

**Following Fallis: A Literary Walk with “The Best Laid Plans”**

**Jacqueline Cerroni Lawlor**

University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, MA Thesis

June 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Patricia Palulis

Thesis Committee: Dr. Cynthia Morawski and Dr. Raymond Leblanc

© Jacqueline Cerroni Lawlor, Ottawa, Canada, 2012

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee: Raymond Leblanc and Cynthia Morawski for their insights, comments and encouragement throughout my writing process. I would also like to thank Dr. Judith Robertson for first introducing me to the topic of the travelling reader and encouraging me to continue in this area of literacy studies. Finally, I am very grateful for the support and guidance of Dr. Patricia Palulis in the writing of this article.

Dedicated to Brent, Ava, Noni and Brogan

Brent, I could not have done this without your love and support. Thank you for choosing me to walk beside you on this crazy path we call life.

### **Abstract**

Lingering in the topic of literary engagement, this article follows a reader enthralled by words and the significant non-space where fiction and reality intersect. Using Terry Fallis' political satire "The Best Laid Plans," a physical map of the reading is followed as I amble through the Ottawa sites depicted in the novel. In this literary pilgrimage, reading is considered as a corporeal (re)action with a series of educative affects. Contrasting this experience with common in-school reading practices, this narrative encourages the honouring of the individualized relationship between reader and text as well as highlighting the pedagogical value of dallying in a work of fiction. Drawing on concepts of spatiality, I contemplate the notion of the home city as a familiar and yet capricious place, made more significant by a fantastic connection. Reading in significant spaces has a lasting, sprawling outcome whereby text, place and reader are all affected.

Table of Contents:

Introduction to the Article	p. 6
The Article: <b>Following Fallis: A Literary Walk with “The Best Laid Plans”</b>	p. 8
Conclusion	p. 43
List of References	p. 45

### Introduction to the Article:

This article delves into the subject of literary engagement and traces the path of a reader who treads one step further than the page. Written in the form of a personal narrative, the work follows my journey with the novel “The Best Laid Plans” (2007) by Terry Fallis, as I physically walk through the literal sites that make up the fictitious reality of Fallis’ characters. As passionate readers captivated by a text have craved for an experience that extends beyond the final page, many have been drawn to visit the sites that once inspired beloved authors or walked in the footsteps of favoured characters. Within this article, the pedagogical value of such a corporeal experience of reading is displayed and deliberated alongside current in-school reading practices.

Before entering the collision of the book and the space, I developed a number of questions to frame my research. These were compiled into three themes:

1. *Reading in Motion*: How does the action and movement of visiting a literary site affect the reading experience?
2. *Reading through Space*: What is the significance of space/place to a reader’s lived experience when making a literary pilgrimage?
3. *Reading for Formal Learning*: Exploring this alternative approach to reading in situ exposes an educational experience of reading not usually met in the institutionalized setting. What are the implications for current in-school reading practices?

Having read and reread the book, dog-eared pages, written notes in the margins and mapped the specific locales described in the novel, I undertook a journey in my own familiar home-town, Ottawa. Carrying the book—my only guide—I physically walked through the once fictive, now real spaces. This involved three separate excursions on three different days. I took notes along the way, but found that most of my reflection occurred at home as each day had finished and I was able to wallow in the night light of my computer screen. Recording the journey as a narrative, I hoped the reader would be able to follow the web of thoughts that were provoked as the spaces of fiction and the realities of places overlapped.

My theoretical framework is woven throughout the article as I found myself pondering various subjects as a result of my physical presence, my *being there* in the obscurities of the book/space. Most prominent is the commitment to literary theory that drives my comprehension of this unique reading experience. Drawing on Kristeva (1996), I discover the complex web that is created through a reading experience that has no definitive beginning or end as corners of the page point me in countless other directions. My increasing engagement with the text spurs thoughts about education and current reading pedagogies that instill a silencing and stillness of the body (Luke, 1992). I contrast this with my own experience where it is my physical movement that actually enhances my engagement with a text, bringing the body into the reading. Finally, as I explore these spaces with text in mind, I am struck by how involved I feel within places that were once unknown, far away or removed from my everyday life in this city. My home was changed as my roots expanded into new earth. From the educator's point of view, the pilgrimage became a memorable and affective lesson in place consciousness as my desire to both understand and become more involved in my home city swelled.

The Article:

Table of Contents:

Pre-ambling: An Introduction	p. 10
Mapping a Wandering: Questions Unanswered	p. 11
Literally Walking: The Journey Begins	p. 12
Following the Ghosts: Literature Review	p. 15
Writing with my Feet: A Patchwork Methodology	p. 19
Entering the Warp	p. 22
Teachable Moments	p. 26
Reading in Motion	p. 29
A Final Pause	p. 32
A Traveller Returned	p. 34
The Patches: Works Cited	p. 39

### Pre-ambling: An Introduction

Let the words on the page seduce me so that I may enter that delicious non place of here/not here—that space where the hand of the clock ticks to an irrelevant beat and sleep is chased by the dream created on the folds of the page. Let me read and be read to by the pretence of people and the façade of the setting. Lost and yet found, this is my prayer each time my fingers tremble over the cover of a book.

We readers challenge an author in a matter of minutes. Within the first few pages, the fate of the otherwise lifeless characters are determined. The existence of the world created by the author precariously sits on a balance easily tipped by the impulsive reader. However, there is a circumstance that can sway, a setting that can tempt the hungry reader in a way I had not previously considered before this book, “The Best Laid Plans” by Terry Fallis, found its way into my hands. As my eyes glistened over the first few sentences, some all too familiar nouns offered a desirous pull. The words, “Ottawa,” “Parliament Hill,” “the University of Ottawa,” “Sparks Street,” and “the Glebe” intersperse the first four pages of the prologue. While these may be mere labels to many the reader, for me they signify much more: *home*.

Being able to conjure exact images of the various settings mentioned in the book, a bubbling of excitement overflowed from my usual, well trained, stoic reading composure. I vividly recall the first time the main character, Daniel Addison, walked me through these hometown places and fidgeting in my seat. As the bus rolled by the very parliament buildings mentioned, I had this overwhelming desire to tell the stranger sitting next to me that I am actually *reading a story about this place, our home*, right now! Shyness overtaken, I simply grinned as I devoured the pages describing this home that is not my home, this place that is now changed as I see it through another’s words.

Immersing myself in the text, a poem was birthed (Rosenblatt, 1978) as I encountered myself within the art in a degree I had not previously experienced. I also became increasingly aware that despite my 20 years living here, I have yet much to discover in this place I call home. Alberto Manguel (2006) once wrote, “Every reader is either a pausing wanderer or a traveller returned” (p.308). It is this unique literary journey, one of reading and wandering, pausing and travelling, which has called upon me to write.

### Mapping a Wandering: Questions Unanswered

Reading of Daniel's life in Ottawa, I felt drawn to discover the places he mentions. As an educator with a particular interest in reading pedagogies, this desire to physically journey through the literary landscape as depicted in the book raised some interesting questions: How is a reader affected by encountering a fictional setting in real life? While the phenomenon of the literary pilgrim, willingly captive readers who travel to noted book sites, is a recognized pastime, does this experience really fulfill some unknown longing or need for the reader? Does such an experience of tarrying within a literary landscape have a pedagogical value, particularly with regard to common trends of schooled literacy training? How does space/place and movement as one physically walks through a book's setting affect the reading experience?

Questions swirling, I decided to undertake my own literary walk and document this experience. Hoping to open a window on an alternative approach to reading and reading pedagogies, I developed the following specific research themes to guide me as I set out to follow Daniel Addison and Angus McLintock in Fallis (2007) novel:

1. *Reading in Motion*: How does the action and movement of visiting a literary site affect the reading experience?
2. *Reading through Space*: What is the significance of space/place to a reader's lived experience when making a literary pilgrimage?
3. *Reading for Formal Learning*: Exploring this alternative approach to reading in situ exposes an educational experience of reading not usually met in the institutionalized setting. What are the implications for current in-school reading practices?<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I initially developed these questions under the guidance of Dr. Judith Roberston based upon her larger SSHRC funded project entitled "The Private Uses of Quiet Grandeur: A Study of the Literary Pilgrim" (Robertson, 2008, Grant #410 2008 0499). Her research explores the cultural phenomenon of the literary pilgrim and investigates the "*genius loci*, the spirit of the place" (Roberston, 2008, p.10) in relation to reading theory. It is with her support and the guidance of Dr. Palulis, that I don the hat of the literary pilgrim and continue this research to explore Fallis' work on location.

