

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Strollology as a Reading Protocol: Hunger, Thresholds, and Episodic Perception in Hemingway's Paris

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Abstract: This article proposes a strollological reading of Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, focusing on the chapter 'Hunger Was Good Discipline'. Drawing on Lucius Burckhardt's *Spaziergangswissenschaft* (strollology), I turn the 'science of strolling' into a compact reading protocol for narrative walking. The analysis foregrounds three interconnected dimensions: (i) episodic perception, where the walk unfolds as a sequence of perceptual scenes; (ii) thresholds, understood as crossings and micro-decisions that reorganise narrative space; and (iii) bodily cues, with hunger functioning as a perturbation that diverts movement and re-ranks urban affordances. In Hemingway's Paris, hunger is not a mere background condition but an active filter of attention: it sharpens vision, intensifies sensory avoidance, and redistributes desire across streets, shop windows, and places of respite. By emphasising the interplay between embodied cues and spatial choice, the paper clarifies what strollology can contribute to literary geography: a method for reading how texts produce urban space from within the moving body, through expectation, interruption, and the logic of the route.

Keywords: strollology; literary geography; Ernest Hemingway; *A Moveable Feast*; urban walking; embodied perception; thresholds; hunger.

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Picasso was a short man who had a funny way of walking by putting one foot in front of the other until he would take what he called ‘steps’.

Woody Allen, *A Twenties Memory*

Walking is not simply a fundamental human bodily activity, but it is also a culturally elaborated, playful and pleasurable practice. Over the past two decades, it has become a major site of interdisciplinary work, spanning literature and cultural geography as well as philosophy and anthropology. Within literary geographies in particular, scholars have examined how walking operates as a situated practice of perception and narration, and how texts do not simply describe space but actively produce it (e.g. Lando 1993; Brousseau 1994, 1995, 2025; Westphal 2007; Hones 2008; 2014; 2015; 2022; McLaughlin 2016; Saunders 2010). This strand of scholarship, in different ways, treats movement as a narrative operator: it is through routes, orientations, and thresholds that literary space becomes legible. Classic works such as Alain Montandon’s *Sociopoétique de la promenade* (2000), David Le Breton’s *Éloge de la marche* (2000), Rebecca Solnit’s *Wanderlust* (2000), Frédéric Gros’s *Marcher, une philosophie* (2008) and, more recently, Francesco Careri’s *Walkscapes* (2017) have sustained interest in the practice, its meanings, and its cultural and artistic implications. Taken together, these approaches regard walking not merely as a physical act but as a cultural practice – an act of knowledge, perception and representation of ourselves and our bodies, and of the relations that bind our bodies to those of others and to the world. As Bernard Dieterle observes (Dieterle 2021: 26-27), if the visual arts tend to engage with walking only indirectly – through landscape, landscape painting, or brief cinematic sequences – extended, historically traceable accounts of walking are far more common in written texts. From Rousseau’s *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) to Robert Walser’s *Der Spaziergang* (1917), from the eighteenth century onwards, walking became one of the most prominent figures in the history of literature. Walks are preserved above all in written narratives, discussed in essays, and shaped within literary works.

In making this perspective my own, and speaking as a geographer, the standpoint from which I approach the subject is that of ‘literary geography’. By this expression I refer to an actively collaborative interdiscipline situated at the interface between the humanities and the social sciences; or, to borrow the words of Neal Alexander and David Cooper (editors of *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Geographies*), ‘the place where literature and geography converge’ (Alexander and Cooper 2025: 1). This convergence truly occurs where literary geography goes beyond the literary analysis of geographical themes or the geographical analysis of literary texts: ‘Literature and geography have to function as a combined double subject, on the one hand, and a combined, double, theoretical, and methodological framework, on the other’ (Hones 2014: 8). Although the aims and methods of contemporary literary geography are multiple and varied, it is nonetheless a field to which both geographers and literary critics have made important contributions. So, over time, this cross-sectional area of study has evolved, and from the testimonial and documentary value once attributed to literature, through the new cultural geography and the mediations of cultural studies, and from the textual turn to an

appreciation of the performative power of literary texts: these are not static objects, but ‘happenings’ that emerge through the relational interactions of authors, texts and readers within specific social and spatial contexts. So, in the following pages, I use this framework to show how a walk can operate as a textual device that reconfigures urban perception from within the body itself.

