



Study of the Heterotopic Space in *Solo of a Revenant* of Kossi Efoui and the Enigma of the Return of Dany Laferrière According to the Geocritic of Bertrand Westphal*

Shabnam NIKRAFAT**/Bahman NAMVAR MOTLAGH***

IN the contemporary world, returning to one's hometown after a considerable period has inspired countless authors whose lives were affected by emigration and exile. Kossi Efoui, the author of *A Returnee's Solo*, and Dany Laferrière, who wrote *the Riddle of Return*, each has narrated the experience of alterity of returnee in the familiar atmosphere of his hometown. In this paper, the relation between the represented space and the referential one, and the meaning that is consequently resulted in the return process are analyzed based on Westphal's geocriticism theory. Furthermore, by adapting the heterotopia's theory, also named the "other space", which was first presented by Foucault and then developed by Westphal, an explanation of the function of cemetery as the other space has given, which becomes meaningful in contrast with the hometown dominance.

The geocritics of Westphal helps us to take into account the referential space based on which literary works are written. It is by relying on the implication of real space in the fictional space that Foucault evokes the idea of heterotopy or "other space". He qualifies the intermediate space as heterotopic, which is measured by the degree of transgression and its challenge in relation to the established norm.

*Received: 2018/01/29

Accepted: 2018/12/01

**Ph.D. student, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran, (corresponding author), E-mail: Shabnam.nik66@yahoo.com

***Associate Professor, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran, E-mail: bnmotlagh@yahoo.fr

Heterotopic places come from a localizable reality, but they challenge, enrich, or neutralize the places to which they return. Heterotopy takes on new dimensions in the geocritics of Westphal.

In fact, one of the main issues in geocritics is the analysis of the relations between artistic representations and their referents. For interpretation of the difference between reality and its fictional representation, there are three models according to Westphal: homotopy, heterotopy, and utopia. Homotopy occurs when the literary text is governed by the name of the referential place. In this case, the literary text updates one of the virtual properties of a realm without denying, however, its current properties. When the relationship between the place represented and the referential place becomes opaque, blurred, and contradictory, we can speak of heterotopy. The third model concerns utopia that is not related to a factual place. The point that Westphal adds to this typology is what he calls the *transnominatation*. In this model, the referent, whom the events of the novel are attributed to, is named explicitly, but the author undoes the link that unites the referential place with its representation. The choice of such a strategy is the search for a new virginity for a referent who is saturated with names. From this point of view, we can link the notion of Westphal's transnominatation to what Foucault defines as heterotopy.

It is in relation to the question of the return to the native country that the concept of heterotopia is evoked in this writing corpus which consists of *A Returnee's solo* and *The Riddle of return*. *A Returnee's solo*, written in 2009, tells the story of an African exile who, after ten years of inter-ethnic massacres, returns to his war-ravaged country where, in the present, there is a modern order and an apparent reconciliation. *The Riddle of Return*, written in 2009, tells the story of a Haitian writer who spent thirty-three years in exile in Montreal before returning to Haiti to organize the funeral of his father, without his cadaver in his native village. Heterotopy in the world of these returnees is formed in reaction to the fixity and absurdity of the dominant space that reigns over their homeland. In these narratives, we are interested in the relations between the fictional space and the referential space on the one hand, and in the function of the cemetery, which is considered as a "different space" on the other.

In *A Returnee's Solo*, the narrator does not write his story in a precise geography. On the one hand, it evokes a country which is never mentioned. On the other hand, he continues to enumerate the nationalities of individuals whose territories were, in a certain period, subject to the invasions of the colonizers. This is how the narrator makes the presence of History in fiction. All this contributes to creating a fictional space in which the reality of the world has been condensed and united in an obsessive repetition. Heterotopy, in this novel, consists in making the various aspects of the world of colonies implicitly coexist in a single space of fiction.

This problematic relationship between real space and fictional space is not unrelated to the tendency of the returnee to describe "other spaces." The cemetery represents a remarkable space where people who are foreign to modern order are frequent.

Going to the cemetery to see the tomb of his Little Aunt, the returnee is seduced by the attitude of a cohort of women repeating an endless catalog of names of the dead and the missing. These "mourning women" are pushed out of the city by the public force, since their behavior is in contradiction with the discourse of peace, which is established on the oblivion of the past. The cemetery, for the presence of these women, can form a heterotopy of deviation in the sense that their continuous cries are deviant in relation to a society in which the established norm requires the suppression of pains in favor of a false reconciliation.

The path of *the return* in *the Riddle of Return* starts from the big city (Port-au-Prince) and continues in the villages to finally reach the cemetery of Baradères in his father's hometown. From one village to another, he frequents the cemeteries. In Baradères, death does not seem to be limited to the cemetery as long as people can feel death there. Even the daily life of children is touched by this coexistence of past and present, of life and death. The indisputable presence of death in the lives of villagers enriches the representation of space whose imaginary dimensions begin to get activated.

Yet we must not ignore that the names of referential places are mentioned from the first lines. The returnee spends his time in the villages of Montreal, for example, he speaks of the village of Trois-Pistoles. He goes to see his father's body in Manhattan. He arrives in Port-au-Prince in the suburbs of which he describes the Piétonville commune. While in *A Returnee's Solo* fictional geographical names tend to hide the referential reality, in *the Riddle of Return*, the returnee does not hesitate to specify the factual spatial framework from which he creates his fiction. Leaving the port, the returnee climbs aboard a boat and chooses the sea as the last place to end his journey. The space of the sea and the beach allow him to telescope the different times in a space whose landmarks begin to oscillate between reality and reverie. Even when it detaches itself from time and space in the heterotopic space of the ship, the referential reality does not diminish in favor of reverie. In *the Riddle of Return*, the narrator used the transnominating process to keep the real references while seeking to enrich them with heterotopic spaces, especially the cemetery space where life and death coexist. In this way, it seems that he wanted to weaken the imposed weight of the referential space.

We have shown that the spaces represented are rooted, each in a certain way, in referential reality and at the same time, they challenge this referential reality. While Laferrière represents space from real names to gradually free himself from the weight of referential reality and to slip into the world of the dead, Efoui puts his returnee in the opposite way. He implies death from the beginning in his story. At the same time, he avoids

naming the space of his story, not because he wants to ignore it, but to enrich it by his fictionality so as to condense the realities of African history in one place.

The referential reality in *the Riddle of Return* is thus the point of departure from which lines of flight begin to finally open on a space beyond names; the space that has been the place of a perpetual interpenetration between reality and fiction. But the instance of the fiction in *A Returnee's solo* encompasses circles surrounding a diverse referential reality which the narrator constantly delays naming, while it tends to highlight it despite all the decomposition that flooded it. The evocation of these heterotopic spaces that disturbs the structures of the dominant space also determines the form of these narratives of the return by integrating pauses in the rhythm of the narration. Thus, reading these stories gives rather the impression of a poetry than an adventure to tell. Looking for the meaning of heterotopy in the structure of the story also opens new horizons in the study of the movements that the returnee does through "other spaces". This would lead us to note, through the interaction of the subject with space, a kind of trajectory that separates us from both pure subjectivity and objectivity.