

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

The Work and the World: Mobilities and Literary Space

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Abstract:

This special section started its life as papers delivered at the American Association of Geographers meeting in 2015, in two panels which broadly considered the relationships between 'the work and the world'. Those panels explored the various ways in which literatures overspill their textual boundaries and interact with the world. The papers that were delivered together suggested that the space of 'the work', or literature, or art, is not necessarily distanced from the spaces of the world. From studies of mobility as a theme in literary representations, to new ways of mapping, and histories of travel and writing, these papers each argue that literary works are necessarily bound up in extra-textual space, and these extra-textual spaces are constituent parts of literature. Joining these papers is a mutual recognition that being mobile is as important as being in place for people's encounters with fiction. The interactions of mobile people with texts are used by each author as a way to think through the various expressions and consequences of the embodied and experiential act of encountering literature. In this special issue, we consider how the dynamic relationships between reader and text, person and world, can reverberate on literary creation and re-creation. We demonstrate a variety of ways in which the space of literature and literature's relationship to the extra-textual world are being theorised within the broad church of literary geography.

Keywords: mobility, travel, space of literature, actual-world, representation.

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In recent years the pages of this journal have illustrated the variety of approaches to the relationship between space and text manifest in literary geography. Indeed, the journal's first editorial noted that the past few decades have seen the rise of a 'broader literary geography, which has come to include work grounded in a wide range of academic fields including not only human geography but also literary criticism, literary cartography, geocriticism, comparative literature, and the digital and spatial humanities' (Hones et al. 2015: 1). The articles in this special section have been collected with one, simple, aim: to illustrate how the various strands of literary geography can productively be brought together around one topic or question. The question here is: what is the space of literature, how is it defined and how does it relate to the actual world? Tellingly, the articles collected here are all joined in foregrounding mobility of people and texts as a key site for the generation and understanding of the relationships between the work and the world.

The articles collected in this special section started life as papers delivered at the American Association of Geographers meeting in 2015, in two panels which broadly considered the relationships between 'the work and the world'. In those panels my co-convenor, Dr. Philip Howell, and I wanted to explore the various ways in which literary geographies can contribute to the ways literatures overflow their textual boundaries and interact with the world. We were eager to address the idea, once so common in literary studies, that the space of 'the work', or literature, or art, is necessarily distanced from the space of the world. We were looking for contributions that might suggest a challenge to the idea that literary works sit at relational, perhaps ontological distance from the 'actual world'. The papers that we received took this simple idea and ran with it. From studies of mobility as a theme in literary representations, to new ways of mapping, and histories of travel and writing, each paper demonstrated that the work and the world are often not distanced at all. Instead, these papers each argue that the work is necessarily bound up in the world, and the world is a part of literary works.

Joining these papers is a mutual recognition that being mobile is as important as being in place for people's encounters with fiction. The interactions of mobile people with texts are used by each author as a way to think through the various expressions and consequences of the embodied and experiential act of encountering literature. The embodied and the experiential is a key aspect of writing and reading for the authors here. Perhaps this is because, as Rebecca Solnit said of her own experience of walking her native San Francisco: 'walking is a state in which the mind, the body and the world are aligned' (Solnit 2002: 7); and also that 'each walk moves through space like a thread through fabric, sewing it together into a continuous experience' (xv). Like Solnit's experience of the California coastlands, for each author, people's experiences in the world, experiences gained on-the-move, are the engine which drive the process of literature, knitting together actual-world experiences and literary texts into one, continuous and indivisible *happening*.

