

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

The Spatial Hinge: Reframed

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First introduced in Thurgill and Lovell's (2019) examination of place and collaboration in the text-as-spatial-event (Hones 2008, 2014), the spatial hinge describes the ways in which, given the right circumstances, 'actual-world places [might] shift from shaping the reading of the text to being shaped by the reading of the text' (Thurgill and Lovell 2019: 18). The spatial hinge articulates how textual geographies continue to shape and influence the experiencing of extra-literary environments as part of an affective post-reading process:

a process which extends a reading (and with it the text itself) into places previously unassociated with the text, which start to feel as if they belong to the text and, as a result, come to be experienced by readers as fundamental parts of its literary landscape, even where the author has made no connection to such a site in their writing. (Thurgill 2021: 153)

The inseparability of the actual-world and the literary, together with the numerous literary-geographical combinations which unfold from the spatial event of the text, have recently been conceptualised as 'interspatiality' (Hones 2022a, 2022b, forthcoming). Interspatiality offers a new way of thinking and talking about the inseparable nature of literary-geographical space without the limitations and pitfalls found in the binary thinking of terms like the 'literary and actual-world' or the 'real and imagined'. As Hones writes, interspatiality 'enable[s] a way of talking about literary-social-geographical combinations in terms which acknowledge the ways in which they are always inextricably mingled' (Hones 2022b: 15). The spatial hinge is, perhaps, best understood, then, as naming one specific way in which interspatiality can be seen to manifest. As described by Thurgill and Lovell (2019), the experiencing of literary space

in an otherwise unassociated actual-world environment shows how readers encounter textual geographies not through a process of spatial bifurcation, but through the unification of spatial realms, an inhabiting of the all at once social-spatial-textual (see Hones *forthcoming*).

The spatial hinge is, unquestionably, a matter of reader perception. It names a process whereby affectual stimuli – sounds, sights, smells, haptic interaction, etc. – inadvertently stimulate an apprehension of physical space which connects it to or momentarily sets it within an imagined literary geography. The effect is that of a collaborative spatial happening, an ‘event’, an interaction between author, reader, text, and geography (Hones 2008, 2014, 2022a) that is unanticipated by either author or reader, but which nonetheless impacts on the reader’s understanding of the (literary-)geographical space outside of the text. But while the spatial hinge initially focused on the ways in which readers might experience literary spaces in physical spaces unassociated with the text, I’ve become increasingly aware that such a hinge is itself an interspatiality, albeit in meta form. For such hinges are experienced not only by readers but also by authors and the characters who inhabit their literary worlds, because, as Hones (*forthcoming*) notes, authors and characters are also readers; their worlds, too, are shaped and experienced as interspatialities.

What I want to do in this paper, then, is to further explore some of the ways in which the spatial hinge might operate *intra-textually* as well as *extra-textually*, expanding on the notion of an interlocked, entangled literary-geography - imagined and experienced both by readers and characters (when characters are understood to be readers in their own right). Focusing on a single sentence from Susan Hill’s 1983 novel *The Woman in Black*, this short ‘Thinking Space’ article takes a speculative approach to the literary text as both product and producer of relational space, laying the foundations for a new way of thinking about and utilising the concept of the spatial hinge. While this article is exploratory in nature, tracing the possibilities *of* and *for* the spatial hinge, it is nonetheless designed to offer a practical intervention in the current theory and practice of literary geography. Such a move does not indicate a downward shifting of analytical focus – an unnecessary homing in on authorial intention – rather, it prompts a reconfiguration of the spatial hinge as a process which occurs both without and within the literary text, offering a new perspective on a still emerging concept.

Characters, in the same way as readers (and authors), live in complicated textual-tangible-sensory worlds; literary-geographical amalgams which in turn add to the believability of the text. Verisimilitudinous in nature, the writing of spatial hinges into narrative settings allows characters to experience intra-textual geographies in ways which mirror the lived geographical experience of the reader (and author), that is to say, as spatialities formed through unending connections forged between physical, imagined, and remembered geographies: places lived in, visited, read about, painted, narrated, dreamt of, and so on.

