LITERARY RESOURCES FOR HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY:
A FLORIDA EXAMPLE

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Geographers are witnessing a movement in research which emphasizes the humane element of our concerns. Humanistic geography, according to Tuan, "achieves an understanding of the human world by studying people's relations with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place." Gould notes that, "At the present time the pendulum is swinging towards a behavioral geography characterized very strongly by a concern for the micro-spatial behavior of the individual, his cognitive mechanism and psyche."

A humanistic geography, distinct from one based on logical positivism, seeks to develop "a sense of place," something more in the location concept than merely the scientifically measurable. The artistic may be less objective, less quantifiable; but such qualities do not make it any less important. Wright recognized a geography composed of scientifically verifiable data, surrounded by a vast periphery of information that had to be dealt with subjectively. The geographer, he felt, could profitably use imagination and intuition in efforts to gain an understanding of place and circumstance. Thus, we respond to the "siren's song," and share with others the humanity which is within ourselves. In this context, what Berry has to say about "metageography" is apposite.

What, then is proposed is a view of the world from the vantage of process metageography. By metageography is meant that part of geographic speculation dealing with the principles lying behind perceptions of reality, and transcending them, including such concepts as essence, cause, and identity.

No one would suppose that the humanistic movement is universal among geographers. Yet for those who might move in such a direction, a consideration of some of the elements of a humanistic component to the discipline is in order. This paper considers the implications of this trend for historical geographers, with an illustration from Florida literature.

Humanistic Historical Geography

One of the basic problems facing a humanistic historical geography is the purposeful crossing of that frontier zone which divides scientific from artistic investigations. While much can be learned from scientific studies, artistic examinations of man delve into certain aspects of the human experience with unmatched discernment. Where are historical geographers to look for the humane component? Logically our attention might be directed toward the fertile fields traditionally covered by the humanities. "Essence, cause and identity" as well as a host of other concerns dealing with the condition of mankind have been the foci of great art. All forms of art could be useful, but geographers are likely to find literary works a good place to start. Of course, geographers have not ignored the work of writers, yet the use of these resources has hardly been systematized.

British geographers began to make use of literary resources in the 1930s. Authors of varying stature were investigated to ascertain how much supplementary knowledge their works could add to what was known about particular periods. Studies appeared investigating the quality of Defoe's geographical references, and reconstructing the geography of sixteenth century England through the writings of John Leland and William Camden. Especially notable was Darby's analysis of the Dorset landscape through the novels of Thomas Hardy. In intervening years rather infrequent articles have appeared in what we might term this literary reconstruction tradition, which directs literary resource use in geography toward inductive, regional results.
The Relevance of Literature

If historical geographers are to make more extensive use of artistic resources, they will want to be assured that such materials are relevant to geographic questions. It is correctly assumed that literature is related to the society that produces it, but there have been a range of views on the nature of the relationship between literature and society. At one end is the view that literature is simply reflective, while at the other that it is the cause rather than effect. Between is the notion that literature mirrors society but may also have some influence on its workings. Most literary scholars seem to accept this moderate interpretation.

Sociologists of literature, more than other social scientists, have examined the relationship between literature and society. One of them, Leo Lowenthal, tells us what we can expect to find in literature.

The specific treatment which a creative writer gives to nature or to love, to gestures and moods, to gregariousness or solitude, is a primary source for the study of the penetration of the most intimate spheres of personal life by social forces... In fact, the most generalized concepts about human nature found in literature prove on close inspection to be related to social and political change.

Regarding sources on seventeenth century French society, Lowenthal says, "certainly other sources describe the occupations and preoccupations of the bourgeoisie at the time of Moliere; but only Moliere reveals what it was like to live this experience."

Patterning and Content Analysis

A quality of literature which has received attention from literary scholars in recent years and which may be useful for geographers is patterning. This has to do with the regular use or absence of certain words or images. The systematic portrayal or exclusion of certain social groups from the literature of a period or artistic tradition may be significant. Social scientists may be able to detect relationships between patterns in literature and patterns of living. A noted literary scholar, Raymond Williams has observed:

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, and in the first half of the nineteenth century, a number of words, which are now of capital importance, came for the first time into common English use, or where they had already been generally used in the language, acquired new and important meaning. There is in fact a general pattern of change in these words, and this can be used as a special kind of map by which it is possible to look again at those wider changes in life and thought to which the changes in language refer.

Attempts have been made to analyze language patterning through quantitative techniques, using a method known as content analysis. Geographers have used content analysis with documentary resources from past periods such as journals and newspapers; however, artistic literature has not come in for such scrutiny. Whether analyzed quantitatively or subjectively, patterning in literature is an area of potential interest to social scientists.

Literature at its best can suggest much to the historical geographer beyond mere setting. By its flows, the wealth of example from one time and the dearth from another; its patterning of language, image and subject; its unparalleled penetration of the human condition; literature suggests to us something of the social conditions of the age in which it was produced.

Utility of Literature

One of the most appealing aspects of literary utilization in geography is its historic value, where it may be the only source for certain types of data. For instance, perceptual research often includes interviews and surveys. These methods cannot be used in most historical studies. However, literature from the past often examines the individual in detail, and can be used with care in the examination of perceptual questions.
Of several summaries of historical geographic research which have appeared in the past few years, Prince's classification of the field seems best at providing a suitable niche for literary resource utilization. In his view, research in historical geography falls into either real, imagined, or abstract conceptualizations of the past. The first and last of these refer to the reconstruction of past geographies and attempts to model the past. The imagined approach seeks an understanding of past perceptions, motives, attitudes, and behavior. Literature should be particularly useful in this category.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: The Yearling

Two recent examples of research aim at developing literary resources for geography. Salter and Lloyd investigate the portrayal of landscape in literature through the works of a number of authors. A single author, William Faulkner, is the focus of Aiken's study which attempts to match literary usage with geographical reality in Lafayette County, Mississippi.