The relationship between literature and the actual world – the question of whether the space of literature is cordoned off or integrated into everyday life – sits at the heart of the relational approach to literary geography that has received much attention in the pages of this journal recently. However, it remains pertinent to draw some lines within

which the papers gathered here can be better understood. For our purposes here, the debate over the relationship between the work and the world can be traced to Maurice Blanchot in his *L'Espace littéraire* (1955), translated to English in 1982 as *The Space of Literature*. For Blanchot's translator, Ann Smock, his use of the word *espace* 'implies the withdrawal of what is ordinarily meant by "place"; it suggests the site of this withdrawal. Literature's space is like the place where someone dies: a *nowhere*, Blanchot says' [emphasis added] (Blanchot 1982: 10). Such a stark claim is founded on Blanchot's perception that 'To write is, moreover, to withdraw language from the world' (26) and that, 'literature's purest and most authentic grandeur' is associated with the idea of 'wasted time' (1) – that is, time that would not be considered 'productive' by the world beyond (and perhaps antithetical to) literary enquiry. For Blanchot these are literature's strengths.

The same is true for adherents of 'geocriticism', a literary geographical movement that has arisen in the past decade, alongside the relational thinking embraced by this journal and many of its contributors. Geocriticism's founder-figure, Bertrand Westphal, has echoed Blanchot's idea that literature's power lies in its place *outside* the space and time of the world: 'I will never get tired of repeating that fiction does not reproduce the real, but actualises new virtualities that had remained unformulated, and that then on to *interact* with the real according to the hypertextual logic of interfaces... fiction detects possibilities buried in the folds of the real, knowing that these folds have not been temporised' (Westphal 2007: 171). Furthermore, Westphal's geocritical acolytes, including his English translator Robert Tally, have extended his positions. Tally's own *Spatiality* (2013) is organised around the idea that the author's creative act of construction and the reader's act of interpretation are separate instances (which he calls respectively 'literary cartography' and 'literary geography') - and the text is broken up between these. It is a challenge for Jonathan Bratt's claim, in these pages, that 'authors and readers [are] not primarily... interpreters of texts and the worlds that prefigure them, but [are] bound up with texts and worlds through rhythmic encounters and immersions' (2016: 182).

Despite Tally's challenge, Bratt's words are a reminder that thinking about the work and the world as being immersed within each other can be a productive source of literary insight. Jonathan Bate, in his influential work of ecocriticism, *The Song of the Earth* (2000), made just such a call. For Bate, the power of Byron's haunting poem *Darkness* seemed to transcend any reading that treated it as a 'network of sources... as a purely textual weave' (Bate 2000: 98). Instead, he looked *outside* the text and found a more likely inspiration in the time and place in which the poem was created: the inclement weather of 1816, Europe's 'year without a summer', characterised by very poor harvests, economic and political unrest, and apocalyptic-seeming sunspots, darkening the very face of the sun. Indeed, the Romantic writers' focus on the weather is an important motif in Bate's argument that the work and the world (or nature and culture, as he terms it) are not opposing forces. Just as Byron and Keats composed their poetry by being out in the world, so for Bate, an awareness of one's place in the world (he also drew heavily on Heidegger's ideas of being-in-the-world) was critical to readers' encounters with fiction.

Equally, an awareness of one's place in a text can be critical to understanding people's encounters with the world. Recognition of this idea has been central to certain strands of literary geography, particularly as they have engaged with human geographers' theories of people and place. Human geography's broad relationship to literature as a source of insight into the workings of the world has been growing ever more theoretically enriched. Human geographers working within the methods and concerns of literary geography are becoming more confident in asking not only 'what does literature know?' (Saunders 2010: 439) but also 'how do encounters with literature play out in the lives we live?'. Anderson's recent contribution to this journal, on relational literary geography and assemblage theory (Anderson 2015) provides a useful illustration of the power of asking both these questions.

