



Diálogo

Volume 17 | Number 1

Article 8

2014

Tracking Jesusa: Geographic Information Systems and Character Development in *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*

Pamela H. Long
Auburn University at Montgomery

Kevin W. Long
Auburn University at Montgomery

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo>



Part of the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Long, Pamela H. and Long, Kevin W. (2014) "Tracking Jesusa: Geographic Information Systems and Character Development in *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*," *Diálogo*: Vol. 17 : No. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol17/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Latino Research at Via Sapiientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Diálogo* by an authorized editor of Via Sapiientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

Tracking Jesusa: Geographic Information Systems and Character Development in *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*

PAMELA H. LONG AND KEVIN W. LONG
AUBURN UNIVERSITY AT MONTGOMERY

Los mapas son ficciones mal escritas ...
TOMÁS ELOY MARTÍNEZ, PURGATORIO

Abstract: This study examines the uses of mapping software and web tools to produce multimedia annotations of a literary work—in this case *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* by Elena Poniatowska—to the end of strengthening student engagement with the text, and cultural and literary contexts. The authors, a professor and a student at Auburn University-Montgomery, photographed scenes of specific sites and landmarks mentioned in the novel, mapped them on Google Maps, then linked the sites with historic photos of the periods indicated in the novel, in preparation for creating a unique website.

Key Terms: Elena Poniatowska, mapping, maps, literature and mapping, geographical systems, litmaps, Mexico City

This project¹ grew out of a course taught in spring of 2006, “Novels, Films and Music of the Mexican Revolution.” It became apparent that of all the texts used, students were most captivated by *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1969; *Here’s to You, Jesusa!*, 2001) by Elena Poniatowska. During the semester, while in Mexico City for a scholarly conference, the professor took snapshots of places mentioned by the character Jesusa in the novel, and placed those images on her WebCT site.² When juxtaposed with historical maps and photographs of the neighborhoods in the time periods of Jesusa’s experience, the novel came alive before the students’ eyes. At this point, the professor realized that the Internet was one way in which U.S. students (as well as many Mexican students) could experience literary artifacts in ways that, just ten years ago, could only be imagined. It suggested a new way of annotating texts that reaches beyond traditional footnotes and glossaries.

During the summer of 2008, the professor and her son, a student in Geographic Information Systems (G.I.S.), traveled to Mexico City to obtain maps, photographs, and historical images. The objective was to produce

annotations for the novel in two manners: They created a website with hyperlinks to Google maps and historical images, and a tablet computer application. The professor visited the Mexican national archives in Pachuca³ to seek historical photographs: 120 images were downloaded, which formed the basis of study for this project, and they traveled to various sectors of Mexico City, shooting still photos of sites documented in the historical photos. The class was taught again in fall of 2009, with these new resources.

GEOGRAPHY, DATA SYSTEMS AND LITERATURE

G.I.S. is an umbrella term for several software programs that allow people to analyze spatial data and to create useful maps from that information. Users can record and apply data that normal paper maps would not be able to display and make it spatial. For example, the user can ask this program (*GeoMedia*) to show all companies with 300 or more employees working in that building that are within two miles of a river. G.I.S. is not only applicable for geographers, anthropologists, and archeologists, it is also useful for a wide array of professions, including emergency responders, police, and the military. In our region, G.I.S. has been field tested with firefighters in northern Alabama counties; and, after the 2011 tsunami, Auburn University-Montgomery was called upon to create maps for disaster relief in Japan. Our project in this study applied G.I.S. to create a spatial timeline of events that happened in Poniatowska’s novel. We are now creating an extensive website to allow users to experience the book not only textually but also spatially, linking photographs and documents with physical features in the G.I.S.

Recently, the Institut für Kartografie und Geoinformation in Zurich created an interactive mapping and visualization system called “A Literary Atlas of Europe”⁴ that charts the specific geography of European fiction. According to its creators, “Maps are conceived for individual texts, but also for large groups of texts, in view of statistical queries. In the process, not only are the literary

riches of single regions illuminated, but also fictionalized landscapes and cities in all of Europe could be examined comparatively, in the sense of a literary-geographical system.” (Piatti, et al) While our project simulates the European project in its attempt to locate a literary product within a cartographic product, ours varies significantly in that it concentrates on a single testimonial artifact, and situates the events and locations of that single work. Furthermore, our project, unlike the European map, inserts media artifacts into the text, creating a flow of both history and space that we believe is unique to this project.

