



**CREATIVE TOURISM IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES:
PLACE, CULTURE, AND LOCAL REPRESENTATION**
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Literary Atlas: A Digital Resource for Creative Tourism in Wales

Kieron Smith, Jon Anderson, Jeffrey Morgan

Recent developments in the tourism industry, as well as in the academic study of tourism, have resulted in new engagements with the “creative turn.” Richards and Wilson (2006) trace this trend to the wider socio-economic context of late capitalism, and the postmodernist and “postmaterialist” attitudes that have arisen from this, wherein broad patterns of consumption have shifted from a focus on the consumption of objects toward a focus on the consumption of activities and experiences. Whereas social “distinction” (Bourdieu 1984) was once signalled by the things one *owns*, in recent years, distinction is increasingly signalled by the things one *does*. In the context of tourist activity, this has translated into a shift from the “spectatorial” goal of consuming as many locations as possible in one lifetime, that which Urry and Larsen describe as the “collecting of different signs that have been very briefly seen in passing at a glance” (2011, 20), toward more interactive forms of touristic “experience” (Pine and Gilmore 1999). No longer is the hackneyed photograph of the Taj Mahal or the Eiffel Tower taken at a distance enough to satisfy tourists possessing a more critical understanding of these “serially reproduced” signifiers of place (Richards and Wilson 2006). The “experience hunger of postmodern consumers” (Richards 2011, 1229) is such that tourists are increasingly seeking not simply to tick destinations off their bucket lists, but to engage in experiences through which they can inform, enrich, and express their senses of themselves.

The benefits of this state of affairs for tourist destinations in smaller communities are, potentially, numerous. For one, the shift in appetite from the consumption of tangible destinations to “intangible cultural resources” means that those locations that do not possess a “rich built heritage”—Taj Mahals and Eiffel Towers—can potentially attract tourists on the basis of their intangible cultural heritage (Richards 2011, 1230). As Duxbury notes in chapter 1 of this volume, creative tourism can attract visitors on a more manageable, smaller scale, and outside the “usual high-tourism season.” Moreover, smaller communities, by virtue of their smallness, tend to be “distinctive” in ways that larger destinations are not. In an era of intense competition for tourist footfall, smaller communities can offer tourists unique and unusual experiences, giving them a “symbolic edge” (Richards 2011, 1230) over their more recognizable competitors. Furthermore, a touristic interest in those intangible, unquantifiable features that make a place “distinctive”—landscapes, languages, cultures, literatures—means that these things might be celebrated and safeguarded for future generations in ways they may not ordinarily be. Creative tourism provides creative people within smaller communities additional revenue for their skills, giving them more opportunities to *create*, and thereby develop and sustain their own practices, resources, and collaborative networks (see Duxbury in this volume). Combined with the provision of “creative” participative experiences, in which tourists are invited to become “co-performers and co-creators” in experiences that enable “self-realization and self-expression” (Richards 2011, 1237), it may therefore be possible to preserve and develop cultural distinctiveness, providing resources for future inhabitants while at the same time attracting tourist trade.

However, there are challenges. Tourism is a powerful part of the “cultural and symbolic economy” (Richards 2011, 1237) the world over, one of the key mechanisms through which culture is produced and reproduced. Given the onus the OECD places on destinations to “transform the basic inherited factors into created assets,” to “make better use of their inherited and created assets to make themselves attractive to tourists” (2009, 29–30), there is the danger that cultural inheritances are reshaped and commodified in the image of the priorities of mass tourism. In this context, smaller communities, again by virtue of their smallness, are arguably more vulnerable to such economic and cultural pressures than larger destinations.

