

**A classic in human geography: William Bunge's (1971) *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution***

Trevor Barnes  
Department of Geography  
University of British Columbia  
British Columbia  
CANADA

Nik Heynen  
Department of Geography  
University of Georgia, Athens  
Georgia  
USA

That Bill Bunge's *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution* has gone unrecognized as a *classic* in *Progress in Human Geography's* roster of "Classics in human geography" struck us as a problem in need of remedy; an ill in need of cure. Hence, we invited Andy Merrifield and Alison Mountz to join us in a celebratory remediation. The University of Georgia Press is in the process of re-publishing Bunge's book nearly forty years after it was first issued. We expect, maybe even insist, that geographers who haven't yet read the book because either they "missed it" the first time around (and which would now include the majority of the working profession, even the "senior" co-author of this paper), or they couldn't find a copy at the time, to order the new edition (Bunge 2011).

If you do, you will then own a classic. It was hardly an instant classic, though. Pierce Lewis (1973:131) in his review for the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* called *Fitzgerald* a "bitter disappointment." The work was "egregiously awful," "grossly disorganized," "a shoddy undisciplined book" (Lewis 1973: 131-32). Bunge (1974:485) replied, ending his rejoinder with the hope that *Fitzgerald* "will ... age into respectability." It hasn't. But that is why it is now a classic and is being reissued. *Fitzgerald* is a tortured book, controversial, angry, partial, withering, and hyperbolic. It is at the polar end of traditional academic scholarship defined by objectivity, measured judgment, balance, transparent logic, and painstaking documentation. But it is precisely these former qualities, not the latter, that account for the book's creative and political brilliance. Forty years after its publication, *Fitzgerald* remains fresh, energetic, compelling, and relevant. One of Bunge's purposes in *Fitzgerald* was to do human geography differently. He pushed the discipline in a new direction, helping to transform it into something else. If we see *Fitzgerald* differently now compared to when it was written it is because the discipline in which we gave become socialised has significantly altered. *Fitzgerald* helped to change it. We all contain, perhaps more than we would like to think, perhaps more than we would like to know, a little bit of Bunge, a little bit of *Fitzgerald*.

The road to *Fitzgerald* was paved with universal intentions. Bill Bunge was one of Bill "Garrison's Raiders" at the University of Washington Geography Department in the late 1950s (Bunge 1988: ix-xxviii). His Ph.D. thesis, "Theoretical geography" (originally titled "Fundamental geography"), showed that all geographical phenomena ineluctably succumbed to the universal scientific explanatory principles of Bunge's favourite kind of mathematics, geometry. In a 1959 letter, he wagged his finger at Richard Hartshorne: "*We are achieving universality at the theoretical level.... We are theoretical or fundamental geographers*"<sup>1</sup> (emphasis in the original). With assistance from his father, Bill Senior, and Torsten Hägerstrand, who had visited the University of Washington in 1959, Bunge published in 1962 *Theoretical geography* with Gleerup Press in Lund. 38 years later it was Bunge's first "classic in human geography" (*Progress in Human Geography*, 2000, volume 25 (1)).

The same year *Theoretical Geography* was published, Bunge became an Assistant Professor of Geography at Wayne State University, Detroit. He "moved to the edge of the ghetto redline of Detroit, the Fitzgerald community, a Martin Luther King neighbourhood" (Bunge 1988: xvii). At first the particularities of Fitzgerald took a back seat to the universal as Bunge talked Greek letters and the axioms of Euclid with former, now diasporic, "Raiders" in the back room of a New Brighton, MI, tavern, the once-a-month home of the Michigan Interuniversity Community of Mathematical Geographers (MICMOG). But as America increasingly came apart during the

1960s, so universal more and more lost their grip on Bunge. Even as a “Raider” Bunge had been intensely political, buying a special suit and tie for graduate student picketing in Seattle (Tobler 1998). By the mid-1960s, the situation was much worse. “The Crime had started,” as Bunge (1979:170) wrote.

Selma .... Peace demonstrations in New York, in Washington, Civil Rights demonstrations in Jackson, Mississippi. ... I went to Chicago for the Martin Luther King demonstrations in 1966. While there I stayed in the black ghetto in a hotel at 67<sup>th</sup> and Stony Island. I learned how you have to “get ready to kill the world” to walk across the street to get a corned beef sandwich; ... [A] young black woman, Gwendolyn Warren, from Fitzgerald in Detroit ... was filled with hatred towards me because I did not notice the children being murdered by automobiles in front of their homes or children starving in front of abundant food.

