

Accentuating Environmental Concerns through Literary Spaces: A Geocritical Exploration of the Select Novels Set on Land, Water and in Space

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Abstract

The present study employs the novel approach of geocriticism to the text. The select texts are studied using the methodology propounded by Bertrand Westphal- *Geocriticism* (2007)- that aims to explore the representation of spaces through multidisciplinary approach. The researcher aims at immersive, integrated ecological literary research, through geocritical perspectives. The undertaken study explores space-based analysis of the eco narratives set at different places such as land, sea and space. The study emphasises the variety of perspective instrumented by geocriticism that stimulates the understanding of the literary text. The literary representation of the spaces enhances the dynamic relationship amongst the human and non-human world as depicted in the literary work. The study thus explores the variety of patterns, and forms of geographical representations practised when narrating eco-centred storyline. The novels undertaken for the analysis are set on land, water and in space. Nature's *Confession* (2014) by J. L. Morin is an eco-novel and a climate fiction. Secondly *The Tourist Trail* (2018) by John Yunker which is an environmental novel Set at the Southern Ocean. And lastly the researcher explores the novel *Interstellar* (2014) by Greg Keyes renders Earth's final possibility to discover a planet fit for human habitation before extinction of the human race.

Keywords: *ecology, anthropology, ecofiction, ecocriticism, geocriticism, spaces*

Introduction

Literary criticism has been utilising various historical critical theories and approaches. Nature has always been presented dynamically in the literature. In recent years growing ecological concern for the environment has been reflected in literature as well as literary criticism. The ecological issues have been mirrored in eco narratives, eco fictions, pre and post-apocalyptic literatures, cli-fictions, green literature and so on. Nonetheless in recent years the dynamic relation between literature and geography has also been drawing attention for better understanding of the literary texts. Ecocriticism and geocriticism both being multidisciplinary in their approach can be employed mutually to critically analyse the literary work.

The mysteries and beauties of nature have always found expression in poetry and prose for many centuries. However, in the contemporary era the ecological concern has found its reflection in literature. It is the consequence of the human being's threat to the environment. The writers notice and record that the ecology on earth is in danger due to the anthropocentric attitude of human beings. Simply defined, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (Cheryll Glotfelty). The sense of concern towards nature and environment led the critics to ecocritical readings of the literary texts. Eco critics aimed at preservation and conservation of the environment may it be land, water or space.

The literary representation of different spaces of land, water and cosmos are studied through the lens of *Geocriticism*- the term coined by Bertrand Westphal in *La Géocritique. Réel, fiction, espace* (2007). In the field of humanities, the methodological studies of spatial turn were the consequence of the growing interest in geographical studies since the twentieth century. As propounded by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991) geocriticism undertakes to analyse the representation of spaces in literature. And according to Tally (2013) the geographical area is located in various regions and territories. These spaces play a dynamic role in the temporal dimensions and the it's dwellers. The spaces shape the collective memory, historicity, social, cultural and even political identity. These dynamic relationships between the space and its dweller vary according to different spaces. Geocriticism focuses on the terms like *Literary Geography* and *Literary Cartography* which according to it is a

novel way of reading as well as writing the literature. Firstly the term “*Literary Geography*” denotes the study of spaces in literary works and its dynamic relations. Secondly the term “*Literary Cartography*” utilises maps and territories as a tool to analyse the literary work to add novel dimensions to the perspectives (Piatti, 2017). Thirdly Geocriticism explores from the perspective of the term “*Referentiality*”. Referentiality is the dynamic relationship between a “geospace”- a referent, and its representations in the literary work through the author’s imagination. And fourthly “*Spatiotemporality*”, which means a complex connection between space and time that makes possible the perception of diverse temporalities in the same territory (Westphal, 2013, 137). Apart from these Geocriticism affirms the analysis through diversified disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, architecture and the interactions happening amongst them.

Rereading Literary Spaces

The representation of spaces like landscape, waterscape and spacescape find different perspectives and objectives in Literature. Human beings have been dwelling on land for thousands of years, then they learned to sail and started dominating the seas. And now human beings are encroaching the universe through space travel. The interaction and dynamic relation amongst all the elements of nature- including human beings- have found the reflection in various novels that talk about environmental and ecological concerns. *Nature’s Confession* by J. L. Morin is one such novel that deals with the serious concerns on earth in which Earth is completely polluted and destroyed by global warming triggered by the greedy anthropocentric attitude of man. The novel covers very attention seeking prevailing issues which are alarming for the very existence of all life forms on the earth. J.L. Morin illustrates various geographical and environmental entities to talk about climate change and global warming. *Nature’s Confession* raises the question on the survival of life on earth on the backdrop of destructive activities of human beings. J.L. Morin presents three different settings that highlight the theme of the novel. Firstly the dystopian earth in danger due to pollution, then the icy planet Grod which has aliens with high technology and lastly the Planetoid Phira with bountiful nature and primates. The novel shows how the Emperor of the Earth and Ocean for his greed excavates the mineral oils consequently polluting the earth to the extent that result in animal extinction, vanishing trees and vegetation and climate change. It describes the dust storms that originated at ‘eArizona’ in summers and ‘Vortex Polar Storms’ in winters. The conditions on earth are contrasted with the conditions on Planetoid Phira where natural landscapes are nurtured and landscapes nurture everything as well. The landscape on the Phira is the “land of ponds” and “untouched Nature”. The author J. L. Morin emphasises through the descriptions of Phira that human beings are gifted with resources and bountiful marvels of nature; however, he must not interfere and deplete the other entities in the environment so that nature and mother earth will remain like heaven. This will save our own existence with other non-human worlds. Earth is a beautiful place to live on but due to anthropocene activities the beauty is fading away and future generations may not get the opportunity to enjoy the beauty. It is our moral duty as humans to take care and not destroy the earth. Such novels create eco consciousness amongst the readers to save earth and our own existence.

