

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Expanding Worlds: Place and Collaboration in (and after) the ‘Text-as-Spatial-Event’

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This short position paper seeks to explore the collaborative role of place in the unfolding of the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ (Hones 2008) via the expansion of the extra-textual. The work presented here forms part of an ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration initiated by our meeting at the ‘Literary Geographies of Collaboration’ roundtable, held at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in August 2018. While each of us has worked with literary texts in previous analyses of place and performativity within our ‘home’ disciplines, cultural geography (Thurgill 2018) and tourism studies (Lovell and Bull 2017; Lovell 2019), this collaboration has allowed us to reconsider the parameters of influence involved in the reading of literary texts, and moreover, to think about the ways in which the extra-textual might be used to show an expansion or development of reading(s) and of space(s) that continues far beyond the text itself. In what follows, we set out place’s collaborative role in (and after) the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ and outline the conditions for the oscillation of affect at work in the re-imagining of extra-literary environments. This ‘oscillation of affect’ sees the sights, sounds, smells and *feel* of places that readers experience prior to engaging with literary texts, and which work to inform their understanding of the text’s geography, undergo a transformative process through the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ so that places can come to be seen as displaying the affective

properties of the text itself. We suggest that this shifting of affect from shaping literary to actual-world experiences may even prompt some readers to locate extra-literary experiences in actual-world places not associated with the novel but which *feel* like they share the same affective environment.

Relational literary geographies have demonstrated the collaborative nature of texts and in doing so considered the role of actual-world places in the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ (Hones 2008, 2014; Anderson 2015; McLaughlin 2016a, 2016b, 2018; Thurgill 2018). The ‘text-as-spatial-event’ initiated by Hones (2008, 2014) sets out the grounds on which we might understand texts to unfold through a series of interrelated spatial processes that allow for the gathering of actants ‘engaged across distance [...] bringing together a broad array of people, places, times, contexts, networks, and communities.’ (Hones 2008: 1301). Hones’ spatial reading of Colum McCann’s 2009 novel *Let the Great World Spin* (2014) describes the collaborative process through which texts come into being as spatial events that happen beyond the fictional/actual-world dichotomy, establishing the literary text ‘not just as the product of geographies, or the representation of geographies, but also as a geographical event in itself.’ (32). Hones frames literary texts as collaborative and co-produced entities that continue to open up new paths into and out of the geographies in which they are written, published and read to form ‘a geographical nexus that happened and continues to happen in the complex interaction of agents and situations scattered across time and space, both human and nonhuman, absent and present.’ (Hones 2014: 32).

Through a Deleuzian reading of Hones’ ‘text-as-spatial-event’, Anderson (2015) employs the language of assemblage to describe the way(s) in which texts are produced via a networking of interconnected actants, all working together to bring the text into being. Meanwhile, McLaughlin (2016a, 2016b, 2018) has developed an ‘expansionary literary geography’ to show how intentional readings of literary texts open up possibilities for extending the reaches of literary space into actual-world settings through his analysis of Sherlockians, a self-named group of devotees of Doyle’s famous fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. Thurgill (2018) elucidates the performative role of actual-world places in shaping experiential encounters with texts and their extra-textual affect(s) through a close reading of M.R. James’ “A Warning to The Curious” (1925). Each of the above examples draws heavily from Hones’ (2014) theorizing of literary texts as generating (at least) three distinct spatial types or ‘spheres’ through which to conduct their analyses. Hones (2014) describes these spaces as: [1] *the intra-textual*, that which relates to the fictional space of the literary work, ‘its locations, distances, and networks’ (8); [2] *the inter-textual*, which develops from the author’s described connections to a literary world exterior to the space of the novel (8); and [3] *the extra-textual*, the social space in which the text is produced and which allows for the collaboration between author, reader, editor and publisher to take place.

This third spatial sphere, the extra-textual, not only describes the social space in which the text is produced but can also relate to a literary text’s actual-world setting(s) or named locations; that is to say, the characters, buildings and landscapes that are presented as fiction but which might share an existence with a world exterior to the text. It is through the extra-textual that Anderson and others have explored the affective nature of place – those

conditions which form '[t]he lived sensation, the feel, and emotional resonance of place' (Duff 2010: 881) – and its influence in the reading and expansion of literary texts and their worlds. For Hones (2008, 2014), the extra-textual functions as a space where the text is produced by authors, editors, publishers and so on, but also where it is read, interpreted and experienced. The influence of experiential actual-world geographies made prior to (and during) the reading of literary texts forms a significant component of Hones' 'text-as-spatial-event'. This lived-cache of geographical experiences connecting readers to a world of referent towns, villages, cities, forests, beaches, marshes, car parks, offices, waiting rooms, shops, classrooms, train stations, airports and so on, is part of what informs the reader's comprehension of a text's space – be it actual-world or imaginary. It is this process that connects the reader's understanding of the places unfolding from the pages of the text to an exterior and experiential actual-world environment. What we would like to argue here, however, is that while an experiential understanding of place(s) certainly plays a collaborative role in the co-production of literary texts, this engagement with the extra-textual does not reach its terminus after the reading of a text has ended. Rather, we posit a spatial 'hinge' operating between the instances of the reading and the read, whereby the role of the extra-textual outlined by Hones (2008, 2014) becomes inverted, so that actual-world places shift from shaping the reading of the text to being shaped *by* the reading of the text.

