Introduction

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This special issue of *Critical Survey* offers several pathways for critical exploration. It is the first time the journal has explored the field of literary criticism known as ‘ecocriticism’ or ‘green cultural studies’, and this will be its first focus on walking literature and related art. In opening up these two routes, our special issue allows a view both on the roles of walking in poetry, literary non-fiction, fiction and the walking arts in the UK and Ireland, and on the possibilities of ecocriticism as a method of addressing these roles. The choice of theme reflects and responds to a current interest in walking and walking-related culture, as evidenced by the burgeoning of walking-based ‘new nature writing’ and the development of artistic projects such as Dee Heddon and Misha Myers’ *Walking Library* (ongoing since 2013) – site-specific collections that emphasise the social and cultural aspects of walking. We present here a selection of essays that engage with walking literature and art with a predominantly rural focus. They are also essays that, in terms of chronology or approach, move beyond consideration of the walking practices of the Romantics, since these have already been widely explored in ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism arose in the 1990s, motivated by the need to consider nature or the environment as it appears in literature and culture in terms of its material reality or phenomenological appeal rather than as a mere backdrop or reference-less lexical cluster. The perspective has since expanded to consider many different aspects of our relationship with non-human nature, and even to question the usefulness of the concept of ‘nature’ (as opposed to ‘environment’ or another term) itself. In part, this questioning has been motivated by an awareness of the historical deployment of ‘nature’ as a construct to reinforce dominant ideologies around gender, class and race, as well as by the suggestion that the term ‘nature’ perpetuates an unhelpful conceptual

divide between the natural world and the human. It seems plausible that contemporary walking literature, informed by this new ecocritical apparatus, will be nuanced in its evocations of nature, sceptical of the established aesthetic conventions of landscape appreciation, and informed by ideas drawn from ecological science. But as this special issue demonstrates, even accounts of walking in literature from the early twentieth century, though pre-dating the emergence of ecocriticism, reflect the scientific advances of the late nineteenth century and the slowly gathering awareness of environmental risk that characterise this era, and provide a historical precedent for the current complexity of our attitudes to nature and the environment.

At the heart of this special issue is the question of why walking is so prominent in recent cultural output. Is it because walking as wayfaring or 'wanderlust' offers unique opportunities for our times? And if walking does offer these opportunities, how do the emerging cultural forms meet the corresponding challenges? We write in the context of a new geological era that has been (unofficially) named the Anthropocene to denote the period of the earth's history during which 'humans have a decisive influence on the state, dynamics and future of the Earth system'.¹ Literature has often turned to nature as a counter to the anxieties of its era and, more specifically, to the difficulties of the city and social or personal life, in order to access a kind of 'nature cure'. Now, more than ever before, encounters on foot allow us to observe endangered nature and to reassess undervalued or damaged landscapes and environments.

Of course, this turning to the natural world has historically often come hand in hand with the pastoral urge to retreat, expressed in 'naïve' forms, as identified by Raymond Williams and Terry Gifford, which commodify nature or rural folk. However, the contemporary walking authors and artists studied here resist that urge to access an idealised ruralism which hindered many early experiments in these forms, offering instead complex, hybrid responses to their chosen terrain. It may even be theorised that the psychological urge to 'escape' in nature can, through these less appropriative perspectives of the mobile observer, lead us to a less acquisitive attitude to non-human nature, a new appreciation of our material interconnection with the environment, new forms of phenomenology, enchantment and spirituality, and even a reinvigorated sociability.

There is also a sense of renewed creative inspiration. With its concern with 'truth to experience', walking literature owes much to

travel writing and topographical poetry, where the authenticity of the experience communicated provides some of the literary value. Combine the ‘nature cure’ and the urge to truthfulness with the demand to find new ways to respond to perceived environmental threats, and you find a literature that ranges from the jeremiad, to the ecstatic, prophetic or playful. The twenty-first-century writers and walking artists described in this collection often marry the seriousness of their intention with innovations in approach and style that provide us with new forms of literary and artistic pleasure.

