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Introduction: Peripherality and Literary Urban Studies
Lieven Ameel, Jason Finch and Markku Salmela

The city in literary studies: centrality and peripherality

The city has always occupied a special position amongst literary spaces. From the very earliest surviving literary texts, city images appear in all their contradictory complexity: as nodes of creative and destructive energy; as beacons of utopian possibility and of moral warning. In their literary emanations, cities tend to be understood through the notions of centrality and density, in implicit contrast to a (suburban, rural, colonial) hinterland or periphery. As urban sprawl and the implosion of post-industrial cities have shown, a sense of peripheral urbanity may, however, be as essential to contemporary urban centres. At the same time, some of the most interesting urban phenomena are being acted out in what was formerly considered the periphery: in Europe, redeveloping harbour areas; in China and in developing countries, megacities arising in regions that until recently were barely urbanized. Literary urban studies, with its traditional focus on the imposing capitals of modernity and postmodernity, has so far remained underdeveloped in its engagement with these new developments. In much of the scholarly research on city literature, cities that are below the radar of Western metropolises and their canonized literature have remained largely out of sight. So has the extent to which all cities are also defined by a profound sense of peripherality. The present volume aims to fill the gap.

There is a long history of studying the city in literature, much of it concerned with the focal cities of modernism and its various successors, and with the notion of the city as a centripetal, magnetic force. From Volker Klotz’s seminal work *Die ezählte Stadt* (1969) (“The narrated city”) onwards, several of the diachronic studies narrating the development of urban images in literature have been distinguished by a focus
on the capital cities of modernity and postmodernity, to the detriment of more peripheral cities. Concomitant with this emphasis on capital cities we find, not surprisingly, an interest in the canonized novels of Western literature. Klotz starts his outline of the narrated city with the Madrid (and imagined Paris) of Alain-René Lesage, and he ends with the St Petersburg of Andrei Bely, the New York of John Dos Passos, and the Berlin of Alfred Döblin. In Richard Lehan’s influential *The City in Literature* (1998), Rome, London and New York are writ large. In Robert Alter’s *Imagined Cities* (2005), we find again a strong emphasis on the well-established capitals of modernity and postmodernity: Gustave Flaubert’s Paris; the London of Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf. Two somewhat more peripheral cities feature also prominently in Alter’s study: James Joyce’s Dublin and Franz Kafka’s Prague. But these two cities can hardly be called peripheral in the context of literary urbanity: thanks to Joyce and Kafka’s treatments of them, they have become central showpieces of modernist urban literary setting. The example of Prague and Dublin illustrates how relative the concept of “peripherality” is in speaking of cities and their representations.

Cities such as Dublin and Prague, as well as cities that function as regional metropolises (e.g. Stockholm, Santiago de Chile, Johannesburg), and capitals of countries that are not the largest or most culturally prominent from a Western perspective, can all be understood as peripheral in a global context. Yet to think of them in this way is always to think in relation to a perceived centre which is elsewhere: it is always only a way of metaphorizing spatial relations. Such cities are not peripheral in any absolute or factual sense. Indeed, in several novels discussed in this volume, cities such as these are characterized by their dynamic nature as both supra-regional centre and global periphery. Within Scandinavian literature, Stockholm, for example, has a central, even metropolitan position, but for a writer such as August Strindberg (Selboe, below), the Swedish capital occupies a distinct periphery in relation to the European cultural mainstream.

In several studies of the literary city, there is not only a focus on a small number of capital cities in the Western world, but also an emphasis on the notion that the city is defined by its quality of *centrality*, and on aspects of the city’s centralizing and accumulative powers. The city has for long been seen as a spatial symbol of central and centralizing forces (see Kostof), from the imperial capitals of antiquity and nineteenth-century Europe, to the cities of industrialization, fed by uprooted rural populations. Several nineteenth-century novels, for example, can be
seen as describing the growth of nation states and the rise of centralizing systems run by national capitals, through the journeys of young men or women from the provinces to the capital (see Moretti 11–74). Such centripetal images of canonized European capitals have become firmly established archetypes in city literature and its study.

