Spanish Spaces
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In Gonzalo Torrente Ballester’s novel *Yo no soy yo, evidentemente* (I Am Clearly Not Myself), a German character makes the following remark:

> Sobre este mundo real … hemos montado otro imaginario para nosotros mismos, un mundo que no nos engaña, pero que nos divierte y en el fondo nos satisface: La Alemania como debió ser, un país y una sociedad en la que tendríamos cabida. Quizás vaya en ello un poco de nostalgia de lo que se perdió para siempre. (Torrente Ballester 2008: 421–2)

We have erected for ourselves on top of this world another imaginary one, a world of which we have no illusions but which amuses us and deep down satisfies us: Germany as it ought to have been, a country and a society which would have had room for us. There is in that, perhaps, a little nostalgia for what was lost for ever.

This quotation from one of Torrente’s later novels encapsulates much of what I am going to discuss in this chapter, focusing on Torrente’s use of landscape, space and place in his work as a way of expressing the desire of association with a Spain that he wishes were otherwise. As with the previous chapter, we find a suggestion of Spain and its history as it ought to have been – history and memory as malleable fantasy – but now seen from the other side, the side of those who were the victors of the Civil War. Landscape, space and place become a means of wishing away past historical allegiances in favour of an imaginary land – but linked to the real one – where one fits in.

We are talking about forgetting, rather than rewriting, the history of Spain, since Torrente’s aim is in part to undermine the link between the written word and historical truth. Torrente has been hailed by many scholars as a writer of metafictional novels which draw attention to their own construction and make explicit the authorial process. But they also draw attention to the processes of historical writing. Jo Labanyi argues for Torrente as an author ‘concerned to demythify official versions of history not because such versions are mythical but because they attempt to pass themselves off as history: that is, because they take history seriously’ (Labanyi 1989: 179). For Torrente, ‘history is equated with repression, and myth with liberation’ (ibid.). Throughout his work Torrente has
Forgetting

taken a debunking attitude to history and has treated it in what has become
his trademark whimsical, playful approach: as David Herzberger says, Torrente
‘enjoys the game of fiction and plays it better than most’ (Herzberger 1989: 38).
What has been neglected for the most part in this approach is that Torrente
takes an equally playful approach to geography. Only Ángel Loureiro, to the best
of my knowledge, has devoted serious concern to the role of space, arguing that
‘En la obra de Torrente el espacio trasciende un papel funcionario para adquirir
características peculiares que le otorgan una dimensión especialmente activa’
(In Torrente’s work space transcends a functional role to acquire peculiar
characteristics that provide it with an especially active dimension; Loureiro
1990: 229). In the trilogy of Torrente’s best known-works, La saga/fuga de J.B.
(The Saga/Fugue of J.B., 1972), Fragmentos de apocalipsis (Fragments of the Apoca-
lypse, 1977) and La isla de los jacintos cortados (The Island of Cut Hyacinths, 1980),
the spaces and places are malleable, open to manipulation by favoured charac-
ters in the novels (Loureiro 1990: 229–30). The trilogy also offers secret spaces
wherein lies some historical key, or indeed something to tell us that history and
myth have been manipulated (ibid.: 230): thus for Loureiro a playful attitude to
time or history cannot be conceived of without a similarly playful approach to
space. For ‘tanto el tiempo como el espacio pueden ser maleables en la ficción’
(time as well as space are malleable in fiction; ibid.: 214). This ludic plasticity is
readily apparent with the levitating town of Castroforte del Baralla, the setting
for La saga/fuga: the novel ends with the final and terminal levitation of the town
away from Spanish terra firma. In Fragmentos the cathedral city of Villasanta is
ultimately a construction of words that is easily destroyed at the whim of the
narrator. Likewise the island of La isla de los jacintos cortados is able to move itself
about like a boat, and towards the end the novel takes on the role of a warship
sailing out to battle. In terms of history, Herzberger argues that

the past springs forth as liquefied matter able to flow into one narrative struc-
ture or another, changing shape or meaning as it forms and reforms in unending
patterns of deviance. Writing the past thus becomes a twofold endeavor: it is a
way to write and act against the grain, as well as a means to develop narrations
that allow (and even compel) the opening of history to divergence. (Herzberger
1995: 2)

Herzberger has in mind here the blurring of not only fiction and history but
fiction and historiography and the notion that history, too, is a form of narrative.
But the idea of liquefied matters applies to uses of geography, too: landscapes,
too, can change shape or meaning in order to write against the grain.