My contribution is to foreground the logic of the walk as an interpretive object. In light of this framework, I propose to read an episode from Hemingway’s *A Moveable Feast* (1964) (specifically, the chapter ‘Hunger Was Good Discipline’) through Lucius Burckhardt’s strollology. I argue that his ideas allow us to grasp more precisely certain implications of narrative, beginning with the role of bodily cues – such as hunger – which, functioning as a perturbing element, divert movement and reorganise the experience of urban space away from a more functional, ‘optimised’ mode of perception. With this move, I am fully aware that I am stepping onto largely uncharted ground: Burckhardt is seldom regarded as a useful author for work in literary geography; if anything, his name appears more readily in urban studies, the sociology of perception or landscape criticism. Yet his *Spaziergangswissenschaft*, or science of strolling, does not concern itself with the landscape as such, but with the ways in which it is read in the act of walking. For Burckhardt, walking is not an object of study but a working method, a mode of inquiry, a situated construction, an embodied form of knowledge. However, he is in my opinion a profoundly literary author – not because he sought to elaborate a literary theory, but because he aimed to show that our relationship with places is an interpretive journey, one permeated by expectations, memories, anticipations and disappointments which are often mediated by literary texts, and shaped as much by hunger, fatigue, smells and temperature.

A Moveable Feast is a literary project that remained unfinished after Hemingway’s death (1961). It was published posthumously in 1964. It is not a novel, but a nonfiction work – an autobiographical text built on a sequence of small sketches. The book is composed of 19 chapters plus some fragments that were removed from the first edition, and which were recovered in subsequent editions. The focus of this text is the story of Hemingway’s golden years in Paris together with his first wife Hadley, while working as a European correspondent for the ‘Toronto Daily Star’. Paris was the place to be for those hopeful American writers during the 1920s. During his stay, the American writer immersed himself in the city’s vibrant cultural and literary scene, attending cafés and restaurants with Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, John Dos Passos and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Without question, these years spent mostly (though not exclusively) in Paris, shaped his life and writing more profoundly than any comparable period in his life (Kennedy 2013: 154).

To understand the nature of the relationship between Hemingway and the French capital, it is sufficient to mention the end of a text, *A Paris Letter*, published in 1933 – so, when the French experience could now be said to be concluded – in *Esquire* magazine. In this letter, as we see, a ‘plangent image of the city’ emerges (Kennedy 1996: 197). Let’s read:

Paris is very beautiful this fall. It was a fine place to be quite young in and it is a necessary part of a man’s education. We all loved it once and we lie if we say we didn’t. But she is

like a mistress who does not grow old and she has other lovers now. She was old to start with but we did not know it then. We thought she was just older than we were, and that was attractive then. So when we did not love her any more we held it against her. But that was wrong because she is always the same age and she always has new lovers. (Hemingway 1967: 158)

Paris had undoubtedly played a crucial role in Hemingway's development as a writer, teaching him the language of modern fiction and placed him in a milieu conducive to writing and vibrating with artistic activity. In *A Moveable Feast* the city is defined as a 'new world of writing ... where there was a way of living well and working' (Hemingway 1964: 132). And also:

There is never any ending to Paris and the memory of each person who has lived in it differs from that of any other. We always returned to it no matter who we were or how it was changed or with what difficulties, or ease, it could be reached. Paris was always worth it and you received return for whatever you brought to it. But this is how Paris was in the early days when we were very poor and very happy. (Hemingway 1964: 211)

Verna Kale (2010) highlights the ambivalence of Hemingway's text: *A Moveable Feast* is a strikingly concrete memoir, attentive to the street names, sights and smells of the places it evokes; yet the Paris it describes is also a mythical space, a reconstructed city filtered and idealized through nostalgia and the poetics of memory. In this sense, the city becomes a narrative device for telling the story of the writer's emergence through hardship and struggle. It is precisely at this juncture – before turning to Hemingway's walks through the streets of the French capital – that Burckhardt's notion of strolling becomes necessary to introduce.