Wales is a case in point. With a population of little over 3 million, Wales is by most measures a “small nation.” Though situated within the United Kingdom, since the formation of a devolved administration in 1999, it has possessed a measure of political independence. A stagnating post-industrial economy has resulted in a concerted effort by the Welsh Government (WG) to push toward the promotion of Wales as a tourist destination. One corollary of this has been an emphasis in policy literature on “distinctiveness,” and on offering tourists a “strong Welsh experience” (Visit Wales 2011, 1). Meanwhile, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, followed by the creation of a Welsh “future generations commissioner” in 2016, placed the onus on the WG to secure a sustainable ecological, social, and cultural environment for future generations. The question for tourism development in the Welsh context, then, is whether tourism can be harnessed—as it has been so successfully in, for example, Iceland (see Aquino and Burns in this volume) and Portugal (Duxbury in this volume)—as a means of improving the economy whilst simultaneously preserving and developing the nation’s distinctiveness in an ecologically, socially, and culturally sustainable way.

This is the context in which *Literary Atlas* has been developed. *Literary Atlas: Plotting English Language Novels in Wales* is an innovative, interdisciplinary exercise in the field of literary geography.¹ The project has created an interactive website showcasing digital deep maps of a selection of novels written in the English language and set in Wales. Alongside this, it has designed an evaluative framework, organizing reading groups and field trips to locations around Wales, encouraging participants—including tourists—to engage with Welsh space and place through the lens of literature, while at the same time evaluating these engagements as potential uses of the *Literary Atlas* website. This chapter will outline the main features of the project and examine some of its findings. It will question whether digital deep mapping of this kind can offer a resource through which residents and visitors can engage with Welsh space and place in sustainable and mutually beneficial, co-creative ways.

Tourism has been an important feature of the Welsh economy for some time. Wales’s economy was once dominated by the extraction of natural resources—primarily, and most famously, from the late nineteenth century onwards, “King Coal” (Morgan [1981] 1998, 322). By the early

twentieth century, Wales was a global centre of heavy industry, but with the decline in the profitability of coal in the 1930s, and the decline in the profitability of those heavy industries that replaced it in the 1980s, Wales's economy has in recent decades been restructured around the service and creative industries, with a major focus on tourism. By the mid-1990s, tourism accounted for nearly one in ten Welsh jobs and “contributed as much to the gross domestic product of Wales as it did in Greece or Spain” (Johnes 2012, 403). Moreover, following the global economic crash of 2008, further hopes were pinned on tourism as a means to attract international investment. As one WG strategy document notes:

Tourism has a key role to play in reinforcing a distinctive and compelling national identity for Wales in the UK and Internationally as a place to visit, invest in and as a place to do business. It can help to reflect our true culture and character. . . . Perceptions of Wales are influenced by a complex mix of factors. Not all of these can be overcome easily but consistent and reinforcing branding can help to overcome weak associations with Wales and develop positive attitudes. (Welsh Government 2013, 7)

Indeed, the tourist industry is an invaluable component of the Welsh economy. Not only is it a major employer that continues to support around 10 per cent of the Welsh workforce, the sector also supports jobs across the spread of the country (Welsh Government 2013, 7), while other sectors—public and private services, the media, finance—are concentrated in South Wales, particularly in the capital, Cardiff. Under the devolution settlement in place at the time of writing, the WG possesses no direct revenue-raising powers; however, it does have the remit to devise its own distinct Welsh tourism strategy as a means to stimulate domestic and international tourism and foreign direct investment. Since 2005 this function has been operated by a department within the WG, Visit Wales.

In the context of what it admitted were the “exceptional financial challenges” of the post-crash era (Welsh Government 2010, 3), compounded by increased competition in both domestic and international tourism markets (Welsh Government 2013, 5), the WG has in recent years pursued

a tourism strategy that focuses on developing Wales's unique "brand" for domestic and international markets and shaping Wales as a "distinctive" destination. To this end, it has taken up the widespread enthusiasm for "mega-events" in Western economies (Richards and Palmer 2010; Rojek 2013). In 2010, the WG established a Major Events Unit to attract and create mega-events in Wales. This new unit was set a remit to create "a positive external reputation and brand image for Wales" and to "deliver a series of economic, social, cultural, and legacy benefits" (Welsh Government 2010, 3). These would primarily consist of major sporting events, such as the 2010 Ryder Cup (Harris 2015), but would also include musical and cultural festivals (Welsh Government 2010). In the area of culture, the Major Events Unit opted to use the recent centenaries of two internationally recognized writers of Welsh birth, Dylan Thomas (2014) and Roald Dahl (2015), as the basis for year-long cultural festivals celebrating the legacy of these writers and, naturally, capitalizing on their value as well-known figures. Following the perceived success of these events, Visit Wales has since pursued a "thematic years approach" to tourism in Wales. The WG declared 2016 as the "Year of Adventure," 2017 the "Year of Legends," and 2018 the "Year of the Sea" (Welsh Government 2016), with the emphasis being the "long-term ambition to grow a stronger and more defined brand for tourism in Wales" (Welsh Government 2016).