Given this apparent rejuvenation and reinvention of current walking literature and art, another question central to our enquiry is whether reading older texts through the lens of contemporary ‘green’ perspectives can uncover elements of their use of walking that might previously have gone unnoticed. Two of the essays in this collection, which engage with fictional works dating to the first half of the twentieth century, reveal a range of innovations in form and content, and demonstrate the centrality of walking to the narratives, pointing up the ways in which the protagonists’ identities and energies are shaped by their walking interactions with the natural world. In *The Old Ways*, Robert Macfarlane argues that walking is not just a means of arriving at knowledge, ‘it is the means of knowing’ itself.² These essays add to the notion that builds throughout this collection, that walking, historically and in the twenty-first century, represents a unique mode of investigation and perception. This emerges both in self-reflection and in a heightened, embodied attentiveness to the world in which we walk.

In the first essay in this special issue – “‘Sensuous Singularity’: Hamish Fulton’s Cairngorm “Walk-Texts”” – Alan Macpherson explores the work of contemporary walking artist Hamish Fulton. In particular, he considers the aptitude of Fulton’s ‘walk-texts’ for stimulating an ecologically ethical sensibility. Drawing on the ideas of political theorist Jane Bennett, Macpherson identifies in Fulton’s work an attention to the ‘sensuous singularity’ of the landscapes through which he walks, which provides a means of accessing an ‘enchanted sensibility’. The lack of such affective engagement with the natural world, in Fulton’s view, is at the root of the kinds of human behaviours that have led to anthropogenic climate change. For Macpherson, the act of walking is Fulton’s central experiential activity – and one to which writing and art are subordinate. So significant is walking as a mode and method for Fulton, Macpherson writes, that he insists on his identity as a ‘walking artist’, eschewing other possible descriptions such as sculptor,

conceptual artist or Land artist. The project that resulted in *Mountain Time Human Time* (2010) involved Fulton in a twenty-one-day walk in the Cairngorms. Other walks have been undertaken in more urban settings and in groups, for example *Walk Around the Block* (2010) and *Slowwalk in Support of Ai Weiwei* (2011) which took place in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern.

Nevertheless, despite the centrality of the act of walking *per se*, Macpherson characterises Fulton's 'walk-texts' as a form of embodied practice and performance, which, as such, can convey to their audience something of the experience of the walk itself. And in a beautifully insightful reading, he argues that two recurring strategies found in Fulton's Cairngorm walk-texts – the list and the return – offer in combination a linguistic mode uniquely suited to the consideration of environmental ethics in the context of the Anthropocene. Macpherson notes: 'the text that opens *Wild Life*, from a seven-day walk in 1985, is composed of a list that extends to seventeen pages', and argues that the list form (or *ontography*) speaks to Bennett's notion of sensuous singularity. He suggests that this feature can also activate our sense of Derridean *différance*, accentuating linguistic points of singularity and collocation – a process that might then be applied to the landscape itself. Likewise, the notion of return – of revisiting landscapes in different days, months, seasons or years, which recurs in Fulton's work – activates similar, valuable processes of focused attentiveness and differentiation.

Simone Kotva and Alice Tarbuck engage with the spiritual aspects of walking in their essay, 'The Non-Secular Pilgrimage: Walking and Looking in Ken Cockburn and Alec Finlay's *The Road North*'. Cockburn and Finlay's project, while deliberately distanced from the doctrines of institutionalised religion, is nevertheless, as Kotva and Tarbuck argue, firmly rooted in the tradition of contemplative practice, from the spirituality of the Desert Fathers to the manuals of Zen monasticism, incorporating along the way nods towards the Celtic practice of peregrination, and taking inspiration from the seventeenth-century Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō. For Kotva and Tarbuck, this 'non-secular' (though non-denominational) approach is indicative of a sacred dimension to recent nature poetry.

Like Fulton's walk-texts, Cockburn and Finlay's *The Road North* project (which resulted in *The Road North* poetry collection) employs more than one medium to convey its subject matter, combining *haiku* poems with a blog and photographs. In this, and again like Fulton, they

might be seen to be endeavouring to convey the experience of the walk rather than merely inscribing statements about that experience, with the poetry itself sometimes expressing in its very prosody the motion and timing of footsteps. In addition to these features, Cockburn and Finlay also adopt another element of Bashō's practice, which involves an interactive relationship with both the landscape and subsequent walkers of that terrain, composing *haiku* on labels, and attaching them to trees or other objects as they pass. At the same time, though, as Kotva and Tarbuck persuasively suggest, the poets are ultimately reluctant to invest their work too heavily with the spiritual expectations of pilgrimage. Instead, 'they prefer to explore walking and looking as a liminality which secures the practitioner a vantage on the 'edge' of pilgrimage' – a vantage point that represents the potential for an enhanced mode of attentiveness to the material world.