My aim in this chapter is to consider Torrente’s efforts to make geography
ludic and to problematise the link between geographical signifier and signi-
fied, with the aim of once again seeing Spain through its landscape, spaces and
places as a ‘dream of presence’, always in the process of becoming in response
to desire, but never fully realised. But also – bearing in mind Loureiro’s link of Torrentian space and time – I wish to explore the geographical and historical implications of the nostalgic imaginary world that Torrente posited in Yo no soy yo, a ‘world that has room for us’. And I do this in the light of a recent paper by Ana Gómez-Pérez that explores Torrente’s own suspect past. Torrente was known for having links to the Falange in the early years of the Franco era: despite signs later on of dissidence from the Francoist position, he refused to make a public admission of guilt for belonging to the Falange. Instead he ‘remained evasive and began to elaborate a very personal theory of literature that denied the relationship between fiction and reality so he might continue to develop as a writer without the constant reminder of his earlier ideological commitments’. But he subsequently found that a trap, too, and tried to escape through the use of metafiction (Gómez-Pérez 2005: 100). Other scholars have tried to smooth over Torrente’s political past. Janet Pérez talks of his association with Falangist intellectuals as a way of covering over his previous galleguismo (and thus protecting his family). Pérez presents him as caught between two stools, disillusioned with Francoism, persecuted by the latter for protests against censorship but ignored by the opposition precisely because of his earlier political taint (Pérez 1988: 157). Labanyi, too, notes the ambiguity of the author’s political affiliation over time: writing for an anarchist paper while a member of the Falangist literary scene, later disaffected from the regime and censured for his signing a letter demanding censorship reform (in 1961) (Labanyi 1989: 214). Gómez-Pérez herself notes his increasing marginalisation by both sides, a position exacerbated by the fact that he was not in tune with left-wing literary trends of socialism realism (Gómez-Pérez 2005: 103) until his development of a ludic style coincided in the 1970s with the Latin American wave of magical realism. What intrigues me here is the concept Gómez-Pérez implies of a retreat into precisely the ‘mundo imaginario’ explicitly referred to in Yo no soy yo, a world in which Torrente might have had his place. In this sense, this retreat to an imaginary world with its own geography is a process of forgetting: ‘Torrente subjects literature and literary criticism to a process of constant destruction, and from then on feels free to create at will without reference to the ghosts of his past’ (Gómez-Pérez 2005: 116). Or, as the editors put it in the collection in which Gómez-Pérez’s essay appears: ‘Following the official demise of Franco’s regime, this writer felt profoundly guilty about his political affiliations which, coupled with his subsequent social rejection, worked to create a personal literary theory that distanced his creative work from reality and any type of political ideology’ (Merino and Song 2005: 19). This chapter argues that this desire to forget the past manifests itself through the use in his novels of imaginary landscapes and places that defy location: in particular, the levitating town of La saga/fuga de J.B., the cathedral city of Fragmentos de apocalipsis and the
difficulties of mapping territory in another of his novels *La rosa de los vientos* (The Compass Rose, 1993). The chapter considers these novels to demonstrate how landscape, space and place, being apparently indeterminate, function as sites of literary play. Nonetheless, as metafictional texts, I believe that they also draw attention precisely to their status as texts of forgetting, and that this too comes into play when considering Torrente’s playful geography. Paul Ricoeur comments that ‘The imagination, freed from its service to the past, has taken the place of memory’ (Ricoeur 2004: 66). The imaginary world does not deceive us, as Torrente tells us in *Yo no soy yo*, but it allows for an alternative reality that replaces what really happened, the world as it ought to have been rather than as it really was. But it is not an alternative space whereby lost or hidden memories may be recuperated, as with the previous chapter, but rather a retreat from the more uncomfortable associations with the past, a space wherein history might not be re-remembered but undone, dissolved – a space, perhaps, where historical guilt can be done away, where there is room for an association with Spain that lacks any history.

The question – or problem, depending on your point of view – of what to do with the Francoist cultural legacy has recently come into view as Hispanic scholars debate how we remember the past. Merino and Song wish to ‘demonstrate the artificiality of the break with the past, that is, Franco’s death, as a paradigmatic moment of change, a historical narrative, of the end of Francoism’: they argue that there are still links between the Francoist past and the democratic present (Merino and Song 2005: 15). Jordi Gracia argues, in the same volume, Half a century is plenty of time to allow us to turn to the past and look at it ourselves, not through the lenses of others who experienced the difficulties of anti-Franco militancy or were forced to modify their readings and criteria so as to avoid playing up to a power or counter-power. We have started to read Spanish fascist literature using criteria that are less biographically conditioned and thus freer from the hostility personal experience previously projected on it and its practitioners. (Gracia 2005: 279)

I am not so sure that hostility to the positions sometimes or always embraced by authors such as Torrente is eroding so simply. Hostility is also a memory that can be passed to new generations, and also at one remove to scholars educated about such memories. Nonetheless, if, as in the previous chapter, I talked of a geography of memory, it seems fair to talk also of a geography of forgetting. Imagined geographies are commonplace as a daydreamer’s escape of more mundane or even traumatic realities: the efforts to reconsider the role of Francoist cultural texts means that we might consider the possibility of personal traumas even for those on the winning side in the Civil War. That last clause was one I found personally difficult to write: how to compare Torrente’s own personal difficulties with the starvation and poverty, unjust imprison-
ment and execution undergone by many in the Franco era? It is a question to which I have no easy answer. Nonetheless, it is not at all clear that Torrente’s ‘world as it ought to have been’ coincides precisely with a Francoist Spain: I believe it to be a place where history – any history, including a Francoist one – can be escaped and thus forgotten. I believe Torrente’s position to be that any imaginary geography, including his own, can be deconstructed and destroyed, but that while it lasts it gives pleasure free from the constraints of history, and those geographies that he imagines are places where he or his characters can conceive themselves as belonging. And this use of geography to ‘forget’ history is, I think, worth exploration. In doing this, I wish to bear in mind Alison Ribeiro de Menezes’ warning when she criticises the simple binary opposition of remembering and forgetting ‘as if the two terms are mutually exclusive’ (Ribeiro de Menezes 2010: 8). Torrente shares with del Toro the desire to tell stories beyond the constraints of history and in that sense they are both writing history as if it were otherwise that goes beyond a Manichaean split between left and right or losers and winners. Torrente’s desire to retreat into fiction posited by Gómez-Pérez is hardly a posture of triumphalism, for all that during the dictatorship he had a voice not afforded to those who supported the losing side. But, furthermore, the use of a ludic geography to erase history is not the simple forgetting that we might suppose, because Torrente’s landscapes are haunted by a real referent, that of Galicia, Torrente’s homeland. It is not that the places that Torrente writes about are Galician necessarily, or that he is in effect trying to reproduce elements of the region, but I do suggest that even in the process of forgetting, such a process implies a memory ghosting behind.

Torrente himself claimed an indeterminacy for Galician landscape, which we can easily detect in his work:

En Castilla, un árbol es un árbol, una piedra es una piedra, y lo mismo una casa o un castillo. En Galicia no sabemos lo que es nada. El castillo puede ser casa o puede ser la joroba de un gigante, y evidentemente los pobladores de los bosques son muchos más de los que se ven. Es decir, existe una indeterminación, una vaguedad, que nos impide ser dogmáticos. De manera que la primera diferencia notable frente al dogmatismo castellano es la ambigüedad del gallego. (Torrente Ballester 1989: 2)

In Castile, a tree is a tree, a stone is a stone, and likewise a house or a castle. In Galicia we do not know what anything is. The castle could be a house or it could be a giant’s humpback, and obviously the inhabitants of the woods are many more than we can see. That is, there exists an indeterminacy, a vagueness, which prevents us from being dogmatic. So that the first notable difference in the face of Castilian dogmatism is the Galician’s ambiguity.

