Quotidian Reading: Digitally Mapping Literary and Personal Geographies

Tom Keegan
thomas-keegan@uiowa.edu
University of Iowa, United States of America

Sarah Bond
sarah-bond@uiowa.edu
University of Iowa, United States of America

Students (and some teachers) feel rightly intimidated by Petronius' *Satyricon* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*. They are big books that are too often cast as *things* to be conquered or "done"— as in " I did *Ulysses*"—rather than encountered as portals to better understanding ourselves and the world in which we live. In the face of literary complexity and historical heft, students and instructors experience an anxiety of knowing. They feel expected to master a text rather than adapt it to their own needs or desires. In this long paper, we (Professors Sarah Bond and Tom Keegan) offer an alternate approach to reading texts in which the experiential learning advocated for by John Dewey (and often averred by literary theorists) is combined with a host of digital mapping tools, broadly understood. We describe our work in two courses—one in Classics and one in English—as aimed at connecting the content of Petronius' and Joyce's novels with the daily lives of our students. In our courses students undertook a kind of "quotidian reading" in which they identified spaces and practices in the novels and relocated those elements in their own lives, sharing their observations through mapping, blogging, and podcasting. The resulting coursework reversed the emphasis on knowing the text as thing, and placed it, instead, on knowing the text as a mode of self-understanding. Given both Joyce's and Petronius' preoccupation with space and geography, we invited students to map their own daily travels, applying the text as epically or mundanely as they saw fit. We were interested in how students came to see the text as relevant to them as everyday people.

This student-driven cartography in which real spaces are interpreted alongside "imaginary" spaces via digital means encourages humanities students to close the gap between what they are reading and what they are living. Quotidian reading has the potential to refigure all types of textual spaces—from the *Aeneid*'s description of the underworld to Dante's description of it over a millennium later—by inviting students to annotate and augment their spatial dynamics with textual references—and vice versa. In this paper, we lay out a set of best practices, digital methods, and core approaches to allowing students to thread the "imagined spaces" of the text into the daily spaces of our students' lives. Digital tools offer intriguing possibilities for reframing the stoic and epicurean spaces embedded in the *Satyricon* or resituating the daily environments and existential perspectives of *Ulysses'* Bloom, Stephen, and Molly. As our students mapping (among other things) the use, disuse, and misuse of public spaces in Iowa City, they approach a new understanding of Petronius' satirical spaces or Joyce's novel articulation of the public sphere. Through the use of the open-source tool "ImageMapster," which uses HTML5 canvases rather than Java in order to work in modern browsers, students represent, annotate, layer, and ultimately archive these literary topographies. The process allows students to engage in memoir through the geographic medium of the map and to remediate their experience of their daily life—in much the same way that Petronius and Joyce did. One result, has been the creation of personal "base maps" for the literary texts as constructed by our students. This product of the pedagogical enterprise suggests a new approach for commonly taught literary texts in other courses. Standards for the mapping of literary geographies as personal geographies are virtually non-existent, though they are a means for both engagement and reflection.

In some ways, this paper moves the application of GPS beyond Bill Clinton's 1996 desire to "encourage acceptance and integration of GPS into peaceful civil, commercial and scientific applications worldwide." That broad public intent, combined with the pedagogical legacy of the "spatial turn" in literature, history, and art, has yielded a growing interest in digital humanities projects that make use of mapping as a tool of self-discovery. The pedagogical approach detailed in this paper expands on spatial turn's address of the "microcosms of everyday life and the macrocosms of global flows." And while cartography provides the ability to relate points spatially as they exist on the Earth's surface, literature often deviates from the physical geometries denoted through longitude, latitude, and elevations coordinates. Through a quotidian

reading, the spatial structure and topographical features found within novels such as Petronius' *Satyricon* or James Joyce's *Ulysses* help students organize, access, and navigate literary texts and themselves in daily life. The frequent tensions between the "real" and the "imaginary" geographies of a text and of our everyday lives can—when reflected upon—serve to unveil to students the emotions, perceptions, and motives of a character or author. This paper, we hope, will invite thoughtful conversation about the nature of the digital humanities in and beyond the classroom, as students are encouraged to see digital tools as ones they can use in everyday life.