

Teaching Literary Urban Studies

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Abstract

This chapter brings together different perspectives on teaching literary urban studies (LUS), drawing from experiences of teaching particular courses on city literature. The chapter considers different themes in teaching LUS: 1. teaching generalist courses on the city in literature; 2. the city in non-LUS courses; 3. teaching courses on specific literary cities; 4. teaching interdisciplinary courses; 4. methods and resources in teaching LUS. In a final section, the chapter looks towards possibilities for further collaborations and future directions.

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1. Introduction: approaches to literary urban studies; methods, resources, aims, contexts

Courses on city literature are being taught on a global scale, and in considerable numbers. The high number of courses that are taught across different universities in 2020 alone, which came up in even a quick internet search, bears witness to the undiminished appeal of the subject.ⁱ In addition to generalist courses on city literature, there are numerous courses on specific cities in literature, or courses that integrate literary urban studies (from here on abbreviated as LUS) within interdisciplinary modules. On the basis of discussions in consecutive conferences and symposiums organized by the Association for Literary Urban Studies,ⁱⁱ it is clear that teachers can benefit greatly from exchanging experiences and resources when drawing up course plans and when implementing ideas for courses on city literature. LUS courses have a set of shared theoretical resources: the classic urban studies texts of Georg Simmel and Robert Park, Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe continue to be important cornerstones, as do more recent classics such as Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* or Janet Wolff's and Elizabeth Wilson's reassessment of the legacy of the flâneur. But more collaborative work is needed to actively discuss how such theory can be brought into twenty-first century classrooms. In addition to theoretical texts, there is a corpus of classical LUS literature – Charles Dickens, Émile Zola, Aleksandr Pushkin, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Benito Pérez Galdós and Franz Kafka, among others – that continues to be taught actively in LUS courses in the present century. While classical texts remain in use, a new canon of texts is gradually taking shape; China Miéville's *The City and the City* (2009) can be seen as one example of a literary text that has been taught widely both in courses in the humanities and in architecture. Functioning below, or besides, an Anglo-Saxon radar, national and regional canons of city literature are forming, and a higher awareness of such texts beyond the Anglosphere provide important and necessary correctives to LUS as it is developing in university lecture rooms globally. In addition to sharing literary and scholarly texts, teachers can benefit also from each others' experience in terms of teaching methods. These include

textual analysis methods specifically geared towards unpacking spatial thematics, or towards stimulating active interaction with real-world urban materialities, for example in the form of walking lectures, or in the form of a module on Deep Locational Criticism (see Finch, *Deep Locational*). Courses may also be taught in ways that guide students toward connections with local activism.

Often, developing teaching modules independently means that the responsible teacher may run into challenges that could have been alleviated if a shared set of teaching resources within LUS had been available. When sending out students on a *flâneuring* mission or a *dérive* (see Ameel, “Panoramic Perspectives”), what guidelines should be distributed to ensure that unsafe encounters are avoided and that local legal restrictions on semi-public space are followed? When teaching interdisciplinary courses with architecture and planning students, what key concepts need to be defined from the outset to ensure a sufficient common ground? What ethical and methodological guidelines come into play when carrying out empirical LUS research as part of teaching? These questions will always have to be answered with particular local contexts in mind, but it is important to raise them here as part of a collaborative effort to outline key approaches in teaching LUS.

In the research literature on city literature, there is relatively little material that specifically considers teaching LUS. This is the more surprising since so many books in LUS have found their inspiration either in teaching, or from taking a course on the subject at undergraduate level, as prefaces and acknowledgements repeatedly attest (see e.g. Margolies 1; Wilhite ix). The recent *Palgrave Handbook to the City in Literature* (Tambling) does not have a separate chapter on teaching; the same goes for books such as *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (McNamara). The *Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and The City* (Charley) does feature a number of chapters that look specifically at teaching, but these all deal with teaching architecture, and they reflect the interest on the part of planning and architecture in drawing on literature as part of teaching practices. One book which stands out is *Teaching Space, Place and Literature* (Tally), which, as the title indicates, focuses specifically on teaching, and which contains several chapters on cities, including Andrea Goulet and Eugenie Birch’s article on teaching modern Paris, Catharina Löffler’s article on teaching eighteenth-century London, Frank Rashid’s article on teaching Detroit, and Lieven Ameel’s article on teaching the panorama and the walk.

Apart from these, there are still relatively few resources in terms of hands-on expositions of how the functioning of urban space within literature can be unpacked in teaching for undergraduates, especially in comparison to the richness of resources when it comes to teaching narrative plot, narrator roles, tropes and metaphors, or genre. This lack of resources is grounded more generally in the marginalization of questions of space in literary studies until fairly recently (see Ameen, *Helsinki in Early 23-26*; Bal 134), which in turn is rooted in the assumption that space falls under the less important category of description (see Buchholz and Jahn 555). In the wake of what has been called the “Spatial Turn”, much has been done to foreground spatial – and urban – questions (see e.g. Verraest and Keunen for a bibliography of landscape and narration). Inquiries into urban spatial relationships and spatial experiences in literature, it has been asserted, are particularly instructive for unpacking power relationships, but also for how alternative visions of society are taking shape in literature (see Salmela et al.). The renewed focus on space, however, has rarely translated into producing material that is particularly useful for teaching space. Notable exceptions are Jason Finch’s *Literary Urban Studies and How to Practice It*, Marie-Laure Ryan’s “space”, and Hilary Dannenberg’s “Windows, Doorways and Portals in Narrative Fiction and Media” (the last both touching on urban space only tangentially).