In this essay Torrente makes reference at various points in his essay to his own ‘poetic geography’ that nonetheless corresponds to towns and cities in Galicia,
so that Santiago becomes Villasanta de la Estrella in *Fragmentos* as others have also noted, while he implies that Castroforte of *La saga/fuga* corresponds to Pontevedra (Torrente Ballester 1989: 9). The quotation above, however, not only suggests play and fantasy (references to giants and castles) but an imprecision which significantly excludes dogma (a dogma specifically defined as Castilian). And yet there is still some connection to a ‘real’ Galicia, although that reality is not in itself precise and concrete: it appears to Torrente to be malleable in a manner akin to the landscapes of his own novels. It is this elusive Galician referent that, I will argue, complicates the notion of forgetting as far as the use of space and place is concerned, as regards the two major novels *La saga/fuga de J.B.* and *Fragmentos de Apocalipsis*. I have selected these novels because their geographies are in a sense paired: Castroforte de Baralla, the location of the first novel, is opposed and hostile to Villasanta de la Estrella, the setting of the second. But both towns are subject to manipulation and dissolution by certain privileged characters contained within them; and both carry traces of Galician landscape markings. I will then move to another novel, less well known and discussed, *La rosa de los vientos*, to consider Torrente’s use of geography in terms of mapping and cartographic ideas, where the question of real referents, although still touching on Galicia on occasion, opens up more widely to reinforce the notion of geographical hauntology even as Torrente uses landscape to create a space outside history.

**Two opposed towns: Castroforte and Villasanta**

Torrente’s best-known imaginary space is without doubt the levitating town of Castroforte del Baralla in *La saga/fuga*: it levitates when all the townspeople are thinking of the same thing, an ironic form of Benedict Anderson’s imagined community (Anderson 1991). We are informed that Castroforte is the capital of Galicia’s fifth province (Torrente Ballester 1995: 52), thus giving a clear link to the region, but the town does not appear on Spanish maps – the result, argues the character Belalúa, of a deliberate suppression by Spanish Prime Minister Cánovas (ibid.: 53). Torrente’s many references to historical figures such as Cánovas, as well as the writers Miguel de Unamuno and Ramón de Maeztu in their turn, both of whom acknowledge the town and thus by implication the fact that it exists, ironically confer on the town a concrete existence. The town’s rivalry with neighbouring Villasanta de la Estrella does likewise, adding a further irony in that the latter town will itself be shown to be nothing but words in *Fragmentos*.

The town levitates when everyone is thinking the same thing, but more than that: when the city ‘vivió el mismo ensimismamiento, vivió como si el resto del mundo no existiera’ (it lives the same self-absorption, it lives as if the rest of
the word does not exist; ibid.: 218, italics in original). It literally and figuratively becomes detached from the rest of the world. The protagonist Bastida argues that ‘cuando Castroforte del Baralla se ensimisma hasta cierto punto, un punto máximo, claro, la cima del ensimismamiento, asciende en los aires, en una palabra, levita, y no desciende hasta que deja de pensar, de interesarse por algo suyo y piensa o se interesa por algo ajeno’ (when Castroforte del Baralla reaches a certain point of self-absorption, a maximum point, of course, the height of self-absorption, it ascends into the air, it levitates, in a word, and it does not come down until it stops thinking, stops being interested in something about itself and thinks or becomes interested in something else’; ibid.). Thus it is not just the unity of thought but the thinking of things relating only to the town that cause the phenomenon, a forgetting of life outside the town: and only by remembering the latter does the town return to earth. When Bastida experiences this levitation himself, the town is foggy, a fog that is ‘opaca, impermeable’ (opaque, impenetrable; ibid.: 248), a fog very reminiscent of Galicia. The fog further emphasises the detachment of the town from the rest of Spain, absorbed in its own Galician mist. The fog, the levitation, are signs of forgetting. When Jesualdo Bendaña, returned from the USA, asks, ‘¿es más hermoso Castroforte envuelto en sus nieblas habituales o a la luz de un sol crudo y desmitificante?’ (is Castroforte more beautiful wrapped in its usual mist or in the light of a hard, demythifying sun?; ibid.: 425), implicitly he would prefer the latter, since he brings with him a reputation for destroying much cherished beliefs as well as a ‘taint’ of scientific thought from his American exile. His point of view is not accepted by the inhabitants of Castroforte. The fog, however, also brings with it not only the possibility of forgetting but also the spectral presence of Galicia’s climate.

Loureiro describes Castroforte as ‘incapaz de actuar, está ya sólo limitado a reflexionar y fantasear sobre sí mismo: un pueblo ensimismado, cuya búsqueda de un tiempo perdido, le sitúa, paradójicamente, fuera del tiempo’ (incapable of acting, it is now simply confined to reflecting on and fantasising about itself: an insular people, whose search for a lost past paradoxically positions it outside of time; Loureiro 1990: 152–3). This further reminds us the possibility of forgetting, or of seeking an alternative time. Castroforte becomes a lost space as well as a lost time, a space out of time and out of history. When Bastida first becomes aware of the town in the process of levitation, he leans over the side of the town as it rises, and sees the following:

vi, allá abajo, como seguramente podrá verse desde un aeroplano, el contorno de la ría, las tierras donde debiera hallarse Castroforte, algo así como la carne desgarrada de un cuerpo al que se le ha arrancado un brazo. Yo estaba, indiscutiblemente, en Castroforte, pero Castroforte no se hallaba en su sitio. (Torrente Ballester 1995, 249)
I saw down below, as could surely be seen from a plane, the contours of the river, the ground where Castroforte ought to have been, rather like the torn flesh of a body from which an arm has been ripped. I was, undoubtedly, in Castroforte, but Castroforte was not where it was supposed to be.