While ecocritics have typically focused on Romanticism as the source of 'green literature', in Michelle Poland's 'Walking with the Goat-God: Gothic Ecology in Algernon Blackwood's *Pan's Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories*' (1912), the modernist Gothic imagination is seen as anticipating the tropes of 'chaos ecology' and modern understandings of a shifting natural world and 'disturbed' nature. As she explains, this is the version of nature that underpins contemporary ecological thinking, including the concept of the Anthropocene. This identification of this era of transition (even if the start date has yet to be agreed upon) underscores the ways in which environmental systems and life are open to change and disorder rather than being 'temperate, balanced and nurturing'.

In Poland's essay, she describes how the writer Blackwood's own experiences of environmental upheaval – including freak weather and dramatic geomorphic events, as well as the First World War – inspired his understanding of the chaos and disruption of nature. In *Pan's Garden*, nature is a dynamic and unpredictable actor that produces 'terror and wonder, horror and delight'. Poland explores the cultural evolution of ideas of Pan that resulted in his identity, for Blackwood, as an embodiment of 'nature'. Walking with Pan becomes a symbol for the return of our repressed identity with nature in both inner and outer forms. While the primary experience invoked through Blackwood's text is terror, when we see how easily nature breaks through our assumed divisions and 'polarities', the threat that is at the heart of Blackwood's Gothic imagination – through our time in 'Pan's garden' or the 'ecosystem' – will be death, if we are not able to achieve a more

collaborative stance. While walking is a mainly a figurative device in Blackwood's stories, Poland explains that the author's early imagination was inspired by his own experiences of 'wonder and delight', walking and storytelling in forests and mountains.

The case of an author from a slightly later period, Dorothy Edwards, illustrates how walking can be both the basis of literary inspiration and a reminder of our interdependence with the ecosystem. Despite our awareness of the relationships between 'green exercise' and recovery from mental illness (see, for example, the work on Green Exercise from the University of Essex),³ this aspect of walking is seldom discussed in literary criticism, even in ecocriticism, or if it is, it is considered to be a kind of bourgeois indulgence. However, literature can be explored for the way in which walking can help us to recover, for instance, from depression. Is walking in nature beneficial purely as a 'physical' experience, or does it have additional imaginative or cognitive dimensions that allow us to recover?

Drawing on Edwards' novel *Winter Sonata* and her collection of stories, *Rhapsody*, Steven Lovatt explores how walking, and other forms of movement, can serve as narrative devices, as aids to characterisation, and as metaphors for mental energy or its absence. Lovatt explains that this is partly due to the limited time and space of Edwards' storyworlds, where the situation of her characters is imbued with greater significance, despite the absence of much 'happening', because of the limited viewpoint. However, Lovatt's central point is that notions of movement and stasis are key themes and aesthetic devices in Edwards' narratives, linked by their relationship to energy and its dissipation to the author's experiences, and to her efforts to recover from depression.

Frustration in romantic relationships, inner stasis and outer 'nothingness' are key to the characters' experiences of depression. At these moments, what appears to be an absence of 'plot' becomes a storyworld where the physical, imaginative and cognitive (or narrative) dimensions of walking and storytelling can be explored. In *Winter Sonata*, the heroine Olivia Neran walks to try to overcome her depression. Here and elsewhere, walking is linked to a recovery of mental energy, much, as Lovatt explains, as it had been in Edwards' own life. However, through the motifs of 'stasis' and 'nothingness', Edwards links walking to the existence of an inner life through its creation of a narrative – in walking, something happens. As Lovatt explains, 'For both Edwards and her characters, telling and walking are aspects of the same attempt at recovery; the "recreation" of walking is nothing less

than an attempt at the recreation of the cosmos, and with it, the self'. Lovatt's sensitive reading of these works suggests new critical pathways into Edwards' literary innovations.