This article wants to bring together different perspectives on teaching LUS. These perspectives are drawn from experiences of teaching particular courses on city literature. They look at methods and resources – what worked particularly well, what proved to be challenging – and at the specific institutional, cultural and/or geographical contexts within which courses and course materials operate. Throughout this article, what is foregrounded is an interest in “citiness”, an interest that runs as a thread through this companion: an interest in that what is specific, in terms of methods, approaches, material interconnections, to teaching a course on city literature.ⁱⁱⁱ We will set out with a section on teaching generalist courses on the city in literature; we will then consider the city in non-LUS courses; teaching courses on specific literary cities; teaching interdisciplinary courses; and methods and resources in teaching LUS. In a final section, we will look towards possibilities for further collaborations and future directions.

2. Teaching generalist “city in literature” classes: classical literary urban studies resources and their critique

An example of a generalist LUS course is “Literature and Urban Space”, an elective of 26 class hours taught to a group of 12 students at the Tampere University (then University of Tampere) English department on several occasions between 2012 and 2018. Although the course went through different incarnations, the core syllabus remained mostly founded on staples of LUS, with literary fiction in the main role and brief forays into other genres (essays, poetry, drama) and media (comics, film, games, music). Theoretical readings ranged from classics of urban sociology to more recent work representing LUS proper and general spatial theory, as well as some notions from postmodern theory. Students read literary works from different eras from the 1830s (Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd”) onwards, with a relatively even division among established literary-historical eras. The most prominent cities of the English-speaking world such as New York and London received plenty of attention, but this practical choice was carefully contextualized and the different statuses of cities (defined, e.g., as alpha, second, or peripheral) discussed at some length. Some writers such as Poe, Dickens, Woolf and Rudolph Fisher were included every time the course was taught, others (e.g. J.D. Salinger, Samuel Selvon, Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, Tama Janowitz, Bret Easton Ellis, Hanif Kureishi, Doreen Baingana) only once or twice. In addition to the generalist objective of sketching some components of urban experience, the selection of course materials also aimed at encouraging an appreciation of the varieties of city experience – in different locations, and by different groups of people. Student presentations (on topics largely of students’ own choice) were consistently included for pedagogical reasons but also served to diversify the geographical, generic and medial range of texts covered during the course. The disciplinary setting shaped most discussions towards a focus on the English-speaking world. Yet fruitful and sometimes unexpected connections or contrasts with cities elsewhere regularly provided moments of recognition based on students’ personal experience.

Teaching a generalist (but language-specific) course like this requires a number of choices that guide the topics of conversation. The title of the course was originally selected to suggest types of meaningful interaction between text and space at various scales, not only at the level of the universal umbrella entity of *the* city. As discussions on the course evinced repeatedly, many of these interactions involve the politics of contested space. This idea inevitably emerged in examinations of stories such as Rudolph Fisher’s “The City of Refuge” (1925), where the fugitive African American protagonist marvels at Harlem as a black utopia, only to find himself caught by new forms of oppression. It often dominated class conversations on race, wealth and spatial access in texts such as Baingana’s “Tropical Fish” (2005), and

discussions of female *flânerie* in Woolf. It emerged in perhaps less obvious ways when Poe's taxonomy of urban classes was discussed, or when some students eagerly analyzed the spatial threshold formed by ballpark turnstiles at the beginning of DeLillo's "Pafko at the Wall" (1992), a story included in the course primarily as a representation of an urban event capable of rapidly transforming the nature of space.

The idea of contestation was not only useful for close textual analysis but also easily transposable to the upper level of the canon, providing additional insight into the university classroom itself as an urban space in which ideological choices play out (or an "ideological state apparatus" as theorized by Louis Althusser). Students at the Tampere English department represent increasingly diverse identity categories – albeit still less diverse than in many bigger cities globally – and are often inclined to approach canonical literary texts critically, sometimes even with a kind of prejudice. This means, on the one hand, that contextualizing texts historically and politically is crucial and, on the other, that the perspectives communicated by canonical authors or theorists are questioned almost as a matter of course. In such situations the teacher's role is generally not to argue directly for the importance of those perspectives but to negotiate, with the group's help, fruitful twenty-first-century ways of reading the texts that ideally preserve some measure of the texts' original "citiness". In this way, a relatively conventional course on city literature may become a productive exploration of human identity and conflict that resonates with students both in some limited universal sense (through the experiential meaning of *the* city) and through the recognition of radically different positionalities and dependencies.

