Melanie Conroy, *Literary Geographies in Balzac and Proust.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 1 + 78 pp. Maps, tables, figures, references, and sources. $22.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781108994910; $22.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781108992923.

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This slim volume by Melanie Conroy contains a generous amount of interesting information about geographic places and their meanings in the works of Balzac and Proust. It is an unusual mix of statistical information and literary interpretation. Conroy derives this information through what is termed throughout the book "literary geography," defined as the use of different methods of exploring literary places and their meaning in literature. Using a set of computerized practices, one can "map" spatial information that appears in literary texts and deduce meanings from it. Here the word "map" takes on a much larger meaning than the one we normally think of as roadmaps on cell phones. An example of one of these maps consists of a two-dimensional surface with the names of places, say cities, positioned in proper spatial relation to each other, and at those places are positioned colored spheres whose size represents the number of times this city appears in the texts. Another type of information that can be deduced from digital cartography shows how the meaning of places can change, even in a single text. In this way, literary geography provides information that one can use to formulate a new understanding of the texts. These meanings can begin with statistical information, which then can generate thematic and symbolic readings of the textual material. Because of the unusual content of this book, this review aims to give the reader samples of the information on the maps and Conroy's interpretation of them, but one really must view the maps to gain a true appreciation of Conroy's work and the interest of her study.

The book consists of four chapters: an introduction, a chapter on Balzac, a chapter on Proust (each of which has multiple subheadings), and a conclusion. The introduction defines literary geography, explaining that it involves topics rather than consisting of a method. Here one also finds an explanation of its tools, which are computer technologies that create digital maps. As mentioned above, these maps make visible specific spatial relations within a literary corpus by showing, for example, the frequency of the mention of certain places and their geographic relations with each other, places that can be real or imaginary. These maps include not just France but also the larger world as it was known in Balzac's and Proust's times.

The second chapter tackles "Balzac's Map of the World." Mapping here confirms that Balzac's texts remain strongly tied to Paris, Touraine, and the Loire Valley. However, it also reveals that the *Comédie Humaine* is one of the first great novel series with a true global footprint, and Balzac's

representation of foreign places conforms roughly to their real locations. Conroy notes that the way these places are related to social issues shows that Balzac thought of himself as a kind of naturalist who studied human types in their varying environments. Some of the interesting information in this section: All the continents are mentioned except for Antarctica; some of the places mentioned are India, Malaysia, North Africa, and, surprisingly, Sharonville, Ohio; Chabert, Gobseck, and Montriveau are some of the characters linked to foreign places. Also, all of Balzac's texts refer to places in Europe. After this first section on foreign countries, the city of Paris is explored as a major hub because almost all of the characters are connected to Paris at some point, and Paris is mentioned in almost all of the works and is the most common primary setting. As an example of the content in this section, one of the maps shows the number of times that various regions, such as the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the Palais Royal, are named while also placing them on a map that shows their position in relation to each other. Conroy then makes some interesting interpretations of the data on this map.

After Paris, this second chapter examines the French provinces. It notes that their importance underscores that Balzac was one of the first French writers to use French geography on a national scale, and it highlights the essential nature of provincial life in France. Some of Balzac's information is incorrect, some is fictional, and some is accurate and historical. Certain buildings described in these areas are fictional, and some are real historical structures. In this section, Conway provides a computer-generated map of the real historical places mentioned in the text, and a map of the fictional places in the texts. Also included is an unusual nineteenth-century map that uses color to show the population density of the French departments, which is similar to these computer-generated maps. Finally, Conway notes that Balzac manages to link Paris with the provinces by means of characters who travel, and she makes quasi-sociological comparisons between other cities and towns in France.

The second chapter tackles the concept of time and the networks created between characters and places in Balzac's texts. This is done without using traditional maps, and these "other" maps concentrate on relationality. Different types of maps here include a bubble line that shows the way in which the mention of the five most referenced places in Balzac's *Lost Illusions* appear and disappear in the texts. In another example, a line graph shows how frequently some of these places (and a few others) are mentioned in *Lost Illusions*. Finally, a network graph with bubbles shows the named places in the Middle East, Asia, and the "Orient," along with the names of the characters associated with these places in *The Human Comedy* at large. For Balzac, Asia stands in opposition to the Orient, and his Asia is that of European colonization. Some interesting results include the fact that several female characters are linked to Asia and the Orient but do not travel there.

The section titled "In the Shadow of the Empire" notes that travel to distant and culturally diverse places is mainly a male pursuit undertaken for business, including the slave trade, and is associated with previous generations of men rather than with the era of the July Monarchy. Other travel relates to military men, such as Chabert, and it is mainly linked to the Empire and maintaining its power.

The third chapter, "Proust's Imagined Map," begins with the section titled "Proust's Reimagined Places," referring to the places Proust invented, such as Balbec and Combray. In this way, Proust breaks with Balzac's realist method. Yet, these invented places are based on real towns and provide actual cultural differences between these two places. Conroy notes that these towns in

Proust have already been mapped, with Balbec and Combray located near existing towns. It is Proust's description of the town of Combray that allows one to locate it near the real small city of Illiers. The first digital map in this section shows both the real and invented places in or near France in the *Search for Lost Time.*

In the second section on Proust, "A Model of Post-realist Geography," we learn that Proust shares Balzac's interest in Paris, the provinces, and the remaining world, although Proust is less interested in places outside of France. Proust's writing practices are similar to those of realist description in that Proust gives a mix of real and fictional places, centers on the experience of the characters, and recognizes the importance of social class and place. Conroy notes that places in Proust can recur in different volumes and are mentioned by multiple characters who do not know each other, thus creating a shared reality in which setting and place are linked to each other but not necessarily to real places. Conroy observes that the fictional nature of these places gives them an otherworldly status while remaining in the real world of Paris or Venice.

Section three of the Proust chapter, "Alternative Maps: Words, Characters, Place, and Time," notes that places are associated with the narrator's contact with specific characters and what was said of them, and it mixes real experiences with what was said or imagined about them. An interesting bubble chart in this section shows the distribution of the mention of Combray, Paris, and Balbec in the seven volumes of the work. Another chart maps the number of times that different mentions of the signifiers of nationality of six foreign places appear in the seven volumes. Also noted are the types of foreign places associated with specific characters. Finally, the author makes comparisons between the nature of Balzac's and Proust's representations of foreign places, such as their relation to imperialism and commerce or leisure, travel, and family ties.

The conclusion discusses the idea of realism in the two authors. If both use real places, Proust also distances the real world in his fiction, which, Conroy concludes, puts Proust's places outside of history. This useful book shows how statistical tools can paint new pictures of the geographies of the authors and can generate new and interesting meanings in these important texts.

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