

The Making of a Literary Map

Joyce Kinkead

avid Lee, fondly known in Utah as the “pig poet” for his collection *The Porcine Canticles* (1984), tells the story of his seventh-grade teacher’s poetry assignment from a Texas childhood:

She sent us to the li-berry to find
a pome. We were supposed to
change some words to make it
our pome. I came back with “Hell
hath no fury like a sow with
pigs.” She gave me an F. (Magid
1993, 1)

Today, when David Lee reads one of his pig poems to audiences around the state, they chuckle and applaud.

Many students already know David Lee before he visits their schools for poetry readings because his picture is one of twelve important writers on a poster in their classrooms. Utah is not the only state that has produced a pictorial bibliography of outstanding writers. A Gallery of Literary Maps at recent NCTE conventions demonstrates that more than two dozen state guides depicting notable authors have been created by energetic NCTE state affiliates. (A list is available from NCTE Headquarters; contact Millie Davis, Director of Affiliate and Member Services.)

As with any gallery, the posters vary widely in style—glossy to pen-and-ink. For the Mississippi literary map, a local artist created soft watercolor portraits of writers such as Mary Beth Henley and Eudora Welty blooming from the fertile soil; in contrast, Oregon’s writers, including the late William Stafford, Beverly Cleary, and Chief Joseph are backed by glossy tall timbers. For Utah, the sketches of Edward Abbey and May Swenson pop out from an almost harsh topographical map. Each literary atlas has as its *raison d’être*, though, a celebration and acknowledgement of its writers, famous and not so famous. The maps exist to educate the public—students, teachers, librarians, parents—about the rich cultural resource that lies in the poetry and prose of a region.

Regardless of the level of polish, all of these maps demonstrate an impressive commitment by their creators. The process for

developing literary maps is long and demanding; yet, it can be done, demonstrated by the 27 state maps available. For those who want to undertake this journey and memorialize their state and its authors, this article outlines a possible route, including detours, potholes, and curves. We offer specific advice derived from our own project, *Literary Utah*. In telling this particular story, we believe that others will find it helpful to their creative process.

THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS

In 1988, several English teachers decided to create *A Literary Guide to Utah*, anticipating the state’s centennial (1996), and unveil the product at the Southwest Regional Conference for English Teachers to be held two years later. Initial goals included the following:

- make Utah students more aware of the state’s rich literary history;
- create a map that is visually attractive and can be used in schools, libraries, media centers, and bookstores;
- compile an annotated bibliography for use by teachers;
- include “literature” from the first discovery of the area, including Native American stories as well as exploration and travel narratives.

To avoid reinventing the wheel, we contacted map project directors in other states for advice—Betty Whitlock of Mississippi, Ulrich H. Hardt of Oregon, Jean Copland of Georgia—and purchased literary maps from as many states as possible, using the NCTE Catalog as a guide.

QUESTIONS FOR THE MAP MAKERS

With this information in hand, the Utah Council of Teachers of English met to discuss the idea of sponsoring a guide to the state’s literature. Everyone thought the map a worthy project, but there were questions. 1) Who will design the map? Should UCTE sponsor a contest among students and/or teachers in the state to create the map and/or guide, or would it be better to retain a professional graphic designer or artist? 2) Who will publish the guide and/or map? Our op-

The author offers a guide to literary map makers.

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tions seemed to be a university press, copy center, or professional printing company. 3) What are the criteria for inclusion on the map or in the guide? How will we deal with “self-published” authors? What are the restrictions for inclusion? Should the works be limited to certain genres such as drama, poetry, fiction, and creative literary essays? In Utah, we faced the particular problem of how to deal with spiritual works, especially biographies of church leaders. 4) How will we locate names and works of state authors, and can we get students and teachers involved? 5) Who will pay for the project and should we charge a fee? 6) How will the guide be organized? By community? Genre? Reading level (children’s, YAL, adult)? 7) How will the final product be distributed, and how can we make sure every English classroom has a copy? 8) How might we offend?

A PLAN EMERGES

Through conversations among English teachers, a plan emerged. We would request from each community a list of its writers so the guide could be organized by town, creating a sense of ownership and pride. Authors’ names would be cross-referenced in an index. The state English journal seemed a likely place to publish the bibliographic guide to save printing costs. By this time, the Council was firmly committed to two products: the map and the bibliographic guide. One of the most important decisions was that the bibliographic guide would be *inclusive* (as many works as possible) whereas the map would be *exclusive*, depicting those authors who best represent the state.

