LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

There 'Where Earth Lies Exhausted': The Spaces of Swinburne's 'By The North Sea'

Martin Spaul

Anglia Ruskin University

Chris Wilbert

Independent Scholar

Abstract:
This study is set in the context of recent studies of the culture of littoral landscapes, and specifically nineteenth-century literary engagements with the coast of England. It examines the representation of the coastal landscape of Dunwich, Suffolk embedded in Algernon Swinburne's 1880 poem *By The North Sea*; in doing so, it focuses on the means by which that representation is distanced from the modernity of the popular tourist destination which the site had become by the late nineteenth century. The study is framed as an exercise in the application of assemblage theory, and constructs three principal assemblages as a means of analysing the distancing effect mentioned above: the historic landscape of the Dunwich area, with its physical and cultural components; the tourist landscape of the Dunwich area, with its infrastructure, practices and culture; and the literary landscape represented in 'By The North Sea', with the extensive modification and interpretation of the topography mediated by a wide range of poetic genres, texts and cultural references. An outline model of the selective literary appropriation of such landscapes is derived from the case study.

Keywords: Victorian poetry; Algernon Swinburne; littoral landscape; Suffolk coast; assemblage theory; nineteenth century tourism.

Author contact: martin.spaul@aru.ac.uk; chriswilbert@rocketmail.com

Introduction

Within the broad sphere of recent work on coastal and maritime cultural geographies (e.g. Horatscheck et al. 2014; Lambert et al. 2006), and the anglophone literary response to littoral spaces (Kluwick and Richter 2015), there has been a particular focus on nineteenth-century cultural responses to littoral space. This focus has reflected the intense interest that expanding access to the British coast generated in the Victorian period (Ingleby and Kerr 2018). Victorian literature relating to littoral space is characterised by a cleavage between the novel – which tended to reflect the burgeoning commercial modernisation of the coastal fringe (Oulton 2022a) – and poetry, which largely remained anchored in romantic models which portrayed the coast as 'a threshold within imaginative reach of the divine' (Keirstead 2019: 78). Victorian poetry tended to depict a littoral space from which the traces of modernity had been expunged (Oulton 2022b). The reasons for the persistence of the romantic framing of the coast in Victorian poetry can be sought in literary genre histories, in reader expectations, and in the literary market place; but the current study is concerned only with the literary devices which distance poetic texts from the commercial and touristic features of the landscapes in which they are set.

This study focuses on one representative poem and its setting: Algernon Swinburne's (1880) 'By The North Sea' (hereafter BTNS) and the stretch of the coast between Dunwich and Southwold in Suffolk, England, to which Swinburne was a frequent visitor from the mid 1870s to the early 1880s. BTNS provides an effective case through which to explore Oulton's (2022b: 38) 'suspension of modernity'. It possesses the principal genre characteristics of the 'greater romantic lyric' (Abrams 1984: 76-108): a troubled lone consciousness meditating on and through a landscape, struggling to achieve an insight and deepened understanding. In addition the setting, its cultural history, and the local nineteenth century tourist experience have been extensively documented.

Placing 'By The North Sea'

BTNS is a lengthy engagement with one of the besetting problems of the Victorian age: coming to terms with the challenges to Christian faith posed by scientific developments, particularly the altered sense of time and of the mutability of the earth suggested by the emerging science of geology (see, e.g., Tomko 2004; Zimmerman 2008). In his seminal study of Swinburne's text, McSweeney identified the role played by the poem's littoral setting: 'Like many of Swinburne's poems, "By the North Sea" is a meditation in the presence of a landscape; as in a number of other poems, the specific setting is the seashore' (McSweeney 1973: 222). Through its seven sections and seventy-five stanzas the poet meditates on the finitude of human existence in a drama played out between sea, land, wind and sun.

Alexander and Cooper (2017: 7-9) set out a broad division between poetry which uses a generic 'setting' (broad landscape features that might occur in many places) and poetry which is specific about 'geography' (located, identifiable landscapes). Some

Victorian littoral poems may be placed in the former category, such as Tennyson's 'Break, Break, Break' or parts of 'In Memoriam' (a text against which, as Lyons (2013: 85-112) demonstrates, Swinburne was reacting in BTNS*)*; and in the latter Arnold's 'Dover Beach'*,* with its precisely identified location and topography (Zimmerman 2008: 4-5). Although Swinburne repeatedly used generalised coastal imagery in his works (Jarvis 2013), with few precise geographical referents, this is not the case with BTNS, and its placement in Alexander and Cooper's categories is problematic. As far as the original text of the poem is concerned, the exact location of this seashore is left obscure; a reader coming innocently to the original could only identify the location with reference to the contextual details of Swinburne's life, or with a prior knowledge of the Suffolk coast and something of a flair for geographical detection. However, as McSweeney (1973: 223) shows with reference to the text of Swinburne's letters, the seashore which Swinburne has in mind is a very specific one: the eroding cliffs and beach at Dunwich, Suffolk, in eastern England; and its now-submerged medieval port. The location was only explicitly identified by Swinburne in a later reprint of BTNS in a selected edition of his poems in 1887, as a sequence with the titles 'By The North Sea', 'In the Salt Marshes', and 'Dunwich' (see McGann 1972: 142). This raises the question of whether Alexander and Cooper's categories generate a spectrum, and where on that spectrum one should place BTNS.

Some light can be shed on Swinburne's geographical reticence by recalling comments made by William Sharp (Swinburne's contemporary, and editor) in his *Literary Geography* on the use which Swinburne was making of local topography in his work: 'he had no thought to strike the note of locality, which is accidental', in favour of 'that greater utterance where locality is … unimportant' (Sharp 1904: 129). The features that Swinburne had extracted from the landscape function in a manner akin to a stage set, topographically and historically precise details were selected and reworked to support the articulation of a set of ideas not intrinsically linked to the Suffolk coast (Riede 1978: 162-81; Levin 2013: 115-30; Fippinger 2009: 681-85). However, there remains a perplexing gap between Swinburne's detailed immersion in the geography and history of Dunwich – as the framework to which his meditations have been attached – and the non-appearance of that geography and history in a named, explicit form in the text. Swinburne's text has been the subject of several extended studies in recent years (Levin 2013; Fippinger 2009; Lyons 2013) and the specific geography occluded in the poem has in each case been a significant factor in elucidating its meaning; the studies suggest that locality is anything but 'unimportant'.

