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From Topophobia to Topophilia: *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*

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Abstract:

The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space provides a comprehensive critical overview of the latest advancements in the arena of spatial literary studies. Its primary questions move along the avenues opened up for literary criticism by the ‘spatial turn’ in cultural studies and the humanities in general. The investigations illuminate key concerns regarding the reciprocal relationships between spatiality and the human senses, their production of spatial and social relations, as well as an interpretation of space as a fluid dimension constantly in a state of becoming. The contributions present thoroughgoing analyses of a wide array of literary texts from diverse historical and geographical settings, and frequently evidence the profound impact that recent phenomenological and New Materialist bents have exerted on literary study. Expansive in scope and content, yet incisive and approachable, the volume should find both novices and experts, from the full range of disciplines that it engages with, among its reading public.

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Robert, T. Tally Jr.; *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*. London/New York: Routledge, 2017. 376 pages, 175 GBP. ISBN: 978-1138816350.

Abstract:

The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space provides a comprehensive critical overview of the latest advancements in the arena of spatial literary studies. Its primary questions move along the avenues opened up for literary criticism by the 'spatial turn' in cultural studies and the humanities in general. The investigations illuminate key concerns regarding the reciprocal relationships between spatiality and the human senses, their production of spatial and social relations, as well as an interpretation of space as a fluid dimension constantly in a state of becoming. The contributions present thoroughgoing analyses of a wide array of literary texts from diverse historical and geographical settings, and frequently evidence the profound impact that recent phenomenological and New Materialist bends have exerted on literary study. Expansive in scope and content, yet incisive and approachable, the volume should find both novices and experts, from the full range of disciplines that it engages with, among its reading public.

The aim of *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* is to survey and organize current research revolving around spatial literary studies and their manifold configurations and critical practices. In the aftermath of the 'spatial turn,' over the past two decades, spatial literary studies has been burgeoning steadily as a transdisciplinary field of knowledge and criticism. Therefore, incorporating the work of thirty-three scholars from an impressive range of disciplinary and national milieux, this *Handbook* arrives at a propitious time. Its chapters broach issues like the performativity and construction of space, the difference between space and place, embodied human experience of space, and literary spaces within and without the text, to name a few. The essays are threaded together by a largely postmodernist and postcolonial understanding of space as a dynamic force or a network of relations, rather than a fixed, passive container of temporality.

The *Handbook* comprises five parts that, albeit thematically diverse, often converge along conceptual and theoretical lines. Part I, “Spatial Theory and Practice,” sets the tone for the subsequent inquiries. Following the editor’s introduction, six essays engage with: chronicling literary-geographical dialogues and attempting to define the scope of the new fields of literary geography (ch. 2); critical literary geography (ch. 3); space as an event, experienced sensorially (ch. 4) or “invented” as in Deleuzean thought (ch. 5); place in phenomenology (ch. 6); and the spatiality of literary and scholarly production (ch. 7). Despite the diverse viewpoints, the majority of these theorizations are underpinned by a regarding of space as a material, lived reality, negotiated through social relations.

Part II, “Critical Methodologies,” changes course towards applied methods of geographical analysis onto literary terrain. ‘Mapping’ decidedly proves the most fruitful, as three of the seven chapters telescope on literary cartography. Firstly, Peta Mitchell and David Cooper explore maps of literature in the digital era. The former records the rise of (literary) neogeography, considering it, notably, as a novel subfield unrestricted to mere digital mapping, but rather “incorporating artistic, subjective, *ad hoc*, and psychogeographical-style mapping practices, whether digitally enabled or not, and embracing the broad range of interdisciplinary mapping and counter-mapping strategies” (p. 88). Saliently, Mitchell adopts a chiefly favorable stance to CriticalGIS (Geographical Information Systems), yet not without its caveats. First, such technologies inevitably become instrumental in late capitalism’s pursuit of profit, and second, their positivist and mimeticist bent is “not easy to reconcile with a literary-cartographic endeavor that stresses the subjective, experiential nature of space and place” (p. 90). David Cooper furthers the latter interpretation by elaborating, among other projects, on a digital mapping undertaking entitled “Romantic Bristol: Writing the City,” which entails “encountering digital maps of Romanticism out onto the urban streets” (p. 143). Such a project, Cooper notes, underscores “embodied situatedness”, and invites the advent of a “digital post-phenomenological literary geography” (p. 143 f.). Reversing the lens, Christina Ljungberg persuasively avers that reading a text and mapping geographies in literature are cognitive processes of organization and orientation, activated through the brain’s use of schemata, which are instrumental in visualizing space. While such conceptualizations resonate with the well-established notion of cognitive mapping, propounded by scholars like Kevin Lynch, Frederic Jameson, and Wendy B. Faris, Ljungberg’s novelty is located in perceiving this schematic (re)arrangement of spatial relations as an “inherently performative,” “innate disposition” (p. 97). Therefore, Ljungberg’s, Mitchell’s and Cooper’s new lights on literary cartographies render Part II the center of gravity for the *Handbook*’s innovations in theory application.