The work of getting teachers across the state on board began with the annual fall conference. Using the theme of “Put Utah Writers on the Map,” the Council distributed flyers via professional meetings, the State Office of Education, superintendents, the Council’s newsletter, and the press, asking for input from teachers, students, and the public. Those responding to the call received information on the scope of the guide, sources for finding state writers, and format. The editors for the project wanted works not only written by Utahans but also works set in Utah. A deadline of six months prior to the unveiling was set. Teachers were urged to use this as a classroom project to

increase their students’ awareness of local writers. The reward would be a listing of contributors’ names in the guide.

Simultaneously, financial support was solicited from the Utah Endowment for the Humanities and a state university. The former awarded the Council a mini-grant of \$1,500 while the latter supplied \$5,000 to meet the rest of the financial goal. These funds, coupled with donated time from scholars, teachers, and students from around the state, meant that the Council did not spend any of its own budget on the project. Other potential funding sources discussed but not used included private foundations and corporations.

Early on, the project leaders approached various graphic artists—students in university graphic arts courses, art professors, commercial artists—to discuss the project, settling finally on a graphic artist who enjoys working with a limited budget as a design factor. This artist added ideas for increased publicity through tie-ins such as bookmarks, postcards, and calendars.

SOURCES OF AUTHORS’ NAMES

Gathering the names for the guide and deciding who would be pictured on the map proved an arduous task. Experts knowledgeable of state writers were consulted, especially those at the Utah Arts Council, which sponsors an annual original writing competition, as well as university creative writing professors. In point of fact, anyone in contact with the project editors was asked, “Who are the Utah writers you know and recommend?” No one was safe. In faculty lounges, during parties, and in grocery store aisles, friends and acquaintances were queried, yielding names such as Claire Huffaker, known as a screenwriter for John Wayne films but also author of *The Cowboy and the Cossack*, a novel about 15 American cowboys and 15 Russian cossacks riding herd in 1880 Siberia. Younger informants clued us in to the popularity of John D. Fitzgerald’s *Great Brain* series.

Newspapers and magazines—especially the Sunday Arts section—yielded information about authors’ readings and current publications. In these pages, we first found Pamela Houston, a Park City resident who won second place in a 1989 contest for a short-story collection; in a few years, she has

UTAH ENGLISH JOURNAL 1994

★ "This is the native home of hope." WALLACE STEGNER ★

LITERARY

LITERARY UTAH
reflects a surprising diversity and number of poets, dramatists, novelists, and essayists. The terrain includes writers who were born in the state, resided here, or set their work here.

"This window into the past grows in value with the passing years." JUANITA BROOKS "Paradoxical Utah!" MAURINE WHIPPLE

"The desert is a vast world, an oceanic world, as deep in its way and complex and various as the sea." EDWARD ABBEY

"We take the rim trail, crushing bloom of sage, sniffing resinous wind, our boots in the wild, small, everycolored Rocky Mountain flowers."
From "The Last" by Max Davidson

UTAH

"some people back home was so poor they eat rabbits ever night for supper so long their kids would run under the porch and hide ever time they heard the dog bark..."
From "The Last" by Max Davidson

UTAH COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

The cover of the 1994 Utah English Journal (reproduced above) featured the map of "Literary Utah." Photos on p. 68 and p. 69 are from an exhibit of literary maps shown at recent NCTE conventions.

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moved to national prominence for her *Cowboys Are My Weakness*.

One of our best sources was a poet and friend who made a game out of enumerating as many writers as possible, coming up with over 100 names. Sherlockian visits to bookstores found us taking notes about the contents of shelves marked "Utah Authors" or "Local Interest." The subject index of the library included a tab for "Utah Writers" and proved especially fruitful for one entry, a 1957 thesis, "Utah Writers of the Twentieth Century: A Reference Tool," and within it lists of authors once popular but largely forgotten—Montgomery Meigs Atwater, for instance, a resident of Alta who used the alpine setting in the 1949 *Avalanche Patrol*. In libraries' special collections or archives were placed works by state authors, another gold mine.

