**Footprints in Spatial Narratives: Reading at the Limits of Digital Literary Mapping**Joanna E. Taylor (University of Manchester) | joanna.taylor@manchester.ac.uk
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*– and not simply by the fact that this shading of
forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam,
the gloom of cypresses
is what I wish to prove.*

Eavan Boland, ‘That the Science of Cartography is Limited’

The message at the heart of Eavan Boland’s poem, ‘That the Science of Cartography is Limited’, is a straightforward one: that, while maps are good at representing a landscape’s facts, they fail to capture the human stories – historical and personal – that imbue a place with meaning. More than this, a map reveals almost nothing about what it’s like to be in a place: to smell the foliage, to feel the ground underfoot, and to recognise the numberless interactions at both macro and micro scales that have made the place meaningful. Cartography, Boland’s poem indicates, is good at representing where something is, but not at showing why it matters.

These limitations are exaggerated by digital maps. Notwithstanding attempts to represent digitally the experience of standing in a location (Google’s Street View being the most obvious example), digital maps – like their analogue precursors – cannot comprehend an embodied sense of place. This is largely a problem with the map’s most fundamental characteristic: on its own, this kind of visual medium cannot capture the complex and multisensory feeling of being in a particular place at a particular time, and in a particular body. This chapter seeks to demonstrate how a literary spatial narrative might afford new ways of rectifying this limitation. It demonstrates how incorporating embodied data – including heart-rate monitoring and GPS tracks – alongside a literary text in a mapping environment might transform both how we read, and how we understand the role of embodiment in historical and contemporary place-making.

To do so, it takes as a case study one particular text: Dorothy Wordsworth’s epistolary account of her pioneering ascent of England’s highest mountain, Scafell Pike, on October 7 1818. It reads this letter alongside data gathered from a recreation of this walk – precisely 200 years later – by a party of researchers, artists and mountaineers who followed in Wordsworth’s footsteps. In part, this was a recreation of an important moment in British Romantic literature and mountaineering history. But, as this chapter claims, the recreation was also an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between active reading and digital technologies, wherein the maps created by walking this route might transform the ways we read and respond to the texts the initial ascent inspired. The chapter’s ultimate claim is that bringing these two types of data – those generated by author and by reader – together can foreground a phenomenology of place that induces new ways of reading both text and map.