In the course of the last half-century, urban literary studies has brought into being an impressive apparatus with which to examine canonized literary capitals, as well as the notion of centralizing power that emanates from them. Literary Paris, to name but one of the most obvious classical literary capitals, has been the object of several extensive examinations, such as those carried out by Pierre Citron, and by Karlheinz Stierle. There is a Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Paris, and companion volumes on New York, Los Angeles and London (Manley; McNamara; Milne; Patell and Waterman). There are literary atlases and guides to London and St Petersburg (see e.g. Glinert; Blair), two cities with a particularly distinguished record in urban literary studies (on St Petersburg, see also Huttunen and Pesonen). Indeed, these imposing capitals of the literary imagination have provided most of the specific examples for the generic phrase “the city” in literary studies. They have also generated an arguably disproportionate attention amongst scholars of the literary city: literary London, for example, boasts its very own academic journal, the Literary London Journal. But work produced in such a framework risks losing perspective. This can manifest itself in a failure to understand one enormous city in relation to others of different sizes and a tendency to treat the one city as if it were a world in itself, self-sufficient and self-serving. The idea of a city as *imago mundi*, the image of the whole world, may be a commonplace in city literature, but it could best be treated with suspicion by scholars of the literary city.

Most, if not all of the above studies of the literary city have pointed out the crucial relevance of genre and period conventions in shaping urban experiences in literature. Several monographs have been devoted to examining the link between city experiences in literature and the period and genre conventions in which they are steeped. Examples include Nicholas Freeman’s *Conceiving the City*, on turn-of-the-twentieth-century London, Lawrence Phillips’s collection on Victorian and Edwardian London and Christophe Den Tandt’s *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*. But scholarship often assumes that genre and period conventions are most clearly visible in central cities and a few privileged national literatures, and can then be “exported” wholesale to more
marginal and peripheral cities. Work on modernist studies as it appears in a journal like *Modernism/Modernity*, for example, certainly explores the manifestations of modernism in cities from Tokyo to Tbilisi (Chikhradze; Weisenfeld), but rarely questions the secondary or subaltern status of these cities in relation to the supposed global capitals of modernism, Paris and New York. The same is true for literary tradition, in which Zola’s naturalist Paris is made prior to and foundational for parallel accounts of northern European cities, or, say, Latin American cities. A fuller examination of the relationship between literature and urban peripherality will reveal the limitations of such an approach. Cities commonly understood as peripheral need to be addressed comparatively but also in their own right, in the contexts of their own national and regional literatures.

Thematically structured studies of the city have tended to be more attuned to the importance of literary cities that are off the beaten track than surveys or diachronic work, and also, more generally speaking, to peripheral spaces within cities. Several examinations of the urban experience in American literature have offered insightful contributions to our understanding of urban peripheralities and (relatively, and from a global perspective) peripheral cities, such as Boston and Chicago (Jaye and Watts; Rotella). Thematically structured volumes such as *After-Images of the City* (Resina and Ingescay) and *Babylon or New Jerusalem?* (Tinkler-Villani) present intriguing readings in relation to peripheral and medium-sized cities, the likes of Barcelona (Resina) and Belfast (Tigges). Similarly, the volumes *The Urban Condition* and *Post Ex Sub Dis* by the Ghent Urban Studies Team have drawn attention to the fragmentation, decentralization and discontinuities in the contemporary urban condition and its literature. The last decade has seen a number of thought-provoking studies of Northern European capitals such as Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm, that for long have been somewhat peripheral to the grand tradition of urban literary studies (see e.g. Borg; Klok; Ameel). An interesting volume from the point of view of the present collection of articles is *Cities on the Margin: On the Margin of Cities* (Laplace and Tabuteau), which focuses on contemporary Irish and British fiction. More recent, geocritical examinations of literary spaces, such as Robert Tally’s edited volumes *Geocritical Explorations* and *Literary Cartographies*, have further put into perspective conventional, Eurocentric views of the centrality of a small number of canonized literary cities. What appears from these new insights is a growing perception of urban peripherality as crucial to the understanding of cities and their literature.
Urban peripherality

The idea that the city must be defined first and foremost by its characteristic of *centrality* has been expounded by Henri Lefebvre in one of his many influential essays on the city (116–17). Lefebvre claims that there “can be no city or urban reality without a centre” (96). As a Marxist, Lefebvre considers the notion of centrality indispensable if the workings of power structures upon the urban fabric are to be understood, and hence contested. And yet to us it would seem that the city is defined by *peripherality* as much as by the aspect of *centrality*.