Armed with these three themes, I set aside a good set of walking boots and the complete winter attire required to face the snow we Ottawa dwellers are all too familiar with. After mapping my route for my adventure, I set out on my journey with “The Best Laid Plans” in hand.

Literally Walking: The Journey Begins

*Last night was Robbie Burns’s day* and as I pull out of my driveway I laugh at how prescient this is. If health and the hour would have permitted, I would toast a glass of Lagavulin in honour of Angus (it is his signature drink in the book) before I set out this morning. Instead, I raise my cup of coffee to my lips and wave to my two daughters in the window as I back out of the driveway. Glancing at the seat beside me, I smile as I see the pair of binoculars my four year old “loaned” me when I told her I was going on an adventure for the day. “Going on an adventure” is one of her most favoured games and the idea that Mom, the one who is usually at home attending to traditional domestic matters, is actually going on a real adventure, is exciting. She’s right. I am overwhelmed at the sense of how much fun I am having as I head East on the 417 towards Cumberland, the home of Angus McLintock.

---

Terry Fallis’ book itself is, in a word: hilarious. It follows the story of one Daniel Addison, a speech writer for the Liberal leader of the Canadian Parliament, who after a failed relationship with one of his colleagues, looks for a total change of lifestyle. He accepts a teaching position at the University of Ottawa, where he once completed his PhD, moves out to Cumberland and into an old boathouse-made-apartment on the property of Angus McLintock. Angus is an intelligent Scottish man who loves chess and is an Engineering professor at the University of Ottawa. He spends his spare time building his own hovercraft and writing letters to his late wife Marin Lee, a renowned feminist scholar who taught at Carleton University. As a parting promise to his previous boss on the hill, Daniel was committed to finding a doomed Liberal candidate to run for office in the Cumberland-Prescott riding. The riding is the hometown of the much loved conservative finance minister, Eric Cameron, and his success is so sure, that Daniel is eventually able to convince Angus to put his name on the seemingly meaningless ballot. Of course, the whole plan runs amok after Cameron is caught in a scandalous

sex scene that makes news headlines all over the country. Angus is voted in and, not only this, quickly becomes a favoured politician on the hill for his brutish yet intelligent character and repeatedly standing up for what he believes is, “best for Canada? And secondly, if necessary, what is best for the people of Cumberland Prescott” (Fallis, 2007, p.157). With no egocentric desires, he is a unique and much beloved politician and, like the majority of the fictional Canadian populace, the reader becomes quite taken with him.

Aside from the allure of the setting in this book, I was also drawn in by the humour. This 2011 Canada Reads Winner also won the Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour in 2008. The book is funny and, as such, very unlike my usual reads. Many times I found myself laughing aloud or reading with a grin on my face. It is the light-heartedness of the text that increases my enjoyment of this whole research experience.

Indeed, I am having fun.

As the 417 narrows to a mere two lanes, I mull over these words “Fun” and “Literacy,” or “Reading Pedagogy” and wonder how often they are strung together. To what degree do we permit our students to *play* with a text? I recently came across an article in the Globe and Mail that poignantly stated, “Students in Ontario are among the most proficient readers in the world, but those bragging rights may have come at a cost: The joy of reading” (Hammer, 2011, para. 1). We teach students to read by sounding out words and decoding sentences, but to what extent are current practices really inviting them to be personally involved with the fantasy of the book? How much space is allotted in the average classroom for students to indulge in “the pleasures of the text” (Barthes, 1975, p.17)?

Williams (2005) writes of the nefarious use of standardized testing in relation to literacy education explaining that we rob students of the power to make their own meaning from literature. With such a practice, we forget the reasons why we want students to read and write in the first place. He affirms, “Reading and writing is about communicating with other human beings –about being a part of a society and its ongoing conversations” (p. 154). Similarly, Kersten and Pardo (2007) speak of the complex and innovative methods required of teachers to teach literacy in a way that meets the needs of the students while balancing the expectations of policy makers. Gambrell (2011) describes the alarming statistic that “37% of students [in North

America] have reported that they do not read for enjoyment at all” (p. 172) and continues to highlight the many ways in which we can help students to develop a romance with the written word.

Turning right off the 417 and onto the quaint main street of Cumberland, this notion of *engagement* pulses through me. Rolling along the streets, I am setting the stage for a “coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.12). Fallis’ text resounds in my ears as my eyes scan the small buildings in front of me. The Ottawa River runs the length of the town and I compulsively search for a home with a boathouse that may be labelled as the McLintock residence. Of course, there is none that resembles the depiction in my mind and as my car winds up the road, I decide to stop and get my bearings. I pull into the Cumberland Heritage Museum parking lot and go over my notes.



It is cold, the snow is deep, and the front of the museum looks so inviting, I soon find myself with novel and notebook in hand marching up the front steps of the converted old, displaced train station. Opening the door with a blast of heat, I am met by two bewildered faces,



one of which asks, “Can I help you?” It appears the museum is closed for the winter months and my arrival in this space is baffling. Explaining myself and my mission in Cumberland, I suddenly feel foolish. What does this book have to do with the museum? Nothing. Why do I feel the need to explain myself to this woman who, if I may boldly judge her expression, thinks I am an obsessive nut?

I feel a wash of shame and embarrassment. I know my reasons for this wandering but why do I hesitate to reveal my hopes and plans—my desire to enter into a communion with the literary word that extends beyond the bind of the pages. Why use the title of “researcher”;

however unorthodox my methodology, as a shield behind which to hide? Immediately the words of writer and literary pilgrim Janet Malcolm (2002) surface in my pool of thoughts,

I am a character in a new drama: the absurdist farce of the literary pilgrim who leaves the magical pages of a work of genius and travels to an “original scene” that can only fall short of his expectations. (p.4)

These words swirling, with particular subconscious emphasis on “absurdist farce,” I find myself rambling about Fallis’ novel (which she has never heard of) and my journey. The gatekeeper before me appears to warm to my idea and invites me to walk around the grounds of the site though all the buildings are locked. I quickly thank her and although this place still has nothing



to do with the novel, am happy to escape through the back door and wander through the picturesque old grounds.

My wandering in this historical space spurs the ghosts of past literary pilgrims throughout time. Their stories float before me as

I drift down a deserted snowy path. Malcolm’s portrayal of the traditional literary pilgrim is but one example; however, given my feelings of defense, it remains prominent amongst the countless other adventure tales I have read. Perhaps it is her austere manner of writing that speaks to me in the cold. Toes rubbing together to keep warm, I mosey through my readings and past guides.

### Following the Ghosts: Literature Review

Malcolm’s narrative follows her pursuit of Chekhov in his Russian homeland. Reading her work, one senses a deep intimacy between her and the texts Chekhov once penned. In her

case, this intense connection with his written word directly conflicts with her present experiences within the spaces he wrote about and frequented. The beautiful garden at Autka, a “symbolic place of grace” (p. 56), that plays prominent in his text, is found by Malcolm in actuality to be “merely a garden” (ibid). Similarly, in Dostoyevsky’s museum, she writes of a need to “stretch one’s imagination” in order to make “some connection to the author of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brother’s Karamazov*” (p. 157). The “dreariness” (ibid.) of the rooms cannot match the magic and power of the fictional settings.

Despite the incongruence between the fictional space and physical place, Malcolm does exhibit a fortified bond to her beloved author, Chekhov, throughout her journey. She frequently strives to describe Chekhov’s personality through her own interactions with the people she meets on her trip. An angry diplomat at a hotel, a man with an “obviously flawed character” (p.96) stimulates her to examine Chekhov’s own persona (he would have made “mincemeat” of this unlikeable man) and she corrects widespread misperceptions. She affirms, “In fact, Chekhov was entirely unforgiving of any of his characters who were cruel” (ibid). Various travel experiences within these haunted spaces prompt her to critically examine the texts and better understand the character of this man who once arbitrarily told a biographer to “Write what you want” (p.16). She is affected by her travels and her relationship with the author has visibly grown despite her denial and projected reticent attitude.

