

Literary Cartography and the Collecting of Place and Experience, with Specific Reference to Collecting Arthur Ransome

DAVID GOODWIN

Arthur Ransome was a versatile writer whose published works cover a spectrum spanning literary criticism, journalism/political commentary, sailing, fishing, folklore and children's writing. It is therefore unsurprising that Ransome collections may have diverse emphases, or that his books are collected by a variety of ages. Collectors range from venerable bibliophiles to quite new readers of "chapter books" who want to own the complete *Swallows and Amazons (S&A)* series, all of which are still in print in both hard and soft cover, with the earliest books having remained in print for over eighty years. Two aspects of collecting Ransome are given special attention in this article. First, what I have termed the "collecting of place," namely visiting and exploring places about which Ransome wrote. And second, what I have called the "collecting of experience," namely cultivating such skills as sailing and signalling, or engaging in pursuits such as camping, bird watching, hill walking and exploring inspired by Ransome's work. Collecting place and experience both suggest a level of participation in a created literary world that goes beyond literary tourism, which dates back at least to the 1700s¹ and which in the Ransome context could be expected to include visiting places such as Low Ludderburn (where *S&A* was written) and Rusland Church (where Ransome is buried). Peter Stanley writes that "Ransome devotees have evinced a strong desire to connect with the man and his stories geographically,"² and while Ransome collections may begin with the *S&A* series, many have been extended to embrace photograph albums, anecdotes and funds of memories of personal odysseys and adventures, plus impressive skill sets. This paper sets the context of a personal Ransome collection and then focuses on a question not adequately addressed by the literature, namely whether the use of cartography and the correspondence of literary territory with real places may influence collecting.

Background: A Personal Collection

My personal Ransome collection began when my father paid me a "ticky" (that is threepence) a head to rid our property of the introduced house-sparrows that

¹ David Cooper and Ian N. Gregory, "Mapping the English Lake District: A Literary GIS," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2011): 89–108; David Cooper and Gary Priestnall, "The Processual Intertextuality of Literary Cartographies: Critical and Digital Practices," *Cartographic Journal*, 48.4 (2011): 250–62.

² Peter Stanley, "Arthur Ransome's 'Toys': Objects that Mattered," *Mixed Moss: The Journal of the Arthur Ransome Society* (2012): 7.

kept away the native birds he so loved to have in our garden on the outskirts of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, he worked on a second prong of the strategy, which was to plant indigenous trees and shrubs to create diverse habitats. We probably owned only a single Ransome book at that stage, and with those tickys I set about buying the rest of the series. I remember inscribing, tongue in cheek, inside one cover: “To the thirty four sparrows who made this book possible.” My father’s and my combined efforts bore fruit; we had European flycatchers nesting in the garden and Marshall eagles flying over the tennis court, and an ornithologist friend more than once remarked on the astonishing species diversity of that micro-environment. I think Dick Callum and the Bird Protection Society would have approved.³

I bought mostly paperbacks, but at some point I did become aware of “first editions”—perhaps through Rumer Godden’s novel *China Court*, where a fortune in brown-paper-covered first editions comes to light. Thereafter, it became habit to scrutinise books to see what edition they were and to favour older copies where there was a choice, and over the years I have picked up a motley assortment of the later Ransome first editions, though entirely lacking in dust jackets and still missing the most valuable early books in the series. My enthusiasm must have been infectious, because I remember one of my brothers being accosted by a flamboyant and evidently insightful bookseller in Harare: “You’re looking for Arthur Ransome, aren’t you?” she said, and when he asked somewhat guiltily how she knew, she just looked him up and down and replied: “You’re about the right age. They’re over there.”

