interdisciplinary field of literary cartography, in which literature and the world it represents are explored by means of mapping literary texts, has experienced a powerful revival. Geographical and pseudo-geographical maps reveal the relation of fictional spaces to the material world and help to understand the crucial role of space in the construction of literary texts and, on the other hand, the key role of literature in the construction of space (Luchetta 2025). Maps help visualize the represented places of action or projected spaces of dreams and memories and provide readers/researchers with new geographical knowledge. Literary maps combine an objective real world with the subjective worldview of narrators and characters and function as meeting points for the experiences of writers and readers/researchers. The power of maps in drawing unique insights into literary space from spatial data has been widely discussed and proved (Moretti 1998, Frayn 2017, Bushell 2020, Hutcheon 2023). There were also successful attempts to create professional digital maps of literary works (Cooper and Gregory 2011, Piatti et al. 2011, Bushell et al. 2021). However, literary cartography's theory and methodology constantly develop and expand with the mappings of new literary texts. Based on our previous research (Beconytė et al., 2019), we offer a conceptual model of geographical data adapted for mapping a geographical continuum of a novel by the Lithuanian author (Kulvinskaitė 2019). This novel is unique in that it is one of the first books that reflect Vilnius of the 1990s (the years immediately after the restoration of Lithuania's independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union) from a female perspective. A teenage girl who later becomes a young woman from a non-privileged district grows up and learns about the world and herself through exploring the city. The places mentioned in the novel are not typically visited by tourists, do not appear on Vilnius postcards, nor are they represented in other works of literature. A number of the sites depicted have now vanished due to changes in Vilnius's urban space. Thus, the story and the map capture a specific space of the past and preserve it as a site of memory. According to the author, this was one of the novel's aims – to create a story of coming-of-age in relation to the urban space, which our maps make explicit.

We intended to systematically decipher this fictional space's geography and translate it into maps everyone could easily understand. Their data model represents as much geographical information as possible – not only the places of action but also places and territories that are only mentioned, observed, or remembered. Information has been collected from the novel and used to validate and improve the proposed model. We designed analytical and synthetic literary maps concerning real physical space. The presented model can be applied to mapping other works of fiction. The maps are not only documents of the vanishing memory of the post-Soviet past of the capital city of Lithuania but also examples of the application of cartographic techniques and symbols that can be used to map the spaces of other works of autofictional narration.

The maps allow exploring the captivating world of biographical fiction through the subjective view of a young girl in post-Soviet Vilnius – from her childhood to her PhD studies. They show the places of action, the routes connecting the events and the protagonist's experiences of the things that happen to her for the first time, the cumulative importance of places, relations with other people, and the fluctuating surface of emotions. They also possess historical significance. Therefore, we have arranged the maps to form a portrait of a girl observing and experiencing the spaces described in the book (Fig. 1).

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