

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## Introduction: Collaborations in Literary Geography

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In the autumn of 2018, as the days began to lengthen and thoughts turned to the new (European) academic year, a group of geographers, literary scholars and creative practitioners gathered again in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, to discuss current thinking and future directions in literary geography. Recognising that there are and continue to be ‘many different ways in which the field is and has been defined’ (Hones et. al. 2015: 1), the roundtable conference took as its theme ‘collaboration in the theory and practice of literary geography’. The three Thinking Space pieces that follow from this introduction, the first of two collections of Thinking Space pieces to emerge from the Cambridge conference, provide a small but representative sample of the productive thinking and discussions which took place there, both within the space of the roundtable itself and on the margins. Here, I will briefly discuss the ways in which the conference participants worked together to define and to practice collaboration in literary geography before providing an overview of the Thinking Space pieces and their own points of connection.

Collaboration in its many guises has been a cornerstone of the current wave of literary geographies which has emerged in the past two decades. Many of the attempts to define and describe interdisciplinary literary geography have emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts in driving it forward. Writing in these pages, in the journal’s first issue, Neal Alexander cites geographers’ increasingly sophisticated textual readings, alongside literary studies scholars’ engagement with geographical theory, as evidence that literary geography is ‘moving decisively in the direction of more thoroughly interdisciplinary and collaborative research’ (Alexander 2015: 4). In their first editorial in these pages, introducing interdisciplinary literary geography and its aims, Hones et. al. argue that collaboration and connection between texts

and academic work is fundamental to the practice of literary geography: they define it as ‘not just reading while making connections between geography and literature, but also making connections while reading scholarly work in geography and literary studies, work that may not be defined as literary geography but which nonetheless can be productively read in such a way’ (Hones et. al. 2015: 2).

Perhaps the most memorable image of interdisciplinary literary geography as a collaborative activity comes from Sheila Hones’s *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in ‘Let the Great World Spin’*. Drawing on the ‘pivotal event’ in Colum McCann’s novel, Philippe Petit’s 1974 sidewalk between the two towers of the newly-completed World Trade Centre complex, Hones presents interdisciplinary literary geography as its own balancing act between human geography and literary studies. Underscoring the potential pitfalls that collaboration across disciplines can bring to literary geographers, Hones writes that ‘a work located between these two disciplines [geography and literary studies] has to pay close attention to the academic version of what for Petit were his “cavaletti” - his anchor ropes. Further, just as Petit was challenged by destabilising gusts, updrafts, and downdrafts, studies in interdisciplinary literary geography will inevitably have some difficulty maintaining their balance on the crosswinds of literary and spatial theory’ (Hones 2014: 8).

The discussions which unfolded at the 2018 Cambridge literary geography roundtable conference considered collaboration in literary geography in three ways. First, collaboration between researchers. Participants discussed the current expectations in higher education for research that cuts across disciplinary boundaries. Despite one or two comments on the decline of the ‘Renaissance scholar’, it was generally agreed that trying to work across boundaries as a lone researcher was not the best way to forge disciplinary collaborations. In the first instance, applying methodologies or theories from other disciplines to one’s own research, whilst undoubtedly a productive endeavour, was regarded by participants as ‘just borrowing’ and unlikely to foster what was considered to be genuine collaboration. Such borrowing is also potentially hampered by the often rigid disciplinary boundaries thrown up around funding applications, jobs and teaching - roles in which researchers must still define themselves within disciplinary boundaries, rather than working across them. Furthermore, it was suggested that different disciplines and fields have different ways of approaching similar problems and different notions of rigour and methodology - all of which can potentially frustrate the researcher who plans to work on their own across disciplines. To counteract these potential pitfalls, participants recommended genuinely collaborative work, particularly research involving two or more researchers from different fields and disciplines, coming together around a broad problem or theme that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Such collaboration would involve researchers bringing their own understandings of methodologies, processes, rigour and techniques to bear - and to share - on the problem at hand. It was noted during the discussion that such collaborative work needs new kinds of writing to address its outcomes. This new writing, which would overcome the latent tendency of arts, humanities and social science researchers to write on their own, would need to be rooted in long conversations between colleagues, aiming to develop collaborative ways of thinking and expressing new ideas and findings.

