

TURF WARS: THE TERRITORIAL CLAIMS OF SPATIAL LITERARY STUDIES AND OF LITERARY GEOGRAPHY

Patricia ȘOITU
Ovidius University of Constanța

Abstract: *In the aftermath of the Spatial Turn, a variety of spatial theories and their corresponding practices emerged, ranging from geocriticism, literary cartography and literary geography to geophilosophy, geohistory and geopoetics. As such, a multiplicity of critical and applied interconnections became possible, and thence spatial theories became engaged with literature, poetry, narrative theories, geography, history, cartography, sociology, philosophy and architecture, giving birth to a wide variety of fields and subfields in their own right. Given the sometimes tangential, yet opposite character of such practices, their proponents sometimes tend to become over-possessive and to egocentrically trace boundaries, thus limiting most of the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary exchange which may prove instrumentally beneficial for the growing body of research within spatial humanities at the moment. Marking borders could prove to be either useful, as a means of theoretical clarification, or alienating, therefore creating adversity and territorial seclusion. The endless so-called turf wars between Robert Tally Jr. and Sheila Hones as the main practitioners of spatial literary studies and literary geography, respectively, as well as their apparently similar field affiliations and methodologies, have generated a great deal of confusion with regard to the validity and the substance of both theoretical endeavours. This article is but a humble attempt to identify and explain the misconstruals and misinterpretations which have led to the current border-tracing, with a focus on affiliations, borderlines and methodologies.*

Keywords: *spatial turn, spatial literary studies, literary geography, turf wars, boundaries*

I. Introduction

Although the concept of space had existed mostly in relation to a symbolic hermeneutic, at the end of the Second World War the postmodern condition advocated a regime of coexistence that wiped out all theoretical and concrete hierarchies and also marked the boundaries between conceptual and material and between real and imaginary worlds as quite indistinct. While the project of positivism had clearly failed, historical time was no longer a reality and – from a single, linear, dominant structure – the concept of time, as well as space, underwent fragmentation and reconfiguration. During the spatiotemporal revolution, the concept of time gained verticality, line and duration multiplied, and the possibility of a chronometric imaginary emerged.

Unhinged from temporal rationality, space became open to vast political, historical, artistic, literary and philosophical explorations. Within the last decade of the twentieth century, the postmodernist aesthetic, along with poststructuralism and postcolonialism encouraged and disseminated the spatial turn across several countries and various disciplines and subdisciplines. Since time and space are inseparable, critics, theorists and academics – coerced by a tentative *Zeitgeist* – adapted and came up with various and innovative modes of analysing real and imaginary worlds, as well as the crepuscular areas in-between.

Spatial theorizations and critical practices were developed by prominent thinkers of the age: Michel Foucault's 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces" and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) called for radical re-readings of space, while Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976) proclaimed the administration of space to be the greatest aesthetic issue of the century. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari endorsed the advent of geography over history, only four years apart from Frederic Jameson's essay, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," which acknowledged space to be the dominant category in day-to-day life. 1989 proved to be not only the year of major political turmoil across Central and Eastern Europe, but also the year when David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* outlined a sense of spatio-temporal compression, while in *Postmodern Geographies*, Edward Soja's multiple geographies were critically pervaded by an altogether spatial logic. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (1998) introduced *distant reading* as a novel way of investigating the relationships between space and literature and opened the path towards new areas and methods of analysing and interpreting the complex and continually expanding field of spatiality.

Towards the end of the 20th century, spatiality became the newest addition to the broad and encompassing field of literature, as references to spaces and places in the form of countries, cities, kingdoms, regions, landscapes and other types of geographical characteristics proved crucial in properly defining and analysing the implications found at the heart of the setting in diverse literary works and genres. Additionally, maps – as a tool of exploring space and outlining spatiality – whether drawn within the text, mental, cognitive or virtual, became increasingly useful in helping the reader decipher and create the meanings and metaphors of the text's real or imaginary geography. Even in the absence of maps or of any indications pointing to a specific known or unknown space or place, readers projected and built possible geographies by making use of their already-known spatial surroundings, both assimilating and creating the narrative space and structure, whether linear or not. Inventing (non-)existent textual spatialities –

as a deeper form of reader response – became proof of literature’s engagement with matters of spatiality, topography and geography. As such, space was no longer viewed as an empty background container of narrative events to the detriment of time (which represented narrative development), but turned into the principal matter of analysis for interdisciplinary approaches in various fields and subfields.