For those with Florida interests, the name of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings immediately comes to mind. What follows is a report on preliminary research into her writing as a resource for the historical geographer.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' literary production was extremely varied. She wrote newspaper articles, short stories, poems, novels, and even a cookbook. She is best known for her classic, The Yearling, for which she received the Pulitzer Prize in 1939. Gordon Bigelow wrote the major criticism of Rawlings' work. He focuses on her life at Cross Creek, in North Central Florida, her relations with the local population, and the evidence of this interaction in her writing. He contends that "place" was a vital concept to her. A geographer's investigation of a "sense of place" in her works is, therefore, in line with literary criticism.

In previous work I have presented four overlapping concepts appropriate for the historical geographer who would use literary resources. These four are landscape, human ecology, strategy, and regionalism. The Yearling can contribute to our understanding of Florida in each of these areas.

Landscape

Many novels give us detailed accounts of physical and cultural landscapes. The Yearling is set in the pine scrub forest of North Central Florida. Population density is low. The reader acquires a strong impression of the enormity of the forest and the isolation of individual families. The novel contains long and accurate descriptions of pine islands (high places, such as where the Baxters, the main family in the story, live); the St. Johns River; a small settlement on that river; wildlife; sinkholes; and many other naturalist observations. Clearly Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings knew the land.

Human Ecology

Numerous themes may be investigated within the concept of human ecology. The traditional geographic concept of man-land can be expanded to include the cultural environment. Social geographic themes of interaction between groups in society are often found in novels. Perceptual questions would be included in this concept.

The Baxters live a solitary life. Jody Baxter and his father try to make a living through farming and hunting. This struggle is not an easy one, and Bigelow points out that Rawlings herself had anything but an easy time making a living off her land at Cross Creek. The Baxters' life is not one of total isolation, however. They travel to a small settlement on the St. Johns and interact with a wider range of people. The experience expands their world view and demonstrates the existence of an alternate mode of living.

The Baxters' neighbors are the Forresters. The interaction between these families highlights a perceived social hierarchy in the scrub. While the Baxters to themselves seem to personify characteristics of hard work within a strong moral code, the Forresters have slipped somewhat from the ideal. The Forresters are conscious of this perception and sensitive to it. There are ties...
of shared experience between the Baxters and Forresters. However, individual members of both families complicate the relationship. Thus, Rawlings presented us with a complex social geographic system, a system which is the operational environment of the inhabitants of the scrub.

The central relationship in the novel is between Jody Baxter and his fawn. There are parallel maturation processes as the fawn becomes a yearling and as Jody becomes a young man. Their growth is intimately connected with the environment. The fawn finds it more and more difficult to live in close proximity with humans, and ultimately perishes. The boy, similarly, has difficulty coming to grips with his surroundings. Elements of his environmental trial include; an isolation not of his own choosing; a sensitive nature rebelling at harsh realities of the forest; responsibilities too great for one so young; and the lure of the outside world.

**Strategy**

I have used this category to include motivation, plan, and action. Economic geography themes involve decisions on how to make a living, communication and transportation connections, and the difficult economic realities of life. Geographers will be most interested in the spatial ramifications of these themes.

The Baxters do not have to live in the forest, and yet the father has made a conscious decision to do so. The following lines gives us some feeling for his ideas.

> But in the towns and villages, in farming sections where neighbors were not too far apart, men's minds and actions and property overlapped. There were intrusions on the individual spirit. . . . The peace of the vast aloof scrub had drawn him with the beneficence of its silence . . . .

> Making a living came harder there, distances were troublesome in the buying of supplies and the marketing of crops. But the clearing was peculiarly his own.20

The Baxters' plan is a combination of emotional preference and realistic determination. As with much frontier literature, the maintenance of their independence is a central concern. The particular method of making a living is secondary to the rugged natures necessary to attempt it. All of this is done within spatial frameworks; one material, that they are well aware of, and the other metaphysical, perhaps only dimly comprehended. They know that they have a hundred acre tract in the forest from which to scratch a living. This is a harsh material reality. And then there is the mental concept of range of freedom, hinted at in the passage above. Just because it is less clearly defined in material terms does not make it any less operative in their lives.

**Regionalism**

Most novels attempt to establish a setting. In many cases this will be mere background with little thought given to accuracy or locational flavor. In the case of *The Yearling*, Rawlings presented a complex picture of an area and the people who inhabit it.

The forest, because of the difficulties that it presents, excludes diverse elements of society. Within this setting is found a group of people characterized by many of the traits discussed in the human ecology section. "Cracker" Florida is inhabited by poor, rural, white, and relatively uneducated people. We see them during the pioneer period in North Central Florida. This group is set apart physically, and perceives of itself as different. Perceptions of outsiders and how they live, even in the small settlement on the St. Johns, become fixed in the minds of the pioneers.

In *The Yearling* we read of the physical and cultural characteristics of an era. Much of this information we could get from geography and history texts, but the combination of these settings, including the penetrating examination of individual lives gives us a new perspective. Rawlings herself was not native to the region, but she lived among its people and her portrayal of that society seems valid.
Conclusion

There is a humanistic movement underway in geography, and historical geographers can find ways to respond to it. Artistic literature would seem to be a valuable source in this regard. It is clear that literature is intimately related to period and place. Furthermore, literature can deal with perceptual questions for geographical studies of the past. Admittedly, this is a very subjective undertaking. There may be differing interpretations of a literary source. However, a preliminary look at Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' novel *The Yearling* suggests that there is much of value for the historical geographer in her books.

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11. Ibid.