The 1967 riots in Detroit were the turning point. During “the smoke of revolution ... for six days in July 1967, I lived in everyone’s definition of freedom – no state.... [It] had been driven out. ... I was free to think freely, so I did. I wrote a peace book, *Fitzgerald*” (Bunge 1988: xix). Concrete particularities consequently became as important as universal abstractions. From inside Fitzgerald, he began studying the neighbourhood intensively, an area of a square mile. As he wrote to Hartshorne in 1968, “I suppose no square mile has ever been studied as intensively.”<sup>iii</sup>

Along with study went “Geographical Expeditions.” But they were not Expeditions of Empire, or even run-of-the-mill urban geographical field trips. They were neither “a ‘nice’ geography, [n]or a *status quo* geography,” but a geography that “shocks because it includes the full range of human experience on the earth’s surface.... It is also democratic as opposed to an elitist expedition. Local people are to be incorporated as students and as professors. They are not to be further exploited. Their point of view is given first” (Bunge 1969). In that light, in 1968 Bunge with Gwendolyn Warren inaugurated the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI). The DGEI offered free college extension courses to Detroit inner city residents. Sponsored by the University of Michigan, the first course was run in the summer of 1969 with an enrolment of 40, “Geographical aspects of urban planning” (Horvarth 1971:74). Michigan State subsequently took on the sponsorship, expanding the geography offerings, and in 1970 listing courses from ten different departments with an enrolment of over 400. In doing so, DGEI facilitated research by the community in its own neighbourhood for its own ends. That’s what the extension courses were about. They were part of a larger pedagogical project, not to indoctrinate, but to provide pragmatic tools for Fitzgerald residents to get things done, to change their world for the better. Change was to come from within and not outside.

Bunge was pioneering “a peoples’ geography,” participating in grassroots campaigns to recover the inner city for its residents. He was also becoming a public intellectual. In *The Crisis* and *The New York Times* he informed readers about historical problems of racism, and the promise of geography for improving people’s lives (Bunge 1965a; 1965b). In *The Crisis*, he begged for the chance for geographers to use their science for the benefit of society. *Fitzgerald* was part of that same effort at a public appeal, and explaining its coffee-table book like features: its oversized format, pull-out text boxes, big font characters, and he writing broken up by gritty, compelling black and white photographs, arresting figures, and large, easy-to-read maps

For Bunge, the discipline of geography should be engaged in the radically democratic project of providing pedagogical resources to enable suppressed and exploited communities to manage for themselves, to facilitate flourishing geographical lives (Heyman 2007). But for that to happen, geographers needed to change. Fitzgerald showed how. They must go into the field, be involved, and actively connect with the communities they study.

Needless to say, Bunge's position was not well received. He was fired from Wayne State in 1969. He went to Canada, driving a cab in Toronto for many years. He reckoned this was where a true geographical education could be had: "You will know more, if you have driven a cab, than a man sitting there with a factorial ecology printout," he said in an interview (Dow 1976: 4). While the discipline may not have yet come around to believing that all geographers should be cabbies, since *Fitzgerald* was first published, it has increasingly come around to believing that geographers should actively participate and interact with the communities they study. It has come around to the view that there is no God's eye view of the kind that mathematical universals promise. Instead, we are altogether at ground level. Research is not some specialized pure activity, the preserve of a few elite experts. But it needs to be carried out collectively, in the interests of everyone. This was yet another kind of revolution that Bunge's book provoked, allowing us forty years on to recognize that *Fitzgerald* is a classic.

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<sup>i</sup> W. Bunge to R. Hartshorne, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959. American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Papers of Richard Hartshorne, "Correspondence William Bunge," File F, Box 194.

<sup>ii</sup> W. Bunge to R. Hartshorne, October 15, 1968, American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Papers of Richard Hartshorne, "Correspondence William Bunge," File F, Box 194.

Preview of "Fitzgerald" by William Wheeler Bunge. Fitzgerald: Geography Of Revolution. by. William Wheeler Bunge. 4.60 Rating details. 5 ratings 1 review. But even if Fitzgerald were utterly unique and nothing about America in general could be learned by studying it, Geography of a Revolution would still be one of the best books I've ever read. The book is a collection of anecdotes drawn from Fitzgerald's recent troubled history (the Rebellion of '67), profiles of and extensive interviews with local leaders (the pastor, the teacher, the town planner), maps of the area, charts, graphs and diatribe courtesy of mr. Bunge himself. in Progress in Human Geography. Progress in Human Geography , Volume 35, pp 715-717; doi:10.1177/030913251103500501. Publisher Website. Google Scholar. Keywords: Revolution / Geography / Bunge / Schenkman Publishing / Publishing Co / William / Fitzgerald. Scifeed alert for new publications. Never miss any articles matching your research from any publisher. Share this article. Click here to see the statistics on "Progress in Human Geography" . References (2). Show/hide references.