

**Review: Sally Bushell, *Reading and Mapping Fiction: Spatialising the Literary Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 336pp. ISBN 978-1-108-48745-0, £75.00.**

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WITHIN THE FIELD of space and place studies, recent critical attention has turned towards the relations between literature and geography, and the historical transformation of literary and cartographic practices.<sup>1</sup> The long-nineteenth century has tended to be the era which has received the most critical attention within this scholarly field, due to the rapid development of the novel as a literary form and the acceleration of cartographic practices within this period.<sup>2</sup> In her 2020 monograph, *Reading and Mapping Fiction: Spatialising the Literary Text*, Sally Bushell introduces a methodology for discussing the development of the fictional map within its specific cartographic context across this period. Bushell's work builds, in particular, on the methodological approaches of Robert Tally, Emmanuelle Peraldo and Anders Engberg-Pedersen, opening up new ways of reading fictional maps and of mapping fictions.<sup>3</sup>

Bushell begins with what she claims is a 'simple question': 'to what extent do we map as we read?', immediately followed by a more complex one: 'How essential a part of the experience of a literary work is the way in which we spatialise,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert T. Tally Jr., 'Series Editor's Preface,' in *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. ix-x.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Sarah Wylie, *Mapping with Words: Anglo-Canadian Literary Cartographies, 1789-1916* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas, *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998); Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Sally Bushell, *Reading and Mapping Fiction: Spatialising the Literary Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 3. See also: Emmanuelle Peraldo, *Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space throughout History* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); Anders Engberg-Pedersen, *Literature and Cartography: Theories, Histories, Genres* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

and visualise the place and space of the fictional world?' Bushell sets out to comprehensively answer these questions, examining the relationship between map and text as 'part of the totality of meaning for the literary work'.<sup>4</sup> Bushell takes the emergence of the fictional map that appeared alongside various texts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — including adventure and spy fiction, detective novels, children's literature, and fantasy works — to interrogate the centrality of space to our experience of literature in the twenty-first century. The focus is tightly centred on representations of imaginary place and space, on an author's mapping of that imaginative space as an integral part of composition, and on the reader's own integration of map and text.

Bushell's work opens with a discussion of critical theory through the progression of such elusive terms as literary geography, literary cartography, geocriticism, and critical literary mapping. Previous studies have tended to skip this step, and instead prioritise the literary context. Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel*, for example, begins, after a brief introduction on its genesis, by mapping the estates of Jane Austen's novels, and its critical discussions are interspersed throughout the monograph in six 'Theoretical Interludes'.<sup>5</sup> Bushell instead prioritises a theoretical interrogation, dedicating the first chapter to tracing the critical developments in the study of fictional maps since the post-war period. In doing so, Bushell opens up the rhetorical questioning of the study, once again moving from the deceptively simple (what is a map?) to the more complicated ('How do we address a juxtaposed visual-verbal relationship within a predominantly verbal form?').<sup>6</sup> Considering that this is a field that has struggled to be united under a singular umbrella term, Bushell does an adept job of articulating the distinctions, for instance, between the studies of literary geography and literary cartography. The goal of her study is not to offer a new definition, but to select the most useful definitions from those already established and apply them throughout her own analyses.

The most original contribution to the field of critical literary mapping comes in the second chapter, in which Bushell situates the development of the fictional

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<sup>4</sup> Bushell, p. 1; *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Bushell, p. 36.

map from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries alongside major turning points in the history of cartography. Bushell highlights what nineteenth-century fictional maps owed to pre-existing examples in a 'lineage for fictional maps', and establishes the study's methodology of reading such maps alongside the developments of cartography in each historical moment.<sup>7</sup> In an innovative move, Bushell illuminates the extent to which authors drew on real-world cartographic processes in the composition of their fictional spaces and maps, asserting that fictional maps are 'subject to the same shifts in process and practice in the world' as real-world maps.<sup>8</sup> This dual application of literary and cartographic histories makes for a captivating and persuasive interpretation of the development of the nineteenth-century map across genres in the chapters that follow. This is facilitated by a dissection of the development of cartography at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in particular an acceleration of precision in the mapping of nation and Empire.

