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## MAPPING THE ROUTES OF GEOCRITICISM: AN INTRODUCTION TO THEORY

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### Abstract

Time and space have always been intrinsically linked to fictional texts i.e. “the setting” of a work. Literature generally, during different times and especially in postmodern era has had a close affinity with the concept of space. Textual and real spaces are at the core of the analysis. It tries to describe space as a new critical category. It poses a question whether place should become a new critical category in addition to race, class and gender. This paper tries to consider the importance of the concept of space in literature based on the newly born theory of Geocriticism. It tries to widen the scope of knowledge by enquiring into the basic tenets of Geocriticism.

**Keywords:-** Space, Spatial Turn, Literature and Geography, Geocriticism, Geocentric approach, literary cartography, referentiality, topography, multifocalization and polysensoriality.

### Introduction:

Time and space have always been intrinsically linked to fictional texts i.e. “the setting” of a work. “When and where does it take place?” is one of the first questions the reader asks oneself when he starts reading a text. The Spatial Turn as a trans-disciplinary phenomenon in the

humanities was coined for the first time in 1989 by Edward Soja in “Postmodern Geographies” to explain the increasing concern of academics in social sciences for space in the 1960s. All critics like Robert Tally, Greg Garrard and Bertrand Westphal agree upon the omnipresence of space, place and mapping at the core of the analysis in Geocriticism. Geocriticism was theorized by Bertrand Westphal in an innovative work published in 2007 entitled “Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces.” Geocriticism is a new means for reading and literary criticism, a new interdisciplinary method of analysis that prioritizes space, places and geographical practices in literary criticism. Textual and real spaces are at the core of the analysis. It tries to describe space as a new critical category. It poses a question whether place should become a new critical category in addition to race, class and gender. Whether it is legitimate to say that a literary text enables us to work on the object “space”, which does not belong to geography only? What does it bring to literary criticism to use geographical tools like cartography or geocritical concepts? Can literary texts be sources for the geographer?

Literature generally, during different times and especially in

postmodern era has had a close affinity with the concept of space. In literature the concept of space is regarded as the physically existing environment in which an event, a story or happening occurs. A literary writer tries to give a new picture of life to the reader by combining a represented place of the real world with imaginary spaces. Sometimes representation of spaces and places are a mere copy of the real places and sometimes they are wholly imaginary in order to represent a utopian society. This issue has motivated some critics to consider the concept of place deeply. In this way Geocriticism that has come into existence by Bertrand Westphal and Robert T. Tally at the time of postmodern tries to analyse real and imaginary spaces and their relation with one another in literature and reality. Geocriticism also regards all writing as a map. This paper tries to consider the importance of the concept of space in literature based on the newly born theory of Geocriticism.

The Basic Tenets in Geocriticism:-

It surveys a territory, speculates about others, suggests possible paths to take, and argues in favor of certain practices and against others, all while peregrinating around multiple discourses of space, place, and literature. The nineteenth century had been dominated by a discourse of time, history, and teleological development. But after the Second World War, space began to reassert itself in critical theory, rivaling if not overtaking time. The effects of post-colonialism, globalization and the rise of more advanced information technologies helped to push space into the foreground, as traditional geographic limits were

blurred, erased, or redrawn. Many critics and theorists had to develop new interpretive and critical models to address what Fredric Jameson and Edward Soja's called the "new spatiality implicit in the postmodern." The perception of space and the representation of space do not involve the same things. Geocriticism tends to be an exploratory critical practice, or set of practices, whereby readers, scholars, and critics engage with the spaces that make life, through lived experience and through imaginary projections, meaningful. It tries to answer what happens to space-time in an anomic context in which fiction, among other forms, becomes key to a reasonable reading of the world? What methodology can we use to understand that which seems to escape our understanding? What do we mean by space?

