



Text as It Happens: Literary Geography

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Abstract

This article reviews the current situation in geographical work with fiction in the context of an explicitly spatial view of the writing–reading nexus as a contextualized and always emerging geographical event. It argues that this way of conceptualizing the text events of both narrative fiction and academic knowledge production provides a way of understanding and dealing with incompatible literary interpretations and also with irreconcilable approaches to literary geography. This openness to multiplicity develops from the point that text events are not only relational by nature and generated within social contexts in the initial encounter of author, text, and reader, but also only become publicly accessible when subsequently articulated within the mediating context of a particular social situation. The article proposes that literary geography as a collective endeavor can be developed and consolidated through an appreciation of the varying contexts within which geographically oriented work with fiction is performed and articulated.

1 Introduction

As reader and writer, you and I, we are currently sharing a moment of text-based spatial interaction, a geographical event. We are engaged across distance, participating in an improvisation that is bringing together a broad array of people, places, times, contexts, networks, and communities. The way in which our spatial event will unfold is both unpredictable and unique: it is emerging at this moment out of the mixing together of my intentions and habits in writing and your purposes and habits in reading. This encounter and mixing together also includes multiple traces of other readers and writers: novelists, geographers, colleagues, students, reviewers, and editors. It is informed by disparate communities and specialist competencies, by contexts and local conditions. The physical words on the page are involved: the text, the font, the layout, the page, and the screen. Writing and reading technologies are part of it, too, not to mention lighting, heating, the view from our windows, and ambient sound: my chair, your desk, and our bodies. Our shared text event is happening now in place and time, at the intersection of all these things.

In this way, as a reader taking up a text, you have set off an event. The idea of text as event – that a text ‘happens’ when read – is well established

in literary studies, particularly in the fields of reader-response and reception (Machor and Goldstein 2001; Schweickart and Flynn 2004). Nonetheless, the happening has rarely been understood within literary studies as a spatial event, something with a geography; which is to say, something which happens at the intersection of agents and situations scattered across time and space, both human and non-human, absent and present. A more explicitly geographical view of the practice of reading can be found in work in the histories of science and of the book (Keighren 2006; Livingstone 2005), but here the emphasis is not so much on the spatiality of the reading experience itself as on the geographies of book production and dissemination and the spatial distribution of particular interpretations (their association with particular regions and locations). This difference in emphasis is no doubt related not only to disciplinary differences but also to genre-related differences in the practice of interpretation: while reader-response and reception studies engage primarily with the reading of fiction and poetry, work in the history of science concentrates on non-fiction. James Machor's *Readers in History*, for example, deals with American literature and its 19th-century contexts of response, while James Secord's *Victorian Sensation* focuses on the publication, reception, and authorship of the 1844 *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Machor 1993; Secord 2000).

The aim of this article is to review the field of geographical work dealing with fiction and poetry in the context of an explicitly spatial view of text that understands the writing-reading nexus as a contextualized and always emerging event. It has two main arguments, the second of which develops from the first. The more basic proposal is that, in its inherent validation of multiplicity in reading, this way of conceptualizing fiction provides a helpfully non-competitive way of understanding and dealing not only with incompatible interpretations of particular texts but also with widely different definitions of the reader. This openness to multiplicity develops from the point that fictional text events are not only relational by nature and generated within social contexts to start with, but further only become publicly accessible when subsequently articulated within the mediating context of a particular social situation. Performed readings or interpretations are thus produced in relation to at least two geographies, the first being the geography of the initial text event, and the second being the geography of the context in which the reader's experience of that event is later narrated.

