

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Narrative Space in  
*Let The Great World Spin*

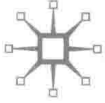
**SHEILA HONES**



LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES  
NARRATIVE SPACE IN *LET THE GREAT WORLD SPIN*

Sheila Hones

palgrave  
macmillan



LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Copyright © Sheila Hones, 2014

All rights reserved.

First published in 2014 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-1-137-41312-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hones, Sheila.

Literary geographies : narrative space in *Let the great world spin* / Sheila Hones.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-137-41312-3 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. McCann, Colum, 1965—*Let the great world spin*. 2. Space and time in literature. 3. Narration (Rhetoric) 4. Intertextuality. I. Title.

PR6063.C335Z69 2014

823'.914—dc23

2014004125

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Scribe Inc.

First edition: August 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As this work is a revised and expanded version of a manuscript written for Tokyo University Press, I would first like to thank my editor at TUP, Kensuke Goto, and our translator, Eimi Ozawa. I would also like to acknowledge the practical and financial support of Tokyo University Press and the University of Tokyo's Center for Pacific and American Studies.

At Palgrave Macmillan, I would like to thank Brigitte Shull, Ryan Jenkins, and the editorial and production teams.

The generous support of colleagues, staff, and graduate students at the University of Tokyo, in particular in the Department of Area Studies and in the English teaching section, has been vital to this project, and I am especially grateful to my colleagues in North American studies: Masako Notoji, Yasuo Endo, Fumiko Nishizaki, Yujin Yaguchi, and Kenryu Hashikawa. Other Tokyo colleagues I would like to thank include Izumi Hirobe, Shoko Imai, Julia Leyda, Masami Nakao, Nao Nomura, and Hatsue Shinohara; among colleagues elsewhere, I am particularly grateful to Michele Acuto, Mike Crang, James Kneale, and Angharad Saunders. Richard Carter-White heroically read and commented on both versions of the manuscript.

Personal friends-and-family thanks go especially to GHH and the Hones, Freegard, and Common families, to Jane and Phil Blake, Clive Collins, Dexter Da Silva, Caroline Kuroda, Graham Law, Allan Morrison, Tony Mills, Marie Plasse, Amanda Shepherd, and the inspiring Bill Vance.

Finally, the always cheerful practical and moral support of my friends Yujin and Caroline kept this book alive, as did the care and support I have received (and continue to receive) from medical professionals in Japan and the United Kingdom. I would like to thank Dr. Taiyo Kikuchi and the staff at the Mitakanomori Clinic in Tokyo, as well as Maggie Warth and the satellite unit staff at the Royal United Hospital Bath. Finally, I would like to thank my specialist at the Okubo Hospital in Tokyo, Dr. Sachiko Wakai, and her colleagues Dr. Yasutomo Abe, Dr. Ari Shimizu (now at Tokyo Women's Medical University), Dr. Hirofumi Tani, Dr. Koji Yonekura, and the whole hospital staff.

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
1 Introduction	1
2 The Event of the Novel	19
3 Narrative Locations	35
4 <i>The Great World's</i> New York	51
5 Narrative Space	69
6 Distances	85
7 The Intertextual City	101
8 Literary Space	115
9 Geographies of Creation and Promotion	129
10 Geographies of Reception	145
11 Conclusion: What Happens Next?	163
Notes	183
Bibliography	201
Index	211

## CHAPTER 1



### INTRODUCTION

It's early in the morning on Wednesday, August 7, 1974, and commuters are heading into Manhattan. At ground level, people traveling into work are coming up from subway stations, climbing out of taxis, and stepping down from buses. The city is full of morning noise and movement: trucks honking, subways rumbling, ferries landing, revolving doors revolving. Gradually, in the midst of the sound and the traffic, many of the commuters slow down, stop walking, and come to a halt; their heads tilt back as they gaze up to the 110th floor. They are wondering, talking to strangers, asking each other what's going on. So high above the streets that it's difficult even to make out a human figure, the French wirewalker Philippe Petit is about to begin a highly illegal performance. He is going to walk back and forth between two towers, a distance of 61 meters, on a 200-kilogram steel cable with no safety net. He is 417 meters above street level, holding a balance pole that is 8 meters long and weighs 25 kilograms. During his 45 minutes on the wire, he will walk, kneel, lie down, and chat with a seagull. The commuters below will be rooted to the sidewalks, mesmerized. The police, meanwhile, will be racing up through the towers and hovering, ready to pounce, in the sky.<sup>1</sup>

