



J.B. Priestley's miscellaneous writings and stylistic devices

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Abstract

The article is about J.B. Priestley one of the best known and most prolific writers of twentieth century Britain. The purpose of this article is about to know the miscellaneous writings and stylistic devices of the author used in his work. Priestley's works have been commented on at length in a diversity of publications including academic journals, articles and also as an example in books by geographers. Priestley's output was prodigious. Notwithstanding novels, he composed criticism, articles, journals, plays, film contents, social narratives and self-portrayals. For variety of reasons Priestley's works is also important for geography. Priestley's geographical imagination is centered on landscape and the related concepts of dwelling. To uncover that imagination I lean towards humanistic approaches, Humanistic geology i.e. supported by Phenomenology, that involve themes such as the centrality of meaning and experience; the conjunction of facts and values, object and subject, material form and ideas, in geographic interpretation; the importance of context, synthesis, and therefore holism in geographic understanding; a view of man that is contextual and not abstracted, particular rather than aggregate; and a perspective where human initiative and activity is not suppressed beneath the weight of a determining environment.

Keywords: miscellaneous writings, stylistic devices, geographical imagination, landscape, humanistic geology, phenomenology, perspective

Introduction

J.B. Priestley, in 1930^s began a new career as dramatist, a form of writing many have considered best suited to his great talents. His plays were impeccably crafted, sometimes experimental and are characterized by pre-war-settings and various perspectives on time, they include: "Dangerous Corner", "The Yorkshire Comedy", "When We Are Married", "I Have Been Before", and his most famous play, "An Inspector Calls". Although there have been many studies by geographers on literature and geography he has escaped their attention. He offers opportunities for discoveries in terms of the imagination he can bring to both fictional and non-fictional descriptions and interpretations of landscapes, and by showing how they were meaningful for himself and his characters. His journalism has an imaginative quality that closely resembles the comments and ideas in his novels. Priestley was a writer who had a strong sense of attachment to Bradford and rural West Yorkshire and who was able to write about his experiences from the inside as a journalist, and then to use them to shape those from the outside as an established novelist.

Priestley as a 'Landscape Writer'!!!

Much of his output is related directly or indirectly to landscape although it would be misleading, of course, to claim he was a 'landscape writer'. He made no secret about taking Stamp and Beaver's *Geographic and Economic Survey* with him on his English Journey, which at least shows some awareness by him of academic geography. As a setting for the exploration it is helpful to recognize the sorts of his scene works. These contain the representations of Bradford and the Yorkshire wide open in his paper articles distributed in 1913 and 1919 in which focused and innovative pictures of urban and rustic scenes stick out. He built up his reactions to scene in books distributed during the 1930s,

with accounts identified with the relationship of the modern territories and London, famously alluded to as the North-South Divide. Since he was not a regional writer Priestley could avoid creating an inward-looking identity for West Yorkshire. He used his experiences there as a source of ideas, narratives and examples in different genres. Since Priestley was a popular writer his thoughts on landscape were read widely. His geographical imagination is unusual because he did not abandon the North and continued to write about it. This dividing of his attention between the provinces and London no doubt made his textual landscapes particularly influential since they appealed to both metropolitan and provincial readers. The feelings of his characters in *Angel Pavement*, for example, provide a humanistic dimension to landscape experiences in an economic and social context. In both his descriptions of Bradford and London he engaged with the effects of modernity on landscape experiences.

Methodology

Humanistic geology is supported by phenomenology. For Seamon this implies a method for study which attempts to reveal and portray things and encounters. Phenomenology also involves 'believing, remembering, wishing, deciding and imagining things; feeling apprehensive, excited, or angry... judging and evaluating' ^[1]. It enables writing to be considered as a process of giving form to ideas, meanings, feelings, suggestions and attitudes and as such creates landscapes, not only for the writer, but as a context with which readers can engage and develop through their own responses. Phenomenology is the theoretical framework for this research because it is concerned with landscape experiences as commented on by Priestley and created by him for the characters in his novels. The comprehensive history of developments in geographical thinking relating to

landscape and phenomenology by Wylie ^[2] provides some directions for thinking about Priestley's work. Essentially, phenomenology means rejecting the idea of simply observing and representing landscape from a detached position. Instead landscape is regarded in terms of engagement, interaction and interpretation to form meanings, not simply a scene viewed from a fixed position, for example in relation to particular aesthetic tastes.

Basing this study on phenomenology means that a variety of activities and elements in urban and rural landscapes are relevant in the consideration of Priestley's work ^[3].

Objectives of the Study

The rejection of landscape as simply a view from one location means considering movement and mobility. This idea is relevant not only to journeys but also metaphorically in relation to narratives. Authors in effect take their readers through landscapes between places and over time. Movement as well as accessibility is at the heart of experiencing and engaging directly with landscapes. Landscape can be understood 'as a mobile form of everyday lived practice' ^[4].