Building on this idea of a secondary geography of performative context, the article goes on to propose that the idea of text-as-event can be usefully deployed even more broadly in conceptualizing literary geography as a coherent field: not just as a method of dealing with differences in the methods and results of interpretation, but also as a method of dealing with the more fundamental differences in theory and practice that currently seem to separate work interested in critical interpretation and textual

analysis from work directed toward material and embodied practices of public reception. While this article concentrates on work that tends more toward academic interpretation than the analysis of popular reception, it nonetheless takes it for granted that professional textual criticism (and the analysis of that criticism, defined as one form of public reception) is simply one of several strategies that would make up a unified and comprehensive field of literary geography – that a wide range of mutually informative geographical work with literary texts is currently being produced in the context of radically different disciplinary conversations, for different purposes, and in different academic and social contexts. Hence, the basic idea here is that rethinking the production of knowledge in literary geography within the framework of the text as a geographical event might provide a way of understanding and coping with differences in approach across the field as a whole. The methodological potential of literary geography as a collective endeavor could then be developed and consolidated by confronting, theorizing, and working with the reasons behind its current diversity. In this way, it might become possible for productive collaboration across the field to emerge out of an appreciation of the varying contexts within which geographically oriented work with fiction is performed and articulated.

2 Literary Geographies

One of the most fundamental issues in literary geography has been (and still is) the question of whether its key terms refer to discipline or to subject matter. On the one hand, the term ‘geography’ has been used to refer not only to the theories and practices of an academic field but also to the spaces, places, and phenomena of the physical world. On the other hand, while the term ‘literature’ has at times been used to refer to literary studies as a discipline, it has more commonly been taken to refer to literary texts as primary sources. The imagined interaction has sometimes as a result become quite complex. Daniels and Rycroft, for example, in their paper on Alan Sillitoe’s Nottingham novels, set out to ‘try to re-vision the relationship between “geography and literature” in a way which takes account of some recent developments in cultural geography and literary criticism’ (Daniels and Rycroft 1993, 461). Nonetheless, they consider geography and literature ‘not as the conjunction of two essentially distinct, coherent disciplines’, but as ‘a field of textual genres – the novel, the poem, the travel guide, the map, and the regional monograph – with complex overlaps and interconnections’. In this way, although their emphasis at first appears to be on the interface between two disciplines, they nonetheless construct the field of overlap not by bringing together scholarly work in geography and literary criticism, but by comparing academic texts produced by geographers (the map, the regional monograph) with literary texts produced by authors (the novel, the poem).

In similar fashion, Robinson (1977) proposed that 'Proust's view of the world . . . bears many resemblances to that of the French school of geography' (p. 556), while Gilbert (1994) has looked at the 'intertextuality of urban ecologists and writers of urban fiction' (p. 285). Other geographers have constructed the interface in similarly textual terms, although they have often at the same time emphasized the way in which 'the geographer's mode of regard is very different to that of the novelist' (Simpson-Housley 1988, 270). Pocock's humanistic approach also focused on literary texts rather than literary studies: while 'acknowledging the complementary field of literary criticism', he envisioned the interface primarily as the meeting of human geography, 'an art or social science', with literature, 'an artistic creation' (1981a, 9; see also 1988). Bordessa (1988) countered this emphasis on opposition – a geography of factual descriptions versus literary 'flights of imagination' (Mallory and Simpson-Housley 1987, xii) – on the grounds that literature (novels) and geography (the discipline) are both 'bent to the same task of understanding the world', each able to 'benefit from being informed by the progress of the other' (Bordessa 1988, 273).

All of the works cited so far were published in the period 1975–1995 and can be located relatively easily in relation to Pocock's (1988) review of the field for *Progress in Human Geography*, in which he argued the case for the literary text as both 'a source and a tool for geographical exploration' and a textual model: the 'ultimate engagement with literature is achieved when a scholar turns artist' (p. 96). Brosseau's (1994) review of the field for the same journal, however, indicated a major shift in emphasis and, by implication at least, a greatly increased interest in the analytic methods of literary criticism. Brosseau (1994) argued strongly for the need 'to spend more time on the text itself – its general structure, composition, narrative modes, variety of languages, style, etc. – before embarking on any type of interpretation whatsoever' (p. 347). While Brosseau maintained the configuration of the interface in terms of the relationship between geography as a discipline and the literary text, he insisted on the value of the close reading techniques characteristic of literary studies in analyzing the subversive power of fiction, arguing that geographers engaging with literary texts should overlook neither 'the specificity of its form' nor 'its singular use of language'. In this way, Brosseau (1994) enabled a major shift in attention away from the geography of the fictive world and toward the ways in which 'the literary text may constitute a "geographer" in its own right as it generates norms, particular modes of readability, that produce a particular type of geography' (p. 349).