Backwards stepping even further into the past, I connect Malcolm with Erskine Stuart (1892), one of the earliest accounts of literary pilgrimage that has crossed my path. It is evident that the value of the literary pilgrimage is high for Stuart as it prompted him to write a meticulous record of the literary shrines in Yorkshire to date. Yet, his accounts lack substance and feeling. The introduction of his book affirms that the trend of literary pilgrimages is “very fashionable,” however he highlights his feeling that England’s “American cousins” have taken this “hero-worship to a pitch that is ridiculous” (p. v of preface). The taciturn attitude reminds me of Malcolm’s reserve and my own embarrassment.

Stuart’s critiques are short, personal opinions, rather than offering an analysis of the literature or the place, or the *effect* of the place. Notably, however, the reader gets the sense that the basis of what constitutes a “good” piece of writing for Stuart is one that most adequately

depicts or reflects what the author is seeing (see for example, p. 118). Which begs the question that perhaps it is the words having spun such a magical portrayal of something that is actually real and concrete that most excites Stuart after all? Perhaps something does happen to the text when the reader's eye beholds that original object of affection?

In a novel chronicling his own process of work, the biographer Richard Holmes (1985) follows the footsteps of various favoured authors and travel writers long since deceased. As Holmes tracks his subjects, he interacts with them in a variety of ways and his relationships with his subjects grow to an intensity one could label as obsessive or extreme. Being present in the spaces they once filled, he “witnesses” their “daily human affairs” (p. 173) and revives these long gone authors, revealing new aspects of their characters, life events, and writing. He frequently visualizes himself as embedded in the lives of his subjects. For example he writes, “Sometimes even I would imagine myself, like a character out of Baroness Orczy, committing Mary [Wollstonecraft] to some fatal escape in the Luxembourg prison, then personally intervening to save her” (p. 115). He justifies his use of a “fantasy existence” (p. 168) as another necessary component of biography, allowing him to become more “intimate” (p. 120) with his subjects. He calls this “an invasion or encroachment of the present upon the past and in some sense the past upon the present” (p. 66). This strange space where time loses its footing concurrently guides his footsteps through writing.

Holmes is certain that the act of travelling to the dwellings of his subjects, “living with them for several years” (p. 173), is pertinent to his work. It is his presence in their spaces, seeing the view from their windows (p. 179) that allows him to form this deep relationship, one “of trust” (p. 173) enabling him to uncover the “deep truth” behind the author's characters (p. 143). However it is also the lack of an intimate reality that is a point of frustration for Holmes. Continually craving this intimacy, he often feels “excluded, left behind, shut out from the magic circle” (p. 143).

The theme of intimacy that Holmes at times shares and Malcolm yearns for, a binary feeling of inclusion/exclusion, is a frequent theme of the literary pilgrim. As Robertson and Radford (2009) describe, it is a “rummaging after something that pursues, something alive but not quite catchable” (p. 208). To be swept into the fantasy world of the book, or to revive a

beloved author into a present existence as Holmes has done, requires both a letting go of impossibilities and a surrendering to the imagination.

This act of willing capitulation is a particularly prominent trend in the writing of Ian Marshall (1998) as he explores the literature of the Appalachian Trail. It is his use of imagination that allows a transcendental experience (see for example, p. 97, 158, 174,) by creating a reading of the novel that fills in gaps and creates bonds with characters. Concurrently, it adds to his hiking experience, allowing him to develop a relationship with the natural world, perceiving nature in new and various ways (p. 228). In effect, his presence in the space/place brings a new element, a third party (that of place) into the reading experience, and one with much to add. The transactional relationship between the three parties is best depicted in the following paragraph,

I felt myself in sacred places –sacred to me in part because great writers whom I admire wrote about those places, but sacred too because they had inspired the work of great writers, had made the writing possible. (...) [E]verything I learned in libraries about Melville’s reading of Thoreau did no more than reinforce what I sensed the moment I read the words while reclining in summit meadows and nestling amid sheltering rocks atop the mountains where they rambled. Sharing their geographic perspectives, I felt that I understood their views. To overhear literary conversations over a century old, to follow the trail on an influence, I went to the source, where the leaves still whisper with the wind on the slopes of Monument Mountain and Greylock. (p. 178-179)

It is the combination of the individual reader’s consciousness, the passion for the book, and the place that strengthens and heightens Marshall’s reading experience. As a result, he concludes that literary critics “need to get out more often, to rediscover that there’s a life of the body as well as a life of the mind. And a world that’s bigger than our consciousness” (p. 231).

It is the intensity of emotion that both Marshall and Holmes experience that most strikes me. The power of such an experience is what lead Judith Roberston to use the word “fevered” (2008, p.13; 2009, p.206) to paint the portrait of the literary pilgrim. In her own travels to the site of Virginia Woolf’s home in London, she reveals the excitement made flesh as a “moment of awakening an almost sexual frisson of happiness” (2009, p. 207). Together, Robertson and

Radford (2009) trace these overwhelming feelings of desire in the face of an author's home or a book's physical setting to Derrida's (1976) archive. They write,

Derrida paints the archive as a haunted place, spectral, inhabited with promises of the unspoken and unsaid. Derrida reminds us that it is in such a place that the reader addresses herself directly and nakedly to the ghost of a beloved author or reading, delirious in memory, but in reality, incipient, a promise still in keeping. (p.207)

I think of Kent (1949) who used the word "passion" (p. 5) to describe the draw of the reader to the physical origin of the text. Marking the memory, the pulsing connections made between author, text, reader, and place allow the relationship to thrive. The tension of text-illuminated-by-space continues to affect the reader in this bewildering head where past readings, memories and future readings converge. Like tugging the loose thread on a binding of a book and watching the pages fall to the floor, this archive becomes "simultaneously a secure space in which to launch a sense of self as reader and a point of disembarkation for further unravelling" (Robertson and Radford, 2009, p. 208). Transcending time, reading continues.

### Writing with my Feet: A Patchwork Methodology



It truly is a beautiful spot and I marvel at how I did not know of the existence of the museum prior to this chance happening. I am drawn to an old one room school house a happily painted yellow sitting in the bleak winter snow. I press my nose against the glass on the frosted window pane and am transported. Being in my thirties with no personal memories of this type of schooling, I picture the only other memories I have—mine and yet not mine, pieces of



me but pieces of others, those of beloved books I have read: my archive. I can see Anne breaking the ledger on Gilbert Blythe's head (Montgomery, 1908). Shifting my gaze to the front of the room, I see Lavinia teaching the Irish émigré's children on Newfoundland's coast (Morgan, 1992). These book scenes float forward, as they were etched into my memory and I claim the experience of the characters as my own. I remember their feelings and thoughts as some hybrid reality. I am swept in and yet shut out by the cold pane of glass.

Finger's numbing, I shove my hands deep in my pockets and trudge along the only navigable pathway in the now knee deep snow. My nomadic wandering and pondering in this space reminds me of de Certeau's (1992) description of Labadie the Nomad who "wrote with his feet, that is, geographically" (de Certeau, p.291). As various book scenes flutter in and out of my head, I think of Labadie's "*patchwork*" in which he writes as he walks "weaving together references and theoretical fragments" (p.290, italics in original). Weaving together Fallis' novel, past pilgrims, and the current spaces within which I saunter, my own story of this wandering is forced to be more legible than my thoughts. In writing, I must dawdle in reflection of my experience of this text, one that has become "transmuted into something 'rich and strange'" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.34). This act of narration renders the methodology of this weave to be more knotty: I am both actor and analyst. Wolfreys (1998) describes such an act of writing as a "doubled narrator" (p.76). It is a writing with "textual movement" whereby there is a constant "slippage" between the roles of participation within the story and that of interpretation (ibid.). It is a slippery path, but then, so is reading.

It is then that I see the graveyard nestled behind the old church. While I know that this graveyard has no significance in Fallis' book, my thoughts wander through the pages of Angus' daily love letters to his "remarkable" (Fallis, 2007, p.21) wife, Marin, a woman I would have loved to meet if only she were once real. They are



beautiful scenes of enduring love, one that fortifies even in spirit. In the stillness of the night, Daniel often heard Angus weeping her loss in his workshop below him. “As I swam out into the river, the moon illuminating my path, I swear I could hear you and feel you next to me,” Angus writes, “If only I could see you. Is that too much to ask?” (Fallis, 2007, p.89).

My heart warms as I am reminded of my own loving household and I decide to move on with this journey and head back in to those questioning faces at the museum entrance.

