

The Concept of Geopoetics and the Text-Space of *the Man in the Panther's Skin*

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Abstract: Reflections on space as a category have been widely discussed in Western thought since the 1960s. This direction is often referred to as the “spatial turn (rotation)”, which incorporates many space-related considerations. Space is the main way in which the text is formed; it defines its contextual dimension, characters, metaphors and so on.

One of the modern concepts of exploring space in Humanities-Geopoetics - explores the impact of culture and, above all, creative processes regarding the structuring of the human world. The idea and concept of Geopoetics belongs to the Scottish philosopher Kenneth White. According to White, Geopoetics starts when we allow something to happen. Geopolitics addresses real space. Its area of interest includes power relations between global cities and States. Geopoetics is a deeper and more radical initiative. To be more precise, Geopoetics is the "rewriting" of the real space. The text may include unreal space or real space, but with barcodes that are not specific to that particular place and processed faces that are no longer identical to the real ones. Therefore, the text can be considered as an alternative map of the world. One of the manifestations of Geopoetics is the cultural self-assertion of the territories, sometimes referred to as "Geopoiesis". This

can be expressed by locating cities, capitals in the places desired by the author; thus the writer creates the so-called textual spaces, or rather space-texts.

I believe that analysing the space of *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, in particular, exploring the significance of the spaces in different contexts and the role they play in terms of creating the whole plot of the poem will be significant not only for Rustvelology, but also for Georgian literary studies and will incorporate *MPS* more actively into the discourse of international literary studies in the modern world.

Key words: *Geopoetics, Kenneth White, the Modern Theories of Space, Text-space, "The Man in the Panther's Skin".*

Reflections on space as a category have been discussed in Western thought since the 1960s. This applies to the philosophies of literary studies and cultural studies. Space is frequently presented as the main category concerning the analysis of the literary text whereas, compared to it, the primacy of time as a category, relocates in the background. Therefore, the place where the plot of the text develops is more significantly emphasised compared to the cases when it does develop. This is often referred to as the "spatial turn (rotation)".

In humanities, the term "turn" refers to the research according to a particular category. In the case of the "spatial turn", it is the space (the so-called "spatial rotation"), which incorporates many space-related considerations. Space is the main way in which the text is formed - it defines its contextual parameters, characters, metaphors, so on.

The development of the spatial theory in this regard is one of the modern methods in the history of text research, which, I think, will be interesting concerning *the Man in the Panther's Skin*, because the space of the poem is quite colourful, multifunctional and versatile. In confirmation of this, we can consider the second line of the first stanza of the poem: „...to us men He has given the

world, infinite in variety we possess it" (W. 1). According to Rustavelologian thought, "the world" is the multi-coloured land created for humans [8, p. 27].*

"A multi-coloured world" can be perceived as a combination of diverse, heterogeneous spaces, allowing us to study the spaces of the epic in the connection with the modern concepts of space.

Many kinds of research and papers have been written about the modern theories of space. The Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature is also working on this issue. In Georgian literary studies, Professor Irma Ratiani is credited with the first attempt to compare the liminality theory with the eschatological anti-utopia model [15], whereas Professor Maka Elbakidze has applied the above-mentioned theory to Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther's Skin* [6, pp. 25-40], which is an attempt to incorporate the liminality theory as one of the modern approaches within the study of Rustaveli's poem and, at the same time, to connect this methodological concept with the late medieval literary text. In this paper, space and time are discussed as liminal phenomena, and the characters' actions ("stampede", madness etc.) are connected with the liminal model of the chronotope.

Modern Western studies are often written in a pluralistic approach; in other words, they are not based on a particular theory but the researchers prefer the diversity of theories. The boundaries between sciences are also erased; for example, we can name the French philosopher and literary critic Michel Foucault, who borrowed the term "heterotopia" from medicine. In medicine, this term describes the appearance of a cell in an unexpected place. Foucault employs the term "heterotopia" in the preface to his book *The Order of Things*. According to him, heterotopia is a discourse type which disrupts the ruling order of discourse. In 1976, in his radio report named as "Heterotopias" (published in 1984 under the title *About Other Spaces*), heterotopia was classed as utopia realised in reality. In other words, the utopian spaces embodied in

* Translated by Marjory Scott Wardrop (1912).

reality, which as opposed to traditional, everyday spaces existing in a particular culture. According to Foucault, theatres, cinemas, museums, libraries, etc. are considered to be heterotopic spaces. In such spaces, content and subjects that are incompatible in the traditional sense, are gathered in one place and also, different times (past, present, future) coexist as the traditional perception of time is violated. Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" was used in various fields of thought and was widely pervaded in literary studies [11; 12].

In modern humanities, researchers often explore ancient texts using modern methods of text analysis, including the concept of geopoetics. For example, Lyudmila Ternovaya's work *The link between Shakespeare's Geopoetics and Geopolitics* [15, 98-101], discusses Shakespeare's work according to Bakhtin's theories. Dr. Hussein Aldoori points out that Shakespeare's universality allows us to study his work in the context of modern theories [1]. The texts that, at first glance, have no connection with the modernity, are studied within the context of geopolitics. For example, the modern German scholar Erika Schellenberger-Diederich discusses the works of German writers and poets (Hölderlin, Novalis, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Droste-Hülshoff, Mörike, Stifter, Rilke, Bachmann, Celan) in this respect [18].