Geo critics have long advocated a "geocentered" approach to literature and cultural studies, which would allow a particular place to serve as the focal point for a variety of critical practices. They looked at the various depictions of that multifaceted zone—whether using classical myth, modern fiction, historical works, tourist brochures, or something else—to form a pluralistic image of the place. Our understanding of a particular place is determined not only by our personal experiences with it, but also by our reading about others' experiences, by our point of view, including our biases and our wishful thinking. Thus Geocriticism attempts to understand the real and fictional spaces that we inhabit, cross through, imagine, survey, modify, celebrate, disparage, and on and on in an infinite variety. It allows us to understand "real" places by understanding their

fundamental fictionality. And vice-versa, of course. We understand “fictional” spaces by grasping their own levels of reality as they become part of our world. Geo critic understands that the referentiality operating between fiction and the “real” world is characterized by constant movement, or oscillation whereby one can never really fix or pin down the referent. The inability to fix a referent in a literary text makes the project of geocriticism more worthwhile, infinite and variety of texts that refer to a place in order to shape the vision (an ever-shifting image) of the “real- and- imagined” place.

Geocriticism considers all writing as a map and the main point is to recognize the real and imaginary places. Bertrand Westphal argues that space is more important than time and geography more important than history. Central to Westphal’s conception of literary criticism is the conviction that it is only by emphasizing the referential force of literature that we can understand the essential function of true literary creation. “The referentiality of fiction allows it to point to a recognizable place, real or imaginary or a bit of both at once, while also transforming that place, making it part of a fictional world” (Westphal, 2011). So far in the study and analysis of literature concerning the issue of space, most of the spatial analyses were based on the individual point of view. This point of view generally is the point of the view of the narrator who can be real and who can be a fictional one. Westphal (2011) elaborates that “this is an ego-centered analysis. By bringing together multiple authors, including multiple genres and disciplines, the geocritic plans out a

number of different points of view, allowing diverse perspectives to flesh out, to round out, and perhaps to overcome the stereotyping or otherwise limiting images of a given place. By focusing on senses, the geocritic can register the sensuous plenum of a place.

Space is a concept that encompasses the universe; it is oriented toward the infinitely large or reduced to the infinitely small, which is itself infinitely and infinitesimally vast. Space is not the empty container. Historically, space has always been subject to symbolic readings. The concrete details of geography often relate to a spiritual hermeneutic rather than to immediate observation. The Middle Ages and medieval time describe the journey of man toward God, who monopolizes his spirit and conditions his soul and medieval space is, “eminently ontological, psychological, conclusive. Like time, it becomes the sphere of activity of the symbol. All things being created by God, they partake of the same transcendental reality, eluding in advance the cleavage that will emerge later between reality and fiction, between an affirmed verisimilitude and the supposedly unrealistic. Dante conceived his Divine Comedy according to this panoptic (and vertical) orientation, enabling him to comprehend three dimensions of the afterlife: hell, purgatory, and paradise. Space was inherently a speculation on the supernatural and a reflection of creation. If the conception of time was static, as a measure of material action; the conception of space was more dynamic. The concept of space- time has emerged and evolved since the Renaissance. In his book “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,”

Bakhtin stressed the importance of a major shift from the verticality of time to its horizontality. He might have also added that the perception of space becomes vertical with the introduction of perspective in painting and mapping, and with the alignment of the planet's sidereal depth in the solar system. This shift has strengthened over the centuries, and it still holds us today. The postmodern condition has cast doubt on the certitudes of modernity and has reconciled the contemporary with a certain proto-modernity—the one that proclaimed the coherence of a world under the sign of non-exclusion and coexistence of all things.

Postmodernism undermines the modernist belief that theory can mirror reality, and replaces it with a partial, relativistic viewpoint emphasizing the contingent, mediated nature of theory building. In this context, the role of those arts that have a mimetic relationship to the world is transformed and achieves greater significance: literature, cinema, painting, photography, music, sculpture, and so on. Are these aesthetically confined to the task of reintegrating this world? If the perception of spatiotemporal referentiality fades, then the fictional discourse conveyed through the arts is in fact also transformed from its original vocation. And if credibility in fiction has always been measured in terms of the reference to the “real” world, in the postmodern era one can no longer say that the world of cement, concrete, or steel is more real than the world of paper and ink. Space, as the central fact of the place, would appear to be a key concept in literature. Space has

had a timely re-emergence in literary and cultural studies in recent years.