The essays of Part III, “Work Sites,” zero in on particular loci to examine the production and signification of fictional places. Among these, Siobhan Carroll’s atopias, Amanda Dennis’ heterotopias, and Barbara

Piatti's "projected places" constitute noteworthy alternatives to, and interrogations of, represented 'real' places (p. 179). Carroll addresses the ambivalence of natural atopias/non-places, primarily the ocean, and man-made ones, such as airports and cyberspace. Her nuanced discussion encapsulates the full range of their forms and meanings – from sites of hostility, inscrutability, and threats to society and the individual, to havens of "potential freedom" from marginalization (p. 161) and "self-creation and artistic expression" (p. 164). Furthermore, resting on Foucault's understanding of heterotopia, and especially on Bertrand Westphal's iteration of it as a "laboratory of the possible" (p. 171), Dennis considers literary spaces, and the space of literature, as challenges to the existing order and sites of experimentation. "[L]iterature as heterotopia", she declares, broadening the Foucauldian definition, "has an active role in constructing the reality it 'represents'" (p. 171). Finally, Piatti examines "projected places," conjured up as dreams, memories, or longings in fictional characters' imaginations, in a process she terms "*second-degree construction*" (p. 186; emphasis in the original). Particularly forward-looking is Piatti's call for the foundation of an "advanced theory of projected places" (p. 184), which marks an uncharted territory in literary geography.

One of the greatest achievements of *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* lies in its broad compass. It delivers a plethora of high quality inquiries, covering relevant approaches, perspectives, and corpus, which render it an invaluable teaching aid and a powerful research tool. In summary, it strikes a fine balance between applying established theories in novel ways and illuminating paths for future scholarly pursuits. Importantly, the volume closes with a firm statement on current gender politics, inviting a unity of geocriticism, literature, and feminist activism. Grounding spatio-literal criticism not only in the current intellectual but also in the socio-cultural climate, its final section affirms the *Handbook's* pertinence for and openness to entering and encompassing a broader political and humanistic discourse.

German Abstract:

Von Topophobie zu Topophilie: *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*

The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space liefert einen umfassenden und kritischen Überblick über die jüngsten Entwicklungen im Feld der „spatial literary studies“. Seine grundlegenden Fragen bewegen sich entlang der Pfade, die der spatial turn innerhalb der Kulturwissenschaften eröffnet hat – für die Geisteswissenschaften im Allgemeinen und für die Literaturwissenschaft im Besonderen. Die enthaltenen Untersuchungen beleuchten zentrale Probleme im Blick auf das reziproke Verhältnis von Räumlichkeit und menschlicher Wahrnehmung, Fragen der Produktion von räumlichen und sozialen Beziehungen sowie eine Interpretation von Raum als fluider Dimension im Status eines konstanten Werdens. Die Beiträge bieten gründliche Analysen eines großen Spektrums literarischer Texte von diversem historischem und geographischem Ursprung. An vielen Stellen wird dabei der Beweis erbracht, wie tiefgreifend sich jüngste Entwicklungen in Phänomenologie und *new materialism* auf die Literaturwissenschaft ausgewirkt haben. Weitreichend in Umfang und Inhalt, dabei prägnant und zugänglich, sollte dieser Band ihr Publikum finden – innerhalb der ganzen Bandbreite der betroffenen Disziplinen sowie unter Einsteigern und Experten gleichermaßen.

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