Therefore, I think it will be interesting to analyse the space of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* according to the modern concepts of space. In particular, to explore the significance of space in different contexts and the role they play in terms of creating the whole plot of the poem.

One of the modern concepts of exploring space in Humanities – Geopoetics – researches the impact of culture and, above all, creative processes on the structuring of the human world. The idea and concept of Geopoetics belongs to the Scottish philosopher Kenneth White. He is also a poet, writer and researcher. According to White, Geopoetics starts when we allow something to happen. Geopolitics addresses real space. The area of its interest includes power relations between the global scale cities and Sta-

tes. Geopoetics is a deeper and more radical initiative. Its area of interest is not a territorial power between States, but the existence of a human being in the universe, the relationship between humans and the celestial/stellar world, and also the problem of existence on the Earth. In other words, the world and the Universe are interconnected in Geopoetics.

According to White (I rely on White's approach to Geopoetics), Geopoetics can be called a theory, which means that the author wants to give a systemic character to his idea. Beyond all the religious, ideological, moral, psychological differences that exist and sometimes create havoc in our world, there is one thing (and it can only be the Earth, this strange and beautiful planet, apparently unique in the galaxy [25]. (I believe the words from *MPS* "...to us men He has given the world," are very close to the main idea of Geopolitics in this context, hence, the "world" in the poem is the Earth as an idea that unites all people from different spaces.)

As for the term "Poetics", White does not use it in its traditional sense, but as a "poetic intellect" (*nous poietikos*), which can also be found in the writings of Aristotle. "Poetics" for him is a fundamental dynamic of thought. Therefore, there exists the Poetics of literature, philosophy, science, and politics. Geopoetics, and hence any consequential geopoetician, exists in an enormous time - space [25]. In his book *Le Plateau de l'Albatros** (*The flatness of the albatross*), White drew up a complete map of Geopoetics from three points of view: philosophical, scientific and poetic. In the mentioned work, the researcher names the proto-geopoeticians such as Humboldt, Thoreau (Henry David Thoreau - 19th century American essayist, poet, philosopher) or Segalen (Victor Segalen - 19th-20th century French military physician, ethnographer, writer, literary critic, etc.) not only to demonstrate how deeply the thought is related to life, but also to show that the idea of Geopoetics was hidden in certain minds across time and space. The

* White's theoretical work on geopoetics – *Le Plateau de l'Albatros* (in French language).

researcher points out that interpretations and analyses of the above-mentioned authors go beyond erudition and history; they open up the Geography of the mind, which implies understanding the world in the context of the author's imagination [25].

In order to maintain the perspective of the idea of Geopoetics and to promote multicultural and transdisciplinary research, Kenneth White established the International Institute of Geopoetics in 1989.

Geopoetics is the "rewriting" of the real space. The text may include either unreal space or real space, but with barcodes that are not specific to that particular place, processed faces that are no longer identical to the real. The text can be considered as an alternative map of the world, in this case. One of the manifestations of Geopoetics is the cultural self-assertion of the territories, sometimes referred to as "Geopoiesis". This can be expressed by placing the cities, capitals in the locations desired by the author, that is, the writer creates the so-called textual spaces, space-texts. I think discussing the text of the *MPS* in this context would be a significantly interesting step and it would make the researching stages of the poem even more interesting and versatile.

The Geopoetical understanding of space may have different grounds. Geopoetics and textual spaces, in general, are interesting due to the fact that some of the content and ideas related to one particular geographical space can be transferred to a completely different geographical space in a literary text, or they can develop elsewhere; for example, Georgian characters, metaphors, contents that are considered to be relevant to the Georgian reality, as well as terms, frequently used metaphors etc. which are characteristic of a particular space, are easily decoded in the same environment and by the representatives of that linguistic space, may be transferred to a completely different space (eg, in Arabia, India ...).

The field of interest of this article is Geopoetics as a literary trend and space as a category, and therefore the space of the *MPS* which, in fact, was invented by the author. It is not necessary for the text-space to be entirely invented, the content of the space

and what this space is related to are most significant. In this regard, it would be interesting to explore the motive for utilizing a specific space in the poem, the existence of space as a category. As well as this, it is interesting to study the literary/textual space of the poem and the way it refers to the real one. What effect does space, in which the characters move, have on the characters of the epic.

In this regard, I think it is also interesting to analyse the 9th stanza of the *MPS* ("This Persian tale, now done into Georgian...now I have found it and mounted it in a setting of verse..." (W. 16), which presents possible variations in the understanding of the whole poetic space in an interesting way and allows studying the textual spaces of the poem according to the modern concepts of space. If we take a look at Rustvelian studies, there are obvious attempts to comment on this stanza, for example, in his commentary on the first printed edition of the epic, Vakhtang VI considered both the story and the poem to be Rustvelian. The plot of the *MPS* is considered to be of Persian origin in Archil's poem *Conversation between Teimuraz and Rustveli*. Nikolai Marr expressed the same opinion about the plot of the epic in Rustvelian studies and argued that it was based on different points of view (the origin of the names of the characters, the religious concept of the poem...).