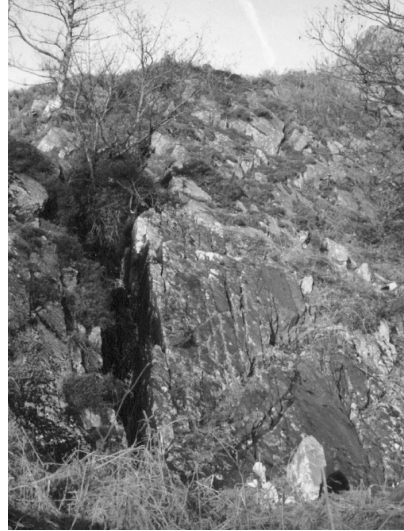
There are some intriguing twists that add zest to collecting early editions of Ransome—for example, the eight mistakes on the semaphore plate in the first edition of *Missee Lee*, corrected in the second edition. Another interesting quirk is that Ransome did not begin illustrating his own books immediately.⁴ The first edition of *Swallows and Amazons* was unillustrated, having only the Stephen Spurrier map on the dust jacket, which was retained as an endpaper map in subsequent editions. Clifford Webb then illustrated both *S&A* and its successor, *Swallowdale*, and we know that Ransome took Webb to Bank Ground farm, the inspiration for Holly Howe in the Lake District books, to draw Roger tacking up the field towards the farmhouse.⁵ Webb must also have had other features of interest pointed out, as evidenced by his careful recording of details such as the angle of the rocks on Peel Island, the semaphore flag on a pier end at Bowness (Rio Bay, in *S&A*), which was a signal to passing steamers that there were passengers

³ Arthur Ransome, *Coot Club* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934).

⁴ David Stewart, ed., *Illustrating Arthur Ransome* (Kendal: Amazon Publications, 1994).

⁵ Christina Hardyment, *Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint’s Trunk* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), 32.

waiting,⁶ and a rock feature and waterfall to the south west of Coniston (see below) that lends weight to one possible identification for the secret valley of Swallowdale.⁷ In indicating what to draw, Ransome may have provided better clues than can be gleaned from his own illustrations, which for all we know are an unspecific collage comprising imaginings and childhood memories rather than necessarily being drawn from life.



Left: Clifford Webb's illustration of the waterfall below Swallowdale;⁸ Right: Waterfall and rock face SW of Coniston.⁹

Collecting Ransome is as wide as a collector wishes to make it. My own collecting has been desultory apart from the complete *S&A* series and any books that shed further light on these and their creator. I have managed to find examples of Ransome's other writing, a few of which I read with enjoyment (*Rod and Line* and *Racundra's First Cruise*) and some of which I did not even finish (*Old Peter's Russian Tales*). I was sufficiently interested in Ransome as a writer to seek out his early writing, despite his disclaimer that "No one but an idiot or an enemy would want to possess any book written by me before 1914."¹⁰ At the time I began the research, Ransome's early work was rare and costly, and I consulted it

⁶ Sewart, *Illustrating Arthur Ransome*, 3–4.

⁷ This location is the first choice of Swallowdale for Roger Wardale, *Arthur Ransome's Lakeland: A Quest for the Real "Swallows and Amazons" Country* (Lancaster: Dalesman Books, 1986, 1988 2nd ed.), 32.

⁸ Arthur Ransome, *Swallowdale* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 177.

⁹ Photograph by the author.

¹⁰ Julia Jones, review of "Arthur Ransome's Long-Lost Study of Robert Louis Stevenson," *Mixed Moss: The Journal of the Arthur Ransome Society* (2012): 38, 39.

in the Bodleian library, where I read, photocopied and made notes on early work such as *The ABC of Physical Culture*, written when he was only twenty and doing hack work, sharing digs in Chelsea with the poet Edward Thomas, and *Aladdin* (not my kind of poetry at all), *The Child's Book of the Seasons* and *A History of Storytelling*. Photocopied excerpts and handwritten notes thus form a valued part of my collection. It is of interest that the accessibility of out-of-copyright material is sometimes easier today, with a number of scanned early works being available online—so if simply reading the words Ransome wrote is an object, much of his early writing may today be collected as PDF documents on a memory stick or on e-readers. Perhaps a generation to come may feel a comparable satisfaction in such a digital collection, but it seems to me that the thrill of the chase would be lost, as would the travelling hopefully while scouring second hand book shops for treasures as a book lover succumbs to the “gentle madness” of collecting.¹¹ Those who have separated leaves with a card or knife will know that this too is a kind of exploring—it is seeing pages no other person has laid eyes on. Having to read and make notes on a published book—not fungible in the same way as a digital document—arguably also encourages more careful reading, perhaps comparable with the difference between snapping off a photo to look at after the holiday and savouring a scene while capturing it in watercolour.