3. Embedding literary cities in the curriculum

Courses with LUS themes may be developed on the basis of the personal research interests of respective teaching faculty. Lecturers, however, do not always have the possibility to choose which courses they are going to teach. We often inherit modules that might seem rather detached from our research interests. In such cases, we have to try to find ways to engage students and connect our field of expertise to the predesigned curriculum, despite program restrictions and the lack of full control over the course design. Such situations have helped us reflect on the importance of urban setting and *citiness*, also when teaching courses that are not specifically devoted to LUS. We draw from our experiences across a range of undergraduate and postgraduate modules in Spain, the United Kingdom and Finland to outline a series of strategies that can be of help to other lecturers facing a similar situation:

how to integrate the city into generalist literary modules or into specialized courses that are designed for other purposes? What new dimensions of meaning are brought to the fore when we place the city at central stage in the discussion of literary genres that have not traditionally been considered part of the urban canon, or in texts that we do not immediately read as urban?

To address these questions we find it important to displace the narrative focus from subject to place. In order to illustrate this change of focus we will firstly refer to lectures on the literary fantastic. When teaching the fantastic, lecturers tend to prioritize the supernatural creature in the course design. Most courses dedicated to the fantastic are structured in a taxonomy of monsters: ghosts, vampires, revenants, witches, zombies, for example. The conceptual shift we apply when teaching such modules implies putting the emphasis on the urban space which is occupied and transgressed by this creature. The *who* is replaced by the *where*. Instead of examining the specificities of, for instance, a ghost in a particular narrative, in our lectures we look at the place in which the ghost is located (the city), the metaphorical conflict that its presence in the city creates and, ultimately, the critical discourse that this supernatural creature adds to LUS.

For example, the undergraduate final-year module “Monsters in contemporary Spanish fiction” (University of Nottingham, 2015-2020) introduced students to the study of teratology (or study of abnormality in organisms) in fiction written in Spain during the second half of the twentieth century. The leitmotif was certainly not the city but the monster figure. However, we applied a LUS perspective to highlight the multiple crossovers between monstrosity, the expression of fear and the city. A representative case study is the teaching of the novel *Sin noticias de Gurb* by Eduardo Mendoza (“No Word from Gurb”; 1990), in which an alien arrives with his partner, Gurb, to pre-Olympic Barcelona to report back on life on earth. Gurb then metamorphoses into a human being and vanishes in the city. His partner, an unnamed narrator, sets out to find him and writes a diary to recount his experiences as an alien in the Catalan city. In class we discussed how these friendly and clumsy aliens on a mission to learn from earth (and not to conquer or destroy it) broke with established science fiction clichés. These included how supernatural creatures interacted with the city. To fully understand the character construction in this novel it was essential to situate these aliens as radical outsiders in that urban context. The narrator’s journey of adaptation involves all sorts of humorous misfortunes because of his lack of understanding of the earthly urban context.

Most importantly, this inexperienced, pathetic alien brings to the fore the hypocrisies and hardships of the city's everyday dynamics, ranging from pollution, density and anonymity to cultural corruption and urban speculation.

We follow a similar urban perspective on the fantastic in other culture-specific modules, for example in the MA module “Themes and motifs of literary and cultural Spanish history” (taught in Spanish at the University of Alcalá, 2020-). Classic supernatural short stories by Benito Galdós, for example the fairy tale “La princesa y el granuja” (“The Princess and the Rogue”; 1877), or contemporary fantastic texts such as “Los viajeros perdidos” by José María Merino (“The Lost Passengers”; 2002), are taught in this module specifically from the point of view of LUS. This perspective reveals forms of urban criticism that the fantastic performs (criticism of class and consumerism in modern Madrid in the first case and of postmodern non-places in the second), a critical dimension that comes to the fore when our attention shifts to the urban setting.

A third example of the role of questions of urban space and urban experience from a course that in its general outlook did not focus on LUS, is the multidisciplinary, team-taught course “Russia Today: Culture and Society” (2019, taught in Finnish), taught at the University of Helsinki, and aimed at master's students from various disciplines. In the lecture on contemporary literature, new prose fiction was taught from the perspective of provincial cities. This LUS perspective gave the students an understanding about the centrality of the role that provincial cities have in the Russian cultural imagination in the 2000s, how this long tradition of literary provincial cities has formed since the nineteenth century, and the kinds of social questions addressed in fiction through the provincial settings. A similar course, also aimed at master students, is the team-taught course “Literature of the Russian North” (taught in Finnish at the University of Helsinki), which will be organized in 2022. This course discusses the literature of the Russian Arctic from a wide range of perspectives. Besides the literatures of indigenous peoples, such as the Nenets and Sámi, the course also included one lecture which examined Arctic cities in the Russian literature. Here, the LUS perspective contributes to the teaching of Soviet history of the Arctic, in a period when the development of new Soviet cities in the Arctic had a central role. Additionally, the LUS perspective offers tools to analyze the different meanings of Arctic cities in contemporary culture.