One alternative way of understanding what could be called the centrality of peripherality would be via the place philosophy of Jeff Malpas. Reading Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Malpas distinguishes two notions of the edge or limit (Greek *peras*: the etymological origin of the peripheries under consideration here) of some place (84). These are first limit as origin, something’s determining nature (what makes it *it* and not something else), and second limit as terminus, merely the point in space at which something stops. Malpas relates these to the negative and positive senses of limit posited in Kant’s *Prologomena*. This is part of Malpas’s broader project to develop a place philosophy, or a topology, based on notions like interaction, interdependence, multiple unity and equiprimordiality (89). In the last of these, the unity of somewhere and the variety of its individual parts are of equal importance in its being. Potentially, Malpas’s philosophical topology offers literary scholars concerned with place a theoretical underpinning that casts light on cities across the world and the peripheries of cities of many sizes in a way that Lefebvre, almost by necessity, cannot.

The relationship between multitudinous urban experiences and the concept of peripherality can now be stated. For one thing, reading Malpas, the fact that the city’s own self and its others, neighbours and components are connected rather than in any absolute way divided comes into focus. This chimes with the interest shown by the contributors to this book in the fact that urban peripheries are simultaneously real and imagined, and with the relative magnitude of one city or another as a matter of human perception rather than absolute fact. Moreover, the urban “centrality” Lefebvre deems so crucial does not, in fact, exclude notions of the peripheral. On the contrary, it posits the possibility, or even the inevitability, of reactions and counter-actions, the kinds of “tactics” Michel de Certeau saw at work in urban citizens’ everyday activities vis-à-vis the overpowering “strategies” of capitalist society (29–42).
While several studies of the literary city have foregrounded the city’s accumulating and centralizing symbolical powers, this does not mean to say that they have not, at least on an implicit level, acknowledged the importance of urban peripherality. Urban peripherality, the never-ending procession of uncanny, disturbing and strangely familiar figures out of the corners of one’s eyes in the city streets, the palimpsestic set of disorientating experiences erupting from the margins of the city, is what defines, to a considerable extent, urban literature. In literary urban studies, the importance of urban peripherality is often approached through the conflict between totalizing, panoptic forces and the contesting, ground-level tactics of marginalized groups that is so eloquently described in the opening pages of Michel de Certeau’s “Walking in the City” (91–5). Christopher Prendergast (210–11), for example, draws extensively on de Certeau’s thinking in his treatment of the difference between the panoramic view and the walker’s perspective in nineteenth-century literary Paris. Richard Lehan sees a similar conflict at work in literary fiction of the city. This, in his view, was the chronically unresolved friction between the opposing poles of Enlightenment ideas – corroborated by Christianity, linear thinking, and the power of reason – and on the other hand a Dionysian will to power, grounded in mythological and cyclical movements that underlie the city grid (see Lehan 68–70, 89–94). De Certeau and Malpas demonstrate in quite different but equally valuable ways how the edge, the limit, the periphery and absence all define urban experience every bit as much as do their opposites. Read in a way illuminated by these writers, city peripheries can be seen as central even to many of the most canonical city novels and poems set in literary metropolises, from the evocations of the prostitute and urban scavenger in Baudelaire and Dickens, to the sudden and often uncanny appearance of such peripheral figures as the immigrant, the suburban outcast, or the tourist passing through in a plethora of city novels (cf. Salmela below; Tambling below).

Another development inevitably reflected in literature is the redefinition of the outer edges of cities as a result of new infrastructure such as ring roads and airports. These have become an essential part of city life in the era of global travel, a fact not necessarily cherished by nostalgically or romantically inclined urban dwellers. What is more, to adopt the frequently cited terminology of Marc Augé, these zones – which often dominate the form of the city in cartographic and satellite images – are characterised by chains of non-places serving the needs of constant mobility: terminals, stations, interiors of vehicles, landscapes of tarmac. As Iain Sinclair powerfully illustrates in his circumnavigation of the
M25 in *London Orbital*, such artificial blood vessels of the city have not only taken over the functions of natural urban arteries such as rivers but may also display in their zones of influence a particularly profound “truth” about the city as a whole. This capacity to reveal, we argue, is connected to, if not dependent on, the peripheral location of most of these non-places. They are geographically peripheral to urban areas but functionally central – edges and borders with the power to enclose and define the centre.

