

Diaspoetics: “We must be still and moving still”

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Abstract

My paper is concerned with the lines of regularity which bring a genre, any genre, into being as a discursive category. When the genre happens to be a travelling one, as is the case with Diaspora Criticism, then these modes of regularity are riven by certain internal fissures, contradictions, aporias and evasions that are, ironically, the basic constitutive features of the generic category. The paper argues that Diaspora Criticism is a critical genre that takes as its object a thing called ‘diaspora.’ The viability of the critical genre, it follows, rests on defining and delimiting the object of its inquiry. This act of positing a new critical site through the inscribing of parameters is, paradoxically, at odds with the site-violating implications of its primary signifier or object, since diaspeir is Greek for ‘scattering’ (speir) and was originally employed to explain the botanical phenomenon of seed dispersal. In any event, this chapter is concerned with Diaspora Criticism’s attempt to mark itself off as a new theoretical domain by targeting an object called ‘diaspora’, an enterprise in which the present writer is wryly implicated. What it says or avoids saying about this object creates (after Foucault) the condition for the emergence, delimitation and specification of the domain itself. Taking its cue from theories of genre as well as discourse analysis, the paper argues that there is a startling rift between the thematics of Diaspora Criticism (predicated on the lateral and unstable flows of people, cultures, capital) and its theoretics, based on the nomination and regulation of a disciplinary regime: a knowledge category.