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

Geographies of the Marginal: Dialogues on Spatiality and Marginality in Literary Cartographies

In Conversation with Professor Robert T. Tally

Carla Tempestoso
(Università della Calabria, IT)

Introduction

This interview with Professor Robert T. Tally stems from a sustained interest in the intersections of spatial theory, literary analysis, and the politics of marginality. As one of the foremost voices in Spatial Literary Studies and co-editor of the journal *Margins*, Tally has contributed extensively to the theorization of space and place in literature, particularly through his promotion of geocritical methodologies. Professor Tally is a Professor of English and an Honorary Professor of International Studies at Texas State University, where he has received numerous honours for his academic work, including multiple awards for excellence in scholarly activity and teaching.

A pivotal figure in the development of the spatial humanities, Tally's influential works include *Spatiality* (2012), part of Routledge's *The New Critical Idiom* series, where he offers a compelling overview of the so-called *Spatial Turn* in contemporary theory. Engaging with thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and Edward Soja, *Spatiality* argues for a geocritical framework capable of illuminating how literature both reflects and reshapes spatial realities. This commitment to spatial thinking is further elaborated in his edited volume *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011) and his translation of Bertrand Westphal's foundational *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011).

The questions posed in this interview revolve around Tally's body of work, including *Utopia in the Age of Globalization* (2013), *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism: Overlapping Territories*

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

in Environmental and Spatial Literary Studies (2017), and *The Fiction of Dread* (2024). Central to our dialogue is the notion that spatiality is not a neutral backdrop but a constitutive force in literature—a force that enables the construction, negotiation, and critique of marginality. As such, this conversation investigates how concepts like exclusion, utopia, and the monstrous intersect with literary cartographies, and how geocritical methods may serve to map the contours of marginal existence, both imagined and lived.

~~~~~~

CT: Professor Tally, thank you for granting me this interview. I am honoured to have the opportunity to ask you some questions. Could you tell us about your journey and how you became interested in the studies of spatiality?

RT: I don't recall a time when I was not interested in space, place, and "mapping" (broadly conceived). Perhaps it is because, as a child, my family moved a lot, and I suppose displacement makes one more aware of place in general. As the saying goes, in Tolkien's version of it, "a fish out of water is the only fish to have an inkling of water." I expect it is also because I'm from the American South (in my case, North Carolina), where it seems that asking "Where are you from?" is a natural first question to ask when meeting someone, which then invites a discussion of that place or of people or events connected with it (e.g., "Oh, I have a cousin who lives there!" or "I visited that city when I was in high school" and so on). And then there's the more embarrassing possibility, which is that I don't have the best "sense of direction" and therefore can get easily lost; someone who is lost or worried about getting lost is more likely to think about mapping or desiring a map, I'd imagine.

As for my studies, the influence of existentialism likely paved that path, for existentialism insists upon the fact of one's situatedness in space (as well as in time), also emphasizing the ways that the situation is changeable, thus that our being-in-the-world is changeable. While reading and thinking about one's place in space—especially in social

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047
~~~~~~

space, which I found to be somewhat analogous and related to one's place in history—I became more aware of theorists and other writers who deal with such issues, including Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and my own teacher Fredric Jameson. Later, this work was enlarged through reading others, and as I came to work more closely on what we might think of as "traditional" literary studies (e.g., I wrote my dissertation on Herman Melville and *Moby-Dick*), I began to imagine ways in which these theories worked in relation to literature, especially to narrative. Not everything I've done since is part of the same overall project, of course, but most of what I do is still informed by this intellectual background.