In the later period, in Rustvelian literature there existed an opinion that this line refers to the author's attempt to disguise the location of the action and many parallels of this can be found in the world literature [4, 63-65]. According to Revaz Siradze, "Persianness of the story" means inventing the story and its being Persian, concerning its literary nature, while "being translated" implies rethinking the plot in Georgian and not a direct translation into Georgian [20, 193; 19]. According to the point of view popular in foreign Kartvelology, the „Persian tale“ does not denote a story of the Persian origin, but a Persian epic- type story [5, 56-57; 21, XIII-XIV]. The same point of view is developed by Professor Elguja Khintibidze, who considers that the word "Persian" means East in its general sense and the action of the plot of the epic was

developed in Oriental countries (Arabia, India ...), while "Georgian translations" is understood as the reality of the Georgian court allegorically reflected in the narrative of *MPS* and the plot of the poem unfolds through the framework of the Oriental type [8]. Herewith, E. Khintibidze pointed out that the Oriental, "wandering" stories are included by the author in the Georgian fable framework. Zaza Khintibidze offers an interesting understanding of the word "I have found" from one of the verses of the same stanza ("... I have found it and mounted it in a setting of verse"). According to the author, the above-mentioned word may mean creating by the author's imagination, finding something in the creative process and not discovering an already existing storyline in other literary or folk spaces.

Each of these views provides an opportunity to consider the diversified space of the poem (which includes real, unreal, factual, historically proven, or fictional spaces as well) to be interestingly considered in the context of modern concepts of space, as it offers several possible options for understanding poetic text-space. Moreover, I would like to mention here that I agree with the opinion accepted by a wide circle of Rustvelologists, according to which the plot frameworks of the poem, an Arabian story and the story of India, are based on the history of the Georgian royal court and policy of the XII century (The only daughter's, Tamar's enthronement by the Georgian king George III following the consent of the nobles; Tamar's two marriages, etc.).

In terms of rethinking the authorial text-space into another space and creating an alternative space, Elguja Khintibidze's recent research seems quite interesting; in particular, his discovery that *MPS* is the source of the plots of two plays by Shakespeare's junior contemporaries Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher – *A King and No King* and *Philaster*. In this case, I am interested in the toponym where the setting the plot of *A King and No King* develops. This is Iberia. To confirm the fact that this Iberia is Georgia and not the Pyrenees Peninsula confirmed in historical sources, it is enough to pay attention to the development of the story: after a brilliant

victory over Armenia, the king of Iberia brings the defeated king with him and returns to Iberia court, where the further events unfold. I wonder what was the basis for naming Iberia as a place of action by English playwrights: 1. They must have learned about the origin of the author of the poem and, therefore, the story was played in the country of Rustaveli; 2. The story of Tariel and Nestan (the love story of Tariel and Nestan is pointed out as a plot source by E. Khintibidze) was provided to them as a Georgian story, a love story developed in Georgia/Iberia?

The exploration of this issue requires a different direction of research. However, the existence of an alternative space in the work of foreign playwrights, while Rustaveli never mentions the toponymic of Georgia/Iberia in the text, creates a basis for specific interest concerning this issue and strengthens the argument about the political situation in Georgia at that time described by Rustaveli in *MPS*.

From the point of view of Geopoetics, it will be interesting to divide the space of *MPS* into several sections: real, unreal, fictional (which includes a combination of vital and significant spaces for the development of the plot, such as mainland, sea, war, etc.), which did not (or do not) exist historically. In other words, this is the so-called fictitious space, that may or may not have existed on a toponymic level, but may be considered as a prototype of any real space concerning both the actions performed and the specific environment.

Generally, the opinions related to the consideration of the geographical space of *MPS* can be divided into three groups: 1. Poetic spaces symbolically refer to different regions of Georgia (eg, India is East, Arabia is West, Mulghazanzar is a seaside city or any port city, etc.); 2. The textual space is completely unreal, mystical and everything is invented by the author; 3. All the spaces presented in the poem exist, implying a real geographical environment, which can be specified by taking into account different circumstances and maps. Each theory has its defenders and propagators, even though, for me it is significant to relate the arti-

stic/textual and real spaces of the poem, as well as the influence of these spaces to the characters and behaviours of the protagonists, understanding the space-texts on the level of modern literary concepts.

Therefore, I believe we can add another point to the above-mentioned groups, which might unite real, historical and poetic spaces. Within the research, these spaces will be studied separately and, also, with respect to each other. Specifically, attention will be paid to the following issues: what was the spatial scheme of Georgia as a historically existing state during the Rustaveli period and what kind authorial environment is presented. In other words, it is interesting to explore the relationship between real and textual spaces. Textual spaces include both real and imaginary, fictitious spaces, the existence of which is not historically proven, although they may prototypically represent any existing, real space.

I think that understanding the poem within the discourse of the presented concept is significant not only for Rustvelology but also for Georgian literary to integrate *MPS* more actively into the discourse of international literary studies in the modern world.

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