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A NEW MAP FOR LITERARY CRITICISM: GEOCRITICISM AND ITS RESPONSE TO CONTEMPORARY CRISES

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Abstract

Born from both spatial theories in the vein of Foucault and Lefebvre as well as research in a vast diversity of disciplines (geography, cartography, cultural studies, urban studies, sociology, ecology, and more), Geocriticism is interdisciplinary by nature and therefore serves as an example of what other criticism can and should strive for: intellectual interconnectedness. By using geocriticism as a practical model, this paper argues that, ideally applied, theoretical lenses are more than merely an excuse for the perpetuation of academic jargon; they are a necessary response to contemporary concerns. This article examines the emergence of geocriticism, its principles, and a sample of recent scholarship engaging with the theory in a meaningful way.

Keywords: *literary criticism; geocriticism; interdisciplinarity; spatiality; humanities.*

INTRODUCTION

On February 27th, 2023, staff writer Nathan Heller published an article in *The New Yorker,* titled "The End of the English Major," which explores the reasons enrollment in the humanities is in such steep decline. I remember reading and discussing this article with a number of friends, colleagues, and professors at the time. Considering that I *was* an English major, it was obviously extremely

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relevant and not a little distressing. Yet, it was hardly a shocking announcement or the only piece of its kind. The humanities have been in crisis for years now—easily for as long as myself and students of my generation have been alive to worry about them (look at J. H. Plumb's *Crisis in the Humanities*, which was published as early as 1964).

What makes Heller's article stand out is the way in which he presents the issue; rather than pontificating his own opinion, Heller strings together his conversations with various people in academia, both students and professors, those in the humanities and those outside of them. By listening to these voices, Nathan Heller takes the reader through some of the tunes he hears again and again. There are the obvious and less obvious reasons, and then those reasons that probably should be more obvious than they are.

Quoting her parents, "who were low-income and immigrants," one student told Heller that "'You don't go to Harvard for basket weaving'" and emphasized that as a first-generation college student, she herself "always viewed humanities as a passion project" or "hobby-based" (Heller), rather than a field that appealed to practical considerations. But while these students and academics to whom Heller speaks cite the ever-expected issues of career prospects and financial concerns, they also point to some of the less-than-flattering conceptions many outsiders hold about the humanities. As Heller says, "a shift in perception is noticeable" with many claiming that "critical practices have become too specialized," teaching gestures of critique that have little to do with how non-critical readers experience and enjoy literature. Heller further addresses a sentiment gathering particular momentum in literary studies as of late: "Bring back the awe, some say, and the students will follow."

This call to "bring back the awe" is nothing new either. One of the loudest voices among many, Rita Felski, in her book *The Limits of Critique*, advocates for "postcritique." This new approach to literary analysis favors appreciation for aesthetics, reader experience (very much in the vein of Reader-response Theory), and other ways of moving past what Felski refers to as the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (coined by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur). Literary studies have become stuck behind the detective's lens, Felski says, always dredging texts for evidence of hidden meaning.

While Felski herself may not intend for a postcritical movement to be politically divisive, the social undercurrents and outside forces nudging it along

are undeniably political. Speak to anyone who complains about the supposed 'negativity' in literary studies, and more often than not, such a complaint will be appended with a comment about political agendas in education. "Can't we just enjoy beautiful literature?" they say, "Why does everything have to be made so political?" But just as most modern critique is inherently political, so is the rising turn against it. Pressures for change do not occur during political equilibrium, but rather when the politics *inside* academia do not align with the politics of the forces in power *outside* academia. There are implications in that call to "bring back the awe" which cannot be ignored. "Bring back" not "find" or "bring forth." *Bring back* the good old days, it seems to say, or even, make literary studies great again.

Of course critique is political (Marxist theory, feminist theory, queer theory, postcolonial theory, ecocriticism. Need I list more?). All theory since the beginning of academic time has formed in response to contemporary concerns. Consider New Criticism's focus on structure and close reading in response to the chaos and senselessness of two world wars, Critical Race Theory's response to the Civil Rights Movement, or even Aristotle's response to Plato's condemnation of poets with *Poetics*. In all these cases and more, scholars have used literary theory as a tool to grapple with the timeliest issues in their generation's consciousness. To deny humanities students today the same opportunity to engage with the world in meaningful ways is to deny the purpose of the humanities themselves. However, it is when those meaningful ways fail to be clear or meaningful to anyone outside of the immediate academic circle that, perhaps, problems emerge.

