

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Literary Geography as Walking Experience: Introduction

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Abstract: This special issue grew out of the study day *Flâneries marseillaises: La marche comme dispositif narratif et outil de diagnostic spatial*, held on 28 March 2024 at Aix-Marseille Université[i]. Drawing on the discussions and research perspectives that emerged during that occasion, this volume seeks to foster a dialogue between disciplines and practices that do not always intersect: geography and literature on the one hand; academic research, artistic creation, and social practices on the other. To this end, it identifies in walking a means of promoting open and relational approaches. Walking appears simultaneously as a narrative device within literary texts and as a creative practice of traversing and narrating places and territories, both within and beyond academia.

Keywords: walking; literary geography; mobile literary analysis; literary creative practices; active learning.

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Literary Geography as Walking Experience

This special issue grew out of the study day *Flâneries marseillaises: La marche comme dispositif narratif et outil de diagnostic spatial*, held on 28 March 2024 at Aix-Marseille Université¹. Drawing on the discussions and research perspectives that emerged during that occasion, this volume seeks to foster a dialogue between disciplines and practices that do not always intersect: geography and literature on the one hand; academic research, artistic creation, and social practices on the other. To this end, it identifies in walking a means of promoting open and relational approaches. Walking appears simultaneously as a narrative device within literary texts and as a creative practice of traversing and narrating places and territories, both within and beyond academia. The ambition of this issue is therefore twofold. First, it aims to develop an inter- and transdisciplinary reflection on walking and its representations, rethinking literature as a sensitive and embodied form of knowledge. Second, it explores action- and creative-research approaches within literary geography, reconsidering the discipline not only as a critical framework, but also as a tool of social engagement, active pedagogy, and civic participation. The contributions gathered here should therefore be read through this constant movement between inside and outside – from the text to the context, from the academic sphere to the situated lived experience.

As Amato notes in his historical reconstruction, ‘walking belongs to the history of gesture’ (Amato 2004: 4), a practice that has gradually developed into a multiplicity of forms, methods, and meanings. Yet despite this plurality, walking retains a distinctive specificity: it is ‘a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned. . . [it] allows us to be in our body and in the world without being overwhelmed by it’ (Solnit 2018: 5). Walking thus becomes not only a way of moving through and orienting oneself within space, but also a mode of perception and relation. At the same time, it can also be understood as ‘a symbolic form through which to transform the landscape’ (Careri 2002: 3), revealing the dualistic nature of walking.

Plurality, imagination, context, and materiality therefore emerge as the key concepts underpinning this issue. By placing walking practices at the center of its inquiry, the volume explores both the imaginative and narrative device activated through the representation of walking, and the experiential, socio-cultural, and pedagogical dimensions that such practices make possible. These analyses of the kinaesthetic dimension of space thus aim to observe ‘how movement is enacted, felt, perceived, expressed, metered, choreographed, appreciated and desired’ (Merriam and Pearce 2018: 493).

Walking emerges, in this sense, as a practice through which literary geography can be rethought in relation to the living world: within the space where texts and territories meet beyond the confines of the book, in the textures and rhythms of everyday life. What role, then, do literature and narrative play in the construction, but also the problematisation, of spatial imaginaries? How do they shape our perception of social practices and modes of inhabiting spaces? Can narrative walking practices become methods of cultural and social inquiry, as well as mobile tools for developing new ways of seeing, experiencing, and engaging

with territory? More broadly, is it possible to imagine a social use of literature and of literary geography within wider creative processes of active citizenship and cultural participation?

These are some of the questions explored in *Literary Geography as Walking Experience*, a special issue that aims to open a shared space for reflection on both experiential practices of reading and textual practices of traversing places and territories, grounded in the contexts in which we have been working in recent years, particularly Italy and France. In doing so, it embraces a plurality of perspectives on literary geography, in keeping with the broader editorial vision of the hosting journal. The plural title points not only to the diversity of places and texts explored, but also to the multiplicity of approaches through which they are examined.

The eight contributions and ten voices gathered in this volume each engage, in their own way, with walking as a practice through which social space is perceived, narrated, and materially experienced, offering mobile approaches to textual analysis, processes of textual territorialisation, and experimental pedagogies in literary geography.

Following Marc Brosseau's framework of literary geography (Brosseau 2022), the contributions are organised into three main sections, each intended to foster different forms of dialogue between literature, geography, and the social practices of literary geography.

The first section, *Walking as a Method of Literary Analysis*, examines the relationship between literature and geography at a diegetic level, focusing on the processes of textual construction. Situated within the so-called 'textual turn' in literary geography (Brosseau 2022: 81-104), it reconsiders experiential forms of engaging with texts, approaching walking as a narrative device and as a way of traversing the literary space.