Lucius Burckhardt and strollology

Jesko Fezer and Martin Schmitz write that Lucius Burckhardt 'was rebellious for he made a science out of taking a stroll' (Fezer and Schmitz 2012: 7). It is a striking observation, for we tend to overlook the quietly subversive potential of a simple walk. Strollology, the science he founded, is the discipline that examines how a person perceives his surroundings while walking. This is not an abstract theory, but an unconventional pedagogical method that emerged from Burckhardt's teaching practice at the University of Kassel in the 1980s. Burckhardt was a Swiss sociologist, economist, and theorist of architecture and design, who died in Basel in 2003. The strolls are, and have always been, experimental in form. They were 'scientific walks' with a specific cognitive intent and functioned as teaching tools, emerging from his seminars and oriented towards students' interests.

At its core lies the idea that we must learn to rediscover the world with fresh eyes, for the benefits of observing and encountering places become visible only when we look at them as if we were strangers. Through it, Burckhardt was seeking to produce both a distancing effect and a renewed sense of recognition. But let's proceed in order.

The premise on which strollology is based is a crisis of traditionally understood perception, especially on the urban scale (a phenomenon already identified by Georg Simmel's *The Metropolis and Mental Life* and Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*). This science is born in a precise historical moment, when in Europe motorization slowly reached never-before-seen dimensions, with very important consequences, such as to inhibit the right to walk in the city (Fezer and Schmitz 2012: 24-25). The basic idea is that urban planning runs counter to the interests of local inhabitants and means more than simply traffic planning. So, in a text from the early 1980s, for example, Burckhardt reflects on the concept of livability (in German: *Wohnlichkeit*) concerning the city, and writes:

For traffic planners, lane width for cars is a quantifiable factor whereas the convenience to a person of using the sidewalk is not. What was more natural then, than to narrow the width of our city sidewalks to just about that of the human body, and to widen the roads to accommodate the traffic planners' recurrently raised norm? (Burckhardt 2012: 178)

So, when the number of cars increased, the street ceased to be an area one might, for example, play in. This is a problem: the loss of the street as public space – a permanent expropriation – and the consequent multiplication of thresholds and barriers has to do with the reduction of urban dwellers' quality of life. The reduction of spaces for pedestrians and motorization has important consequences on our perception: a drive does not recreate the same conditions as the walk of yore and with the end of the traditional journey, a whole world has been lost. Strollology is the reaction to this state of affairs, a way of reclaiming a certain type of experience of the world, by walking: when, traditionally, the discovery of the world was a slow, gradual event. Not by chance, the science of stroll reminds us that we are not parachutists, says Burckhardt:

For it is not as if we find ourselves 'beamed' all of a sudden to Piccadilly Circus or the Cancelleria; instead we find our way there, one way or another. We leave our hotel on the Via Nomentana or the Pincio, catch a bus or flag a cab – younger people go on foot. We check out the streets, cross squares, stroll along the Corso, perhaps take in the Palazzo Vidone, the Linotte and St. Andrea della Valle, and are thus sufficiently prepared also for the Cancelleria to fall into place. A parachutist who happened to land among the endless cars parked in the narrow alley in front of the Cancelleria would gain a quite different impression of the architecture than we do. (Burckhardt 2015: 225)

A marked contrast exists between the worldviews experienced by a walker and a parachutist. In the first case, the context explored strollologically serves as an explanatory complement to the actual object of the visit: the walk builds its overall meaning step by step (Burckhardt uses the metaphor of the string of pearls). Thus, only the stroll itself – the path traced through its successive stations – does justice to the place. In the second case, none of this applies: the

parachutist comes from above, glides to the ground, and is already there. The meaning he derives from the actual object of his visit is partial, indeed very poor.

In short, our way of interacting with the world is structurally linked to the way we move through it – whether vertically or horizontally, on foot, by bicycle, or by car. The means of transport conditions the change in perception and determines the quality and quantity of interaction: its rhythms, the possibility of exploring the surrounding environment with our senses, and the experience of fatigue, heat, cold, and so on. Thus, the same thing is no longer the same.