This broad-brush "thematic" approach to tourism draws upon research that suggests that the creation of "distinctive" national branding plays an important part in attracting foreign direct investment and, of course, tourists. Visitor research conducted by Visit Wales showed that "having a distinct, authentic Welsh experience is an important factor in influencing trip satisfaction" (2012, 1). Indeed, the WG tourism policy and strategy documents since 2008 have been peppered with the terms "authentic" and "distinctive," and the two are often used together, interchangeably, as the following excerpts show: "travellers are looking for distinctive, authentic experiences" (1); "having a distinct, authentic Welsh experience" (1); "the presentation of authentic, compelling and distinctive stories" (6); "Authentic experiences: We need to provide a distinctive sense of place experience" (Welsh Government 2013, 27). However, "distinctiveness" and "authenticity" are, of course, not synonymous terms. It is possible to be "distinctive" without being remotely "authentic," and vice

versa. Inevitably, these conceptual slippages spill out into the practice of cultural tourism itself; indeed, it could be argued that in recent years, cultural tourism in Wales has begun to emphasize “distinctiveness” at the expense of “authenticity.” Of course, after post-structuralism, “authenticity” is itself a fraught, problematic concept. But in terms of national culture, we can perhaps settle on a definition that rests in some sense on the notion of culture that has been produced by individuals and communities of a given nation, or culture that responds in some way to “places” and the individuals and communities that inhabit them. Yet in recent years this seems to have been sidelined in favour of “distinctiveness.” For instance, in 2016 Wales saw a major centenary celebration of the birth of writer Roald Dahl, which was that year the main focus for Literature Wales, the organization tasked with overseeing Wales’s literary heritage. That year witnessed major exhibitions, adaptations, and a major two-day carnival event in Cardiff—City of the Unexpected—funded and promoted by the WG through Literature Wales. Roald Dahl was of course an indisputably brilliant writer, and in particular the City of the Unexpected event was, in tourism terms, a “distinctive” success, bringing thousands of people to Cardiff (Price 2016). But the question of whether this was a celebration of an “authentic” Wales is open to debate. Dahl was born in Cardiff to Norwegian parents, but at age eight left to be educated in the English public school system; thereafter, he never returned for longer than brief holidays. In a context in which tourism is an indispensable facet of a fragile Welsh economy, an approach to tourism that is able to showcase both the “distinctive” and “authentic” aspects of Welsh life and culture seems preferable.

It should be said that Welsh tourism is not the primary analytical focus of the *Literary Atlas* project. However, the conceptual framework within which the project operates overlaps in fruitful ways with recent developments in tourism studies. The term “literary geography” was famously first used by William Sharp in his 1904 book of the same name, which attempted to offer an account of what he called “the distinctive features of the actual or delineated country of certain famous writers, and on certain regions which have many literary associations” such as “Dickens-land” (South East England), “Scott-land” (Scotland), or “The Literary Geography of the Lakes” (Cumbria) (1904, vii). This was an approach that viewed

places and landscapes as static backdrops to literary works. However, the theoretical conceptualization of the field has since shifted considerably. Literary geography is informed by the intersection of the spatial turn in the humanities and the cultural turn in the social sciences that has taken place over the past few decades. In both the humanities and social sciences it is now commonly understood that “places” are not stable, fixed backdrops to human experience, straightforwardly available to representation, but plural, processual, and culturally encoded: experienced and created through human activity. In Edward Soja’s terms, the human experience of place is best understood as hyphenated, dynamic, “real-and-imagined” (1996). Literary geography is therefore an interdiscipline concerned with the place of the literary imagination within these complex, dynamic processes of place creation—in Franco Moretti’s words, the sense in which works of literature are a part of the “ongoing composition” through which “real-and-imagined” places are made and lived (1998, 35).