Opening the doors, I am greeted with an excited, “Hi, how was it? Did you know that Fallis’ book has sequels? He lives in Toronto and he comes to Ottawa often. I can’t believe I’ve never heard of him. Have you seen his webpage? Here take a look. It was a Canada Reads winner (...).” She’s been hooked. She offers her assistance in any way she can and asks what specific Cumberland sites are recorded in the novel. She has, she reveals after all, lived in Cumberland her whole life. As we go through the various Cumberland based settings Fallis has written about, my suspicion that none of them actually exists is affirmed. Yet, my feelings are not deflated and I find I am buoyed by the enthusiasm of this woman and her work partner; I am revved up to continue this journey. Before departing, she tells me more about the museum and how it is a favourite spot amongst many young Ottawa dwelling families with children. It’s easy to see and I promise to return in the warmer weather with my husband and children.

Getting back into my car in what can certainly be labelled a winter storm, even by Ottawa measures, I take a breath. I have not been whisked away into the world of Fallis from this experience so far, but my hope is not dashed. Like my tires, spinning and grasping for some solid ground, some navigable pathway, I ponder this strange space I am in. *Is this an obsessive act?* I approach a church outside that caught my eye on the way in to the village. Again, it is not the “Cumberland United Church” from the book (Fallis, 2007, p.269), but it makes me think of the scene in that church hall when Angus tries to sway the opinion of his constituents on tax cuts. Barely a word passes his lips on the matter before he finds



himself under a “hail of donuts” with “red jelly in the middle of his forehead and two honey-glazed Timbits enmeshed in his beard” (Fallis, 2007, p. 287). I clamber out of the car to snap a photo.

Standing alone on the street, with one eye open as I turn the focus on the lens, I take a step forward to better frame the shot. A car urgently wraps around the corner and the window rolls down as I snap the shutter key. I lower the camera and that same right foot extended in front of me slips forward on the invisible ice. Laying in the snow on my back the stranger in the window laughs with an embarrassed tone and asks if I am alright. I am not hurt. I let out a hoot—it’s just like the book! Thankfully, however, it was Daniel, who strolling down a sidewalk in Cumberland, had a “fall broken by a fresh, putrid pile of excrement the size of a small ottoman” (Fallis, 2007, p.1). While I am not usually a fan of bathroom humour, the parallel circumstance does cause me to get up, giggling, along with the couple in the car—though for totally different reasons.

After giving the couple directions back to Ottawa and realizing that this storm is certainly going to make the roads slow, I am back in my car and heading for home. Crawling along the highway, I imagine Daniel and Angus making their regular trip along this route to the parliament buildings. It is so slow moving, a hovercraft along the Ottawa River running parallel to my route really would be the ideal commuter option in this climate. I revel in this idea for a while. Soon, my thoughts meander through the pictures I have taken and the places I have visited today. There is no distinct literal connection I have made to the text in this portion of my journey. I did not stand in the spot that Angus stood, or see through windows that inspired the author... but there is still a vibe, a pulse connecting the text to my imagination in these indistinct places. As my car passes the downtown core exit ramps that wind their way to parliament, I am brought back to my reality. Supper is to be made, children to be bathed and stories read to segue into sleep. But tomorrow, I am free to linger in the literary landscape some more.

---

Entering the Warp:

*It has been two days* and with the ice

sufficiently thawed from the sidewalks, I feel ready to venture out into the salty streets again. Dressed to face the wind across the parliament grounds, I step off the OC transpo bus at the corner of



Slater and Metcalfe and am facing none other than the infamous Starbucks coffee shop that pops up numerous



times throughout the novel—a favourite spot of Daniel and Lindsay as they cultivate a budding romance. I decide to grab a coffee to join in the spirit of the book. Marching out of the store with the cup warming my hands, a sign catches my eye and I freeze with a burst of excitement. This is the very building that houses the Liberal Party of Canada headquarters (see also Fallis, 2007, p. 92). Snapping a photo, I marvel at what a great place this is to start the day's literary walk—a point of entry into the “parallel world” of reading (Sumara, 2003, p. 93).

Entering the warp, a strange “third space” (Bhabha, as found in Rutherford, 1990), where the text runs through the brain while the body walks through present space, I stroll up the road towards Center Block. Camera in hand, I snap photos of the grounds half wondering if the pictures may display the images in my head of Daniel and Angus trudging up to their offices. Some magical medium between



what I see before me and what I envision, the lens offers enough distortion, a being there and yet not being there, that I revel in; these mysterious milliseconds between each camera *snap*.



After receiving my parliamentary tour ticket I take the elevator up to the top of the Peace tower. Peering at the city below, I trace the line of the frozen Ottawa river east towards Cumberland. *Snap*—there is Angus floating in on his hovercraft to cast the infamous vote that brings down the government (Fallis, 2007, p.304). *Snap*—there is the traffic jam or “three-lane-bus wedge” (ibid. p.213) on the Alexandra bridge that causes Daniel to miss the meeting with Rhonda and the commitments Angus makes to work together with the “Alliance for Canadian Women” (ibid.). *Snap*—East block, West block, I do not yet know what these buildings hold but they have all been present in the story, that bit of (un)reality I understand and relate to.

The warp is spinning, I am increasingly consumed by the fantasy of the book world as it mutates into actuality before me. The text bleeds into the space within which I move and touch and feel. I think of Alberto Manguel (2010) when he describes his beloved character Alice lost in Wonderland, “The danger, as Alice and her White Knight knew, is that we sometimes confuse a name and what we call a name, a thing and what we call a thing. The graceful phantoms on a page, with which we so readily tag the world, are not the world” (p.7). The stew of the real and the book world is thick with absurdity and yet I willingly gulp it in, as hungry readers do. I mimic Littau (2006) and “suspend disbelief” as I walk and read—yet I engage in this reading without the words or the book in front of me. “How else” Littau asks, “would fiction allow us the pleasures of sympathy, empathy, passion or terror?” (p.75). “How much more,” I marvel, “are these pleasures heightened by the physical nature, the movement of my body on this journey?”

The veins I trace between the place and the book revive the story in my mind. It continues to breathe without requiring my hands to turn the pages and pump the beat forth. This

living-reading breathes into me as I give over to it by simply my presence, my *being there* in the story.

Taking greater meaning in my company, the text has become the living, breathing poem, as Rosenblatt (1978) once described. She writes,

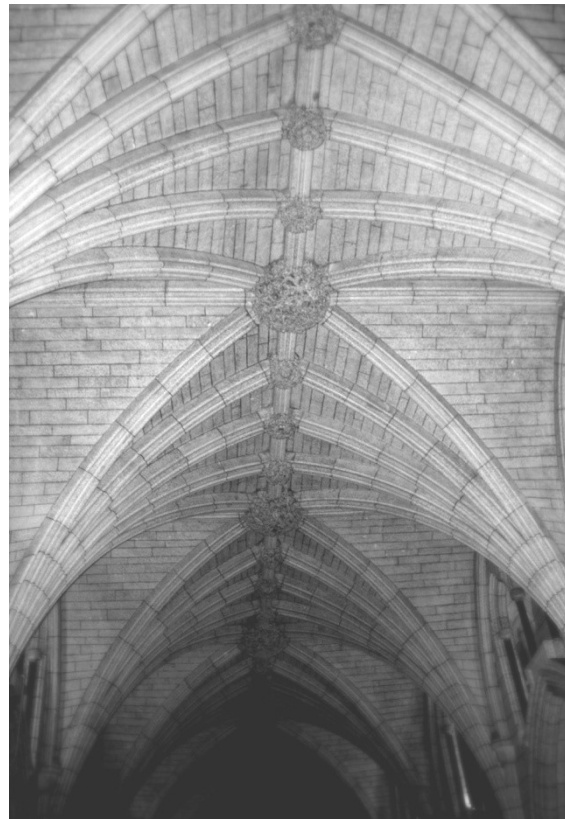
Just as knowing is the process linking a knower and a known, so a poem should not be thought of as an object, an entity, but rather as an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text. (p.21)

Reading is not static. It is a forward motion; the “active process” whereby the reader’s lived engagement with the text is increasingly greedy. It is a *presence* that blurs the boundaries between the real/not-real. This strange, mutable space where reader and text remake one another is described by Sumara (1996) as well,

It is in this relational space that the reader’s world becomes re-woven, and it is this re-weaving of the reader’s self that alters the reader’s lived world... it is a relationship, which, through the space opened up by the conditioned imagination of the reader, becomes a transformative space. (p. 80)

To be totally enveloped within a reading causes the inside/outside to merge—in my case, the thoughts of the reader, the text, the place/space and memories converge. In this moment, I am living through the reading. Rosenblatt describes, “*In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text*” (ibid, p.25, italics in original). I am living through the setting.

