

The Caucasus: From Geopolitics to Geopoetics
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1. “I regret, my friend, that you were not with me to see the magnificent chain of these mountains; their icy heights, which from a distance, during a clear sunrise, appear as strange clouds, multicoloured and still; I regret that you were not with me to climb the sharp-edged peak of Beshtu, with its summit comprised of five hills, or Mashuk, or Iron, Stone and Snake Mountains. The Caucasian region, the torrid boundary of Asia, arouses interest in all respects. [The Russian General] Ermolov has filled it with his name and beneficent genius. The savage Circassians have become timorous; their ancient audacity is disappearing. The roads are becoming less dangerous by the hour, and the numerous convoys are becoming superfluous. It is to be hoped that this conquered land, which until now has brought no real benefit to Russia, will soon form a bridge between us and the Persians for safe trading, that it will not be an obstacle to us in future wars - and that perhaps we shall carry out Napoleon’s chimerical plan of conquering India.” - **A. S. Pushkin, letter to L. S. Pushkin, September 24, 1820, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*** (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR)1962, Vol. 10: 17-18.

2. The term **geopoetics** appears to have been coined by the French-Scottish poet and intellectual Kenneth White in 1979. I take up the term as defined by the Italian poet-scholar **Federico Italiano** in “Geo-Introduzione,” *Geopoetische. Studi di geografia e letteratura*, ed. Federico Italiano and Marco Mastronunzio (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2011). Italiano sees geopoetics as the “hybrid fruit of an epistemic translation” between the disciplines of geography, literary theory, and practice (11-12), an “**operative category for the understanding of geographical knowledge and for the modes of inscription of the Earth into a literary text**” (18). Geopoetics is thus principally interested in how spatial-geographical, territorial and ecological-environmental markers are aesthetically encoded in a text, revealing a specific inscription of the Earth or some part of it in a literary artefact. Geopoetics examines the “engagement with geographical epistemologies in the culture at large” while at the same time insisting on the “potential of poetic experimentation” to dislodge the “ontological fixity of geography.” **Rebecca Walsh, *The Geopoetics of Modernism*** (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2015), 5. See also Eric Magrane, Linda Russo, Sarah de Leeuw, Craig Santos Perez, eds., *Geopoetics in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

3. “An entirely new model of thinking about the earth and its relationship to its human inhabitants came into being around 1800. ... Emerging from the interaction between human and terrestrial forces, geographical reality represents the dynamic oneness of man and the earth [according to] the concrete forms that geographic reality takes.” **Chenxi Tang, *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity. Geography, Literature and Philosophy in German Romanticism*** (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 3-5.

4. “An aesthetic landscape can be defined as a cross section of natural space viewed without practical interests and apprehended as an indivisible unity that stands for nature as a whole.

The eye that sees a landscape is not only disinterested but also has the synthesizing power capable of transforming the manifoldness of natural objects and phenomena... into a unity. **Chenxi Tang**, *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity*, 59.

5. “Коль ныне радостна Россия! / Она, коснувшись облаков, / Конца не зрит своей державы... / Седит и ноги простирает/ На степь, где Хину отделяет/ Пространная стена от нас;/ Веселый взор свой обращает/ И вокруг довольства исчисляет,/ Возлеги лактем на Кавказ.” М. V. Lomonosov, “Oda na den’ vosshestviia na vs Rossiiskii prestol ee Velichestva Gosudaryni imperatritsy Elisavety Petrovny 1748 goda,” **М. Lomonosov**, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk, 1952), vol. 8: 221-222.

[How joyous is Russia now! / She, touching the clouds, / Sees no end to her realm... / She sits, her legs spread out / Onto the steppe, where China is separated / From us by an extended wall; / She casts her merry gaze about / counting the prosperity around her, / While resting her elbow on the Caucasus.”]