In the early 1990s, a close connection was established between the spatial turn in the humanities and the cultural turn in social sciences, reviving the possibility of interdisciplinary exchange, while visibly influencing both literature and geography. The impact of the cultural turn on geography brought about novel ways of approaching its relationship to literature, other than instrumentally. At that moment, two main perspectives could be distinguished: conceiving literature as a substitute of geographic epistemology, or using it as a sociological tool to investigate the spatio-cultural politics of identity. Yet, there is always room for new perspectives born out of the ceaseless interdisciplinary exchange between the two pillars of literature and geography. Consequently, one such possibility is based on the assumption that, by dialogically portraying novels-*qua*-geographies, the focus is less on the context and the author and more on the text, which gains the ability to model its reader by means of narrative and discursive practices, while employing literary criticism as a tool for validating the existence of the mode of analysis itself. Another popular line of reasoning relies on approaching literary texts-*qua*-maps as a manner of actively engaging the reader in the process of mapping, by making use of his/her knowledge of familiar or unfamiliar spaces and places. The differences between and the common points of these two theories are reduced to the readers, whether they are envisioned as passive receptacles of the text-map that models them, or as geographers in their own right who draw, alongside the author, the map of the text.

As noted by Robert Tally Jr. in his introduction to *Literary Cartographies*¹ (2014), within the humanities and social sciences, a wide array of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary fields and subfields have risen from the ashes of the last century. Spatial literary studies, literary cartography, literary geography, geocriticism, geophilosophy, geohistory and geopoetics radically transfigured contemporary criticism, through research on the intricate connections between space, place, mapping, cartography, literature, geography, history and the world (*LC* ix). In *Spatiality*² (2013), Tally Jr. argued that within the narratives, the concepts of space and place evolved from identical or inexact copies of the real world to mythical,

¹ Henceforth *LC*.

² Henceforth *SP*.

spiritual, allegorical representations and mappings, enhancing the role and the perception of spatial and literary studies. Following the spatial confusion generated by fast-rate globalization and capitalism, as well as the enlargement and displacement of one's space, spatial criticism – undergirded by post-postmodernism – has also extended towards the less surveyed regions of literature, cyberspace and media, with a newer focus on digital humanities. At the moment, the continuous development of the spatial turn stands not only as proof for the past's unenthusiastic engagement with the *topoi* of space, place and mapping, but also as rediscovery of our selves and the kaleidoscopic real and imaginary worlds that surround us.

Inevitably, certain scholars and practitioners dedicated to spatial humanities have observed that, despite the resembling methodologies concerning their fields and subfields, there are inexorable differences that ought to be recognized and challenged. In the absence of palpable arguments, such difficulties and crossroads often lead to egocentric border tracing and pigeonholing, eventually disregarding possibilities of interaction. The swift emergence of a multitude of disciplinary fields and subfields may prove an obstacle in the way of properly discerning between noticeable bodies of theories and their corresponding practices. In “Spatial Literary Studies versus Literary Geography?”³ (2019), Tally Jr. explains that “disciplinary border policing is vexed, alienating,” but that “it may also be the case that such distinctions need to be made in order to avoid confusions that would be unhelpful to all concerned” (392). Indeed, marking borders is either useful, as explicit delineations could provide theoretical clarification, or estranging, in which case the lack of clear-cut viewpoints might lead to adversity and grudges. The seemingly endless struggle for *territory* between Robert Tally Jr. and Sheila Hones as the main proponents of spatial literary studies and literary geography, respectively, as well as their various subsequent attempts at clarification, has generated confusion with regard to both approaches. This article humbly attempts to shed some light on the misconstruals and misinterpretations which have led to the current turf wars over chimerical boundaries.

