

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Conversations: Introduction

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The plural title *Literary Geographies* was chosen for this journal when it launched in 2015 because it had become evident at the first meeting of the founding editors that there was more than one literary geography in the room. From the beginning, the journal was envisioned as a venue that would enable conversations between various distinct forms of literary geography: a journal of literary geographies as they were framed, defined, practiced, and theorised differently in relation to different academic traditions and assumptions. The idea has always been that the plural form of the journal's title refers to a contingent collaborative project rather than a field or a specialization.

The fourteen essays featured in this issue develop this project with a wide-ranging literary-geographical conversation. The first two essays bring new voices and perspectives to ongoing conversations: Felicitas Kuebler and Matthias Naumann connect their work on the political and literary geographies of far-right violence with Laurie McRae Andrew's 2018 essay, 'Towards a Political Literary Geography,' while Daniel Runnel puts Lacey Schauwecker's 2020

essay 'Isolation and Intimacy in the Sonoran Desert: A Migrant's Account' in conversation with Raquel Gutiérrez's 2022 collection of essays *Brown Neon* as part of his engagement with the problem of 'looking at the border wall.' Mon Madomitsu then continues the work he started in his 2023 essay on literary geography and political science, opening a new conversation between aesthetics, geopolitics, and literary geography with this issue's discussion of geopolitical essentialism.

In his essay on 'crossover conversations' in the detective novels of Italian writer Gabriella Genisi, Nicola Gabellieri pulls together ongoing literary geographical themes of intertextuality, detective fiction, and the textual construction of Mediterranean Noir. Carolien Fornasarai takes work on the depiction and reception of intra- and extra-textual televisual geographies beyond the representation of place through visual settings with a reading of embodied non-verbal forms of communication in the televised period drama *Peaky Blinders*.

The issue then takes a turn from the non-verbal to the epistolary, with Tulika Banik and Rajarshi Mitra's reading of the early twentieth-century letters of Bengali scholar Sukumar Ray. Translated and published in 1987 during his birth centenary, these letters provide Banik and Mitra with the opportunity to discuss scholarly emotions, spaces, distances, and conversations in an essay which includes their own exchange of letters. Taking the intersection of letter-writing and literary geography in a very different direction, Gene Slepov focuses on the ways in which the epistolary form of Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* (1748) enables its complex textual geography of proximity and distance.

The focus on literary-geographical readings of fiction continues with Nicole Dib's essay on Hernan Diaz's novel *In the Distance* (2017), which also further develops the ongoing conversation between theory and practice in literary geography and in spatial literary studies, Dib works with the formal characteristics of the text's 'burrowing chapters' in order to explore the link between subterranean caves and scenes of anti-conversation. Tom Muir's essay also works with two genres of conversation. In taking up Derrida's 'visor effect' as a way of reading John Stow's *Survey of London* and Zadie Smith's *NW* in conversation, Muir also initiates a conversation between the visor effect and the literary-geographical concept of interspatiality. A third conceptually productive conversational opportunity for literary geography is suggested by Seth Horton in his application of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'minor' to a re-reading of Suzan-Lori Parks's novel, *Getting Mother's Body*. Showing how the novel places African American literature in dialogue with other literary representations of the geography of the American Southwest, Horton shows how 'minor' characters and regions can accomplish mutual redefinition.

The next two essays form something of a conversation in themselves, as Daniel Finch-Race and Emiliano Guaraldo contribute a pair of essays about the 2023 exhibition held at the Prada Foundation in Venice, *Everybody Talks about the Weather*, both focusing in particular on the placement of forty-odd textual fragments in Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann's contribution *How Does the World End (for Others)?* For Guaraldo, the unique spatio-literary concept of this installation was particularly striking when experienced within the Venetian lagoon. In his own 'conversational-style analysis,' Finch-Race links his discussion to Guaraldo's description of the way in which Geissler and Sann place 'divergent narratives in conversation, allowing for a

multiplicity of emergent meanings' as well as to ongoing conversations in this journal on critical worldbuilding.

Both of the concluding essays in this issue deal specifically with the difficulties and responsibilities of conversational practice. First, James Thurgill considers the ethics as well as the responsibilities that accompany literary geography's engagements with temporally and spatially 'distant' texts and spectral networks of 'absent writers and distant voices.' Finally, Richard Carter-White explores the theme of conversation as it relates to the literary genre of survivor testimony, reflecting on the conversational dynamics of AI-driven interactive digital witnessing as they relate to the distance and uncertainty that underpin testimony as a genre.

The collaborative process of moving these fourteen essays from initial inquiries made in response to our CFP through to publication has itself been fully conversational. The copyediting stage for this issue, for example, generated a series of conversations about details of phrasing, including (for example) that of Carter-White's suggestion that it 'could even be said that testimony is propelled by conversation, but by the strangeness of conversance, the converse of estrangement.' In the course of author-editor conversation, Carter-White explained that he was trying to get at two points:

. . . that, on the one hand, testimony is often characterised by a failure to communicate . . . this is what I mean by the 'strangeness of conversance' . . . but on the other hand, this failure is what makes of communication an ongoing project and not a closed case – it is something to continue striving for, a reaching-toward that never ends – which is what I mean by the 'converse of estrangement' (the converse [opposite] of being finished with, indifferent etc to someone).

In the course of this author/editor conversation, the justification for the paragraph's convoluted structure became evident: 'because the sentence is enigmatic . . . it requires labour of the reader to engage in a conversation with it if it is going to have any chance of making sense, and even if the reader is generous enough to do that nothing is guaranteed, it might all collapse . . . and that is what means the conversation is ongoing.' (Carter-White, personal correspondence 2024). *Literary Geographies*, as a plural conversation, is itself a form of 'striving for' and 'reaching-toward,' an ongoing project powered by participant generosity. Marking the end of the journal's first decade, the wide-ranging and generously-engaged essays in this twentieth issue invite their readers to enter into and extend the conversation.