The contents of a 1996 special issue of *GeoJournal* mark a key moment in the divergence of streams of work in literary geography. On the one hand, the issue's survey essay reviews the history of 'geography and literature' from a position that discounts the early work in the field (e.g., Darby 1948) that compared literary descriptions with real places or reconstructed historical geographies from literary sources (Lando 1996).

Instead, it validates a humanistic approach that 'regards literature *as a source of environmental knowledge*', an approach which looked to understand landscape not only in terms of artifacts or physical features but also 'in terms of behavior, sensations, ideas, feelings, hopes, and faith' (Lando 1996, 10). In the same issue, however, Squire acknowledges the importance of taking into consideration 'the social, cultural and political contexts within which texts are created and interpreted' (Daniels 1985; Silk 1984; Thrift 1978) in her study of the stories of Beatrix Potter (Squire 1996, 76). Noting that 'questions of textual consumption and cultural communication have gone virtually unexplored' in geographical literary studies, Squire considers Potter's stories not only as geographically interesting in themselves, but also in relation to product merchandising, global tourism, cultural production/consumption, and various kinds of reader. The same issue of *GeoJournal* also includes Sharp's (1996) article on 'literature, geography, and Salman Rushdie' in which she argues for an expanded and re-theorized literary geography, in this case taking up for consideration not only 'Rushdie's global geo-graphing' but also 'the geo-graphing of Rushdie' (p. 125).

Sharp's updated review of the field and further development of this line of argument appeared in *Area* (Sharp 2000). Here, Sharp (2000) builds on Brosseau's insistence on the need to focus on the distinctiveness of literary expression and its ability to 'destabilize' taken-for-granted geographies in calling for a literary geography able to deal with texts as both complex artistic creations and as 'things' that have 'very material existences and detectable roles within society' (p. 333). Partly as a result of this emphasis on the broad social significance of text, Sharp (2000) makes a clear distinction between literature and literary studies, justifiably viewing literary theorists as performing particular kinds of reading and emphasizing that, as not all readers 'read the complexities of the text with the . . . informed skills' of a literary critic, the question of 'how [a text] was received, interpreted and read by its various audiences' must be taken seriously (p. 332).

3 *Speaking across Boundaries*

One of the many ways in which the history of the geographical engagement with literary text could be narrated might thus be in terms of an ever-expanding answer to the question of what, exactly, is geographical about text. Starting with early discussions of literary geography published in the *Geographical Review* (Anon 1924, 1938) that focused on the 'highly developed geographical instinct' of some authors and the subsequent value of their literary descriptions of local place and region, such a narrative would be able, in one plot thread, to trace this approach through to the present day. There has been a steady stream of articles, for example, in the *Journal of Geography* laying out the value of literary texts in teaching geographical themes and regions (see, for example, Brooker-Gross 1981; Elbow and Martinson 1980; Gesler 2004; Hathaway 1993; Hoy and Elbow 1976;

Lamme 1977; Marchetti 1993; Mitchell 1998). Similarly, in his 1998 discussion of regional writers of Eastern Ontario who 'allow a better understanding of landscape and inscapes of this particular place' (p. 29), Osborne (1996) pushed back against the move to shift attention away from 'the authorial imagination', noting that 'for me, authors continue to be the *primary* guarantors of meaning' (p. 38).