CT: In your work *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism: Overlapping Territories in Environmental and Spatial Literary Studies*, you explore the intersections between ecocriticism and geocriticism. How do you see these two fields contributing to our understanding of marginality, particularly in relation to environmental and spatial justice?
RT: I'm not sure whether *I* do much exploring of those intersections, but the contributors to that volume do a great job. Apart from the Introduction to *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism*, which I wrote with my co-editor Christine M. Battista, I have never really done any work on ecocriticism or environmental literary studies. Chrissie was the ecocritic between the two of us. But it is clear that there are "overlapping territories" within the critical theories and practices of geocriticism and ecocriticism. The critical awareness of space and place ("topophrenia") is undoubtedly part of any environmentalist program, and the analysis of the ways in which space is produced, ordered, inhabited, occupied, traversed, or otherwise encountered may contribute greatly to the ecological and environmental studies of various spaces and places as well.

As for marginality in relation to environmental and spatial justice, I am not expert, but we have certainly seen at both local and more international levels the ways in which pollution is unevenly distributed. Just as the landfill or dump may be located at the margins

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

of a city or outside its limits, thus transporting garbage to the "margins" with respect to a civil "centre," at regional or national levels waste can be dispatched to wastelands (or worse, the sea, which has its notorious islands of trash and now microparticles of plastic throughout), and in an international system, some entire countries—many in what used to be called the Third World—become dumping grounds for the detritus and jetsam of so-called "developed" economies. In this sense, spatial and environmental marginalization is directly tied to systems of "waste management" that perpetuate other forms of inequality, not least of which involves public health. But then, the reality of global climate change has only underscored the degree to which all people in all places are part of a single broader system, which itself must be changed if humanity on the planet is to survive. Hence, marginality certainly exists, but all people are likely closer to those "margins" in everyday life than they might imagine.

CT: Given your extensive work on spatiality and geocriticism, how do you see the concept of marginality being spatially constructed within literary and cultural texts, particularly in relation to the 'spatial turn' you discuss in *Spatiality*?

RT: Marginality is interesting, in large part because it is relational, always defined with respect to some sort of centrality or otherwise prioritized organization of space. But surely one of the most crucial lessons taught by geocriticism or spatial literary studies is that space is itself dynamic, and hence what might be thought of as marginal or central in a given moment or circumstance might be reversed or altered in others. The "spatial turn" in the humanities and the social sciences did not so much highlight that which was previously marginalized or even reveal the processes of marginalization, although that may also be true, as it helped to make clear the ways in which what we imagine as central or marginal are historically, culturally, and socially contingent.

I expect that that's why poststructuralist theory (as it is called in the UK and USA, at least, for the term never meant much in France, even to the thinkers to whom the label was

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

applied) has been so important to the so-called "spatial turn," since the work of such thinkers as Foucault, Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard, to name a few, contributed to theory of social norms and forms in flux. Foucault in particular—with his studies of madness, the medical gaze, discipline and punishment, and sexuality—is probably most closely associated with the spatial and political study of the margins and the marginalized, but even there, he is most interested in the emergence of the power of normalization and the "invention" of knowledge, far more so than in the identities of the marginalized or something like that. Indeed, not to sound too deconstructionist, but the margins are themselves centres, and vice versa, when one examines the dynamics of space and historically produced and as occupied or inhabited. The same ways of representing space that would create centres and margins can operate in such a way as to reverse or transform those spaces and their representations in literature.

If anything, the "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences has help to show how terms like *marginal* or *central* cannot refer to stable categories or populations but must be seen as part of a more complex array of forces, making marginality or centrality contingent upon innumerable factors that render them perpetually subject to change or even reversal.

CT: In *The Fiction of Dre*ad, you explore dystopian narratives. How does the portrayal of marginal characters and spaces in these narratives reflect broader anxieties about societal marginalization and exclusion?