Michel Foucault presented the term *heterotopia* as a spatial concept to be distinguished from the utopia. Whereas utopias are characterized by singleness – a single ruler, a code of laws, unchanging institutions – heterotopias exist between other spaces, are both and also neither. A heterotopia is a space apart from the order of everyday life combining multiple spatial functions or symbolic meanings in one site. Examples of different categories of heterotopia presented by Foucault include the cinema, the theatre, the garden, the Persian rug, the museum, the library, the fairground, the village of holiday cottages, the Turkish bath and the Nordic sauna, the brothel, and colonies built around religious ideals. These share a quality of apartness. The idea of the heterotopia has been applied by scholars in many social and cultural fields, who have greatly lengthened Foucault’s list of heterotopic sites (see Johnson). The notion of the heterotopia stands importantly in the background of the peripheries explored in this volume. Peripheries tend to be multiple, since one person’s perception of where a given city gives way to something else is not the same as another’s. There may be peripheral genres and writers as there are cities on various sorts of periphery when seen from different viewpoints. City peripheries are part of the everyday life of cities rather than special sectors as Foucauldian heterotopias are, however. And cities judged peripheral, like city peripheries, have existed throughout human history. This fact also distinguishes peripheries from heterotopias, said by Foucault to exist fully and profoundly only in the ages of modernity and postmodernity when an “absolute break” (“rupture absolu”) with a “traditional” past has occurred. The category of modernity inherent to the Foucauldian heterotopias has since the 1960s come in for much criticism, not least from writers whose point of view is explicitly spatial (e.g. Ogborn 1–38). Yet perhaps, somewhat battered, it survives.

Re-evaluating the concept of heterotopia from a peripheral standpoint is among the tasks undertaken by this book. Particularly relevant for our purposes is a volume edited by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter entitled *Heterotopia and the City*. Here, the accent is on the precise moment of the early twenty-first century, labelled following
Fredric Jameson “postcivil society”. Moreover while literary accounts of cities are mentioned only in passing, one or two contributors (Doron; Heyns) do examine the outskirts of cities as the location of heterotopias. For Foucault, it will be remembered, heterotopias are to be found in the very hearts of cities, as in the case of museums, or far beyond their boundaries (e.g. holiday villages) just as much as in zones judged peripherally urban in this book (brothels, graveyards). Gil Doron has examined the “dead zones” of Tel Aviv, derelict, formerly-used land in urban areas, calling to mind the third landscape (le tiers paysage) proposed by the landscape architect Gilles Clément: the urban fringe or abandoned inner city which nature has been allowed to reclaim following human abandonment. Doron concludes that these “dead zones” are not heterotopias but perhaps “their residue” (Doron 210). Comparably, for Maureen Heyns (232), the planned regeneration of an ancient inner-London suburb on the eastern fringe of the City of London, Spitalfields, has seen it deliberately “heterotopianized” from above. In fact, a theorization of urban peripherality might have helped both Doron and Heyns gain more insight into their material – the cities of Tel Aviv and London viewed from the perspective of urban planning – than does Foucault’s famous account of heterotopias. Spitalfields and areas of former industrial and simply unused land in the environs of Tel Aviv are clearly both peripheries, but of radically different sorts, calling for a typology of urban peripherality to be established.

The examples above illustrate once more the problematics involved in using the term peripheral. Literary Tel Aviv is only peripheral when seen from a specific perspective; it is easy to think of literary traditions in which it plays a central role. Many of the urban places that are peripheral to one literary tradition might well constitute a central location to another one. Examples can be multiplied at will: from a global perspective, as well as seen amongst the urban spaces in the Western literary canon, Harlem in New York City’s Manhattan constitutes not more than a periphery, while in African-American literature, it is nothing less than a literary Mecca, an absolute focal point (cf. Chadwick-Joshua 172). The suburbs, long seen as quintessential examples of non-places, and held in little esteem in studies of the literary city, have recently been reappraised as being crucial to our understanding of the twentieth-century American novel (Jurca). The way in which we use peripheral in this volume when speaking of cities and urban spaces, will always assume a relative perspective, and the awareness that a shift in point of view may turn a geography of domination and subordination on its head.
Contributions to this volume

The first half of this book is devoted to city peripheries: those areas and experiences that are located or take place at a distance from the perceived urban centre. Most of the chapters in this section examine that thematic within the canonized literary cities of London, New York, and Paris. This spatial and geographical description, however, represents only one aspect of what is at stake. A concern with what lies beyond city walls, historically speaking, is in these chapters coupled with analysis of other societal divisions in an effort to chart overlaps and incongruities in spatial and social hierarchies. Different dimensions of poverty, physical decay, undesirability, and exclusion are highlighted in this kind of examination, which itself is a version of the cognitive mapping conceived by Fredric Jameson. In other words, one can rarely assume a balance of power between communities “beyond the walls” and those inside.