Research Hypothesis

How physical landscape, people, activities, uses and differences can be experienced depends on what is accessible and available to be noticed. Access is also related to the visibility of activities and the opportunities to understand and appreciate the ideological and historical formation that landscapes symbolize ^[5].

Analysis & Interpretation

Priestley's writings contribute to cultures of landscape by supporting, criticizing or challenging, for example, the ways Bradford and London were expressions of political, social and economic contexts. Landscapes symbolize particular messages, and this research aims to discover how Priestley contributed to making his interpretation of these meanings understandable for his readers by looking under the surface or by approaching his representations of landscapes from alternative directions.

Wylie ^[6] has summarized a definition of 'cultures of landscape'. For him they refer to everyday landscape activities and 'to the regulatory processes and cultural discourses through which notions of the proper conduct of such practices-in-landscape are elaborated'. These 'regulatory processes' and 'cultural discourses' can be considered in relation to Priestley's work as referring to how attitudes to, for example, provincial and metropolitan landscapes have been regulated by stereotyping and consequently influencing how they are expected to be regarded. For example, within the context of the research, this implies the presentation of provincial decline relative to the superiority and centralization of London, and how and the extent to which Priestley engaged in representing alternative positions.

Matless ^[7] has commented that 'cultures of landscape' refers to the 'ways in which particular sets of practices are seen to generate particular ways of being in the landscape, which thereby becomes the occasion for an intellectual, spiritual and physical citizenship'. The relevance of this definition to the research is simply to find out what issues of citizenship concerned Priestley and motivated him to alert his readers, for example, to the treatment of landscapes by individuals and authorities, and the need for either some form of conservation or the creation of a

better alternative. Landscapes are cultural productions that create identities and then become valued or rejected through change or neglect. Accordingly, there are the issues of encroaching modernities, regeneration and loss of sense of place.

Landscapes are opportunities for personal development and learning, and form the basis of individual geographies. Like all authors, however, Priestley was inevitably writing from a position related to family, education and social background in particular historical periods and landscapes. This does not mean that his skill and creativity was 'to a great extent displaced into the logic of his...social location' ^[8].

Priestley was too imaginative to be constrained as this rather extreme view suggests. What he represented is an expression of his values, interests, motivations and personal history. However, he was not totally free to choose. His novels, articles, non-fiction and other work were produced with regard to what was acceptable to readers and editors within the contemporary literary climate. There is also the issue of the length and purpose of his articles in particular, and the type of language, literary conventions, metaphors and topics that were appropriate. He was also not presenting his thoughts completely independent of their amendment for publication. Writing within such contexts is a version of 'rule governed creativity' rather than a completely independent expression of ideas. My definition of landscape includes exceptional landscapes, such as those with special designations for natural beauty, ecology, architectural conservation, historic importance or urban design, including streets, squares and parks. Everyday landscapes are also included in this definition and in many cases are what Priestley – and his characters – experienced. One definition of 'ordinary landscapes' refers to that continuous surface which we can see all around us...an ensemble which is under continuous creation and alteration as much or more from the unconscious processes of daily living as from calculated landscape design...Ordinary landscapes are a companion of that form of social history which seeks to understand the routine lives of ordinary people...All landscapes are regarded as symbolic, as expressions of cultural values, social behaviour, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time ^[9]. In that capacity the exploration is worried about what Priestley saw as schedules in an ordinary scene setting. As respects esteems, conduct and activities and 'specific areas', they are what Priestley has chipped away at a particular minute to portray Bradford and London. In phenomenology, the totality of what is experienced in regular scenes involves an individual's life world which identifies with the scope of encounters and their spatial degree. An actual existence world is in this way a scene where to live, either physically or through memory. It is a critical idea since it relates straightforwardly to Priestley's life in Bradford in his initial years and the development of an association with nearby scenes as he moved around. The exploration, as a result, shows what Priestley viewed as his initial life world as an affirmation of his connection to Bradford and the Yorkshire open country. This includes distinguishing models from encounters in his day by day life. Their importance was a designing, a juxtaposition of encounters and memories. In this regard the examination doesn't offer unmistakable quality to what can be seen and disregard the experience of scene utilizing different faculties and memory. Landscapes are essentially physical and social settings, encounters and networks. Accordingly landscapes comprise

buildings, streets, squares and rural spaces – including their qualities and character – which are the settings for the activities of everyday life ^[10].