6. “О юный вождь! сверша походы, / Прошел ты с воинством Кавказ,/ Зрел ужасы, красы природы:/ Как, с ребр там страшных гор лиясь, /Ревут в мрак бездн сердиты реки;/ Как с чел их с грохотом снега/ Падут, лежавши целы веки; / Как серны, вниз склонив рога,/ Зрят в мгле спокойно под собою/ Рожденье молний и громов.” **G. Derzhavin: Sochineniia Derzhavina s ob”iasnitel’nyimi primechaniiami Ia. Grota**. 7 vols. 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Akademiia nauk, 1868–78): 2: 20-21.

[O young leader!—in waging your campaigns, / You have marched through the Caucasus with your soldiery, / You have gazed upon the horrors, the beauties of nature:/ The angry rivers, as they pour forth there from the ribs of terrifying mountains / As they roar into the gloom of abysses: /The snows as from their brows [of the hills] thunderously /They fall, after having lain there for whole centuries; /The chamois, their horns bent down, View calmly in the gloom below them /The birth of lightning and thunder.]

7. Sovereignty is the “idea of authority embodied in those bordered territorial organizations we refer to as ‘states’ or ‘nations.’ ... It implies both the supreme authority lodged in the state and the idea of the political and legal independence of geographically separate states.” **Robert Jackson**, *Sovereignty. Evolution of an Idea* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008). In the words of Martin Loughlin, “sovereignty is absolute, perpetual and indivisible, while government is conditional, limited and divisible. Sovereignty is conceptual, government empirical” **Martin Loughlin**, “Droit politique” *Jus Politicum. Revue de droit politique* 17 (2017), 298. In Russia as in Europe, sovereignty was first theorized within the confines of modern absolutism; yet to reduce sovereignty to its absolutist origins is to misrecognize its role in the modern era, during which it has served as the constitutive ground of the political itself as a public as well as official concern. “Political theology refers not to the theological legitimation or theological essence of political authority but rather to the problem of the relationship between politics and religion once this theological legitimation is no longer

convincing.” Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). In my book

8. “To sit on rocks – to muse o’er flood and fell - / To slowly trace the forest’s shady scene, / Where things that own not Man’s dominion dwell, This is not solitude – ‘tis but to hold / Converse with Nature’s charms and view her stores unrolled. // But midst the crowd, the hum, the shock of men, / To hear, to see, to feel, and to possess, / And roam along, the World’s tired denizen, / This is to be alone – This, This is Solitude!” **Lord Byron**, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Selected Poetry of Lord Byron* (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), 2: XXV-XXVI,

9. “From the dark barriers of that rugged clime, / Even to the center of Illyria’s vales, / Childe Harold pass’s o’er many a mount sublime, / Through lands scarce noticed in historic tales... / To greet Albania’s chief, whose dread command / Is lawless law; for with a bloody hand / He sways a nation, turbulent and bold:/ Yet here and there some daring mountain-band / Disdain his power, and from their rocky hold / Hurl their defiance far, nor yield, unless to gold..... / Fierce are Albania’s children, yet they lack / Not virtues, were those virtues more mature. / Where is the foe that ever saw their back? / Who can so well the toil of war endure? / Their native fastness’s not more secure / Than they in doubtful time of troubles need: / Their wrath how deadly! but their friendship sure, When Gratitude or Velour bids them bleed, / Unshaken rushing on where’re their chief may lead. **Lord Byron**, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, (2: XLVI-XLVII; LXV)

10. Прими с улыбкою, мой друг, / Свободной музы приношенье: / Тебе я посвятил, изгнанной лиры пенью / И вдохновенный свой досуг. / Во дни печальные разлуки / Мои задумчивые звуки/ Напоминали мне Кавказ,/ Где пасмурный Бешту пустынный величавый,/ Аулов и полей властитель пятиглавый,/ Был новый для меня Парнас.
A.S. Pushkin, *Kavkazskii plennik, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, 3: 87.

[Take with a smile, my friend, / This offering of the *free muse*: / I have dedicated to you the song of the exiled lyre / And my inspired leisure.... / During the days of our sad separation / My pensive sounds/ Reminded me of the Caucasus, / Where the gloomy [Mount] Beshtu, stately yet solitary, / the five-head ruler of Caucasian villages and fields, / Was for me a new Parnassus.]

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