Reflecting on my own time as an undergraduate and then graduate student, I cannot recall ever hearing a professor or colleague question the use of modern theoretical lenses in the analysis of literature. I think that this may be more of a problem than any theory in and of itself. As students, we learn these paths of study unquestioningly—not, as some may argue, because we are "brainwashed" to do so, but because they seem so obviously necessary. After all, literary criticism has been the governing force behind the formal study of literature to date. Yet, with the turns of ideological tides, the value of these systems must be explicitly justified in how they appeal to more than just the insular world of scholarship and theoretical bubbles. According to Felski, postcritique "presumes a knowledge of critique; it is not a rejection of an

intellectual tradition but a working through its limits" (355). Embracing postcritique or not, shouldn't we be doing this anyway?

While Felski's postcritique might speak to the 'disenchantment' voiced by students, it does not address most of the other concerns in Heller's article, concerns which, if we truly wish to save the English major from its prophesied demise, we must address. I argue that rather than turning away from theoretical lenses, scholars of literature (particularly students) should be looking at new forms of critique and how they might serve as a positive example for forward progression. There are new waves of criticism that are especially primed to answer this call, one of which is geocriticism. Optimally applied, literary criticism is a necessary response to contemporary concerns, and Geocriticism offers a unique model for rethinking theoretical approaches.

GEOCRITICISM

A Culmination of the Spatial Turn

When Edward Soja published *Postmodern geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* in 1989, he was just starting to see evidence of what he coined as "the spatial turn":

> As we move closer to the end of the twentieth century, however, Foucault's premonitory observations on the emergence of an 'epoch of space' assume a more reasonable cast. The material and intellectual contexts of modern critical social theory have begun to shift dramatically. In the 1980s, the hoary traditions of a space-blinkered historicism are being challenged with unprecedented explicitness by convergent calls for a far-reaching spatialization of the critical imagination. A distinctively postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, brashly reasserting the interpretive significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary crititcal thought. (Soja 11)

Now, thirty-six years later, it is safe to say that the 'epoch of space' has in fact become a reality and the critical imagination is thoroughly spatialized. Scholarship is more spatially-conscious than ever, thanks to the theoretical momentum of postmodernism and postcolonialism—not to mention technological innovations in mapping, global visualization, and other geospatial technologies (GPS, GIS, RS). Riding in on this swell, geocriticism arose as a

natural and "timely" (Tally, Translator's Preface, ix) coalescence of theory and practices that fell under the umbrella of spatial analysis but were not firmly delineated until French scholar Bertrand Westphal published *La Géocritique: réel, fiction, espace* in 2007. In his book, Westphal proposes a "'spatiological' inventory" for geocritical practices across a multitude of disciplines (7). Officially, geocriticism is young (a baby as most modern criticism goes), but the roots of Westphal's geocriticism trace back to forebears and pioneers of spatial theory—Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, David Harvey, et cetera—so it is heartily formed and situated in the geo-literary conversation.

Geocritical Principles

When I was a graduate student of English, no literary theory appealed to me quite so much as geocriticism, which I began to work with and read extensively on at the encouragement of one of my professors. The greatest appeal arises not from the general concepts of spatial or geographic analysis, but from its unique principles, elements, and most especially, its perspective.

As Westphal writes, "most issues of spatial analysis in the field of literature focus on the individual's point of view, which, depending on the genre, is the author's or a fictional character's point of view … an egocentered analysis" (111), but geocriticism claims a drastically different path, favoring "a geocentered approach, which places place at the center of debate" (112). Specifically, geocriticism decenters the individual person and even the individual *text*.

Instead, the *spatial referent* is king. For instance, rather than focus exclusively on Richard Wright's *representation* of Chicago in *Native Son*, a geocritic centers Chicago's South Side itself and analyzes Wright's novel as one representation among many—for example, poetry and music about Chicago, photographs of the South Side, along with historical and current maps. "Thus," says Westphal, "the spatial referent is the basis for the analysis, not the author and his or her work. In a word, one moves from the writer to the place, not the other way around, using complex chronology and diverse points of view" (Westphal 112). Geocriticism acknowledges the constant influence of fictional and non-fictional representation on the real-world referent and of the referent on representation; this *referentiality* is a core principle of the theory (Westphal 6).