Building on textual sources, the second section, *Walking as a Pedagogical Tool*, focuses on creative approaches to literary geography in educational contexts, both academic and school-based. Here, the walking act is explored as a pedagogical and experiential tool, within a broader understanding of the text as an 'event' (Hones 2008: 1301) and as a generator of meanings oriented toward social use.

Finally, the third section, *Walking as a Creative Practice*, further expands these relational possibilities with and beyond texts, shifting towards creative practices of spatial writing and literary territorialisation. Grounded in creative-research and action-research approaches, it explores walking as both a tool of social inquiry and a method for textual reactivation, at the intersection between the cultural turn in literary geography (Brosseau 2022: 51-55) and the so-called literary geography 'around the text'² (

171-197). The aim is, on the one hand, to reassess literature as an alternative way of apprehending geographical reality (53) and, on the other, to reconsider the spatiality of literary reception processes and their socio-territorial performativity.

Across the various contributions, walking emerges as a constant thread, fostering a 'dialogical relationship within which literary texts can be rethought, following Brosseau, as 'active entities' that both incorporate and produce geographical knowledge of reality. Likewise, if the invitation is to 'step outside' the apparent 'closure' of the text (Brosseau 2022: 81-104), the contributions gathered here aim to rethink the spatial dimension of literature and

the role of the reader, while also paying attention to what can be observed beyond the text itself. In this way, literature is reconsidered as a participatory and mobile practice.

The first section *Walking as a method of literary analysis* initially situates itself within the so-called ‘textual turn’ of literary geography (Brosseau 2022: 81-104), taking the text as a privileged starting point for analysing the relationship between space and representation. These articles thus move beyond an exclusively textual understanding of geography – one in which geographical elements such as maps or toponyms are treated merely as representations of territory – in order to examine instead the practices through which they are produced, activated, and made meaningful within literary writing.

Walking, in this sense, is no longer only a narrative figure of the text, but becomes a method that connects writing, experience, and context. From a narrative device organising textual space, it turns into an analytical tool capable of revealing the material and social conditions of literary production, as well as its effects beyond the textual plot. In doing so, it opens up a broader reflection on practices of inhabitation and mobility, offering renewed ways of observing, understanding, and reimagining spaces and or ways of living them.

Marcello Tanca’s article ‘Strollology as a Reading Protocol: Hunger, Thresholds and Episodic Perceptions in Hemingway’s Paris’ proposes a reading of *A Moveable Feast*, in particular the chapter ‘Hunger Was Good Discipline,’ through Lucius Burckhardt’s strollology. Walking is here understood as a situated interpretative practice, analysed through its perceptual dimensions, the thresholds, pedestrian movement, and the bodily cues guiding experience. In this framework, hunger functions as a device that filters attention and reorganises urban space, showing how Paris emerges from the interaction between body, movement, and environment.

The desire to reread text and context through embodied practices is also present in Irene Cecchini’s article ‘Practices of Mobility in *La vita agra*.’ Here, the author analyses one of the most significant works of Italian urban fiction of the economic boom, in which Milan becomes the emblematic site of the crisis of the myth of progress and of the alienation produced by industrial rhythms. The kinetic dimension of the narrative becomes not only a means of observing the construction of space within the text, but above all a tool for understanding the context in which the author writes and his own biography.

The other two articles in this section broaden the analysis to rural representations, closer to the natural environment. Davide Papotti examines three authors who choose to walk along rivers: *Racconto del fiume Sangro* by Paolo Morelli, *Maldifiume* by Simona Baldanzi, and *Walking the Nile* by Levison Wood. His article ‘Walking the River: Writers on the Banks’ begins by situating literary representations of rivers within a broader cultural fascination with flowing water, using cultural geography as its framework. Papotti then analyses selected passages to show how walking along rivers shapes the authors’ perceptions and experiences. In doing so, he explores the ‘area of influence’ of rivers, questioning how their boundaries and presence are defined, and examines the role of maps within the narratives, highlighting the emergence of a ‘cartographic imagination.’

Finally, Estelle Ceccarini’s article ‘From Walking as a Relationship to the World to Walking as an Exploration of a Work and a Country: a Geopoetic Approach to the Work of

Max-Philippe Delavouët,' explores the theme of walking in the Provençal poetic and prose work of Max-Philippe Delavouët, intertwining textual analysis with a reflection on its conditions of production and territorial implications. Here too, walking is read not only as a narrative element but also as a device through which the rural space of Provence is constructed and organised. The article further extends its focus to contemporary forms of patrimonialization of the author, particularly the activities of the dedicated cultural centre and the literary walks that accompany its promotion. In this interplay between text, context, and walking practices in the Provençal territory, the contribution interrogates how the work is today re-signified through spatial experience, between literary memory and transformations of the landscape.