My collection also holds several books that were formative for Ransome, such as W. G. Collingwood's *Thorstein of the Mere*, and Frank Bullen's *The Cruise of the 'Cachalot'*, along with works of those whom Ransome influenced, such as Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock (*The Far-Distant Oxus* and *Oxus in Summer*). I have read but drawn a line at keeping the work of Elinor Lyon, who, although claiming to write in reaction to Ransome and creating characters who are almost buffoons in their propensity to set fire to objects and sink boats, borrows several features of Ransome's writing tradition, including his style of maps. The main focus of my collection can probably be summed up as anything that helps me revisit the luminous *S&A* world I knew as a child. The biographies further that end by shedding light on Ransome, the places about which he wrote and the possible genesis of his characters, and I regularly revisit the autobiography, Hugh Brogan's *The Life of Arthur Ransome*, and Roger Wardale's *Nancy Blackett under Sail*. Finally, I keep a certain amount of literary criticism, such as Peter Hunt's *Approaching Arthur Ransome*, Brogan's introduction to *Coots in the North*¹² and Victor Watson's *Reading Series Fiction: From Arthur Ransome to Gene Kemp*.¹³

¹¹ Jeremy Berlin, “The Things They Brought Back,” *National Geographic* 225.1 (January 2014): 62, quotes author Nicholas Basbanes.

¹² Hugh Brogan, *Coots in the North & Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988).

¹³ Victor Watson, *Reading Series Fiction: From Arthur Ransome to Gene Kemp* (London, Routledge Falmer, 2000).

There are also photocopied extracts from a recent PhD by Hazel Sheeky¹⁴ and scores of journal articles.

Of particular interest are books by other Ransome place-collectors—Christina Hardyment, Claire Kendall-Price, Roger Wardale and others.¹⁵ Last, there is my own collection of place in the form of a pictorial record of time spent in locations about which Ransome wrote, plus memories and an invisible collection of experience in the form of knowledge, skills and perspectives acquired through my reading of the *SC&A* series.

Collecting Place and Experience

The fact that I and one of my sisters learned to signal almost certainly resulted from reading Ransome's work. My love for astronomical position-fixing also probably had something to do with it, although also a lot to do with a scout-master who had surveyed in the desert during the war and to a next door land surveyor who practised for the Cape to Rio yacht race on his balcony with a sextant and artificial horizon. At school, as a hobby I made two crude sextants and observed sun and stars and worked out positions. Later I was intrigued to realise that *Missee Lee* had a more serious error than the mistakes in the semaphore plate, namely the flawed method by which Captain Flint and John determined longitude. I lost no time writing an article pointing out this error and received a generous letter back from Christina Hardyment, author of *Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's trunk*, who recommended my paper for publication, although in the end someone else beat me to it.

I took the first chance I could to explore Ransome country in 1978, working a passage from Cape Town to Rotterdam on a container ship, cleaning cabins and toilets and washing up, and soon made a friend of the second officer, whom I joined on the bridge during tea breaks. A ship's bridge proved more animated and challenging than my neighbour's balcony, and every morning the second officer would take his sextant observations, I would take mine, and we would work independently and compare results. Amateur that I was, I plotted our course not on a chart but in my school atlas. My positions come to an abrupt end about ten degrees north of the equator, off the West coast of Africa, when the captain (in

¹⁴ Hazel Sheeky, "Camping and Tramping, Swallows and Amazons: Interwar Children's Fiction and the Search for England" (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2012). <https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10443/1502/1/Sheeky%2012.pdf> Accessed 2/08/2013.

¹⁵ For example, Hardyment, *Captain Flint's Trunk*; Claire Kendall Price, *In the Footsteps of the Swallows and Amazons: 19 Illustrated walks in Arthur Ransome country* (York: Wild Cat publishing, 1993); Roger Wardale, *Arthur Ransome's Lakeland*; Roger Wardale, *Arthur Ransome's East Anglia: A search for Coots, Swallows and Amazons* (Norfolk: Poppyland Publishing, 1986, 1988; 2nd ed.); Pauline Marshall, *Where it all began: The Origins of Swallows and Amazons* (Author published, 1991).

the grip of a hangover, I was informed by the second officer) reminded me that I was merely a cleaner and forbade me to set foot on the bridge again.

I hitch-hiked up to Cumbria, worked for a while on a shooting estate, then split the cost of a motorcycle with a friend and finally was headed for the Lake District in search of Arthur Ransome, the first of many trips that would take me, and later my wife and daughters, all over England and Scotland. We were not alone—Ransome's *S&A* series has been translated into 18 languages and has created an international quasi-family, many of whom make an effort to visit Ransome country. As Peter Stanley writes, "an entire cottage industry revolves around identifying, describing and celebrating sites in the Lake District and elsewhere that inspired, correspond to or otherwise evoke places in his novels."¹⁶ The primary motivator of devotees is probably a desire to correlate vivid mental pictures built up of Ransome's literary territory with what it looks like in reality, and the principal means by which this is achieved is through Ransome's maps.

