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Peter D. Tame, *Isotopias: Places and Spaces in French War Fiction of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Bern, Peter Lang, 2015. xiv + 572 pp. Maps, figures, notes, glossary, bibliography, and index. ISBN 978-3-0343-0837-3.

Review by Margaret Attack, University of Leeds.

There are many ways of approaching spaces and places in literature. I was once fortunate enough to contribute in a small way to the wonderful *Dictionary of Imaginary Places*, edited by Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi.[1] *The Lord of the Rings* and the Narnia novels were the works I read, the brief being to treat these non-existent places of literary imagination as ones one might visit, and therefore equip the potential traveller with full information on their geography, history, customs as well as practical details such as their currency. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*[2] took a different tack, making tangible the foundational role of writing and the imaginary in the very existence of the city, and indeed the extensive libraries devoted to Paris or London attest to the structural role of text and image in the identity of the cities whose streets we walk. Peter Tame's study of the spaces and places of French war fiction embraces battlegrounds and rural landscapes, towns and villages, interiors and exteriors as well as cities; on its cover it has a most striking image of a Dutch war cemetery, combining both melancholy, heightened by the long shadows across the grass covered with the leaves of autumn, and resilience, as the multiple little stone crosses seem to stand very straight as they face the blazing yellow of the late afternoon sun. It is a strong illustration of the intrinsically cultural nature of space and its symbolic and affective power, echoed in his later discussion of Malraux's *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* and the evocative description of the two tall walnut trees creating a sculptural space between them: "cette statue indulgente que se sculptaient à elles-mêmes les forces de la terre, et que le soleil au ras des collines étendait sur l'angoisse des hommes jusqu'à l'horizon." [3]

Peter Tame is seeking to open literary topography as a new literary field of study (p. 2) and introduce a paradigm shift in critical work on war fiction (p. 11) with a new methodology elaborated in the intricate and detailed analysis of a very wide range of novels. The "spatial turn" in criticism dates from the 1970s, and Tame situates his approach in relation to Bakhtin, Foucault, structuralism and Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism, among others. The introduction is devoted to establishing the concepts, the terminology and the corpus. He defines isotopias as "fictional places and spaces that exist as parallels to those in reality" (p. 2), and although he later presents the relationship between art and reality as mutually influential, this study is primarily interested in the discrete imagined realities of fictional worlds. To this end he devises a new vocabulary; there are forty-five terms in the glossary of which just four (ecotopia, utopia, dystopia, heterotopia) are not neologisms, and it does not include zootopia which seems to refer to spaces

including or compared to wild animals, or cornutopia, the space of plenty found in the grocery in *Au Bon Beurre*. Each “-topia” represents a particular spatial reality or world, including individual characters who are also presented as spatial entities in the narrative with their own inner world or “psychotopia.” Compound isotopias, which will be very important in the critical readings, occur when spaces are inflected by two or more different colorations (a dream space can be also a death space and a war space: oneirotopia, thanatopia, aretopia). Intermedial isotopias draw on elements from different media (painting, film etc.), while intergeneric isotopias combine different genres. It is argued that the effect of compound isotopias is to distance the reader from the reality portrayed, placing it “at several removes from the reader” (p.60), to thicken the description and form a kind of screen that fulfils a dual purpose of protection and projection, without which, in the case of *Les Bienveillantes*, “the full horror of the genocidal war and the Holocaust would be virtually unbearable for the reader” (p. 269), which suggests that a concept of writing as unmarked and transparent underpins the elaboration of the isotopic. The final element of the critical apparatus is the notion of “isotopic mode.” Four are identified (Figure 5, p. 20): loss, possession, repossession and alienation (which includes displacement); each textual analysis charts their operation, and conclusions are drawn as to which isotopic mode dominates, both at the level of the individual novel and for each of the major groupings.