Theoretical Framework

Assemblage theory (DeLanda 2006, 2016) has been applied in a range of spatial contexts and disciplines: human geography (Anderson et al. 2012), historical geography and archaeology (Fowler 2013, Jervis 2016), literary studies (Shaw 2018), and literary geography (Anderson 2015). Anderson (2015: 127) makes the point that framing artistic constructions as assemblages 'encourages us to diagnose the meaningful contingent processes that

produce a book, diagnose where the individual component parts have come from, where they are going to, and how they have come together.'

Of particular relevance to this current study is the use of assemblage theory in the analysis of coastal villages (Woods 2015), landscape (Van Dyke 2013: 407-411) and tourist destinations (Briassoulis 2017), providing related models of how the multiple facets of places can be modelled as assemblages. The basic concept of the assemblage – a heterogeneous set of components in a dynamic, contingent arrangement – provides a means of accommodating the multiple facets of place and landscape (Muir 1999) in a single analytical framework. In DeLanda's (2006: 12) formulation, the components of an assemblage span the material and the expressive, which, in landscape terms, encompasses natural and built forms, communities, human practices, cultural forms, bodies, perceptions and affects (Woods 2015: 30-31) – paralleling the catholic categories of 'actant' in actor network theory (Latour 2005: 54-55) and 'object' of object oriented philosophy (Harman 2017: 25-58) – sweeping in the range of components found in a historic, culturally dense coastal site.

Swinburne's romanticised suppression of the commercial leisure landscape of the Suffolk coast from the text of BTNS can be articulated with the construction of three interpenetrating assemblages (modelled on Briassoulis 2017: 308). The first assemblage approaches the landscape as a historical product, incorporating the shifting geomorphology, the growth and decay of its built forms, and the cultural meanings and texts (written and visual) which have become attached to the Dunwich area. This assemblage is fundamental to the remaining two, as they incorporate its components into their own arrangements. The second assemblage approaches the area from the point of view of the tourist economy, infrastructure and practices which had colonised the area in the latter part of the nineteenth century, drawing on contemporary guidebooks, memoirs and artworks. The third assemblage is the area as represented in Swinburne's text, with landscape features placed in relation to the wider concerns and forms of Victorian culture, and in relation to Swinburne's personal literary agenda. As the first two assemblages are mapped, the linkages with Swinburne's reception of the landscape will be emphasised, giving the analysis a sense of direction, culminating in the literary presentation of the landscape as the principal object of inquiry.

This account draws on a range of standard features of assemblage theory. Firstly, the assemblages outlined above interpenetrate in the sense that they share components, but place them in different relations. A key tenet of assemblage theory is that of the exteriority of relations (DeLanda 2006: 10-12), meaning that it is not an essential feature of a component that it is present in any particular arrangement, but can appear in multiple assemblages, and exhibit different capacities depending on the relations in which it is placed. To use an example from the analysis below, a medieval ecclesiastical ruin may appear in its capacity as a congenial site of relaxation for the tourist, or provide the stimulus for a meditation on the decline of Christianity in a literary context. Secondly, assemblages are dynamic entities held – perhaps temporarily – in stable configurations by forces which give it shape (referred to as forces of territorialisation, DeLanda 2006: 12-15). How these

forces are expressed depends on the nature of the assemblage: in the analysis below the tourist landscape is territorialised by specialised infrastructure and leisure practices overlaid on the historic site, and by the linguistic resources (referred to as codings, DeLanda 2006: 15-16) of guidebooks and advertising materials which gave meaning and coherence to the tourist experience. In contrast, as part of the 'suspension of modernity', Swinburne's literary landscape is territorialised via the conventions of the romantic lyric and the cohesive force of the elements of Victorian literary culture incorporated in the literary assemblage.

Three Assemblages

Dunwich: Landscape and History

The components of a historic landscape assemblage can be set out in both spatial and temporal dimensions, each with their own distinctive relations. Dunwich cliffs, from which the narrator of BTNS initially speaks, present the sea with a wall of soft, easily-eroded sandy Crags a little less then twenty metres high. At the time of the composition of the poem wave action, assisted by seasonal storms and gradual relative rises in sea level, was eroding the cliff face at over a metre per year (Pye and Blott 2006). Episodes of rapid erosion and the destruction of human settlements are common features of the East Anglian coastline, and one which held a particular fascination for Swinburne. In her memoirs Clara Watts-Dunton noted that Swinburne was captivated by 'the romantic interest of any part of the coastline overlooking a part of the sea covering submerged territory'. Swinburne's attitude to a formation like Dunwich cliffs was that 'a coast formed after the sea had swallowed a piece of Old England had [...] the effect of a potent and awe-inspiring spell' (Watts-Dunton 1922: 182-83). The potency of overlooking the sea from this site was magnified by the presence of the ruins of All Saints church, one of the last vestiges of medieval Dunwich, with its tower providing a vantage point nearly twenty metres above the cliff-top – a perspective no longer available, as the ruins were lost to the sea in the early part of the twentieth century.

The material components of the landscape of BTNS can be enumerated and placed in their spatial and temporal settings via the panorama afforded by All Saints tower in 1880. To the east lies the sea, turbid in almost any conditions, a grey-brown mass which hides the sandbanks and ruins beneath the surface, and one which was impenetrable to the nineteenth-century gaze – although not to twenty-first century technology (Sear et al 2011). The view eastwards over the empty sea is one that could only be reconstructed in imagination from the range of sources available to Swinburne and his contemporaries. The lost medieval town was mapped by Ralph Agas in 1587, with a reproduction being made by the Suffolk engraver Joshua Kirby in the mid-18th century; this was one of a set of illustrations prepared by Kirby for Thomas Gardner's *A Historical Account of Dunwich, Anciently a City, now a Borough* (1754). Gardner's text has performed much of the work of the territorialisation of Dunwich as a significant historic site, remaining in print to the

Figure 1. Dunwich and its environs, surveyed c.1881-1883. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland, Map Images Website, under Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) licence.

present day (in facsimile), providing resources for guidebooks (see below), popular accounts (Parker 1978) and academic studies (Sear et al. 2011: 114-116).