From a geocritical point of view, the oscillatory relationship between referent and representation(s) disrupts the traditional hierarchy imposed on "real" and "imagined," thereby making the referent nearly impossible to "really fix or pin down" (Tally, Translator's Preface, xi). Because of this, the feat of analyzing the referent requires both a multifocal and interdisciplinary approach (Westphal 30). Geocriticism opens its own unique forum for scholars from a diversity of disciplines to contribute and interact by "allow[ing] a particular place to serve as the focal point for a variety of critical practices" (Tally, Translator's Preface, ix).

By its own principles, geocriticism does not belong to literary studies alone, but it is an outward-facing form of analysis that places literary studies in a position of collaboration and interaction with other scholarship, giving it an immediate relevance to outside disciplines. While no field of study should seek to defend its existence by ingratiating itself to others, there is an argument to be had for this relevance. If, as Heller's article suggests, students are actively perceiving English studies as "too specialized" and lacking "real world" applications, then interdisciplinarity is certainly a favorable direction for growth, not to mention exciting from a student perspective. As any English major will tell you, literature is valuable and brimming with intellectual potential. Why not share? As Westphal states: "Literature is not a subordinate field, operating in the services of other humanities and social sciences, but literature can certainly help them with their projects" (32). The reverse is also true; geo-literary scholars are already adopting tools and concepts from external disciplines to expand the field of literature in exciting new ways. In her paper "Wounded Cities: Topographies of Self and Nation in Fay Afaf Kanafani's *Nadia, Captive Hope*," Tunisian scholar Hager Ben Driss merges urban studies with literary analysis of autobiography. Driss adapts anthropological concepts like the "the divided city" and references studies in the Middle East by urban planning professionals (299-300).

Using geocriticism, authors like Al-Khafaji ("Geocriticism: Reading Literature in the Spatial Turn") and Alves and Quieroz ("Studying Urban Space and Literary Representations Using GIS: Lisbon, Portugal, 1852-2009") engage with innovative methods of literary mapping with GIS (Geographic Information Systems) technologies. Where Al-Khafaji chooses to briefly examine the ancient

worlds of *Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*, Alves and Quieroz conduct a scrupulous geocritical study of Lisbon, Portugal.

REVIEWING THE SCHOLARSHIP: HOW STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS ARE USING GEOCRITICISM

Consider three Ph.D. candidates who embrace geocriticism as a framework for their research, each yielding a unique expression of the theory: one from Greece geocritically analyzes Myrivilis' *The Mermaid Madonna* (*Η Παναγιά η Γοργόνα*) to examine a new geographic understanding of Greekness (Margariti); one from Romania studies the experience of space in Bucharest during the Revolution of 1989 with a geocritical analysis of Cărtărescu's *Orbitor* and Suceavă's *Noaptea cand cineva a murit pentru tine* (Susarenco); and one from the United States explores the active role of transcontinental railspaces by applying geocriticism to Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train* (Smith). It is one thing to read about and appreciate the critical lens itself, but to truly assess its value, one must analyze it in action. While there is an increasing number of papers utilizing geocriticism as a framework, few have endeavored to analyze those papers and their value to critical conversation. The following section aims to contribute in a small way to such research by examining a sample of scholarship by contemporary academics and students engaging with geocriticism in meaningful ways. The purpose of my analysis is to examine exactly how geocriticism has been utilized in the years following its conception.

Process

I began my analysis by selecting 24 papers authored by scholars and students internationally, which I sourced from various online databases. For each paper, I evaluated and inventoried the following:

- Author disciplines and specializations
- Author nationality
- Academic level at the time of publication (e.g., post-graduate student, university professor)
- Topics
- Purpose
- Geography under analysis

- Application methods of geocriticism
- In-text descriptions of geocriticism as a theoretical framework
- Critical language and terms used throughout the text

Findings

Author demographics

Of the 24 papers, 10 originate from the United States, 3 from Romania, 2 from Egypt, and 1 from each of the following: Czechia, Finland, Germany, Greece, India, Iraq, Italy, Portugal, and Tunisia (see Figure 1). Although I endeavored to find geocritical authors from as many different countries as possible, the sample was still unfortunately skewed with a disproportionate percentage of papers from the United States.

