MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Robert T. Tally (ed.), *Spatial Literary Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space, Geography, and the Imagination* (Routledge, 2021)

Reviewed by Adriana Marinelli
(Università degli Studi di Napoli Parthenope, IT)

Robert T. Tally's research has consistently engaged with the challenging notion of spatiality in literary texts. Over the years, his work has paved the way for investigations into the intersection of literature and geography. Indeed, the inherent complexity of spatial constructs calls for interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches and strategies able to combine literary theories and geography. Marked by ceaseless vitality, this emerging field of scholarship is still undergoing a process of definition and redefinition as its methodologies and objectives continue to evolve.

Spatial Literary Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space, Geography, and the Imagination (2021) edited by Robert T. Tally Jr. is one of the most recent volumes that contribute new insights to this scholarly domain. Tally begins by remarking upon the term "spatial" employed as an adjective to modify the phrase *literary studies*, and thereby including "matter of space, place, mapping, geography, architecture, spatial relations, and so on" (2). Based on this fundamental premise, the collection brings together a significant number of essays spanning theory and practice, to demonstrate the coexistence of integrated perspectives when addressing spatial concerns. The contributions engage with both literature and media, addressing not only physical locations but also imagined environments, social spaces, and virtual realms.

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549043

The volume is made up of five sections, each focusing on a distinct facet that contributes to the complex mosaic of *Spatial Literary Studies*. The opening section "Geocritical Theory and Practice" reconstructs the theoretical framework behind the geocritical approach, with close reference to literary analysis. Mariya Shymchshyn and Jessica Maucione's essays emphasise the foundational relevance of interdisciplinary dialogue between geographers and philosophers in advancing the field, claiming that the "notion of space as a locus of intersections, contacts, tensions, and relationships gives numerous possibilities to geocriticism" (20). Building upon this theoretical background, Emmanuelle Peraldo and Yann Calbérac further investigate the role of maps in *Gulliver's Travel* by Jonathan Swift (1726) and *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll (1871). Integrating a semiotic perspective, they reflect upon the performative functions of these cartographic tools, proposing new perspectives for interpreting both novels. Indeed, such tools enhance narrative comprehension by mediating the relationship between the reader and the text.

Expanding on the previously established theoretical framework, the collection showcases several applications across a number of literary contexts. The third section, "Geographies of the Text", shifts the focus to how the dimension of space creates a specific *locus* that fosters a broader understanding of both the text and its author. Specifically, the essays in this section investigate how the geography emerging from literary texts can be employed to reconstruct a "spatiality" originating within the narrative itself. This involves exploring spaces characterised by liminality (Dreiding), memory (Robertson), and nature (Franco), and analysing how these *loci* actively contribute to the construction of identity. Rogério Melo Franco and Julia Kroger both analyse the concept of spatiality in French poetry and prose. By characterizing Mallarmé's text as "properly spatial, earthy, and territorial" (4). Franco both challenges and explores the "spatial" identity of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* seeking to reveal the ways in which space itself contributes to the text's significance. By contrast, Julia Kroger reconstructs Zola's knowledge of Paris through his preparatory notes,

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549043

demonstrating how social and economic forces shape the lived experiences of his characters. Another chapter in this section likely considers how the space *of* the text can serve as a lens through which to reconstruct identity. Indeed, according to Michelle Dreiding, beginnings in Toni Morrison's novels function as textual *loci* to establish themes of liminality and self-discovery. Similarly, Kate Siklosi examines how M. NourbeSe Philip reclaims the space and place of silence, interpreting it not as absence but as a powerful, alternative epistemology. Interestingly, silence constructs a specific space which is strictly linked to postcolonial concerns, demonstrating how Philip uses spatiality to challenge dominant historical narratives and "universalising historicism".

Through a mere preposition switch, the third section of the volume titled "Geography in the text" moves from the geography *emerging from* the text to the analysis of space *within* the narrative itself, examining how characters inhabit and are shaped by their surroundings. Several contributions in this section engage in the reconstruction of specific, tangible spaces - such as caves (Crane and Fletcher), deserts (Ager), and ghettos (Murat Öner) - which enrich the reader's understanding of the novel by unveiling subtle dimensions of its main characters. Such analyses serve to illustrate how such spaces are not merely passive settings but actively shape the characters' experiences and participate in the articulation of the novel's themes. For instance, Adam R. McKees connects the city-country binarism to Nietzschean themes and broader historical and philosophical notions, underscoring how this context is reflected in the spatial representation. Tally's geocritical approach further interweaves with postcolonialism in Dunstin Crowley's contribution, where spatial boundaries and transgressions are related to issues of power, identity and resistance. Indeed, the spatial literary approach both intersects with and draws insight from postcolonial theory and of "the necessity to account from the particular conditions and histories that variously shape the relations between space and place, rather than relying on dichotomous categories with preset evaluations" (223).