Despite the limitations of pre-established module outlines, we strongly believe in the benefits of embedding LUS in the curriculum. An urban perspective in the classroom brings new

meanings to the literary genres and cultural contexts we teach, and, conversely, these have the potential to be important resources to unpack new critical discourses on cities in literature.

4. Teaching courses on specific literary cities

One of the most recognizable kinds of LUS course is the one-term seminar focusing on the representations of one specific city in literature. Sometimes, such seminars are taught yearly, with considerable impact within the broader curriculum of the respective department. One example of such regular courses is the “Writing New York” course at NYU, which has formed the basis of several books, including *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of New York* (McNamara). Courses can of course also be one-off courses that are marginalized within their departments, with their position in part depending on whether they are taught by tenured faculty or by junior researchers. When designing a LUS course on a specific city, context will largely decide what kind of aims, texts, and methods take precedence. A course on a city with a highly well-known literary canon (say, St Petersburg or Paris) will have to position itself consciously with respect to that canon, finding new approaches or ways to contest or enrich established views. Often, this will involve also a positioning in terms of research paradigms: the study of St Petersburg has been associated with a particular semiotic approach to literary space, an approach that can have much to offer but which can also be critiqued, in particular for how it marginalizes provincial cities within a broader symbolic geography. In the case of contexts in which the city is perceived to take a less prominent role in the national literary history (say, teaching a course on literary Helsinki within a Finnish literature department), a LUS course on a specific city will have to take on blind spots in national or regional literary histories. The material and institutional contexts of how a university campus interacts within its immediate surroundings will also have a part to play. A campus located in the middle of the city will provide clearer possibilities for walking seminars, tactile assignments, or community interaction. Teaching a course on a specific city while being located in a completely different locality will offer challenges, but may also open up intriguing overlaps and cross-references, which will be explored in more depth below.

The course “City in Literature”, taught in Finnish at the University of Helsinki in spring 2015, is one example of a course that focuses on one particular city in literature, and that was

set in the respective reference city. It was taught in Finnish as an optional course to a mixed group of around 20 graduate and undergraduate students, most of them studying either Finnish language or Finnish literature as their main subject. The course focused on Helsinki but also included material on other cities. It consisted of 13 sessions, with one introductory session followed by 12 reading sessions, each on one novel. The novels were chosen to present a chronological order, but also to represent some of the diversity of literary authors writing books set in Helsinki. The course had a strong focus on literary genre, and the students were introduced to important genres in literary urban studies, including the Young Man/Woman from the Province (see Chanda), the “ecological” and “synoptic” city novels (see Gelfant), the suburban novel, the crime novel, and the dystopian city novel, among others. In the background of the course was the somewhat established view of Finnish literary history as having a focus on rural environments, a view which students had generally assimilated, and which they were encouraged to challenge throughout. One way to actively relate the course material to the personal lived experiences of the students was by way of regular questionnaires that examined the associations that were evoked by Helsinki toponyms in the texts. Teaching and research went hand in hand, and the analysis of these questionnaires led to several articles (see Ameel and Ainiola).

Teaching a course focused on a city that most of one’s students have never visited brings its own challenges, made evident in a course on the subject of major English authors, taught at Governors State University in Chicago in Spring 2021. Though not specifically a LUS course, each text focused on the representation of London during a different historical era, to give a sense of the development of English literature across time. For example, students compared Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) with Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) on issues like social class, colonialism, and war. Woolf’s novel is concerned with the importance of India in the life of its characters, especially the recently-returned colonial civil servant Peter. India shapes the thoughts of the characters and their perception of London as a center of economic and political power through its absence and distance. By contrast, in *White Teeth* the Iqbal family hail from Bengal, later Bangladesh, and the political and cultural tensions of post-independence India form a crucial part of the family’s relationship with London. Their role as South Asian immigrants in shaping the life of the city marks a profound shift in the relationship between London and the (former) colonies. The Iqbals’ perspective radically transforms how the city is represented in comparison with a novel like *Mrs Dalloway*.

There are analogous, though by no means identical, transformations in American cities, and Governors State students often referred to migrancy and racial diversity in Chicago as a touchstone in getting to grips with novels of London. However, students' responses to London literature were often filtered through a limited and stereotypical understanding of London. A common refrain, for instance, was that the London of the 1920s was "an upper class city" and that this accounts for the limited social circle that *Mrs Dalloway* represents. This is unsurprising, since popular representations of London in the US center around images of royalty and aristocracy, and monumental spaces like Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square, rather than traditionally working-class and migrant neighborhoods like Peckham or Brixton. Teaching a course on London often requires familiarizing students with the city's cultural and social history so that, for example, students can recognize and respond critically to the deliberately limited and circumscribed perspective of the characters in *Mrs Dalloway*. This becomes more necessary, and difficult, as one approaches the present. The complex legacy of generations of postcolonial migration, and ongoing processes of gentrification and urban transformation are often beyond the scope of a course on English literature. But without some engagement with the particularities of contemporary London, US students will filter their reading of contemporary texts, engaged as they are with issues of immigration, displacement, and social inequality, through the lens of the American city.