Cartography in Children's Literature

The emphasis placed on cartography in the study of literature has escalated in recent years. Offen notes that "It is not hyperbole to say that Literary Studies has taken a 'cartographic turn' or that History has taken a 'spatial turn'."¹⁷ Richardson adds that "The explosive growth of new geographical technologies also has brought elements of geography into direct interaction with the humanities and the creative arts, as well as within society more broadly."¹⁸ This escalation of literary cartographic studies includes recent work on digital mapping and Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Scholars have suggested that "the practices of in-the-field literary map-reading and map-making" will increase and will use digital mapping tools¹⁹ and that GIS has a role in mapping out "qualitative 'data' provided by the articulation of subjective spatial experiences."²⁰

Narrowing the field to children's cartography, Claire Ranson has defined three broad categories, namely maps which depict a real place; fantasy maps; and maps that combine both fantasy and reality.²¹ Ransome's Lake District settings are of the third type, in their merging and reorganising of real landscapes. Even as author,

¹⁶ Peter Stanley, "Arthur Ransome's 'Toys,'" *Mixed Moss*, 6.

¹⁷ Karl Offen, "Historical Geography II: Digital Imaginations," *Progress In Human Geography* 37.4 (2013): 564.

¹⁸ Stephen Daniels, Dydia DeLyser, J. Nicholas Entrikin and Douglas Richardson, Eds., *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2011), xix.

¹⁹ Cooper and Priestnall, "The Processual Intertextuality of Literary Cartographies."

²⁰ Cooper and Gregory, "Mapping the English Lake District: a Literary GIS," 89.

²¹ Claire Ranson, "Cartography in Children's Literature." In: *Sustaining the Vision. Selected Papers from the 24th Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship*, (Worcester, England, July 17–21, 1995), 164.

Ransome claimed to be taken aback at times by the failure of the real Lake District landscape to conform to his vivid, internalised fictional landscape, as if “some giant or earthquake has been doing a little scene-shifting overnight.”²² It comes as no surprise that the Lakes were the landscape of Ransome’s childhood holidays, because the way in which Coniston and Windermere and their environs have been fused in the Lake District books has a feel of a child’s egocentric orientation system,²³ which would find no inconsistency in Rio Bay (on Windermere) being just along the shore road from Holly Howe (Bank Ground Farm, on Coniston), or the Octopus lagoon (Allan Tarn) having been turned through 90° and moved halfway up the composite lake. For children, awareness of relative location comes only later, and the ability to comprehend survey maps probably comes via linear route maps.²⁴ Tracks such as the one in Swallowdale, from the Watchtower to the four firs to the oak tree beside the Amazon,²⁵ are sufficiently linear to satisfy any child at a stage where “movements must be linked to reference points.”²⁶ It may be significant that later books, set in locations encountered by Ransome as an adult, have closer correspondence between real and fictional landscapes—indeed some of his Essex and Norfolk maps are sparse, utilitarian creations that give the appearance of being traced from published maps with little further embellishment. In these “adult maps,” coupled with the text and Ransome’s illustrations, there is no difficulty about identifying exact locations and even buildings—for example Alma Cottages and the Butt and Oyster Inn at Pin Mill.²⁷ Two works in which locations are unspecific are those Hardyment differentiates with the nice distinction of being “realistic fantasy rather than fantastical reality.”²⁸ These are *Missee Lee*,²⁹ whose endpaper map of an unidentifiable stretch of the China coastline seems hydrologically improbable but is undeniably attractively embellished with junks and compasses in the place of latitudes and longitudes, and *Peter Duck*,³⁰ which locates Crab Island somewhere in the East Caribbean but furnishes no geographical coordinates either on the endpaper maps or on the larger-scale map in the text. No one is likely to seek seriously for a literal Crab Island or Chinese pirate stronghold on the basis of these maps.

A cartographical turning point for Ransome seems to arrive in *Pigeon Post*, the fifth book of the *S&A* series, when, in addition to an inset with the kind of map familiar to readers of the earlier books, for the first time he uses heights (in feet

²² Peter Hunt, *Approaching Arthur Ransome* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 15.

²³ Roger Hart, *Children’s Experience of Place* (New York: Irvington, 1979), 395.