This detachment from the rest of Spain is no easy matter, given the suggestion of injury by the displacement, in the image of the arm ripped off. Nonetheless, the fog’s Galician specificity offers the spectral possibility of the real Spain from which Castroforte can detach itself, thus reintroducing a sense of attachment if only to a certain degree, given Galicia’s own semi-detached geographical position north of Portugal, out on a limb as it were. Galicia is, as Labanyi reminds us, a Finisterre (Labanyi 1989: 218): we can consider this as a place where the land ends, ceases to be, but its own materiality is still implied in the term. Pérez claims Castroforte as ‘a microcosm of Galicia’, with elements of Santiago, A Coruña, use of Galician myths, and a ‘satire’ of Francoist policy towards regions such as Galicia, given the town’s lack of official existence (Pérez 1984: 104). Alicia Giménez suggests the final levitation of Castroforte as possibly even a final escape from the godos (the town’s members who are not nativos and who are associated with Madrid), and that it has unified all the people together in its own self-absorption (Giménez 1981: 76). Since the nativos are also associated in the novel with an uprising and bid for independence in the nineteenth century, this offers a possibility of seeing the town’s levitation in terms of independence from the rest of Spain. Labanyi, however, suggests that the novel satirises both Galician regionalism and Falangism: ‘Castroforte ... has indeed levitated in the sense that it has lost touch with reality’ (Labanyi 1989: 220). Lynne E. Overesch-Maister also notes links to Galician regionalism in the blame that Castrofortians attribute to Cánovas for their ‘geo-political inexistence’ (Overesch-Maister 1989: 130–1): she further argues that ‘Torrente’s works often deal with characters whose actions do not transcend the local level, albeit they embody national or even international trends of thought in a highly idiosyncratic mind-set’ (ibid.: 127). However we wish to read these traces of Galicia – and the possibility of different interpretations itself suggests the ambiguities of hauntology – the complex imbrications of an imaginary space with a real referent suggest both the possibility and impossibility of forgetting.

If the levitation of Castroforte away from the Spanish mainland is a communal act, the destruction of Villasanta de la Estrella in Fragmentos is, in contrast, an act of the narrator’s imagination. The narrator calls space into being through words and words alone:

He nombrado al torre, y ahí está. Ahora, si nombro la ciudad, ahí estará también. Entonces, digo: catedral, monasterios, iglesias, la Universidad, el ayuntamiento, el palacio de arzobispo; y digo: rúas, plazas, travesías, la carrera del Duque, el callejón de los Endemoniados ... (Torrente Ballester 1997: 37)
I have mentioned the tower, and there it is. Now, if I mention the city, there it will be too. So then, I mention: cathedral, monasteries, churches, the university, the town hall, the Archbishop’s palace; and I mention: streets, squares, crossroads, the Duque road, the Passage of the Endemoniados ...

And so on and so on. But in the same way he created Villasanta simply by calling it into being, he can and does destroy it simply through words. The role of words – and who controls the words – in the creation of Villasanta is crucial. Giménez argues that ‘Torrente ha querido llegar a la composición de un mundo regido únicamente por las reglas literarias de la ficción y que encontrará en sí mismo la propia razón de su existencia’ (Torrente has aimed to achieve the composition of a world governed only by the literary rules of fiction, and which will find within itself its own reason for being; Giménez 1981: 84). Loureiro observes that these are spaces created only with words, so that in the original planned ending to the novel it was only the words rather than the city that was destroyed (Loureiro 1990: 233–4). The final version simply sees Villasanta collapse into a pile of dust while the narrator begins to think of something else, but an appendix gives an alternative version:

donde yo había escrito ‘torre’, se desvaneció la torre, y si habia dicho ‘magnolio’, el magnolio se descompuso en tronco, en ramas, en hojas, en flores, que, a su vez, se quebrantaron y dejaron volar los elementos constitutivos, así los sonoros como los gráficos, pero de tal manera descoyuntados que por un lado iba el sonido y por otro el signo escrito, de suerte que el A no correspondía con el A, definitivamente separados. (Torrente Ballester 1997: 440)

where I had written ‘tower’, the tower disappeared, and if I had said ‘magnolia tree’, the tree divided into trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, which, in their turn, broke up and let their constitutive elements fly away, in the same way the sounds and the letters, but dislocated in such a way that the sound went one way and the written sign the other, so that A did not correspond to A, definitively separated.

Like words, geography too can collapse and be emptied of meaning. Gómez-Pérez for her part argues that the author is ‘always insisting that the existence of this entire world depends directly on his own will and word’ (Gómez-Pérez 2005: 109); an insistence, ultimately, that Torrente himself has control of his spaces. The novel itself confirms all these ideas in the key phrase: ‘Nada de lo que escribo ni de lo que he escrito tiene que ver con la realidad. Su espacio es mi imaginación ...’ (Nothing of what I am writing nor of what I have written has anything to do with reality. Its space is my imagination; Torrente Ballester 1997: 33). The last sentence confirms the crucial role of the author’s or narrator’s mind in the creation of space: but the notion that such space has nothing to do with reality is also intriguing, particularly as regards the temptation to equate Villasanta’s cathedral with the real cathedral at Santiago de Compostela, perhaps the best-known Galician landmark. The desire for control over space
and time together and the possibility of controlling meaning are akin to the desire to forget, rewrite or even unwrite: but Galicia continues to haunt the process. Nil Santiáñez Tió in his preface to the Destino edition of the novel argues that the narrator/secret agent ‘construye un laberinto de palabras para encerrarse en él y esconderse así de sus perseguidores’ (constructs a labyrinth of words in order to shut himself up in it and thus hide from his pursuers). And ‘el laberinto que es la novela tiene como objetivo refugiar a su narrador’ (the labyrinth that is the novel aims to give its narrator refuge; Torrente Ballester 1997: lii). This reminds us of Torrente’s retreat into his own fiction as posited by Gómez-Pérez. But the spectre of Galicia traces itself in the labyrinth: the trace of a real location means that the labyrinth is possibly locatable and thus not a total refuge.

Santiáñez Tió notes that the labyrinth ensures that no one has a stable point of reference for orientation (Torrente Ballester 1997: liv), and the notion that stable points of reference are missing points towards the problems of mapping and navigation that we will encounter in La rosa de los vientos. The lack of referents recurs when the narrator discovers that someone else is invading and using his narration – a reminder that the desire for association with a specific space or place is not monolithic but can relate to a variety of different purposes on the part of different subjects. But it is the disappearance of referents to which I wish to draw attention here:

Se nos ofrecían a la vista ciudades incompletas, las que yo había visto o imaginado, y, entre ellas, Villasanta de la Estrella, más que ciudad, fantasma, pues nada en ella había de preciso y claro, ni de ordenado, sino un montón de cosas en espera de que alguien las colocase en su sitio. (Torrente Ballester 1997: 232)

Incomplete cities lay open to our gaze, cities I had seen or imagined, and among them was Villasanta de la Estrella, a ghost more than a city, since nothing in it was clear and exact, nor orderly, but a pile of things waiting for someone to put them in the right place.