II. *Ager quo Campus*

Before anything, *ager quo campus* is, according to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, a plain reference not to the primary meaning of *ager*, that is “a piece of land, esp. marked off by political or geographical boundaries, territory” (82), nor to *campus* as “field of action, scope, opportunity, the subject-matter or sphere of an orator or writer” (263), but rather to the possible interrelations and distinctions between the two terms. In case of the

³ Henceforth “SL”.

current academic dispute, it seems to me that the avid territorial claims of Tally Jr.'s *spatial literary studies* and those of Hones' *literary geography* have been pervaded by the aforementioned logic of exchange. Both theorizations have mutually offered and refused space of engagement, neither lacks notoriety, and each could benefit from interdisciplinary exchange with the other. In my opinion, the co-existence and intersection of multiple literary geographies which hold common ground has been a reality for some time, in spite of their main affiliation to broader fields, such as literature and geography; besides, without literature's meeting spot, none of them would have existed as they do today. Yet, reasonably, the main confusions and uncertainties concerning both spatial literary studies and literary geography reside in their manifold affiliations, methodologies and boundaries. Out of a need to avoid unwarranted criticism, from now on I will refer to spatial literary studies and literary geography as theoretical subfields in their own right.

In this particular dispute, most scholars interested in spatiality tend to avoid any type of pigeonholing and are unsure whether they should refer to them as fields or subfields. Unlike Sheila Hones' radical perspective in "Literary Geography and Spatial Literary Studies"⁴ (2018), where spatial literary studies are categorically seen as "an 'emerging field' within the humanities," while literary geography is portrayed as "a more established interdisciplinary field or subfield of geography with close ties to social sciences" (Tally Jr., "SL" 392), Tally Jr. has always been more reticent in considering either spatial literary studies or literary geography as distinct disciplinary fields or subfields, despite the fact that both critical practices almost hold that label for their practitioners and readers: "I am somewhat hesitant to identify *spatial literary studies* as the name of a distinctive disciplinary or subdisciplinary field" (Tally Jr., "SL" 392). Tally Jr. not only agrees to Hones' view that the main distinction between the two subfields lies in their affiliation to different disciplines that should not be confused, but also denies any past intention towards legitimizing either geocriticism or spatial literary studies as disciplines or subdisciplines in their own right, despite later admitting that his use of spatial literary studies may have arisen as a sort of "disciplinary gesture" (Tally Jr., "SL" 394). Additionally, he explains his use of the word *spatial* – as basic adjective – and makes intelligible efforts to demonstrate that spatial literary studies is not a distinct field, but a multiplicity of practices and approaches related to space, place and literature, which was meant to encourage interdisciplinary efforts, by promoting literary, as well as humanistic research.

⁴ Henceforth "LGSL".

In *Spatiality*, throughout the chapter titled “Literary Geography,” Tally Jr. considers literary geography to be “largely a product of the reader’s own engagement with the text” (Tally Jr., *SP* 85), the fusion between reading and writing resulting in the reader’s imaginative version of the writer’s literary cartography, as creative writers come up with a form of literary cartography by which they manage to map the real-and-imagined spaces of their worlds, both within the text in a figurative manner. On the flip side, Hones’ need to correct Tally Jr.’s apparently all-encompassing definition of spatial literary studies, in the Introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*⁵ (2017), as “almost any approach to the text that focuses attention on space, place, and mapping” (3), is understandable – especially if one thinks of the affiliation of their subfields to separate, yet possibly tangential fields. In Hones’ opinion, Tally Jr. takes literary geography out of its human geography context to incorporate it in the “growing body of work in spatial literary studies” (Hones, “LGSL” 146), while apparently conceiving of a quasi-synonymy between geocriticism, spatial literary studies and literary geography. Obviously, despite his formulation, Tally Jr. did not make a purpose out of jumbling the particularities of each subfield concerned, but referred only to his own apprehension of literary geography, specifically the version offered earlier in *Spatiality* – as a complement to literary cartography which enables readers to understand and create their own social spaces based on the real and imagined spaces within narratives, a version partially intersecting with Hones’.

