

# Geopoetical Analysis of Livonia During The Great Northern War Based on *The Last Novik*—A Historical Novel by Ivan Lazhechnikov

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The term geopoetics has a wide interpretation. It is defined as a project of the cultural activity aimed at creating and changing territorial myths and research path, which considers the interaction between literary creativity and geographical space. Defining this term, it is possible to introduce a geopoetical analysis diagram based on three interconnected positions: the writer's personality, the universe of an artwork and its characters. *The Last Novik*—A historical novel by Lazhechnikov analysis example presented on a diagram reveals the relationship between time and space in the literary work, as well as the author's interaction with the described events.

**Keywords:** geopoetic, The Great Northern War, Livonia, *The Last Novik*

## Introduction

Starting the geopoetical analysis of *The Last Novik*—A historical novel by Ivan Lazhechnikov, it is crucial to turn to the origins of the geopoethics term and its definition. The term was initially introduced by Scottish philosopher Kenneth White in 1994, who defined geopoetics as a cultural activity aimed on at creating and changing the territorial myths.

Geopoetics, as a way of perceiving the world and artistic creativity, implies the poetics of the space of distant journeys, globalitarism and special intellectual searches of the creator, his appreciation for home and foreign lands, comprehension of natural phenomena's features of both industrial and postindustrial city landscapes and a countryside that kept its distinctive vibe. A vivid example of this is *The Last Novik* novel protagonist life, which represents an involuntary journey and a constant feeling of homesickness. Almost every chapter including the central character's Voldemar participation represents the contradistinction of a foreign land and home. For instance, in the fifth chapter of the third part entitled *The Story of the Last Novik*, the character says that his main sorrow is death in foreign lands: "Bitter death in a foreign land, a dead body not sprinkled by the tear of a friend or a fellow, not serviced by a priest, challenged by the beasts – that is the lustration expected of me!" (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 55).

As a rule, in the context of such a geopoetics understanding oppositions are often found: East and West, nature and postindustrial landscape, ancient times and reality, divine and evil forces, peacetime and war. It also

often means an explicit marking of human and nature relations, both peaceful and conflictual. For instance, description of military actions for the creator, who acts as a thinker and analyst is not just a disclosure of action causes and consistent event description, but also a suffering for the death of his people and homeland humiliation feeling manifestation. War is perceived as a desecration and destruction of the land. In novel *The Last Novik*, a blind man Conrad from Torneo misses his homeland and describes the foreign lands in the darkest way, while homeland seems sunny and bright to him. This contrast is transmitted primarily through the description of natural phenomenon and the nature singularity, as well as people living in the area feature characteristics.

Elzbieta Rybicka in her work marks the question, is the geopoetics really special in scientific research methods? The answer to this question is highly hypothetical in the author's opinion. The reason for this is that all research methods in this context are directly related to a geographical phenomena' and literary works' interaction. Most of these methods have a transdisciplinary basis in spite they originate from the scientific sphere. The main problem is that variety of methods used in the humanities goes beyond the boundaries of the theory and usually faces the dominance of individual, creative innovations or interventions that arose in confrontation with the studied object, for which reason it can not have a stable and normative pattern (Rybicka, 2014, p. 117).

Speaking of geopoetics, the importance of personal perceptions and experience is often emphasized, that is also marked by Vasily Shchukin in his research work *The Myth of the Noble Nest*. In his work, he says that the intimate intellectual and emotional experience is closely related to the experience passed in a particular place. Moments of trials and sudden insights often appear in a person's life in times associated with a meeting, an unexpected dialogue that emerged during this meeting. In addition, this meeting can occur not only with other living and spiritualized creatures, but also with a situation or an object, that define any meaning or idea that encourages a person to change or expand his vision for the world (Shchukin, 2014, p. 46).

In the scientific article *The Geopoetics: in the circle of probable knowledge*, Aleksander Baldin defines geopoetics as a special literary technique, which mainly focuses on the fact that a space is revealed in a verbal description, which is clearly visible. The description of Livonia in *The Last Novik* novel could be an example of that (Baldin, 2002, pp. 1-4).