From the mid-1990s on, however, geographers also began to emphasize the value of engaging critically not only with the 'intricate and complex signifying practice called text' (Brousseau 1994, 349) but also with the contexts of writing, publishing, promotion, and reading. Even within the tradition of close reading, more attention was being paid to the 'how' of fiction – narrative style, intertextuality, figurative language – than to the 'what and where' of plot and setting. Furthermore, in addition to this expanded focus on author, text, and the (unlocated, academic) reader, the field began to include studies of the textual experiences of particular kinds of readers, turning to the discussion of non-academic audiences (e.g., Sharp 2000), or to the resisting reader engaging with text against the grain of its implied authorial audience (Barnett 1996; Morris 1996; Phillips 2001).

Five years after Sharp's *Area* review, Miles Ogborn published an updated review of work on the 'relationships between words and spaces' in a special issue of the journal *New Formations*. Here, he summarized the current situation in literary geography, noting how scholarly attention has moved away from an interest in the differences between spaces and texts to engage with the issue of their similarities (Ogborn 2005–2006). These similarities are being explored, he argues, in four main directions, texts and spaces now being regarded in parallel as 'culturally produced, as sharing a formal aesthetics, as material, and as differentially enacted through embodied practice'. As this list suggests and as Ogborn further notes, a gap appears to be opening up in literary geography between two radically different approaches: on the one hand, there are 'ever more complex readings of the meanings of texts, spaces and their conjunctions', and on the other, studies of the 'geographies of production and dissemination and embodied practices of reading and writing' (p. 149).

This sense of a gap, however, depends to some extent on the assumption that the readings produced by academics and literary critics are essentially different (and unrelated) to those produced by the general public. This appearance of essential difference is naturalized by the fact that professional criticism, on the one hand, is understood to contain its own significance, while public interpretations require further interpretation, analysis, or explanation. In addition, criticism tends to be detached from issues of production and dissemination, and its social context taken for granted. But if we take up the idea that all readings are articulated within the mediating context of some kind of social situation – whether an academic journal or a conversation in the supermarket – then it becomes possible to understand professional and public readings not so much as essentially

different practices but as the same kind of practice differently conditioned by context, conventions, and expectations. What kinds of interpretation are considered appropriate? How is disagreement managed? How is originality assessed and how much is it valued? What skills are privileged? What kinds of other texts are referred to? How is language used? In the end, one kind of reading is hardly more embodied, material, or real than another, nor is one inherently more informative, more authentic, or more authoritative. It all depends on the complex contextual geographies of the encounter with text and the articulation of response.

The disciplinary differences separating geography from literary studies, however, make it quite difficult to think of academic criticism as one form of public consumption. Where geographical work with fiction naturally tends to take it for granted that textual analysis is a strategy useful for the exploration of geographical themes, work in literary studies has a different purpose and writes for a different audience. Thus, while literary critics do work with geographical theory, they do not often refer to substantive work on literary texts produced by geographers, and even the key reviews of work in the field are rarely mentioned. Sara Blair's (1998) 'Cultural Geography and the Place of the Literary', for example, despite being expressly directed toward the topic of crossover work in geography and literature, cites a wide range of work by geographers and spatial theorists (Lefebvre, for example, Harvey, Massey, Sassen, Soja) but makes no reference to work on literary topics published in geographical journals, not even citing the review articles by Pocock (1981b) and Brosseau (1994). Similarly, Andrew Thacker's article 'The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography', published in the same issue of *New Formations* as Ogborn's review, while it expresses enthusiasm for 'the growth of a genuinely interdisciplinary field that studies the interface between texts and spaces', and emphasizes the impact on literary and cultural studies of work by Harvey and Soja, makes no reference to Pocock, Lando, Brosseau, or Sharp (or Blair, working in American literary history, while Thacker is mainly engaging with the UK and European literary modernism).