A turn to the northern parapet of the tower revealed the village of Walberswick and the town of Southwold in the far distance, with the salt marshes of the *Selected Poems* title in the middle distance; these being the silted estuary of the historic course of the River Blyth, protected from the sea by a shingle bar created by longshore drift (Johnson 2017: 13-17). The shifting formations of the East Anglian coast paralleled Dunwich's history of growth and loss. In the medieval period, where the Blyth reached the sea at Dunwich its estuary created a haven for shipping that allowed Dunwich to thrive, exploiting the trading and fishing networks that defined the economy of the North Sea basin (Bates and Liddiard 2013). By the thirteenth century this economic foundation was compromised; storm surges overwhelmed the low-lying parts of the town, silt was clogging the haven and the shingle bar narrowing its entrance. By the early fifteenth century the loss was complete, and there was no economic reason to mount any resistance to the steady erosion of what had been one of the largest and most prosperous towns in East Anglia (Parker 1978). The epigraph which Swinburne selected for BTNS – Walter Landor's 'We are what suns and winds and

waters make us' – was literally true of Dunwich; the winds and waters made 'England's Atlantis', and the imaginative grip which its submergence has held to the present day.

The western prospect from All Saints tower was dominated in the middle distance by lowland heath. The Crags of Dunwich cliffs weather to a soil largely unsuited for agriculture, and the product is a 'Sandling' landscape of grasses and heather, for which the area is currently valued (Suffolk Coast and Heaths 2012: 22-24). In the near distance the view was of human habitation and small fields given over to pasture. Immediately to the west were the ruins of Greyfriars, a friary constructed further inland in the fourteenth century after the destruction of the original building by a late-thirteenth-century storm. A little to the south of the friary ruins were the buildings of the Barne estate, with its principal house – also named Greyfriars – and attendant cottages sheltered from the winds by belts of trees. The remnants of Dunwich village, mostly nineteenth-century buildings which were adjuncts of the Barne estate, were visible to the north-west. Completing the panorama to the south were the cliffs marking the edge of Dunwich heath, with the coastline gently curving to the distant headland of Thorpeness.

A historic landscape is not exhausted by its material components, and Dunwich had prompted a large volume of texts, and a record of affective responses to the site, by the late-nineteenth century. The cultural dimensions of the historic assemblage reach out from the site, without any easily identifiable boundaries. A writer coming to Dunwich in the 1870s was not entering a literary blank canvas, but was rather challenged to devise a new perspective on a subject which had become a sentimental cliché. Defoe had given some attention to Dunwich in his *A Tour Through the Eastern Counties of England* (1722), consigning its loss to 'the fate of things' and delivering a homily on the inevitable 'declination' of all things 'in the womb of time, and the course of nature'. The story of Dunwich occupied a significant place in the national consciousness in the early nineteenth century, partly because the town was a prominent 'rotten borough', sending two MPs to parliament from a village of some 200 souls on the strength of a status several centuries out of date, an abuse subject to extensive national debate in the prelude to the 1832 Great Reform Act (see, e.g., Fraser 2014). Ellis (1912: 35-36) chronicled the verse and fiction which had been generated by the history of Dunwich's submersion, and of its ruined remnants, from the late-eighteenth century onwards. George Crabbe – best known for poems centred on Aldeburgh – glosses the site in his 1780 poem 'The Candidate' as: 'A crumbling ruin, once a city's pride, / […] / Where Sadness, gazing on time's ravage, hung, / And Silence to Destruction's trophy clung'. Similar despairing, elegiac tones were repeated in the minor local poetry of the first half of the nineteenth century, establishing a place image ripe for consumption by the sentimental tourist. The popularity of Dunwich's ruins as the focus of tourist excursions is apparent in Wilkie Collins' (1862) *No Name*, as during a stay in Aldeburgh the central characters take, by way of a leisure trip, 'a long drive to a place on the coast here called Dunwich' where they find 'the last relic of the once populous city of Dunwich which has survived the destruction of the place, centuries since, by the all-devouring sea'. Variations on this repeated theme are provided by an extensive visual record; Gardner's *History* (see above) included a rich set of engravings of lost buildings and

artifacts. JMW Turner passed Dunwich on a coastal voyage in 1822, sketching the cliffs from the sea and working the subject up in 1824 into a painting which was circulated in an engraved form as part of a series of 'Picturesque Views on the East Coast of England'. Here, the ruins of All Saints church and of Greyfriars Friary are rendered as ghostly silhouettes against a lowering sky, the drama heightened by accentuating the scale of the cliffs, and by the inclusion of a diminutive group of fishermen struggling to launch a boat in a trademark Turner tempestuous sea (Collins 2005: 9-10).

The history of Dunwich's submersion featured in Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830). Lyell's text, central to debates on the emerging science of geology's impact on the Christian world view was well-known in literary circles (Porter 1976; Tomko 2004; Lyons 2013: 96). The East Anglian coast furnished Lyell with a wealth of evidence on the processes of erosion (Lyell 1830: 267-75). After a scientific assessment he transposed his argument against the doctrine of 'the permanency of existing continents' into a more colourful, figurative mode, drawing on Gardner's *History* and its gothic imagery of graveyards laid open by the erosion of the sea cliffs, with bones and gravestones tumbling from the graveyard of All Saints church into the sea (273-274). In a geographical leap, he yoked Dunwich with the Northumbrian coast, via one of Thomas Bewick's jocular 'end piece' engravings in *A History of British Birds* (1847: 222, orig. 1804). In this image, broken fragments of gravestone are all that are left of a vain effort 'to perpetuate the memory' of someone whose name has already been washed away (see Figure 2). This prospect was profoundly troubling to a religious sensibility which expected sanctified bodies to lie peacefully awaiting resurrection on the day of judgement; a shock effect which had been exploited in Charlotte Smith's 1789 'Sonnet Written in the Church Yard at Middleton' which enjoyed a wide currency in nineteenth-century Britain (Roberts 2019: 1-9).