That is not, in itself, a completely flawed lens; Governors State students were surprised by how relatable the depiction of modern London was, and the common experiences of urban life within a global city are important touchstones for reading contemporary literature. But this needs to be balanced with discussion of the nuances of London. For instance, in *White Teeth* one character, Millat, the son of a Bengali-Muslim immigrant, is frustrated and angry with English culture, from which he is excluded by his skin-color and heritage. He becomes immersed in Raggastani subculture, in which youths, mainly from South Asian backgrounds, adopt Jamaican and Anglo-African accents, music, and culture and blend them with American gangster rap and Islamic activism, as a massively hybridized form of cultural expression. Raggastani culture has a lot of points in common with similar hybrid subcultures in the US, not least in how it confronts white cultural hegemony (even as it is subsumed by it, as satirized by Sascha Baron Cohen's Ali G character). However, it is also a response to conditions in urban England, expressing post-colonial solidarity and confronting white resentment at the long-term presence of multiple ethnic communities in contemporary London. The Governors State class addressed Raggastani culture, and it was at once

eminently understandable to a classroom of Chicagoans, and required careful historical explanation of its emergence in London.

This indicates the value of balancing an emphasis on the historical and cultural detail with enabling students to draw upon their own experience of city life in interpreting what they read. In one assignment, students were asked to adapt one of the texts and retell the story in a way that speaks to their own lived experience. There were no particular limitations here; students were allowed to take a major thematic issue from one of the novels on the course, or to take its literary style, or one of its major characters, and transpose them to a new setting. The process allowed students to think about the parallels and differences between London and Chicago. This was accomplished not through lecturing or a guiding hand, but through enabling students to explore the text and the city themselves. Recognizing the value of students' experiences in engaging with texts, while remaining attuned to the particularities of each city, is the central challenge of a course on a place with which students are unfamiliar. But the tension between these demands is a productive one that can yield tremendous insight into how texts from far-flung places enrich our understanding of our own life worlds.

5. Interdisciplinary courses

LUS quite naturally involves perspectives from many different fields of study, and courses on city literature can be found in human geography, architecture, urban studies, and cultural history as well as in literary studies. Some LUS courses are aimed specifically at interdisciplinary graduate audiences, with students coming from a range of disciplines. An example of such an interdisciplinary master level course is “The City as a Narrative”, which has been organized in Finnish three times at Tampere University, Finland. The following is based on the two first implementations of the course, in the autumn of 2016 and 2017. In addition to individual reading and writing tasks, the course included weekly classes of three hours each over a three-month period. The course brought together about 30 students and four teachers from three different disciplines: architecture and urban planning, literary studies, and environmental politics. The students came initially from two universities that have since merged (in 2019).

The main idea of the course was to provide insights into research and working methods in each respective fields of study. As the course title reveals, “city” and “narrative” were the two major concepts explored through multiple learning methods, including flipped

classrooms, dialogue lectures, conventional lectures, as well as through text and image analyses of urban short stories, urban cartoons, urban lyrics, the Tampere general city plan, and Tampere City Council discussions. In the beginning of each course, all three disciplines presented their own field of study with a focus on relevant approaches and key vocabulary. This was important to achieve a common language for the following group works and discussions, which involved mixed groups with students from all disciplines.

The course content was closely linked to the themes of China Miéville's novel *The City and the City* (2009), a speculative crime novel which follows a murder investigation in the twin city Bészel–Ul Qoma, with an enigmatic third city existing in-between. Students were asked to pay close attention to the theme of othering in the novel, and student assignments were geared to connect this theme to their own everyday environments. During a city-walk in the Hervanta suburbs, for example, the students were asked to examine private/public liminal spaces and visible signs of othering. The walk was accomplished in small groups, with joined presentations after the walk and discussions among all the participants.

A learning method called “Two images and a story,” developed as part of the course, was used to help discussions. Each student was asked to present two photos, drawings or images connected by a story in a five-minute presentation. The assigned topics were dichotomic, for instance “Our city and their city” or “city of dreams and reality”. The presentations generated vivid discussion and opened up a huge variation of perspectives on urban life. Other dichotomies, such as utopia/dystopia, walking/driving, ability/control, urban/suburban, or dweller/planner, were also examined as part of the course, in the spirit of Miéville's book.

The course concluded with a seminar in which a young novelist from Tampere gave a guest lecture about her working methods. In 2016, Alexandra Salmela discussed her novel *Antisankari* (“The Anti-Hero”; 2015), and in 2017 J. S. Meresmaa presented her novel *Naakkamestari* (“The Daw Master”; 2016), books which all course participants read prior to the seminar. The focus in the final seminar was on providing insights into how literary authors constructed urban space in their works, how they develop their settings, plots and characters, in short, on the authorial perspectives that tends to remain out of sight in more conventional LUS courses. During the course, the participants also learned more about how urban narratives can be used in urban planning documents in order to better involve the citizens, and how narratives can reflect and construct complicated power relations. With its many lively discussions, the course also supported negotiating and arguing skills: the course

was organized in a way that explicitly meant to reproduce situations similar to those encountered by multidisciplinary teams of urban planning professionals, engaging with stakeholders from different backgrounds.