In the past decade, Tally Jr. has gradually reconsidered his position in relation to both subfields, ranging from alternative equivocality – “spatially oriented literary studies, whether operating under the banner of literary geography, literary cartography, geophilosophy, geopoetics, geocriticism” (Tally Jr., *LC* ix) – to a complementary logic – “I am thinking of literary geography as a complement and counterpart to literary cartographies” (Tally Jr., *SP* 80). Such approaches portray literary geography as an innovative inquiry into real and imaginary places, while they prefigure the existence of multiple literary geographies. Therefore, as time has passed, Tally Jr. has not only revised his definition of literary geography: “I have referred to the spaces mapped by the writer as the *literary geography* of the text (...). I recognize that this meaning does not easily comport with the terminology, themes and approaches of the subdiscipline of that name” (Tally Jr., *RHLS* 3). He has also made an explicit categorization, while acknowledging the difference between his understanding of literary geography and a more generally established *subfield* that has to do with a spatial version of literary history.

⁵ Henceforth *RHLS*.

Quite surprisingly, he also upholds literary geography to be “a field of study” where “there are a number of scholars actively engaged” (Tally Jr., *SP* 79) and somehow manages to point to literary geography as to a field of study, only to rightfully deem it unstable later: “I find that literary geography may not be as stable a category as Hones suggests” (Tally Jr., “SL” 393), right after taking note of Hones’ previously mentioned article. His claims reside mostly in the ceaseless shifting definitions of literary geography, as well as in the terminological coinage which did not belong to a geographer in the first place, but to writers such as William Sharp and Virginia Woolf: “needless to say, Sharp and Woolf were not geographers: rather, they were writing these works strictly in their capacity as literary critics” (Tally Jr., “SL” 400). As far as the shifting definitions are concerned, the same can be said about spatial literary studies. Tally Jr.’s inclusive politics, as well as the vast number of interdisciplinary essays he edited, has turned spatial literary studies into an incredibly fast-developing conglomerate – dare I say, subfield –, which could only tangentially engage with Hones’ version of literary geography – another subfield in its own right. Nevertheless, Tally Jr.’s spatial literary studies, as well as its aims and methodologies, is far more well-defined and better delineated than Hones’ literary geography, which has a long way ahead.

Tally Jr.’s all-inclusive politics when it comes to spatial literary studies and literary geography is to be read as a somewhat distant call for interdisciplinarity, since he has come to view spatial literary studies as engaging, by means of literary practices, with other subdisciplines and disciplines, despite its literature-based practices. Similarly, the editors of the first issue of *Literary Geographies*, Sheila Hones, Alexander Neil, David Cooper, James Kneale and Juha Ridanpää, have offered a complex definition of literary geography, construed not only as a conventional approach to literary texts, but also as a manner of reading poetry, fiction or drama, while using the interconnections between geography and literature as a tool of analysis and as “a way of reading” such work (including theoretical work in geography and literature), which may not be defined as literary geography *per se*, but which can be read as such (*Literary Geographies* 1–2). Based on this note, Tally Jr. has, in turn, mentioned that were literary geography to be regarded as a way of reading, then so should literary studies, whose methodology “is defined by reading, analysis, and interpretation” (Tally Jr., “SL” 401). While Hones wishes to get a hold of the bigger piece of an interdisciplinary possibility, even self-contradicting as it appears, the critic seems to remain – to some extent – firmly rooted inside ivory tower. She states that literary geography’s affiliation lies mostly with human geography as an academic discipline based in the fundamental discipline of geography,

whereas spatial literary studies is not connected to geography or found among the wider range of social sciences, as opposed to literary geography.

Assuming that literary critics were the first to touch on the subject of literary geography, I imagine that, in spite of Hones' specialised (counter)-bibliography, Tally Jr.'s assertion might be partially validated by the ancient, yet useful *Geography of Strabo*, to give an example. For Strabo, geography as a science – similarly to any other sciences – concerned the philosopher as much as it did the geographer. Strabo contended that he, along with his predecessors,

one of whom was Hipparchus himself, are right in regarding Homer as the founder of the science of geography; for Homer has surpassed all men, both of ancient and modern times, not only in the excellence of his poetry (...), but also in the acquaintance to all that pertains to public life. (*Geography I–III* 5)

Strange as it may seem, both critics make the same point, if inadvertently: in their supposed on-going *turf war*, both Tally Jr. and Hones indirectly situate the emergence of literary geography in the epistemological project of human and cultural geographies and in the mere possibility of interdisciplinary collaboration between human geography, social sciences and literary studies, regardless of the allegedly present intellectual disjoining between humanities and social sciences. Yet, for literary geography – as Hones understands it – no discernible and clear contours can be identified, due to the fact that it relies on a multiplicity of fields and subfields with no clear indication of how each of them contributes specifically to the formation of this useful, but jumbled subfield.