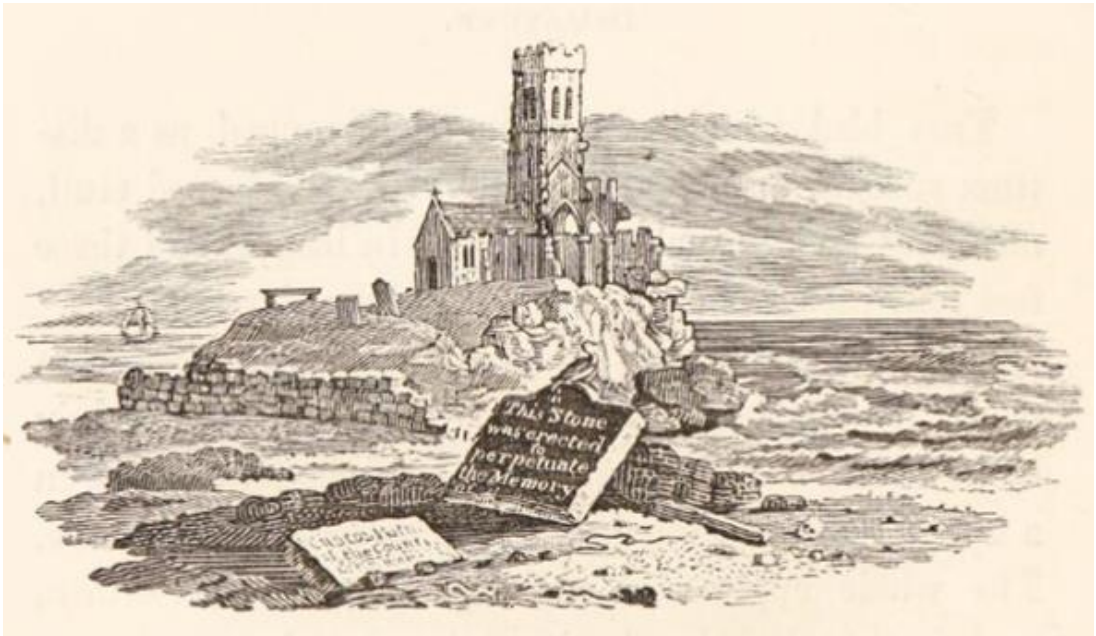

Figure 2: Engraving cited by Lyell, in Bewick (1847: 222). History of British birds. The figures engraved on wood / by Thomas Bewick. Public Domain Mark.

The Suffolk Coast: A Nineteenth-Century Leisure Landscape

By the time of Swinburne's visits to Suffolk in the 1870s, the Great Eastern Railway was managing a network linking London to most of the East Anglian coast, integrating it with the encompassing assemblage of the Victorian railway system (Fisher-Høyrem 2022: 69-106). The network had been constructed by a set of precursor companies from the late 1830s onwards, facilitating the expansion of nascent East Anglian coastal resorts: Great Yarmouth, first reached by rail in 1844, followed by Lowestoft in 1847, and Cromer in 1877 (Rouse 1982: 69-80). Southwold was not directly linked to the rail network at the time of Swinburne's visits, being accessible via horse-drawn bus from the Great Eastern station at Darsham, but was nevertheless a popular tourist site. The link was improved by the opening of the Southwold Railway in 1879, and by sea from the 1880';s onwards by a passenger route linking London to the East Coast resorts. A newly-mobile middle and lower-middle class public was enabled to access the expanding East Anglian coastal resorts, and a broad leisure infrastructure developed – ranging from the popular entertainments available at sites such as Cromer and Yarmouth, to the more refined offerings of Aldeburgh and Southwold (Rouse 1982). The human components of this expanding assemblage enabled by the railways, hotels and boarding houses included writers and artists, transported from their cultural milieux in London to productive contact with the East Anglian coast, as hitherto obscure sites were exploited and assimilated into a wider space of cultural circulation (see Scott 2002; Collins 2005; Munn 2006).

Close relations developed between the emerging leisure economy and creative interpretations of place (for an overview of this dynamic, see Borsay 2013: 179-83), adding a wide range of cultural artifacts and ideas to the tourist culture. In the case of Dunwich and its environs this assimilation was most marked in the visual arts, as an increasing number of artists exploited the visual possibilities – and potential tourist markets – of Southwold, Walberswick and Dunwich. In Walberswick a symbiotic relationship emerged between the local community and an artists' colony, with a supply of living accommodation, studio space and models paid for by the proceeds from art sales (Scott 2002: 34-5). The geographical reach of the relationships set up by the creative exploitation of the Suffolk coast is exemplified by the painter Philip Wilson Steer. In the 1880s Steer carried techniques learned at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris to Walberswick and Southwold, rendering the East Anglian coast in a novel form. Steer's principal interest was in sunlit landscapes enlivened by a leisured human presence – a popular theme of the French impressionist idiom in which he worked – recording tourists and beach scenes with a range of impressionist effects. His system of working involved summer sketching excursions to the coast, absorbing himself in holiday scenes, with the material gathered being assimilated in finished canvases during winters spent in his Chelsea studio (Collins 2012: 52) and exhibited in London galleries. In addition, a substantial body of visual artworks was produced by an intermittent artists' colony hosted in Dunwich by the painter Edwin Edwards during the late 1860s and 1870s. Notably, his visitor Charles Keene

produced both topographical landscapes and – in his role as a *Punch* cartoonist – humorous depictions of culture clashes between visitors and locals which give some insight into the ways a traditional coastal economy was being transformed into one based on tourism. A series of cartoons showing artists seated at their *plein air* easels (avatars of Keene and his fellow artists), while being subjected to uncomprehending comments from both local fisherfolk and visitors, vividly depicted the collision of multiple coastal cultures (Collins 2005: 50-5).