Maureen O'Connor's elegant contribution to this special issue also considers the relationship between depression or melancholy and the 'green' landscape in contemporary Irish fiction. The novels considered in 'Blue Roads, Blue Fields: The Melancholy of the Girl Walker in Irish Women's Fiction' demonstrate how fiction can contribute to a 'puncturing of the pastoral'. While the environmental movement may fetishise or commodify the colour green, O'Connor explains how contemporary writers Edna O'Brien, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Clare Boylan have different connotations of both 'nature' and the colour green. In the lives of woman in rural Ireland, as O'Connor argues, green 'signals and camouflages predacious intentions'. And while the female protagonists in these works may become seduced by or long for escape in nature, 'the natural' in post-Independence Ireland is used in the construction of a painful and contradictory construction of pure womanhood, or associated with the opportunity to make a quick profit.

In Boylan's novel *Holy Pictures*, which is set in the 1920s, O'Connor finds that black is the colour most often associated with landscape, and linked to the threats of nature, embodiment and fertility that come with the conservative, patriarchal cultural paradigm. The protagonists are most often connected to the colour 'blue', as a melancholy state, the colour of the Virgin Mary, and a symbol of a landscape that holds the memories of violence and dishonoured dead. Her walkers are offered the chance to escape by walking into this blue landscape but, in doing so, they risk their culturally sanctioned identities as both 'pure' and 'natural'.

These fictional accounts of women walkers in rural Ireland raise uncomfortable questions about the connections between environmental appropriation and the treatment of women as commodities. In O'Brien's *Down by the River*, Mary's incestuous father looks to make a quick profit from a section of 'fallow bogland'. In Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's *The Dancers Dancing*, her teenage character Orla relishes in the discovery of her own body through its immersion in a lush green burn, but this only occurs when she is sufficiently far – geographically and culturally – from her sense of the demands of the patriarchy. The pastoral escape is abruptly ended by the dramatic discovery of children's skulls – a possible 'cillin' or a site of infanticide. This, along with the onset of Orla's menstrual period, reminds the reader of the social structures and

taboos that can seem to sever us from joy in our connections to nature. However, in O'Connor's conclusion, she notices how, for these authors, 'melancholy' experiences in the landscape present opportunities for freedom, when they give us the courage to reject the demands of a dominant culture. Her thoughtful contribution to this collection shows how literary accounts of our experiences of non-human nature allow us to explore our own complexities, both as embodied creatures and as agents of cultures that occasionally make impossible demands on us.

For our final article in the collection, we are delighted to present an essay co-written by two 'walking artists': the poet Harriet Tarlo and the visual artist Judith Tucker. "Off Path, Counter Path": Contemporary Walking Collaborations in Landscape, Art and Poetry' is a reflection on how these two practitioners incorporate walking into their collaborative work and respective creative methods. The essay includes original texts and images and provides a unique insight into the potentialities of the contemporary walking arts. Tarlo and Tucker envisage their collaborations as counter-cultural activities, in which they walk 'against the grain' of 'a capitalist, resource-greedy [culture ...] which takes little account of the immediate environmental crisis', and, in artistic terms, against the conceptual divisions between different art forms and between the abstract and the representational. They also assess the legacy of Romantic and modernist walking art and literature, and see themselves as moving away from these traditions and their preoccupation with individual subjectivities, instead 'painting and writing away from the self and into the field'. These are considerations that enter into their decisions on how best to transmit and exhibit these works.

In "Off Path, Counter Path", Tarlo and Tucker focus on the collaborative practices they have brought to two projects in particular: *Tributaries* (ongoing since 2011), based on walks on the Black Hill, near Holmfirth in the South Pennines, and *Excavations and Estuaries* (ongoing since 2013), located on the estuarial coastline and Fitties Plotland near Cleethorpes. Both projects attest to the authors' sensitivity to the social histories of these places – to their industrial and agricultural traces. Their method involves walking interactively together but working independently in their respective media, in a process of sociability and shared attentiveness. They are also careful to stress the broader sociability of the walking experience and their interactions with others, 'from wildlife trust volunteers, film makers and fellow-artists to people we simply met on the way', not forgetting their constant canine companion, Esther.

The resulting compositions register the 'discrete steps' of their creators but also enhance and extend each other. Drawing on their understanding of recent ecocritical developments, especially the embodied perspectives of the new materialisms, Tarlo and Tucker reject the notion of landscape as a 'view', with its attendant anthropocentric suggestion of a privileged viewer, and engage in 'a more entangled interpretation of this activity'. Tucker's paintings offer the prospect of a landscape transmitted through the body of the artist, felt in the arms and hands. Tarlo adopts an 'open form' for her poetry, which provides an expanded phenomenological dimension to the textual content. Together, their artistic responses to the paths they tread offer the people who look at the drawn and written lines 'possible futures ..., walks or lines or even shifts in perception that they may be yet to take, on path, off-path or counter-path, in the gallery and outside'.