Thurgill (2018) set out the ways in which an existing knowledge of the East Anglian coastline informed his own experience of M.R. James' short ghost story "A Warning to the Curious" (1925), set in Suffolk's seaside town of Aldeburgh (reimagined by James as Seaburgh in his text), and allowed for a specific 'text-as-spatial-event' to be performed via the text's referent landscape. Outlined in the same article, Thurgill notes how the aesthetically comparable North Norfolk coastline was used by directors Jonathan Miller and Lawrence Gordon Clark in their film adaptations of James' stories, *Whistle and I'll Come to You* (1968) and *A Warning to the Curious* (1972) respectively. In retrospect, this relocating and reimagining of Jamesian spaces raises some interesting questions about the relationship of texts to the actual-world locations they might utilise. While there may well be logistical reasons as to why the cinematic interpretation of "A Warning to the Curious" could not be conducted at the Seaburgh-Aldeburgh location in which James sets it, the director's choice to film at the Norfolk sites of Wells-next-the-Sea, Holkham, Waxham and Happisburgh demonstrates something more intuitive and fluid about the way places and texts are connected through reading.

The locating of Jamesian places outside of and additional to those used in James' writing works to develop a cumulative extra-textual landscape in which readers (and viewers) can understand the tale to happen. This suggests that texts continue to act upon readers post-reading, influencing the way that unrelated actual-world spaces are perceived. While the Norfolk coastline is visually similar to that of James' Aldeburgh setting, the locations in which the adaptation was filmed are, of course, not entirely like those described in the short story, rather they appear to share what we might call Jamesian atmospherics.

The extra-textual geography of "A Warning to the Curious" is navigable within the actual-world Aldeburgh; its various spaces, as well as the footsteps of James' characters, are

readily identifiable and accessible for many readers of the text. The use of alternative actual-world places together with their acceptance by viewers and readers of James' stories as 'Jamesian' points to a further acting of text upon the extra-textual beyond the confines of the story and suggests that unrelated places can be perceived, interpreted and experienced by readers to expand literary space(s).

The expansionary nature of the post text-place relationship, with each feeding into the extending of the experiential world of the other, has gained further clarity through our own (Thurgill and Lovell's) ongoing exchanges on the role of extra-cinematic and extra-textual sites of heritage in contemporary literary and film tourism. This is particularly relevant to concepts such as the idealizing 'tourist gaze,' (Urry 2002), which Lovell (2019) has adapted as the 'magical gaze' to reflect how historic sites and urban heritage reveal storied, medieval-fairytale aspects, when they have previously been encountered by the tourist as the extra-textual settings for fantasy novels, films and television series such as *Game of Thrones*. In addition, Lovell's analysis of online customer feedback relating to literary and film tourism of extra-textual spaces connected to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels has shown how readers' (and viewers') actual-world experiences continue to be influenced by a text after the reading/viewing has taken place. Of particular interest was the attempted location of Rowling's fictional 'Diagon Alley' in actual-world settings (Lovell 2019). Unsubstantiated claims of sites considered to be, or to have influenced the imagining of, 'Diagon Alley' were reported at multiple UK sites, including; Chepstow (Hocker Hill Street and St Mary Street); Edinburgh (Victoria Street and Candlemaker Row); Exeter (Gandy Street); London (Cecil Court and Godwin Court) and York (Lady Peckett's Yard and The Shambles). To this end, Rowling, her literary descriptions and her readers have each continued to embark in a collaborative 'spatialising' of the extra-textual world that locates places that *feel* like they have *inspired* the author's imagined geographies, after the initial reading has been conducted. In doing so, experiential environments, actual-world places, are further shaped by the way texts and readers enact upon them. Rowling's Diagon Alley itself is considered by some readers to be located in the historic environment: gazed upon, but also remaining unreachable. For some of Rowling's readers, the experiences of place that informed their initial reading of the Potter texts (i.e. lived connections to an actual-world environment) switch to become transformative in the reader's geographical imagination.

The examples introduced here work to show that the geography of the literary text is, as Hones (2014) claims, a cumulative one: 'a blend of fact and fiction, memory and projection, the verifiable and the imagined' (51) that reaches beyond the literary space of the text itself. What begins to emerge from these two, albeit brief, examples is the foundation for a reassessing of place's role in and after the 'text-as-spatial-event'. While spatial experience and lived-geographic knowledge inform the reading of literary texts, this process can reverse once the reading is complete, so that texts themselves come to shape spatial experience and inform geographical knowledge. Within this shifting it is, of course, place that plays an active role in working with the author, reader and text to ground, legitimise and then expand the geography of the novel. Place collaborates in the 'text-as-spatial-event' not only in the imagining of literary places, but in the continued state of re-imagining those belonging to the actual-world.

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