

The Poetics of Place and Space:

Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and the Lake District

Abstract:

This article draws upon the ‘spatial turn’ in critical practice to open up thinking about Romantic and post-Romantic representations of geo-specific space. The opening section maps out the philosophical foundations for spatial literary criticism by tracing two main strands of spatial theory: one which emerges out of Heideggerian phenomenology; and the other which is based on the Marxist cultural analysis of Henri Lefebvre. The article then highlights some ways in which these spatial theories have been used to offer new readings of Romantic texts. The second half of the essay roots this spatial thinking by focusing on literary representations of the Lake District. It shows how notions of boundary and boundedness are central to Wordsworth’s spatial configuration of his native region; alongside this, it indicates how Wordsworth’s mapping of the area has influenced later constructions of the landscape as a ‘social space’. The final section points towards further thinking by briefly examining the work of the twentieth-century Cumbrian writer, Norman Nicholson (1914-87), and highlighting the tensions in his development of a site-specific, post-Romantic poetics of place and space.

i) Theorizing Place and Space: Post-Heideggerian Spatial Theory

In the Introduction to *Byron and Place: History, Tradition, Nostalgia* (2003), Stephen Cheeke indicates that the term ‘spatial studies can refer to ‘a range of cognate disciplines’, including ‘urban and environmental studies, geopolitics, ecocriticism, postmodern geography’. ¹ Although he acknowledges this theoretical plurality,

Cheeke argues that these disparate approaches have all been underpinned by ‘the sustained rethinking of philosophical questions of space and place’ (p. 7). In an attempt to map out this ‘spatial turn’, Cheeke rightly identifies two main threads of thinking: ‘a “poetics of space”’ which emerges out of the late work of Martin Heidegger; and a ‘Marxist cultural analysis’ (p. 8) which emphasises the production of social space and which is exemplified by the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre. In order to examine spatial criticism, and its impact on Romantic studies, then, there is a need to highlight conceptual distinctions between Heideggerian and Lefebvrian thinking; at the same time, though, it is essential to remain sensitive to the theoretical intersections of the two lines of spatial thought.

Heidegger’s understanding of the interwoven nature of *Dasein*’s ‘being-in-the-world’ is famously set out in Division I of his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time* (1927), and it is a concept which crucially informs his later meditations on spatial experience. His thinking on being and dwelling, locatedness and rootedness, is developed in ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ (1954): an influential late essay in which Heidegger puts forward his thesis that: ‘Dwelling [. . .] is *the basic character* of Being in keeping with which mortals exist.’² Heidegger asserts the primacy of dwelling over building and he supports this argument through a characteristic process of etymological excavation, noting how the ‘Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in a place’ (p. 144).³ In Heideggerian terms, then, dwelling is inextricably connected to notions of rootedness and situatedness; place is understood to be defined by ideas of fixity and stability.

In ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ Heidegger opens up thinking about the experience of space as well as place, as he asserts that: ‘To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwell* they persist through spaces by virtue of their staying among things and locations’ (p. 157). As the phenomenological geographer, Edward Relph, explains, Heidegger’s thinking points towards the understanding that ‘geographical experience begins in places and reaches out across spaces to landscapes and regions of existence’.

⁴ Dwelling may be rooted in a particular place but *Dasein*’s everyday experience of ‘being-in-the-world’ also involves negotiation with, and movement through, spaces: sites of openness, boundlessness and potentiality. In turn, however, those spaces only come into being as a result of the existence of the fixed, bounded locations defined as places: ‘the spaces through which we go daily are provided for by locations’ (‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, p. 154).

As Jeff Malpas points out in *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (2006), Heidegger’s late thinking on place and space is problematic in that ‘the focus on place comes as part as what has often been seen as an obscure and barely philosophical mysticism’. ⁵ Yet Heidegger’s emphasis on the bodily situatedness of being, his imbricated definitions of place and space, and his preoccupation with the poetic articulation of what it means to be and to dwell, have all influenced later phenomenological theorists of space and spatiality. In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), for instance, Gaston Bachelard implicitly draws upon Heideggerian thinking to explore the inhabitation of the architectural space of the house. Bachelard sets out his phenomenological ambition to identify what he calls the ‘primitiveness’ of the “‘humble home” [house]’ and to unconceal, to borrow a Heideggerian verb, ‘the primary function of inhabiting’. ⁶ As with Heidegger, Bachelard’s philosophical

model of everydayness continually oscillates between ideas of rootedness and openness, boundedness and potentiality, as he endeavours to articulate the phenomenological essence, or 'primitiveness', of spatial experience: a project which involves reflection upon the nature of poetry, and the role of the poet, in bringing-forth the oneirism embedded in the quotidian.⁷