Petit has been working toward this moment steadily since 1968, when he came across an article in a magazine that included early plans for the World Trade Center's twin towers. He was waiting in a dentist's office, but immediately, seized with excitement, he forgot his toothache. Having already announced his intention to become a famous wirewalker, the moment he saw the plans he understood that the towers were going to offer him his great opportunity. In the grip of a "nearly fanatical new passion" for wirewalking, he recalls in his

memoir *To Reach the Clouds*, “It is as a reflex that I take the pencil from behind my ear to trace a line between the two rooftops.”<sup>2</sup> Of course at that time, the towers only existed on paper; he would have to wait until they were built to fulfill his artistic dream. But while he waited, he planned, and he practiced. He worked as a tightrope walker, a unicyclist, and a juggler; in 1971, he walked between the towers of the Notre Dame de Paris; and in 1973, he walked between the two north pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Both times, he was arrested. Undaunted, his ultimate ambition remained the World Trade Center.

Petit’s preparations were meticulous. He would be the center of attention, the daredevil artist, but the performance would of necessity be a collaboration. He would have to rely on a team of friends and supporters—for financial as well as practical and moral support—and he would need his audience. It could even be said that in the end he needed the authorities and the police: to make it a challenge, to make it illegal, to make it thrilling, and to conclude and punctuate the performance with an arrest.

Petit’s triumphant performance became immediately established as a significant element in the popular image of the twin towers. Some commentators have even argued that it humanized the towers, turning the tide of popular opinion in a positive direction.<sup>3</sup> But nearly thirty years later, with the destruction of the towers on September 11, 2001, Petit’s walk took on an even more highly charged dimension of significance. After 9/11, Petit’s audacious wirewalk emerged with renewed force as a positive and creative moment in World Trade Center history and public memory: the image of the “man on wire” became rekindled as the image of the artist presenting as a free gift to an astonished public something beautiful and full of hope. The invasion of American space that the French wirewalker performed—an invasion conceived, planned, and initially rehearsed outside the United States—was, of course, like the terrorist attacks of 2001, an illegal surprise assault on the towers. But it sprang from a radically different intent and was aimed at vastly different results.

### THREE KEY ELEMENTS

Philippe Petit’s wirewalk between the World Trade Center towers has been placed here, as the opening scene for this book, because of its connections with three key elements to the study: (1) Colum McCann’s 2009 novel *Let the Great World Spin*, (2) the role of collaboration in artistic and academic performance, and (3) interdisciplinary

literary geography as something that happens between, and as a result connects, literary studies and geography.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, these three elements provide the foundations for the broad aim of this book, which is to explore a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to the narrative spatiality of a work of contemporary fiction through a combination of theory and method in literary studies with theory and method in cultural geography.

The first reason, then, that this study opens with a narrative version of Petit's 1974 wirewalk is that it forms the pivotal event in the case study text, Colum McCann's popular and artistically acclaimed 2009 novel, *Let the Great World Spin* (hereafter referred to as *The Great World*). McCann's fifth novel, *The Great World* has achieved both popular and critical success: a bestseller, it has also been awarded several major literary prizes, including the US 2009 National Book Award and the 2011 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. For this kind of study in literary geography, the novel's critical and popular reception is important because it means that the novel can be studied not only from the focused perspective of a close critical reading but also in terms of promotion and popular reader reception. And because this study also considers the geographies of the author's public persona, it is worth noting here at the beginning that McCann was born in Dublin in 1965, currently lives in New York City, where he teaches in the creative writing program at Hunter College, and holds dual US/Irish citizenship. Already living in New York in September 2001, McCann experienced the aftermath of the attacks on the towers at firsthand. "The question, as a writer," he has explained, "was how to find meaning at all when there was, in plain sight, a world charged with meaning. If everything meant something . . . then how was it possible to create an alternative meaning, or more exactly, a novel?"<sup>5</sup>

The second reason that this study opens with the Petit wirewalk has to do with its relation to the collaborative nature of performance; while Petit's walk was in many ways a solo tour de force, performed by a single artist, his dance across the space between the towers depended for its impact on the involvement of an eclectic collection of collaborators. These included not only financial backers, training partners, and members of the team actually involved in setting up the wirewalk, between the night of August 6 and the morning of August 7, but also Petit's audience, the general public, journalists, photographers, the police, and the judiciary.