6. Contextualizing and locating literary urban studies

Contextualization is one key element to reflect upon when teaching city literature, and an element that has been discussed in several of the previous sections. Students and their teachers alike need to explicitly consider, then decenter or provincialize their own experiences of citiness. In our experiences of teaching city literature in diverse cultural and geographical contexts, the need to explicitly bring in a positioned perspective is a recurrent theme, regardless of whether we try to convey the South Side of Dublin to students more familiar with the South Side of Chicago, or when taking into account the varied notions of urbanity held by students who had grown up in, say, suburban Madrid or inner Bogota. We have elsewhere argued that the city novel is fundamentally about negotiating spatial, temporal, social, moral and linguistic distances (see Ameal, “The City Novel”). The explicit positioning of students and teachers may include all of these distancing aspects.

Asking students to consider their position vis-a-vis the material and historical referent city is one first step in approaching a LUS text. Even fairly recent historical periods may have become as inaccessible to local students as contemporary contexts that are situated in other parts of the globe: in a survey that measured knowledge of early-twentieth-century Helsinki, and carried among local Finnish students and exchange students at the University of Helsinki, both groups scored roughly equally poor (see Ameal and Ainiala). When teaching diverse groups of students, the teacher should be aware that different countries have different angles to history and to particular historical events; what is considered as basic knowledge can vary extensively, even in neighboring countries. This may come up when discussing sensitive subjects such as historical class struggles, the memory of the Holocaust, or the postcolonial traces in particular city.

Literary texts distanced in time can have disconcerting representations of ethnicity, gender and sexuality that have to be carefully contextualized when they are used in teaching. Contextualizing as such can be understood as a dynamic tool in the process of interpretation (see e.g. Burke). It is important to recognize that context is not a passive background but an essential part in the meaning-making process. In studying city literature, this means creating

or constructing a relevant and necessary context for interpretation. Taking one example, the novels and short stories of the Finnish writer Elvi Sinervo have usually been read in the context of working class literature, a genre to which they undoubtedly belong. However, when read in a context of city literature and urban debates, such as the hygiene reforms and fight against tuberculosis in the 1930s, Sinervo's intensive way of writing about sensory experience can be understood not just as a literary device but as a way of giving a voice to the urban poor, who in most texts about urban poverty and hygiene are treated merely as objects of reform (see Laine).

Methods that deliberately address questions of positionality and that invite students to take into account personal perspectives include walking seminars or creative writing classes (see e.g. Peterle). One approach is provided by psychogeography, a field at the crossroads of academic investigation of place and creative (non-fiction) writing. Practicing psychogeography can take the form of a writer-researcher narrating their own sensory encounters with real-world sites, taking account of the associations of memory which they meet, seeking both the historical and other resonances of the locations they are in, and meaning for themselves in relation to their own past(s) (see Tso). Indeed, the very act of cultivating self-consciousness about one's urban surroundings, taking notes, and connecting different pasts with different perspectives on the present, could enhance literary reading as well as an active presence in the city, conducive to a more explicitly activist method in LUS (see Roy). Whenever students are asked to interact with personal or real-world experiences of the city, it is important to also draw their attention to relevant existing methods and approaches from outside literary studies: the social sciences have detailed methods for conducting and analyzing questionnaires and interviews, and methods from ethnography are important when moving as outside researcher into urban communities. When interacting with local communities, ethical questions have to be born in mind: are respondents properly informed, are they enabled to co-produce knowledge, do they get access to research results?

Positioning also includes, of course, positioning oneself vis-a-vis the literary text in question. When students come from backgrounds other than literary studies, as is the case in interdisciplinary courses, there may be an urge to move quickly towards questions of urban referentiality, and to pay comparatively less attention to the complex formality of the text itself. In the case of a city poem such as Baudelaire's poem "À une passante" ("To a Passer-By"; 1875), a first question is that of which text is used in the classroom: is the poem read in

the original, or in an English or other translation (among the many existing translations)? Inevitably, the formal and genre-specific features need further explication. In Baudelaire's poem, the formality of the genre is central for understanding the thematic and referential features of citiness. As a sonnet, the poem represents one of the most formal literary genres (clashing, to a degree, with the mundane urban topic). As an urban sketch, it is also one of the most informal and most modern textual genres, attuned to the transitory cityness that Baudelaire aimed to capture, in part drawing on contemporary journalistic language. When considering the formal aspects of the poem further, questions of material, referential, and cultural space are key. There is, of course, the referential space – here, Paris of the Second Empire. But there is also the space that a poem takes up in a book, being a certain number of lines long, and there is the white space that surrounds it on a page (or as commonly reproduced electronically). And finally, there is also the cultural space taken up by a particular poem – in the case of Baudelaire's poem, as a locus for later readings of the city in terms of an “aesthetics of shock” (cf. Moretti “Homo palpitans”) or in terms of gendered power relationships (cf. Wilson).