An alternative spatial theory, however, is offered by the French thinker, Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*: a key text which was published in France in 1974 and first translated into English in 1991. Lefebvre seeks to position his own spatial meditations within a wider philosophical framework, drawing, in particular, upon the thinking of Hegel and Nietzsche. Perhaps most importantly, however, Lefebvre is influenced by Marx as he endeavours to construct a theory which is founded upon the inextricable indivisibility of spatiality and society.

In order to develop his Marxist thinking, Lefebvre eschews the standard, Heideggerian dialectic of place and space. Instead, he sets up a model of 'social space' which consists of a 'conceptual triad' or 'the three moments': '*spatial practice*' or 'the *perceived*' spaces of everyday activity; '*representations of space*' or 'the conceptualised space' mapped out by government and other official agencies; and the '*representational spaces*' experienced by inhabitants and which consist of an overlaying of the physical with the imaginative.⁸ The three 'moments' identified by Lefebvre do not exist in mutually exclusive compartments of spatial experience but, rather, ceaselessly interweave, interconnect and interpenetrate in quotidian being. His socio-spatial theorizing can be seen to have had a profound influence on later thinkers, including Ed Soja, the author of *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion*

of Space in Critical Social Theory (1989); and Rob Shields, the author of *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (1991). Lefebvre's emphasis on spatial production can also be traced in Michel de Certeau's key work, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

It would be erroneous, however, to suggest that Heidegger and Lefebvre offer two contrasting and conflicting theories of space founded upon either phenomenological or broadly Marxist principles. Instead, these two main lines of spatial enquiry continually overlap and intersect. For instance, Heideggerian thinking informs the phenomenological geography of Edward Relph, whose study, *Place and Placelessness* (1976), begins with the proposition that: 'To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place.'⁹ Relph's phenomenological project has been developed further by the geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, who argues that everyday being is defined by the habitual 'tug of place and space'.¹⁰ Yet, in spite of their explicitly phenomenological concerns, both Relph and Tuan are also preoccupied with social constructions of space and, to take up Tuan's phrase, 'the Creation of Place'.¹¹

What is more, Lefebvre himself moves away from, yet continues to draw upon, Heideggerian spatial thinking. In exploring social spatialities, Lefebvre critiques what he identifies to be Heidegger's 'obsession with space' (p. 122): a conception of space 'religious and political in character' which 'was a product of the bonds of consanguinity, soil and language' (p. 48). In the words of Stuart Elden, Lefebvre wishes to challenge the 'mystification and abstraction' embedded within Heideggerian thought; he wishes to anchor his spatial theory in the lived-places of

social experience.¹² At the same time, though, Lefebvre's work remains implicitly underpinned by a series of Heideggerian principles and his model of 'social space' is founded upon the interconnectedness of 'being-in-the-world' and the experience of the everyday. As Elden points out, Lefebvre's philosophical relationship with Heidegger 'is often neglected' in studies of Lefebvre's work but 'forms a key part of his [Lefebvre's] theoretical armoury' (p. 76).

A comprehensive review of post-Heideggerian spatial thinking would necessarily require consideration of a range of other theorists and theories. An inclusive spatial survey would need to discuss, for example, Foucault's 'heterotopias'; David Harvey's postmodern geography; and Doreen Massey's work on gendered experiences of social space.¹³ Yet, in the present context, it is important to identify two main strands of spatial thinking: one which can be said to be broadly phenomenological; and the other which focuses on the relationship between spatial practices and the social production of spaces. In both fields, though, theorists remain preoccupied with several, key overlapping issues: the dialectical relationship of place and space; the interpenetration of actual and imaginative geographies; and the constructions of notions of boundary and boundedness.

ii) Romanticism, Place and Space: The Growth of Spatial Criticism

Post-Heideggerian spatial theory has become an important conceptual and methodological tool for critics engaged with the 'hypercomplex' (Lefebvre, p. 88) urban spaces represented in Modernist texts.¹⁴ In what ways, though, has spatial thinking been used to develop new readings of Romantic texts? As Cheeke points out, the application of spatial theory in Romantic studies is not straightforward:

Romanticism is perhaps the most problematic and interesting among the various fields of literary studies in its relation to the new cultural geography, in that it has traditionally been burdened with the notion of a particular orientation towards the natural world which may at first seem most resistant to [. . .] geo-historical excavation. (p. 9)

As a result of the Romantic preoccupation with rural topographies, then, it is not surprising that recent theoretical work on the representation of place has been dominated by ‘green’ readings and the emergence of ecocritical practice.¹⁵ Yet although there are clear intersections between ecocritical and spatial approaches – not least in the pervasive influence of Heidegger – there is a need to refer to the work of critics who situate their own responses to Romantic place and space at a tangent to the overtly environmental or ecological.

Although he does not explicitly draw upon post-Heideggerian spatial thinking, John Barrell gestures towards a Romantic spatial studies with the publication of his 1972 monograph, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. Barrell documents the historical intersection of actual and imaginative geographies as he charts the movement from a spatiality of ‘simple oneness’ to the profound sense of boundedness produced by the parliamentary enclosure of Helpston, Clare’s village, in 1820.¹⁶ Barrell’s critical interest is both writer- and geo-specific in that he provides spatial readings of three Clare poems which offer a response to that enclosure (‘Helpstone’; ‘Helpstone Green’; and ‘The Lamentations of Round Oak Waters’); his critical interest is also intertextual as he shows how Clare’s poetic response to topographical change is shaped by pre-Romantic landscape poems by Goldsmith and Gray (p. 110). However, his wider concerns – including the socio-political evolution of landscape; the importance of locality to the Romantic articulation of a sense of place; and the actual and

imaginative oscillation between experiences and ideas of enclosedness and openness - clearly correspond with the spatial preoccupations of later critics.¹⁷

The conceptual possibilities presented by spatial theory are explored further by Philip Shaw in a 1993 essay entitled 'Romantic Space: Topo-analysis and Subjectivity in *The Prelude*'. In this theoretically dense article, Shaw explores 'the concept of space as a tool for critical analysis' by examining the work of a range of spatial thinkers, from Foucault to Lefebvre, Soja to Bachelard.¹⁸ One of Shaw's principal concerns is to set up 'correspondences between structural and phenomenological being': a relationship which he defines, in a Lefebvrian manner, as that 'between dominant ideologies and the unstructured moments of everyday life' (p. 65). In other words, Shaw argues that there is a need to move beyond the historical tension between 'social space' and 'the privileged role of the transcendental subject within post-Kantian philosophy' (p. 74); there is a need to accept Lefebvre's thesis 'that space is at once abstract *and* material' (p. 75) and that, as a result, all spatial experience is indivisible from 'the socio-economic relations' (p. 75) that govern lived-place. Shaw endeavours 'to open Romantic history to the reassertion of social space' (p. 79) by offering a playfully theoretical re-reading of *The Prelude* and assembling a form of critical analysis predicated on a series of what he calls 'spatial subversion[s]' (p. 93).

Wordsworth also provides the focus for Michael Wiley's monograph, *Romantic Geography: Wordsworth and Anglo-European Spaces* (1998). As with Shaw, Wiley's reading of Wordsworth is founded upon a Lefebvrian understanding of 'social space': 'Nature, solitude and the imagination [. . .] are material concerns for Wordsworth, grounded in the land he lived in and walked upon, inseparable from physical, social

and political place'.¹⁹ In examining what he labels 'the utopian-imaginative mindset' (p. 2) of the 1790s, Wiley emphasises the importance of boundedness, arguing that 'representations of space' can delineate 'ideological as well as physical boundaries' (p. 3). He also charts the interpenetration of abstract and actual geographies, suggesting that 'Wordsworth's writing operates on the hope that his imaginative landscapes will influence real perceptions and practices' (p. 3). More recently, Wiley has applied his interest in the spatial theory of Lefebvre, Soja and Harvey, to Charlotte Smith's *The Emigrants*, arguing that the text 'reveals the contradictions and shortcomings inherent in dominant late-eighteenth-century English and French geographical self-representations'.²⁰