The position this study takes is that the writing/reading event enabled by Petit's wirewalk—McCann's novel—is just as strongly and inevitably collaborative an event. Petit needed inspiration from others;

he needed to learn from experts; he needed collaborators and an audience. McCann, too, in writing his novel depended on inspiration from other artists and writers, local informants and experts, collaborators in the form of editors and publishers, and an audience. McCann himself is very clear on this point, emphasizing not only the sources of inspiration he took from his reading (the first being an essay in Paul Auster's *The Red Notebook*) but also his local research and his informants (homicide detectives and computer hackers, among others); he has also stated clearly and repeatedly that a book "is completed only when it is finished by a reader."<sup>6</sup>

Third, the Petit wirewalk is used here to raise the curtain in order to draw attention to a kind of energy I understand as "the power of creativity in the space between." Not only is this study in interdisciplinarity, like Petit's performance and McCann's novel, inherently collaborative, it is also, in a sense, an academic version of Petit's adventure between the towers. Literary geography, as an academic crossover field, is something else that has to happen in "the space between," in this case, in the gap dividing and connecting literary studies and academic geography. As an example of interdisciplinary scholarship, this book is a work that is performed, as we might say, in the space between the tower of geography, on the one side, and the tower of literary studies, on the other: two well-established structures, with independent foundations, which afford different views. As a work of literary geography, this book is thus itself a metaphorical wirewalk—a much less risky wirewalk, but still, of its kind, a small adventure in the space between. It is intended to function as a practical example of a kind of interdisciplinary performance, which—like Petit's dance across gaping emptiness—can only succeed if it is produced out of collaboration, grounded on a connecting link firmly secured at both ends, and attracts an audience.

### LET THE GREAT WORLD SPIN

As Colum McCann describes it, *The Great World* is "a story of lives entwined in the early 1970's . . . [most of which] takes place on one day in New York in August 1974 when Phillipe Petit (unnamed in the book) makes his tightrope walk across the World Trade Center towers, a walk that was called 'the artistic crime of the 20th century.'" The novel "follows the intricate lives of a number of different people who live on the ground, or, rather, people who walk the ground's tightrope [as they] accidentally dovetail in and out of each other's lives

on this one day . . . It's a collision, really, a web in this big sprawling complex web that we call New York."<sup>7</sup>

Lending the narrative voice to a dozen people involved in this collision, McCann has organized *The Great World* into 13 chapters and one photograph. The opening chapter has a conventional third-person narrator, while the remaining 12 chapters are each narrated from the perspective of one of 11 major characters: some in the first person ("I stood looking around for Corrigan"), others in a third-person voice limited, mainly, to a single point of view ("Most days, he had to admit, were dire").<sup>8</sup> The fictionalized, unnamed wirewalk artist functions as the center of consciousness for two chapters and, in addition, his performance of the high-wire walk across the space between the newly completed World Trade Center towers provides one of the key narrative hubs through which the various individual stories connect. The first 12 chapters take place at the time of the 1974 wirewalk performance; the thirteenth and final chapter is set 32 years later in 2006 and is narrated by a character who appears briefly as a small child in the earlier section.

Between the 1974 chapters and the 2006 chapter, McCann leaves a structurally vital narrative gap, an empty space where readers might well expect to find the events of 9/11. McCann has in this way created a gap in the novel where 9/11 "ought to be," and he has dealt with the events in this way in order to generate something new in that "space between." He takes the events of 9/11 out of the narrative and replaces them with something else. That day, inevitably, haunts the narrative, but it functions like an invisible rock in the flow of a river. McCann acknowledges that both in spite of and because of the way the narrative flows around this invisible event, creating a central absence, *The Great World* is still, inevitably, a 9/11 novel. "This is my own emotional response to 9/11," he has explained in interviews, "it's not a measured intellectual response"; he hopes that this literary, emotional response will generate an alternative space for its readers, "a new space in which to breathe."<sup>9</sup>