The *Tourist Trail* by John Yunker is set in the backdrop of environmental issues related to oceans and the creatures dwelling in it. It is about species in danger of extinction and about the environmental activists and naturalists who devote their lives to protect them. The novel describes the horrible conditions of fishermen and whalers hunting uncontrollably just to satisfy their greed. It is a narrative that illustrates how human beings interact with the sea that destroys the ecosystem in water. The action in the novel takes place in the most remote waters of the ocean and discusses the endangered species and the efforts taken by the naturalists and environmentalists to save them. It discusses the issues of bycatch, oil spill and pollution in ocean waters. John Yunker uses geographical entities to illustrate the action in the novel. He sets a metaphor of Drake Passage to render the difficult and uncertain life of an environmental activist. Sometimes smooth calm and peaceful and instantaneously huge waves of action. The marriage of Aneas and Angela at Drake Passage symbolises that their marriage will be full of storms. Angela realises that Aeneas is the man of water while she belonged to land. But the ocean in her opinion reflected her thoughts.

“to Antarctic Conversion, she realised— where the oceans of the north met the Southern Ocean, warm waters colliding with icy cold, a wild roil that made her wonder what other conflicts await her.”
(TTT.p.160)

Angela realises that just like northern and southern arm and icy cold waters collide with each other, the same is the case with her and Aneas. Even though she is a naturalist and he is an environmental activist, their ways to tackle the issue are different. John Yunker uses yet another metaphor of an iceberg which is swaying sideways. When Robert watches the iceberg swaying his opposite direction thinks that he is on the right side, however the underside of the iceberg hits his ship and he realises that he was wrong and nature has its own ways and laws. We need to respect nature and the non-human world (animals). The writer John Yunker conveys the message that if we will not take care of nature, we will eventually destroy ourselves.

The novel dealing with space is the movie novelization by Greg Keys-*Interstellar* (2014). It is a dystopian future where humanity is struggling to stay alive with the help of space exploration. It illustrates a group of explorers who travel across space through the wormhole. The interstellar voyage is made possible in the novel in spite of the limitations of speed and time with the help of a wormhole. The novel is set during the late 21st century. The novel renders that many of the crops on the earth have gone extinct and there is food scarcity throughout the earth. The people in the novel live under the constant threat of dust storms. Greg Keys describes Miller's planet that orbits around Gargantua which is a giant black hole. The existence of black holes affects the time on the planet. Due to its gravitational force the clock is slowed down. Cooper says that blackhole do "crazy things" with time. The miller's planet moves so slow that it is crazy that one hour on it is equal to seven years on earth and their brief visit to Miller's planet cost them 23 years, 4 months, and 8 days of earthly time. Apart from the time issue the planet is all covered with water and very giant and massive waves are not favourable for human habitation on Miller's planet. Dr. Mann's planet too is not habitable. As described in the novel the air is not breathable as it has excessive ammonia. Even the clouds on Dr. Mann's planet were deceptive. Clouds were the "formation of frozen carbon dioxide-dry ice" covered with cloudy vapour. The frozen clouds were just like the "wonderland" clouds in the children's fantasy world, on which they can walk or run or even play. The author Greg Keys makes us realise that interstellar travel is possible but it is perplexing as well. So it is very important on the part of the contemporary generation to take care of the environment and ecosystem so that future generations will not have to run away from Earth. Man can think of settling in space due to advanced technology but will he be able to enjoy the natural beauty, pure oxygen, water and other essential things needed for life. The author has made the readers ponder on such questions and take environmental issues as serious issues to be dealt with. Unitedly we can develop an egalitarian society and live happily together.

Conclusion

The interdisciplinary perspective of ecocriticism and geocriticism is helpful to understand the narratives and how geographical factors play an important role in shaping the narratives about places and their ecologies. The researcher has made an attempt to critically analyse three novels *Nature's Confession*, *Tourist Trail* and *Interstellar* which are set at three different settings of land, water and space. The geographical descriptions of the spaces enhance the understanding of the narrative at various levels from characters to point of views. However, the researcher studied these spaces from an ecocritical perspective. The different spaces and their geographical descriptions illustrated the issues and concerns related to environment and ecology thus emphasising the threat to the very existence of not only other species but human beings as well. Human beings, the dweller of land destroying its abode. And further disturbing the ecosystem in the waterscapes and polluting the spacescapes through space travel as well. The issues and concerns have found the proper expression through the use of geocritical descriptions of spaces in all the three select novels. The characters in the novel learn about nature in the set spaces and introspect their own responsibilities towards nature. And gradually they find their life purpose of protecting nature. And so do the readers. In conclusion, Geocriticism is an innovative methodology that helps the researchers analyse a literary work. The geographical spaces represented in the literary works are not just background but have an important role to play creating eco awareness and for sure will help to develop an egalitarian society which will help and save the earth and human existence.

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