‘Landscape’ extends from urban landscapes to remote wilderness. Between these extremes are industrial landscapes and those which are really neither completely urban nor rural, such as suburbia, urban sprawl and the countryside on the edge of towns. The experience of all these landscapes contributes to shaping realities, knowledge and behaviours. Landscapes become charged with meanings, attitudes and personal feelings, and are consequently valued and the focus of attachment. The meanings that develop through experience become nostalgia as a result of the passage of time. Landscapes give form to memories. Meanings become attitudes that value or challenge what has been experienced.

Priestley’s fictional and non-fictional work is itself a distinct textual landscape that was shaped by his imaginative use of narrative, figurative language, literary strategies and realism. Priestley was responding to landscapes but he was really creating them through his work. His landscapes were given form through descriptions, interpretations and evaluations, which are either internalized or communicated for a purpose. For example, literary texts can present and promote landscapes in different ways for personal and political reasons. Priestley created narratives not only within his novels but also in his journalism. In 1913, and then during 1919, he in effect presented a story of his responses to landscapes, places, issues and events in and around Bradford. Similarly his London novels bear a strong relationship with the metropolitan landscapes that existed. They are also textual geographies which comprise places, districts, buildings and streets which he allowed his characters to use for fictional reasons. His journalism and novels can also be seen as part of grander geo-historical narratives. Although the early journalism only extends over a very short period of time, it forms part of grand narratives concerned with the growth and decline of the industrial provinces and those organized nationally around the First World War. Both the early journalism and the novels also form part of the narrative of the North-South Divide associated with the stereotyping of industrial cities relative to London in the national consciousness. It is also possible to see the early writings and London novels, for example, as part of a network of non-fiction, journalism, official and academic reports that together are essential for creating a more extensive geography based on different types of texts. The significance of Priestley’s work is that he provides pieces for this jig-saw. ‘Individuality as a writer depends on literary strategies to form narratives which combine intertextuality, argument, political positions, plot and setting’ ^[11].

Findings of the Study:

The core of this research is how the origin of Priestley’s sense of dwelling was maintained and developed through distinct phases of his work and how he interpreted provincial and London settings. My argument is that this process was contextualized in terms of what shaped it and how later writings have been influenced. Narratives are not simply expressions of change over time but become increasingly spatial, since they relate to different places, districts, towns and areas of countryside within and outside the text. As Priestley’s narrative builds up following the early journalism we can see its spatial extent relating to a story

about much of England. Within Bradford and London his writing has a spatial extent which has its own distinctiveness through combining different landscapes.

This research is in effect of a narration of Priestley’s words, a response by me which is concerned with recognizing patterns and relationships within a context. Hones has proposed a particular and explicitly spatial view of text that understands the writing-reading nexus as a contextualized and always emerging event. She added that ‘interpretations are...produced in relation to at least two geographies, the first being the geography of the initial text event, and the second being the geography of the context in which the reader’s experience of that event is later narrated’¹².

The writings in this research are more or less fictionalized and did not have an overt geographical or historical purpose to understand landscapes. For this reason the research does not look to Priestley as a convenient source of geographical facts from which to construct historical topographies. Although he was a significant commentator on places and landscapes, he was concerned less with recording and more with interpreting for political purposes as a journalist, to develop a geographical message in his London novels, to interpret nostalgia in *Bright Day*, and to draw attention to change in the documentary film *Lost City*. Priestley’s fictional and non-fictional work also relates to a form of provincial-metropolitan integration within his literary representation.

Priestley has provided a source of ideas and information for looking at landscapes and places across the passage of time, rather than the direction for searching for the authority of the text. However, I contend that Priestley’s imaginative use of landscapes should not be isolated from what it says about those which can be accessed in reality. It is not my aim, however, to see Priestley’s work as a guide to Bradford or London. Naming places on the moors, for example, would have made his descriptions read like extracts from a guidebook. When a writer has avoided naming specific places the descriptions can be more personalized, thereby emphasizing his or her moods and feelings. However, by naming, literary writing complements other geographical media. For example, we can read about what that narrow street on a map was like to walk along or what it was possible to see looking along the Thames. Priestley was not isolated from the local literary environment, which comprised a variety of writers, and was a friend of James Mackereth ^[13].

Suggestions of the Study

Richard Pendlebury, an English teacher at Belle Vue, no doubt introduced him to the tradition of the writers of fiction with rural settings. The most distinguished writers who had lived in the vicinity of Bradford were, of course, the Bronte sisters. Crehan pointed to Emily Bronte’s purposeful concern for isolation, her attachment to home and the moors, freedom, and the representation of landscape distinctiveness, which all point towards a relationship with landscape of which Priestley would have been aware. It has not been possible, however, to confirm whether Priestley studied geography while at Belle Vue to complement these literary contacts, nor if the lessons included the awareness of local urban and rural landscapes. There is, however, evidence of local geography being taught at another higher grade school (Hanson) relating to the layout of Bradford and the orientation of the pupils travelling around the City ^[14].