In his wide-ranging investigation of what it means to call somewhere peripheral, Jeremy Tambling draws on a wealth of literary sources and boundaries of urbanity. This critical excursion into “peripheral centres” also revisits some of the concepts outlined in this introduction. Indeed, Tambling’s very aim is conceptual: to study the cultural and theoretical distinctions implied by the vocabulary of urban borders in their various contexts. These contexts span across two centuries and create a number of opportunities for comparison before the argument returns to Paris and its environs. As a grand tour from Zola to Dickens, from Céline and Georges Perec to Mathieu Kassovitz, this chapter serves in part as a second, somewhat differently focused introduction to the whole volume’s topic of peripherality. The fundamental problem inherent in the concept itself proves to be the politics of exclusion it tends to accompany, the practice of putting people – as Tambling phrases it – out of sight.

Lieven Ameel’s approach to the social boundaries and substrata of urban life brings an entirely different boundary into discussion: the threshold at which the literary text itself begins. Observing the opening sequence of a literary text in terms of spatial signposts subtly reminds the reader of the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” in fiction (Bakhtin 84), although Ameel’s notion of choice is not the chronotope. Instead, he explores the value systems and “social geographies” superimposed on urban space by the acts of world-making performed in several texts’ initial paragraphs, with McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) as the primary example. The boundaries and peripheries, in this case, are social and moral rather than purely spatial. The same could be argued about Jason Finch’s analysis of the
“semi-slum” in the works of George Gissing and Alexander Baron, whose characters often cross and traverse the contact zones between respectable society and urban squalor in London. A notion such as the semi-slum is not easily aligned with simplistic dichotomies: it shows that there are necessarily more than two or three rungs on the social ladder and several cross-over zones within any large city. Fittingly, it is the complexity of imaginative urban places that comes to the fore as Finch applies his own interdisciplinary method of place-reading, *Deep Locational Criticism* (Finch 2015).

Markku Salmela’s contribution places its geographical focal point on a part of Long Island, an area in the outskirts of New York City which may be seen to have its own suburban literary tradition initiated by Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. However, the place examined – an inhabited rubbish dump featured in Thomas Pynchon’s story “Low-lands” (1960) – hardly has anything except its approximate location in common with Gatsby’s mansion. This peculiar slum has its own heterotopic organization and marginal, ethnic-minority population, and, like the main character, it defines itself in opposition with the middle-class realms of the suburb and the urban avenue. It also consists of society’s discarded material, the concrete residue produced by urban and suburban domesticity, and so the narrative of waste that runs through the history of urban modernity becomes an important interpretative context for the story.

In Chapter 5, Aleksejs Taube’s study of London’s East End in Peter Ackroyd’s fiction pays attention to bodily experience in the process of place-bound identity construction. The “complex dialectical relationship between urban space and embodied subjectivity” is revealed in a four-part thematic analysis that moves from Victorian ideologies and the cabbalistic tradition to Marxist and technological discourses, all powerfully illustrating the metaphorical inscription of values and worldviews on the built environment. To complete the section on city peripheries, Marita Wenzel directs our attention to Johannesburg, a city that may appear peripheral from some narrow Eurocentric perspectives but has long been a major continental hub and an economically vibrant multicultural metropolis. The effect of national history on the city’s spatial configuration and divided cultures is still strongly visible, but as Wenzel makes clear in her analysis of Zakes Mda’s and Ivan Vladislavić’s work, a positive sense of hybridity can also be detected in everyday boundary crossings. The outcome is a complicated postcolonial urbanity conditioned by social divides, particularly the gap between “white” and “black” economies and traditions. Out of this mixture emerges a sense
of the city as a social space that despite its unique features is in other respects strikingly similar to the images of historical London or Paris represented in previous chapters. In other words, the ways in which identity and social class are rooted in (peripheral) urban space often follow patterns discernible in numerous other geographical locations as well.