An alternative spatial approach is offered by Cheeke in *Byron and Place: History, Tradition, Nostalgia*. In his Introduction, Cheeke signals that 'a Wordsworthianism inevitably preconditions our thinking about Romanticism and place, offering its own forceful notion of the interstructuring of subjectivity and situation' (p. 9). He acknowledges that 'it is hard either to resist or escape the paradigms of psyche-in-place offered by *The Prelude*' (p. 9); but he argues that an alternative to Wordsworth's localism is provided by Byron's 'counter-vision of cosmopolitan experience' (p. 9). Although Cheeke suggests that it would be wrong to believe that Byron rejects a Wordsworthian 'natural supernaturalism' in favour of a mode of 'enlightened scepticism' (p. 9), he proposes that Byron's sense of place derives, at least in part, from the desire for authentic experiences of historically-layered sites or locations. In short, Cheeke rejects the kind of ahistorical account of phenomenological experience promoted by, say, Gaston Bachelard, in favour of an overtly historicized reading of Byron's textual articulation of the spatial.

There are other examples of spatial approaches to Romantic writers and writing. In an unpublished doctoral thesis which influenced the ecocriticism of Jonathan Bate, Terry McCormick draws upon the phenomenological geography of Relph and Tuan to read Wordsworth as a poet of place.²¹ In ‘Re/Writing Home: Women Romantic Writers and the Politics of Location’ (1997), Amanda Gilroy explores ‘how the discourse of home, and the spatial occupation by subjects in relation to this discursive place’, operates in the writing of Hemans, Joanna Baillie and Anna Jameson.²² More recently, a special issue of *European Romantic Review* featured ‘Wordsworth Digs the Lawn’: an essay in which Timothy Morton reads the neglected 1829 poem, ‘This lawn, a carpet all alive’, and demonstrates the intersections of spatial and ecocritical approaches to Romantic poetry.²³

iv) Applying Post-Heideggerian Spatial Theory: Wordsworth and the Lake District

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard argues that: ‘Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains’ (p. 211). Is it possible, though, to apply Bachelard’s phenomenological model of insideness and outsideness to the textual representation of ‘social space’? The critical potential of spatial theory can be tested by drawing upon the Bachelardian dialectic of inside and outside space to raise conceptual issues of geographical boundary and boundedness for literary accounts of the English Lake District. What might it mean to be ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the Lakes? Why might a poet choose to position him or herself in this way?

Reference to any map will indicate that the old counties of Cumberland, Westmorland and north Lancashire occupied an almost peninsula status within the geography of Great Britain. This topographical marginalization was integral to the development of the region as a site of Picturesque tourism and was used to establish a clear dialectic between insiders and outsiders. In general, the traveller did not casually pass through the Lakes *en route* to his or her ultimate destination; instead, he or she had to make the conscious decision to head *into* this landscape of fells and tarns, crags and becks. The recommended journey into this singular terrain reinforced the overarching sensation of entering a bounded space, as the Picturesque guide books encouraged the visitor to approach the Lakes by crossing the shifting sands of Morecambe Bay. In the words of Peter Davidson, the Lake District represented a ‘Hyperborean elsewhere’ for those outsiders moving across the liminal, placeless space of the Bay.²⁴ The configuration of the Lake District as a circumscribed space, then, emerged out of a Lefebvrian interpenetration of the topographical and the imaginative, the physical and the aesthetic, leading to the construction of what John Murdoch calls ‘a Northern Arcadia’.²⁵

Crucially, the Picturesque model of insideness-outsideness can also be traced in Wordsworth’s textual accounts of geo-specific experience. In ‘Section First’ of the *Guide to the Lakes*, Wordsworth sets out his own spatial model of the area. To facilitate this mapping, Wordsworth endeavours to locate the centre of the region: a project which results in the construction of an imaginary Picturesque ‘station’ on a cloud ‘hanging midway’ between the peaks of ‘Great Gavel, or Scawfell’.²⁶ By ‘*literalizing*’ a ‘bird’s eye geographical perspective’ (Wiley, p. 157), Wordsworth is able to map out much of the region’s topography, setting out his famous conception of

the Lake District as a wheel. The natural boundaries of the sea, and ‘the plain country’ (p. 173), define the circumference of the wheel; but Wordsworth’s configuration of space remains dominated by the overpowering idea of the centre. Wordsworth thereby constructs a centripetal model which clearly, and unapologetically, focuses upon a ‘central point’ (p. 173) and which, concurrently, marginalizes those sites which lie at its periphery, on the rim of the wheel. Wordsworth’s figurative Station suggests the magnetic ‘central point’ towards which the region’s mountains cluster; it is the site at which the area’s fundamental ‘Lake District-ness’ can be located.