Further evidence of the late-nineteenth-century visitor experience of Dunwich and its environs can be recovered from a range of tourist guides, first-hand reports, photographs and postcards. The Southwold and Dunwich entries in Ward's *Guide to the Eastern Counties* (1883) permit a reconstruction in outline of the tourist setting which provided the springboard for Swinburne's meditation, and give an indication of the way in which the tourist assemblage was coded. A walk would take Victorian tourists from the hotels and guest houses of Southwold – 'the least obtrusive of all the East coast watering places that are accessible by rail' – by ferry across the Blyth to picturesque Walberswick where they would 'find endless subjects for the sketch-book'; and thence to Dunwich, 'get[ting] along as best you may, now over pebbles, and now by the edge of the marsh'. Ward's *Guide* recommends Dunwich to the visitor enamoured of a 'sprawl on the turf under the shadow of old walls', 'a breezy common and pure air' and a 'dip in or sail over the sea', all with the security of knowing that one will not be 'greeted by a swarm of noisy excursionists'; and insisting that Dunwich is 'anything but the melancholy spot' its history 'would lead the visitor to expect', with a delight being taken in the romance of 'crumbling walls … much overgrown with ivy' (101-103). In his 'Old Suffolk' essay of 1879 Henry James echoed the mood of the *Guide,* articulating the affective components of the tourist culture of the area. Layering melancholy, curiosity and delight, he defied 'any one, at desolate, exquisite Dunwich, to be disappointed in anything'. Any lingering sadness transforms into its opposite, as 'the minor key is struck here with a felicity that leaves no sigh to be breathed, no loss to be suffered'; with 'this sawlike action' producing in 'a mind that can properly brood', 'an interest, a sort of mystery, that more than makes up for what it may have surrendered' (James 1905: 320-21, orig. 1879). Less subtly than James, the poet Edward Fitzgerald recorded in his letters a sentimental attachment to 'the robin singing in the ivy that hangs on those old Priory walls', 'Blackberries ripening from stems which those old Grey Friars picked from', and 'the poor little Dunwich rose, brought by those monks from the north country' (Wright 1901: 229, 255).

The archive of the Dunwich museum (eHive 2022) hosts a collection of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century photographs and postcards, which – as well as preserving traces of some of the material culture of the tourist economy – provides an insight into the leisure practices of the period. It has an extensive visual record of holidaymakers bathing, boarding fishing vessels pressed into leisure roles, strolling along the clifftop, or seated in the shade of the ruins of All Saints church. One carefully-composed photograph shows a meditative Swinburne gazing – in significant isolation – out from the cliffs along the curve of the coastline towards Southwold.

The Literary Landscape of 'By The North Sea'

Swinburne's perception of the area and its literary potential can be extracted from a series of letters written by him in the period from 1875 to 1880. A few months after his first visit to the area in the late summer of 1875, he enthused that the experience of the Suffolk coast was entirely new to him, and went on to itemise the features of Dunwich which would provide the components of the literary landscape of BTNS: the sweep of the landscape from the eroding, sandy cliffs to the arc of the shingle beach and inland salt marshes; the realisation that the sea had 'slowly swallowed' a city, leaving 'but two shells of ruined masonry'; the lethal sandbanks 'the worst in England for shipwrecks'; and, strikingly, his equating of the shore with the classical Greek Hades, declaring that he 'had read of it in the Odyssey' (letter to Edwin Harrison, in Hake and Compton-Rickett 1918: 59-62). In later letters, after the composition of BTNS, he indicated that the 'whole picture is from life — salt marshes, ruins and bones protruding seawards through the soil of the crumbling sandbanks' (Letter to Lord Houghton, in Gosse and Wise 1919: 76-77); and that he 'climbed the crumbling tower' of the ruined All Saints church and looked out over 'the marshes […] which belong to neither land nor sea' – a sight as mournful as the Maremma in Dante's *Inferno* (Letter to Benjamin Buisson, in Lang 1960: 176). Swinburne creates in these letters the embryo of a 'suffering traveller' – a commonplace of early-nineteenth-century literature (Thompson 2007) – which grows to maturity in the form of BTNS's first-person narrator who 'journeys [...] alone' to a desolated, seemingly 'time-forgotten' borderland (145-56). His textual reconstruction of Dunwich arranges a set of landscape features and poetic forms which serve to render a real-and-imagined place capable of sitting alongside the tourist landscape encountered by the leisure visitor. The delineation of the spaces in the poem can be studied in partial isolation from its free-ranging meditations (treated extensively in the studies by Levin, Fippinger and Lyons cited above); a disaggregation facilitated by Swinburne's working method, which Edward Thomas characterised as an 'alternation of bold and definite description with raptures and reveries kindled by the landscape and seascape described' (Thomas 1917: 267).

The tower of All Saints church, and Swinburne's climb up it, have a particular potency, enabling a prospect view over a wide landscape in this flat region, and placing the narratorial gaze at a remove from the intricate patterns of life found at ground level. BTNS sits in the lineage of the eighteenth-century 'prospect poem' and its romantic revivals, endowing the narrator with the capacity to select from and construct the territory surveyed (Labbe 1999: 204-205). The text begins with a selective gloss on the features of the open heathland to the west – 'A land that is lonelier than ruin […] Far fields that a rose never blew in, / Wan waste where the winds lack breath; / Waste endless and boundless and flowerless / … Where earth lies exhausted' (ll.1-8) – invoking the wasteland mythology of the Arthurian legends, which had earlier been reworked in poetic form by both Swinburne and Tennyson. Wasteland imagery plays multiple roles in the text and the landscape it creates, parodying both the language of Tennysonian despair (Lyons 2013: 92-93) – similar imagery appears in 'In Memoriam' (see, e.g., sections III, VIII and XXII) – and

representing a world seen through the lens of lost faith. Neither of these roles would have been effectively served by a more comprehensive view of the working landscape of the Suffolk coast. Where the eighteenth century prospect poem used distance to create lands of smiling plenty in pursuit of conservative political ends (Barrell 1972: 21-34), Swinburne's text eradicates productive human presence to create desolation. The heaths, the site of traditional sheep grazing practices until the early twentieth century, are transformed into a land '[...] herdless and sheepless, / No pasture or shelter for herds' (17-18). The view to the north, over the salt marshes, prompts an intensification of the wasteland theme as the gaze ranges over 'Miles, and miles, and miles of desolation! / […] / Time-forgotten, yea since time's creation,' (145-49) – again erasing the extensive human use and shaping of the landscape, with its historic system of drainage and embankment, traditional practices such as reed-cutting for thatch, and duck decoying. There is an irony that the narrator at this point pleads for 'Sign or token of some eldest nation' that 'Here would make the strange land not so strange' (146-47), when it is precisely those signs have been forcibly erased from the text. The text's representation of the landscape in this part of the poem is not stabilised with reference to components and relations of the historic or tourist landscapes outlined in the analyses above, but with literary models, and a link to the popular Victorian reception of the Arthurian legends, characterised by Bryden (2020) as an extensive assemblage of texts, visual representations, material culture, and an attachment to what could be perceived as 'Arthurian' landscapes.