The second type of collaboration discussed was that between teachers and students. Participants began by sharing their experiences of including students in classroom or university-wide activities to create or shape educational curricula. Beyond the work taking place in universities in Britain, Australia and Mexico to include students in higher-level decisions to shape curricula, particularly in this era when decolonising curricula is so important, participants shared their experiences of bringing students into the process of co-planning lessons and modules. This is an innovative teaching technique wherein, at the beginning of the year, term or semester, the teacher presents the students with a blank model guide and works with their students to fill it in, based on student's own reading, expectations and current knowledges. It was agreed that such an open and collaborative process does allow students a say in what they learn, when and how. However, the process depends on everyone turning up and taking part; participants' experiences suggest that this process can breed anxiety among many students; and in an era of high price tags for higher education, such an open and undirected learning experience might seem like 'short change' for many. Another, more common, type of collaboration with students involved fieldwork or other hands-on activities, to encourage students to participate in their own learning. Conference participants' own experiences of such activities - from coaxing students at a Japanese university to discover and document potential sites for ghost stories around the campus, to taking communications students in Melbourne on a psychogeographical tour of the city - provided anecdotal evidence of how varied students' collaborations can be. The psychogeographical tour of Melbourne, for instance, highlighted how different disciplines' different ways of approaching research problems and methodologies demand new approaches to make interdisciplinary collaborations effective. Since the course included students from many different backgrounds, teachers found it was necessary to redefine the experience for communications students as 'literary field studies', redefining the activity in a language that they would understand in order to embolden them to participate.

The conference discussed a third type of collaboration under the label 'public literary geography'. This concept was raised by one participant as a means of rising to the challenge of ensuring that geography studies in general, and literary geography in particular, can remain relevant and legitimate in an age of greater public scrutiny of university research and budgets. Two main paths for ensuring a public face for literary geography were proposed: first, an open access journal that would break down the barriers between research and the public; secondly, through deliberate collaborations with groups outside the academy. This discussion was framed by the question 'where are the places for public literary geography'. It was noted that historians can meet the public through local history - where can literary geographers have similar influence and engagement? Some participants suggested the positive role of literary festivals and art exhibitions as routes for literary geographers to extend their research and influence and impact out into the world. Others commented on the value that literary geographers can provide to institutions such as tourism providers. As one participant put it, literary geography can collaborate in the 'co-construction of knowledge, the conceiving of places and their immaterial heritages'. The discussion ended with a call for greater collaboration between literary geographers and civil society groups in public engagement -

and for universities to put as much store by public engagement and public education as they currently do by research and teaching.

Out of this discussion a number of position papers, ideas and suggestions for the interdiscipline's forward movement have emerged. In this issue we present three of these as Thinking Space articles. More will follow in later issues. Each of these Thinking Space article addresses its own collaborative and research-led concerns. Yet, in doing so, they all touch on similar themes and ideas that demonstrate points of connection and collaborative work for literary geographies into the future. The first Thinking Space article, Deborah Snow Molloy's 'Collaborative Embodiment', traces the word 'embodiment' as it appears across different disciplines to better understand the similarities and points of collaboration between them. Reading across literature, geography and bodily matters, Molloy teases out the different ways in which 'embodiment' has been imagined in these three arenas: as subjectivity of experience; as experience being in the world; and bodies as physical entities respectively. By tracing how these three conceptions play out in literary geographies, in human geographies and in literary feminism, Molloy argues that a shared focus on embodiment provides more space for collaborative effort than is currently realised. She writes that: 'As social scientists engage with more ephemeral aspects of bodily experience, they are turning to the poetic language of literature for the means to discuss unmeasurable subjectivities such as pain, grief or mental distress, but there is scope for much greater collaboration' (Molloy 2019: 9). For Molloy, this collaboration is rooted in enriching literary geographies' understanding of embodiment in literary enquiry, to 'shed new light on how we understand literary texts' (9).