THE NOVEL AS A MAP AND TESTIMONY

During the 1960s, Mexican essayist and journalist, Elena Poniatowska, began spending Wednesday afternoons in a dilapidated, decaying neighborhood of Mexico City, listening to a remarkable woman, Josefina Bórquez, tell the stories of her life, a life which traced a history of early 20th century Mexico from the perspective of the peasant and disenfranchised of society. Through dialogue and memory, Poniatowska created a testimonial novel that demythologizes the official version of those historical events. Reading the English translation of *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*—hereafter shortened to *Hasta no verte*—a triangle emerges, connecting the revolutionary political process in the Mexican republic, the personal life of Jesusa, and the explosive post-revolutionary urban development of Mexico City.

Originally published in Mexico in 1969, the novel has been categorized by some critics in the genre known in Latin America as *novela-testimonio*, a hybrid genre in which the novel and social history intersect. Although Poniatowska has been challenged for inserting her own voice and “editing” her protagonist’s commentaries (whom she called Jesusa Palancares), blending her own version of events with her source (see López and Steele), what emerges is a backside of the tapestry of the Revolution and its aftermath: the destruction of the lives of women who assisted and fought alongside men, and survived it. In the same way, the urban landscape suffers devastation, and later the urban community inhabited by those who survived the Revolution, mostly those who are lower echelon working-class women like Jesusa.

Jesusa is on her way to claim her widow’s pension, as promised to her upon her husband’s death in the Revolution, and Venustiano Carranza’s installation as president. Unfortunately, as the train stops at Buena

Vista station in what was then the outskirts of Mexico City, she is robbed. As a result, Jesusa is forced to take up residence in Mexico City. After being mistreated as a household servant, she forges a place for herself in a community of small business owners and peons, displaced from the countryside to the city, like so many other *campesinos*. This population explosion in Mexico City following the initial decade of struggle of the Revolution, and its incumbent environmental crises, are mirrored in the social catastrophes that Jesusa suffers throughout her life: abandonment by friends, loss of employment, eviction, disease and hunger. Told in first-person, the *novela-testimonio* develops on three levels: Jesusa’s personal story of religious experience, autonomy and despair; the political engagement and disillusionment of the working poor; and the reformation and demographic explosion of Mexico City.

CARTOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

As a work of *testimonio*, *Hasta no verte* charts a path between history and memory, between the lived experience of the main character as *testigo* and the realm of the (real) national narrative of the Mexican Revolution. Its trajectory traces the arc between memory and history described by Pierre Nora: “Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic—responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection.” (8) Jesusa’s recollections of the events of the Revolution and her internal urban map intersect, and often contradict official narratives and cartographies. These are inscribed from a subaltern, *soldado raso* perspective, rather than that of the intellectual or *funcionario*.

In reading Jesusa’s story, the interstices between lived history and official history become apparent. Barbara Piatti has written that it’s obvious to any experienced reader that “each literary work takes place somewhere.” (178) Many texts have settings that have what Piatti calls a “real world counterpart” so realistically depicted that they could serve as guidebooks to the work’s region or city. But as Piatti posits, literary texts may create spaces for the reader that are not congruent with lived reality. Literary geographies may be partly or completely invented, such as the fictional California of *Amadís de Gaula*, or a “crossfading of two spaces” in Cortázar’s short story

“The Other Sky,” in which the topographies of Buenos Aires and Paris are comingled. Fictional spaces can also be understood as regions with imagined elements, such as the “Macondo” of *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez; even an existing region remodeled to the *imaginaire* of the author, such as Rosario Castellanos’ “Ciudad Real” in her stories.

Jesusa experiences marginalization not only on the social and economic level, but on a geographic plane as well. In an early essay on the development of computer generated mapping and literary works, Douglas Pocock foresaw a rich discourse between written products and charted artifacts.

The concept of place provides an organising concept for what is termed our immersion in, or interpenetration with, the world. With its experiential perspective and varied scale, place relates to an area which is bounded and has distinctive internal structure, to which meaning is attributed and which evokes an affective response. The natural result of familiarity with place, however, may require a stranger’s questioning or actual severance in order to articulate a response which in any taken-for-granted world lies dormant. Physical place is “re-place” through our sensibilities by an image of place, which is no less real, while the phenomenon of sense or spirit of place highlights the experiential nature of our engagement. In terms of scale, place may refer to one’s favourite chair, a room or building, increasing to one’s country or even continent. (Pocock, 17)