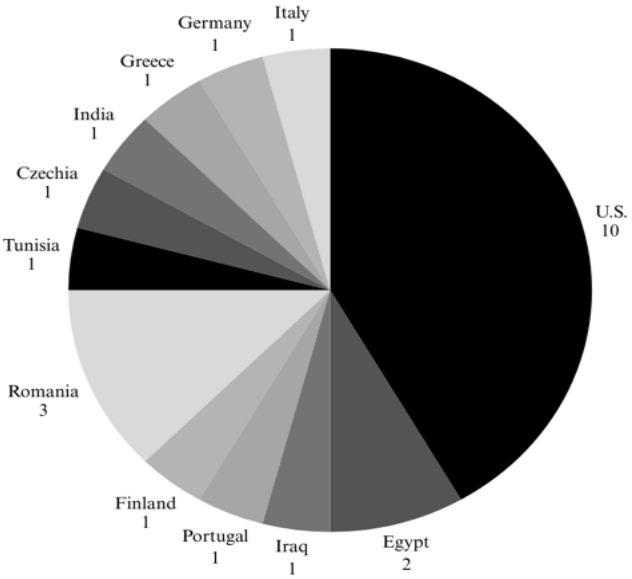

Figure 1. Scholar nationalities

There are several likely reasons for this: (1) I was (for the most part) limited to papers written in English or with English translations, (2) my access to non-American sources was affected by my region and/or my own knowledge of

particular digital libraries, and (3) the use and awareness of geocriticism is currently more widely spread in the U.S. than other countries. As I searched for these papers by criticism, topics, and keywords rather than by country, the sample of scholarship does appear to be representative of the wide and diverse international spread of geocriticism.

While this spread has begun to reach students and Ph.D. candidates and their dissertational research, an overwhelming majority of these scholars already hold a degree and university professorship (see Figure 2). Since five out of the 24 papers were written by more than one author, the total number in Figures 1 and 2 is higher than 24. In the case of Vernon and Miller, at the date of their paper's publication, Margaret A. Miller was a postgraduate Ph.D. student while Matthew Vernon was a university professor who already held a Ph.D.

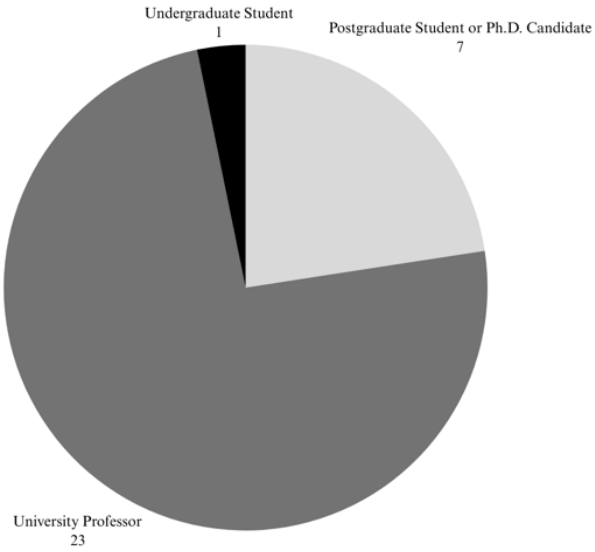

Figure 2. Scholar academic level

With the categorization of author disciplines, it is important to note that many of the authors specialize in multiple disciplines. Additionally, the way that the authors choose to phrase their specialties varies.

For obvious reasons, most fall under some form of literature (see Figure 3). However, a handful of authors originate from other humanities and social sciences disciplines.