Tame is, then, asking the reader to engage with a most complex array of interlocking spatial categories, and the glossary is an important point of reference; it is not easy to remember all the precise meanings, in spite of the fact that the definitions are often helpfully appended to them. Questions about the delineation of these multiple categories are no doubt inevitable. If dispossession is a variant of the isotopic mode “loss,” it is not clear why repossession is not a variant of possession, rather than a separate mode in its own right. I wondered how a space could move from a thanatopia to an isotopia (p.150) if a thanatopia is a kind of isotopia? *Bistopia* is another case. Defined in the glossary as a grey, indeterminate zone, created, we learn, from the archaic adjective for grey ‘bis/bise’ (pronounced bi/bize), in the chapter on Modiano we discover the reason for the italicisation of *bis* in this neologism which is that it has another meaning, of repetition, created from the etymologically unrelated adverb *bis*. Furthermore, there seem to be layers of irreality within the notion of isotopia; for example, the Republican view of Spain in *L’Espoir* is described as “increasingly isotopic” (p. 164), as a utopian dream whose spaces are “isotopic in the fictitious *L’Espoir*” (p. 161) and as “components of an isotopic Spain that lived on in the memories of the veterans...for several decades” (p. 161). We are shifting here between history and literature, and different kinds of imaginary (isotopia as de facto imaginary place in fiction; a fictional place thematised as imaginary), but in a way that helpfully highlights the structural role of the subjective viewpoint to the conception of isotopias. While isotopia is defined in the glossary as “an imaginary place or space in fiction,” the introduction makes clear the importance of viewpoint to the identification of the dominant mode, as is underlined in the conclusion: “places and spaces in fiction are isotopic in the sense that they are products of the subjective imagination of novelists” (p. 518). Authors and the multiplicity of individual readers are key elements of the critical frame, in a way that is difficult to reconcile with the invocation of structuralism or even reader response theory, both of which tend to depersonalise and operate with broad conventional groupings or structures. If the author is dead for structuralist analysts, s/he certainly is not dead here. Biographically informed views and authorial intentions as expressed through the principal narrative voice are essential to these critical readings.

The large corpus of primary and secondary texts focuses on novels of soldiers and civilians. With the exception of Modiano and Littell, all the primary texts were written before 1970 and

they constitute in many ways a very canonical choice in relation to early studies of war and Occupation fiction. Several of the eighty-six secondary texts were written later, but most of these are only mentioned in passing, and some, such as Alexis Jenni's *L'Art de la guerre* and Laurent Binet's *HHhH*, do not appear in the index at all. It is also a strikingly male corpus, with Irène Némirovsky the only woman in the twenty-five primary texts, and of the five women figuring in the secondary texts, only Duras receives as much as a paragraph. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the vocabulary of "man" and "mankind" dominates in the more metaphysical discussions, since *l'homme* and *les hommes* are indeed at the centre of the preoccupations of the predominantly male central characters, though the careful attention to "he or she" when referring to actual readers does jar somewhat with the at best quaint use of "authoress" for Némirovsky. One wonders why fiction of and about the Algerian war is not mentioned, since it seems to meet these parameters of French war fiction, particularly given the attention to the colonisation of Morocco in Brasillach's *La Conquérante* of 1943. Neither women's writing nor detective fiction is included, nor the studies that have demonstrated the importance of these fields as postwar vectors.^[4] On the whole it is the plot that determines in which of the five sections a novel appears, irrespective of when it was written and published. Brasillach's *Les Captifs* is set in the 1930s and thus discussed as an interwar novel. Only *La Conquérante*, set before the first world war, and *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* are analysed in relation to their moment of composition and publication.

Part one, "The Great War" discusses *Les Croix de Bois* (Roland Dorgelès, 1919), *Le Diable au corps* (Raymond Radiguet 1923), *Roux le bandit* (André Chamson 1925), and two of Jules Romains's "roman-cycle" *Les Hommes de bonne volonté*, *Prélude à Verdun* (1937) and *Verdun* (1938). All are postwar novels, and *Prélude à Verdun* is one of the major works of the late 1930s that, along with Martin du Gard's *L'Été 14* and Giraudoux's *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, addressed the outbreak of World War I at a time of increasing anxiety about the imminence of another war. *Les Croix de Bois* is presented as a memotopia of martyrdom; three arenas are operating here, the microtopia of the individual soldier, the mesotopia (intermediate space) of Eastern France, and the macrotopia of France. The cemetery, that is such a vital part of the narrative, is both sacrotopia, thanatopia and memotopia, a sacred site of death where the drama of a double death, namely the risk that the crosses to the dead will also disappear, means this is a memotopia threatened by amnesia. Carnavalesque scenes at the front are compared to a stage set, and this is thus also a dramatopia, demonstrating the creation of an intergeneric isotopia. *Le Diable au corps* contrasts the mesotopia of the "love-nest" of Marthe and François, an erotopia, with the front, and the utopia and ludotopia of the Marne as opposed to the dystopias of Paris and the battlefields. *Roux le Bandit* is set in the Cévennes, a rural landscape invested with special qualities as Roux, a deserter from the war, becomes a kind of hermit priest, a prophet figure. A rurotopia, then, that is also a sacrotopia with thanatopic and memotopic dimensions.