The prospect poem returns in a more recognisable eighteenth-century form as the focus of thought in the text turns toward a joyous transcendence with 'the elements of earth, wind, sun, and sea' replacing 'the Christian God' (Riede 1978: 172). The turn in thought parallels a turn in perception, as a single-minded focus on the supposedly barren heaths and marshes is interrupted by landscape components which had hitherto been ignored: 'What houses and woodlands that nestle / Safe inland to lee of the hill / As it slopes from the headlands that wrestle / And succumb to the strong sea's will?' (243-46). A human presence – albeit a timeless one – is restored with a glimpse of the houses of Dunwich, the Barne estate, and more distant villages. A view that had been dominated by barren and impotent heaths becomes instead the site of productive life: 'Where the wings of the sea-wind slacken, / Green lawns to the landward thrive, / Fields brighten and pine-woods blacken,/ And the heat in their heart is alive;' (251-54) – a transposed form of the restoration of life to the Arthurian wasteland with the finding of the grail and healing of the Fisher King. This renewed vision still holds the late-nineteenth century working and tourist landscapes at a distance – just as the eighteenth-century prospect poem sanitised rural struggle – 'suspending modernity' even as modern secularism begins to triumph over what Swinburne regarded as outworn superstition.

The view from the church tower served to hold the Dunwich of the 1870s at a spatial distance; but a contrasting device serves to hold it at a temporal distance as the text recedes, in imagination, into the medieval period. Amongst the ruins of the church and friary medieval Dunwich is made to appear as a spectral presence, 'Now triumphal, crowning all a city, / Roofs exalted once with prayer and psalm,' (417-418), restored to its pristine state

'Church and hospice wrought in faultless fashion, / Hall and chancel bounteous and sublime,' (421-22). This recession is an exercise in Victorian medievalism commonplace in the pre-Raphaelite milieu in which Swinburne moved, and is supported by a rich nineteenth-century literary and visual culture shot through with an attachment to an imagined medieval period (see, e.g. Parker and Wagner 2020). Although limited evidence of the submerged medieval town was available – the main exception being Gardner's account – an imaginative projection based on surviving medieval buildings at other sites, reinforced by Victorian gothic architecture, would have been a common nineteenth-century competence. This appears in an incident recorded by Watts-Dunton who, in the company of Swinburne on one of their holidays, encountered the travel writer George Borrow standing entranced on the clifftop at Dunwich; on being disturbed Borrow insisted that the effect of the ruins was such that he had passed into a state 'in which the old city of Dunwich in its glorious days appeared before him […] the streets were full of bustle, and the sea in front full of ships'. Borrow regarded the seeing of such visions as commonplace and that, 'a great city to a man like [him] has a ghost of itself' (Hake and Compton-Rickett 1916: 89-91). This vision of the past is echoed in the poem: 'Where over the grave of a city/ The ghost of it stands' (249-50). A similar idealised image of medieval culture appears in the text – 'Filled and thrilled with force of choral chime,/ Filled with spirit of prayer and thrilled with passion' (424-25) – an image undercut as the temporal distance collapses, and the narrator returns once again to his own time. The return is not to enjoy, with the visitor of Ward's *Guide,* a 'sprawl on the turf in the shade of old ruins' , but to stand amongst 'Dust, and grass, and barren silent stones.' as '[…] one hollow tower and hoary / Naked in the sea-wind stands and moans' (434-36), as the narrator carries the atmosphere and diction of the gothic with him from the past.

Figure 3. Greyfriars ruins, 2022. Copyright, the authors.

A combination of spatial and temporal distancing occurs when Swinburne enlarges on his 1875 assertion that the coast of Suffolk was 'quite new to [him], except that [he] had read of it in the Odyssey as the shore of Hades' (Hake and Compton-Rickett 1918: 60). This theme is developed into an excursion into Homer's realm, and the narrator of the poem travels to the underworld with Odysseus, overlaying the ancient past and a Mediterranean location on Dunwich cliffs, drawing components from yet another literary world to the Suffolk coast. The eliding of these two frames is made less fanciful when the view upwards from the base of the cliffs in the late nineteenth century is recalled - 'above the sand-hill ranges / Watch the towers and tombs of men that sinned / Once, …' (177-79). The graveyard of All Saints was being steadily eroded, with bones and tombstones tumbling from the topmost layers of soil down to the cliff base. An observer standing on the beach was quite literally placed in an underworld, alongside (and below) the dead. The Dunwich Museum archive (eHive 2022) contains a photographic record of Swinburne's 'Hades', in which the detritus of the graveyard has been arranged (seemingly by the photographer) into a troubling *memento mori* – an overt exercise in 'necromanticism' and the Victorian 'cult of death' (Westover 2012). The binding of Dunwich cliffs to the classical past can be traced to the presence of ancient Greece as a significant component in Victorian thought (see, e.g., Evangelista 2009) and, more specifically, to Swinburne's thoroughgoing if unconventional Hellenism (Ribeyrol 2013a). In literary terms, Swinburne had visited Hades on two occasions in the 1860s, with two poems on the theme of Proserpine, the goddess abducted by Pluto and taken to the underworld. In BTNS he concludes that on travelling to Dunwich cliffs he has made the same journey, 'Here is Hades, manifest, beholden' (l.191) and that this is 'Where the border-line was crossed [...] sundering / Death from life' (ll.193-194). In his well-practised, anglicised ancient Greek diction (Ribeyrol 2013b) he rehearses Odysseus' journey to Hades as if it were being made beside the North Sea. This conceit appears less fanciful when considered against the background of the tradition in English landscape gardening of creating planned routes which narrate classical myths, including descents into grottos which represent Hades (see, e.g., Schulz 1981). Seeing the ancient Mediterranean behind the veil of the English landscape was a well-established reflex for a cultural elite.