So, strollology is a theory for practical application, not yet another methodology for deciphering literature, and it is situated at the intersection of sociology, architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, landscape design, design, economics, ecology, and art history (Dieterle 2021: 28). Yet, even if Burckhardt states that he is not interested in the walk as a means of representation but rather as a mode of perception (Burckhardt 2015: 231), it is difficult to escape the fascination of the connection he establishes between the physical gesture of walking (and therefore the particular way in which we experience the world) and certain literary texts. Indeed, our perceptive capacities are honed by descriptions that feed geographies meticulously prepared in our mind's eye: they create, between the viewer and the environment, a set of expectancies that stipulates by what criteria something may be taken – for example – as a 'good landscape', a 'pleasant place', and so on. This is how expectations are created in us, and one sees what one has learned to see. Thus, the premise for the city walks is that we no longer see our everyday surroundings, says Burckhardt (284). This is what happens when we read a description of a landscape in a novel, a magazine, a travel brochure, or a textbook: such representations quietly school our gaze, teaching us to notice only what we have been prepared to see. 'The image we form of the landscape is pre-shaped by the interest we take in it and by our expectation of the typical, as well as by our dreams and desires' (Burckhardt 2017: 312; my translation). This mechanism is summarised in the following question formulated in 1987 by Burckhardt himself: *Was entdecken Entdecker?* – or: *What do discoverers discover?*

The question emerges from, and within, the experience of several walks organised by Burckhardt with his students. One of these field trips, the 'Voyage to Tahiti', took place in Kassel in 1987, in a former military area that had fallen into disuse. During the stroll, structured in stages, an actor read aloud passages from Georg Forster's *Reise um die Welt* (1777). Forster, to clarify, is the German explorer who reached Tahiti with James Cook in 1772. The final destination of the walk was the Dönche, a protected natural area that, until only a few years earlier, had served as a training ground for the tank drivers of the Federal Republic of Germany's army. The walk through 'Tahiti' in the Dönche revealed curious correspondences or associations between Forster's descriptions and the landscape actually present in Kassel. A similar experiment was carried out a few years later by Burckhardt in Bovisa, a district on the northern outskirts of Milan, now largely residential yet still marked by remnants of nineteenth-century factory buildings and other industrial structures (gas holders, factory ruins, makeshift orchards, *cascine*). Here too, the staged journey through the neighbourhood was interspersed with readings of passages from Forster's report.

In both cases, the point of the intervention lay in the fact that these two-hundred-year-old diary pages from the Caribbean sharpened participants' perception of present-day landscapes rather than obscuring them: the places encountered along the walk 'all acquired a new, doubled meaning' (Burckhardt 2017: 308; my translation). What we have, therefore, is a comparison between places conjured by text and places that exist in reality: the experiment consists in seeing whether the descriptions handed down to us of that 'paradisiacal island' might apply equally well to a recently abandoned tank training ground or a former industrial district. In this search for correspondences and discontinuities, the thresholds, transitions, closures, and openings of the one (Forster's descriptions) become those of the other (what you see in the act of strolling). Thus the 'Voyage to Tahiti' compels participants to view what is otherwise self-evident and familiar through the eyes of an outsider, thanks to the estranging effect of stepping – for the duration of the learning walk – into the role of a historical explorer of exotic lands.

Hemingway: 'Hunger Was Good Discipline'

What I want to do now is to turn Burckhardt's science of strolling into a compact reading protocol and apply it to a single episode from *A Moveable Feast*. Indeed, if Burckhardt shows how the text shapes perception, Hemingway shows how the body can do the same. Therefore, my focus is now on (i) episodic perception (walking as a sequence of perceptual scenes), (ii) thresholds (how crossings and micro-decisions organise narrative space), and (iii) bodily cues such as hunger as perturbations that divert movement and re-rank urban affordances. As we will see, in Hemingway's Paris, hunger does not simply accompany the walk but actively filters what can be seen, endured, and desired, turning the city into an interpretive itinerary shaped by smells, shop windows, avoidance, and relief – thereby reshaping the narrative map of Paris from within the body.

Before following in the footsteps of the American writer we must recall that life in 1920s Paris was not all a bed of roses. This is the city where Hemingway became Hemingway, but the apprenticeship years were marked by scarcity. The chapter entitled 'Hunger Was Good Discipline' is emblematic in this regard: he recalls his experience as a penniless writer who did not always have the money to eat.