Literary Atlas is primarily an exploration of these varied, complex processes of place creation and composition. Its aim is to establish a new way of mapping English-language novels set in Wales in order to gain fresh insights into the role of “place” in the relationship between who we are as individuals and groups, and the geographical locations that shape these identities. To this end, the project has set out to create an online, open-access digital atlas of literary cartographies of twelve English-language novels set in Wales. In a key sense, the project aims to use mapping as a way to embark on a Deleuzian “deterritorialization” of the dominant “cognitive maps” (Jameson 1987) of the literature of the British Isles, which often overlooks writing from the smaller community of Wales. This is clearly an important task for a small nation in an era in which cultural and creative tourism are on the rise. In this sense, digital mapping is a powerful means of enabling a destination such as Wales to harness, in Richards’s terms, “the aspects of creativity that are linked to place” (2011, 1238) in a way that is sensitive to the particular cultural and economic needs of that place.

Selecting the twelve novels was no easy task. There is a long and rich tradition of English-language writing in Wales, and it took some time to whittle down a lengthy longlist of possibilities to just twelve. They were ultimately selected according to the following criteria:

- The narrative must be based in Wales, with a specific Welsh place or region as central to the narrative.
- The book must be written in English. (There is a rich and distinct anglophone literary tradition worth studying in its own right. This criterion is not meant to downplay the wealth of Welsh-language literature in print. Were this to be a comprehensive atlas of literary Wales, literature in both languages would need to be included).
- The books must be works of fiction that take the form of the novel. This was a pragmatic scoping decision in order to provide a clear focus for the *Literary Atlas*. There is a plan to expand the site to plays, poems, short stories or non-fiction in the future.
- The novels should offer a cross-section of genre, and represent different eras in Wales's anglophone literary history.
- The novels should offer as broad a geographical coverage as possible.
- The novels should represent a broad diversity of authors active in Wales (in relation to gender, ethnicity, age, etc.). The book does not have to be by a Welsh-born author.
- The final list should include both "classic" Welsh fiction and contemporary writers in order to draw attention to new materials in addition to established works.

From these criteria, the *Literary Atlas* team consulted with a range of academic and literary experts in Wales, as well as asking the public to offer their own choices for selection. The final shortlist maps literature from a broad range of Wales's social and physical geographies:

1. Raymond Williams's *Border Country* (1960). A historical novel charting the lives of the Prices, a family living in the village of Pandy, near Abergavenny, close to the Welsh-English border, from the 1920s to the 1950s.

2. Malcolm Pryce's *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* (2001). A fantastical parody of the hard-boiled crime novel, set in a fictionalized Aberystwyth, a coastal town on the scenic Ceredigion coastline.
3. Alys Conran's *Pigeon* (2016). A story of two young teenagers growing up in and around Bethesda, a post-industrial slate-mining town in Snowdonia.
4. Tristan Hughes's *Revenant* (2008). Three young teenagers return to the site of a collective trauma near their hometown; the place is unnamed but based on the pretty coastal town of Beaumaris.
5. Christopher Meredith's *Shifts* (1988). A novel recounting the social and emotional impact of the slow closure of the colossal Ebbw Vale steelworks on four main characters.
6. Menna Gallie's *Strike for a Kingdom* (1959). A "whodunit" set in a small South Wales mining community of Ystradgynlais during the 1926 general strike.
7. Trezza Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place* (2001). The story of the Gaucis, a Maltese family living in the multicultural Butetown area of Cardiff—known colloquially as Tiger Bay—in the 1960s.
8. Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967). A young-adult fantasy novel that reimagines the fourth branch of the *Mabinogion*, set in the beautiful yet remote village of Llanymawddwy, in North Wales.
9. Amy Dillwyn's *The Rebecca Rioter* (1881). A romping historical novel recounting a young man from a village just outside Swansea caught up in the Rebecca Riots of the 1840s.
10. Niall Griffiths's *Sheepshagger* (2001). The tragic tale of Ianto, a troubled young native of an unspecified location somewhere in the Cambrian mountains of West Wales, caught up in the drug counterculture of the 1990s.