For McCann, who believes that "a good novel can be a doorstep to despair," the heart of the novel can be found not in moments of disaster and loss but in a representative moment of rescue. The wirewalker's performance is, of course, important in the narrative, structurally and thematically—but it is not "a rescue." In fact, it has much in common with the 9/11 attacks: it is unsanctioned, dangerous, and clandestine; it takes place high above street level, in the morning light, in Manhattan's downtown business district. McCann creates a very different setting for the event he wants to place in the gap that was made when

the towers crumbled into dust: "The story comes right down to the ground, in the very dark of night, in the roughest part of New York, when two little girls emerge from a Bronx housing complex and get rescued by strangers. That, for me, is the core image of the novel. That's the moment when the towers get built back up."<sup>10</sup>

*The Great World* has inevitably been read very often as "a 9/11 novel." McCann himself explains that "9/11 was the initial impetus for the book," but he also insists that "in some ways it's an anti-9/11 novel," not only because he "wanted to lift it out of the 9/11 'grief machine,'" but also because it is "a book about the 70s—'Flared jeans, shaggy hair, disco lights, that sort of thing'"—and at the same time, it is a book about "now."<sup>11</sup> Readers have further contextualized the novel generically within world fiction, Irish fiction, and US fiction and thematically as "a New York novel" or a work of "immigrant fiction." Taken together, the various literary, historical, and contextual aspects of the novel make it a productive case study text for an adventure in interdisciplinary literary geography. On the one hand, its literary themes and intertextual references provide excellent material for close readings made in the tradition of a text-analysis approach to literary geography; on the other hand—and in terms of the social processes of its creation, production, dissemination and reception—the novel provides equally promising material for a literary geography approach focusing on text-reader networks.

## COLLABORATION

Central to this book is the concept of an artistic performance or production as an event, something that happens—and keeps on happening—in space as well as time. It comes into being and then continues to unfold not only in the creation of an original performance (wire-walking, for example, or writing fiction) but also in subsequent viewings, interpretations, readings, and memories.<sup>12</sup> This idea works with Petit's wirewalk, but it can also be productively applied to McCann's novel—and of course to fiction in general. Approaching the novel in this way, as a spatial event, a collaboration that is "never finished; never closed," we can understand it as a process happening at the intersection of multiple participants, including authors, editors, publishers, texts, teachers, critics, and readers.<sup>13</sup> The text, when it happens, comes into being in the interaction of differently contextualized processes, and these processes are each in themselves generated in the context of countless interactions across space and time. There is, of course, a real author called Colum McCann; actual copies—physical books or

ebooks—of the various editions of *The Great World* can be purchased in bookstores or online or borrowed from libraries and friends; individuals obtain the book, read it, write about it in letters or emails or blogs, or discuss it in reading groups. *The Great World* happens as an event in the interaction of these elements: author, text, and readers.

This book, too, is an event. It is happening right now, as my writing and your reading interact in space and time: we are engaged in a collaboration. In fact, in the case of this particular text—originally written in English, rewritten in Japanese, and then revised and expanded in English—the collaboration involves a translator, several reviewers, and at least three editors, as well as an author (me) and a reader (you). It also involves the various other readers, colleagues and friends who contributed their participation to the event before the original English manuscript was even sent to the translator.<sup>14</sup> Our writing-reading event will involve the coming-together across various kinds of distance (temporal, spatial, linguistic) of many participants, and as you read, wherever and whenever you are right now, you will be collaborating with me in an improvisation that pulls together multiple people, places, times, contexts, networks, and communities. Our collaboration is unpredictable and unique. It might suddenly stop halfway, if you lose patience or interest and stop reading. But at this moment, it is still a meeting-up of my intentions and ways of writing with your purposes and ways of reading. Our writing-reading collaboration also includes the participation of the many other readers and writers who have influenced our various ways of writing and reading: editors, literary critics, geographers, teachers, colleagues, students, novelists, and reviewers. It is informed by otherwise unrelated communities and disparate specialist competencies, and by a vast range of historical contexts and local conditions.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY LITERARY GEOGRAPHY