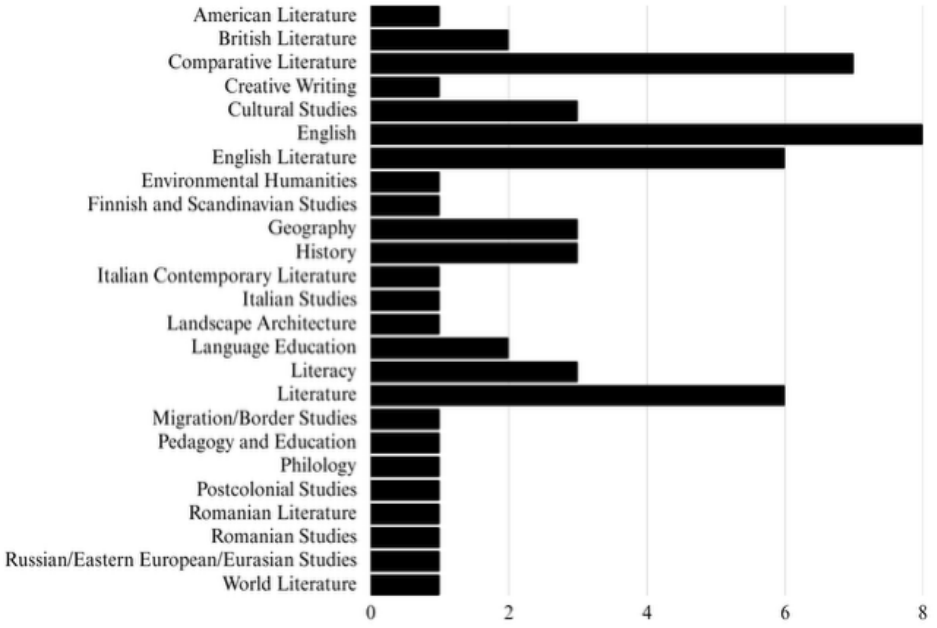

Figure 3. Scholar specializations

Increasingly, as I examined these papers, I noticed just how many of them were written in collaboration across disciplines—some of these scholars belonging as faculty to the same university, but entirely different departments. For example, in the case of Alves and Quieroz, Alves is a professor in the history department and Quieroz a professor in the Geography and Regional Planning department at the Institute of Contemporary History in Lisbon. These kinds of collaborations further indicate that geocriticism is a theoretical framework that encourages such ties built by shared interests.

Applications and approaches

Ultimately, I found that none of these papers truly and fully perform geocritical analysis as specified by Bertrand Westphal's vision (in terms of accuracy, Alvez and Quieroz arguably come the nearest of all 24). This is hardly surprising since one of the core principles of the theory is failure. As Robert T. Tally Jr. explains in his Translator's Preface to the English translation of Westphal's book,

> Of course, the idea of *completing* the geocritical analysis of a place is as false as the idea of fixing it in a permanent, unchanging, and static image. If failure is inevitable, then the goal must be to fail in interesting ways. And geocriticism presents interesting ways to engage with the spaces of fiction and reality. (Tally, Translator's Preface, xi)

The geocritic assumes failure, or in other words, a "working through the limits"—the very thing Rita Felski promotes in postcritique. Because of this, geocriticism is a highly self-aware and flexible form of critique. Reading these 24 papers, I observed that each author (or set of authors) chooses to "borrow" pieces of geocriticism to utilize for their own specialized purpose.

One example that stands out is Teodora Susarenco, a Ph.D. student of Philology at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, who takes a more evaluative approach to geocriticism. In her paper, "Geocriticism: for an interpretation of the Romanian novel about the Revolution of 1989," Susarenco "tests the waters" so to speak. Her objective is to determine if geocriticism is actually applicable, and to do so, she conducts her own geocritical analysis of Bucharest during the Revolution of 1989 through the representation of this space in novels by Bogdan Suceavă and Mircea Cărtărescu. Very specifically, towards the beginning of the paper, Susarenco directly states that she takes issue with Westphal's dismissal of chronological delineations. Considering the inevitable changes and variations between given points in time, she questions how a geographic place can even be properly studied without outlining some kind of chronological boundaries (Susarenco 30). Here, Susarenco acknowledges what she views as a "problem" or limitation of geocriticism and then proceeds to meld the critique to her own intellectual needs.

Like Susarenco, Petr Chalupský, in his paper, "'Siblings to the empty spaces in the heart': Space, Place, and Landscape in Jim Crace's *Quarantine*," differentiates his geocritical analysis from a strictly Westphalian approach. Considering geocriticism in the context of other spatial analyses, Chalupský describes the theory as more elastic, asserting that geocriticism's "defining principles allow alternately focused geocritical approaches" (24). According to the paper's abstract, Chalupský "Us[es] an ego-centred variant of geocriticism and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia as its theoretical points of departure" (19). As models, he points to Robert T. Tally, "whose geocritical approach differs from Westphal in its markedly ego-centred focus," and the

phenomenological approach of Eric Prieto (Chalupský 24). Chalupský analyzes the desert scrubland of Crace's novel both as a heterotopia and as a character-like actor in the story, with significant and independent agency of its own (34), but he also examines the landscape's effect on individual characters' minds and experiences.