I draw on Kristeva’s notion of the reader and the creator of texts as being “subjects in



process” (1996. p.190). With each nod towards the text, it changes and has the power to change you in return – a series of mutual affects. That is when I hear it, the question, “Did you like the book?” a voice asks as the elevator descends. My grasp on the novel loosens as I turn the cover over. “Isn’t it fun?” I ask. “Yes, indeed,” is the reply. I want to ask if, like me the book is the reason for the visit, but instead the doors open and the crowd obediently funnels out along the corridors. Heading separate ways, I pick up my pace as question period in the House of Commons is about to begin—an unexpected highlight for today’s visit.

### Teachable Moments:

Green is the colour that confronts the senses when you enter the House. It is true that this “room is extraordinary in its design, power, and history.” Nonetheless I cannot help but think “Yes, Angus, you are right the bold colour does leave something to be desired.”<sup>2</sup> My eyes scan the crowd—no, of course, *he* is not here, I only thought maybe someone like him... I fold my hands in my lap. Camera being temporarily held at the security check point, there is nothing to do but watch. As I struggle to hear the proceedings, my thoughts drift and I imagine Angus sitting in one of the chairs with his desk totally clean. “The “no paper” rule had long since been discarded as an anachronism. In his short time on the Hill, Angus had become a parliamentary purist of sorts and in the House kept his desk clear and clean” (Fallis, 2007, p.185). I scoff at the junk on everyone’s desks, and especially the Blackberrys that are in constant use.

When a woman addresses the speaker in French, the security guard beside me silently indicates that the gadget attached to our chairs will translate if needed. I pick it up and tune into the appropriate channel. The conversation becomes clearer as I no longer have difficulty hearing the proceedings. Recent job losses in Montreal, Quebec are spurring a debate about the climbing jobless rate in all of Canada, particularly the declining manufacturing sector. The drama increases as each side rants about proposals once put forward and opposition votes that brought these down. The conversation is a juicy circular argument that has both sides cheering and it is *so*

---

<sup>2</sup> See Fallis, 2007, p. 177: the scene when Angus writes to Marin, “It’s a wonderful chamber. Glorious. I’m not keen on the green they’ve used for the carpet, but other than that, ‘tis a fitting and worthy House.”

*easy* to envision the scene where Angus nobly states, “This Government has lied to me, lied to this House and lied to all Canadians” before being escorted from the chamber (Fallis, 2007, p.267).

But as the time passes, Angus and Daniel float away and I am drawn into a more grounded attendance. I find myself pondering what to do about Old Age Security and how such things as the jobless rate will affect our economy. Fiction aside, the veracity of what is happening in my home right now draws me in. I watch for a full hour.

I leave the House with a new appreciation for the political process and, I feel, a much better understanding of the proceedings as a result of my having experienced it firsthand. Not considering myself to be particularly politically savvy, the book has opened doors to an educational experience that allowed me to enlighten myself in a fun and interesting way. Just as a reader in the online CBC Books Group commented:

I am completely not interested in Canadian politics, it is boring and sometimes infuriating to hear. When I heard about this book and how it is based on comedy, I knew I had to read it right away. I am completely enjoying the read, and I can't wait to finish it, so that I may lend it to my wife. I am definitely more interested in our own politics, and thanks to this book, I will have a sense of humor for it. (Supgao, 2011)

In reading we become a part of the messy web that connects strands of others—be it other readings, other people who have read, other memories that relate to the reading, place, and the bits of life that can be traced to one another. We no longer know the beginning nor do we ever reach a conclusive end. It is Julia Kristeva who, drawing on Bakhtin, is credited with developing the theory of intertextuality, whereby a text is described as this plural sprawl. She writes,

(...) the question of content is to be understood not as being about a single content – “What does this mean in the sentence?”—but as content that may be dispersed, traceable to different point of origin; the final meaning of this content will be neither the original source nor any one of the possible meanings taken on in the text, but will be, rather a continuous movement back and forth in the space between the origin and all the possible connotative meanings. (1996, p.191)

As my thoughts of the book are interspersed with following the debates in the House, the subsequent meaning of the text and my presence within this non space become more obscure. I dangle and sway between the real and not real, the text and the possibilities of new ends—new understandings, the stepping stones.

Waiting for my tour to start, I find a bench in a quiet corner of the lobby to sit and flip through the pages of the book. This random act of reading reminds me of my two year old who likes to read her beloved books both backwards and forwards at the same time. The sequence of the story is lost on anyone but her. The memorable, most meaningful moments, favoured pictures and events in a plot line are relished while others are rejected in utter disregard, too trivial for her at this moment in time. To the stranger, it would appear that she has little to no interest in the book or the act of reading at all, perhaps, even, that her attention span is incapable of absorbing the text. But I know this frenzied act is one of love and desire.

Rosenblatt (1978) once asked “to what extent do environmental pressures—home, school, societal—lead the child to focus on the efferent handling of language and to push the richly fused cognitive-affective matrix into the fringes of consciousness?” (p.40). David Sumara (2003) has called for an increased understanding that reading is a multisensory experience and asks us not to “ignore biological and ecological issues” of reading engagement (2003, p.89). Pondering the notion of handling a book, fingering the pages, scanning and skipping through sections, reading and lingering, re-rereading, I am struck with how these actions and movements are what transform the book into something more personal. As the reading itself becomes increasingly messy, the connections between text and the reader are actually reinforced.

Breaking the silence of my reading meditation, a noisy group of teenagers enters the now small space where the tours begin. A startled man retreats to the empty half of the bench beside me and asks, “Are you in the 12:15 tour group?” I respond that I am. He grunts, and with a nod to the group, emphatically states, “I sure hope they’re not.” I can’t help but smile and as I look about the room I see a number of other adults scattered about in wistful seclusion—likely the rest of my 12:15 tour group. We adults can have so little patience for our youth as we simultaneously request their involvement in such important matters as the political process and yet hardly welcome them into such environments.

Two frazzled teachers walk through the crowd attempting to shush the students and the grumpy man beside me glares at the cluster beside us who refuse to obey. The teacher gives the students a few assignment questions before they are divided into groups and, to the great relief of my bench partner, led out of the lobby by guides. I imagine being a part of the group and trying to get students excited about something that many have a preconceived notion of being dry and boring. This is where fiction takes value once again. By reinforcing the real with fantasy, capitalizing on the imagination, the student is permitted to have a lot more fun with the subject material. Facilitating the conditions for imaginative thought, Sumara (2002) argues, allows the student “to create interpreted bridges between what is held in memory, what currently exists, and what is predicted about the future” (p.5). It is a means of linking information, strengthening one’s knowledge and understanding as “literary interpretation practices can transform imaginative occasions in productive insights” (ibid.). Imagine a class reading the scene of Angus arriving on parliament hill in his hovercraft and taking down the government in the House of Commons before walking into the very place where this scene is set? What a great hook before opening the door to the factual history as well as the present political scene and processes!

---

### Reading in Motion:

**12:15 arrives.** My feet lead my body through the patchwork again, weaving the text and the place in symbiosis. “The boundary between inner and outer world breaks down, and the literary work of art (...) leads us into a new world” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.21). At moments I hear Angus, Daniel, or even the young Muriel working for Mackenzie King; at others I meet history and futures. The experience of the place consents to an embodied experience of reading. “Pairing words with experience and experience with words” Manguel (2010) writes, “we readers, sift through stories that echo or prepare us for an experience or tell us of experiences that will never be ours as we know all too well, except on the burning page.” (p. x). The motion of walking takes me one step closer to the text and yet I am always one step removed.

Reacting to the text through physical meanderings, I am informed by feelings, invoked by the words-in-space. Robertson and Radford (2009) explain how the literary pilgrim “invokes an

air of unfashionable, even antiquarian, literacy, where *thinking* itself needs, like ink on parchment, a physical body and its senses to connect” (p.206). It is the “corporealities” (ibid, p.203) of reading that are brought to light and even celebrated in such a physical act of walking and reading. I am reconnecting the body to the act of reading.