11. Fflur Dafydd's *Twenty Thousand Saints* (2008). A novel exploring notions of Welsh cultural and political identity through the experiences of a group of characters staying on Bardsey Island one summer.
12. Lloyd Jones's *Mr Vogel* (2004). A fantastical travelogue of a perambulatory journey around the entire coast of Wales.

Beyond the de/reterritorializing potential of *Literary Atlas*, a key feature of the project is its use of “deep mapping” as a means to unpack the multi-faceted, processual, palimpsestic nature of places. Deep mapping is a malleable concept that has been interpreted in innumerable ways by cartographers, artists, and academics. Its origins lie in the work of Guy Debord and the Situationist movement, but its more recent articulations can usefully be traced to the post-structuralist problematization of the notion of objective, “Cartesian” mapping as an adequate means of representing spaces and places. Deep maps, by their nature, are designed to disrupt and destabilize, in Doreen Massey's terms, the “elitist, exclusivist enclosures within which so much of the production of what is defined as legitimate knowledge still goes on” (2005, 75). One potential function of the deep map is therefore to destabilize normative, “spectatorial” knowledges of place—knowledges that, in the search for “distinctiveness,” can omit or occlude the complex forces that shape places and those who inhabit them—and invite more nuanced, “creative” experiences and inhabitations of place. Deep mapping the ways in which works of literature inhabit places is one means of exploring and unpacking these multiple layers, and opening up new ways of understanding and experiencing place.

Literary Atlas has pursued an approach to digital deep mapping formulated by Damian Walford Davies, who posited the idea of a “Digital Literary Atlas of Wales” in his 2012 book *Cartographies of Culture*. This is an approach to literary mapping that, in Walford Davies's terms

Resist[s] simply “imposing” cartographic templates on literary works, and merely extracting various kind of mappable data from them. Rather, by offering the user/reader an interactive platform on which to explore a variety of cartographic

and geographical “contexts” in relation to which a given author and literary work can meaningfully be located, the . . . [atlas prompts] a critical and affective inhabitation of the cultural dimensionality of a literary work. (2012, 206)

In other words, the team started with “extractions” of “mappable data”; in our case, we geoparsed every reference to a “real” or approximated place contained in each of the twelve novels, and named these “plotpoints.” However, this was done with the aim of exploring the wider “cultural dimensionality” of those works. This “cultural dimensionality” refers to the broad, potentially endless range of geographical, historical, and cultural references, intertexts, and textures that constitute “real-and-imagined” place. Our deep maps therefore augment these plotpoints with a range of supplementary materials, such as selected extracts from the chosen novels; excerpts from interviews undertaken with authors and experts; audio extracts from the novels read by the author and the *Literary Atlas* team; street-view images of the novels’ locations; historical and contemporary maps of the novels’ locations; photos and films connected to the sites of the novels; and commentary from the *Literary Atlas* team.

These deep maps can be navigated independently by the *Literary Atlas* user, but they are also curated into routes, which we have termed “plotlines.” These plotlines are suggested routes through the literary and geographical landscape of the novel, its “cultural dimensionality,” narrating insights into the “plot” of both text and place. Anderson has described plotlines as both “geographical and literary routes through the world. They are cartographic navigations that connect the page to the place and entangle them into an ongoing composition” (2016, 161). In other words, plotlines are physical routes that enable users to explore the entanglements of the “real” and “imagined.” The *Literary Atlas* user can choose a plotline for a particular novel and scroll through features of its deep map to gain a new understanding of the relations between literature and geography. Sometimes a plotline will follow a route a character has followed; for instance, one plotline for *The Rebecca Rioter* traces the route taken by the protagonist, Evan Williams, on his escape from the authorities, having taken part in the Rebecca Riots. Sometimes a plotline will trace a route through a key thematic feature of a novel; one plotline for the novel

Sheepshagger pursues the ways the novel explores the notion of “wildness” in contrast to its depictions of urban space. Other times, a plotline will explore an important aspect of an author’s writing process; one plotline traces the biography of author Alan Garner in the years leading up to his writing of *The Owl Service*. All of these plotlines attempt to shed new light on the complex ways in which physical and social place play their part in the literary imagination. It is possible to follow these plotlines on a computer, tablet, or smartphone in any location—enabling the user to engage with these routes virtually, as well as, crucially, to walk them in practice. We will return to this point shortly.