However, analyzing the description of space in a work, it is necessary to remember about the chronotope, that was introduced in 1930 by the philosopher and culturologist M.M. Bakhtin who studied the epic narrative forms and genres of the European novel. His quote from the scientific work *The Forms of Time and Chronotope in Novel* might be an explanation of what included in the concept of the artistic chronotope:

There is a fusion of spatial and temporal signs in a meaningful and specific entity in the literary and artistic chronotope. The signs of time are revealed in space, and space is comprehended and measured by time. The artistic chronotope is characterized by this intersection of rows and merging of patterns. (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 300)

Consequently, only at a certain time and in a certain space an event that directly depends on both one and the second factor can occur.

One of the founders of humanitarian geography Yi-Fu Tuan also says about the disclosure of space in his work *Space and Place*, noting that the space in his work stands for a movement and action, and the place has a meaning of involvement and locking. Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes that the fullness of social and territorial meaning is important for the place as a part of space. Therefore, habitat of each character in a literary work is not just

geographical coordinates within his location, but also a special mental form, holding a certain cultural aspect. The concept of space also includes the intersection of social relations. Self-identification with a particular place occurs at the expense of a character's personal contact with a certain territory. The contact of the character with the territory is meant as a re-creation of social ties that are unique for a specific location. According to this definition of the place, it is worth noting that this concept holds a dominant position in the geography of perception. The place is not the character's reaction to a space as a kind of picture, its definition includes the territorial justification of individuals' society, the self-identification of character's space (Tuan, 2001, p. 179).

According to this, the following diagram of geopoetical analysis for this historical novel emerged.