In using the image of the wheel to establish a model of Lake District boundedness, Wordsworth not only sets up a topographical division between inside and outside landscapes, but he also creates an apparently unbridgeable social distinction between the spatial experiences of the native and the visitor. Significantly, the *Guide* is underpinned by Wordsworth’s desire to position himself as an authentic insider within the sequestered space of the Lakes. In his own words, it is a resident’s attempt to deliver a ‘more exact and considerate observation than, as far as the writer knows, have hitherto been applied to local scenery’ (p. 171). Although the *Guide* exists as a topographical account of a singular region, then, it is also an attempted articulation of what it means to dwell authentically within this circumscribed space. Wordsworth asserts his insider status by describing the annual cycles of the Lake District from the perspective of one who has experienced all four seasons; a sense of inhabitation which is set up in opposition to the leisurely, temporary pursuits of the thrill-seeking tourist.

The topophilic poem, *Home at Grasmere*, represents another key articulation of Wordsworth's Lakeland dwelling; an autobiographical account of the writer's relocation to Dove Cottage in the winter of 1799 which has become the focus for ecocritical readings.²⁷ The topographical seclusion of the valley reinforces the protective domesticity suggested by the poem's title; and, although the text resists a fixed interpretation, Wordsworth's Grasmere *can* be read as a utopian space. Boundedness is desirable in that it creates an intimacy, to draw upon Bachelardian terminology, conducive to oneirism and, by extension, the poetic practice. Wordsworth thereby sets up a spatial model of double boundedness or dual insiderness: the vale of Grasmere is an inner chamber within the circumscribed space of the English Lakes; it is a 'termination and a last retreat, / A Centre' to be found towards the heart of that bounded region.²⁸

As a result, Wordsworth's *Guide* and *Home at Grasmere* can be read as offering intrinsically subjective representations of inhabitation. Wordsworth's articulated vision of the landscape of the Lakes was predicated, at least in part, on the poet's need for self-definition; and his later writings indicate that there were limitations to his imagining of the region as a public space.²⁹ What is more, the question remains as to whether or not the repeated assertion of socio-spatial insiderness runs counter to the unconsciousness which is essential to genuinely authentic being and dwelling. Yet, in spite of these contradictions and tensions, the *Guide* has been appropriated to shape the ways in which the region's landscape has come to be understood, perceived and even managed. In *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998), Stephen Gill indicates how, in the 1890s, Wordsworthian thinking informed the foundational philosophies of the National Trust.³⁰ Similarly, in *Romantic Ecology*, Bate suggests that Wordsworth's

Guide was perhaps *the* key reference book when the boundaries of the Lake District National Park were established in 1951 (pp. 47-52). In other words, Wordsworth's projection of the Lake District as 'a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy' (*Guide*, p. 225), helped to shape what the cultural geographer, David Matless, refers to as the 'socio-spiritual space' of the National Park: a topography in which 'the mystical rub[s] shoulders with the legislative'.³¹

In Lefebvrian terms, then, textual 'representational spaces' have led to the production of new 'representations of space'; and National Parks can be understood to be politically-constructed topographies in which 'the once-prevalent characteristic "natural" has grown distinct and become a subordinate feature' (Lefebvre, p. 84). As a result, the great paradox is that Wordsworth, in setting up a dialectic of outside and inside to offer a vision of authentic dwelling, has contributed to the 'socialization' of the landscape of the Lakes. It is a geo-specific, socio-spatial process which led a facetious W. H. Auden, writing in July 1952, to question whether he should see the Lake District as simply: 'Another bourgeois invention like the piano?'³²

v) Post-Romantic Spatial Poetics: Nicholson and the Lake District

It is possible that the conceptual understanding of Romantic spaces and spatialities may be expanded further by examining the ways in which later writers have reinscribed particular topographies. The final section of the essay, then, points towards further thinking about the imaginative legacies created by Romantic geographies by highlighting a twentieth-century poet's engagement with what might be called the 'spatial intertextuality' of the Lake District landscape.

