LINES OF ENQUIRY:
REORDERING EDINBURGH’S LITERARY HISTORY

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I consider spatial literary studies—whether doing business as geocriticism, literary geography, the spatial humanities, or using some other moniker—as a multiform critical practice that would include almost any approach to the text that focuses attention on space, place, or mapping, whether within the confines of the text, in reference to the outside world, or some combination of the two. What Edward W. Soja has termed the real-and-imagined places of literature, criticism, history, and theory, as well as of our own abstract conceptions and lived experience, these constitute the practical domain for spatial literary studies.

How does one determine exactly which texts could, in the aggregate, reasonably constitute a meaningful body of material with which to analyze the literary representations of a given geographical site? … With certain cities, such as Paris, London, Rome, or New York, the almost mythic status of these places and the seemingly innumerable textual references to them render any geocritical analysis, at least those laying claim to a kind of scientific value, impossible. As Westphal admits, ‘to attempt to undertake a full-scale geocritical analysis of those hotspots would be madness.’ A geo-centered method, if it aims truly to avoid the perception of bias, seems somewhat doomed from the start.

edinburgh
(edɪnbərə) n.
UNESCO City of Literature
The aims of the project

• Using the textmining of large collections of digitised books to identify narrative works set in Edinburgh.

• Georeferencing the Edinburgh placenames in those works to make mapping possible.

• Creating visualisations which allow users to adopt both birds’ eye and ‘frogs’ eye’ perspectives: online interface, iOS app.
“Our aim in creating LitLong was to find out what the topography of a literary city such as Edinburgh would look like if we allowed digital reading to work on a very large body of texts. Edinburgh has a justly well-known literary history, cumulatively curated down the years by its many writers and readers. This history is visible in books, maps, walking tours and the city’s many literary sites and sights. But might there be other voices to hear in the chorus? Other, less familiar stories? By letting the computer do the reading, we’ve tried to set that familiar narrative of Edinburgh’s literary history in the less familiar context of hundreds of other works. We also want our maps and our app to illustrate old connections, and forge new ones, among the hundreds of literary works we’ve been able to capture.”
The stats

What’s in our dataset?

- 550 published works – novels, short stories, memoirs, biographies, letters
- 1,600 place names – streets, buildings, open spaces, areas, monuments etc.
- 47,000 extracts – all focused on a place name mention
Welcome to LitLong: Edinburgh!

Welcome to LitLong: Edinburgh! Here you can explore literary Edinburgh from the inside - through the invocation of the many places of this wonderful city in nearly 550 novels, stories, memoirs and journals. Whether you’re looking to trace a path through a single book or the work of a particular author, whether you’re interested to see how any location has been written about, or whether you just want to wander through some of the many stories that have contributed to the city’s literary history, LitLong: Edinburgh can take you there.
<table>
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<th>Snippet</th>
<th>Scanned page</th>
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<td>He reclined there, quaffing the caller air. The high wintry <em>wind</em> the grey sky, the clamour of blackbirds, “the bleating of sheep being shorn in a field near the garden,” the gold coming out upon the whins, the great trailing flight of crows “passing continually between the wintry leaden sky and the wintry cold-looking hills,” these made up the environing picture of his soul’s life at Swanston. Here he worked, and worked</td>
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<td>The summer days at Swanston enriched his heart’s experience of communion with Nature; while in winter the swift glance, like a swallow’s flight, across the Forth, from the back windows of Heriot Row, gave vision of the Hills of Fife, beyond the shining Firth which “bridled the wild Hielian’man” in the days of old. Swanston gave him also word pictures which stand out clear and perfect in a line or two.</td>
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<td>Those who kept together — a miserable few — often halted to rest themselves, and to allow their lagging comrades to overtake them. Then onward they went again, still hoping for assistance, reinforcement, and supplies; onward again, through the <em>wind</em>, and the rain, and the darkness — onward to their defeat at Penland, and their scaffold at Edinburgh. It was calculated that they lost one half of their army on that disastrous night-march.</td>
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<td>MASTER ANDREW Murray, an outed minister, residing in the <a href="http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ark:/13960/t3xs69k0j">Pottow</a> on the morning after the defeat, heard the sounds of cheering and the march of many feet beneath his window. He gazed out with colours flying, and with music sounding, Dalzell, victorious, entered Edinburgh. MASTER ANDREW Murray, an outed minister, residing in the <a href="http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ark:/13960/t3xs69k0j">Pottow</a> on the morning after the defeat, heard the sounds of cheering and the march of many feet beneath his window. He gazed out with colours flying, and with music sounding, Dalzell, victorious, entered Edinburgh.</td>
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The extraordinary height of the houses was marked by lights, which, glimmering irregularly along their front, ascended so high among the attics, that they seemed at length to twinkle in the middle sky. This coup d’oeil, which still subsists in a certain degree, was then more imposing, living to the uninterrupted range of buildings on each side, which, broken only at the space where the North Bridge joins the main street, formed a superb and uniform Place, extending from the foot of the Luckenbooths to the head of the Canongate, and responding in breadth and length to the uncommon height of

“North Bridge”
No. of extracts here: 146
Links etc.

http://Litlong.org

http://palimpsest.blogs.edina.ac.uk/

‘Edinburgh’s Literary History Mapped at the Click of a Button’
http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/28/edinburgh-literary-history-online-map-lit-long

BL Labs Research Award, runner up 2015

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