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**Adam Sills, Against the Map: The Politics of Geography in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2021). Pp. 318; 36 b/w illus., 33 maps. $115.00 cloth, $45.00 paper.**

Adam Sills’s Against the Mapbuilds a damning case against the “technology” of cartography. It opposes the “consolidation” of nation, state, and empire into knowable territory by tracing a long critical history of cartography’s rationalizing vision as “fraud, deception, worldliness, conquest, hubris, madness, artifice, greed, and excess” (10). Sills frames the book as a rebuttal of Benedict Anderson’s argument, extended to early modern England and Britain by Richard Helgerson, that map and nation necessarily go together, where cartography lets the state know the territory it claimed while the populace embraces the “logo-map” as national image (1). The Andersonian claim wobbles before the history of popular resistance to cartography, particularly colonial surveying, documented in the work of Matthew H. Edney and others: residents misled, disobeyed, and even killed surveyors to deliberately frustrate cartographic control. Sills connects these two foundational bodies of scholarship by turning to post-Restoration Britain, discerning a counterhistory of “cartographic resistance,” people refusing the nation-map equation and thereby troubling the map’s centrality to “the formation of the nation-state” even in “the imperial center” (8).

Sills’s approach, his “heterotopic conceit,” is excavating anti-cartographic geographies in eighteenth-century literature (10-13). Against the Map does not just critique cartography: it reads literary spaces as imagined communities outside the map, alternatives to the nation-state’s cartographic hegemony. After an introduction laying out the broad theoretical and historical background for the attack on cartography, each chapter considers a different author, moving through the relevant historical cartographic context and the author’s anti-cartographic thought to finally illuminate a textual heterotopia. For example, in a powerful chapter on Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko, Sills insists on the inseparability of Atlantic cartography and the slave trade, arguing that Behn understood and criticized this link. Then, through a comparison with Behn’s dramas, Sills shows how Oroonoko deploys the “disjunctive” locales of the “scenic stage” to present an alternative geography of empire as incomprehensible, “uneven and fragmented” space rather than “stable and objectively knowable” (63). The other chapters discuss John Bunyan’s theocentric neighborhood of Dissenting community, against censuses of Dissenters; Jonathan Swift’s ideal country as patriotic principle rather than mere land and property, unlike Irish land surveys; the marketplace in Daniel Defoe’s Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain as unmappable space between general market forces and specific local markets; and Samuel Johnson’s reflections on the Scottish home as a site reconciling ancient heritage and post-Union civilizational progress, rejecting both antiquarian and economic maps. While a coda returns to the neighborhood as a model of affective community in Edmund Burke and Jane Austen, Sills stresses that his book does not deliver a teleological history. His case against the map proceeds by incriminating illustration, not progressive indictment.

The paratactic structure can be a virtue, helping the busy reader understand much of Sills’s argument from a single chapter—and, with the 36 eye-catching plates, making the chapters very suitable for course readings. It also foregrounds the book’s most appealing aspect, the distinctive possibilities opened by each heterotopia’s vision of a world arranged against the map. The book’s broadest strength, though, is how Sills synthesizes geographic and literary scholarship to expand a history of eighteenth-century literary geography into a critique of the “cartographic fallacy” writ large, especially as he differentiates textual versus cartographic geographies (233). (While Sills is an associate professor of English at Hofstra University, his command of the history and theory of geography impresses.) No map is safe in Against the Map. There is a striking digression on Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic, where Sills discerns a worrying “logo-map” that blurs the literal and figurative into “the reified image of modernity itself” (59), a point resonant with questions about the place of the ocean in Gilroy’s paradigm.1 A more central argument—perhaps informed by Sills’s experience as co-editor of Digital Defoe—is the concluding critique of Franco Moretti’s literary cartography for failing to consider “the ways in which maps themselves signified” in these texts and times, namely that the relationship of “narrative space” and “cartographic space” may be “antagonistic and contradictory” (233). Here, Against the Mapcontributes to contemporary debates, especially but not exclusively within the digital humanities, about the risks of cartography as imperial epistemology.2

Such vigorous prosecution risks becoming too total in both target and method. Against the Mapsuccessfully shows the harms of a major strain of cartography—rational, gridded, territorial—but edges toward a less convincing condemnation of the “map” and “mapping” in general, even though they may not always share these cartographic mores. The many metaphorical significations of “mapping” in literary criticism are summarily dismissed as assuming “a congruence between the map” and literature (13). Though Sills sometimes distinguishes cartography and map, as when he interprets Bunyan’s map of salvation and damnation as showing that maps must be read allegorically, not “done away with altogether,” he still ends up against the map tout court, concluding that Bunyan’s neighborly spaces are “not reducible to a map” (40-1). Equating cartography and map becomes even harder to accept when combined with Sills’s occasionally rigid historicizing logic: the contexts he provides bind the map to a Whiggish nation-state’s uses of cartography, and those contextual links determine any evaluation of maps then and since. For example, Oroonoko’s fascination with the slave trading captain’s “globes and maps” are cast as a “fail[ure] to read [them] in their proper political and ideological contexts.” But Oroonoko has no access to these “contexts” or way to determine which are “proper,” and while Sills briefly admits Oroonoko’s “sympathetic pull” to the maps’ “novelty” and their “value and importance” to his coastal kingdom, he returns to denouncing this “whole way of seeing the world” (60-1). (Such argumentation also risks repetition: the Johnson chapter’s lengthy analysis of Scottish economic and antiquarian maps similarly concludes that they “must be read and interpreted in the same context as any other imperial cartography,” “providing a homogenous and rational view of the territory” to serve as “instruments of conquest and colonial subjugation” and icons thereof [189].) Regardless of whether such contextualist reasoning is inherently flawed, it would persuade better by more carefully distinguishing cartography and map and remaining open to less determined possibilities for mapping—if only to show that these possibilities still share cartography’s curse.

Let these criticisms not obscure the significance and strength of Against the Map as a valuable, high-stakes polemic in geography, literary and otherwise. It holds a broader importance in opposing the long history of cartography as servant of nation and empire, providing a corrective to the recent upswell of (often digital) maps not just literary but also demographic, economic, and epidemiologic. (And we are lucky to have this book: while earlier versions of the introduction, Bunyan, Behn, and Defoe chapters were available in articles and in Sills’s dissertation, the book languished after the original publisher, AMS Press, went bankrupt.) I recommend especially the Swift chapter on Irish surveying as the clearest articulation of Sills’s case; the Behn chapter as an eye-opening teaching companion; the paired Bunyan-Burke/Austen chapters for an exploration of the heterotopic history of the neighborhood; and the Defoe and Johnson chapters to those interested in economic writing. Sills has made an engaging, comprehensive, and urgently necessary case against cartography in his book, one a range of fields should heed.

1. Compare the uses of Gilroy in, for example, Tiffany Lethabo King, The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2019) and Kimberley Peters and Philip Steinberg, “The Ocean in Excess: Towards a More-than-Wet Ontology,” Dialogues in Human Geography 9, no. 3 (2019): 293–307.

2. See the roundtable on Vincent Brown’s Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760-1761 in Social *Text* 33, no. 4, 125 (2015): 131-51.