Disciplinary differences – differences in purpose, context, vocabulary, and authorial audience – thus inhibit the development of 'a genuinely interdisciplinary field'. Despite calls for balance – for the need to pay attention to both 'the textuality of space' and 'the spatiality of texts' (Stainer 2006) – the two strands remain stubbornly distinct. Stainer, for example, explains that '[f]or the geographer, literary fiction potentially allows insights into places and manifestations of place identity' on the basis of 'the inherent spatiality of the novel as a cultural form, and the position of the novelist as simultaneous witness/interpreter and shaper of social worlds real and imagined' (Stainer 2006, 103–104). Meanwhile, Thacker makes it clear that for him literary geography is primarily a matter of interpretation: the 'process of reading and interpreting literary texts by reference to geographical concepts . . . is what I mean by a critical literary

geography' (Thacker 2005–2006, 60). Thacker's interest thus lies in how 'the analysis of literary texts can be enriched by the use of geographical ideas and practices' (Thacker 2005–2006, 56). His version of literary geography is grounded firmly in the context of literary and cultural criticism and his review is for that reason a history of a particular geographically inflected 'interpretative strategy' in a particular (non-geographical) field.

In the same themed issue of the journal *New Formations*, Richard Phillips and Scott McCracken explicitly acknowledge the difficulties of cross-disciplinary work, remarking that 'misunderstandings are the inevitable consequences of differences in perspective, language and values: of different critical literacies' (Phillips and McCracken 2005–2006, 8), and further noting the significance of 'the realities of disciplinary power and influence' and of literal as well as disciplinary locations. As they point out, the special issue in which their editorial appears, and which is focused on the question of 'where the spatial imagination is taking cultural criticism', developed out of a conference that 'took place on geographical terrain', although the journal itself includes 'culture, theory and politics, but not geography in its title' (p. 8). These difficulties of collaboration in the field of literary geography, as they suggest, cannot be understood simply in terms of broad disciplinary differences between geography and literary studies, but must also take into consideration the different interests, contexts, and power relations that sustain the separation of interpretive work and studies of the material practices of publication and consumption. 'Speaking productively across boundaries,' they conclude, 'is something that has to be worked at'.

There is a knotty problem, of course, at the heart of any attempt to speak across boundaries: to whom is one speaking? Is one's audience primarily 'over there'? Or should one be trying to speak 'over there' and 'over here' at the same time? How much to explain, how much background to provide, which terms to use, how to locate one's argument, what to cite? The location of the speaking simplifies the problem at the same time that it reinforces the boundaries. If a scholar were to present exactly the same article in precisely the same way at a geography conference and at a meeting of literary studies specialists, it would quite likely lead to miscommunication if not mystification in one or both locations. But if the scholar were to tailor the article in two different forms for two different journals (*American Literary History*, for example, and *Progress in Human Geography*), writing in a different style and using a different set of contextualizing citations, the separation of spheres would be maintained: borders would be confirmed as well as crossed.

4 *The Location of Meaning*

Is it possible, then, for these various approaches to the idea of a literary geography brought into productive collaboration? Can literary geographers,

geographers interested in the public consumption of literary texts, and literary critics interested in the application of spatial theory speak across boundaries while still making sense ‘at home’? Perhaps one way forward might be found in a heightened metadisciplinary awareness of that ‘home’, built on an understanding of the ways in which it differs from other traditions dealing with similar material. The key here lies in the idea that the performative context is a contributing element in the event of text and the exchange of ideas – with context understood as ‘a performative social situation’, not necessarily local, ‘a plural event which is more or less spatially extensive and more or less temporally specific’ and which ‘invites only particular kinds of presenting practices’ (Thrift 1996, 7, 41). By understanding the significance of the context of knowledge production in these terms, and accepting the extent to which academic performances are always embedded in ‘a contextually specific process of social negotiation’ (Thrift 1996, 8), we might become able to theorize difference in terms of location rather than disagreement, develop newly spatialized ways of envisioning common ground, and become more willing and more likely to read as well as write across boundaries.

