

**Robert T. Tally Jr. *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative and the Spatial Imagination*.  
Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019.**

Robert T. Tally Jr. needs no introduction. His underpinning critical and theoretical work on Fredric Jameson and Bernard Westphal has positioned him perfectly as a lead interpreter and commentator on “the spatial turn” of the late 20th Century – a role which came to fruition in his highly influential Routledge guide on *Spatiality* (2014). Over the last ten years, then, Tally has roamed across the fields of geography/cartography/ literature and spatial studies and *Topophrenia* brings together a series of powerful essays to create “a tour or itinerary through various points on the map of my recent thinking about literary cartography” (8). The title is an act of homage to cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan and his classic 1974 study *Topophilia* (“a sense of place/love of place”). Tally’s term posits “placemindedness” as a fundamental human condition but focusses attention on the ways in which affective geography necessarily also involves a degree of “disorder or dis-ease” (9). From Tally’s point of view ours is “an age of enhanced spatiality” (3) in which “We are always mapping, whether we are aware of it or not”(3).

Tally’s rich blend of deeply informed spatial theory is here characteristically combined with a deep understanding of the spatial form of the novel and exploration into the nature of the spatial imagination. For Tally, place itself is always textualised – “to attempt to know a place one maps it, but one also reads it and narrates it” (63) and there is constant slippage between figurative mapping and the spatial dimensions of narrative form: “maps presuppose narratives, which in turn may function as maps” (31). Just as *Spatiality* sought to categorise three core elements involved in acts of mapping place and space in literature, so this collection is organised into three main parts. Tally distinguishes between: spatial cartographic theory (*cartographics*); *geocriticism* as the analytic model and method of interpretation; and *literary cartography* as the subject of enquiry centred on the relationship between place, representation and text for writer and reader (38).

The first activity is exemplified in Part I by the essay that defines his position in and through Bernard Westphal in “Introducing Geocriticism”. Here he determines his own form as “a set of practices according to which the reader focusses attention on the ways that literature represents, shapes or is formed by the real” (39) as opposed to the more purist place-centrism of Westphal who begins with a site and seeks to locate the stories that attach to it. Parts II and III both shift attention to literary cartography as the subject, with geocriticism as the method. Tally’s approach to mapping is strongly focussed upon the writer as mapmaker who both creates and represents the territory. Eschewing the reproduction or interpretation of any *actual* maps, Tally seeks to articulate a model that “maps” from within the text and does so in part to dissolve the traditional distinction (going back to Lessing) between visual and verbal. Thus, the distinction between sequentiality of text and the fixed image of the map is for him held within the movement between plot action and descriptive pause. Narrative is defined as a form of spatial creation: “not just a form of representation but a form of world-making” (79) with the writer as surveyor of the territory he or she brings into being and the narrator/persona charting the world that is both produced and represented. A figurative understanding of mapping and spatiality collapses all distinctions between “real” place, represented and imagined.

The true agenda of the collection and surely the title it could have been given – “Defining Literary Cartography” – emerges across Parts II and III. This is where Tally’s heart lies – in redetermining what we understand this term to mean from denoting a loose interdisciplinary field to a quite specific account of figurative representation of a fictional world and of literary cartography as innate: “part of any narrative project not a technical term for a certain type of interdisciplinary practice limited to the combining methods used in literature and geography”

(131). Since there *is* an already defined larger field in play one cannot help but long for a different term for what Tally is so ardently trying to describe here – something I would probably call “literary spatiality” – but which is really about the coming-into-being of the literary work and the unfolding of it not only sequentially or temporally but spatially at all levels – not just as represented within the text but in terms of narrative-as-map and in relation to the act of creation. Nonetheless, it is in the deeper exploration of what this conception of literature might mean for the novel as an epistemological form that “like the map . . . is a form of knowledge as well as an attempt to know” (113) that key essays such as “The Mise en Abyme of Literary Cartography” and “Theatricum Geographicum” become most absorbing.

Of course there are decisions with which one could take issue. The choice not to present maps alongside texts (because literary mapping is fundamentally about mapping textually) becomes complicated, even compromised, in the face of a writer such as Tolkien – who literally maps in order to write (visualisation of imagined space generates narrative). And here one might equally question why the literary work as a form to be mapped should not embrace the paratext as well as the text. The decision to focus solely on the novel rather than work across a range of forms is also open to debate. But these are issues the author himself is clearly aware of (and raises) and equally ones that apply to his broader approach not just to the essays published here. In any case it is always irritating to have a reviewer focus on what one has *not* done and, at some level, not quite playing the game. By any measure, this is an extremely authoritative, readable and clear-sighted collection of writings that stimulates and provokes further thought. Individual pieces do indeed unify into a “whole greater than the sum of their parts” and in so doing provide essential reading for anyone working in the related fields of Literary Cartography and the Spatial Humanities.

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