Literature Review

Education and leisure were brought together as a result of Jonathon Priestley's interests in archaeology and botany, which no doubt contributed to Jack's experiences of rural landscape on their hikes into Airedale and Wharfedale ^[15].

The Good Companions was published after two years of *Adam in Moonshine*. Although the novels are very different they share descriptions of the Pennine landscape and to some extent are complementary in relation to rural and urban landscapes in Yorkshire. The panorama at the opening of *The Good Companions* is a most evocative encapsulation of Priestley's attachment to Bradford and its setting in the wild Pennine landscape.

The first third of *They Walk in the City* is set in a fictionalized Bradford, which Priestley called Haliford. Edward Fielding, one of the two fundamental characters, has a solid likeness to Priestley, which he reaffirmed with the portrayal of the fields that Nelson viewed as 'a personal touch'. Basically the novel is about the complexities in urban life among London and the modern areas.

In *Bright Day*, which was first published in 1946, Priestley was affirming, developing and interpreting the meaning of memory by exploring its literary potential through the experience of a young writer, Gregory Dawson. The novel is about the past meeting the present, and provided an opportunity to access a city redolent with memories and to develop their literary potential. Priestley has given form to the effects of time on the human consciousness. Nelson has noted the 'vivid and moving evocation of a particular place and period and of the gradual disintegration of a seemingly euphoric existence' ^[16].

'The Swan Arcadian' is particularly important since it provides a context for the writings published before the First World War. It can be read almost as a compendium of *Bradford Pioneer* articles that Priestley did not have time to write in 1913. He not only defined his attachment but also re-engaged with the issue of provincial identity and the relationship of Bradford and London. He referred to 'a kind of regional self-sufficiency, not defying London but genuinely indifferent to it' ^[17].

"Angel Pavement" is also milestone writing of Priestley and it clearly marks an important stage in Priestley's writing career and is an essential source for discovering how he related to London, although this was represented in fiction and was obviously linked to his concern about remaining a popular novelist. It is obvious from the principal pages of the novel that he needed to find his characters in metropolitan scenes that he had not just seen in detail however which he needed to speak to innovatively and with feeling. Priestley was a shrewd and cunning writer who obtained point by point information on London, not just an eager common inquirer with just a shallow attention to its praised spots and visitor scenes. I believe he would not have wanted, for commercial and literary reasons, to write openly as if he were a resentful, provincial author, thereby putting himself in the awkward position of being negative about what many considered to be the World's greatest city. He had moved to London so he could foster his writing career by developing a network of literary contacts such as J.C. Squire and John Lane, whom he acknowledged in 'I had the time'²¹, the last section of *Margin Released*.

The possibility of alienating his metropolitan readers – by the overt championing of the North – was an unacceptable direction

in which to go. To have done so would have seemed that he was simply a regional novelist writing in exile in London. Writing about landscapes and places essentially identify his existential belonging to Bradford as his home town in terms of its significance, symbolism and memories. All the writings I have considered share the purpose of demonstrating how directly and indirectly, Bradford and the Yorkshire countryside were continuing and essential elements in his life, literary development and achievements. Bradford was not, however, the only place for which he developed strong attachments. His sense of existential belonging was no doubt intensified by contact with other places such as the Isle of Wight ^[18].

Conclusion

In his early writings Priestley clearly demonstrated that it was his purpose to draw attention to those places which were important to him for different reasons. Some places appear, however, to be valued less for their personal meanings or interest and more because they are associated with significant local issues. Significantly, however, he was not constrained by prioritizing the presentation of provincial landscapes, as he would have been as a regional writer. The places and landscapes considered in this study are mainly urban and are related to central areas and inner residential districts. He was not particularly concerned with suburban landscapes and their expansion into the countryside.

What Priestley has written about real places and landscapes – whether they have been described with fictional names or not – is central to the connection of his work with contemporary cultural geography. His detail, imagination and insights provide a degree of clarity which is relevant for some future theoretical discussions, which in the past have had a tendency to be rather opaque and abstract. He was writing as an observer, not a theoretician, to produce work which is related directly to people's lives and experience.

Since Priestley's landscapes and places are expressions of his feelings, sensory responses and sensibilities, he can be compared to writers associated with Romanticism. Although Priestley was not a poet, he aspired to be one early in his career and a poetical quality is evident in his later work. Of special significance in the particular context of Romanticism, however, is the potential for exploring the issue of the Romantic discourse of the self and nature involving male perspectives, and in the case of both Priestley and Hoskins their position in the English middle class. This approach to Romanticism also provides a bridge with cultural geography in terms of the assessment and appraisal of Priestley's work in relation to discourses concerned with the experiences of those who are without the opportunities or the ability to express themselves like him.

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