One specific methodological approach particularly attuned to help interconnect personal experiences, urban referentiality, and the complex formal texture of a literary text consists of visual or mapping assignments. Visual assignments can stimulate students to engage in new ways with texts; they can encourage creative responses as well as innovative analytical approaches to interpreting city texts. Such approaches can both augment and enhance textual analysis. Assignments that encourage students to use and create maps can reveal previously unseen aspects of texts and their engagement with space, and show how literary analysis can draw on, and speak back to, other discourses like geography and cartography. Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2007) can be quite forbidding for an undergraduate classroom because of its focus on distant reading, but it also includes lots of mapping exercises that can be adapted in various ways in a classroom. For instance, in his discussion of Mary Mitford's *Our Village* (1824), Moretti maps the kinds of work practices the collection includes, demonstrating that the collection portrays the “centric” nature of village life, in which “serious daily needs” are represented closer to one's home while “frivolous superfluities” are encountered in London and other large towns (44). Moretti argues that such exercises can be carried out on any aspect of a text: simply “reduce the text to a few elements” and “abstract them from the narrative flow” to create a map through

which we can see what he calls “emerging qualities that were not visible” before (53, original emphasis).

Similarly, students working on James Joyce’s 1916 novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (especially when they are not familiar with Dublin), might take cartographic note of all of the places Stephen Dedalus walks in the novel. This could involve marking all of the landmarks encountered, the named places, and tracing the connections between them. We might note, for instance, that Stephen’s perambulations frequently bring him from the increasingly squalid residential neighborhoods to which his family moves in the novel, and between landmarks of Church and state power in the city center, and eventually toward the coast. Such movements might illustrate how his movements map the topographical symbolism of the city; how its power structures, and Stephen’s evolving relationship with, and rejection of them, are reflected in his movements through physical space. The point here, though, is not to pre-empt what such mapping might show, but instead to encourage students to discover new patterns that are not revealed simply by reading the text.

One might develop such exercises into a group project, by asking students to map an aspect of multiple texts incorporating different perspectives on the same city. For instance, in a course on migrant perspectives of the city, a class might map the places where migrant characters in many novels set in London live, and where they work and socialize. Or one could take novels set in a single city across different historical periods, and map certain aspects that interest the group of students in question (is there a change in the pattern of where characters go to the pub in novels of different decades?). Again, what a teacher decides to map is less important than the act of mapping itself, which enables students to abstract information, recognize and interpret patterns, and think about it in ways that traditional textual analysis does not enable. Especially, though, it encourages students to examine the relationship between texts and space, rather than taking that relationship for granted. Such mapping exercises could be greatly augmented in an interdisciplinary course, allowing literary analysis to contribute actively to our understanding of geographical or sociological issues like cartography or planning rather than simply drawing upon those disciplines to inform our reading practices. The ideas mentioned here may work best in a course focusing on a particular city, but could be adapted to courses that consider similar types of city space across the world or a region (for instance a course on slums, or on financial districts).

“Mapping” can also mean the creation of a visual representation of space, of course, and this need not even involve a real place. When teaching China Mieville’s *The City and the City* one of the most pressing issues is the sheer unrepresentability of the cityscape(s) it describes. How should we represent a space whose defining feature is the subjective “unseeing” of one “city” at a time? Can this “othering” of space be mapped? In a course on speculative fiction at Governors State University, students were asked to create a map of the cityscape of Ul Qoma/Beszel, using any method they preferred, and to briefly describe their work and the decisions they made in writing. Some students made hand-drawn maps, another created a three-dimensional model using Styrofoam blocks, yet another drew a picture of the streetscape. The results were interesting: some students simply split the city in half, representing it as a divided city like Belfast, Berlin, or Jerusalem. The novel does not really allow for this reading, even though such divided cities are an important cultural context for the novel. Others sought to color-code an imagined city, marking spaces that are in one or both of the cities, and spaces that are in neither. This, too, overlooks some of the ways characters in the novel are forced to interpret space in a continuous and evolving way. The purpose, though, was not to arrive at a “correct” map of the city, but to use the process of creation to confront the complex relationship to space that the novel sets up, and in doing so recognize our own role, as readers as well as users of city space, in the continuous and evolving creation of the meaning of city space. But it is not just in a “weird fiction” novel such as Mieville’s that this complex relationship to space emerges, and acts of map-making will always tend to enable students to confront the problematic, subjective nature of our encounters with city space, where texts, readers, and the occupants of space negotiate what is included and excluded from the map.