Sara Luchetta and Juha Ridanpää's Thinking Space article on the 'More than representational lives of literary maps' looks back at a recent history of collaborative discussions around mapping and more-than-representational thinking in cultural geography to present five avenues for future research into the lives of literary mappings. They draw on the premises of non-representational theory, that geographers should pay attention to the liveliness and performativity of space, to the flow of events and the spaces of the now; and they emphasise the inherent instability of space - that it is complicated, multidimensional and always in motion. They argue that mappings have a vital role to play in this understanding of space as a multi-relational happening - particularly since collaborative research in cartography, particularly that of Kitchin and Dodge (2007) and Del Casino and Hanna (2005), has emphasised that we should think of maps not as things but as processes - as *mappings* - and that analyses of mappings need 'to go beyond the representation/practice binary' to include both aspects of this technology in its relations with space (Luchetta and Ridanpää 2019: 13). The five foci of more-than-representational mapping that Luchetta and Ridanpää present here are inspired by literary cartography's recent work on reader-generated mapping, a process that is borne of the inherently collaborative event of reading and was launched into the literary geographical consciousness by a piece of collaborative research - David Cooper and Gary Priestnall's 'The Processual Intertextuality of Literary Cartographies: Critical and Digital Practices' (2011). As Luchetta and Ridanpää argue here, to gain a full understanding of the various roles that reader-generated literary mappings play in the production of different kinds of spatial events - as connectors between different ways of seeing the world, as guides to a

spatial reading of the text, as rousers of emotion and tellers of stories, and as connectors between fictional spaces and actual world spaces - we must pay attention to the various ways in which these mappings collaborate with forces outside of themselves.

The third Thinking Space article in this issue is James Thurgill and Jane Lovell's 'Expanding Worlds: Place and collaboration in (and after) the "text-as-spatial-event"'. Here, Thurgill and Lovell explore the entanglement of actual and fictional places and their co-construction as effects of the spatial event of fiction. They describe something called the 'oscillation of affect' - just as actual-world places play a role in the interrelations between readers, texts and readers' experiences and memories in the making of fictional places, so these actual-world places 'can come to be seen as displaying the affective properties of the text itself' (Thurgill and Lovell 2019: 16-7). From this point, the authors go on to argue that 'this shifting of affect from shaping literary to actual-world experiences may even prompt some readers to locate extra-literary experiences in actual-world places not associated with the novel but which *feel* like they share the same affective environment' (17.). Their Thinking Space article works through the foundations and the implications of this proposition, particularly the importance of the 'extra-textual' dimension of literary space - the spatial dimension in which fictions are written, published and disseminated, but also where readers encounter texts themselves. They argue that the extra-textual space of fiction, '[t]his lived-cache of geographical experiences connecting readers to a world of referent towns, villages, cities, forests, beaches, marshes, car parks, offices, waiting rooms, shops, classrooms, train stations, airports and so on, is part of what informs the reader's comprehension of a text's space - be it actual-world or imaginary' (18). It is in recognising the importance of extra-textual space to readers' encounters with texts and their encounters with places, that we can better understand what Thurgill and Lovell call 'the affective nature of place - those conditions which form "[t]he lived sensation, the feel, and emotional resonance of place"' (Duff 2010: 881)' (18).

Across all three of these Thinking Space articles, the same ideas are expressed in new ways: first, that literary geography, as a collaborative interdisciplinary, has a central role to play in shaping how other disciplines, including human geography more broadly, conceive of and engage with new and existing concepts, methodologies and analytical tools. Secondly, that literary geography itself is an inherently collaborative exercise - that its place on the high wires strung between different, perhaps more recognised, disciplinary traditions gives it the ability to bring people and ideas and methods together to tackle problems or generate new concepts that cross disciplinary divides. Thirdly, as each of the Thinking Space articles here demonstrates, literary geography is well positioned to draw fruitfully from collaborative research enterprises, whether between academics working together on telling a history or analysing a problem, or by academics drawing on collaborative works already underway to approach new problems from new angles.

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