This ghosting of Villasanta works both to render it indistinct – lacking specific landmarks whereby one might orientate oneself – but also to remind us that it has a real referent both in the narrator’s own mind and also outside it. Even an imaginary world still needs a sense of place. Thus the narrator draws attention to the idea that even the fictional characters he creates must move through place, and indeed he insists on it. As the anarchists walk through Villasanta for a clandestine meeting, he stresses the different routes they must take (ibid.: 186). Elsewhere, the narrator talks of the possibility of writing out the anarchists’ plans to blow up a church (only to find, when they investigate, that all the churches are worth saving): this will give the narrator a chance ‘de describir indirectamente lugares y rincones’ (to describe indirectly places and corners; ibid.: 335). While the narrator confuses too easy an association of Villasanta
with the real Santiago by listing the latter as one of the cities from which delegates will attend the Villasanta anarchists’ conference (ibid.: 336), the mere naming of Santiago introduces it as a spectre once more, alongside the naming of other real Galician towns which link this imaginary place to a real referent once again. Herzberger observes that Villasanta’s cathedral is ‘a space for play and irony’, an impossible space in which its architect goes forward in time to see it and to bring back its design through time (Herzberger 1995: 125). This playful and impossible space encompasses the whole of Villasanta; but play and irony, too, have little meaning without at least some connection to real referents. Loueiro views this play between imagination and reality as smoke and mirrors (Loueiro 1990: 236), but elsewhere notes, perhaps in contradiction, that imagination does not reign supreme in Torrente’s novels but is counterbalanced by the weight of everyday reality (ibid.: 68). But perhaps the strongest encapsulation of the play between imagination and real referents comes with Torrente’s own description of Santiago’s cathedral: ‘El ser de Compostela es este hacerse y deshacerse en juego interminable’ (The essence of Compostela is this creation and dissolution in a never-ending game; Torrente Ballester 1998: 21).

When Wylie, as mentioned in the opening chapter, talks of landscape writing he is emphasising the importance of the subject and of personal referents in engaging with landscape, space and place. Torrente’s two towns suggest the possibility of landscape un-writing as well as landscape writing, which in turn implies the crucial nature of subjectivity. They are pliable imaginary spaces that bend to the needs of the subject, but that subject cannot but draw in turn on ideas that correspond to real referents. These are spaces of forgetting and of retreat, of detachment from the real Spain and its real history; but the trace of Galicia to be found in both Castroforte and Villasanta suggest a semi-detached position that once again evokes Spain as both the place to retreat from and the place with which a final, total rupture suggests the trauma of being unable to come to terms with the less pleasant ghosts of the past.

**Mapping in La rosa de los vientos**

Having briefly considered spatial aspects in these two major novels in Torrente’s work, I now turn to a lesser-known novel, La rosa de los vientos, which has as it settings one of those imaginary countries suggested by the narrator of Fragmentos, a country that cannot be located on any map. The protagonist of La rosa is the Gran Duque Ferdinando, now in exile, having been deposed from power after his cousin, the great imperialist el Águila del Este (the Eagle of the East), conquered his land. From his exile Ferdinando reflects on the events that led to his loss of power, basing his tale on a variety of documents which may or may not be authentic. In her essay on the novel, Pérez suggests that Torrente is
undermining our usual reliance on documented history: she observes the diffi-
culty in establishing not only the historical events but also the probable falsity
of many, if not all, of the documents on which the story is based (Pérez 1989:
81–2). Pérez’s essay aims to tease out the instability of memory, the falsification
of documentary evidence, the fact that history is written by the winners and not
by the losers, such as el Gran Duque, and the fact that chroniclers have their own
biases and predispositions.

But this instability applies to geography, too, and the geographical parallel
to documentary evidence on which history is based is the act of cartography,
of mapping. If we cannot trust historical documents, why should we trust
in geographical data? With this dilemma we return once again to the lack of
geographical fixity to be found in Torrente’s work, and in this light it is worth
first considering the relevance of the novel’s title, La rosa de los vientos, or the
compass rose, which immediately brings to mind ideas of ships and the sea, of
navigation – of geographical movement. The compass suggests simultaneously
fixed points whereby location can be pinpointed, and the freedom of movement,
of navigating, between these points. It is, not incidentally, worth remembering
that the ideas of north, south, east and west that the compass brings to mind
are to some extent in the mind and location of the beholder (thus reintroducing
once more the importance of the subject): for me, for instance, writing this in
the north of England, Spain is a country to the south, while for someone in
Africa or Australia, it is to the north. The cardinal points are in fact mutable
terms. Given all this it is surprising that Pérez does not realise the significance
of the novel’s title and the notion of geographical mutability. She observes the
significance of the wind as a motif in Torrente’s novels, and says,

Wind and compass are ... both symbolically related to creation, a coincidence
which is interesting primarily in relation to the novel’s title, for while wind is
fairly important in La rosa de los vientos, the compass is not; there is only one
allusion to it, in the context of a ghostly procession ‘viniendo de las calles que
confluyen, casi tantas como los rumbos de la Rosa’. (Pérez 1989: 83)

Pérez sees the symbol of the compass rose in terms of history:

History is ‘la rosa de los vientos’, pointing first one direction and then another,
depending, perhaps, which hand is on the helm. Both the ‘rosa de los vientos’
and history are supposed to orient or guide, yet various accidents can cause them
to go awry (from a change in magnetic fields to a change of influences on the
historiographer). (Pérez 1989: 95)

But geographical data, too, can go awry even as it is supposed to orientate us. As
we shall see, Torrente leads us to doubt geography and maps, until ultimately
the novel hints at an absence at the heart of the geographical enterprise:
nothingness. The compass points north or south but navigational data dissolve
until eventually the compass is pointing at nothing. Furthermore, however, the
compass rose becomes a symbol of resistance to dominant ideologies: a notion that is at first blush anachronistic as regards a formerly Falangist writer. In that space of nothingness new countries and spaces might be created that do not appear on any map, but where there is room for ‘us’ as in No yo soy yo, as opposed to a ‘real’ Spain where there might be no room for a former Falangist.