7. Collaborations and future directions

When considering future teaching collaborations for LUS, it is worth noting the potential found in collaborations with a range of fields and programs, all of which come with their own set of challenges and opportunities. Within literary studies, one of the fields with which LUS can collaborate fruitfully is world literature. In the past two decades, the field of world literature has promoted an expansion of the lens through which literature has usually been examined, from the traditional focus on nations and nation states to that of the world. LUS offers a change of scale that likewise challenges the predominance of the nation, zooming in on the city rather than the state. Exploring literature through both lenses, combining the micro

and macro levels, would allow for a new perspective on both the urban and the world – created through comparative courses that examine city literature on a global scale. There is a vast potential in courses of comparative urbanisms, such as “The City in World Literature” or “Literatures of the Metropolis – a Global Perspective,” in examinations of different urban themes, such as the flâneur, gentrification or urban marginalities, in a global and comparative context.

At the same time, recent debates about the canon of world literature could prove beneficial for future refinement of courses in LUS: world literature debates on the need to broaden the literary canon beyond western literature draw our attention to the question of which cities we teach in generalist courses on urban literature, and encourage us to make sure that we teach the literature of cities beyond the canonical metropolises of the west, and create a more diverse and inclusive syllabus, that would also expose aspects of urban literature that otherwise remain invisible. Likewise, recent attention in world literature to the need to broaden the canon of theories and methodologies beyond Euro-American ones (Krishnaswamy; Bar-Izhak) can draw our attention to the urban theories that we teach – reminding us that theory is never universal, but always grounded in a particular context, and that some theories that are now part of the canon of urban studies may not be the most suitable for teaching all literary cities, while our students may also have very different experiences of urbanity when compared to the theoretical perspectives we teach. For example, the now-canonical theories of the Chicago school of urban studies, which are based on studies from a highly segregated American city, might not work well for understanding the cultural life of a Middle Eastern city that is more ethnically and socio-economically mixed and is spatially laid out completely differently. To address these possible discrepancies, it is important to diversify the urban theory we teach as part of city literature courses. This could also be taken as an opportunity to draw students’ attention to the incongruence of canonical theories with their own literary urban experiences, and in advanced seminars, it would be possible to challenge students to collectively work on creating their own grounded theory, in a way that is more suitable for the urban-literary environment they are studying.

Beyond literary studies, two potential arenas for collaboration with LUS are area studies and the urban humanities. One of the challenges for both is the need to tailor courses to suit a program that is not focused on literature. In the context of the urban humanities, one way of addressing this challenge could be to create courses that examine literary narratives as a

gateway for understanding the everyday human experience of the city, allowing us to get an embedded and embodied perspective into the experiences of urban phenomena such as living in a gentrifying neighborhood, experiencing social stratification in an urban context, or the mobility between city centers and their suburbs. Another approach could be to link a city's literature to its history. In the context of area studies programs, LUS courses could emphasize the relations between the urban and the national, and the ways in which cultural phenomena are manifested in the literary city. It is an opportunity to explore how a focus on the city rather than on the "area" can open up new possibilities of perceiving some of the general themes usually studied in the field. It is also an opportunity to expose students to the relations between the immediate physical and social space and its cultural creations and to explore what these relations can add to our understanding of an area.

To conclude, with this chapter we aim to offer an overview of some of the central approaches and resources for teaching LUS in a variety of cultural contexts. While acknowledging that each classroom is different, the collective work on this chapter, which was based on sharing experiences from a range of contexts, has also helped us to realize common future directions for LUS that we consider necessary. These involve the inclusion of experiential on-site exercises with students; the design of syllabi that expand the LUS canon beyond canonical alpha cities; the inclusion of approaches that draw attention to feminist urban perspectives, and that challenge and broaden Euro-American theoretical and literary frameworks, and finally, the need for more collaborative work among scholars. We believe the latter is not only beneficial for sharing teaching strategies and resources. It can also help us understand and reconsider our role as LUS teachers in an increasingly precarious and taxing academic environment.

Our work as educators and scholars does not end when the teaching finishes and, likewise, we hope that our students' wish to engage with LUS will not be limited to our courses. For this reason, we consider it essential to draw students' attention to existing spaces that, beyond the classroom, allow for an exchange of resources, experiences and scholarship. Examples of these are the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS) and the network *Fringe Urban Narratives: Peripheries, Identities, Intersections* (Fringe). With a focus on the overlap between cities and literature, in the first case, and dedicated to the urban geographical and cultural margins in the second, both networks provide an open platform for academics at different stages in their careers. They also offer a communicative space to question our

position in LUS as educators and researchers. In the future we hope to see more collaborative work resulting from these ongoing and necessary debates on the state of our discipline and our role in it as agents of change.

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ⁱ Google search, April 2020. Courses included "Mexico City in Literature and Film"; Boston University (2020), "The Modern City in Literature"; University College Dublin (2020), "The City in Literature"; Temple University, Italy (2020-2021).

ⁱⁱ One example is the round table discussion at the closure of the conference *Literary Second Cities*, organized in Turku at Åbo Akademi University in 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Throughout the article, we use the collective pronoun "we" to refer to the authors, even if the respective cases we discuss here mostly comprise courses taught by one of the authors.