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549043

The fourth part, "The Problematics of Place" deals with the complex notion of place, as embedded in a specific context involving both literature and movies (Kohler). Walter Bosse examines Ralph Ellison's essay on Harlem, further underscoring its implications as "place of nowhere". By reconstructing the complex mosaic of racial, psychological, and cultural dynamics, Harlem comes to embody a form of universal specificity, an enduring condition that resists the contemporary tendency to conceive of place as rigidly bound to identity. Thereby illustrating the "dynamic processes in our American cityscapes, processes that continue to involve racial conflict, urban displacement, and ghettoization" (238). Moreover, cities become the privileged lens which "can either aid or restrict a writer's ability to make sense of one's existence in the tumultuous twentieth century" (240). Chris Margrave inspects Walker Percy's contrasting relationship with Covington, whose trace finds an echo in his novels. Through the spatial perspective, Convington motivates Percy's seminal awareness of place, that he conceives not as "an end, but a means to achieving a perspective: that the human condition is an unrooted experience" (251), stressing the notion of the human condition as fundamentally dislocated and in search of meaning. Will Cunnigham further examines Toni Morrison's work to broaden the potential of her texts, questioning two of her novels. The author highlights the implications of space as intrinsically bound to race, while emphasising a distinctive spatial fluidity which allows for considerations regarding broader sociohistorical processes. Cunningham thus points to "the hybridity" of Morrison's novels that configure themes as spaces reflecting on "both an oppressive whiteness and the act of re-visioning and remembering—the narrative of the oppressed—which is the home of counter-hegemonic practices and their spatial manifestation" (275).

Nathan Frank then concludes the section with a contribution on "Dave Eggers's Spatial Virtuality and the Condition of Literature". Frank investigates "the spatial turn in literary and cultural studies as that which is present without being local" (289). This notion of "spatial virtuality" can enhance our understanding of power dynamics by considering how one can be "in or out, contained or excluded" (289) regardless of physical location. He

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549043

further introduces the idea of a "condition of literature", where the focus shifts to "the conditions they create, instead of referring to the conditions that create them" (289). Frank aptly focuses upon the intrinsic Worth of literature as an "(inter)textual umbrella" that includes "textual worlds" which are not necessarily confined to the literary sphere, highlighting how literature brings these worlds into dialogue, transforms them, and ultimately transcends their boundaries (290).

In his concluding remarks to the volume, Tally positions spatial literary studies as a distinct category set in contrast to literary geography. Drawing upon the contrast between the adjectives "spatial" and "literary" he offers a nuanced examination of what distinguishes broader, evolving field of inquiry. While literary geography might be conceived as "a blend of two disciplines, literature and geography" (328), spatial literary studies, as a field rooted within literary studies itself, focuses on issues, questions, and topics inherently related to literature, while still encouraging broader transdisciplinary encounters (329). Bringing together a wide range of multifaceted essays, Tally's recent volume proposes innovative and original interpretations that significantly contribute to and enrich the existing scholarship. While it is true that spatial literary studies remains a field in the process of active definition and refinement, its burgeoning critical potential is equally evident. Indeed, not only do these contributions offer insightful analyses of the intricate interplay between literary texts and the complex dimensions of space but they also serve as solid basis for future investigations. By highlighting the constant and evolving relationship between literature, space, and the human imagination, Tally's edited volume firmly establishes the enduring relevance and intellectual vitality of this increasingly crucial area of study.

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549043

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Bio-bibliographical note

Adriana Marinelli is a third-year PhD Candidate at Parthenope University of Naples. Her project explores the influence of classical antiquity on Robert Graves's poetry. She has conducted her research with the Robert Graves Collection, housed in St. John's College, Oxford. She has participated in several national and international conferences presenting papers on Robert Graves and the Classics. She also launched an online series of pop-up seminars about Robert Graves with Michael Joseph, editor of the *Robert Graves Review.*

Email address: adriana.marinelli001@studenti.uniparthenope.it

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549043