This egocentered approach seems to be especially prevalent among the geocritical scholarship, perhaps even overbalancing more exclusively geocentered work (as outlined by Bertrand Westphal). Although he does not describe his application of geocriticism as a "variant" like Chalupský does, Ahmad similarly focuses his analysis on the relationships between space and characters in his paper "Poetics of Place: A Geocritical Reading of Sherman Alexie's 'The Search Engine', 'Lawyer's League', and 'Can I Get a Witness.'" Studying spaces and places in Sherman Alexie's stories, Ahmad finds meaning in their influence on character and plot—"...space plays a pivotal role in the formation of his characters and in the development of events..." (51)—and in the ways place serves as manifestations of "people's thoughts and behaviors" (62) and important cultural undertones. For example, Ahmad posits that the basketball court in Alexie's *Ten Little Indians* is a "symbolic battlefield" that represents the conflict between white Americans and Native Americans (56). Although this more egocentered application departs from Westphal's principles, authors like Ahmad still consider their analyses to fall under the geocritical umbrella.

While the majority of these authors fully label their work as "geocriticism," a few do not, preferring to emphasize their hybrid approach. One example can be found in the paper "Producing Space(s) Through Poetry: Geofeminism in Contemporary Romanian Poetry," by Diana Huțanu, in which Huțanu studies poetry from frACTalia, a publishing house with an "affirmed left-wing feminist consciousness" (196). She makes brief mention of geocriticism, and borrows quite a bit from the theory, but labels her specific approach as "geofeminism," hybridizing criticism to a more specified end. Huțanu asserts that, "while geocritical readings of Romanian literature have been practised, a geofeminist approach could further uncover socio-political dynamics by using appropriate tools and contribute to the consolidation of a contextualised feminism" (202).

The most surprising trend of note is that many of the papers do not analyze more than one text. Even assuming failure, the absence of

multifocalization distances these projects from Westphal's geocriticism even further. With that in mind, one possibility that must be contended with is that when a number of these authors use the term "geocriticism," they are referring more loosely to spatial/geographic analysis rather than to the much more specific practice of critique presented by Westphal—much in the same way that many refer to all guide dogs as "Seeing Eye dogs" or tissues as "Kleenex", even though these are service dogs trained by one particular organization or tissues from one particular brand name, respectively. Could "geocriticism" become a catchall term? The evidence seems to suggest so.

Topics

The number of topics explored across these 24 papers is too great to list, but I did find significant patterns. With their spatial focus, many addressed current or recent issues related to geography and environment. Some authors use geocriticism as a device to creatively explore national history and identity while others look close to home (or more specifically, close to the classroom) by considering pedagogical applications of geocriticism in education. In general, there is a sense of immediacy in all of these topics.

At least seven of the papers use geocriticism to explore one or more of the following as central topics: immigrant/migrant experience, transnationalism, geopolitics, the effects of colonialism, and border spaces. Some of the authors addressing these topics expressed that they found geocriticism to be especially helpful for connecting the literary conversation about these issues to other disciplines. For example, in her paper, "Speculations on the Mediterranean Borderscape: *Le Baiser de Lampedusa*," Silvia Ruzzi writes that her "principal interest in geocriticism is the interdisciplinary investigation of space" (56). She believes geocriticism to be exceptionally applicable to border studies (one of her several areas of specialty) as a helpful tool for analysis, not the least because border studies itself is an interdisciplinary field and also shares geocriticism's emphasis on multifocalization and diverse perspectives (Ruzzi 57). On this, Ruzzi further states that "a geocentric approach to literary productions serves as a critical device for border scholars, since it theorizes spatial literary studies as an important way to comprehend and react to b/order issues" (57). In her paper, Ruzzi performs what she calls a "geo-literary analysis"

of the 2011 Tunisian novel *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* by Mounir Charfi, specifically analyzing Charfi's representation of the Mediterranean Sea as a borderscape amidst migration, geopolitical tension, shifting geography, and global injustice.