In this special issue, we propose to continue this debate by considering how the dynamic relationships between reader and text, person and world, can reverberate on literary creation and re-creation. We propose to demonstrate a variety of ways in which the space of literature and literature's relationship to the extra-textual world are being theorised within the broad church of literary geography. Each paper addresses these dynamic, creative relations between work and world by foregrounding mobilities of people and texts - as a constituent part of people's encounters with fiction and with the actual world. We start with Madeleine Hamlin's 'Geographies of Mobility in James Joyce's *Dubliners*'. Hamlin practices a geographically-attuned reading which emphasises the interplay between mobility and immobility at the heart of this text. For Hamlin the crucial aspect of *Dubliners* is how it 'pressures the boundaries of the real and the fictional' (Hamlin 2016: 128). This pressure comes first from the author's intention - she tellingly describes the novel's representation of Dublin not as metaphor but as synecdoche, referring to the part he intended the novel to play in broader Irish society, culture and history. Secondly, the novel's place in the world is enacted through the reader's orientation in the novel. As, 'the city is coded via symbolic references to place that rely upon a knowledge of the city's urban geography and cultural history' (1), so the reader's encounter with Joyce's Dublin rises and falls in relation to their own encounters with the world outside of it.

David McLaughlin's 'The Game's Afoot!: Walking as practice in Sherlockian literary geographies' extends this emphasis on readers' geographical and social position as a conduit of the relationship between the work and the world. Through readings of three literary guidebooks written by and for devotees of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, McLaughlin argues that they portray a form of encounter with fiction that he describes as 'expansionary literary geography'. The fan-written texts he discusses are representative of a corpus of texts that has until recently received little scholarly attention. McLaughlin demonstrates that in framing their encounters with place in a narrative of travel, these authors all, in their own ways use the power of walking to combine embodied experiences in the actual world with acts of memory and imagination, inscribing the Sherlock Holmes texts into the world. Their walking and its representation become a form of both reading and writing, a physical experience of the unfolding of narrative in time and space, and a contribution to the imaginative expansion of Holmes's world.

Turning from readers to authors, Steven Driever's 'Beyond the Narrative: An Intertextual Reading of Harry Franck's Travel Writing on Haiti, 1919-1938' explores the role that travel writing played in shaping debates in America over the United States' military involvement in that Caribbean island. Writing about a genre which has long carried with it expectations of realistic representation as well as covert fictionalisation, Driever demonstrates the role that this genre plays in reaffirming and questioning the apparent boundaries between fact and fiction and between text and the world. Franck's own mobility and its contrast to the immobility of his American readership - at least in relation to Haiti - become the driver of his texts' power to convey an image of Haiti - whether as a peaceful holiday resort or an occupied and fractured society.

We end this section by zooming out, to take a more cosmological view of literature and the world. In 'The Spirit Wanders with Things: A Literary Post-Phenomenology', Jonathan Bratt outlines what he terms a 'post-phenomenology' of literary production. Turning from the idea that people, whether authors or readers, are 'primarily as interpreters of texts and the worlds that prefigure them' (Bratt 2016: 182), Bratt proposes that people are 'bound up with texts and worlds through rhythmic encounters and immersions' (182). Leading from the philosophical stance that readers are not simply eyes and minds but are creatures in the world, embodied and affective, Bratt's article reflects many of the concerns of relational literary geography towards the importance of situated encounters with literature. Importantly, Bratt focuses on the dynamics of reading, how 'author, reader, and work undergo mutual transformation' (182) in the process of encountering fiction.

Together, these articles form a vision of the variety of ways in which literary geographers can be attentive to the importance of mobilities in forming relations between literary works and the actual world. Indeed, the articles encountered here have all moved a long way from their origins, as oral papers delivered in a conference room, in a hotel, in downtown Chicago. Via the internet, these papers have moved from their authors' computers to the editors' and reviewers' - and back again- each time facilitating dialogue and being altered in turn. Their next step, to paraphrase Hones, is 'up to you'. That is, how the ideas contained here shape the lives that we as academics live is contingent on the spaces and times of their consumption and re-creation by the readers of *Literary Geographies*. No one involved in this special section can yet know what the (necessarily provisional) results will be. However, it is likely that some form of 'mutual transformation' (Bratt 2016: 195), of new encounters, will occur.

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