The discourse of postmodernism has especially emphasized the importance of space, geography, and cartography, as the hyper experience of the postmodern condition calls for the orienting and reorienting efforts of mapmaking. Geocriticism as an interdisciplinary postmodern science of the literary space usually distinguishes poetic, imaginary space of literary works from real space. Westphal promotes Geocriticism as a poetics of the interactions between human spaces and literature and Tally focuses on the social and cultural aspects of space. It explores the role of interaction between the imaginary and real spaces. A geocritical analysis examines both, and perhaps more pointedly look at the ways in which the two overlap, resist one another, or form new spatial practices altogether. Time and space have always been intrinsically linked to fictional texts: they help define what is called “the setting” of a story. “When and where does it take place?” is one of the first questions the reader asks oneself when he starts reading a text.

To put simply, one could propose two basic approaches to visible spaces, one rather abstract, the other more concrete: the first would encompass conceptual space and the second factual place. Context includes social and cultural areas, among others, that “organize overall architecture of an inhabited place.” In short, context connects the space and place by establishing meaningful space in the constitution of a place. Again, the challenge is to identify a typology of interactions between human space itself

and the space that surrounds man. Hans Robert Jauss, the reception theorist, has also contributed to the debate by including 'here and there' situation beginning with which the reality of the everyday or life world organizes itself as surrounding world. Geocriticism probes the human spaces that the mimetic arts arrange through, and in, texts, the image, and cultural interactions related to them. Robert T. Tally one of the adherents in Geocriticism, throughout his studies and researches on space besides focusing on the topography of space, tried to concentrate on the social and cultural aspects of space. He defines Geocriticism as a predominantly literary critical methodological "framework that focuses on the spatial representations within literary texts" while also "explor[ing] the overlapping territories of actual, physical geography and an author's or character's cognitive mapping in the literary text" (Tally, 2008). Drawing from Westphal's theory of Geocriticism, Tally introduced his own concept, that of "literary cartography".

Mapping and spatial analysis applied to literature have been a long lasting research field for both authors, with Tally conceiving the author as a mapmaker and the critic as a map-reader. He uses the term "literary cartography" to describe different ways that writers use to map social spaces. Another Geo critic Céline Sabiron calls the *Waverley* by Walter Scott as a "geographical novel". It might be more provocative statement, as Scott has long been said to be the father of the historical novel. But Sabiron persuasively argues that Scott's novels are mostly geographical since they are

anchored in a very spatial Scotland (The Highlands), inspired by the writer's travels and imagination. Even the poetry also often implies traveling in space, in time and in imagination or texts: indeed, the poet finds inspiration in new landscapes, like Ischia where W.H. Auden spent his summers or Venice, which the romantic poet P. B. Shelley visited, as part of his travels on the Continent which introduced him to picturesque and sublime scenery that influenced his poetry. Shelley also traveled through means of a rich intertext that enabled the poet to go back in time to ancient Greece and Rome. These different travels situate the Italian city between a fantasized and an experienced Venice.

Summing up:-

The general purpose of Geocriticism is to perceive the real and fictional spaces that we are dealing with through our life. Westphal believes that all writings can be regarded as a kind of cartography in a way that most of the realistic maps are unable to depict. In this way, through reading a fiction and focusing on the fictional places in a narrative one can understand real places. A typical geocritical study would focus on a single place e.g. Plurality and multifocal perspectives of the theory make it more interesting and nearer to reality. The texts were then often accompanied by a large number of maps, sometimes even by sketches carried out on site, manuscript drawings or watercolor perspectives from the coast. The representations of space supported by a literary instrument and iconographic sources are in close relation with chorographic literature. This makes us ponder the visual dimension of

geography and more particularly literary geography, as well as the link between different types of images and the writing of space.

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