In his article, *The Body Literate: Discourse and Inscription in Early Literacy Training* Allan Luke calls for a “(Re)membering of the body” in literacy training (1992, p.123, brackets in original). Through a series of classroom observations, he determines that a large part of literacy training involves a stilling of the body to create the “literate habitus” (p.123). Similarly, Manguel (2010) once described how, “A famous children’s book program on the BBC always started with the host asking, “Are you sitting comfortably? Then we shall begin.” The ideal reader” Manguel points out, “is also the ideal sitter” (p.151). I ponder the stark contrast between the placid reader and the engaged reader—the one who interrupts the classroom reading to point at a picture, or to share how it relates to a memorable moment in life. I also think about the students who, like my two year old, finger the pages hurriedly, flipping to favoured illustrations and whisper to their friends during silent reading time only to be told that they must have their eyes on the page at all times. I remember my own desires to show my book to the stranger on the bus and let others in on the inside jokes between me and the author. And now, as I muddle through this space and (re)read through memorized scenes, this physical wandering and “wayfinding” (Chambers, 2008) promotes a “latching” (Lewkowich, 2011) to the text and encounters more than just the page and more than just space. This active reading is one that moves, listens and watches for potential meaning among otherwise foreign spaces. Robertson, Lewkowich and Rottman (2010) write, “To practice reading as an act of listening, which is never passive, becomes a way to allow a dialogue with otherness into the heart of one’s own



reflective capacities, an always unresolved dialogic mode provoked by conversation” (p. 150).

In this conversation I am a part of the book and a part of the space and simultaneously locked out as there are doors we cannot open, rooms we’re not to enter, places we must be quiet. The library, a highlight for many of my 12:15 partners, is something I was looking forward to as it is a favoured locale of Daniel on parliament hill. After a personal guided tour of the room, Angus himself claims “It takes the breath clean away” (Fallis, 2007, p.167).

The national library is said to be a “storehouse of national memory, a political symbol and an embodiment of how a nation sees itself and wishes to be perceived by others” (Hastings & Shipman, 2009, p.36). We are asked to remain silent and halt behind the rail. A large statue of Queen Victoria stands guard in the center of a rich looking parquet oak floor. Looking at the “three-tiered wooden glory” (Fallis, 2007, p.166) of books, it does have a breathtaking effect. It is a grand and beautiful room, but much smaller than I had imagined with pieces of its collection stored at the National Archives. The “domed” (ibid) open concept, while striking to look at, exposes too much for my liking and I suddenly realize I had envisioned a dusty, old, cavernous room with treasures waiting to be uncovered.

I suppose I am like Manguel in that my ideal library would be “a room panelled in dark wood, with soft pools of light and comfortable chairs” (2009, p.90). I imagine pockets of hiding places where the pleasures of texts could be lapped in glorious privacy. Ray Bradbury uses the phrase “seeking a home” to describe his favoured place to read: the library, “a special embryonic place where a person could sit with the vibration of lives off the walls, all around him” (2009, p60). While even I can feel the vibes of history and the ghosts of prominent Canadian figures now passed, the gleam of the gold rails and the bright lights make it all too shiny and revealing for me. Manguel says, “We lend libraries the qualities of our hopes and nightmares; we believe we understand libraries conjured from the shadows (...)” (2006, p.290). If I had access to this grand architecture I think I would relish it most at night, when delicious shadows open pockets of solitude and the ghosts may feel enough shelter to prowl. A guard ensures we do not take any pictures so that the individuals working in the library are not disrupted by our presence. How I wish I could run my fingers along the bindings of these neatly lined, unreachable books. Could I

not read just one title? Under the shimmer of a gorgeous “sky-lit ceiling” (Fallis, 2007, p.166), we shrink in our mutual unimportance before we are asked to quietly leave the room.



The tour continues and while it is very engaging, I begin to tire. A woman beside me complains about how hot her feet are in her Sorel boots and we all nod in agreement—footwear is always a conundrum in this city. When we reach the end, I catch a glimpse of the school group and the teachers wringing the students for thoughtful reviews of their parliamentary experience. I think of Strong-Wilson who wrote “things need to be allowed to be felt before being formalized” (2006, p.74). Then I think of Angus when he says, “Aye, you’ve made yer point. No need to pound it till it stops breathin’” (Fallis, 2007, p.287). They can slay the slain today; I need time to soak it in. I head home.

---

A Final Pause:

*Slush marches in over the coming month* and confused pedestrians ramble about whether the groundhog told the truth. The canal thaws and freezes and thaws again and we debate putting our skates into storage. While I had hoped to see beavertails, hot chocolates and young lovers gliding on the ice outside the window during my last stop in this literary venture, I watch only one brave soul trudge across the now closed canal.

The Ritz is an iconic Ottawa restaurant that Daniel and Lindsay dined at on the eve of a harsh winter storm. Entering this “comfortable Italian restaurant perched on the edge of the frozen canal” (Fallis, 2007, p.292), I am not sure what I expected. As a preteen my family had lived on Fourth Ave in the Glebe. It was my Grandfather’s house and we were bunking in for what was supposed to be a few months but wound up being a few years while waiting for our own Toronto residence to sell in an unforgiving market. I vividly recall regularly walking down the road, skates in hand, after school with my siblings and father to skate along the canal. Whipping to Dow’s lake and back, the cold penetrating our feet, we used to joke about eating supper at the glitzy restaurant. “Oooh! The Ritz!” my Dad would jokingly say as he would twinkle his hands in the air. With one teacher’s salary supporting a family of 6, places like the Ritz were off limits to us.



Perhaps it’s the fluorescent pink sign outside that contrasts with the baroque period classical music and the doily under my teapot, but there is an air of pretention-that-once-was-merited floating through the atmosphere. Living in the current foodie culture where most of the popular Ottawa restaurants emit an air of sleek modernity, the restaurant seems so outdated, almost tacky. No wonder it is mentioned in a book about the political elite.

Looking out over the icy landscape, there is no doubt that the location is prime. Having often lamented the urban planning in this city with fellow Ottawa dwellers, it is easy to imagine what a place this could be—restaurants lining the waters on starry nights, how could that not sound appealing. Sitting here in this empty place at Sunday’s supper hour, I lament these seemingly neglected pieces of this city.

Our food arrives and my thin crust pizza with apple and smoked salmon is delicious. A few other diners trickle in, most of them much older than my date and I. As we eat we reminisce over some favoured Ottawa locations and past experiences, what these places once meant for us and how they have changed as we have changed. Edward Soja (1989) once explained “Space in itself may be primordially given, but the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience” (p. 80). I find myself talking about how this restaurant, the parliament, Cumberland and the other places mentioned in the book have been transformed for me as a result of reading. I explain how not only was my reading affected, but the places themselves took on these shifting identities. As a result of my journey, I conclude, I am indeed more attached and find more personal meaning within these spaces, however mutable and nondescript this meaning may be.

As our meal comes to a close, we both remark on the lovely time we did have in this space, almost as though it is a surprise to us both. There is something very “Ottawa” about being here. Lucy Lippard (1997) once wrote,

At the same time, the dissolution of its familiar landscapes has the same effect on its inhabitants as slower changes in the countryside. The rug is pulled out from under our sense of self when stores close or switch functions, when vacant lots appear or disappear, or when buildings are remodeled. Even when the changes are for the better, the ghosts remain. (p.200)

Perhaps herein lies the truth behind our hesitation to change such significant places as this in this city.

---

### A Traveller Returned:

At home again, I attempt to trace the sprawling path I tread into a neat and tidy bundle as though every lesson must have a conclusion, a definitive and edifying end as we are so often drawn to do in schools. And yet, reading itself does not submit to such a linear progression. Indeed, Rosenblatt (1978) has called it a “circular process” whereby,

“the reader responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time he must draw selectively on the resources of his own fund of experience and sensibility to provide and organize the substance of his response. Out of this new experience, the literary work is formed.” (p.43).

The encounter between reader and text is a very personal affair. The educator in me leans on Rosenblatt as she encourages us to honor the development of the individualized relationship with the text. This requires “rejecting the preoccupation with some illusory unspecifiable absolute or “correct” reading or ideal reader” (ibid, p.140). I relate this to the muddled path I walked where the book floated in and out of space, the time was suspended and yet passing, and the tensions between the real and not-real lead my reading into an unknown realm. All of this, while creating an increasingly tangled storyline, actually engaged me more. I became more of the text as it became more of my life.