As noticed by Tally Jr., Hones' thorough delineation of boundaries between spatial literary studies and literary geography, on the grounds that spatial literary studies belong within the humanities, is in contradiction with her claim to a broader interdisciplinarity (Tally Jr., “SL” 403), a claim widely explained in her *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in Let the Great World Spin* (2014). The use of the French tightrope walker between the twin towers of the World Trade Centre as a metaphor for the interdisciplinary nature of literary geography, as well as its performative nature, helps Hones to structure the separate and independently founded towers of literature and geography, respectively. Given that the dangerous and most rewarding balancing act of literary geography is envisioned as engaging collaboratively with each discipline, i.e. literature, geography, social sciences, while belonging to none, to Tally Jr. such an act cannot be fully interdisciplinary unless “collaboration between researchers whose professional formations lie in different disciplines” (Tally Jr., “SL” 404) occurs, since the

interdisciplinary act of balancing is the result of even participation on the part of multiple disciplines that cannot be completely grasped by one theorist alone. Despite the lack of any danger in defining and refining the aims and methods of a discipline or in the recognition brought to a certain subfield by such actions, Tally Jr.'s alternative may work as an ordering mechanism for the confusion and mess caused by such apparent turf wars, and it may also bring new interdisciplinary perspectives into view, on the condition that it ignores the calls for territorial power and seclusion.

Even so, spatial literary studies – as Tally Jr. understands it – answers mainly to the complex field of literature, and critical work within the subfield is to address complex questions of both literature and space, without requiring a vast amount of information from any other field. If needed, practitioners will engage with the work of “architects, urbanists, philosophers, historians, sociologists, artists, art historians, musicologists, mathematicians, physicists, astronomers, engineers, and any others” (Tally Jr., “SL” 404) only in connection to space and spatiality. Tally Jr.'s point is extremely accurate and clear when it comes to delineating the contours, explaining the affiliation, as well as the connection of spatial literary studies to the broader field of literature, as opposed to Hones' call for an apparently double, yet confusingly – at least – quadruple interdisciplinarity:

the defining characteristic of literary geography (...) is its double-interdisciplinarity: the ‘literary’ of literary geography refers both to literary texts and to literary studies, while the ‘geography’ of literary geography refers not only to real and imagined geographies but also to human geography as an academic discipline. (Hones, “LGSL” 146)

There are certainly some small errors in claiming a doubly-interdisciplinary approach when referring expressly to literary geography as something far more extensive, and engaging only selectively with certain disciplines and subdisciplines, while failing to acknowledge the connections to others, i.e. spatial literary studies, as this *double* approach is also “the feature which most clearly distinguishes it from spatial literary studies” (Hones, “LGSL” 146). This obviously lowers the degree of information exchange, reduces understanding and – needless to say – causes a drop in the quality of research, regardless of the field or subfield concerned. The need for legitimation and difference is still present in both critics' approaches. Yet, working on better distinguishing one's aims and methodologies is not the same as subfield and disciplinary seclusion; such hasty decisions must be avoided.

By indicating that the greater part of research conducted as part of the subfield of literary geography engages not only with literary texts and literary