RT: *The Fiction of Dread: Dystopia, Monstrosity, and Apocalypse* began as a sort of sequel or companion to the earlier book on utopia, but of course part of my point is that dystopia is not really the opposite or even the "flipside" of utopia, but rather another means by which we "map" the present situation while still seeking to imagine alternatives. Hence "dread" is not the opposite of "hope," but rather a sort of anticipatory anxiety about potential futures as experienced very much in the here and now. As I was thinking of that in the context of

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

contemporary culture, I kept coming across figures of monstrosity (including actual "monsters") as well as a wide variety of end-of-the-world scenarios, some of which, ironically perhaps, seem preferable or even utopian with respect to the present condition. For example, in the remake of *The Planet of the Apes*, audiences are actively encouraged to cheer for the apes over and against the humans who have destroyed the world and thus earned their near-species-wide evanescence. In the reimagined *Westworld* series, we sympathize with and even applaud the androids as they wreak havoc upon the humans, whereas in the original film the robots were terrifying enemies to be defeated. This is part of the reversal of margin and centre, perhaps, but it also demonstrates that reversibility was always a feature of the marginality-centrality concept.

The figure of the monster is the most obvious example of the socially marginalized character or group, but as I noted before, marginality is relational and the position on the margins is apt to change as the social spaces (and the powers organizing them) also change. Many dystopian and apocalyptic narratives often place the heroes on the margins, thus establishing a gutsy band of "outsiders" attempting to overcome or just survive the intolerable conditions in which they find themselves; yet here too, they are *central*, and not just for the purposes of the plot but also in order to "marginalize" the enemies in ways that make for better melodrama. To champion the marginal often means to seek to make those perceived as marginalized more central, which politically makes about as much sense as taking one of Foucault's prisoners out of his cell and placing him in the watchtower, where he can panoptically observe all others. That is, the underlying power relations—including those that we may find odious or repressive—do not change at all. In the best of these dystopian works, the dialectic of centre and margin reveals the complexities of such "positioning," and avoids any facile lionizing or demonization of those who seem to occupy such positions. Such narratives are often especially valuable precisely because the force the reader or viewer to engage with the complexity, even if it merely involves sympathizing with the enemy or being sceptical toward the heroes or something like that.

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

CT: You argue for a "new form of utopian discourse" in *Utopia in the Age of Globalization*. How does the concept of marginality challenge or inform these utopian visions, particularly in the context of globalized spaces and systems?

RT: My views on utopia in that book are closely tied to work by Herbert Marcuse and Fredric Jameson, although I don't claim to follow all their ideas all the time, of course. The crucial matter involves the ability or inability to imagine alternatives to what already exists. In discussing the possibility of utopian thinking, for instance, Marcuse refers to "the scandal of qualitative difference." In other words, the utopian impulse is not about just making sure we are able to satisfy our material needs better or have more abundance to work with, but rather involves imagining entirely new forms, inventing new needs and desires that are then satisfied, and constructing future organizations that look nothing like our own existing ones. To put it differently, utopia attempts to overthrow the tyranny of the actual.

Needless to say, perhaps, this cannot truly be done with "blueprint utopias" or other formal plans or schemes. Such may be useful as thought experiments, hence the value of utopian narratives from Thomas More's *Utopia* through Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* to Jameson's own "American Utopia." But Marx's line about not providing "receipts [i.e., recipes] for the cook shops of the future" must always be born in mind by utopians: it is not for us to tell the future how to live, but only for us to engage in a "ruthless critique of all that exists," thus helping to clear the ground upon which to imagine alternatives.

As for marginality, it may be that imagining alternatives to the present order would involve movement toward the centre or, perhaps even more utopian still, the elimination of any social hierarchies with respect to centre or margin. In connection with the contemporary all-too-real "real world" system, this might be viewed in relation to the ongoing effects of the colonial networks which are themselves part of the globalization of capitalism itself. Along similar lines, within societies or communities, the marginalization of ethnic, religious,

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

or racial groups (not always "minorities," of course, since in most societies the dominant castes or classes are themselves of a relatively small number) can serve the powers that be in ways that make changes to the order more difficult. Indeed, there are always multiple, cascading fields of differentiation, often crystallizing into temporarily stable hierarchies with their inequities and iniquities, whose manifestations vary from place to place.