²⁴ Hart, *Children’s Experience*, 395–96.

²⁵ Arthur Ransome, *Swallowdale* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), Endmap.

²⁶ Hart, *Children’s Experience*, 395.

²⁷ Arthur Ransome, *We Didn’t Mean to go to Sea* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 26.

²⁸ Hardyment, *Captain Flint’s Trunk*, 26.

²⁹ Arthur Ransome, *Missee Lee* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941).

³⁰ Arthur Ransome, *Peter Duck* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932).

above sea level) and a form of hachure (not entirely successfully, because it evokes expanses of bare rock rather than grass and heather). *Secret Water*, two books later, despite being my least favourite book is the best developed from a surveying point of view, with the explorers-turned-surveyors using a base line, surveying poles and parallel rulers.³¹ The way that the Naze is incrementally built up from the blank map on page 29 to the complete map of page 375 and the endpapers seems to offer an unwritten invitation to children to go and make their own maps, and my feeling is that in the process Ransome himself learned a thing or two about cartography. Certainly, by *Missee Lee* and *The Picts and the Martyrs*, Ransome is using hachures with more restraint, and his maps are also strengthened by details of swamps, forests and variations in relief even where these are remote from the tracks mentioned in the text, thereby permitting creative digressions by readers.

By the last complete book in the series—*Great Northern?*—Ransome was well into his stride cartographically speaking, and as well as an overview map of the Hebrides the book has (see below) an Admiralty chart complete with soundings³² and a “Hawk’s eye view up the valleys” both as an endpaper map and in the text.³³ As with *Pigeon Post*, heights are given, and by means of hachures (in Mac’s chart) and very successful pecked lines to indicate relief (for the Hawk’s eye view), geographical detail is given even for areas well away from the tracks taken by decoys, red herrings, savage Gaels and rogue ornithologists. The resulting maps, which in my view are the culmination of Ransome’s cartographic skills, provide those visiting Lewis with a very good idea of what to expect. But, as with the Lake District maps, exact locations are hard to pin down, and here the reason cannot be attributed to childhood perspectives being present in the adult creative process. James Shaw Grant tells us that Ransome stayed with his (Grant’s) grandfather at Uig Lodge, and Commander J. K. Dobson invokes family folklore to contend that a number of features in the vicinity of Uig underwent transposition in order to create the book’s setting.³⁴ Ransome also fished on the other side of the Island, behind Grimshader, telling Shaw Grant that he was gathering atmosphere for the book. Ransome appears to have assimilated sufficient ambience to take liberties with the topography as he built up a lucid geographical space in his mind prior to writing, and this mental space is communicated to readers through the text, illustrations and maps. One object of collecting is certainly for devotees to have ready access to this space.

Maps in children’s literature in general offer a springboard for the imagination by permitting readers to engage in their own adventures, particularly where maps are not merely route maps but have gratuitous detail away from the tracks followed

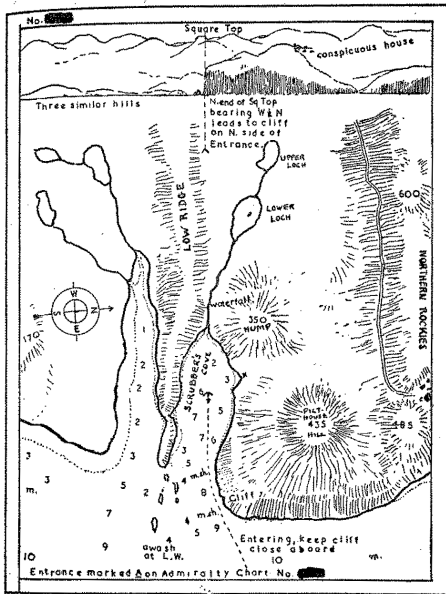
³¹ Arthur Ransome, *Secret Water* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939).

³² Arthur Ransome, *Great Northern?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), 15.