criticism, but also with studies found in social science journals, Hones actually acknowledges and agrees with Tally Jr.'s view of interdisciplinarity concerning literary geography, as – for the male critic – “it may be that the best ways to undertake proper literary geographical research will involve either strictly collaborative efforts by teams comprising literary critics and geographers” or “perhaps, studies by researchers whose own professional formation combines literature and geography” (Tally Jr., “SL” 404). Yet, Hones' manner of addressing so-called literary / geographical interdisciplinarity is limited by its apparently double nature, as submissions for the journal she edits, *Literary Geographies*, are typically sent out for review to one reader belonging to the fields of literary studies / the humanities and to another belonging to those of geography / social sciences (Hones, “LGSL” 147). Building on Tally Jr.'s argument on the “limits” of interdisciplinarity,⁶ I believe that Hones' efforts, though largely appreciated, cannot cover the quadruple or even larger number of fields and subfields concerned, so that literary geography could be thought of and used as an objectively well-defined subfield by critics, academics and students involved in research. There is still a lot of work to be done in addressing with specificity the tangled, but good methodology, along with literary geography's multiple interdisciplinarity and what exactly constitutes it in terms of fields/subfields concerned, transgression of boundaries (if any) between these fields/subfields, critics/reviewers involved and corpora to apply it on, since there may be a space of engagement with digital texts instead of limiting it only to written texts (fiction, poetry and theatre).

Conclusion

Paradoxically, in the introduction to his latest edited volume, *Spatial Literary Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space, Geography, and the Imagination* (2021), Tally Jr. underlines the recently-discovered character of spatial literary studies, in opposition to literary geography as an “older interdisciplinary field” (1), which has speedily developed in recent years, giving birth to what we know as geohumanities. If, for Tally Jr., boundaries have been drawn and acknowledged, the 2019 essay dealing with Hones' critique – appended at the end of the book – would have been useless, but for the useful critical specificity concerning how literary critics engage with geography only through literature-based practices, to reach different views from those of (literary) geographers. Its presence is proof that not only do the borders in question exist as an indistinct mélange of boundless tracings, but also that the male critic intends to keep open the call for elucidation and

⁶ “[T]he literary geographer, in this view, may engage in work associated with two disciplines, but this work also lies outside of both” (Tally Jr., “SL” 403).

transparency, which is a most laudable initiative, especially during today's continuous advent and development in ivory tower-like research.

As many contradicting versions of both subfields arise, the question that must be asked by practitioners and theoreticians is whether literary geography/-ies and spatial literary studies *is* or *are*. Despite literary geography's affiliation to the broader field of geography, the subfield cannot be entirely and claustrophobically related to humanistic and cultural geography. Nor can it have to do with narrative studies alone, while leaving out humanities, as Hones would paradoxically have it. Unfortunately, she uses the plural "literary geographies" to refer to a multiplicity of interrelated literary geographies within a narrative analysis, thence acknowledging the connection between literature and geography, yet expressly denying any intersection of her methodology with that employed by Tally Jr.'s literary cartography. Clearly, *literary geographies* should have not only the meaning ascribed by Hones, but also that of a more inclusive politics, which engages openly and more explicitly with practices employed in both spatial literary studies and geography, instead of being susceptible to unilaterally building itself on literature. In a similar vein, spatial literary studies must be referred to in the plural if Tally Jr. indeed regards the subfield as an all-encompassing one, ready to engage in and benefit from cultural exchange with other subfields, whether or not one of the subfields in question is Hones' literary geography. Hones' subfield, in turn, can grow, change and be supplemented by similar approaches from both spatial and non-spatial nexuses that may turn out to be another piece of common land on which spatial literary studies and literary geography could build not necessarily endless twin towers or broad covers and umbrellas, but limitless research communities which do not fail to preserve their individual attributes.

In opposition to geography's somewhat peripheral connection to literature before the second half of the twentieth century, nowadays we witness a normalization of literature, a conversion of literature into a *field* practice by geographers. Such mixed disciplinary practices might lead to various disputes and calls either in favour of establishing the specific terms and boundaries pertaining to the relationship between the two pillars, or for a merging, a union, which may again be subject to confrontations over unbalanced terms, definitions and power displays. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the research within the subfield of literary geography, regardless of the real/imaginary distinction of spaces analysed, have been a great contribution to the development of spatial literary studies and have been shaping the subfield in question as much as the research outcomes within literary geography have been, in turn, shaped by the former. Therefore, the interdisciplinary and, at times, collaborative analysis of narrative spatiality by means of entwined theories and methods in spatial literary studies and

literary geography could be the keystone to valuable theoretical discoveries that might benefit both subfields and might even create a strip of space, provided that no territorial boundaries are drawn for the sake of drawing and that interdisciplinary research is the primary goal.

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