Within this logic of re-signification, the second section, *Walking as a Pedagogical Tool*, extends the discussion into the pedagogical sphere, both in academic and school contexts. Moving beyond textual analysis, it shifts attention toward the extratextual dimension and to the ways in which the text can be transmitted and revalued as a critical tool. In doing so, it foregrounds the pedagogical potential of walking itself; as professors, we felt it necessary to reflect on the practical application of walking and its hermeneutic value. This section aims to propose creative and performative methods through which teaching can itself be set “on the move.”

In this perspective, the co-authored essay by Héloïse Lauraire and Alain Roger, ‘Strolling Is Not Playing, but You Can Set Yourself Some Rules: From Calling Points to Drawing Dots,’ revisits a pedagogical experiment conceived and implemented by the authors within a preparatory class for the *Grandes Écoles de Paysage* at the Lycée des Métiers de l’Horticulture et du Paysage Jeanne Baret (Montreuil, France), as well as during lectures in a Master’s programme in geography at Université Sorbonne Paris Nord (Villetaneuse, France). By introducing geography students to the aesthetic practice of walking, the contribution further reflects upon its graphic translation, foregrounding the perceptual dimension of the experience and its capacity to foster the imagination of alternative forms of habitability. The text thus becomes a tool for discussing space and its specific construction processes, contributing to the development of a narrative way of seeing the world.

Situated at the intersection of urban and cultural geography, mobility studies, the humanities and geohumanities, Giada Peterle’s essay, ‘Walking with Infrastructures. Urban Thresholds, Photo Walks and Narratives on the Move along the Tangenziale Nord, Padua,’ emphasizes the convergences between space-centred and narrative approaches, geographical and artistic research, and individual and collective walking narratives in urban contexts. Starting from the ‘narrative exercises of attention’ (Bouvet 2024) carried out along the Tangenziale Nord in Padua, this paper expands literary-geographical approaches to walking narratives by focusing on reading and producing texts in motion in urban contexts. Storytelling combined with mobile photography becomes a tool for collectively reinterpreting space. Through an original triangulation of texts, bodies, and urban spaces on the move, the essay proposes new relationships between practices, disciplines, and movement, understood as complementary elements, while also reflecting upon possible strategies for transmitting literary geography within the academic field of the social sciences.

Relationships and the hybridisation of practices and disciplines are at the heart of the third and final section of the volume, *Walking as a Creative Practice*. Moving beyond textual criticism and beyond the text itself, the contributions explore literary creation as both a way of observing and a means of revealing broader socio-environmental processes, from land consolidation to socio-environmental conflicts. At the crossroads of experiential writing and relational practices of textual reactivation, walking emerges as both a method and a creative tool for social inquiry and literary exploration of places and territories, opening up reflections on the role of research-creation and action-research within literary geography.

Chloé Baudry's article, 'Methods of Walking and the Inscription of the Walk in Literary Creation: Reflections from a Writing Project – A Creative Journal,' examines the role that walking practices have played within her research-creative project devoted to land consolidation practices in France and their human, social, and environmental consequences. Family memories and cadastral archives are thus brought into dialogue with a writing practice that rediscovers, through walking, a productive methodology of literary investigation, both in terms of creative process and in the literary translation of territorial transformations.

These concerns likewise reappear in the essay 'Ri-fiabare: Methodological Notes from a Geo-literature Lab, Between Geographies of Life and Narrative Re-appropriations of the Places We Traverse' by Maria Luisa Mura and Francesca Nardi, who together present the experience of their literary geography lab *Ri-fiabare*. Adopting a multi-voiced approach that combines scientific observations with reflections collected *ex post* from participants in the first three sessions, the article examines the applications of literary geography within situated lab-based practices, thereby exploring walking as a creative method for reconnecting texts to their spatial and relational dimensions. By foregrounding the political stakes of representations of extractivist processes and socio-environmental conflicts, the proposal seeks to re-assess the laboratory-based approach as a creative practice of resistance and critical problematization of contemporary modes of dwelling. In doing so, it aligns with a central strand of the cultural turn in literary geography, which conceives of literature as a possible form of intervention in the politics of cultural representation (Brosseau 2022: 53).

What emerges from this itinerary is not only the need to reflect on practices that 'step outside' the text (Brosseau 2022: 17), but also the intention to rethink writing and its creative strategies as a sensitive instrument (Tuan 1978: 194) for engaging with complex social phenomena. Walking thus becomes a way to move beyond disciplinary boundaries and to develop new shared approaches, both in research, in education and in cultural participation, but also in social practices of the everyday life.

This is not a finished or exhaustive work. Yet, if research can itself be understood as a form of walking (Cassano 2024), this collective trajectory may open up new ways of reading texts and contexts, and of understanding places, experiences, and relationships through mobile narrations.

Notes

¹This study day was organized together with the research units CAER (Centre Aixois d'Études Romanes) and CIELAM (Centre interdisciplinaire d'étude des littératures d'Aix-Marseille), in collaboration with the Institut Créativité et Innovation (InCIAM).

²All translations by the authors except where otherwise noted.

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