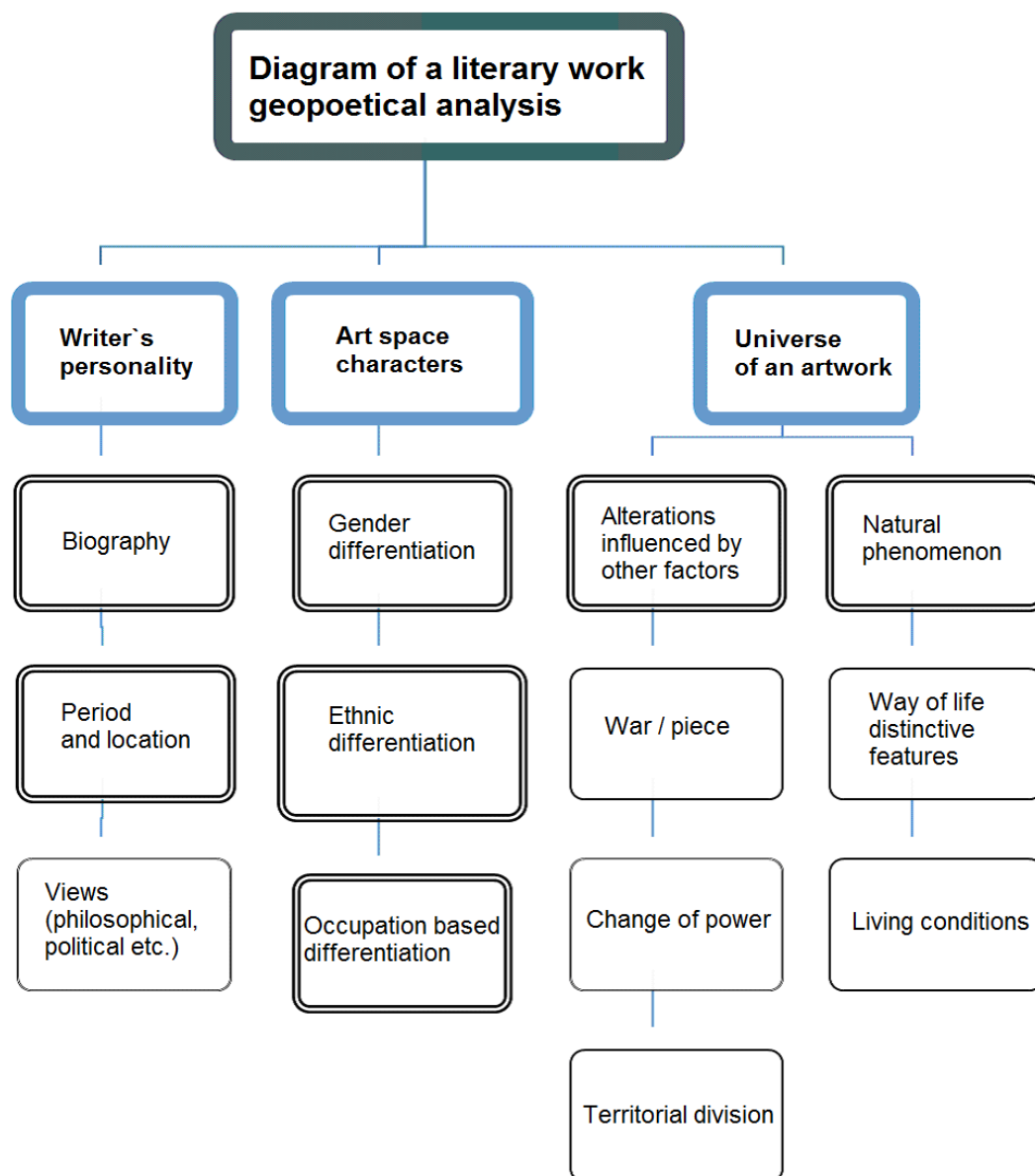


Figure 1. Plan analysis of the historical novel.

Figure 1 clearly shows the analysis plan for Lazhechnikov's *The Last Novik* historical novel.

It follows from the presented diagram, that the geopoetical analysis of a literary work is based on the consideration of the environment represented in the art space and its characters, which interact with the environment, influence and modify it. But, in turn, the environment also affects the characters and modifies their outlook, reflection, way of life features, traditions, as well as the relationship among each other. Thus, there is a certain relationship between these subjects and a mutual impact of the environment on characters and characters on the environment. Writer's personality is an important part of the geopoetic analysis as well. The general direction of the work depends on writer's way of life and his lifetime conclusions. This can be obtained both consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, in order to evaluate a writer, it is important to consider his era: year and century, the events that took place in those times.

The writer of novel *The Last Novik* participated in the Patriotic War of 1812, his battlefield experience reflected in *The Field Notes of a Russian Officer*, published in 1820, which became the first large publication of the writer. It was during the foreign campaigns of 1813-1815 that his progressive, democratic and humanistic views took shape. His field notes are characterized by: loud patriotic pathos, anti-serfdom mind, thoughts on the Patriotic War as a nationwide affair (Blagoy, 1983, p. 576).

Popular literary topics and art trends, subjects that are common for that time should be taken into consideration. Apparently, most of which is connected with the description of a certain art space and the temper of its characters is influenced by the writer's subjective view on the current reality. Proceeding from this, it can be concluded that even a novel pretending to historical authenticity shows the reality of the events from one person's point of view only, that person relies on certain conclusions made during his personal reality analysis, which undoubtedly was influenced by his own life experience and the environment.

Returning to the characters of the art space, it should be emphasized that a group differentiation is also appropriate in this category. For instance, a gender based differentiation is due to the fact that men and women in the novel have a certain role, and therefore their own special function. An example of that is the fact that female characters can not participate in battles. Often, women represent a more sentimental and emotional side of society as shown in the work. This can be found in the analyzed novel *The Last Novik*, which has many examples of charactresses occupying their own niche and being more sentimental than male characters. The evidence of that is an emotionally difficult life story told by a blind man and the reaction of Rabe and her fiancé Wulff. Wulff remained humble and skeptical about the story, while it seemed heartbreaking for the future Empress. The following dialogue passage from the sixth chapter entitled *The Story of the Blind* confirms this:

You, old man!—Scintillating anger like a gunpowder Wulff cried. He had something to add, but the girl Rabe looked at him convincingly and the words froze on his lips.

Leave me to listen to the amusing story of an old man, she said to Zeigmeister,—he is telling it to me. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 86)

The novel has many examples of this kind, the reason for that are also the times narrated in the work, there was a certain etiquette for men and women in the beginning of the XVIII century. Consequently, different parts are given to those male and female characters, which draw a perspective on the general geopoetical idea of Livonia of that time. According to this, Lazhechnikov is characterized by motives, techniques and images of romantic poetry and storytelling, which does not conflict with the literature trends of his time. The next important

differentiation is an ethnic one. That is especially important for works describing the ethnic conflicts related to territorial battles. Those are the novels that usually unveil the patriotic motive.