You got very hungry when you did not eat enough in Paris because all the bakery shops had such good things in the windows and people ate outside at tables on the sidewalk so that you saw and smelled the food. When you had given up journalism and were writing nothing that anyone in America would buy, explaining at home that you were lunching out with someone, the best place to go was the Luxembourg gardens where you saw and smelled nothing to eat all the way from the Place de l'Observatoire to the rue de Vaugirard. There you could always go into the Luxembourg museum and all the paintings were sharpened and clearer and more beautiful if you were belly-empty, hollow-hungry. I learned to understand Cézanne much better and to see truly how he made landscapes when I was hungry. I used to wonder if he were hungry too when he

painted; but I thought possibly it was only that he had forgotten to eat. It was one of those unsound but illuminating thoughts you have when you have been sleepless or hungry. Later I thought Cézanne was probably hungry in a different way. (Hemingway 1964: 69)

The beginning of the chapter offers a series of captivating elements. To begin with, Hemingway frankly describes his difficult early days: he suffered from financial hardship, resorting to fasting and wandering the city, consumed by hunger. His stroll is very particular, it is characterized by an unpleasant sensation of deprivation induced by a lack of adequate nutrition. With a certain irony, he explains that not eating also has positive implications: thanks to hunger, he learned to understand Cézanne much better and to see truly how he created his landscapes. In Hemingway's account, hunger operates as a discipline of attention: it sharpens perception, reorients evaluation, and makes the city legible through intensified sensory selectivity. Furthermore, Hemingway moves on foot, and this forces him to take precautions. Here walking is not framed as *flânerie* or aestheticized urban observation; it functions as an embodied mode of perception structured by deprivation and sensory avoidance. Hemingway's stroll is not, that is to say, organised by a destination but by a bodily constraint. So, hunger functions as a perturbation that edits the city in real time: bakery windows and sidewalk tables become sensory triggers ('you saw and smelled the food'), while other spaces work as temporary zones of relief. He is not heading anywhere, nor does he have a definite destination; he is 'fleeing', driven by hunger, from the city and from the sensations it offers him. Yet this flight does not entail leaving the urban space – Hemingway does not project himself *beyond* the city – but is rather an attempt to withdraw from its temptations while remaining within it, a search for a path through the urban labyrinth that might be free of such enticements.

From this moment onwards the narrative therefore unfolds as episodic perception – the discovery of the world as a gradual event – and these episodes are connected by thresholds. This is particularly evident when Hemingway describes the itinerary of his walks to avoid passing the good eating places whose smells would make him hungry:

After you came out of the Luxembourg you could walk down the narrow rue Férou to the Place St.-Sulpice and there were still no restaurants, only the quiet square with its benches and trees. There was a fountain with lions, and pigeons walked on the pavement and perched on the statues of the bishops.

There was the church and there were shops selling religious objects and vestments on the north side of the square. From this square you could not go further toward the river without passing shops selling fruits, vegetables, wines, or bakery and pastry shops. But by choosing your way carefully you could work to your right around the grey and white stone church and reach the rue de l'Odéon and turn up to your right toward Sylvia Beach's bookshop and on your way you did not pass too many places where things to eat were sold. The rue de l'Odéon was bare of eating places until you reached the square where there were three restaurants. By the time you reached 12 rue de l'Odéon your

hunger was contained but all of your perceptions were heightened again. The photographs looked different and you saw books that you had never seen before. (Hemingway 1964: 69-70)

In the text, precise references draw a topography of the fast. The city unfolds as a sequence of successive, perceptual scenes: so, we can follow Hemingway's movements step by step. The itinerary can therefore be summarized schematically to indicate the order and direction of the main stops named in the text. As you can see, the path draws nervous, zigzagging trajectories (Figure 1). We are on the so-called *rive gauche*, that is, the southern part of the Seine. Hemingway tells us that at the Luxembourg gardens you cannot see or smell anything to eat (he loved this old section of Paris, maybe also for this reason?). And then: our solitary walker moves from Place de l'Observatoire to the rue de Vaugirard, then from rue Férou to the Place St. Sulpice. Here the situation is calm, just a square with a fountain with lions, and pigeons and a church (his favourite in Paris). No restaurants.