Beyond the twelve showcased deep maps, the website provides a range of other scholarly and creative resources. Some of these may be useful for students and scholars of the literary geography of Wales, such as various visualizations of the aggregated data, and bibliographies of secondary literature. Others we anticipate will be fruitful resources for the creative tourist. One of these is a comprehensive “library” map of all anglophone novels set in or connected to Wales. Users can view an interactive, searchable map of Wales and discover novels organized by location. The first iteration of this map was created using the library catalogues of Swansea University, Cardiff University, and the National Library of Wales; all English-language novels collected in the “Wales” collections of these libraries were scanned, and a single geolocation attributed to each novel, based on an approximate general region in which the novel is set, or a central location in the novel’s imagined geography. Currently the map contains over three hundred books, though this number will increase with the development of an interactive function, whereby users can add to the map themselves.

However, the broader aim of *Literary Atlas* is not only to provide users with an informational resource, but also with a practical resource that encourages and enables new creative interactions with Wales’s varied physical and cultural geographies. While the plotlines and library maps on the website enable users to embark on experiences of place filtered through the lens of literature, they equally invite users to engage with place in a way that moves beyond passive, spectatorial experience, and toward something more active, dialogic, embodied, and creative. One of the key features of the site in this regard is an interactive “microfiction”

map, whereby users can write their own five-hundred-word microfictions inspired by Welsh locations and post these online for other users to read. *Literary Atlas* defines microfictions as any brief creative reflection on a place; these may be short narratives, fictional vignettes, travelogues, poetry, creative non-fiction, or any other form the user-writer wants to employ. The interactive interface provided on the site enables users to easily select any geographical location in Wales or the world on which to pin their microfiction, as well as upload a selection of photographs to accompany their work. Set alongside the maps of published fiction set in Wales, these microfictions will allow visitors to the website and to Wales to contribute creatively to the “ongoing composition” of Welsh places.

Furthermore, a key aim of the *Literary Atlas* project is to encourage users to visit literary places for themselves. As a means of exploring and evaluating the possibilities of such uses of the *Literary Atlas* website, the project organized a series of literary field trips to locations from the twelve novels listed above. Informed by recent scholarship on the efficacy of walking as a research tool (Anderson 2004; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Bates and Rhys-Taylor 2017), these trips operated under the understanding that places are not “passive stages in which actions occur,” but rather “the medium that impinge on, structure and facilitate these processes” (Anderson 2004, 255), and that interviewing participants in situ might be a powerful means to uncover the complex, elusive relations between people and place. As Anderson notes, “talking whilst walking” offers the possibility to “tap into the non-mechanistic framework of the mind and its interconnections with place to recall episodes and meanings buried in the archaeology of knowledge” (2004, 260). With these reflections in mind, the project invited participants to take part in field trips to the “real,” physical locations in which the twelve books are set. During these excursions we took journeys through the “literary spaces” (Saunders and Anderson 2014). Beyond reminding participants of the novels’ plots, we did not provide further historical or contextual information about the locations; rather, we stopped to read passages from the novels in situ in order for participants to respond in their own way to the literary representation of the spaces. We recorded participants’ responses while on location, as well as in discussions after the event.