But then, as capitalism as a system becomes more global, it effectively brings the margins or otherwise neglected spaces into its all-consuming ambit. This is not to say that political or cultural "marginalization" does not continue, for that is itself a feature of the spatial dynamics of capitalism; it just means that the uneven and exploitative developments of this network of spaces can only also prove that "we are all in the same boat," as it were. The concept of the Anthropocene, for all its problems—most visibly: ignoring and thus exculpating the people who are actually destroying ecosystems by blaming "mankind" in the abstract—at least has that advantage. If you can admit that man can change the world at its most fundamental levels, then surely you can admit that we can change our societies as well.

CT: In your work on geocriticism, you highlight the importance of mapping and place. How can geocritical methodologies be used to analyse and understand the marginalization of specific communities or groups within urban and rural landscapes?

RT: If we think about literal maps for a moment—and please note, in my own work, I rarely discuss *literal* maps—then among the first things we would notice is the way in which the space depicted is framed, which in turn means we recognize what is most visibly *central* and what could be called *marginal*. What elements are chosen to be included is another part of this, although there is not necessarily anything nefarious about the decision to leave things out. (For example, a street map ought to include streets, but need not include lots of other information; a nautical chart of estuaries or the like will include the depth at low tide, so sailors know whether there is sufficient water to navigate, but such data is not needed on

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

land, presumably.) All this undoubtedly affects the way the spaces and places are viewed more generally, and this will include elements of how we *value* such sites.

Let me offer a potentially humorous example. The cover art (chosen by my publisher) for my edited collection *Teaching Space, Place, and Literature* featured a familiar world map of the landmasses of the planet earth. I say "familiar," because it followed the convention of making the prime meridian (the line connecting the north and south poles and running through Greenwich, England) the centre, and this has been relatively common ever since world maps based on the Mercator Projection became popular after the seventeenth century; that popularity is based, in part, on the adoption of such maps by leaders within the British Empire, who undoubtedly appreciated the ways that England was imagined as central. The map on my book cover also used the Mercator Projection, which distorts spaces, enlarging elements that are farther from the equator, thus making Greenland appear almost as large as South America, for instance, whereas the later is contains over six times Greenland's area. These decisions affect the ways that "we" imagine the world. With the Prime Meridian central, east Asia and Australia or, on the other side, Alaska are literally marginalizations (i.e., located at the edges of the map). As it happens, this image manages to cut out New Zealand and the Pacific Islands entirely, so the Kiwis are worse than marginalized, it seems, as they are omitted entirely!

Needless to say, perhaps, but once a given place is understood in the popular imagination as "marginal," then its populations may be seen as less important in other areas as well. Thus, the way that a given map represents the places on its surface has real world effects, as many critics have noted; some have produced alternative maps, renaming places (e.g., replacing the colonizer's toponyms with prior Indigenous names) or reorganizing the spaces (as with the famous "upside-down" world map). Changing the ways we "see" these spaces can affect the ways we imagine the places and their inhabitants as well. Some of this will depend on the uses to which these "maps" are to be put, after all, so it is not a matter of one map being "correct" and another "incorrect"—although inaccurate representations are

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

possible, obviously—but more a matter of what is better or worse for the purposes to which the map with be put.

Again, marginality or centrality is relational, and these things can change very quickly, depending on the uses to which such concepts are put. In the U.S., for example, the urban-rural divide has taken on all sort of ideological and material nuances, as wealth and power-relations have shifted in recent decades, while the ideals of this or that imagined community reinforce various "codes" associated with such spaces. A certain political rhetoric would simultaneously project "rural" spaces are more *real*—that is, truer representations of an Americanness, with evocations of "the heartland" or other patriotic symbols—and still support policies that contribute to the destruction of that putative "way of life." The very process of making "the heartland" *central* to the idea of America also effectively *marginalizes* those places and the people living in them with respect to the larger national or international political-economic system.