The difficulty begins, however, as soon as the walker leaves Place St. Sulpice. Unfortunately, it is impossible, from there, not to come across shops selling fruit, vegetables, wine, bread, or pastries. If you are fasting and hungry, Paris is a constant temptation. You must choose your way carefully: for example, from Place St. Sulpice and its church you go to rue de l'Odéon, all in all bare of eating places. These episodes are connected by thresholds: minor crossings, turns, and micro-decisions through which urban space is segmented and re-ranked. The strollological point lies in the solution: to choosing the way carefully, to dodge, to go around, to cross by following a logic of avoidance, in which streets are not neutral connectors but graded affordances – some unbearable, some temporarily viable – depending on what the body can tolerate.

A further threshold occurs when the walk reaches the bookshop Shakespeare and Company. Here, the author takes a little break in his stroll: a dialogue takes place between Hemingway and Sylvia Beach, who worries that Hemingway is 'too thin', and then he comes home and has lunch, while complaining that nobody buys his stories ('There is no money coming in since I quit journalism'). Their dialogue marks a break in the story between a 'before' and an 'after'. If Hemingway is tired, disheartened, and pessimistic about his future as a writer, Beach is reassuring, optimistic, and positive. Moreover, Beach gives Hemingway an envelope with money inside – six hundred francs: this is the payment from *Der Querschnitt*, an art magazine published in Germany, for the publication of his poem *The Soul of Spain with McAlmon and Bird the Publishers* (1924). In short, this meeting functions as a hinge between a 'before' and an 'after'. Once money appears, the same city begins to change meaning. Hemingway's quick walk to the Brasserie Lipp's – where the writer at last permits himself a proper meal – marks a reorientation from disciplined avoidance to deliberate approach: 'every place I passed that my stomach noticed as quickly as my eyes or my nose made the walk an added pleasure' (Hemingway 1964: 72). In other words, the episode shows how bodily cues reorder urban affordances and, with them, the narrative map of Paris: the city is not merely traversed but continuously reorganised from within the act of walking itself.