Romains's two novels focus on the sacrotopia that is Verdun, where a variety of landscapes and experiences across the spaces of the battles, the front, and the wider world beyond encompass ludotopias, thanatopias, zootopias, oneirotopias and the multiple psychotopias of the individual soldiers. The conclusion, which also draws on novels by Proust, Giono, Drieu la Rochelle and Martin du Gard, argues that loss, possession and repossession of territory are important, as is to be expected in novels where life at the front plays so central a role (or, in the case of *Le Diable au corps*, the sexual possession of Marthe by François), but that alienation is the dominant mode, for these novels foreground the way the front is divorced from the rest of the country, and the soldiers alienated from civilians.

Part two, “The War between the Wars,” takes up novels focused on French and German relations: *Siegfried et le Limousin* (Jean Giraudoux, 1922) and *L’Année des vaincus* (André Chamson, 1934). *Siegfried et le limousin* demonstrates the drive to achieve Franco-German reconciliation after the trauma of World War I, while *L’Année des vaincus* offers a critique of the new Germany coming to the fore under National-Socialism. It is true, as Tame says, that *L’Année des vaincus* is not strictly a war novel, but then the interwar period is not strictly a war either. Malraux’s *L’Espoir* (1937) features here as a novel of the fight between Fascists and anti-Fascists in the Spanish civil war. The analysis focuses upon the struggle for the country, the iconic scenes of the land viewed from the airplane, so confusingly for the peasant on his first flight finding the terrain unrecognizable from that perspective, and the grandiose descent from the mountain of the injured airman. Full attention is paid to the metaphysical dimension of redemptive fraternity in an indifferent universe (the “metatopia”), and the redemptive power of art. Finally the love triangle at the centre of *Les Sept Couleurs* (Brasillach, 1939), an experimental novel deploying separate fictional techniques such as letter-writing, dialogue, and diaries, involves the national spaces of France, Germany, Italy and Spain in the 1930s. The importance of the latter for Brasillach’s “Latin or Mediterranean ideal of Fascism” (p. 192) reveals, it is suggested, a subconscious alienation from the powerful Nazi Germany and hence the novelist’s own psychotopia.

Part three is devoted to the invasion and defeat of 1940, starting with Julien Gracq, *Un Balcon en forêt* (1958), and accentuating the dream qualities of this oneirotopia, the dramatopia created by the theatricality of the setting, imbued also with Shakespearean subtexts, and the forest as memotopia, marked by memories of childhood and the hypotopia of the main character’s slumbering state. Together with the thanatopia and erotopia, bistopia and dystopia, *Un Balcon en forêt* offers a particularly strong example of the multiple spatial colorations that Tame’s critical methodology deploys in the detailed discussion of the texts. The second text is the first part of Irène Némirovsky’s posthumously published *Suite française*, written in 1941-42, concentrating on the invasion and its immediate impact on a wide cast of very different characters, relating dramas of the exodus, and reactions to the arrival of the Germans. The isotopic mode of loss that dominates here is similarly presented as the dominant mode in *La Route de Flandres*, one of the major texts of the *nouveau roman* and a multi-layered exploration of the experience of battle and defeat that shifts across episodes of present and past, description of event and of representations, in a manner that combines subjective shifts of memory and imagination with the objectivity of events. Overwhelmingly memotopic, with thanatopic and erotopic episodes, the effect is to create a “bewildering narrative labyrinth” (p. 261). The final chapter in this section turns to the “rape” of Eastern Europe, echoing “France violated” in the title of chapter two (on *Suite française*), with a relatively brief discussion of *Les Bienveillantes*, Jonathan Littell’s massive novel that was the most notorious bestseller of 2006. Appropriation and possession are the dominant modes here on both the collective national and individual psychological levels, only to shift to loss after Stalingrad. The vast spaces of the eastern front partake of a range of spatial qualities governed overall by the dual and conflicting perspectives of Nazi utopia and Jewish dystopia. The conclusion to part three draws in Vercors’s *Le Silence de la mer* (1942), Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959) and Robert Merle’s *Week-end à Zuydcoote* (1949) to establish that, across these very different spaces of conflict and literary techniques, the novels of invasion address above all the experience of loss.

Part four is devoted to the Occupation and takes forward the fundamental question as to whether France remained France during this time, with chapters on *Suite française*, *Les Noyers de*