Identifying intra-textual spatial hinges reaffirms their existence beyond the experience of any single reader, and therefore reiterates the relevance of the concept in the analysis of literary-geography: if characters can perceive connections between unassociated textual geographies and the geographies they inhabit, then so, therefore, must the authors who write them into the text and the readers who read it. What this points to is a reflexive process through which authors, who are themselves readers, articulate their literary worlds by

contextualising them as moments of literary-geographical convergence: referent, referenced, and imagined geographies become merged in both the characters and readers' experience of the text. If, as Hones suggests, the geography of literature and that of the lived-world might be productively thought of not as distinct, bifurcated spatial realms, but as unified 'literary-social-geographical combinations' that are 'always inextricably mingled' (Hones 2022b: 15), then reframing the spatial hinge as an affectual process which occurs both within and without the literary text further evidences this inseparability, this *interspatiality*.

Susan Hill's 1980 modern Gothic *The Woman in Black* recounts the narrator's, Arthur Kipps, unfortunate encounter with the spectral apparition of Jennet Humfrye, the text's titular character. The young London solicitor Kipps is sent to Eel Marsh House – a remote manor located on a small, wetland island accessible only by causeway during low-tide – to settle the estate of the recently deceased Alice Drablowe. Kipps arrives at the house only to find that both it and the isolated marshland grounds on which it stands are haunted by the vengeful ghost of Alice Drablowe's sister, Jennet.

The spectral geography of Eel Marsh House – one which is at once haunted and haunting for both character and reader – is marked by its contrast to the surrounding landscape, especially that of the north England countryside evoked by Hill in the pages preceding Kipps' arrival at the house. It is here, before the itinerant Kipps enters the interstitial wetland setting of Eel Marsh House and its connecting causeway, where Hill introduces an unassociated referent extra-literary landscape through which both the character and reader's imaginings of this textual geography become codified. As Kipps says of his surroundings:

I saw this part of the world as those great landscape painters had seen Holland, or the country around Norwich. (Hill 1992: 59)

Here, the presentation of landscape via inter- and extra-textual references works to render Kipps' world knowable, legible, both to Kipps and also to Hill's reader, through its similitude to artworks depicting (and emerging) from an unconnected Dutch geography and/or the unassociated geography of a rural East Anglian county. The textual geography of *The Woman in Black* is given shape, *contoured*, through the action of the spatial hinge. Readers familiar with either of the extra-literary geographies referred to by Hill will immediately recall the rather austere scenes they portray: expansive grey skies weighing down on a vast, flattened landscape of fields and waterways; windmills, fens, canals, broads. These are not the landscapes in which Kipps is travelling, neither do they provide the setting for *The Woman in Black* or receive any further mention in the text. Yet, Kipps feeling as if he's in those landscapes, as well as the affective register that is invoked, are used in combination by Hill both to dramatize and to give texture and depth to the story-world she co-constructs alongside the reader.

Interestingly, while the two referent geographies – Holland and Norwich – may to many readers themselves appear unconnected, the history of the landscape surrounding Norwich is one intimately bound up with the Dutch – the imagined and sometimes actual inhabitants of the paintings referred to by Hill. As David Matless points out, the Broadland area that spans the Norwich suburbs to the Norfolk coast was, in part, given shape through Dutch

engineering (Matless 2014). The drainage of fens and coastal marshlands throughout the 17th century via the introduction of sluice technology, as well as the connecting of communities in the region through newly constructed waterways, was made possible by the use of Dutch workers and Dutch technology (Brain 2021; Luckhurst 2022). Taken together with the shared flatness, fens, and expansive lake systems found in each of the places Kipps mentions, Holland and Norfolk are similar both physically and aesthetically. Nikolaus Pevsner commented on the similarities between the two landscapes in his survey of the Norfolk region: ‘From certain points the view is much like in Dutch C17 landscape paintings’ (Pevsner 1962: 306).

The point here is not to dwell upon the shared social and cultural history of two geographically distinct regions, but rather to show how the imagined landscape through which Hill’s character travels emerges, in part, through an intra-textual moment of feeling *elsewhere*. Kipps’ experience of the north England landscape in which he is travelling is mediated through a ‘hinging’ of and between the geography of the text and the unassociated geographies of Dutch landscape paintings and also the Anglo-Dutch landscaping of Norfolk. The spatial hinge *contours* the world narrated in the text through the characters’ literary-geographical experience, while similarly enriching and deepening the reader’s understanding of the text and the geography which emerges from it. In this case, authors can be understood to introduce spatial hinges to dramatize their characters’ spatial experiences while further contextualising the visual and physical appearance of the text’s imagined geography for readers.

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