The Faber poet, Norman Nicholson (1914-87), spent almost his entire life in Millom: a small iron town which occupies a marginalized position within what is now the unified county of Cumbria. Located on the southern tip of a peninsula jutting out into the Irish Sea, Millom is both geographically and imaginatively distant from the Wordsworthian centre; it is the outermost point of the Duddon valley, one of ‘the spokes from the nave of the wheel’ (*Guide*, p. 171). To draw upon the post-Lefebvrian socio-spatial theory of Rob Shields, Millom could be labelled a ‘place on the margins’: in addition to its location of physical isolation, the town has ‘been placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other’.³³ This marginal status was formalized in 1951 when Millom was not incorporated within the new Lake District National Park.

From this position of marginality, Nicholson used both poetry and topographical prose to challenge the Wordsworthian model of a central, bounded space which has shaped post-Romantic thinking about the Lakes. In *The Lakers: The Adventures of the First Tourists* (1955), Nicholson critiques the environmental ideology underpinning the National Park and warns that the central Lake District is in danger of becoming an open-air museum. He argues that ‘the creation of National Parks and Garden Suburbs [. . .] presume that civilization is an urban affair’; and, as a result, the Lakes has been repackaged as a site of rural retreat for those urban-dwellers living beyond its borders rather than a place of inhabitation.³⁴ The dialectics of inside and outside, rural and urban, are said to be symptomatic of an ongoing objectification of the natural landscape:

Nature, indeed, the physical reality in which alone we have our physical being, is in danger of being seen as a mere dream, a half-believed-in vision of Paradise, of the Fortunate Isles, the Garden Enclosed, the lotus, the womb. (p. 208)

Wordsworth uses images of boundedness and enclosure to celebrate the everyday spatial experiences of those living within the Lakes. Nicholson, on the other hand, is concerned that, for those on the outside of the National Park, these natural topographies have come to represent nothing more than fantastical spaces set apart from the world.

Nicholson, then, seeks to reconcile the social and the spatial in a way which moves beyond, or beneath, the post-Romantic socialization of the landscape. To facilitate this process, he focuses on the idea of dwelling; he goes underground to interrogate the significance of what he describes as the ‘Thirty thousand feet of solid Cumberland’ on which he stands.³⁵ It is here, within telluric space, that Nicholson locates what he calls ‘that organic unity, that wholeness’; a way of being which is built on rootedness, and a direct relationship with the land, rather than the erection of man-made frontiers.

³⁶ For Nicholson, spatial meaning is derived ‘from the rock, from the shape of the land, from its history’ rather than the surface organisation of place and space.

Nicholson uses this geological interest to propose a spatial reconfiguration of the region:

The area which I call the Lake System is a large one, spreading a long way beyond the lakes. It is roughly an oval or ellipse standing on end. Its apexes are Carlisle in the north and Carnforth in the south; its borders are the coast on the west, and on the east the valleys of the Eden and the Lune, or perhaps a line a little nearer the Yorkshire border.³⁷

This spatial remodelling, built on telluric unity rather than surface topography, collapses the post-Romantic hierarchization of regional space. Nicholson prompts the

reader to revisit the local map and directs his or her attention to previously marginalized sites; places removed from the hub of the wheel. Within this revised, democratic configuration of space, Cumbria's industrial towns are positioned within the same spatial unit as the picture-postcard villages of the central Lakes; they are shown to be part of the same 'System'.

Although Nicholson offers a critique of the post-Romantic, centralized model of regional space, however, his own reconfiguration continues to draw upon concepts of boundary and boundedness. In other words, he gestures towards a phenomenological understanding of the wholeness of spatial experience but, ultimately, he remains preoccupied with the ideas of identity and belonging made available by a geographically-defined sense of region. In the end, then, Nicholson builds upon geological knowledge and understanding simply to shift the imaginative borders of region: a recalibration which dismantles the post-Romantic model but which, at the same time, continues to rely upon, and to enforce, a dialectic of inside and outside space.