In this way, reading becomes an act of convening with the Other, presenting opportunity to further one’s understanding of the self. Allowing the imagination to blur the lines between structural realities and fantastic opportunities, a safe world of possibility and potential is revealed. Bringing this back into the classroom, Iftody, Sumara and Davis (2000) highlight the informative nature of personal literary engagements explaining,

“Literary engagements encourage the act of imaginative mind-reading; that is, they permit explicit reflection on the mind-states of others thus enhancing our ability to navigate the complex social webs in which we are embedded” (p.17).

It is in these acts of reflection, as Trinh Minh-ha (1998) explains, the affirmations of “I am like you” and “I am different,” that we come to better understand the self as a continuum, an evolutionary process of reflection and revision: “the migrant self”. She states,

The self-in-displacement or the self-in-creation is one through which changes and discontinuities are accounted for in the making and unmaking of identity, and for which one needs specific but mobile boundaries. [...] It is not a question of blurring boundaries or of rendering them invisible. It is a question of shifting them as they tend to become ending lines. (1998, online citation)

The realm of a book, that boundless book-space within which we become lost, provides a safe facet for the self-in-displacement. How much more so for the individual who loiters within the landscape of a book for a while longer? To what degree do we grant our students moments when their thoughts can drift and roam uninhibited and encourage the “shifting” of these “ending lines”? How long do we allow them to sit in a ponderous state before the bell rings, the books are closed, the answers spelled out, or the test administered?

Having journeyed far beyond the words on the page in this reading, I watched the text melt into the spaces I visited and boundaries slant to accommodate my shifting understandings of these places. Georges Perec (1999) once wrote, “This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page” (p. 13). These spaces previously unmarked by my own feet evolved from simple nouns, spaces I knew from foggy bus windows, hurried walks, and local newspaper photos, into places affectively personal. I think of Gruenewald (2003) who advocates for a place-conscious approach to education with a goal to: “enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there” (p. 620). This was certainly made possible by such a reading engagement as I experienced. Physically moving through doors now unlocked, I attained a greater appreciation of the space as place and felt involved within my surroundings. Kort (2004) speaks to the educational value of exploring a fictionalized space,

The narrativization of space, then, represents a project of uncovering the interrelations between places and their human significance before those relations are broken apart and the spiritual and physical sides of place relations are projected as basically separated from and contrary to one another. (p.189)

Chasing after “Angus the Invisible” (Fallis, 2007, p.27), all the while knowing I would never catch up to him; I strolled to a rhythm as the walls of my city expanded. My bond to these places that have always been a part of my home and yet retained only symbolic importance for they “lack[ed] the weight of reality” (Tuan, 1977, p.18), was strengthened as I wove pieces of myself into the fabric of this ever evolving place, this city-in-becoming (Boutros and Straw, 2010). Beginning with the narrative, the space was introduced but through my experience and interaction it took on a greater meaning in my life, however non-descript this meaning may be.

The rain spits at the last of the huddling snow pile on our lawn. Mesmerized by the water droplets I remember an article I once read by Jardine (2008) who poetically described the power of words. He writes, “Words are not *representations of things*. Words are not *stand-ins*. Words that bespeak the sound of water are meant to make it present, to show it off, to lead us to it and offer us up to its ways, not to stand in front of it and block our way” (p.17, italics in original). Words *are*. They exist as their own active beings. “In words, the thing appears. It is not just *referred to*” (ibid.). Reflecting on my literary experience, I pick up the tattered book beside me and flip through the pages. There are pencil scribbles and fluorescent post-it notes sticking out of all three sides. Dog ears mark the top of some pages and bottom of others. One page has fallen out completely and yellow highlighter has smudged a black ink pen. I have entered these pages, seen the words and experienced them as more than just letters strung together. Months have passed, during which, I have been led to the places of these words, brought them back home with me and now write more because of them. Littau (2006) once wrote,

No longer does the reader get to know the book intimately, no longer does the city dweller know his neighbour, or the train traveller his companion in the compartment. Just as there is little time to make out one face among many in an anonymous crowd, or one image from the next when it is glimpsed from behind a window of a speeding train, so reading is increasingly marked by a fleeting familiarity that knows little of the contemplative tranquility of earlier times. It is as if there is now little time for the reader to think, reflect at their leisure, or truly digest. (p.45)

Connecting this with education, I am drawn once again to Jardine who, in his work with Ross explores the pedagogical value of “whiling” or “tarrying” within a literary art; the magical feeling of being “spellbound” (2009, no page). Such an experience of reading does not lend itself to a conclusive end or a right or wrong. It is a pedagogy of lingering, without a hurried need to explain, experiencing without immediately analyzing or reducing to arbitrary plot summaries or character sketches. It is a reading engagement that honours internal desires to touch what the character has touched, to see what captured the eyes of the author, and walk the path in the footsteps of the ghosts, however impossible that may be. As Helene Cixous (1994) eloquently wrote,

“If we haven’t left the room, if we haven’t gone over the wall, we’re not reading. If we’re only making believe we’re there, if we’re pretending before the eyes of the family, then we’re reading. We are eating. Reading is eating on the sly” (p.21).

### **The Patches: Works Cited**

- Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasures of the text*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Boutros, A. and Straw, W. (2010). *Circulation and the City*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Bradbury, R. (2009). Libraries, the Love of my Life. In Hastings, S. & E. Shipman (Eds.), *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination* (pp. 60-61). Cambridge, ON: Cambridge Galleries.
- Cixous, H. (1994). *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- de Certeau, M. (1992). *The Mystic Fable*. (M. B. Smith, Trans.). (vol. 1). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Erskine Stuart, J.A. (1892). *The Literary Shrines of Yorkshire: The Literary Pilgrim in the Dales*. London, England: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Fallis, T. (2007). *The Best Laid Plans*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart.
- Gambrell, L. (2011). Seven Rules of Engagement: What's most important to know about motivation to read. *The Reading Teacher* 65 (3): 172-178.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal* 40 (3):619.
- Hammer, K. (2011, December, 12). Ontario kids can read well, but they don't have to like it. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/primary-to-secondary/ontario-kids-can-read-well-but-they-dont-have-to-like-it/article2267513/>
- Hastings, S. & Shipman, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination*. Cambridge, ON: Cambridge Galleries.
- Holmes, R. (1985). *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*. New York, NY: Elisabeth Sifton Books/Viking Penguin Inc.
- Iftody, T., Sumara, D. & Davis, B. (2000). Consciousness and the literary engagement: Toward a bio-cultural theory of reading and learning. *Language and Literacy*, 8(1), 1-24.
- Jardine, D. (2008). Translating Water. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 24(6), 11-19.

- Kent, W. (1949). *London for the Literary Pilgrim*. Nottingham, England: The Thoroton Press.
- Kersten, J. and Pardo, L. (2007). Finessing and Hybridizing: Innovative Literacy Practices in Reading First Classrooms. *The Reading Teacher* 61 (2): 146-154.
- Kort, W. (2004). *Place and Space in Modern Fiction*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Kristeva, J. (1996). *Interviews*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Lewkowich, D. (2011). Burning at the Edges: Judith P. Robertson and the Provocations of Reading. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 8 (2), 76-93.
- Lippard, L. (1997). *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Littau, K. (2006). *Theories of reading: Books, bodies and bibliomania*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Luke, A. (1992). The body literate: discourse and inscription in early literary training. *Linguistics and Education*, 4(1), 107-129
- Malcolm, J. (2002). *Reading Chekhov*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Manguel, A. (2006). *The Library at Night*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Manguel, A. (2009). My Library. In Hastings, S. & E. Shipman (Eds.), *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination* (pp. 88-91). Cambridge, ON: Cambridge Galleries.
- Manguel, A. (2010). *A Reader on Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Marshall, I. (1998). *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Montgomery, L.M. (1908). *Anne of Green Gables*. Boston, MA: L.C. Page.
- Morgan, B. (1992). *Random Passage*. St. John's, NF: Breakwater.
- Perec, G. (1999). *Species of Space and Other Pieces*. Trans. John Sturrock. London: Penguin
- Robertson, J. P. (2008). *The Private Uses of Quiet Grandeur: A Study of the Literary Pilgrim*. SocialSciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Grant #410 2008 0499.
- Robertson, J.P. & Radford, L. A. (2009). The Private Uses of Quiet Grandeur: A Meditation on Literary Pilgrimage. *Changing English*, 16 (2): 203-209.