Following up this line of thought in relation to academic as well as popular responses to literary text, we might become able to see how both emerge not only out of the initial encounter of reader, writer, and text, but also out of the particular social situation within which the reader’s experience of that event is later narrated: the conversation, journal, conference, and seminar room. This would make it possible to see how, in the case of published work, there is a complex interaction going on between various imagined audiences and projected readers, an interaction that strongly affects the way in which analysis is framed. First, the literary text encountered by the analyst not only embodies a narrative audience (the fictional audience addressed by the narrator) and an authorial audience (the actual audience implicitly addressed by the author) but also enables a resisting audience engaging with the text at a self-conscious distance, unable or unwilling to identify, for whatever reason, with the implied authorial audience (Barnett 1996; Morris 1996; Phillips 2001). Second, the analyst, just like the book group participant posting online, articulates his or her reading in the context of a specific authorial audience. In the context of professional literary scholarship, the figure commonly referred to as ‘the reader’ is, after all, a highly particular kind of reader, ‘an interpretive (not a natural) category that functions (like “the text” or “the author’s intention”) as a hermeneutic device in practical criticism and the other areas of literary study’ (Mailloux 1982, 13). Interpretations are thus convincing or otherwise only in the context of ‘shared ways of making sense of texts’ and ‘group-licensed strategies for constructing meaning, describable in terms of conditions for intelligibility’ (Mailloux 1982, 11). In geography as well as in literary studies, as Berg has pointed out, ostensibly objective but in fact highly particular readers also have considerable

impact in the shaping of academic knowledge production, as editors, commentators, and peer-reviewers (Berg 2001). To say that readings emerge at the intersection of multiple trajectories is by no means to suggest that all readings can be accepted as equally valid in all contexts. Academic literary studies functions as a coherent academic field precisely because it has efficient methods of preventing interpretative chaos, 'regulating the proliferation of interpretations, of distinguishing interpretations that are competent, valid, and appropriate to the study of literature from those that are incompetent, invalid, or irrelevant' (Schweickart and Flynn 2004, 5)

Not surprisingly, a longstanding problem in the study of all kinds of reader-response (whether academic or not) remains the question of the location of meaning. Does it reside in the intention of the author, the words on the page, or the interpretation produced by a reader? If that reader formulates an interpretation in a written article for a particular audience, where can primary agency be located? Schweickart and Flynn have noted that work emphasizing reader-response tends to obscure 'the significance of the text and the creative agency of the author', while work emphasizing the structuring effects of the text tends in contrast 'to efface the agency of the reader'. They conclude that 'the idea of reading as an interaction between two different entities [has] proved difficult to maintain' (Schweickart and Flynn 2004, 4; see also Kneale 1999). The geographical theorization of interaction as a characteristically spatial practice offers a way out of this dilemma. Specifically, the way in which geographers have worked with the idea of spatial interaction in relation to place can be used to generate a comparable approach to text.

Schweickart and Flynn (2004) suggest that within literary studies there is broad consensus on three points fundamental to reader-response studies: that 'the text is not a container of stable, objective meaning', that 'the reader is a producer of meaning', and that 'readings are necessarily various' (p. 1). This view of text relates well to an understanding of place as something relational, unfinished, and dynamic, internally various and the product of interconnected human and non-human histories. The event of text, too, can be articulated in explicitly spatial terms as 'the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing' (Massey 2005, 141).

Approached in these terms, the text, whether a work of fiction, a work of academic analysis, or a post on an Internet book discussion list, can be understood as something that can *only* emerge in the interaction of agents: writers, readers, texts, networks, and contexts. And this seems, in fact, to be the position toward which literary geography as a collective endeavor has been heading, as the field has steadily expanded to include studies of authors, texts, contexts, production, consumption, and multiple kinds of audience located variously in time and place. Crucially, then, this interaction does not have to be understood as 'an interaction between two different

entities' (text and reader), but can be taken up as an interaction involving multiple agents that are all already mutually co-productive and relationally intertwined. And the 'something' that emerges is always going to be both unprecedented and contingent, because just as the 'here and now' of space and place are always both internally various and externally extensive, so the contextual 'here and now' of a literary or academic text event is also hugely complex both in its internal multiplicity and in its spatial and historical extensions. Space as the dimension in which previously unconnected narratives or historical trajectories meet up and interact (Massey 2005) is also, more specifically, the dimension in which writing and reading can take place.