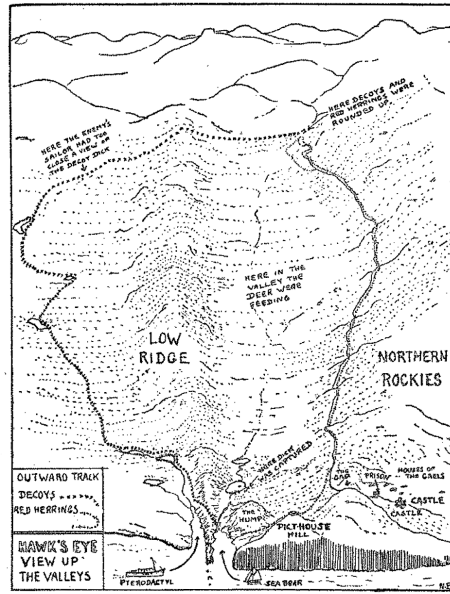
³³ *Ibid.*, 277.

³⁴ James Shaw Grant, *Mixed Moss*, 1.4.

by the protagonists. Hart points to the way “children of different ages and abilities search out new and more complicated routes of travel,”³⁵ and Pavlik has devoted special attention to the tradition of endpaper- or frontispiece-maps in children’s literature, which at least in theory permit “multiple paths (and therefore, multiple possible narratives)” to be taken by readers via their imaginations.³⁶ Pavlik suggests that “a literary map is better thought of as a stage upon which any number of ‘performances’ are possible,”³⁷ offering readers infinite possibilities to “explore them as enabling acts of the imagination in an endless map-reading game.”³⁸



MAC'S CHART OF THE COVE



MAP SHOWING THEIR TRACKS

Not every map will allow children to imagine themselves into the landscape, and one influencing factor is cartographic education. Claire Ranson draws our attention to how evolving cartographic schooling practices have influenced map readability by children and hence have shaped mapping styles.³⁹ Map perspective is also important, with cognitive research into children’s mapping highlighting “the importance of vantage point in children’s ability to understand perspectives other than their own,” and noting that “picturing an overhead view may be difficult because it requires the child to go beyond embodied experiences, and it

³⁵ Hart, *Children's Experience*, 343.

³⁶ Anthony Pavlik, “A Special Kind of Reading Game’: Maps in Children’s Literature,” *International Research in Children’s Literature* 3.1 (2010): 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁹ Ranson, “Cartography,” 164.

asks the child to override reflexive eye-level images by cognitively constructing visualisations of unobserved perspectives.”⁴⁰ This knowledge vindicates Stephen Spurrier’s *S&A* map (and Ransome’s redrawing of it) and also many (though not all) of Ransome’s subsequent maps, where boats, houses, trees, mountains and marine fauna are depicted obliquely, thereby making them more easily apprehensible by children. *Swallowdale* stands out as the only book in the series that at first, when still illustrated by Clifford Webb, had no overall map of the story’s setting. The Webb edition retains only one map in the text, of Wild Cat Island, apparently redrawn by Ransome from Spurrier’s more accomplished equivalent in *S&A* (while adding a spurious latitude and longitude that contains a glaring ambiguity as to North/South, East/West). Later, Ransome drew his own illustrations for the first two books in the series to replace Webb’s illustrations.

Naming is an important part of exploring and mapping and could also be a factor in collectability. Roger Hart points to the way in which children name their landscapes personally and descriptively and teach one another these names.⁴¹ In *S&A* the Walkers and Blacketts, by assigning their own names instead of the “native names” used on the official map, make the landscape their own and achieve “a consensuality over ... what meaning these places and objects have.”⁴² Naming is significant in the alliance between the crews of the Swallow and the Amazon⁴³ in the same way that a secret code or language can be a factor to group membership. It has also led to a canon of “Ransomish” terms that bond initiates today, as evidenced by the “ship’s papers” of The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS),⁴⁴ and probably constitute a factor in encouraging devotees to own the full complement of *S&A* books.

Maps even of fantasy worlds give fictional events a semblance of reality that can engage readers more fully with a story. Bulson writes that “More than anything else, early literary maps were a way to advertise the novel’s realism. No matter how fantastic, surprising, magical, or ridiculous novels may seem, the literary map was a way to stave off the scepticism of readers.”⁴⁵ Tolkien’s Middle Earth map is detailed and plausible, and his work, says Duriez, showed “an increasing emphasis on consistent geography and history.”⁴⁶ In contrast, Peter Hunt argues that C. S. Lewis’s Narnian world, lacking Tolkien’s “cohesive

⁴⁰ Pamela Hirsch and Elisabeth Hollister Sandberg, “Development of Map Construction Skills in Childhood,” *Journal of Cognition and Development* 14.3 (2013): 419.

⁴¹ Hart, *Children’s Experience*, 336–37.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Cooper and Priestnall, “Literary Cartographies,” 255.