This special walking issue of *Critical Survey* concludes with a selection of creative work by Terry Gifford, Anna Stenning, David Arnold, Pippa Marland, A.D. Harvey and Christopher North. This complements the academic essays, taking the dialogue beyond academia and into a range of landscapes – urban, suburban, rural and continental. In these creative pieces, the unpredictability and transgressive potentiality of walking comes to the fore (the redundant map stuffed into a pocket in Christopher North's poem 'Walk or Fifteen Sixteenths of it'), as do the uncomfortable juxtapositions it highlights (the swans and luxury waterside apartments in A.D. Harvey's *haiku*) and the complicated ecological compromises it reveals (the landfill growing wild in Pippa Marland's 'At Lamplighters'). The poems also register the way in which walking enables an unparalleled depth of contemplation, leading to profound personal insights and hauntings: the sense of his absent father walking beside him in Terry Gifford's 'That Orange Tree'; the bitter-sweet realisation of the growing up and away of one's children in David Arnold's 'Birthday, remotely'; and the feeling of a frustrated longing for geographical rootedness in Anna Stenning's 'Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)'.

The poet Edward Thomas, writing in 1913, suggested that 'the century of Pope and Johnson is looked down on for nothing so much as for being townish and for thinking one green field like another'. But he went on to argue, 'We forget that, nevertheless, their fields were greener than ours, and that they did not neglect them save in poetry'.⁴ The implication is that although the eighteenth-century poets flaunted their urban sophistication over the glories of the natural world, their era

was one in which the 'green fields' were not themselves neglected, as they were, Thomas suggests, in his own time. We prepare this special issue of *Critical Survey* for publication in the knowledge that our 'green fields' have experienced another full century of the kind of neglect to which Thomas alluded – of the ongoing, rapacious human domination and exploitation of the natural world, the effects of which become ever more manifest in the context of the Anthropocene.

In Thomas's terms, the fact that we see such a rich engagement with the environment in the works studied here may be a cause for concern, bringing with it the implication that a wealth of green literature and art may be the corollary of an ongoing neglect of the environment itself, and even the notion that the green field of cultural endeavour may be supplanting greener forms of engaging with the natural world. However, while Thomas was sensitive to the many ways in which authors in his own time were disingenuous about their connections with the environment, he and later commentators of a more overtly 'ecological' bent have shown that the artifice of literature can paradoxically reignite more earthy forms of experience. We do not include any contributions related to 'new nature writing' in this issue, and possibly this field has been ploughed enough elsewhere.⁵ Nevertheless, the works studied here, in six essays wonderfully varied in their subject matter and approach, along with the original prose and poetry included in this collection, attest to the development of richly complex, and often practice-led ways of valuing and developing a greater attentiveness to the natural world – all of which are fostered and facilitated by walking. In terms of 'ecological vision', an exploration of the work of current walking artists and a corresponding re-examination of earlier walking literature through the lens of contemporary ecocriticism shows us that walking can be regarded, in the early twenty-first century, as an old technology that continues to provide us with cutting-edge ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

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Anna Stenning is an independent researcher. She has recently compiled an anthology of Edward Thomas's prose and poetry, which will be published during the centenary of Thomas's death at the battle of Arras in 1917. Her Ph.D. thesis considered the literary development of Thomas and Robert Frost between 1912 and 1917. Her other research interests include nature writing and 'walking art'. She lives in Ledbury, Herefordshire, where she teaches and writes on these subjects.

Notes

1. Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Working Group on the Anthropocene, 'What Is the "Anthropocene"? – Current Definition and Status', <https://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene/> (accessed 24 January 2017).
2. Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 27.
3. <http://www.greenexercise.org> (accessed 23 February 2017).
4. Edward Thomas, *The Country* (London: Batsford, 1913), 17.
5. See, for example, Anna Stenning and Terry Gifford, Editorial: 'Twentieth-century nature writing in Britain and Ireland' in *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 17.1 (2013): 1–4.