- Robertson, J., Lewkowich, D. & Rottmann, J. (2010). Saltwater Chronicles: Reading Representational Spaces in Selected Book Clubs in St. John's Newfoundland. *Island Studies Journal* 5 (2):141-164.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ross, S. And Jardine, D. (2009). Won by a certain labour: A conversation on the while of things. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, 5 (February). Retrieved March 8, 2012 from: [http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/jaaacs/Vol5/Ross\\_Jardine.htm](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/jaaacs/Vol5/Ross_Jardine.htm)
- Rutherford, J. (1990). The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha. In: Ders. (Hg): *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221.
- Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern Geographies*. London: Verso.
- Strong-Wilson, T. (2006). Touchstones as sprezzatura: the significance of attachment to teacher literary formation. *Changing English: Studies in Reading and Culture*, 13(1), 69-81.
- Sumara, D.J. (1996). *Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Sumara, D. J. (2002). *Why Reading Literature In School Still Matters: Imagination, Interpretation, Insight*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers: New Jersey.
- Sumara, D. (2003). Towards a theory of embodied literary experience. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2(2), 88-95.
- Supgao. (2011, February 10). CBC Books Group: Comments, The Best Laid Plans. Message posted to <http://www.cbc.ca/books/myprofile/groups/the-best-laid-plans.html#socialcomments>
- Trinh, Minh-ha. (Interviewee) & Grzinic M. (Interviewer). (1998). *Inappropriate/d Artificiality* [Interview Transcript]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/faculty/bourdier/trinh/TTMHInterviews002.htm>
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Williams, B. (2005). Standardized students: The problems with writing for tests instead of people. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 49 (2): 152-158.

Wolfreys, J. (1998). *Deconstruction • Derrida*. New York: St. Martin's Press

## Conclusion:

On my last day of writing this article, I pressed the save key and sent my computer to sleep. It was late. The cold night was begging for a warm duvet and I looked forward to obliging. I walked the usual routine, turning off lights, and pushing the front door closed to trigger the lock, turned off one more light...looked back at the door and it had popped open again. Funny, I thought, it's like reading: ever beckoning; the eternal invitation/the recurring house guest.

There are certain books that stay with us, follow us, and in this case, I chose to follow the book. This wandering and tracking gave way to an educative space worthy of note. My feelings of attachment to the place swelled, as did my desire to learn more about the space. Lingering within the places, imagining and reading, I was able to explore the surroundings in a slow, ponderous manner. Contrasting with common school practices where students and teachers are pressured by time lines and school bells, the experience raised an interesting point about the learning outcomes of relishing and tarrying.

Furthermore, the act of walking and moving brought the body into the story, rendering the reading more personal and more involved. From a practical standpoint, this raises a number of possibilities for further exploration. For instance, how would such an experience affect the reluctant or struggling reader? Would being a part of the book's surroundings encourage the students who are less interested in the written word and works of fiction? Does the experience have the same effect when carried out in a group or does this rob some of the intimacy?

Finally, the article highlights how one's environment affects a reading. From a pedagogical perspective, it begs us to ask how our classrooms and schools are physically affecting the reading experience of students. Is it possible to work in more reading experiences in a variety of locations? This can be done at all grade levels. Imagine reading the classic tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" to a primary level student body but instead of sitting in a classroom, wandering through a treed yard space.

I conclude with a thought that while there is a great deal of focus on teaching students to read, there is still much work needing to be done in the area of guiding students towards literary engagement and enjoyment. Literary pilgrimage, or reading and walking, is a reading of

*possibility* as it opens the book further than the page and beckons us with but one step beyond the binding...and, perhaps, a few strides more.

List of References:

- Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasures of the text*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Boutros, A. and Straw, W. (2010). *Circulation and the City*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Bradbury, R. (2009). Libraries, the Love of my Life. In Hastings, S. & E. Shipman (Eds.), *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination* (pp. 60-61). Cambridge, ON: Cambridge Galleries.
- Cixous, H. (1994). *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- de Certeau, M. (1992). *The Mystic Fable*. (M. B. Smith, Trans.). (vol. 1). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Erskine Stuart, J.A. (1892). *The Literary Shrines of Yorkshire: The Literary Pilgrim in the Dales*. London, England: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Fallis, T. (2007). *The Best Laid Plans*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart.
- Gambrell, L. (2011). Seven Rules of Engagement: What's most important to know about motivation to read. *The Reading Teacher* 65 (3): 172-178.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal* 40 (3):619.
- Hammer, K. (2011, December, 12). Ontario kids can read well, but they don't have to like it. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/primary-to-secondary/ontario-kids-can-read-well-but-they-dont-have-to-like-it/article2267513/>
- Hastings, S. & Shipman, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination*. Cambridge, ON: Cambridge Galleries.
- Holmes, R. (1985). *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*. New York, NY: Elisabeth Sifton Books/Viking Penguin Inc.
- Iftody, T., Sumara, D. & Davis, B. (2000). Consciousness and the literary engagement: Toward a bio-cultural theory of reading and learning. *Language and Literacy*, 8(1), 1-24.
- Jardine, D. (2008). Translating Water. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 24(6), 11-19.

- Kent, W. (1949). *London for the Literary Pilgrim*. Nottingham, England: The Thoroton Press.
- Kersten, J. and Pardo, L. (2007). Finessing and Hybridizing: Innovative Literacy Practices in Reading First Classrooms. *The Reading Teacher* 61 (2): 146-154.
- Kort, W. (2004). *Place and Space in Modern Fiction*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Kristeva, J. (1996). *Interviews*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Lewkowich, D. (2011). Burning at the Edges: Judith P. Robertson and the Provocations of Reading. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 8 (2), 76-93.
- Lippard, L. (1997). *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Littau, K. (2006). *Theories of reading: Books, bodies and bibliomania*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Luke, A. (1992). The body literate: discourse and inscription in early literary training. *Linguistics and Education*, 4(1), 107-129
- Malcolm, J. (2002). *Reading Chekhov*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Manguel, A. (2006). *The Library at Night*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Manguel, A. (2009). My Library. In Hastings, S. & E. Shipman (Eds.), *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination* (pp. 88-91). Cambridge, ON: Cambridge Galleries.
- Manguel, A. (2010). *A Reader on Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Marshall, I. (1998). *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Montgomery, L.M. (1908). *Anne of Green Gables*. Boston, MA: L.C. Page.
- Morgan, B. (1992). *Random Passage*. St. John's, NF: Breakwater.
- Perec, G. (1999). *Species of Space and Other Pieces*. Trans. John Sturrock. London: Penguin
- Robertson, J. P. (2008). *The Private Uses of Quiet Grandeur: A Study of the Literary Pilgrim*. SocialSciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Grant #410 2008 0499.
- Robertson, J.P. & Radford, L. A. (2009). The Private Uses of Quiet Grandeur: A Meditation on Literary Pilgrimage. *Changing English*, 16 (2): 203-209.

- Robertson, J., Lewkowich, D. & Rottmann, J. (2010). Saltwater Chronicles: Reading Representational Spaces in Selected Book Clubs in St. John's Newfoundland. *Island Studies Journal* 5 (2):141-164.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ross, S. And Jardine, D. (2009). Won by a certain labour: A conversation on the while of things. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, 5 (February). Retrieved March 8, 2012 from: [http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/jaaacs/Vol5/Ross\\_Jardine.htm](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/jaaacs/Vol5/Ross_Jardine.htm)
- Rutherford, J. (1990). The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha. In: Ders. (Hg): *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221.
- Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern Geographies*. London: Verso.
- Strong-Wilson, T. (2006). Touchstones as sprezzatura: the significance of attachment to teacher literary formation. *Changing English: Studies in Reading and Culture*, 13(1), 69-81.
- Sumara, D.J. (1996). *Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Sumara, D. J. (2002). *Why Reading Literature In School Still Matters: Imagination, Interpretation, Insight*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers: New Jersey.
- Sumara, D. (2003). Towards a theory of embodied literary experience. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2(2), 88-95.
- Supgao. (2011, February 10). CBC Books Group: Comments, The Best Laid Plans. Message posted to <http://www.cbc.ca/books/myprofile/groups/the-best-laid-plans.html#socialcomments>
- Trinh, Minh-ha. (Interviewee) & Grzanic M. (Interviewer). (1998). *Inappropriate/d Artificiality* [Interview Transcript]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/faculty/bourdier/trinh/TTMHInterviews002.htm>
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Williams, B. (2005). Standardized students: The problems with writing for tests instead of people. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 49 (2): 152-158.

Wolfreys, J. (1998). *Deconstruction • Derrida*. New York: St. Martin's Press