As a result, there is a tension running through Nicholson's textual representations of regional place and space. On the one hand, he demonstrates a determination to transcend the post-Romantic socialization of space and to open up new ways of thinking about the Lake District. Yet, alongside this, he is repeatedly drawn back to existing modes of spatial discourse. It is a tension which is indexed to Nicholson's status as a post-Wordsworth Cumbrian poet and his need for writerly self-definition. In the revisionist spatial model put forward in his topographical prose books, Nicholson's home town of Millom is incorporated within a more expansive vision of

region. This geographical situating of the self is articulated in the opening line of the prose book, *Portrait of the Lakes*, as Nicholson unambiguously announces: ‘I live in the Lake District.’³⁸ As with Wordsworth’s *Guide*, therefore, Nicholson’s topographical prose books can be read, to an extent, as an extended project designed to underline the author’s status as an authentic insider; he speaks with the authority of the native dweller for whom this singular landscape is the environment of the everyday.

More than this, though, Nicholson’s self-positioning opens up poetic possibilities, allowing him to occupy the same physical and imaginative terrain as his Romantic precursor: that ‘great big Old Man on [his] back.’³⁹ In a Bloomian sense, Nicholson’s wrestling with a precursor emerges out of an imaginative engagement with a singularly over-determined landscape. This geo-specific intertextuality is articulated in the early poem, ‘To the River Duddon’ (1944), in which Nicholson both establishes his status as a native of the Lakes and portrays the Duddon Valley as a site of industry:

[. . .] Wordsworth wrote:
 ‘Remote from every taint of sordid industry’.
 But you and I know better, Duddon lass. (p. 17)

Nicholson’s personal, conspiratorial tone is designed to indicate a shared intimacy with the titular river; a quiet familiarity which runs counter to Wordsworth’s appropriation of the Duddon for his ambitious sonnet sequence of 1820. Nicholson, then, offers a twentieth-century rewriting of the socialization of this named place, as he shows how, ‘for nearly thirty years’, he has ‘seen the slagbanks slant / Like screens sheer into the sand’ (p. 17).

Yet, although Nicholson is clearly determined to offer a revisionist portrait of the Duddon as a working river, he remains attracted to the intertextuality of this particular location and, more particularly, to the possibility of becoming one of Wordsworth's second selves. In the third and final section of 'To the River Duddon', there is a demonstrable shift in Nicholson's attitude towards his spatial precursor:

But that which Wordsworth knew, even the old man
 When poetry had failed like desire, was something
 I have yet to learn, and you, Duddon,
 Have learned and re-learned to forget and forget again. (p. 17)

Ultimately, therefore, Nicholson's attitude towards Wordsworth oscillates between reverence and subversion as he both draws upon and critiques the earlier poet. What is more, Nicholson's poetry demonstrates that an awareness of the (Romantic) intertextuality of space can facilitate the development of a complex and palimpsestic engagement with landscape which allows the writer to transcend the imaginative limitations often associated with geo-specific regional writing. It is the responsibility of the spatial critic, armed with an understanding of post-Heideggerian spatial theory, to open up further thinking about the type of post-Romantic poetry of place and space exemplified by Nicholson's intertextual representations of the Lake District topography.

Notes:

- ¹ Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place: History, Tradition, Nostalgia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 7.
- ² Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 143-59 (p. 158).
- ³ There is a need to acknowledge, however, that the accuracy of Heidegger's etymological investigations has been questioned. See, for example, J. Hillis Miller, 'Slipping Vaulting Crossing: Heidegger'. *Topographies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 216-54.
- ⁴ Edward Relph, 'Geographical Experiences and Being-in-the-World: The Phenomenological Origins of Geography'. *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*. Eds David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985; repr. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, pp. 15-31 (p. 27).
- ⁵ Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006, p. 4. In the Introduction to his monograph, Malpas offers a detailed reading of Heidegger's notions of place, space and topology.
- ⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964; repr. 1994, p. 4.
- ⁷ Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft argue that, if Heidegger is to be seen as 'the great modern philosopher [. . .] of "the home"', then Bachelard 'performs a similar function regarding "the house"'. 'Introduction: Culture and Domestic Space'. *Our House: Domestic Space in Modern Culture*. Eds Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, pp. 11-26 (p. 15).
- ⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, pp. 33-40.
- ⁹ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976, p. 1.
- ¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Place, Art, and Self*. Santa Fe: Center for American Places, 2004, p. 7.
- ¹¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 161.
- ¹² Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*. London: Continuum, 2004, p. 79.
- ¹³ See Michel Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1996), 22-27; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990; and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
- ¹⁴ See, for example, Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003; and *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker. London: Routledge, 2005.
- ¹⁵ For an introductory overview of contemporary ecocritical practice, see Kevin Hutchings, 'Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies', *Literature Compass*, 4.1 (2007), 172-202, doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00417.x.
- ¹⁶ John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 104.
- ¹⁷ Barrell's work on Clare can be seen to be an influence on Rachel Crawford's *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. In *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Franco Moretti argues that Barrell's monograph offers a paradigm for cartographical readings of literary texts. See *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary Theory*. London: Verso, 2005, pp. 38-42.
- ¹⁸ Philip Shaw, 'Romantic Space: Topo-analysis and Subjectivity in *The Prelude*'. *The Prelude: Theory in Practice*. Ed. Nigel Wood. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993, pp. 62-97 (p. 62).
- ¹⁹ Michael Wiley, *Romantic Geography: Wordsworth and Anglo-European Spaces*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, p. 3.
- ²⁰ Michael Wiley, 'The Geography of Displacement and Replacement in Charlotte Smith's *The Emigrants*', *European Romantic Review*, 17:1 (2006), 55-68 (p. 55).
- ²¹ Terry McCormick, 'The Poet's Place: An Approach to the Poetry of William Wordsworth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1980). In the acknowledgements to *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, Bate voices his intellectual debt to McCormick's proto-ecocritical reading of Wordsworth's topographical poetry.
- ²² Amanda Gilroy, 'Re/Writing Home: Women Romantic Writers and the Politics of Location'. *Romantic Masculinities*. Eds Tony Pinkney, Keith Hanley and Fred Botting. Keele: Keele University Press, 1997, pp. 30-40 (p. 30).
- ²³ Morton's essay appears in a special edition of *European Romantic Review*, which emerged out of the 2003 conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism. The overarching theme for the conference was 'Placing Romanticism – Sites, Borders, Forms' and, as a result, several of the published articles can be seen to occupy broadly spatial territory.
- ²⁴ Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North*. London: Reaktion, 2005, p. 224.
- ²⁵ *The Discovery of the Lake District: A Northern Arcadia and its Uses*. Ed. John Murdoch. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984.
- ²⁶ William Wordsworth, *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*. Eds W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, II, 151-259 (p. 171).
- ²⁷ See, for example, Karl Kroeber, "'Home at Grasmere": Ecological Holiness', *PMLA*, 89:1 (1974), 132-41; James C. McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001, pp. 53-76; and Kate Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, p. 81.
- ²⁸ William Wordsworth, *Home at Grasmere: Part First, Book First, of the Recluse*. Ed. Beth Darlington. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, MS B, lines 166-67.

²⁹ See, for example, Wordsworth's two letters to the *Morning Post* in which he formulates his vehement opposition to the proposed Kendal to Windermere railway line. 'Letter to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, No. I, 9 December 1844', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, III, 340-48; and 'Letter to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, No. II, 17 December 1844', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, III, 348-56.

³⁰ Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 259.

³¹ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*. London: Reaktion, 1998, p. 84.

³² W. H. Auden, 'Bucolics', in *Collected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber and Faber, 1976, pp. 426-35 (p. 429).

³³ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 1991, p. 3.

³⁴ Norman Nicholson, *The Lakers: The Adventures of the First Tourists*. London: Robert Hale, 1955, p. 208.

³⁵ Norman Nicholson, 'To the River Duddon'. *Five Rivers*. London: Faber and Faber, 1944, pp. 16-17 (p. 17).

³⁶ Norman Nicholson, *Provincial Pleasures*. London: Robert Hale, 1959; repr. Carlisle: Bookcase, 1993, p. 185.

³⁷ Norman Nicholson, *Cumberland and Westmorland*. London: Robert Hale, 1949, p. 1.

³⁸ Norman Nicholson, *Portrait of the Lakes*. London: Robert Hale, 1963; repr. 1980, p. 15.

³⁹ 'An Interview with Norman Nicholson (Philip Hay and Angharad Wyn-Jones', *Signal*, 43:1 (1984), 19-32 (p. 26).

This reference exemplifies the way in which Nicholson repeatedly conflates the textual and the topographical, as he simultaneously alludes to both Wordsworth and the famous Cumbrian fell of Conistone Old Man. It is a bringing together of literature and landscape which Nicholson makes explicit when, further on in the interview, he suggests that: 'Wordsworth is Cumberland' (p. 32).

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