In the second half of this volume, “Peripheral Cities, Genres and Writers,” the theme of peripherality is further broadened and contextualized by acknowledging that literature as well as the city has its own peripheral areas. The “outskirts” of the literary institution can be mapped out in terms of other art forms and media, literary genres, or even individual writers. At least implicitly, then, this section also alludes to analogies that work in the other direction, from fiction to urban space: metaphoric textualizations of the city in both fiction and scholarly studies – the idea that the urban system can be perceived as a text and read for its meanings. Tone Selboe’s essay on Hamsun and Strindberg recognizes such analogies by describing how the writer-protagonists living in two Scandinavian capital cities experience their profession as a function of urbanity, and vice versa. The writer’s work feeds on urban space and shapes it, and this practice of mental mapping is thoroughly informed by the tensions inherent in a series of oppositions: centre and periphery, interiority and exteriority, home and city. At the same time, as the mere book titles *Hunger* (Hamsun) and *Alone* (Strindberg) already spell out, social class remains an important determinant of the urban experience.

In discussing specific cities and fringe areas and the ways in which they are mediated and recreated by fictional texts, many chapters in this book have some affinities with the critical practice of geocriticism, developed recently by scholars such as Bertrand Westphal, Robert T. Tally, and Eric Prieto. Topi Lappalainen applies an approach definable as geocritical in his investigation of Henrika Ringbom’s novel *Martina Dagers längtan* (“Martina Dager’s longing”) and the forest outside of Helsinki. Here, modernity and myth meet at different levels of abstraction where suburban sprawl meets the forest. In the Finnish literary tradition, that contact zone also becomes the site of significant intertextual encounters. Moving to the fin de siècle and another country in Northern Europe, one finds in Eduard Vilde’s 1903 novel *Kui Anija mehed Tallinnas käisid* (“When the men of Anija went to Tallinn”) a marked focus on borders, boundaries, and frontiers. This is the topic of Elle-Mari Talivee and Jason Finch’s essay, which draws on Juri Lotman’s theory of the semiosphere in order to explicate the characteristics of
urban border zones. According to Lotman, borders provide “substance” to semiotic processes and involve components of translation and transformation (210). Appropriately, then, Talivee and Finch’s reading of the main character’s journey across urban boundaries reveals a number of tensions implying urban and societal change. This case study also illustrates the fact that changes in the literary establishment and the emergence of national literatures have often been closely intertwined with the development and growth of urban modernity.

A contemporary Chilean novel set in a quiet satellite city near the capital Santiago is the impetus for Bieke Willem’s probe into place-related nostalgia in Chapter 10. Alejandro Zambra’s *Ways of Going Home* centres on the idea of the protagonist’s return to the family home, which in the story’s time and place entails an obligation to revisit childhood days and, implicitly, the era of Pinochet’s dictatorship. However, certain spatial configurations at the periphery seem capable of erasing the political past, which one cannot help encountering in the original scene of conflict, the urban centre. It is this intertwining of temporality and spatiality in specific urban locations that Willem’s essay explores. The transition from childhood to adulthood is also prominently featured in the next chapter, Lydia Wistisen’s “From Stairwell to Underpass: Young Women’s Spatial Orientation in Swedish Young Adult Literature.” As Wistisen shows, peripheral literary genres can be a great source of information about the urban life of specific groups of people. When it comes to groups that have historically been relatively powerless in society, such as young women, a carefully chosen literary corpus can also help to chart the development of their social position to a more visible and central one. This is precisely what Wistisen’s analysis of young-adult fiction illustrates – while placing an emphasis on the commonalities between social and spatial orientation as characters traverse various spaces in Stockholm.

In the chapter that concludes the book, Nettah Yoeli-Rimmer uses the vantage point of postmodernism to re-introduce the idea of “city as text.” Buenos Aires, as represented in Ricardo Piglia’s novel *La ciudad ausente* (“The absent city”), becomes a novelistic entity: both the city and the text transgress their own boundaries and turn into metaphors for each other. Behind this intriguing textual surface, Yoeli-Rimmer sees an engagement with the questions of peripheral identity, postcolonial dislocation, and modernity on a global scale. Geographical analysis inspired by Franco Moretti is, however, complicated by a postmodern, Derridean sense of an absent centre affecting the city itself. This problematization of binary oppositions such as centre/periphery represents
a fitting conclusion to the whole collection, since the relativity of these concepts runs as a thread through most of the chapters. The definitions and meanings of peripheries always depend on the available perspective.

