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**GEOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY AND POSTWAR  
URBAN REGENERATION IN BRITISH LITERATURE.  
LONDON AS PALIMPSEST**

Author: Alina Cojocaru, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2022, 233 pp.

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This review introduces the reader to a remarkable study on recent British fiction, which “proposes a new interdisciplinary approach to the representations of London in contemporary British literature by exploring the interplay between reality and fiction in mapping the urban imaginary” (1). By means of correlating geocriticism, spatial literary studies and memory studies, Alina Cojocaru’s research “conducts a geocritical analysis of London in recent British literature published between 1975-2005, exploring the literary representations of the real urban restructurings prompted by the rebuilding projects aimed to revitalize the war and poverty-stricken districts of London, the reterritorialization and remapping of the metropolis by immigrants, the gentrification and displacement of communities, as well as the urban dissolution caused by terrorism” (1).

The primary sources used by Cojocaru include the novels *Hawksmoor* (1985) by Peter Ackroyd, *City of the Mind* (1991) by Penelope Lively, *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith, *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy, *High-Rise* (1975) by J.G. Ballard, *Mother London* (1988) by Michael Moorcock, *The Good Terrorist* (1985) by Doris Lessing and *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan. The reasoning behind the choice of this literary corpus has been clearly justified by the author herself. First, the novels are set in London and depict literal or metaphorical journeys of the characters across the city. Second, the narrated events shape a portrayal of the urban landscape, mindscape, atmosphere, lifestyle and characters in the context of the postwar urban regeneration of the British capital. With space as the focus, Alina Cojocaru proposes the idea that “London fiction may be read as a transhistorical epistemic source about spatiality which reveals a timeless pattern of destruction and rebirth.” (3) Third, the volume offers an analysis of the works of writers that are considered important to the British cultural scene, recipients of literary prizes, both male and female writers, so as to give a multitude of perspectives of the topics chosen to be dealt with.

Through a balanced structure of five chapters (I. “Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice”: Textual Approaches to Geographies of Memory; II. The Presence

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of the Past: Geographies of Memory and Myth in London (*Hawksmoor* and *City of the Mind*); III. Breaking Landguage Borders Through the Ironic Reterritorialization of London (*White Teeth* and *Small Island*); IV. Entropic Habitus and Spatial Justice in Gentrified London (*Mother London* and *High-Rise*); V. London, a Space of Terror? (*Saturday* and *The Good Terrorist*)), the author argues that the London fiction written in the early decades of the twenty-first century provides a record of the city in times of de/reconstruction, highlighting the structure of London as a palimpsest, the central image in the selected literary works. Alina Cojocaru also daringly challenges the pre-eminence of the temporal organization of knowledge and concludes that spatiality creates alternative ways of interpretation.

The first chapter intelligently exemplifies an interdisciplinary approach which combines memory studies with geocriticism and spatial literary theory. In the theoretical part of the volume, the idea advanced is that the concept of space will be treated as the fundamental organizing principle of the literary works in question which may be simultaneously read as a narrative and a map by means of which the individual and collective memory of the protagonists can be analyzed.

The second chapter examines London as a contested space, in between the historical and the mythological, the personal and the collective, the public and the hidden layers of meaning which reconstruct the cityscape as a palimpsest. The two focal points of the investigation are geographies of memory and the spatial manifestations of myth in Thatcherite London with London present as a simultaneous city, a place where all events are instantaneous, doubled by the mapping of the city in the aftermath of the destruction and reconstruction of East End.

The third chapter of the book discusses London as a metropolis seen as reterritorialized by immigrants. The Deleuzian term reterritorialization is employed by Alina Cojocaru to cover the acts of effacement and remapping committed by the protagonists in the novels. This quest is ironical since it can barely change the face of London, yet it evokes the tensions underlying the spatial interactions of Anglo-Jamaicans, Bengali and white Jewish characters within multicultural London.

Chapter four shifts the focus from the alleged spatial threat of the invading immigrants to the wounds in the urban fabric inflicted by gentrification. The concept of inner space, described as a space which reflects the inner life of the inhabitants, is used to argue that the stories delineate the effects of spatial dissolutions. Thus, Cojocaru shows how the physical and the psychological strata of the city get intertwined.

The last chapter comes with an exploration of the private and public spaces within a London endangered by terrorism. The palimpsest of physical traumas inflicted upon the cityscape is paralleled by the psychological traumas of the perpetrators who threaten what the protagonists value most – the security of their homes. Ultimately,

the novels trace the connections between the private and the public spaces which become analogous under the strain of urban transformations.

Through ample pages of corpus analysis and smart use of critical and theoretical sources, Alina Cojocaru's research contributes to the enrichment of the fields of geocriticism and spatial literary studies by developing in her book a number of original concepts, i.e. *mythopos*, *mnemotopos*, *landguage*, *entropic habitus*, *urban specularity*, "which connect real and fictional literary spaces and memory in the context of urban regeneration" (214).

The innovative character of this book, *Geographies of Memory and Postwar Urban Regeneration in British Literature. London as Palimpsest*, highlighted in this review, also resides in the fact that it conducts narrative journeys into the textual city of an imaginary London in order to answer one of the urgent questions that its referent is confronted with, namely the radical transformation of the infrastructure and social dynamics within cityspace. "London is envisaged as a site of transgressive spatiality which resembles a palimpsest whose endurance depends on the multifarious layers of meaning hidden in its structure" (215). In this manner, according to Alina Cojocaru, literary London functions as a keeper of memories as well as a catalyst of psychological responses engendering geographical consciousness as the pillar of the narrative structure and a source of manifold imaginary geographies.

#### ***The author***

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