Discussion

It is possible to extract, from the assemblages outlined in the previous section, a programmatic account of the 'suspension of modernity' in BTNS – a particular instance of the selective inclusion of features of 'real' places into literary representations, and the ways in which this can be illuminated by assemblage theory. Broadly, there are two mechanisms of 'suspension', de/reterritorialisation and de/recoding (DeLanda 2006): the disruption of the settled shape of the tourist landscape, with the imposition of a literary reconstruction; and the muting of tourist interpretations of the landscape, with the substitution of literary allusions. However, these processes have to be understood in a sense distinct from that usual in geographical applications of assemblage theory (see, e.g.,

Woods (2015) analysis of the transformation of coastal villages by the forces of globalisation). In the case of BTNS the tourist landscape assemblage is reworked in the imagined space of the literary work, but nothing has occurred in the tourist landscape itself. In the creation of a virtual, literary space the tourist assemblage is broken into its components, which are then selectively expunged. Many of the objects, practices and texts of the Victorian coastline are discarded to leave a depopulated and sparse imagined landscape; but it appears in the text of BTNS supplemented with a stock of cultural objects, and recoded with literary allusions and forms. The ways in which such hybrid literary worlds are constructed has been explored by Shaw (2018) in the context of speculative fiction, with examples of utopian and dystopian literary worlds which selectively draw on real places.

Within this broad framework intriguing examples and variations can be found. In the letters (cited above) which Swinburne wrote explaining his perception of Dunwich, it is possible to discern landscape features being drawn into analogical and instantiation relations with distant landscapes, imagined literary spaces, or selected forms from Victorian culture – creating a literary assemblage without perceptible boundaries. For example, Dingle marshes are linked in Swinburne's perception with the Maremma of Tuscany, especially as it appears in literary form in Dante's *Inferno* (in a version of Thurgill's (2021) 'spatial hinge'). Similarly, the literary model of The Odyssey is invoked to characterise Dunwich cliffs as a form of underworld, drawing on Homer's imagining of Odysseus' journey and bringing its features into the Suffolk landscape. Such supplementation is needed to draw bare landscape components into a rich and (imaginatively) inhabitable literary assemblage, recoded and made intelligible through selected poetic forms. For this to function believably the selected and described landscape components must exhibit the capacity to respond to the relations set up with the literary and cultural objects in the text: a heath must be able to take on the appearance of an Arthurian wasteland, and a drowned medieval town must be able to reappear as if in a vision – operations which depend on rich connections with the cultural background against which the text was written. Thus, the suspension of modernity is not achieved by simple deletion, but by the careful construction of a real-and-imagined space, with a stable and credible set of relations between its components, coded with the conventions of the romantic lyric.

Works Cited

Abrams, M. (1984) *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism*. London: Norton.

Alexander, N. and Cooper, D. (2017) *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-war Poetry*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Anderson, B., Kearnes, M., McFarlane, C. and Swanton, D. (2012) 'On Assemblages and Geography.' *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 2(2), pp. 171-189.

Anderson, J. (2015) 'Towards an Assemblage Approach to Literary Geography.' *Literary Geographies*, 1(2), pp. 120-137.

Barrell, J. (1972) *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bates, D. and Liddiard, R. (2013) *East Anglia and Its North Sea World in the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge: Boydell.

Bewick, T. (1847) *A History of British Birds, Vol.*2 [online] [Accessed 3 March 2023] https://archive.org/details/b29333131_0002/page/222/mode/2up

Borsay, P. (2013) 'A Room With a View: Visualising the Seaside, c. 1750–1914.' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23, pp. 175-201.

Briassoulis, H. (2017) 'Tourism Destinations as Multiplicities: The View from Assemblage Thinking' *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 19, pp. 304-317.

Bryden, I. (2020). 'Tennyson and the Return of King Arthur.' *In* Parker, J. and Wagner, C. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collins, I. (2005) *Making Waves: Artists in Southwold*. Norwich: Black Dog Books.

Collins, I. (2012) 'An Impression of Suffolk.' *Apollo* 176, pp. 48-53.

Collins, W. (1862) *No Name*. [Online] [Accessed 2nd June 2023] https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1438/pg1438-images.html

Defoe, D. (1722) *A Tour Through the Eastern Counties of England*. [Online] [Accessed 2nd June 2023] https://www.gutenberg.org/files/983/983-h/983-h.htm

DeLanda, M. (2006) *A New Philosophy of Society*. London: Continuum.

DeLanda, M. (2016) *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

eHive (2022) 'Dunwich Museum.' [Online] [Accessed 30 August 2022] https://ehive.com/collections/3767/dunwich-museum

Ellis, S. (1912) 'Dunwich in Literature.' *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Oct., pp. 29-37.

Evangelista, S. (2009) *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fippinger, A. (2009) 'Intimations and Imitations of Immortality: Swinburne's "By the North Sea" and a "Poeta Loquitur".' *Victorian Poetry*, 47(4), pp. 675-690.

Fisher-Høyrem, S. (2022) *Rethinking Secular Time in Victorian England*. Cham: Springer.

Fowler, C. (2013) *The Emergent Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fraser, A. (2014) *Perilous Question: The Drama of the Great Reform Bill 1832*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Gardner, T. (1754) *An Historical Account of Dunwich, Anciently a City, Now a Borough*. London: W. Owen.

Gosse, E. and Wise, T. (1919) *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Vol. 2*. London: Heinemann.

Hake, T. and Compton-Rickett, A. (1916) *The Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton, Volume 2*. London: T. C. & E. C. Jack.

Hake, T. and Compton-Rickett, A. (1918) *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne, With Some Personal Recollections*. London: John Murray.

