

Some may be disappointed, therefore, that the book's last section presents two visions of the long-term conservation of the hills' prairie ecology as it existed prior to Euroamerican habitation. Perhaps such a prescription focuses too narrowly on only one aspect of the hills' uniqueness to the exclusion of human history. Since Euroamericans have been and continue to be part of the ongoing environmental history of these hills, it seems important to consider, from the multi-dimensional perspective offered in *Fragile Giants*, how both nature and culture can be accommodated in planning for the Loess Hills of tomorrow. If art and the humanities, including history, can contribute to our understanding of the Loess Hills and its past, can they not enhance our contemplation of this distinctive area's future?

*Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, by Kent C. Ryden. American Land and Life Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993. xvi, 326 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

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For artists, "place" evokes more than the pattern of directions between map coordinates. Nebraska author Wright Morris expanded our sense of place and the meaning of "literature" in his 1948 montage of photographs whose internal composition as much as sequential arrangement contributed to a narrative ("pattern") of place greater than the photographs or accompanying text alone. Thus we have "photo essays" as literary genre—dramatic and historical compositions of word and picture.

Kent C. Ryden's *Mapping the Invisible Landscape* argues that land is story, and its representations in maps, signs, boundaries, folklore, oral history, and literature are points of excursion into the vastness of the human "sense" of place, a deep structure of meanings layered in the natural and human intersections that occur there over time. The "invisible landscape" is land in the imagination, the cognitive maps of those who daily negotiate it, a living dialogue between land, sense, and action. Place is the foundation for an architecture of myth, imagination, and behavior. It drives the local view of the world. Invisible to outsiders passing through, to insiders the cognitive landscape is richly constructed.

Ryden endeavors to be the translator. He surveys maps, surveyors, and the literature of place, defining a taxonomy of disciplinary relations to landscape. To his bibliographic essay he adds oral histories gathered from mining towns, revealing the many constructions of place over time. Some constructions characterize a regional attitude,

even the world of malls and shopping centers, where tall tales and the folklore of place run freely among video arcades and apartment buildings. "Folklore *vivifies* geography," Ryden says; he also shows that geography contributes to folklore. This continuum of science, folklore, and imagination brings together in his narrative the ancient astronomer/cartographer Ptolemaeus, the literary artists William Faulkner and Barry Lopez, essayists Henry David Thoreau, Wendell Berry, and E. B. White, and the citizens Sverdsten and Noyen of the Coeur d'Alene mining district, for whom the sense of place is profound. Maps themselves are edges of the puzzle. Far from being functional in graphics and data, they "inspire," express "dreams and desire." Some depict geophysical obstacles, others reveal tidy concepts of village and security (from Indians and weather); all reflect areas and landforms that are meaningful or "useless" or insignificant. And although they take on the tautologies of place scientifically, their science is limited to a specific purpose and by the culture of the inhabitants and the mapwriters. What's left out is telling: "We sense we are reaching the edge of our world when we run out of stories to tell about the places we see." *Terra infirma* is *terra incognito*; maps are a measure of ignorance. Ryden thus evokes a humanistic cartography: "Where the map fails," he tells us, "the imagination takes over," a statement that becomes an apology for the thick text of his argument and a testament to its beauty. The narrative tangles in the thicket of oral histories, maps, landforms, and historic accounts—which is the forest and which the trees? Ethnographers strive hard to infer from the process of questioning and sorting a set of distinctions and explanations, but the result of Ryden's method is less a cognitive map of sense than it is a sense of cognitive maps, though it shows powerfully how identity is wed to place.

Overall Ryden argues that the telling and writing of place are more evocative of time, memory, and history than "space" construed in two-dimensional maps, and he shows how some characterizations of place actually organize space instead. Yet place escapes definition. Is description enough? Just as Ryden derives from what mapmakers leave out a truer sense of place, we must do likewise with what Ryden leaves out. Is place a container? A dynamic? An evocation? Representation or symbol? A collection of stories? Defined by insiders or outsiders? A concept so relative that translating itself becomes problematical? Or intersections of all the above? What of the place "told" by tourists—cultural tourism and the problem of authenticity? Finally, what meaning does place have if it combines every meaning, or only the meanings of Mrs. Sverdsten?

Ryden's sources are more literary than geophysical—the "telling" is what counts. Chapters are notable for their anecdotes and intersections, not for sustaining a novel thesis. For what other purpose do we build layer by layer Mrs. Sverdsten's fear of bears? Ryden labels such stories "subgenres" of their author's own sense of place, but they can divide *ad infinitum*, leaving the reader well short of a coherent thesis. He converts maps into folklore, chastising cartographers for reductionism. Yet maps are not poems alone; we would be more lost than Ryden in the soul of place if we were to use Elizabeth Bishop to find our way around Manhattan. It doesn't take a scholar to observe that place cannot be evoked by mapmakers alone, nor have mapmakers felt otherwise.

What we have instead of an argument is a beautiful theme and its variations. The book's weakness and strength are in belaboring the obvious: although there is repetition, there is magnificent resonance in the weaving. Landscape is indeed a web of connectedness—maps, architecture, social history, photography, built environment, attitudes, patterns of use. Scholars of Iowa culture might make more of the conventional coordinates of place than the byproducts of our respective disciplines allow. They will recognize treatment of Michael Martone's essays on place and Douglas Bauer's *Prairie City*. They will find in the weave their own deep landscape, into which any locale, no matter how minute, may serve as a point of entry. Though heavy in literary emphasis, this is nonetheless the best one-volume discussion of the many meanings of place that can be found. By placing scientists, literary artists, and common citizens on the level playing field of place, Kent Ryden has actually given us a far richer map of the unmappable, which is, like Wright Morris's *The Home Place*, a good deal larger than the sum of its parts.

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