LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Luann McCracken Fletcher (ed) (2019) *Literary Tourism and the British Isles: History, Imagination and the Politics of Place.* **Lexington Books. ix + 295pp., £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1498581233.**

Never has literary geography felt quite so relevant as during this period of Lockdown. The 'tourist gaze', as defined by Urry (1990) refracted places through a romantic lens. What could be termed the 'Lockdown gaze' adds acute longing to idealisation as we imagine literary places. LuAnn McCracken Fletcher, the editor of *Literary Tourism and the British Isles*: *History, Imagination and the Politics of Place*, cites Saler's (2012) argument that literature functions not as an escape from but a 'complement' to reality. During Lockdown I leave the house on my hourly run or walk and also hurry through the Tudor England of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy, trying to keep up with Cromwell and Henry VIII's pace, observing the tapestries in the palaces, taking a wherry on the Thames and hearing the boatman's observations of life, stopping to watch Lord Privy Seal's shadow flicker by candlelight on the wall of the Tower.

This 2019 volume is a welcome addition to, and evolution of, literary tourism literature and it's perfect Lockdown reading, allowing armchair tourists to follow our literary fantasies to the terrain which formed them. Previous literary tourism studies include Nicola Watson (2006) and Daniel Weston (2016), both of which McCracken Fletcher acknowledges in the introduction, commenting that 'the British Isles have been constantly narrated and re-narrated for literary tourists' (88). Yet this book contains rich fare, critically reimagining literary landscapes and adding to the body of knowledge.

The eclectic locations included in the collection range from Sir Walter Scott's Scotland, the Lake District and Brontë Country to the local opium dens of Limehouse in London, and writers' houses as museums. Some seem like obvious topic choices, but the authors take less well-travelled pathways through familiar landscapes. The chapters detail a variety of different media through which representations of literary places have emerged, including guidebooks and travelogues, yet the similarities between genres become more evident than the differences. Authors studied range from the fantasy of JK Rowling and Diana Gabaldon and the blockbuster adventures of Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown to the classic works of William Shakespeare and Seamus Heaney.

Literary Tourism and the British Isles specialises in both historical literature tourism and literary heritage tourism. Much of this volume is preoccupied with unravelling entwined strands of these literary histo-geographies. As McCracken Fletcher observes, 'Literary tourism is, I have argued, an experiential act supported by a narrative fabric woven of literary text and image; historical memory and discourse; a visitor's desire to connect and a site's desire to foster that connection' (xiii). McCracken Fletcher explores how the tapestry of Scottish collective cultural memory is framed and

reframed, comparing Sir Walter Scott's poetry and novels and Diana Gabaldon's interpretations of Scottishness in the *Outlander* novels. The chapter forms a fascinating account of the writers' appropriation of an assemblage of history, legend and folk detail which build the literary places reflected in the gaze of their readers, the tourism industry and tourists. There are implications, as Mantel (2017a) comments: 'When today you are standing in a Highland Heritage Centre, and have the chance to buy, let's say, a pottery figure of Bonnie Prince Charlie which is also a pepper mill – you can thank Sir Walter'.

Their research processes are compared to Margaret Atwood's statement, '[f]iction is where individual memory and experience and collective memory and experience come together in greater or lesser proportions…' (qtd.192) This intriguing chapter questions the value and perpetuation of clichés of tradition in writing and also the inspiration and opportunism of writers. Similarly, Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins also examines the character of Brontë Country, many facets of which existed before the writers put pen to paper, revealing the literary gaze. The inextricability of landscape and author in the public imagination are unpacked by Seth T. Reno and Crystie R. Deuter, who explore the inspiration for eighteenth and nineteenth- century eco-literary tourism, tracing the writings of William Wordsworth to environmentalism policies in the Lake District.

Adding balance to the romanticism which is theorised and contested throughout the volume, Holly-Gale Millette examines the Victorian slum of Limehouse in London as a peripheral anti-landscape and a place of dark tourism. Millette uses Mikael Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope' to present the topos of Limehouse as 'cast beyond modern time and space', a hyper-exploited entity whose degradation and orientalism are its most valuable currency' (226). She describes how the visitor experience has been exoticised and shaped in Limehouse by multiple texts such as Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* into a topos comprising a 'palimpsest of disorienting experiences that erupt from the margins' which are 'the dark corners and landscapes of fear that literary tourists seek out' (242). The chapter unfolds the unsettling, uncanny experience lurking under the fabric of gentrification.