Harman, G. (2018) *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. London: Pelican Books.

Horatschek, A., Rosenberg, Y. and Schäbler, D. (2014) *Navigating Cultural Spaces: Maritime Places*. Leiden: Brill.

Ingleby, M and Kerr, M. (2018) *Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

James, H. (1905) *English Hours*. Boston: J. R. Osgood and Co.

Jarvis, S. (2013) 'Swinburne: The Insuperable Sea.' *In* Bevis, M. (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jervis, B. (2016) 'Assemblage Theory and Town Foundation in Medieval England' *Cambridge Archaeological Journal,* 26(3), pp. 381-395.

Johnson, T. (2017) 'The Tree and the Rod: Jurisdiction in Late Medieval England.' *Past and Present*, 237, pp. 13-51.

Keirstead, C. (2019) 'Sea Dreams and Realities: Tennyson, Travel, and the Shifting Currents of Littoral Space in Victorian Culture.' *Victorian Poetry*, 57(1), pp. 73-99.

Kluwick, U. and Richter, V. (2015) *The Beach in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures: Reading Littoral Space*. London: Routledge.

Labbe, J. (1999) 'Charlotte Smith, Beachy Head.' *In* Wu, D. (ed) *A Companion to Romanticism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lambert, D. Martins, L. and Ogborn, M. (2006) 'Currents, Visions and Voyages: Historical Geographies of the Sea.' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32, pp. 479-493.

Lang, C. (1960) *The Swinburne Letters Vol. 4*. Oxford:Oxford University Press.

Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levin, Y. (2013) *Swinburne's Apollo: Myth, Faith, and Victorian Spirituality*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

Lyell, C. (1830) *Principles of Geology*, Vol. 1. London: John Murray.

Lyons, S. (2013) '"Life as the End of Life": Algernon Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater, and Secular Aesthetics.' [online] [Accessed 16th February 2023] https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/33745/Lyons_Sarah%20final.pdf?sequence=1

McGann, J. (1972) *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McSweeney, K. (1973) 'Swinburne's "By the North Sea".' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 3, pp. 222-231.

Munn, G. (2006) *Southwold: An Earthly Paradise*. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club.

Oulton, C. (2022a) *Down From London: Seaside Reading in the Railway Age*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Oulton, C. (2022b) '"Why were you silent when I spoke tonight?" Coming to Terms in Tennyson's "Sea Dreams" and Swinburne's *A Midsummer Holiday and Other Poems*'. *Victorians*, 141, pp. 37-50.

Parker, J. and Wagner, C. (2020) *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parker, R. (1978) *Men of Dunwich: The Story of a Vanished Town*. London: Harper Collins.

Pye, K. and Blott, S. (2006) 'Coastal Processes and Morphological Change in the Dunwich-Sizewell Area, Suffolk, UK.' *Journal of Coastal Research*, 22(3), pp. 453-473.

Porter, R. (1976) 'Charles Lyell and the Principles of the History of Geology.' *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 9(2), pp. 91-103.

Ribeyrol, C. (2013a) 'Swinburne: A Nineteenth-century Hellene?' *In* Maxwell, C. and Evangelista, S. (eds) *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ribeyrol, C. (2013b) '"It's bawdier in Greek": A.C. Swinburne's Subversions of the Hellenic Code.' *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 78.

Riede, D. (1978) *Swinburne: A Study of Romantic Mythmaking*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Roberts, B. (2019) *Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Rouse, M. (1982) *Coastal Resorts of East Anglia: The Early Days*. Sudbury: Terence Dalton.

Schulz, M. (1981) 'The Circuit Walk of the Eighteenth-Century Landscape Garden and the Pilgrim's Circuitous Progress.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 15(1), pp. 1-25.

Scott, R. (2002) *Artists at Walberswick: East Anglian Interludes 1880-2000*. Bristol: Art Dictionaries.

Sear, D., Bacon, S., Murdock, A., Doneghan, G., Baggaley, P., Serra, C. and LeBas, T. (2011) 'Cartographic, Geophysical and Diver Surveys of the Medieval Town Site at Dunwich, Suffolk, England.' *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology,* 40(1), pp. 113-132.

Sharp, W. (1904) *Literary Geography*. London: Pall Mall Publications.

Shaw, K. (2018) 'Space, Assemblage and the Non-Human in Speculative Fiction' [online] [Accessed 1st June 2023] https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/23648/2/Shaw_Kristen_2018August_PhD.pdf

Suffolk Coast and Heaths (2012) 'Touching the Tide: Landscape Character Assessment.' [online] [Accessed 4th March 2023] https://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2012-Touching-the-Tide-Landscape-Character-Assessment.pdf

Swinburne, A. (1880) *Studies in Song*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Thomas, E. (1917) *A Literary Pilgrim in England*. London: Methuen.

Thompson, C. (2007). *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thurgill, J. (2019) 'Literary Geography and The Spatial Hinge.' *Literary Geographies,* 7(2), pp. 152-156.

Tomko, M. (2004) 'Varieties of Geological Experience: Religion, Body, and Spirit in Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and Lyell's "Principles of Geology".' *Victorian Poetry*, 42(2), pp. 113-134.

van Dyke, C. (2013) 'Plastic eternities and the mosaic of landscape.' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 31, pp. 400-415.

Ward, C. (1883) *Thorough Guide to the Eastern Counties*. London: Dulau.

Watts-Dunton, C. (1922) *The Home Life of Swinburne*. London: A.M. Philpot.

Westover, P. (2012) *Necromanticism: Traveling to Meet the Dead, 1750-1860*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Woods, M. (2015) 'Territorialisation and the assemblage of rural place: Examples from Canada and New Zealand.' *In* Dessein, J., Battaglini, E. and Horlings, L. (eds) *Cultural Sustainability and Regional Development: Theories and practices of territorialisation*. London: Taylor and Francis Group, pp. 29-42.

Wright, W. (1901) *Letters of Edward FitzGerald in Two Volumes, Vol. 2*. London: Macmillan.

Zimmerman, V. (2008) *Excavating Victorians*. New York: SUNY Press.