CT: Considering the dystopian narratives, as you describe in *The Fiction of Dread*, how does the figure of the 'monster' or the 'outsider' embody or challenge the concept of marginality?
RT: While it is true that the monstrous might be understood as something outside of the norm, an aberration or an alien, and hence "marginal" relative to some notion of the centre-as-normal, part of my argument in *The Fiction of Dread* is that monstrosity has become central or at least predominant on our time. So, I don't really agree that the monstrous represents or occupies a marginal position today, but is rather a means by which we understand our system itself. In this teratocene, an "age of monsters," monstrosity lies at the core of our system. As I say, this is a dynamic, protean system, and so the metaphor of the centre and margin may not be helpful, unless it be understood that those positions are themselves always subject to change, and, indeed, they are likely to contain their opposite already, inasmuch as the margin of one representation might be central to another. In an older "monster theory," perhaps, the monster could be seen as the outsider, but I think now we

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

must face the degree to which any sense of monstrous is itself a means by which we give shape to the non-monstrous, whatever that may be. Monsters thus help us map our "real" world.

CT: You mention the influence of theorists like Foucault and Soja in *Spatiality*. How do their perspectives on power and space intersect with the concept of marginality, and how do you apply these ideas in your analysis of literary texts?

RT: Edward Soja's writings on urban geography are indebted to Foucault, in part because Soja was so intrigued by Foucault's concept of the heterotopia (i.e., places of difference), which Soja in turn connected to his notion of "thirdspace." I find "heterotopia" less helpful, and I think it is probably noteworthy that Foucault introduces the term in the late 1960s only to drop it entirely thereafter, even when writing his book on prisons, which are presumably quite heterotopian; I think he felt the term to be too loose to be of much analytic value, which can even be seen in his "Of Other Spaces" lecture, where a wide variety of disparate sites (e.g., the mirror, cemeteries, brothels, boats, etc.) are named as examples. And, of course, given the dynamism of social space, any heterotopia could become a mono- or homotopia at different moments or under altered circumstances.

Notably, for Foucault, this is not a question of "margins." Often the spaces involved are quite central, and indeed, the spatio-political processes associated with centralization can be seen to create or sustain these spaces of difference. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, it is not that the criminal is marginalized; on the contrary, the criminal to be disciplined or punished is made central to an entire array of powers of normalization. It is a great historical irony that Foucault is sometimes associated with the marginalized or even seen as a champion of their cause, because most often his work demonstrates how the formerly marginalized ("ship of fools," etc.) have ceased to exist in modern societies. For Foucault, even sites or networks of resistance are always still within the matrix of power-knowledge relations, so that there really cannot be a "margin" in which to operate apart

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

from it. Or, to think of it another way, the margins are already incorporated into the centres (and vice versa!).

I'm not sure I'd say I *apply* Foucault or Soja to literature, but I think their work may be of value to literary critics who are thinking of the ways that spaces are organized in societies, which in turn may be of use in examining the representations of social spaces in literary works. If anything, they emphasize the ways that a given locus can have shifting values that reveal more simplistic visions to be facile at best. So, for example, in *The Scarlet Letter*, the scaffold in the middle of Boston is a site of public visibility, and yet it is also where Hawthorne shows so much to be hidden; the forest is a place of secrecy (e.g., where a sexual tryst could occur) but is show to be a space of openness, where one's "true" self can be made visible. But then, as Hawthorne also shows, these too can be reversed as the forest becomes a place of self-delusion or the scaffold a site for hiding the truth. In such a moral geography, the idea of centre and margin can only be provisional, subject to constant modification.

CT: In *Geocritical Explorations*, you discuss the interaction between writers, readers, texts, and places. How does the reader's own marginal position or perspective influence their interpretation of spatial marginality within a text?