The compass and the map are vital tools in navigation: if the compass indicates direction, the map gives us fixed points towards which we move. But cartography is not necessarily an objective science: as James Corner has commented:

The experiences of space cannot be separated from the events that happen in it; space is situated, contingent and differentiated. It is remade continuously every time it is encountered by different people, every time it is represented through another medium, every time its surroundings change, every time new affiliations are forged. (Corner 1999, 227)

That is to say, the meaning of a place changes according to who lives there or uses that place, how the place is used, and how it is represented. Geography is not simply a question of scientific data but also a question of political and social concepts and situations that require human, sociopolitical negotiation (the subject, once more). In this sense geography is a mental as much as a physical entity, and as such it is something we can actively create ourselves according to our needs and desires – and create it anew should those needs and desires change. There are alternative geographies and alternative cartographies: a geographical mutability. As Frieda Hilda Blackwell has observed, a total divorce from external reality is not possible, but the writer has the right or even the responsibility to create new, maybe obscure, realities that have not yet come into being (Blackwell 1985: 13). Loureiro, too, writes of Torrente’s sufficient reality or ‘realidad suficiente’, which corresponds to the minimum of necessary facts that allow the imagination to operate. In consequence: ‘[e]l fetichismo de la realidad referencial queda así eliminado en beneficio del autor y del lector’ (the fetishisation of the referential real is thus eliminated for the benefit of writer and reader; Loureiro 1990: 27, italics mine).

The link between geography and the imagination is also to be found in the links posited by Edward Said between imperialism and geography:

If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination. (Said 1993: 271)
Conquest changes the meaning of the land: as Ferdinando says, ‘mi país ya no es siquiera un país, sino una parte olvidada del de mi primo’ (My country is not even a country any more, but a forgotten part of my cousin’s; Torrente Ballester 1993: 28). In Said’s terms, Ferdinando can only recover his country through his imagination, and the readers of La rosa are witnesses to the (re-)creation of his land in his imagination. His country – never named – has disappeared as a distinct geographical entity, which means that fixed points, whether towns, cities or countries, are still susceptible to change depending on who perceives them and also who names them. The invasion by Ferdinando’s cousin el Águila del Este is a form of colonialism; and Ferdinando must attempt to recuperate his geographical identity in order to recuperate his history. Given his condition of exile, the imagination is the only way in which he can do this: Said says, 

To the anti-imperialist imagination, our space at home in the peripheries has been usurped and put to use by outsiders for their purpose. It is therefore necessary to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover a third nature, not pristine and pre-historical … but deriving from the deprivations of the present. The impulse is cartographic. (Said 1993: 272)

Said is here contrasting ‘third nature’ to ‘second nature’ or what is instinctive. Invention in this case is therefore not a natural impulse but a deliberate and necessary act demanded by a lack of power. What we have in La rosa de los vientos is Ferdinando’s mental creation of an alternative geography and cartography opposed to the imperialism of el Águila del Este, an opposition that derives, as Said says, from the deprivations of the present, of exile. It entails the recuperation and restoration of a geographical identity that, given the historical moment of exile, can only exist in the imagination.

If, as in the first citation from Said, the imperial impulse is to explore and register every corner of the world, then a primary act of rebellion is the fact that no information in La rosa is given that allows us to identify and locate Ferdinando’s country. The first reference to this geographical uncertainty can be found in the novel’s prologue, in which the ‘author’ (is this Torrente or not?) refers to the death of an anonymous old woman:

Se pusieron telegramas a Lisboa, de allí se ordenó su embalsamiento, alguien vino un día con poder, metieron el féretro en el tren, y se dijo que la habían trasladado a su tierra, en un país septentrional, donde la habían enterrado en un rincón de una catedral luterana. (Torrente Ballester 1993: 11)

They sent telegrams to Lisbon, from there they ordered her embalming, one day someone arrived with authorisation, they put the coffin on the train, and it was said she was transferred to her own country, a northern country, where she was buried in a corner of the Lutheran cathedral.

We may suspect that the woman in question is Ferdinando’s daughter Myriam (even though he denies he is her real father); but her country has no name.
Torrente tells us only that it is in the north, and Lutheran (while the northern reference might put us in mind of Galicia, Lutheran does not). But there are still real reference points with the mention of Lisbon; and later Portugal is mentioned as well, a country we can locate on a map. However, the manuscript’s donor asks that Ferdinando’s country not be named: ‘si alguna vez lo publica, cambie los nombres de las personas y trastrueque los de los lugares hasta llegar a situarlo en un país indefinido’ (if one day you publish it, change people’s names and change round the place names so as to site them in an undefined country; Torrente Ballester 1993: 12). The prologue’s author immediately warns us that the author of the manuscript might have changed the place names, and refuses to tell us in the prologue if he himself has also changed the names or not. All this suggests from the outset that geographical data are not to be trusted.

Ferdinando gives us some facts about his country but not enough to identify it: it is surrounded by sea on almost all sides (ibid.: 26), and Portugal is closer than the French Riviera (ibid.: 29–30). This space sounds very much like Spain itself, but then Spain has an imperial past far removed from the status of imperial victim suffered by this country. Pérez (1989: 80–1) believes the country to be a blending of Galicia, Norway, Denmark and possibly Luxemburg, but does not observe the crucial point that the country cannot be identified with any single one of these. Ferdinando’s capital likewise has no name, despite its supposed renown: ‘famosa por sus canales, por sus galerías orientadas al oeste, por sus escasas, aunque incomparables, puestas de sol’ (famous for its canals, its galleries facing west, its rare but incomparable sunsets; Torrente Ballester 1993: 90–1). Its fame rests on a geographical basis through ideas to do with navigation: the canals, the west and the sunsets – but it lacks a name that enables us to locate it. The lack of fixed points in Ferdinando’s memory is a form of disremembering or even forgetting, a form of ludic resistance against the imperialist impulse of el Águila. The territory that the latter thinks to control and dominate, evaporates and evolves into nothingness: it is not named and is thus forgotten. What does seem clear, however, is that this is territory that Ferdinando evokes through memory and shapes to his own needs or desires: ‘No deja de ser curioso que yo sea el señor del espacio y del tiempo infinitos, aunque mi señorío no vaya más allá de un salón calentito’ (It is still odd that I am the lord of infinite space and time, even if my rule goes no further than a nice warm living room; ibid.: 74–5). This demonstrates the ironic invocation of memory even through forgetting: Ferdinando regains power once more precisely through space and time, while nonetheless the actual limit of his space is the room of his exile. Through his control of space he ‘forgets’ his historical situation even as it continues to pertain. The control of territory, even through the mind alone, allows one to forget.
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The map