In the central four chapters, Bushell puts her methodology into practice. Chapter three offers a detailed reading of the maps in Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*; chapter four considers the emergence of detective fiction in relation to real-world crimes and how mapping within newspapers influenced fictional representations; chapter five examines the spatial dimensions of children's fiction and how the explicit presence of the map in many canonical texts signals the prominence of space and place for the genre; and chapter six asserts the significance of the map for fantasy literature in the process of creative composition. The literary-cartographic analysis within these chapters interrogates the historical context of the respective maps and fictional works to be found within each emergent and evolving genre, such that a scholar interested in any one of these genres would find new ways of reading these texts. Bushell places an emphasis on imaginative space as an integral part of the composition of these new forms of literature and cogently draws together conceptions of space within each temporal moment.

One critique of Bushell's work up to this point is that, as a study which purportedly examines the emergence of the map in the nineteenth century, it

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

ignores the predominant genre of the mid-Victorian period, the realist novel, until the seventh chapter of the monograph. The reason presumably lies in the fact that it is easier to analyse something which is present, than it is to analyse a general absence. As Bushell herself concedes, 'maps occur so frequently in *popular* genres but extremely infrequently in *canonical* texts, especially the realist novel'.<sup>9</sup> The penultimate chapter is thus spent in addressing two central questions. First, what can the absence of fictional maps tell us about the realist genre? And, 'where such maps *do* occur [in realist fiction], how do they function?'.<sup>10</sup> Bushell focuses on the writer and the reader of fictional maps to reach her conclusion: fictional maps are internalised by the writer in the process of composition and by the reader in the process of consumption, and these processes occur even when fictional maps are absent.

Bushell offers both pragmatic and theoretical reasons for the absence of maps in realist literature. First, the cost and impracticality of reproducing maps in serial publications meant that publishers and editors were unlikely to desire fictional maps to accompany realist novels. Second, the theoretical reasons relate to the artistic perception of fictional maps in the nineteenth century, in particular the concerns around the 'inability of visual representation to adequately correspond to the richness and depth of the verbal (and thus the danger of *reduction*)', and an 'anxiety about the effect of visual representation alongside the verbal on the internal mental actions of the *reader*'.<sup>11</sup> Bushell expertly refutes these concerns, arguing that fictional maps do not reduce or interfere with a reader's perception of a literary text; rather they aid and enhance the reader's internal cartography.

Having examined the reasons for the absence of maps in most realist texts, she then turns to two realist authors who did include fictional maps in their works: Anthony Trollope and Thomas Hardy. Trollope and Hardy's continual return to the same fictional regions, Barchester and Wessex respectively, necessitated fictional maps that enabled readers to piece together the geographical intertextuality across each author's oeuvre. Bushell considers the presence of the map in texts

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 239, emphases in original.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 245, emphases in original.

which are fundamentally interested in spatial frameworks and convincingly argues that these writers offer, through their maps, an enriched experience of fictional landscapes that would not be possible through text alone.

Throughout this study, Bushell takes the marginal (in this case, the map) and makes it central, expanding our understanding of what a literary work should be considered to be. One of the major achievements of this approach is the way that Bushell cuts across genres and situates the fictional map within its historical context. The final chapter also moves beyond a sole theoretical focus on spatial studies and would appeal to any scholar interested in the Digital Humanities. As this subject is introduced in the very final section of the last chapter, there is not enough space for Bushell to fully integrate her discussion of digital literary cartography into the rest of the study's methodology, but she nevertheless lays the theoretical groundwork for future digital scholarship. As such, this monograph offers an innovative method for understanding the literature and maps of the long-nineteenth century, original ways of reading the century's new and dominant genres, an explanation of what happens to us when we encounter maps in novels as readers, and a guide to the possibilities of future digital humanities projects.



BIOGRAPHY: Sophie Welsh is the recipient of a Collaborative Doctoral Award from the South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (AHRC) in collaboration with Dorset Museum and Dorset History Centre. Her PhD project examines cultures of cartography in the works of the novelist and poet Thomas Hardy, investigating the ways in which historic and contemporary forms of mapping informed the way Hardy wrote about and constructed his fictional landscapes. Sophie is a Postgraduate Representative for the Centre for Victorian Studies at the University of Exeter and a Research & Editorial Assistant for COVE (the Collaborative Organization for Virtual Education).

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