l'Altenburg (Malraux, 1947), *Le Puits des miracles* (Chamson, 1945) and *La Conquérante* (Brasillach 1943), all of which were written during the Occupation. *La Conquérante* is set in 1912 and Tame explores Brasillach's positive representation of the French colonization of Morocco being driven by his positive vision of France in a new German order. In *Suite française*, a claustrotopia of closed doors and windows dominates, as the French domestic spaces replicate the prison their country has become, though combined with the violation of Germans being billeted inside French houses, whereas the fact there is hardly any mention of Jewish difficulties is read as an indication that "the Jews lost their 'space' in occupied France" (p. 280). *Les Noyers* is studied in great detail in what, at forty-four pages, is by far the longest chapter in the book. The novel is possibly a rather eccentric choice for this section; opening and closing in a prisoner of war camp in Chartres in 1940, it involves Turkey before World War I, fighting on the eastern front during World War I and the dispossession of the defeat. Primarily concerned with Malraux's metaphysical reflection, particularly in the pages on the Altenburg colloquium on "la notion d'homme," it is argued Malraux saw France as a space that had ceased to exist. *Le Puits des miracles*, part of which was published clandestinely in 1944 in *Nouvelles Chroniques*,^[5] is a passionate diatribe against the corruption and exploitation of Vichy and its acolytes, whereas *La Conquérante* uses the "contested space" (p. 371) that is Morocco to work through conquest, defeat, French power and the prospect of French dispossession. The conclusion establishes parallels here with *Les Bienveillantes*, and also discusses *Les Forêts de la nuit* (Jean-Louis Curtis, 1947), *Mon village à l'heure allemande* (Jean-Louis Bory, 1945), *Le Silence de la mer*, *Berg et Beck* (Robert Bober, 1999) and *L'Éducation européenne* (Gary, 1956).

The final part, "Liberated Spaces after 1945...and beyond," devotes chapters to Jean Dutourd's *Au Bon Beurre* (1952), *Uranus* (Marcel Aymé, 1948), *Les Racines du ciel* (Gary, 1956) and four novels by Patrick Modiano: his Occupation trilogy of 1968-1971, and *Dora Bruder* (1997). Again bringing together very disparate kinds of writing and situation, from the world of profiteering shopkeepers satirized by Dutourd, to Aymé's often very funny novel of life in newly liberated France, which exploits the classic situation of farce with communists, "neutrals" and collaborators all under the same roof, though it also has its polemical edge in its hostility to collaborationist and communist systems of thought, and its bitter treatment of profiteers, to *Les Racines du ciel*, set in Africa and focused upon the defence of elephants from poachers. War experiences are a major point of reference in the recent history of the European characters in this novel, and Tame's reading draws upon an analogy between hunting elephants and hunting Jews, the defence of elephants and the Resistance. The discussion of Modiano's increasingly autofictional writings about the Occupation charts the importance of the ludic at all levels of these texts, which are "ludotopias of the past rather than coherently plotted stories" (p. 505). Through their artful construction of timelessness, these fictions offer the possibility of repossessing the past.

The conclusion stresses the importance of the isotopic mode of alienation that has been found to dominate the corpus with the exception of the novels of the invasion. This is perhaps not surprising since alienation is the more capacious of the four modes here, including psychological and metaphysical alienation in, for example, *L'Étranger* (p. 520) as well as displacements and migrations. Tame argues that fiction departs from a more historical account that would revolve around loss, possession and repossession of territory in order to offer a different insight and truth about subjective experience: "history can provide answers to rational questions—the whys and wherefores of the past—whilst fiction provides insights into the human heart" (p. 518). While such a distinction downplays the historiographical dimension so crucial to war fiction, as well as

the epistemological and narratological overlaps between history and fiction that have been the subject of so much critical attention in recent years, [6] few would disagree with the importance and legitimacy of perspectives opened by the study of war fiction. There is much to admire and to ponder in the ingenuity of this complex critical apparatus and its very convincing argument that such a detailed investigation of space and place unlocks new and significant perspectives on the writing of war fiction. The breadth of narratives covered is impressive, many of which are no longer at the forefront of critical thinking, and their inclusion here is all the more welcome for that.

NOTES

[1] Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, *Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Denys, 1980).

[2] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Picador, 1979).

[3] *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 152-53; Tame, p. 314.

[4] See for example Claire Gorrara, *Women's Representations of the Occupation in post-'68 France* (London: Macmillan, 1998) and *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War: Past Crimes, Present Memories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Margaret-Anne Hutton, *French Crime Fiction 1945-2005: Investigating World War II*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[5] Lauter [pseud. of André Chamson], "Le Puits des miracles," in *Nouvelles Chroniques* (Paris : Éditions de minuit, 1944): pp. 75-92.

[6] The debate has been reinvigorated with the publication of *Les Bienveillantes* and other "historiographical novels" such as Laurent Binet, *HhHH* and Yan Haenel, *Jan Karski*. See for example *Annales*, "Savoirs de la littérature," 2 (mars-avril 2010); *Le Débat*, "L'Histoire saisie par la fiction," 165 (mai-août 2011); Richard Golsan and Philip Watts, eds. *Yale French Studies* 121(2012), *Literature and History: Around "Suite française" and "Les Bienveillantes."*

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