Other reference books may vary by region. For Utah, we looked to *A Literary History of the American West*, especially chapters on "Mormon Literature," "The Rocky Mountains," "Wallace Stegner," and "Vardis Fisher"; *Utah's History* (sections on the arts); *Utah: A Guide to the State*; and Pulitzer-Prize winning author Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's "Fictional Sisters" in *Mormon Sisters*. Catalogs from regional university presses often

included some literary works, such as the University of Utah's *Bones*, a novel by Franklin Fisher.

One of the best sources was a university class in Young Adult Literature in which each student took on the task of contributing author information, targeting one town—often a hometown. As future teachers, these students assiduously interviewed residents, visited local libraries, and compiled annotated bibliographies. One such student surveyed literature of the state for appropriate quotes to be used on the border of the map, arriving at Wallace Stegner's "this is the native home of hope," among others. Much of the research fell on the editors' shoulders, though, who spent weekends perusing *Books in Print* to find up-to-date information on authors. A CD-ROM version eventually made this task much easier.

SELECTING THE AUTHORS

Only a couple of months before the unveiling, 300 names—mostly with titles—were accumulated. With this information, we confirmed who the "big twelve" would be—those authors pictured on the map. Our goal was to ensure balance in regional representation, gender, time period, and ethnicity. Given that ninety percent of the





state's population lives within a 100-mile radius of Salt Lake City, placing authors around the entire state was difficult.

The final twelve include six male and six female authors, the earliest of these being Zane Grey, who set several of his early 20th-century westerns in the Utah desert, most notably *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Utah's homogeneous population does not lend itself to diversity, and one of our greatest disappointments in the final guide is its lack of literature by American Indians. Given that the map would be displayed in classrooms, we emphasized, too, authors of children's and young adult literature: Margaret Rostkowski, author of *Remember the Dancing Days*; Ivy Ruckman, *Night of the Twisters*; Barbara Williams, *Brigham Young and Me, Clarissa*; Dean Hughes, creator of the *Nutty* and *Lucky* series. Finding photographs for the twelve authors proved somewhat difficult; in fact, although our original list of twelve included John D. Fitzgerald, creator of the popular *Great Brain* stories set in 19th-century Adenville, Utah, and featuring the "smartest 10-year-old schemer west of the Mississippi," he eventually had to be replaced as the only photograph available was a baby picture. Besides the pictures of the twelve, listed on the sides of the state atlas

are the names of 100 other authors, organized by town.

DIFFICULTIES

Although this description may seem to indicate that the process of compiling the guide and designing the map proved easy and proceeded at a leisurely and logical pace, nothing could be less true. The pot-holes in our path were many.

First, we found that teachers often could not find time in an all-too-crowded curriculum to initiate a classroom project to root out local authors. Several of them did the research on their own; the one who immediately comes to mind is a teacher from Delta who identified literature growing out of Japanese internment camps located nearby (e.g., Okubo's *Citizen 13660*). The notion of organizing the guide by town had to be discarded as specific towns could either not be identified, or the authors moved more than once, making choosing a single site difficult. Information on authors, such as birth dates, birthplaces, and death dates, was not consistently submitted. In addition, while early on we decided against listing any self-published works, we eventually found that too restrictive, especially in the case of poets. Finally, we abandoned the notion of using the affili-

ate's English journal as the publishing outlet for the guide and instead produced a separate spiral-bound, 75-page volume.

Although we could not accomplish all of our initial ambitions, goals that we had not foreseen were added. Wanting the bibliographic guide to be pedagogically sound, we solicited lesson plans on Utah works, one on an adolescent novel and one on a May Swenson poem. To our delight, the graphic designer envisioned an information-rich poster, drawing on icons from pioneer primers.

THE UNVEILING

As the unveiling drew near, the Council invited the Governor of the state to officiate at the ceremony in front of an audience of some 400 English teachers. The ink on the print run of 1,000 copies of the map and guide to *Literary Utah* was hardly dry when they arrived at the conference where teachers grabbed 600 of them within minutes. The governor returned to the state capitol with a framed copy. At a reception, four of the authors pictured on the map were honored. Although teachers received the map and guide without cost—a condition of the grant—they could purchase at minimal cost sets of postcards, each set featuring the twelve authors.

The Council's publicity campaign celebrating the completion of *Literary Utah* included radio interviews, press releases, and copies sent to federal and state legislators, the media, Library of Congress, and college libraries. In every communication, the sponsoring agencies were noted and thanked. A lengthy article in the Ogden *Standard-Examiner* recorded author-teacher Margaret Rostkowski's response: "It's a tremendous service to all of us. Just to hold it in your hands and see these 300 or so names, to realize people in little towns all over the state are writing, not just in Salt Lake City." Tom Lyon, editor of the forthcoming state centennial anthology, speculated that "It might surprise people to know just how many significant writers this state has produced or touched. We've taken a back seat to other, better known literary regions."