Charting and photographing this *testimonio* has shown us that the contours of Mexico City expanded to a large degree in similar ways that Jesusa’s character expands: through conflict, abandonment, destruction and marginalization. Working class neighborhoods are destroyed in the name of modernization, and her friends and neighbors must scramble to relocate and reconnect their lives. By the end of the novel, she is living in Ecatepec, on

the very northernmost edge of the city, two bus rides away from her work. In the foreword to the book, Poniatowska says she lost track of her near the end, eventually locating her in a northeastern suburb called Aurora, on the way to Pachuca. She associates these constant moves with Jesusa’s rage against modernization: “Each time she moved farther away, because the city drives out its poor, pushes them to the edges, shoving them, marginalizing them as it expands.” (xxv) These sites, once situated on maps, illustrate and explain the increasing marginalization of Jesusa’s life as the urban system expands.

Because of this marginalization, the *testimonio* of Josefina Bórquez (fictionalized in the novel) gains a level of authority beyond that of the book’s author. In “What is an Author?” Foucault posits that the “authorization” of texts lies in a range of credibilities and ways of reading, rather than in the identity of the writer. Those texts that we now call “literary” texts are, according to Foucault, narrative discourses whose “anonymity caused no difficulties, since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status.” (7) And further, those texts that we now call scientific, including maps and other treatises on the natural sciences, are only “authorized” or given value, when the identity of the author is known. Thus Poniatowska’s problematic “transcription” of Bórquez’s story situates the narrative within the pre-modern realm of “ancient”—and by such, truthful—fiction. Our map project resituates the narrative on that border between fiction (authorized) and non-fiction (authority questionable).

MAPPING AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

Traditionally, literacy has been a strong class marker, privileged over oral accounts since the time of Plato (Ong and Hartley, 214). Poniatowska’s *novela-testimonio* foregrounds orality over textuality, and serves as an axis between orality, visuality and spatiality. As our students become more visually and aurally oriented,⁵ they tend to resist the hierarchies of class, and opt for technologies that collapse spatial and cultural regions. Technologies that make use of visual and oral strategies will be used more frequently to engage student interest and attention.

Several studies have linked the use of mapping with the comprehension and retention of reading passages of literature. Beginning in the late 1960s, Allan Paivio postulated a dual-coding theory of learning, in which “analog” symbols (typically images), and “symbolic codes” (words

and other concepts), are functionally distinct and reside in differentiated “stores” in the brain. Information stored in one section of the brain can be activated or recalled by memories in another area of the brain. According to Paivio, multiple codings, and the use of various methods of input, can increase the likelihood of recall. (Paivio, 284)

Kulhavy and Stock (1996) extended Paivio’s theory of dual coding to their own notion of conjoint retention, postulating that graphical maps can provide image locations that allow learners to search and retrieve semantic information when paired with a reading passage. According to the conjoint retention theory, knowledge that the student had acquired prior to encountering the new material is used as an anchoring device for the new. Only information that conforms to the learner’s prior knowledge and expectations can be incorporated into the grid and retained (see also Kulhavy, 1992). Whereas the discourse such as a novel might be stored or processed as semiotic and symbolic (linguistic) code, maps are spatial-relational models stored as analog data. The bridging of symbolic memory with analog data creates a conjoined pair leading to higher comprehension and greater retention.

In this short essay, we have concentrated on the cartographic and narrative discourses, but we also need to mention briefly the photographic or multimedia aspects of the project. Mexico has a wealth of photographic and cartographic materials related to the 1910 Revolution in archival storage, such as the photographic and cartographic materials at the Museo Archivo de la Fotografía, the Archivo General de la Nación, and the Archivo Casasola, part of the Fototeca Nacional. The latter houses the famous work of photographer Agustín Víctor Casasola and his employees, a pioneering news service agency that captured iconographic photographs of the Mexican Revolution. We are in the process of procuring permissions for website publication of the extensive images obtained during our research at the above archives.⁶

PLANS FOR THE CREATION AND LAUNCHING OF A WEBSITE

Our plan is to develop a multimedia reader’s resource for the novel in two forms: a website with hypertext links to images and interactive maps, as well as a tablet computer application. We plan to add more pairs of historical and contemporary photographs and historical maps to the G.I.S. map to reveal how those places looked at the

beginning of the novel (before or during the Revolution), during the 1960s when Poniatowska was interviewing Josefina/Jesusa, and finally in the early 21st century. We aim to weave together our own photography with historical photographs and maps with explanatory annotations, in order to make the novel more accessible, in the current era, for both Mexican and North American readers, and with both Spanish and English-language selections for the website and the app.