⁴⁴ <http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/> Accessed 20/03/2014.

⁴⁵ Eric Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850–2000* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁶ Colin Duriez, *J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: the Story of a Friendship* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2003), 106.

landscape,” has “a very well-constructed metaphysic” but offers his extensive cast of mythic figures “nowhere to live....”⁴⁷ But although works of fantasy set in fantastical landscapes may make readers want to live more heroically they cannot offer literal destinations for those hoping to collect places where dragons were slain, for example. In contrast, Ransome’s maps, even those exhibiting a “conflation of actual and imagined geographies,”⁴⁸ usually depict some instantly recognisable features that invite inspection—for example, Long Island on Lake Windermere. This congruence between literary world and real life makes a statement that real people were behind the stories—or conceivably might have been—and that the reader’s own life can also hold drama and excitement. Ransome’s work is thus a stimulus for a variety of forms of engagement with the real world, and it is suggested that keying into real-life experience is a significant factor in the durability of Ransome collections.

Children’s books with recognisable counterparts in the real world may also set up goals considered worthwhile by adults who enjoyed the books and desire a concrete sequel such as exploring real places. This kind of goal-setting is reflected in the stated objectives of the Arthur Ransome Society—“To promote [Ransome’s] interests in exploring, camping, sailing, navigation, leadership, literature and much more”⁴⁹—and in the countless visits still made to Ransome country each year. Importantly, possibilities for adult exploration may have the effect of “future proofing” collections begun in childhood by providing goals and delimiting boundaries for adult collecting.

What Distinguishes Collecting Ransome from Other Collecting?

What makes my Arthur Ransome collection different from, say, a coin collection started about the same time? The coin collection has sat neglected in a cupboard for years, and several times I have thought it lost and been only mildly annoyed, yet the Ransome collection has spurred me over 35 years to revisit and extend. So why the difference?

First, it is probably significant that the Ransome books are a series, which invites collecting. Victor Watson writes that reading later books in a series is “like going into a room full of friends.”⁵⁰ Second, there may be a number of cartographic reasons. Maps are a key factor in making stories into places real enough to invite revisiting, with even fantasy maps being a “strategy of geographical authentication.”⁵¹ As seen earlier, maps are also places where readers can have

⁴⁷ Peter Hunt, “Landscapes and Journeys, Metaphors and Maps: The Distinctive Feature of English Fantasy,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 12.1 (1987): 12.

⁴⁸ Cooper and Priestnall, “Literary Cartographies,” 50.

⁴⁹ TARS website, <http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/>, accessed 14 March, 2014.

⁵⁰ Watson, *Reading Series Fiction*, 6.

⁵¹ Cooper and Gregory, “a Literary GIS,” 92.

virtual adventures by making “multiple and individual traverses” through literary maps coupled with their imagination.⁵² Experiencing our own literal adventures may also interweave threads of personal experience with literary images, and later in life there could even be a blurring of what was read or fantasised and what actually took place, in which case we may be recording our own deeds just as much as collecting a particular author. Maps may also give readers confidence that stories are a safe version of real life, where it is always possible to turn back and retrace one’s steps, and later in life we may wish to re-visit those safe places. Last, the idea is well represented in the literature of maps being an assertion of empowerment and control to the child reader,⁵³ and when daunted by the present we may want to revisit places where we once enjoyed dominance.

Having said all of the above, maps alone will not create a vivid literary world. It is perhaps significant that although *Racundra’s First Cruise*⁵⁴ has a map no less helpful than those in the *S&A* series I have not since visited the Baltic either in reality or via imagination. The key difference is probably that for the *S&A* series I grew to know “friends” at a deep level and vicariously shared in their exploits, while for *Racundra* I merely read about someone else’s voyage.

Finally, there is also perhaps a reason for collecting to be found in the level of work done. Both real-life exploration and learning skills such as sailing or signalling, as well as being fun, need to be worked at to be mastered, and an age-old wisdom (with proponents ranging from John Locke through to the Little Red Hen) tells us that work done gives rise to rights. It is suggested that those who have augmented vicarious literary adventures with literal visits, or invested effort in learning a skill such as sailing, will have a sense of having earned a co-owner’s right to a created world.

