

Galleries & Drift

Mapping Undermined Landscapes

Submitted by Pauline Liu-Devereux to the University of Exeter as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, January 2011.

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ABSTRACT

This is a creative/critical project, a collection of narratives inspired by critical discourse that map a local landscape and chart a personal topography. As a result of interdisciplinary study, particularly in the area of cultural geography and map making, I found new ways to explore ideas about Cornwall's heritage, her undermined landscape and expand upon issues raised in my MA dissertation. Recognising the instability and partiality of maps provided insight and mapping became method as newly revealed pathways and subtly shifting perspectives inspired fresh narratives which challenge stereotypical images of Cornwall and reveal the sometimes dark realities of rurality.

The more personal narratives in this collection reveal a different undermined landscape: ideas about romantic constructions and inheritance led to explorations of nostalgia, memory and identity. Life events became life writing and many of these narratives reflect a search for direction and for a missing person: the artist I once was. But there are other disappearances in these narratives and the final chapter gives an account of family events that had to be recorded but which raise ethical questions that life writers cannot ignore. We must take responsibility for the way we write about vulnerable subjects and recognise what this writing tells us about ourselves: that, as Nancy K. Miller has suggested, by exposing our lives to others through life writing, we too become vulnerable subjects.

The essay accompanying these narratives reflects upon process and finds ways of giving an account of the writer writing. It uncovers contemporary theories that are embedded in the narratives and I describe it as an orouboros, a creature that continuously eats its own tail. Like the text it subjects to scrutiny, the essay is a life narrative, an autobiographical act that merges creative and critical thinking and this amalgamation has been my aim since my studies began.