Visiting a place or walking a route described in or determined by a literary narrative may be understood as a form of “experience” tourism (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Indeed, if, as Rebecca Solnit has argued, “narrative writing is closely bound up with walking” because, “just as with following footsteps, it allows one to read the words of someone—the author—who has gone before” ([2001] 2014, 72), then it follows that following the footsteps of an author or character can offer the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of their “experience.” This notion of “experiencing” a place through the eyes of a character was confirmed in one trip to a key location from Christopher Meredith’s novel *Shifts*. *Shifts* explores the social and emotional effects of the gradual closure of the Ebbw Vale Steelworks—a major industrial employer in the South Wales Valleys—at the end of the 1970s, and the different ways in which four characters cope with the changes this protracted closure makes to their lives. One character, Keith, copes by attempting to connect with the industrial history of his hometown, a fictionalized version of the real town of Tredegar. Throughout the course of the novel, Keith visits key locations from the history of the town in his effort to better understand who he is and where he is from. On the *Literary Atlas* field trip to Tredegar, we visited one of these sites, the ruins of the eighteenth-century Sirhowy Ironworks, and read a passage from the novel with the participants. This is one section of that passage:

[Keith] tramped down to the ruin and stared at it, conscious of his looking, like a viewer at an art gallery wondering what to think. It was like repeating a word till it becomes meaningless. He ran a hand over the stone and a crumbling mortar, trying to concentrate. There was still an overhanging plug of iron slag where some stonework had fallen away. The remains of the last tapping. He moved around the ruin running his hand under the overhang and spoke again to himself. (Meredith 1988, 18)

Keith has, in effect, embarked on a field trip of his own, and this enabled *Literary Atlas* to follow his footsteps and experience his self-conscious visit to a local site of historical interest in a quite literal way. Interestingly, the participants’ response to the location corresponded with Keith’s sense of

bewilderment. In the passage above, though Keith knows what he is looking at, he does not quite know “what to think.” Similarly, one participant expressed a similar sense of incomprehension:

When you go to museums they frame it for you, don't they? They tell you why it's important and why you're here. . . . People go because they want to see this important piece of whatever because it's celebrated that way, but . . . I don't know what I'm supposed to think about it. (*Literary Atlas* field trip, 19 October 2017)

This sense of incomprehension did not appear to impair this participant's enjoyment of the field trip; rather, it seemed to enable a more nuanced understanding of the point of view of the character:

I can understand why. . . . I think he's hit it in a nutshell saying that. What do I think when I look at this? And I suppose if you go into an art gallery and it's art that, you know, like minimalism, which many people don't take to, you know, you think what the hell am I supposed to think of this, you know? . . . And I can understand, I think he's hit it on the head there, I hadn't noticed that phrase, but I think he's hit it on the head there. (*Literary Atlas* field trip, 19 October 2017)

In effect, the act of following in the footsteps of a character from the book enabled the participant to acquire not only an experience of the character's point of view, but also, it appears, a stronger understanding of both the book and the location, as well as perhaps the way in which the book responds to and contributes to the “ongoing composition” of the location.

This particular section of *Shifts* was an unusually appropriate one to pursue on a field trip, given that Keith is on a field trip of his own. More often, the *Literary Atlas* field trips would explore locations depicted in a less self-conscious way. However, where possible, the trips did visit locations that are not only described but reflected on by a character or narrator. Another example was on a trip taken to the town of Beaumaris on the island of Anglesey (Ynys Môn), off the coast of North Wales, one of the

main settings of Tristan Hughes's novel *Revenant*. One of the locations visited on this trip was the iconic "West End," a terrace of Georgian-style houses well-known due to its striking and somewhat incongruous architecture and its prominent location on the main approach into the town. The houses are colourfully painted and feature on innumerable tourist images of the area: postcards, guidebooks, souvenirs. We visited this location with a group of participants, and read the following passage narrated by the jaded character of Ricky, who has reluctantly returned to his hometown after a spell working in England:

I park the car on the West End, in front of the Georgian terrace, and I'm sure they've given the houses a lick of paint or five since I last saw them 'cause they're positively beaming today, glowing like, even though it's April and the sun isn't so strong yet. They've done them in rose-pink and lime-green and primrose-yellow, and other colours too, as if they wanted to turn all this stone and concrete into coral beds, to flip the world upside down and have the underwater colours on top, in the air. I don't get it with these seaside places—the way they chuck their slap on when hardly anyone below a hundred and ten wants to go to them any more, like some old bird plastering herself when she knows the best she's going to do is get groped by some pensioner at the bar. I mean, who do they think they're going to fool? Please, come here, we're such jolly folk we paint our houses happy colours. Please stay. Please fork out sixty quid for a night in a place that looks like a frigging rainbow on the outside but is still damp and grim and grey on the inside. A word to the wise: the brighter and more colourful these places look, the more fucking *desperate* they are. (Hughes 2008, 27)