But if Ferdinando’s country lacks fixed points, it nonetheless has its maps. If Wittgenstein talks of a country for which we have no maps (quoted in Casey 2002: 129), La rosa de los vientos deals with maps for which we have no country. When Ferdinando and his friend Fritz, Baron Cronstadt, recreate battles with their tin soldiers, a map features as a tool in their war games (Torrente Ballester 1993: 53), and the idea of the map reappears in a note to Ferdinando from his agent Paulus:

Pues, ayer, cuatro gatos salieron gritando que viva el Emperador, y que esto y que lo otro: traían un cartel muy grande en el que podíamos ver el Águila Imperial comiéndose un pajarillo en cuyo cuerpo habían escrito el nombre de nuestra Patria, y otro, mayor aún, en el que habían pintado el mapa del Imperio, con las provincias que tiene y con las que no tiene todavía: entre éstas, nosotros. Nos habían puesto como si navegásemos perdidos en la mar y el Imperio saliese a rescatarnos. (Torrente Ballester 1993: 160)

So, yesterday, four cats appeared crying long live the Emperor, and this and that: they carried a large placard on which we could see the Imperial Eagle eating up a small bird on the body of which was written the name of our country; and an even bigger one on which was painted the map of the Empire, with the provinces it governs and the ones it does not as yet, ourselves among the latter. They positioned us as if we were sailing lost at sea, and the Empire were coming to rescue us.

In both cases the salient point for my argument here is the relation between the map, war and imperialism. As Said suggests, imperialism just as much as resistance to it can be understood as a cartographic impulse; and in these two examples we can see the map as both the symbol of imperial conquest and also the (imaginary) resistance to it in the war games of Ferdinando and Fritz. We should also notice that Ferdinando’s undefined country figures on both maps. Thus Torrente gives us a map, which is arguably a definition, of an undefined country.

The last sentence of the citation above links the imperial impulse to cartography and navigation. An empire can, apparently, ensure safe navigation: it reorients those who are lost. Navigation is, however, something else that Ferdinando causes us to doubt. While there may be maps, without fixed points of location neither the navigator nor the reader can find out where they are. Ferdinando’s cartographic resistance is one of absences: his country’s maps are maps of nothing. Ferdinando’s erasure of location and points of orientation on his maps is a gesture of forgetting similar to the dissolving landscape of Villasanta and the disappearing town of Castroforte.
The compass rose

We noted previously that it was not only the map but also the compass that aided in navigation. The compass rose allows us to orientate ourselves in relation to the cardinal points. We find many references to north, south, east and west in the novel, the last two with a particular reference to sunrise and sunset. But within Ferdinando’s country we never see the sun: the constant rain blocks it out. Given this situation, the compass is the only aid to navigation, given that the sun cannot be relied on to provide the cardinal points. But the compass rose also comes to mean an absence, because, if fixed points cannot be identified the cardinal points become mere abstractions, objects of veneration, cult, ritual and obsession through their very absence, as we see above all in the beautiful closing image of the novel: the city’s entire population, including the Grand Duke, looking with veneration at the rare sight of a sunset by the sea. The moment is a ceremonial one of unity (everyone must pass through a door called la Puerta de los Dioses, or the Gate of the Gods, a gate which has lost the building to which it was formerly attached):

El sol ya iba cayendo, y el cielo rosa se encendía: también la mar, allá, en la lejanía en que se le juntaba el cielo. Poco a poco dejó de hablar la gente en alto, y todo el mundo miraba hacia el Oeste, hacia aquel medallón dorado, pero un poco rojizo, que se movía hacia la curva del horizonte de su muerte. A nosotros se nos respeataba el privilegio de poderlo mirar como enmarcado por la gran Puerta, pero no estoy seguro de que fuese de verdad un privilegio. El horizonte sin límites, el sol señor, los colores que se van espesando como una niebla que el sol empieza a atravesar, y el movimiento lejano de las olas, nada de eso cabe dentro de un marco. (Torrente Ballester 1993: 292–3).

The sun was already setting, and the sky was lighting up pink: the sea, too, in the distance where it met the sky. Gradually people stopped talking aloud, and everyone looked westward, to that golden medallion, but slightly reddened, which moved towards the horizon of its setting. We [the Ducal Family] were allowed the privilege of being able to look at it through the frame of the great gate, but I am not sure it was really a privilege. The limitless horizon, the solitary sun, the colours thickening like a fog that the sun started to pierce, and the far-off movement of the waves, none of this fits within a frame.

This veneration of the west, and of the points of the compass more generally, can be seen elsewhere in the novel: in the joy of crew members on Guntel’s ship on knowing that they are facing west, a joy Guntel likens to arrival in Paradise (Torrente Ballester 1993: 82); Guntel’s own poem that begins ‘¿Por qué seguís al sol cuando se muere?’ (Why do you follow the sun when it sets?), and which likens navigation of a form of transcendence – ‘ir más allá’ (ibid.: 192); and Ferdinando’s commentary on the poem that refers to an anxious desire to see the sun set, and the embrace of the setting sun’s rays on those who were born
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in his land (ibid.: 191). The link of reverential ecstasy and Paradise with the west offers an implicit opposition to the imperial power of the east, a resistance situated outside the mapped imperial territory. Thus the impulse to resistance leads to an aspiration for transcendence, a desire that expresses itself in geographical terms and above all in a desire for navigation. It is a search for another land beyond this one, a land that has room for ‘us’. The blurring of compass points, and the veneration for the west, is set against the imperial power of the east and thus suggests a refusal to accept the history that is now being written, echoing the forgetting of a history that is now being rewritten of Spain, in which the old order is dismissed. If, as Wylie posited, landscape, space and place are those with which we see, what space and place offer to us here is a lack of fixity and the disappearance of recognisable landmarks and coordinates. But in Rose’s formulation we see a call to care (as suggested by the veneration) for a lost country, a country remembered in preference to a prevailing order which is ignored.