Characters representing a certain nation in this novel usually demonstrate a set of distinctive features and stereotypes associated with this nation. Consequently, the writer does not choose these patterns just by chance. This is due to character's perception of his country reflects a certain set of specialities of his country. As an example can be the blind man's description of nature at his home in Finland in the sixth chapter of the first part entitled *The Story of the Blind*:

I was born in the place, as told by you, where the sun is spinning in the middle of the summer with no rest, where a few days of winter are a round night, likewise each day of the life of a blind man. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 83)

This example shows that the character identifies himself with the place he was born in and lived for a long time. Natural phenomena that occur in his homeland are self-identifying for him, they describe himself. Through the sun, which, making its turn, does not bring the light to the earth when all the winter evenings are covered by dusk and shadow of the night. This is his life, with no ability to see, his everyday is dark despite life processes continue and life goes on. An important aspect of characters' differentiation is also their different occupation and division by class origin. This aspect is one of the most important in evaluation of the art space's characters due to occupation and social position being influential on character's reality perception. The occupation also defines the character's significance in given novel and his ability to influence the surrounding and space.

For example, Adam character's occupation defines his temper, and later his temper stands for a link a situation that connects the characters of Louise and Gustav. Thereby writer describes the librarian Adam Bir in the chapter *The Household* the following way:

Being in love with the science and nature as a passionate young man, with feelings fresh like life unfolded on the first day of creation, he shunned a higher society where no sciences, nature and himself were found, thus he created his own special world of his own society of passionately admirable Greeks and Romans. He loved people as brothers, he wished to serve the society with his talents and creations; but ran away from society, as from infection. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 118)

In contrast, the personality of Patkul, who acts as a judge in the first chapter of the second part, entitled *The Posture* should be reviewed:

The anxiety of a strong passion argued with the smart mind in his eyes; his lips were always showing the grin of condemnation. His clothes showed some negligence; his camisole, unbuttoned to the lower buttons almost, the long ends of a neck scarf hanging; the cuff of the left sleeve was turned away. He did not try to hide himself; nor clothes, nor movements, nor feelings were submitted to forms; he was all out. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 161)

The origin and social status of a character is important for the geopoetical analysis, because it helps to appreciate the unique life of the certain art space. For example, regarding to character's Fritz status and in relation to higher ranked characters, it can be assumed what is the era of the novel. In the first part of the eleventh chapter entitled *The News* the groom's character describes his state of serving the Baroness as relatively free and independent:

Do not be afraid! I am not a street dog that can be kept on a chain: I serve freely, as far as i am fed and caressed; otherwise – i can show my tail within the first hit of a foot. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 144)

However, the character is rather humiliated by his position and just wants to feel free and independent as seen from the example.

The category that distinguishes the characters of the art space is directly related to the main feature of the environment which is appropriate for including factors that influence the change of the given environment and natural phenomena that determine the characteristics of this environment outside the will of a man.

Characters' life distinctive features relies on a certain land's natural phenomena singularity. The description of a musical instrument Kokle in the novel can serve as an example, this instrument was used in Livonia only. The instrument is described in the seventh chapter of the first part entitled *The Vision*:

He compared a musical instrument to a harp or a kokle (kokle—a musical instrument used by Livons in ancient times), put in a box; believed that one could use it instead of a pipe organ in churches and that a musician performing on one of these instruments could as well switch to another in no time. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 60)

The eleventh chapter of the first part clearly shows the difficult life of Livonian peasants:

The village girls who were grazing the stock in the field looked with fear at a sullen Swede and tried to pass him cautiously. The peasant rode to the field with his sow singing a lively song with no care which is rare for Latvians. (Lazhechnikov, 1961, p. 143)

Factors influencing the changes in the environment can be very diverse, but they always, with no exception, depend on the activities of the art space characters. In a historical novel such factors usually are: battle caused territorial divisions, change of power. *The Last Novik* novel is a clear example of these factors changing and shaping the environment.

## Conclusion

The novel tells that all actions taken at a state level depend not on a ruling elite only, but also on each and every character of a given space, his behavior, actions or inactions in any situation. Drawing an all category geopoetical analysis based conclusion, it is worth mentioning that all the paragraphs and subparagraphs of this analysis are closely related. It is necessary to consider all the geopoetical analysis stages that help to recreate the clear vision of the reviewed geospace in order to analyze a specific art space.

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