The discussion of Colum McCann's *The Great World* that follows is offered as an example of one kind of interdisciplinary literary geography at work, attempting to connect theory and method in literary studies with theory and method in cultural geography.<sup>15</sup> The difficulties inherent in this kind of interdisciplinary scholarship are of course significant.<sup>16</sup> In the case of literary geography, for example, the work has to be done in such a way that neither the literature (the texts and the study of those texts) nor the geography (the world and the study of that world) become reduced to the status of subject matter, theme, or raw data. In order to achieve this interdisciplinary balance,

literary geography has to go beyond the literary analysis of geographical themes or the geographical analysis of literary texts. *Literature* and *geography* have to function as a combined double subject, on the one hand, and a combined, double, theoretical, and methodological framework, on the other. This means, to take a practical example, that apparently simple and self-evident terms such as *space* or *reader* have to be carefully used, bearing in mind the various ways in which the meanings of these terms have been debated and negotiated in academic discourse. A literary critic might well use the term *space* as if its meaning is self-evident; a cultural geographer probably would not. Meanwhile, a cultural geographer might well refer to *the reader* as if that concept, too, were unproblematic; a literary scholar working in reception studies probably would not. What this means is that a work located between these two disciplines has to pay close attention to the academic version of what for Petit were his “cavaletti”—his anchor ropes. Further, just as Petit was challenged by destabilizing gusts, updrafts, and downdrafts, studies in interdisciplinary literary geography will inevitably have some difficulty maintaining their balance in the crosswinds of literary and spatial theory.

Nonetheless, while it is at times difficult to reconcile these two theoretical specializations in the practice of literary geography, there are lines that can be thrown between the two. The primary line established in this study connecting literary and spatial theory is anchored at one end in a view of geographical space as “the product of interrelations,” as a dimension of multiplicity and plurality, as always unfinished and under construction, and at the other end in a comparably spatial view of the literary text, as the result of interaction and the product of multiplicity, as permanently in a state of production.<sup>17</sup> This interdisciplinary connection suggests at least three kinds of space for literary geography to consider. There is the fictional space generated in the event of the text: in this case, the geography of *The Great World*, its locations, distances, and networks. Then there is the “unending library” of intertextual literary space: in this case, the uncontained intertextual space that opens out from *The Great World* with every quotation McCann includes and every literary reverberation the reader senses. And then there is the sociospatial dimension of the collaboration of author, editor, publisher, critic, and reader without which reading (and thus text) could not happen: this is the interaction to which McCann refers in his remark that a novel “is completed only when it is finished by a reader.” At least these three kinds of literary-geographical space, then, become visible in a version of literary geography that regards the various spaces of narrative, intertextuality, production, and reception

as simultaneously and equally literary and geographical. And for all this to work, space—whether geographical, narrative, or literary—has to be understood not as a fixed and measurable frame within which action takes place but rather as the product of action: an active dimension of interrelations, intertextualities, and multiplicity.

Working in this way, from an understanding of literary-geographical space made possible by the work of geographers and spatial theorists—such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward Soja, and Doreen Massey—and by the work of literary critics and cultural theorists—such as M. M. Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva—this study of the literary geographies of *The Great World* assumes that the literary-geographical space in which fiction happens is a real space. It is real in the same way that Soja's simultaneously material and symbolic "third space" is real or that intertextuality as "as a space in which a vast number of relations coalesce" is real.<sup>18</sup> The New York of *The Great World* happens in readings as a third space, a flexible space, an unruly space-time, composed of multiple mixed-together New York geographies—material, described, and imagined—brought to the event of the text by author and reader. At the same time, *The Great World* is itself a coming-together of literary allusion and resonance, a nexus in intertextual space-time. And finally the literary-geographical space practiced by the author, text, and reader in the event of *The Great World* is simultaneously substantial and intangible, measurable and mobile.

It is at this point that this line in literary geography diverges from the narratological position that in "speaking of space in narratology and other fields, a distinction should be made between literal and metaphorical uses of the concept."<sup>19</sup> The kind of literary geography practiced in this study of the geographies of McCann's novel understands "literal" space to include not only the container space that depends on a fixed system of coordinates but also all kinds of relational and social space, taken to be equally literal and equally real. As a result, whereas the literal/metaphorical binary currently means for mainstream narratology that "author-reader relations, literary-historical considerations, and intertextual allusions are metaphorical because they fail to account for physical existence," all these aspects of literary space are accorded equal status as real in this study. In this view, the New York City of *The Great World* is no more literal a space than the socioliterary space produced by the interaction of McCann and his readers in the event of the novel.

