

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As may be typical of geographically oriented scholarship, this book and its approaches to city literature have been shaped by the environments in which its contributors grew up, and the places where they continue to live and work.

In the process that led to the previous book by the same editors, *Literature and the Peripheral City*, some autobiographical antecedents for the inquiry were intertwined with the idea of the periphery. With *Literary Second Cities*, it is fitting to highlight the second cities that have figured importantly in our real-life experiences: cities such as Ghent, Belgium, Birmingham, England, and Tampere, Finland. All three are notable for their industrial heritage. Ghent and Tampere are associated with the textile industry, have left-wing political associations, and are university towns. Cities such as these also illustrate the notion that second cities are not only defined by quantifiable factors such as scale, but also by their functions and networked relationships. In the light of most statistical variables, Ghent and Tampere are clearly second to Brussels and Helsinki in their respective national contexts. However, in other ways they escape any suggestion of provincial status, circumventing the influence of the capitals and projecting to inhabitants and visitors a fully autonomous urban identity that reverberates internationally. Birmingham has its own complex story, explored in one chapter of this volume. As the varied but comparable cases of Birmingham, Ghent and Tampere indicate, second cities may be constitutive of particular kinds of urban experiences— notions that underlie the present book. The particularities

of second cities have also found resonance in the personal lives of us editors. Every time we become acquainted with new second cities, whatever the cause and form of the visit, we are familiarizing ourselves with new meaningful nodes in the global urban network.

This book gained impetus from a conference on literary second cities organized in order to chart out the territory of such urban locations and their relationships with literature's primary cities. The wide-ranging discussions that took place during those two days at Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland, in August 2015 confirmed that a sustained scholarly effort in written form was necessary to unleash the full richness of this topic. Some of the dozens of thought-provoking presentations seen in Turku have subsequently evolved into chapters in the present volume. We would like to thank everyone at Åbo Akademi University's English department and the Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology for enabling the event and helping organize it. The H.W. Donner Fund and the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies provided additional funding, for which we are grateful.

Soon after the conference, the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS) took its first tentative steps. In institutionalizing the study of literary cities in this way, our main goal was to create a focal point for developing this innovative, global, and multidisciplinary scholarly field. As far as academic substance is concerned, an important objective is to cultivate further the ongoing discussion on the *citiness* of certain texts—indeed, of literary studies itself—and consider the implications of this expanding urban condition in terms of methodology. Regardless of its locational bases in Finnish cities, the Association has been thoroughly international from its very inception. The years 2017 and 2018 are going to see the first ALUS events outside Finland, in Estonia and the UK respectively, and the future promises further scholarly cooperation with the Ghent Urban Studies Team, the Literary London Society, and other academic organizations with similar interests.

As we are writing this, the Association's first full-scale international conference (*Im*)*Possible Cities*, to be held at the University of Tampere in August 2017, is forthcoming. Our conference is to operate in close unison with the urban planning and urban studies conference *Re-City 2017*, a collaboration that itself serves as a reminder of the essentially interdisciplinary nature of research into the literary city.

Thanks are due to the people at Palgrave for continuing to encourage this and allied projects in literary urban studies. They also chose the external reviewer, anonymous to us, whose insightful feedback at the early stages of preparing this book helped us improve its overall conceptualization significantly.

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