In a very different approach and purpose, Abas, Bamanger, Gashan, and Guler's paper ("Navigating the Land of Opportunities as Muslim Immigrants: A Geocriticism Perspective to Transnationalism in Multicultural Children's Literature") analyzes the representation of transnationalism, particularly the experience of Muslim child immigrant characters in children's books. What is especially unique about this paper is that the authors do not analyze one physical place that can be pointed to on a map, but rather a common experience of transgression/transgressivity shared across the books. Because all four of the researchers are in some way connected to education studies or are educators themselves, they operate with the additional perspective of educational purposes, evaluating these books for their suitability, merit, and potential for incorporation into children's curricula.

CONCLUSIONS: GEOCRITICISM AS A MODEL

If all theory emerges and grows in response to contemporary concerns, then geocriticism is no different. In fact, one might argue that geocriticism is an effective critical response to more than one modern-day crisis. In a 2015 interview with Katiuscia Darici from the University of Verona, Robert Tally Jr. described this unique position:

> Globalization has brought home to many the degree to which disparate places are crucially interconnected [...] various factors – coinciding with postmodernity as a historical period, as it happens – can be identified, including the breakdown of the Bretton Woods monetary system and the explosion in the use of financial derivatives in cross-border transactions, "outsourcing" in manufacturing, the rise of multinationals and the displacement of workforces, high tech innovations, the World-Wide-Web, an increasingly global culture industry, and so forth. The cartographic anxiety one associated with the bewildering spatiotemporal transformations of modern capitalism – "all that is solid melts into air," as Marx put it – expands exponentially in a world in which electronic transactions executed largely by computers using mathematical trading formulae can have more dramatic and lasting effects on a given

> socioeconomic order than entire national industries once did. Space is, in a sense, less real and more urgent in such a world, which is partly why I think that literature and literary criticism, in their fundamental commitment to an educated imagination (as Northrop Frye called it), may be especially well placed to deal with the overwhelming crises of representation and of the imagination in contemporary culture. An empowered imagination is necessary for engaging the spatial and social confusions created and fostered by the conditions of the present world system. (Tally Interview 3-4)

Geocritical scholarship responds directly to this present-world system. It responds to the epidemic of environmental alienation faced by modern generations due to escalating digitization, to climate anxieties, and geopolitical turmoil. For centuries, human-centric culture has endlessly justified destruction and domination of place and environment (along with the people and creatures of place and environment), but with the intensifying voices of environmental justice and eco-centric concerns for a ravaged planet, there is a need for decentralization of humanity. Geocriticism responds to this need also, refocusing the academic view by replacing egocentric analysis with *geo*centered analysis. Through this analysis, scholars are actively connecting with and autonomizing spaces both familiar and foreign. Increasing numbers of new geocritical and other spatially-oriented scholarship continue to emerge as published work. Since 2014, Robert T. Tally Jr. has edited the series "Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies" by Palgrave Macmillan, which already features 48 books and essay collections with exciting topics ranging from medieval romance and Poe studies to the modernist waterscapes of Virginia Woolf. The spatial turn keeps on turning.

Finally, geocriticism speaks to the future of the humanities. One of the sharpest and most frequently wielded accusations against literary critique (and in tandem, "The English Major") is that such theory is alienating and out of touch with the "real world" of hard science and practicality. As a proud English major myself, I would never go so far to agree with its accusers, but I can at least see their point. Over and over again when I teach Composition, I warn my students away from "writing in a vacuum" as many are wont to do. In early drafts, these students will chase their own intellectual tails for about five paragraphs, and while they might be applaudably clever or eloquent, they fail to even nod at the existence of outside arguments or any kind of influential source material. The

underlying problem is often their conception of "writing" as a solitary activity—modeling themselves after this performative and (mostly) fictitious image of the soliloquizing scholar. They simply don't realize that writing is a conversation.

Of course, literary scholars know about the critical conversation, but the conversation often happens behind the closed doors of the disciplinary family home. Geocriticism offers a model for bringing together scholars from all corners of academia, not just those in literature studies. Geocriticism says: literary analysis doesn't have to be a lonely feat scratched away at from a solitary office in the English Department. It demands interdisciplinary collaboration. Multiple expertise and multiple eyes. It offers a model for an *intellectual interconnectedness* that could breathe fresh life into the English Major—not the end but the beginning of something new.

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