**New peripheries**

In the course of work on this book, several refinements and clarifications of the overall concept of literary urban peripheries have emerged, which could indicate new directions for research. Key among these and interwoven with each other, are the hypothesis that a spatial typology of literary urban peripheries could be established, and an improved understanding of the varied modes of literary-peripheral activity.

Literary urban peripheries are diverse. They can include the sorts of edges that are invisible, as when Samuel Beckett’s Molloy reflects that “regions do not suddenly end, as far as I know, but gradually merge into one another” and therefore concludes that he may have left his own region “many times, thinking I was still within it” (60), its peripheries in that case having been passed through unnoticed by him. A similar sort of relationship can be seen in that between the slum, the semi-slum and the non-slum within a broadly homogeneous (even featureless and repetitive) landscape such as that of inner London between the late nineteenth- and the mid-twentieth century (Finch, below). Here, a periphery is defined by blurring and uncertainty in a manner that parallels Molloy’s relationship with his region.

While most cities have blurry border zones, some end abruptly, at clearly delineated borders. They have limits at which the urban area stops and something else begins: sea, mountains or forest, for instance (see Lappalainen, below). In this sense, the periphery can be a limit as in the furthest extreme, somewhere remote or at the end of a line. Specific sites in cities can be singled out as notably and materially peripheral in this sense of extremity, for example when it is learned that Helsinki has the northernmost metro system on earth and within that, one station – at the time of writing Mellunmäki in eastern Helsinki – is the northernmost metro station on earth. Extremities of poverty or non-respectability have something in common with sites that are other or heterotopic including a city’s parallel and hidden nightlife (Ameel, below; Taube, below), or lives led in sites that to many would seem repulsive such as waste disposal areas (Salmela, below), or cities that are moving towards the status of entire bankrupt wastelands (Tambling, below). Thinking of a typology, a periphery can be understood spatially as a point, for example a physical gate in a city’s wall (Talivee and Finch,
Modes of literary-peripheral activity meriting further study include a poetics of the normal and abnormal. A periphery is something defined as outside, or away from, a notional or actual centre, but not other to it, perhaps not beyond the limits (recalling Malpas’s discussion of Heidegger on limit). As such, places that are part of the city but somehow understood as abnormal or non-respectable are notable among peripheral zones. The rubbish dumps side by side with desirable suburbs in the outer New York of Pynchon (Salmela, below) belong here, too. In the Santiago of Alejandro Zambra (Willem, below) suburbs were created under the dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s which were physically distant from the old centre and which were specifically designed to embody and enforce a new, American-style and capitalist sort of normality. This emphasized an opposition between a new urban order and the old centre. As a location that decayed and had shifted from being normal to abnormal, the latter became a new sort of periphery where protests against the dictatorship became most visible. Another fertile mode of activity will be that of passage through border points, the analysis of which will enable the sorts of transition from one thing to another, the acts of filtering and translation, which proved an insight from Lotman applicable to Eduard Vilde’s treatment of Tallinn between the 1850s and the dawn of the twentieth century (Talivee and Finch, below) to be mapped, compared and understood more fully.

This typology of peripheries and modes of urban peripheral activity, within a poetics that insists on oscillating between the geographical city as constructor of human experience, and the city periphery as product of human conception and projection, is multiple. But we do not think that this makes the periphery too loose a category for literary scholars actually to use. It promises, mirroring the use of data mapped using geographical information systems when applied to fields of the humanities (see Gregory and Cooper), to revolutionize study through nuance, to replace dichotomies and even triads with the mapping of specific landscapes and topographies, and to uncover hitherto overlooked dynamics and tensions in the way cities are experienced and rendered in literature. Rather than setting out from the traditional emphasis on a notion of centrality, we need to start mapping literary cities according to their newly recognized core characteristic: their complex peripherality, as outlined in this introduction and in the various chapters in this volume. Welcome to the peripheral city.
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