Navigation

We therefore have a lack of fixed geographical points and in consequence a compass rose that points to nothing (and simultaneously to transcendence, the desire to go beyond). These, taken together, suggest an incapacity to navigate. But throughout the novel we find constant references to the importance of navigation and the sea in the daily life of Ferdinando’s country. Torrente’s description of the city evokes an idea of the sea as essential and inevitable in the citizens’ lives:

La cuidad la cruzan canales y brazos de mar, la mar penetra, las casas asoman a las ondas sus ventanas y balcones, y por todo lugar navegable se nos meten los barcos de todos los calados y de todas las banderas, de modo que al abrir las vidrieras por la mañana, siempre hay una fragata o un bergantín cuyos penoles se acercan familiarmente o pasan de largo como gente de trato. (Torrente Ballester 1993: 37).

The city is criss-crossed by channels and arms of the sea, the sea penetrates it, the windows and balconies of the houses look out on to the waves, and boats of all depths and under all flags enter in by any navigable way, so that when you open your shutters in the morning there is always a frigate or a brig whose yardarms come familiarly close or pass by like old acquaintances.

But with the advent of the new Empire the sea plays a more and more remote role in the daily life of the country. In his first letter Guntel describes what to him is the mystery of a ship and of a maritime voyage, ending his description with the phrase: ‘el mundo está lleno de cosas que nosotros ignoramos’ (the world is full of things we don’t know; Torrente Ballester 1993: 79). Ultimately Ferdinando’s country is beginning to forget its identity and its traditional
customs, as the anonymous writer observes in giving us a final image of the ship of the phantasmal gods as a final memory or trace of a maritime past which is becoming more alien (ibid.: 284). But the loss of the sea renders it more desirable. Navigation is the encounter with the map, its concretisation realised through the compass rose. Thus navigation is also an attempt to recuperate geography and make it concrete. As Said says, geographical identity has to be looked for if it is to be recuperated, and so once again navigation is a desire to go beyond, an attempt to realise a desire for transcendence. But there is, moreover, a tension at the heart of the map and the compass rose. Both indicate the fixed nature of places, but at the same time the possibility for navigation and thus fluid movement and instability. As Denis Cosgrove says, 'The map’s pretence to stable, uniform and smoothly mobile knowledge depends upon inherently unstable, uneven, fragmentary, specifically positioned and haphazardly transferred information' (Cosgrove 1999: 11–12). The compass rose becomes a symbol of constant oscillation between the imperialist tendency to stasis and the impulse to resist it, and likewise a symbol of the desire for transcendence and ultimately for nothingness. The compass rose suggests an ever frustrated desire to make concrete an absence. Geography, symbolised by the compass rose, becomes an impossible object of desire, represented by the sunset ceremony at the end of the novel. Geography, like history, is mutable: stasis and movement, empire and resistance. In the end, as Pérez says, it depends whose hand is on the wheel.

There is thus a desire for association, a desire to belong, but to a place that becomes out of reach. Maps of the impossible place suggest resistance to the prevailing order at the same time that it assumes the impossibility of resisting: the remaking and unmaking of maps, just like the refashioning and ultimately unmaking of Castroforte and Villasanta, imply the resistance to prevailing history and the call to care for another way of being and thus the creation of an imaginary space in which this subjectivity can be fully realised, thus acting as a place of forgetting of and retreat from the real geography and real history of Spain. The spaces and places of Torrente’s work are the ways in which we see Torrente’s attitudes to history made manifest, his alignment with myth rather than history because, as Labanyi observers, myth-makers ‘revel in the potentially infinite proliferation of variant versions offered by myth, as opposed to central authority’s “scientific” insistence on imposing a “single” truth’ (Labanyi 1989: 216). Torrente’s imaginary geographies evade the strictures of ‘real’ history: they are calls to care for a country where he can belong, and he can forget the current rewriting of history.

But that country is not totally divorced from recognisably Spanish territory. Spanish geographical referents become the spectral presence that mean that forgetting, too, is ultimately impossible in Torrente’s work. If the spaces and
places show us the possibility of escape, they also show the starting point from where Torrente begins: the rainy landscapes of Galicia that haunt his work. It is clear from the opening passages of *La rosa* quoted above that Ferdinando’s country is not simply to be equated with Galicia, but the rain and the fog, the difficulties of seeing the sun, the link to navigation, all invoke a potential link with Galicia similar to the towns of Castroforte and Villasanta. These landscapes all share with Galicia the slippery and ludic tendencies identified by Torrente in his own description of his homeland quoted above. We have a compass and maps, and we can navigate around this land, but it is an ambiguous land where maps and compasses may ultimately point to nothingness, to the uncertainties of geography as well as history – and yet where we still may find an impulse to attempt to map the imaginary lands on to a real Galicia and a real Spain. We cannot in the end say whether or not we are talking about Galicia – but then in that sense we must be talking about Galicia, since that uncertainty is in the end the essence of the place. And Galicia in its semi-detachedness thus invokes Spain; it both is and is not of Spain, but in its indeterminacy it inevitably calls to mind the impossible ‘certainty’ of Spain. To conclude, I would refer back to my introductory chapter and the reference there to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s fairytale map of Spain. He exclaims at the magically transformed space, rethought and reimagined through the encouragement of his teacher. But in the final instance it is still a map of Spain and it still evokes the notion of ‘Spain’, however like a fairyland it looks: its rivers are still clearly marked. At the end of *La rosa* Ferdinando comments that one should not forget that his is a country of navigators (Torrente Ballester 1993: 293) and concludes, ‘olvidarlo aquí, me dejaría en los labios ese sabor amargo del que se calla la verdad porque no la juzgan decente’ (forgetting it here would leave in my mouth that bitter taste of one who suppresses the truth because they don’t find it decent; ibid.: 294). Forgetting, in the final analysis, is impossible.

**Note**

1. This author is, incidentally, also the author of the series of Petra Delicado novels (under the name of Alicia Giménez Bartlett) that I will discuss in Chapter 6.
2. I am using the second edition of *La rosa* published by Destino in 1993, and Pérez’s citation from the novel appears on p. 171 of this edition. Translated, the citation means: ‘coming from the converging streets, almost as many as the points of the compass’.