5 Texts as They Happen

Literary geography has the potential to develop as a collective field energized by a sense of shared progress if scholars whose work engages with the geographies of text are willing to recognize the ways in which their own work is conditioned by context, to accept the validity of other contextually conditioned approaches, and to write as well as read across borders. Also critical will be the willingness of scholars working in related fields to cite, present, and publish adventurously, thereby locating their own work in multiple contexts, promoting cross-border thinking, and enabling the development of unprecedented but productive alliances and interactions. This will of necessity have to be a somewhat circular process: the collective audience for literary geography as a whole will have to be generated in the process of being addressed.

The significance of a sense of interaction in the author-text-reader nexus has been well established in relation to poetry and fiction in a range of writings in literary geography. Kobayashi, for example, in an article on the writing and sharing of haiku poetry among first-generation Japanese immigrants in the United States, specifically links social interaction based on shared knowledge and the circulation of texts with the achievement of a sense of belonging in both local place and transnational networks. Kobayashi asks of her texts not only 'What facts does this literature reveal?' and 'How are its values articulated?' but also 'What are its creation, its communication, its sharing, to the people by whom and for whom it was created?' (Kobayashi 1980, 42). Writing on work produced by the Soweto poets in South Africa, Macphail (1997) focuses not on the literary merit of the work but on its progressive function in the community of its immediate production and reception. This acknowledgment of the importance of a sense of belonging can be usefully applied not only to the author-text-reader events of fiction and poetry, but also to the academic texts of literary geography.

Similarly, the power of text to promote collective change and function as social intervention in the geographies of its various audiences has been

noted by geographers working with literary material (Carter 2001; Cresswell 1993; Jazeel 2005; Ridanpää 2007; Sharp 2000; Tyner 2004). This aspect of the text event, too, can be applied to the production of knowledge in literary geography, as long as we acknowledge that it is essential to the idea of the text event that the social impact of any particular text, literary or not, will only emerge in the nexus of its reception by particular readers in particular social contexts. For some readers, a text (whether critical commentary, fiction, or poetry) may appear to speak to reality, as when the 'novelist has the gift of articulating our own inarticulations' (Pocock 1981a, 345). For others, the text may instead be characterized by its failure to articulate, as is the case when Schmid emphasizes, for example, 'the weakness of Chandler's urban critique' while validating, in comparison, Sara Paretsky's presentation of urban detective space, 'more helpful to our larger project of envisioning a "safe" city' (Schmid 1995, 262). The recognition of an apparent gap between the collective 'we' of a particular audience and the text's implied reader (here, in the case of Schmid's *Antipode* paper, between the 'we' of 'our larger project' and Chandler's authorial audience) is part of the text event. And then, there is the resisting reader, as noted in Barnett's (1996, 278) response to *Heart of Darkness* – 'I want to ask what sort of reader this text is trying to turn me into' – and in Surgeoner's (2007, 648) study of van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere*, in which she insists that the 'equivalence of writing and reading means that the text belong simultaneously to the author and the reader,' noting how van Herk herself, in 'un/reading' *Anna Karenina*, produced 'a different fiction'.