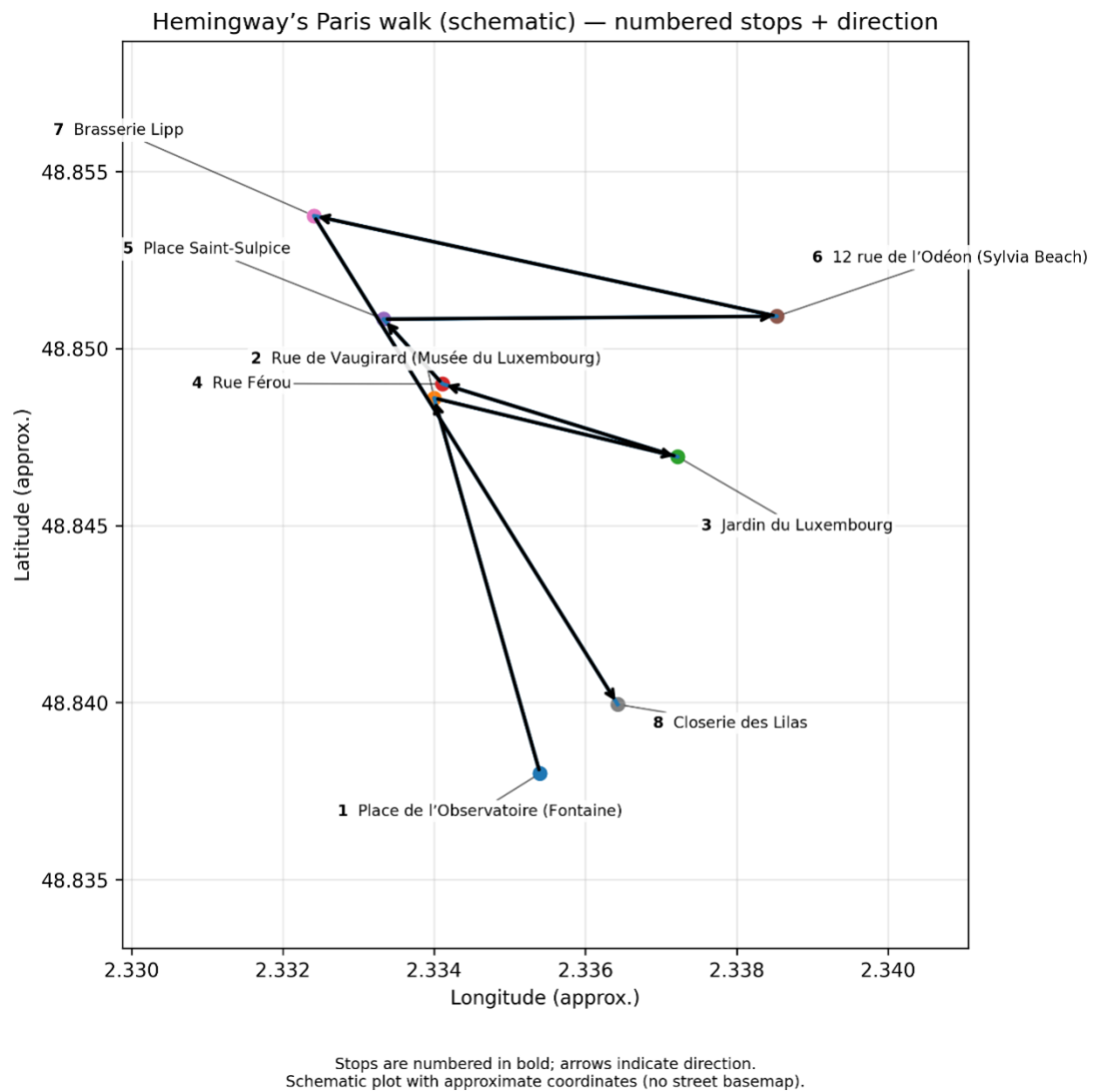


Figure 1. Hemingway's Stroll. Schematic representation of the itinerary described in *A Moveable Feast* ('Hunger Was Good Discipline'). Not a street-accurate urban map, it indicates only the sequence and direction of the main stops named in the text, in support of the strollological reading.

Finally euphoric, the writer will cross Rue de Rennes and rue Bonaparte, then rue Guynemer; he will proceed along rue d'Assas, cross rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and head to the Closerie des Lilas, a brasserie located on the Boulevard du Montparnasse and frequented by many artists and intellectuals. There he will sit in a corner with the light over his shoulder and begin writing the short story *Big Two-Hearted River*. A waiter will bring him a café crème, and Hemingway will drink half of it when it has cooled and leave the rest on the table while he writes.

Seen from this angle, Hemingway's episode also brings into focus Burckhardt's insistence on expectation. Paris is not simply traversed, but continuously re-ranked by episodic perception, thresholds, and bodily cues. The city is not encountered as a neutral

given, but as something pre-shaped by learned images and anticipations: what counts as a ‘good street’, a ‘bearable passage’, or a ‘temptation’ depends on what one has been trained to notice and, in this case, on what hunger amplifies. Paris becomes readable as an interpretive field in which the body, memory, and cultural scripts co-produce perception. A strollological reading, therefore, does not add a map to the text; it shows how the text maps the city from within the act of walking.

At this point, we can ask what strollology adds, in concrete terms, to literary geography, and why Burckhardt’s ideas might prove useful for our work. The answer is that they provide tools for making the ‘production of space’ analytically legible at the scale of the walk. Rather than treating the city as a stable backdrop, a strollological lens brings into focus the micro-operations through which narrative space emerges from within movement: episodic scenes, thresholds, and bodily cues that re-rank urban affordances. Hemingway’s Paris is thus mapped not through cartographic accuracy – following Robert Stockhammer’s principle of mappability (in German: *Kartierbarkeit*; see Stockhammer 2007) – but through an embodied logic of attention, avoidance, and expectation, showing how urban space is continuously interpreted and reorganised in the act of walking. Perhaps this goes somewhat beyond what Burckhardt himself had in mind, but such is often the fate of fertile ideas.

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