Mapping an Ideal

Would we continue to re-visit literary worlds if they were no different from our own? Perhaps not. One attraction of those worlds—and hence of collecting and mapping them—may be their power to filter reality and to depict an ideal world with less danger, disappointment and drudgery than real life. Particularly when reading children’s literature, we may be seeking an ideal. For example, Peter Hunt sees Tolkien’s Shire as a metaphor for “an unspoiled, idyllic, rural England.”⁵⁵ Viewed in this light the storyteller is effectively an omnipotent deity deciding what goes into a story and giving names. Honeyman argues that childhood landscapes

⁵² Pavlik, “Maps,” 28.

⁵³ Susan E. Honeyman, “Childhood Bound: In Gardens, Maps, and Pictures,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 34.2 (2001): 117–32.

⁵⁴ Arthur Ransome, *Racundra’s First Cruise* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949), 16.

⁵⁵ Hunt, “Landscapes and Journeys,” 11.

are an escape from civilised adult spaces,⁵⁶ and perhaps literature—especially children’s literature, and particularly when accompanied by maps—promises the reader experience of a place beyond Arcady, a kind of Garden of Eden, where humankind has authority to give names and where there is still hope for the world.

Childhood, unless there are serious distortions or perversions of it, has elements that later in life we may idealise—leisure time, limited responsibility, freedom from complications associated with work, and Platonic love—and maps encountered in childhood could even act as a vehicle for referencing childhood memories and perspectives. As adults we may subconsciously crave a route back to these perspectives, and collections of childhood books—I would argue particularly those with maps—may appear to offer a route.

Literary Tūrangawaewae

Finally, the idea of a “literary tūrangawaewae” is considered here as having possible relevance to collecting. The Māori word tūrangawaewae means a standing place for the feet. Tūrangawaewae land is where Māori can go to be themselves, to speak the Māori language and to spend time with others who share the same stories and a common history and identity, and the same idea is held by other groups the world over who have retained aspects of communal tenure, and even in the concept of hearth and home in Western societies. Importantly, tūrangawaewae land is a place where a secure back foot is positioned while reaching out to grasp new opportunities and challenges. Māori continue to invest in their tūrangawaewae through remittances and visits and especially through work—mahi—which is an important part of building and maintaining enduring connections. It is suggested that books with a strong sense of place, perhaps made more concrete by real life associations and memories, could even provide a sense of intimately known “people” who share stories and a language (particularly where this includes an esoteric vocabulary such as “painter” and “halyard”) and who have also worked towards a common purpose, even if this is not directed at survival in the same way as cooperating in hunting or agriculture are.

Perhaps collections of childhood book series, particularly those with maps, can effectively set up a conceptual space where “people” are known at a deep level, where a common language is spoken, a common set of stories shared and where there is a sense of belonging to a kind of family, and this knowledge may even provide stability and identity later in life. Sheila Honess writes that the reader “is never really alone: he or she is spatially connected not only to a story, to a book, and to a text, but also to a narrator, an author, and a multitude of other readers, known

⁵⁶ Honeyman, “Childhood Bound,” 2.

and unknown, present and absent, near and far.”⁵⁷ Conceivably, such a literary tūrangawaewae could even help give a young person going out into the world the security to grasp new opportunities or, by guessing how respected “people” might act, even to make better choices or avoid pathologies such as depression.

Conclusions

In conclusion, adults may wish to revisit the literary territory of children’s books for a variety of reasons, including the ideal nature of the worlds depicted, the sense of empowerment they may once have felt in those worlds and, particularly for series fiction, to feel part of a community of well-known friends associated with those worlds. Ransome’s tacit challenge to participate—not merely spectate—may strengthen what I have termed a literary tūrangawaewae connection with such worlds by encouraging work such as learning to tie knots or make a fire safely (termed “the collection of experience”), and where naming and esoteric words and phrases form a belonging bond between initiates. Connection is likely to be stronger where maps are tailored appropriately for readership groups and where sufficient overall detail is given to permit variations to the tracks taken by the characters.

Even for fantastical literary worlds, text, pictures and maps can set up a kind of literary territory capable of being revisited imaginatively, but in cases where there is sufficiently close congruence between this territory and actual locations readers may later in life make efforts to visit and spend time in that territory (termed “the collection of place”). This in turn may “future proof” collections begun in childhood by providing goals and delimiting boundaries for adult collecting. Maps are a key component in correlating literary and real-life place, and thus, it is argued, are a significant factor in collecting.

University of Otago

⁵⁷ Sheila Hones, “Literary Geography: the Novel as a Spatial Event,” in *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*, edited by Stephen Daniels et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), 247.

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