The opportunism of tourism marketing is also threaded throughout the book. McCracken Fletcher observes that: 'Literary tourism creates a complex relationship between the reader who visits a location having been taught what to see, on the one hand, and, on the other, the curators of locations who seek both to frame the literary tourists' experience and to fulfil her expectations' (193). This concern is taken up Linda Young, who considers it a 'wicked problem' in the context of writers' house museums and the part they play as theatres of memory. The interpretation and presentation of literary houses must cater to and balance the expectations of diverse visitors, from literary experts on a pilgrimage to what they see as an affective, meaningful site and serendipitous tourists who happen on the property and its cafe.

This is a book about imagination and McCracken Fletcher contributes two highly engaging chapters, asking one of the crucial questions about fantasy literary tourism in her epilogue on Harry Potter. Fantasy fiction is only made more tantalising by remaining an unreachable, utopic vision, but how can you possibly visit 'there' when there is no 'there' to visit? She finds a solution in the simulacra of Baudrillard (1994) which offer 'modern enchantments' (Saler 2012) mixing commodification and marketing with suggestion and imagination on location to provide tangible representations of literary

fantasy worlds. Like the Harry Potter sites mentioned in the book, fantasy literary film tourism was witnessed on a mass scale at Rosslyn Chapel following the release of the film adaptation of Dan Brown's blockbuster novel *The Da Vinci Code*. Brian de Ruiter's chapter takes us back to the preceding historical legends popularised by Sir Walter Scott, exploring the relationship of place to myths such as the search for the Holy Grail.

This study of Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland by de Ruiter differentiates between authentic and inauthentic heritage, as do other chapters, for example Kelly's inventive study of an 'ecosystem' linking Shakespearian literary memorials. De Ruiter interrogates 'pseudo-history' and 'pseudo-historians' using a truth/fiction dichotomy. This perspective contrasts with Mantel's comment during the 2017 Reith lectures, 'a myth is not a falsehood – it is a truth, cast into symbol and metaphor'. Surely what McCracken Fletcher describes as 'boundaries' between fiction and history are, in mythical places, blurred? 'Invented traditions' (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) become aspects of the fluid, intangible cultural heritage of place, and the blend of 'magi-heritage' allows tourists to experience states of imaginative authenticity, which are enchanting due to their fabrication (Lovell and Bull 2017; Lovell 2019). Speaking of Rosslyn's fictional adaptations, de Ruiter points out that: 'A powerful mythos, which is fluid and able to engage with tourists on multiple levels continues to surround the chapel'. His comment anticipates future fictional appearances of the chapel, however, he could equally have argued that the its mythic qualities seem to precede their fictional iterations.

The chapter brought to mind for me a similar observation by author Philip Pullman (2001) made in a BBC documentary which included a discussion of his relationship to Oxford, where much of his work is set:

> Why do we come here? I don't know. Maybe we don't come here because we're fantasy writers, maybe we become fantasy writers by coming here. I sometimes feel that the mists from the river come out at night and seep through the stonework and alter the contours of things and all these gargoyles face another way. So when you look at it next morning, things are slightly different. Something changes. You can't put your finger on exactly what. And I think there is this mistiness, this vapour in the air.

Gareth Roddy fully embraces the creativity and fluidity of space in an eloquent, intricately-researched chapter on how mist obscures and reveals literary landscapes to the tourist gaze, citing both literature and travel guides about the Celtic West of the British Isles from 1880-1940.

Like all good books, this work can be arresting, altering your perspective, intersecting with other research and raising questions for researchers of literary geographies about what Mantel (2017b) described the devices of selection, elision and artful arrangement used by historical storytellers:

> The nineteenth century historian Lord Macauley said that, 'History has to be burned into the imagination before it can be received by the reason.' So how do we teach history? Is it a set of stories, or a set of skills? Both, I think; we need to pass on the stories, but also impart the skills to hack the stories apart and make new ones.

Literary Tourism and the British Isles: History, Imagination and the Politics of Place demonstrates that new stories will continually be reinscribed on literary geographies at the periphery of the gaze, in another time and place, out 'there' post-Lockdown.

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Jane Lovell
Canterbury Christ Church University
jane.lovell@canterbury.ac.uk