RT: That's an interesting question. I'm not sure if I understand what you mean by a "reader's own marginal position or perspective." Do you mean that the reader stands in a marginal position with respect to the text itself, which would presumably be "central"? Or is this to do with some sense of personal identity as tied to a type of place, such as a reader who grew up on a farm being particularly attuned to the plight of farmers or the specifics of farmland in a novel?

Geocriticism, in the somewhat expansive way I employ the term, refers not so much to a specific method of interpretation but rather to a sort of comportment toward the text that would allow one to pay attention to the spatial aspects of the text under consideration, which could then take many different directions. For instance, literary geography, which

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

could involve the textual representation of different categories of geographical space (say, rural-urban, mountain-valley, or island-mainland), might highlight the ways in which these places influence the characters, events, plot, and so on of the literary work. But one could also examine architectural spaces, even mathematical ones, as influencing the understanding of the text.

As with the map, in which some things may be depicted as more central or more marginal within the framing of the picture itself or simply in the choices of what to include or emphasize (boldface lettering, e.g.), an author might choose to leave certain elements of the narrative out entirely or in the background, foregrounding others. A reader who is interested in those "untold stories" or underrepresented places could focus on them. My most recent book, *The Mismeasure of Orcs: A Critical Reassessment of Tolkien's Demonized Creatures* (2025), examines a particular "race" (or apparent races) within Tolkien's fantasy world as depicted in his writings; these characters are not the main ones, and in some cases one needs to speculate about them (e.g., e.g., Tolkien insists that they were Orc women, who were mothers and wives, but we never *see* any in his texts, in part because he doesn't imagine women as soldiers—we only see one female soldier at all in *The Lord of the Rings*, but even she has to disguise herself as a man in order to fight). But then, Tolkien has enormous quantities of "untold stories," myths and legends hinted at but not fully developed, distant places seen from afar but never visited in person. That is not so much a question of "marginalization" as it is the usual work of literary cartography, where some elements are placed or placed more prominently on the map, and others left off it or not emphasized. Yet that does not prevent readers from exploring those sites on their own as best as they can.

CT: Given the contemporary climate of 'dread' you describe in *The Fiction of Dread*, how does the concept of marginality contribute to or exacerbate this sense of anxiety and hopelessness in popular culture?

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

RT: As far as I can tell, the desire to be more marginal or even marginalized seems to be an aspect of the dystopian anxieties of the present, since for so many, the horror lies in a near-total system which leaves no spaces at the margins or off the map. Many of the pop culture depictions of dystopias or apocalyptic scenarios feature individuals or more often small group attempting to get to the margins, remain on the margins, or establish some enclave apart from the ostensible "central" powers that be. This is not to say that the sense of persecution of those who feel marginalized in a society is mitigated, but it seems that integration into a more central space is less desired than a more total separation from it, a space outside of the terrible world of the mainstream political or social system.

I suppose these enclaves might be considered utopian in that regard, but they are largely the result of the widespread anxiety (or dread) that makes one wish to imagine and to inhabit them. Perhaps it is understandable that, when a world system becomes so vast and nuanced that it is arguably inescapable, there should be the desire by some to escape, to live at the margins. It is an understandable desire, although it strikes me as being almost exactly like elitist enclaves of the very privileged (as with Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*), which is not exactly a utopian vision of a better world. The celebration of the marginal can itself become an endorsement of such inequality, an us-versus-them model that eventually consigns the majority of our fellows to perdition. The real hope would lie in changing the system itself, admittedly a difficult thing to even imagine, as has been widely observed. But dread or anxiety is not the same as "hopelessness," and indeed, dread is ultimately another form of hope in its anticipation of possible futures.

CT: You connect dystopian literature to the anxieties of our current capitalist system. How does the marginalization of certain groups serve the interests of or challenge the stability of this system, as depicted in the texts you analyse?