Here the novel offers an interpretation of the location that runs against the grain of the intended tourist gaze. Ricky, a native, is decidedly cynical about the touristification of his hometown, having seen its less palatable features growing up as a teenager there. In keeping with Anderson's contention that on-location interviews allow participants to "recall . . .

meanings buried in the archaeology of knowledge” (2004, 260), the passage was met with strikingly different responses by participants possessing different ideas about the location. Two of the participants who had never visited Beaumaris before appeared to agree with Ricky’s view, and brought their experiences of their respective hometowns in the Netherlands and Germany to bear on this. The German participant suggested that while they could appreciate the attractiveness of the location, they could agree there were other ways to see it: “To me, it looks fine. It looks nice, but I do get it. If I would have been from here, I think I would have had pretty much the same opinion, very similar opinion [to Ricky]. If I compare it to my town, I feel very much like this about my hometown” (*Literary Atlas* field trip, 23 September 2017). Yet two participants who, though they settled in the area as adults, live on Anglesey and regularly visit Beaumaris, responded somewhat differently. Both disagreed strongly with Ricky’s jaundiced view, with one stating after the passage had been read that “It says more about him than it does the terrace, I think” (*Literary Atlas* field trip, 23 September 2017). Another stated they thought the painted houses were less about attracting tourism and more a reflection of local pride: “Because the people have got pride and they want their village nice” (*Literary Atlas* field trip, 23 September 2017). However, later in the day, during the post-trip discussion, one of these participants appeared to have changed their mind, and having visited the town through the eyes of the novel, decided they could see Ricky’s point of view: “It just made me think that if I lived in Beaumaris and actually experienced it day to day and didn’t live in one of the picturesque painted houses and just lived in around the back roads, whether I would still have the view, the glowing view that I have of it because of the way I visit it” (*Literary Atlas* field trip, 23 September 2017).

Anderson has argued that reading fictions in the context of the “real” places in which they are set can “help us tell a new truth about the relations between people and place.” Examining the “ongoing compositions” between text and place, he argues, “we can locate our own lives, finding new meanings which resonate with our own experiences and broaden our horizons” (2014, 314). The experiences of field trip participants explored here suggest that visiting locations—whether as a tourist or a resident—through the lens of a work of literature can powerfully inform one’s perspective on those places, as well as one’s understanding of the work itself.

It is hoped that the range of digital resources available on the *Literary Atlas* website—the deep maps of selected novels, the distant “library” map, the “microfictions” feature, and much else besides—will prove to be a fruitful resource for users seeking not only “spectatorial” engagements with “serially reproduced” (Richards and Wilson 2006) Welsh place and culture, but also creative experiences that enable, in Richards’s words, “self-realization and self-expression” (2011, 1237). While there are innumerable spectatorial opportunities available in Wales—the sublime heights of Snowdonia in North Wales, the sweeping beaches of the Gower Peninsula in the South, and plenty more in between—it is hoped that *Literary Atlas* will prove to be a resource for deeper and more creative authentic experiences of the rich multiplicity of Welsh places. As Scherf notes in the introduction to this collection, cultural mapping can provide a way of enabling places to showcase their “unique fingerprint on the planet.” Creative literary tourism that utilizes such maps can provide the basis for throwing into relief those “intangible” cultural resources off the beaten track, while at the same time being sensitive to the diverse histories and stories of those places. Seeing these locations through the lens of literature can open up touristic experiences that contribute to the “ongoing composition” of places, offering new perspectives and co-creating sustainable new experiences and senses of place for today and the future.

NOTES

- 1 The project’s website is available at www.literaryatlas.wales.

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