Within a few months of initial publication, demand was so high that a second, revised edition of the bibliographic guide was printed along with 1,000 more maps, dis-

tributed to each school district by the State Department of Education. Revision of the bibliography has been ongoing since the first edition as the database of authors is updated weekly, often incorporating works from a column begun after the creation of *Literary Utah* called "Utah Under Cover," which appears weekly in the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

The final accounting suggests that total costs, including volunteer work, topped \$10,000. But the rewards were many. Obviously, Utah classrooms feature a visible monument to the state's literary output. The Utah Endowment for the Humanities presented *Literary Utah* with an Award of Merit for its contribution to the state. The map became the official cover for the *Utah English Journal*, beginning with the 1991 issue.

AFTER THE PROJECT

What does a council do for an encore after such a project? The first impulse is to rest. After some time has elapsed, we have considered other projects such as a state journal of children's and young adult writing to encourage the next generation of authors. A special issue of *Utah English Journal* devoted to the pedagogical uses of *Literary Utah* appeared in spring, 1994 (see p. 67 for a photograph of the cover). Although the bibliographic guide identifies a multitude of authors whose works might be used in classes, the Council sees a need to showcase how those works are being used by teachers. Drawing on the *Oregon English Journal* for a model—the literary-map issue is included in the NCTE Catalog—we sent the following brainstorming list to potential contributors for this special thematic state journal:

1. Interviews with Utah authors.
2. Poems by Utah writers.
3. Articles showing how poetry or other genres may be used in the classroom.
4. Articles focusing on specific authors.
5. Articles focusing on an aspect of literary history of the state.
6. Articles focusing on archival literature (e.g., journals, diaries).
7. Articles on the landscape or geography of the state and its influence on literature.
8. Brief teaching ideas that use the map or guide.
9. Articles by Utah writers on "why I write."

10. Autobiographical information on Utah writers (see Gallo's *Speaking for Ourselves*, published by NCTE, for models).
11. Reviews of books.
12. Information about writing competitions.
13. A chronology of Utah literature.
14. Games, crossword puzzles, trivial pursuit—using Utah writers.

In keeping the spotlight on local and regional literature in our classrooms, we offer what Utah writer Juanita Brooks calls “a window into the past,” but we also look to the future in hoping it will inspire young writers whose faces and names will be portrayed on future editions. A literary map is a worthwhile and continuing project for any affiliate to pursue as it keeps pace with its own state's dynamic writers.

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Fires

Robert Wrigley

*Softened by snow and rain, taking
contours of rocks and cheatgrass hummocks,
the thing had lain in the ditch all winter,
a flattened cardboard box blown from a truck.
This side up, it said, and Hotpoint.
April now, and a hundred goldfinches explode
when I open the pickup door, a cellophane
flame,
a ghost of smoke. Tented over the fallen fence,
the box's one corner inclines my way,
and when I lift it, the birds go off again,
all wing-breath and speed, so astonishing
I don't notice the bumble bees stumbling on my
arm.*

*One year ago today, I walked the canyon wall
with my torch—a rope of rags, some kerosene,
a bamboo shaft—
burning the silver weeds away. I loved the
choreography
of fire, playing the wind against the river
and the road, against the black break of soil
I'd scratched the day before.
Standing upwind, at the hot edge of a
just-burned acre,
I hear them first, then saw
two rattlesnakes corkscrewing out of flame into
ash.
Now the neural buds are blossoming,
it is the anniversary of fire. I am lying
in the shade of the pickup, looking up
into the face of my neighbor, who asks
had I seen them, the swallows, he means,
come down like vengeance on the bees.
Got you some, didn't they, he says. He's chewing
tobacco, mudding it up on my wounds.
Behind him the goldfinches arc, like painted
fans
opened and closed in a single snap of the wrist.
Now the smell of diesel fuel, now true smoke
black, sooty, shadow-casing, and the last bee,
come up spinning and going down like a star.*

Robert Wrigley is the Richard Hugo Writer in Residence at the University of Montana in Missoula. His most recent book of poetry is *What My Father Believed* (1991, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press).