Central to the problem of the establishment of a 'we' for literary geography is the fact that work in the field has conventionally been sorted and labeled in such a way as to indicate a primary authorial audience defined by its interest in a shared topic or text, and only after that in terms of an interest in literary geography as such. Articles frequently deal with the work of single authors: Dos Passos (e.g. Brosseau 1995), Gibson (Kneale 1999), Joyce, (Bowen 2003; Johnson 2004; Kearns 2005–2006), Kerouac (Cresswell 1993; McDowell 1996; Rycroft 1996), Larkin (Spooner 1992), Lovecraft (Kneale 2006), and Orwell (Tyner 2004, 2005). And this line of single-author work often crosses over with work linking the writing of particular authors to particular places: Joyce with Dublin, for example, or McNamee and Costello with Belfast (Johnson 1999; Stainer 2006); Austen's England (Crang 2003); Faulkner's South (Aiken 1977, 1979, 1981), Hardy's Wessex (Barrell 1982; Birch 1981; Darby 1948), Helen Hunt Jackson's Southern California (DeLyser 2005) and Sir Walter Scott's Scotland (Paterson 1965). Other single-author or single-text articles concentrate their analysis on particular themes: class in Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha* (Leyda 2008), national culture and gender in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (Morris 1996), race in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (Carter 2006) and in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (McKittrick 2000),

and sexuality in Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* (Brown 2006). And there are genre studies, focusing, for example, on adventure stories (Hones 2006; Phillips 1995, 1997), 'the place-defining novel', (Shortridge 1991), science fiction (Kadonaga 1995/1996; Kitchin and Kneale 2001, 2002; Kneale 1999, 2006), periodicals (Hones 1999, 2000), popular history (Hones and Endo 2006), and travel writing (Blunt 1994; Blunt and Rose 1994).

The potential development of a collaborative community in literary geography has been seriously inhibited by the fact that it is both easy and conventional to organize work in this way, by standard categories such as text, author, and genre. The result of this reductive sorting, frequently evident in citation lists, is that intertextual connections are much easier to make in some ways than others. It seems clear, for example, that one piece of work on Joyce's Dublin would be relevant and useful to another, but it is much harder to see how the detailed textual analysis employed by that article on Joyce might, for example, productively inform work on the geographies of counterfactual history, or the articulation of space in utopian fiction. Similarly, it is obvious that an article with the subtitle 'English cultural and gendered identity in *The Secret Garden*' should be consulted by anyone setting out to write on the literary geography of France Hodgson Burnett. And it is also fairly obvious that the article would be useful to anyone writing on the role of fiction in the construction of national, cultural, and gendered identities. What is not so obvious is how well the same article would connect with geographically oriented work on the use of dialect, the resisting reader, or the role of narrative convention in plot resolution. The conventional assumption that an article on science fiction must be practically irrelevant to an article on the modernist novel ignores the important points that they have in common. Such an assumption prevents literary geographers from writing and reading across borders and holds back the creation of a coherent academic audience for their work, because it obscures so much that is shared and fundamentally important.

6 Conclusion

This article has proposed that a broad and flexible understanding of the field of literary geography as the study of 'text as it happens' might not only enable studies of material practices and interpretive readings to be synthesized as companionable approaches to a particular kind of spatial event, but might also provide a broad metadisciplinary framework within which various kinds of academic difference could themselves be theorized and worked with in spatial terms. The embrace of coeval difference, in other words, not only removes the obligation to strive toward definitive interpretation, but also provides a theoretical framework for the understanding of difference in academic interaction. This should enable literary geographers working in different disciplinary traditions, with different

purposes, or in different social contexts to engage with each other's work, exchange ideas, and communicate productively. By taking responsibility for the production of meaning as readers, while abandoning the illusion of control as writers, literary geographers working together across the spectrum of the field could collaboratively generate a productive sense of community. The process of identifying more clearly the various but overlapping spatial contexts and communities within which readings are not only generated and shared but also assessed as 'definitive', 'wrong', 'path-breaking', or 'outdated', should make it easier to accept contrasting approaches to and understandings of the geographies of text and the texts of geography as coexistent and mutually co-productive. In particular, it should become possible for both analytic strategies and specific readings to be read as the located products of particular collaborations and performative social situations, thereby enabling dialogue and opening up new geographical ways of working with fiction.

Acknowledgment

For their very helpful comments on this article, I would like to thank Ian Cook at *Geography Compass*, the journal's two anonymous referees, James Kneale, and Julia Leyda.

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