

**Call for Papers**  
**A New Poetics of Space: Literary Walks in times of Pandemics and Climate Change**

**Online conference: 7 December 2020**

**Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden**

**Keynote Speakers:** Professor Anne D. Wallace (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) and Professor Jon Hegglund (Washington State University)

**Organisers:** Dr Lucy Jeffery & Professor Vicky Angelaki

In the Exeter Book (c. 975), the speaker in an Anglo-Saxon lament entitled ‘The Wanderer’ elegises over the plight of a ‘lone-dweller’ who, ‘weary of hardships’ and ‘the death of kinsmen’, ‘longs for relief’ as he follows ‘paths of exile’ in search of ‘the Almighty’s mercy’.<sup>1</sup> As the verse explores the nature of wandering, the reader (or listener) contemplates how the speaker’s journey has informed his ethical and geographical path. The idea of walking is – as it would also be for later writers and thinkers as diverse as Jane Austen, Friedrich Nietzsche, Mahatma Gandhi, and W. G. Sebald – a source of creative inspiration and a call to political activity. Today, as we face a global pandemic that has made the citizens of over two hundred countries wary of stepping into the great outdoors, walking has acquired added significance.

Depending on one’s geographic and/or economic situation, walking has become salvation, hobby, danger, and protest. In some areas, the sanctioned restrictions on people’s movement meant that the physical and cognitive freedoms at the disposal of the wanderer were removed. Similarly, the compulsory closure of shops, bars, theatres, and museums has rendered the flâneur’s stroll through crowded streets that burgeon with the spoils of capitalism impossible. One can no longer, as Walter Benjamin observed of Baudelaire’s flâneur, ‘go about the city’ in a state of ‘anamnesic intoxication’ and ‘[feed] on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes’.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, 2020 has seen a rise in protest marches concerned with social and racial equality, rendering the walk representative of political agency and activism. Moreover, as the act of walking has become an enactment of the freedoms that remain during quarantine, it is understood in contrast to our increasingly familiar state of Beckettian seclusion.

As we have become more mindful of our day-to-day comings and goings, our engagement with literature that either extolls the virtues of walking or warns against the perils of the journey has both heightened and changed. Furthermore, as our experience of confinement and self-isolation has reshaped our everyday lives, we may recontextualise our examination of literature in relation to a politics of space and place. This online conference, hosted by the Department of English at Mid Sweden University, will explore what the act of walking stands for and what it signifies today in various textual forms. The one-day event aims to reflect the various ways in which walking, in its manifold possibilities and contexts, informs our understanding of the ways in which our experience of confinement has impacted our understanding of society and reading of literature.

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘The Wanderer’ in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Middle Ages Volume A*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, James Simpson, and Alfred David (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 117-120, 118.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 417.

With this in mind, we would like to take stock of the scholarship concerning walking and interrogate how our new politicised landscape is reshaping our understanding of literary landscapes across a range of genres and periods. We aim to explore: what narratives of walking reveal about our understanding of the politics of space, health, and the environment (both urban and rural); and, more broadly, how people are responding creatively to the question of space and confinement today. The project seeks to re-evaluate how we respond to and understand the tradition of the literary walk in light of the twenty-first century's technological developments, societal shifts, environmental challenges, and political situation.

We welcome interdisciplinary perspectives and encourage analyses that explore walking through, but not limited to, the following lines of inquiry:

- Cartographic narration
- Ecocriticism
- Exile
- Freedom and confinement
- Literary topology
- Medical humanities
- Mobility studies
- Music
- Performance
- Peripatetic liminality
- Pilgrimage
- Political marches / protests
- Private and public spaces
- Slowness
- Solitude / self-isolation
- Technology
- The pastoral
- The urban flâneur
- Transcendentalism
- Visual arts

We are keen to investigate the concept of walking in fictive and non-fictive texts and accounts. Any chosen critical, theoretical, methodological, or disciplinary perspective is therefore welcome. We hope that this conference will provide researchers interested in interdisciplinary (especially environment, health, politics) approaches to literature with rigorous and engaging discussions concerning creative and/or theoretical approaches to the theme of walking.

We warmly welcome postgraduates, ECRs, and senior academics interested in how the global climate and epidemiological challenges we currently face inform our understanding of literature that engages with ecocritical issues and notions of confinement. Please send **abstracts (200-250 words), including a title and short bio (100 words)** to [lucy.jeffery@miun.se](mailto:lucy.jeffery@miun.se) by **1 October 2020**. Papers must be between 15 – 20 minutes in length. We aim to respond to all applicants with a decision on their submission by 9 October 2020. Please note that as this conference will take place online, there is **no conference fee**.

If you are interested in attending this online event, but do not wish to present a paper, please contact us directly via email. The conference programme will be posted on the **Mid Sweden University English Department webpage** and **Facebook pages** in due course. Please **address any questions you may have to [lucy.jeffery@miun.se](mailto:lucy.jeffery@miun.se)**

We look forward to hearing from you,  
Dr Lucy Jeffery and Professor Vicky Angelaki.