RT: If ever there were a dynamic system, the surely capitalism—the capitalist mode of production as an organization of the social sphere—is among the most pervasive. At its root,

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

what might be called *marginalization* is tied to alienated labour, the exploitation of the worker and the extraction of surplus value from the labour. That said, all societies have also maintained other forms of marginalization of populations (e.g., ethnic hierarchies, castes, religious discrimination, racisms, and so on) that have contributed to exploitative processes of capitalist development and maintenance. In turn, one finds that such marginalized groups cannot help but discover something like a "class consciousness"—albeit one tied more to race or religion than to economic or social "class" in the traditional Marxist sense—that has at times been placed in the service of anti-capitalist or reformist movements.

Capitalism is, or tends to be, a global system. This does not mean a homogeneous system, of course, and the differences throughout the world and within even relatively delimited spaces within it are always to be found. The system teems with difference, in fact. Marx and Engels famously observed that ways that capitalism has brought "a cosmopolitan character" to all societies in which it is found, for the world market and the global reach of capitalist production means that virtually all nations in the world become intermingled through these relations. Various state forms are required to organize and administer things, but the nation (or race) itself is bound up in an international system. (The rise of nationalisms, which themselves are or tend toward racisms as the "true" members of a given nation are distinguished from those deemed impure, is a reactionary response to this tendency toward the globalization of capital, by and large.) Enclaves, including seemingly utopian ones, might be imagined or even temporarily established, but the system is total, and thus the system itself needs to be changed. In our own era, with climate change and global ecological disaster looming alongside global capitalist exploitation and the rise of ever more vicious forms of nationalism, it is all the more important to recognize the degree to which, as I said before, "we're all in the same boat."

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

CT: Considering the resurgence of utopian discourse, as you suggest, what role do you see for marginalized voices and perspectives in shaping and realizing alternative spatial and social futures?

RT: Well, to the extent that being marginalized is considered a "bad" thing, then presumably any utopian vision would wish to do away with the centre-margin distinction entirely, right? Or perhaps it would simply encourage the revaluation of marginality that already seems to be happening among those who would codify the marginal as a "good" thing. But, as I have been suggesting, the idea of the centre or the margin is neither inherently good or bad, and even if it could be seen to be as such, shifting circumstances would reveal dialectical reversals. Moving an element from the margin to the centre of the map might well provide salutary results, particularly in offering new ways of seeing the spaces and places depicted, which in turn might make available new ideas for alternative arrangements or forms that could be preferable. However, being at the centre is not in itself a good or a bad thing. To the extent that spaces of freedom are possible or even imaginable, they will probably need to be available system-wide, for no one is truly free until everyone is free.

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047

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

Bio-bibliographical notes

Robert T. Tally Jr. is Professor of English at Texas State University. His recent books include *The Mismeasure of Orcs: A Critical Reappraisal of Tolkien's Demonized Creatures* (2025), *The Fiction of Dread: Dystopia, Monstrosity, and Apocalypse* (2024), *Representing Middle-earth: Tolkien, Form, and Ideology* (2024), *The Critical Situation: Vexed Perspectives in Postmodern Literary Studies* (2023), *J.R.R. Tolkien's* The Hobbit*: Realizing History Through Fantasy* (2022), *For a Ruthless Critique of All That Exists: Literature in an Age of Capitalist Realism* (2022), and *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination* (2019). He is also the editor of the "Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies" book series.

Email address: robert.tally@txstate.edu

Carla Tempestoso is currently a research fellow in English Literature at the University of Calabria. She is working on the Bluestocking Circle's writers by adopting both a literary and a digital perspective. Her interdisciplinary research interests include Literary Geography, Gender Studies, Migration Studies and Digital Humanities and she is the author of a number of journal papers and books in the fields. Her latest book is *Il circolo delle Bluestockings. La costruzione dell'autorialità femminile con uno sguardo alle traduzioni italiane* (Rubbettino, 2025).

Email address: carla.tempestoso@unical.it

ISSN 2974-9549
ISBN 9791222335636
DOI 10.7413/2974-9549047