In its understanding of textual space as a real space, this version of literary geography also reaches back to Joseph Frank's idea of spatial

form, regarding narrative spatiality not as a “structural metaphor” but as something much more literal—not taking it as an attempt to eliminate the temporal organization of fictional narrative but instead, more positively, as part of indivisible narrative space-time. The fact that the recognition of spatial form in fiction depends on the contribution of the reader is sometimes taken as evidence of its secondary position, but this is not an issue for a literary geography that refuses to separate time from space and understands the text as a sociospatial event generated in author-text-reader interaction. This position removes the need for the qualification included in the entry on spatial form in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, for example, when it notes that “spatial form possesses an underlying coherence based on thematic analogies . . . and associative cross-references, but this coherence must be established by the reader.”<sup>20</sup> The significant “but” in this explanation, which sustains the dominance of temporal over spatial organization for narrative theory, disappears in a literary geography for which text happens in interaction.

The separation of space and time and the assumption that “simultaneity” is a function of time and not space leads to a second doubt about the idea of spatial form in fiction that can be discounted in an approach to literary geography grounded in an understanding of space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far.”<sup>21</sup> This is the doubt expressed in the explanation that “Joseph Frank famously postulated that modernist literature had a ‘spatial form,’ although his understanding of space was largely limited to a temporal characteristic, simultaneity.”<sup>22</sup> In this view, spatial form is the “artificial” result of the author’s organization of the narrative and the demands it makes on the reader: “Simultaneity or spatiality is artificially imposed by the author’s decision to break the linear narrative into fragments,” which require the reader to “project a kind of spatial mental image as they put these pieces together.” As a result, in this view of spatial form, the spatialization effected by narrative fragmentation “might be considered an allegorical process” requiring the reader to “project a mental image, not unlike a map, in order to grasp the narrative.”<sup>23</sup> However, this kind of deprecation of spatial form as merely metaphorical or allegorical, in contrast with the seemingly more literal temporal form of the novel, becomes unnecessary in a literary geography that takes the participation of the reader in the text event for granted, regards the process of mental mapping not as something allegorical but as an essential element in the production of space, and, most importantly, understands simultaneity not as a “temporal characteristic” but as something thoroughly spatial. This accords with the view of Doreen Massey, for whom space can

be defined as the sphere of a dynamic “contemporaneous plurality,” something far more complex and interesting than “a static slice through time.”<sup>24</sup>

The literary geography practiced in this study is made up, then, of a combination of ideas about geographical space and ideas about literary space, all of which reject the idea that the only kind of real space is the measurable space of a container, or a setting. These two ways of thinking about space, geographical and literary, converge in a literary geography that regards texts as events that happen in the course of sociospatial and intertextual interactions. This way of thinking about fiction—taking the novel as a spatial event—is explained in more detail in Chapter 2, which follows from and builds on this chapter’s introduction of the study’s three key elements: (1) the case study novel, (2) the importance of collaboration in artistic and academic production, and (3) the definition of a particular kind of interdisciplinary literary geography.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

After the introductory setup of Chapters 1 and 2, Chapters 3 and 4 begin the analysis of the literary-geographical spaces of *The Great World* with a relatively conventional summary of the novel’s use of setting, description, and narrative locations. While Chapters 3 and 4 both deal with questions of space and place, Chapter 3 does so in a manner that is able to remain relatively compatible with a view of space as a set of locations, measurable distances, and containers, while Chapter 4 begins the move toward an alternative view of the novel’s narrative space as something flexible and unstable, something that is in constant process throughout the novel: not so much a space that frames action as a space generated through action. The transition from Chapter 3 to Chapter 4 thus replicates the move in human geography from a view of space as something natural, which precedes social activity, to a relational view “in which space is ‘folded into’ social relations through practical activities.” This is the transition from a geography for which space is “an external coordinate, an empty grid of mutually exclusive points, ‘an unchanging box’” within which objects exist and events occur, into a geography for which space and time are not separate, not neutral, and not external to social activity, in which space is practiced rather than inhabited.<sup>25</sup>

Chapters 5 and 6 move away from questions of place and space as they relate to the novel’s New York City setting to turn instead toward the more general question of narrative space. Chapter 5 begins with