CONCLUSION

By G.I.S. charting the historic and contemporary photographs, and our annotations to this *novela-testimonio*, our aim has been to make the characters, places and times of *Hasta no verte* come alive to 21st century readers. In her foreword, Poniatowska relates that Josefina Bórquez (née Jesusa) was not happy with her portrayal in the manuscript that Poniatowska presented to her before publication. (xix-xx) However, when she saw that Poniatowska had chosen her patron saint, el Santo Niño de Atocha, for the cover image, she then asked for twenty copies to distribute to the men at the shop where she worked: “so they’d know about her life, about the many precipices she had crossed, and so they’d have an idea of what the Revolution was really like” (as though her own voice was not strong enough alone). In this literary-G.I.S. website project, our hope is to bring a new, contemporary *author-ization* to the story of the women and many other commoners who helped achieve the victory of the Mexican Revolution, to restore their voices, and bring their experiences to the visualization and understanding of 21st century students.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A version of this essay was read at the South Central Mountain Conference on the Liberal Arts in Auburn, Alabama, in October 2011. Many thanks to the Research Council at Auburn University-Montgomery for grants in 2008, 2009 and 2011, funds and other resources necessary to complete this project.
- 2 Auburn University-Montgomery used the content delivery system WebCT until 2008.
- 3 The Mexican national photographic archives are a project of El Sistema Nacional de Fototecas del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (SINAFO). They are located at the Ex-Convento de San Francisco, Casasola s/n, Col. Centro, 42050 Pachuca de Soto.

- 4 <<http://www.literaturatlas.eu/en/>>
- 5 Diana and James Oblinger's *Educating the Net Generation* is a series of essays that indicate the learning strategies of Net Generation students. Those who were born after 1982 are chiefly aural and visual. "Oral" refers to a method of delivery, rather than the manner of reception ("aural") but implies the use of spoken information. (D. G. Oblinger and J. L. Oblinger)
- 6 INAH has made those photo collections available to the general public via registration on their website. <<http://www.fototeca.inah.gob.mx>>

WORKS CITED

- Kulhavy, Raymond W. et al. "Using Maps to Retrieve Text: A Test of Conjoint Retention." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 17.1 (1992): 56–70.
- Kulhavy, Raymond W., and William A. Stock. "How Cognitive Maps Are Learned and Remembered." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86.1 (1996): 123–145.
- López, Kimberle S. "Internal Colonialism in the Testimonial Process: Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*." *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 52.1 (1998): 21–39.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.
- Oblinger, Diana G., and James L. Oblinger. *Educating the Net Generation*. Washington, D.C.: Educause, 2005.
- Ong, Walter J. and John Hartley. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Paivio, Allan. *Imagery and Verbal Processes*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971.
- Piatti, Barbara et al. "Mapping Literature: Towards a Geography of Fiction." *Cartography and Art*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 1–16. Web. Sept. 25, 2011.
- Pocock, Douglas. *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on the Experience of Place*. London: Croom Helm Helm, 1981.
- Steele, Cynthia. "Testimonio y autor/idad en 'Hasta no verte, Jesús mío,' de Elena Poniatowska." *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 18.36 (1992): 157–183.
- #### FURTHER READING
- Bellver, Catherine G. "Literature and Visual Aids: Textual, Contextual, and Intertextual Applications." *Hispania* 72.4 (1989): 1078–1082.
- Blaut, James M. et al. "Mapping as a Cultural and Cognitive Universal." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93.1 (2003): 165–185.
- Campbell, Ian. "Mapping Moroccan Literature: The Spatial Practices of Modernity in Abdelmajid Ben Jallún's 'Fi al-Ṭufūla.'" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39.3 (2008): 377–397.
- Cooper, David and Ian N. Gregory. "Mapping the English Lake District: A Literary G.I.S." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36.1 (2011): 89–108. New Series.
- Dym, Jordana and Karl Offen. *Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2011.
- . "Maps and the Teaching of Latin American History." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 92.2 (2012): 213–244.
- Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective*. London; New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Harvey, David. "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80.3 (1990): 418–434.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *American Educational Research Journal* 32.3 (1995): 465–491.
- Sui, Daniel Z. "Visuality, Aurality, and Shifting Metaphors of Geographical Thought in the Late Twentieth Century." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90.2 (2000): 322–343.
- Wood, Justin. "'How Green Is My Valley?' Desktop Geographic Information Systems as a Community-Based Participatory Mapping Tool." *Area* 37.2 (2005): 159–170.