



Centre-Periphery-Border: Antons Austrīņš' Spatial Dominants

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Introduction

Since time immemorial the categories of interaction and conflict between the culture of centre and periphery, 'one's own' and 'alien' have been used to characterize the way man perceives the world. Primitive man perceives the world through structural elements – 'one's own' and 'alien' which are construed on the basis of space, morality, spirituality, social belonging, etc. World structuring into 'one's own' and 'alien' is still relevant today although through transformations it has acquired new nuances and dominants depending on the specific system of cultural values. It actualizes the category of the border at the point of contact of opposite poles. Depending on the level of cultural openness, borders may be extended or narrowed. Due to multiculturalism, the border between 'one's own' and 'alien', norms and anti-norms, familiar and unfamiliar may vary and be very individual. That depends on various political, social, ethical, aesthetical, other factors of cultural development. However, the question of existing, expanding, shifting, removing or even eliminating borders is an ideologically important part of modern cultural theories. Thus, new possibilities of text interpretation open up and imply additional connotations in the conception of the category of the border.

At the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th century Latvian literature expanded its borders. Having searched for, renewed and focused on the national values, a tendency towards accepting other peoples' cultural heritage became topical. The intelligentsia was eager to travel, study, live abroad, the spiritual need to explore and show foreign cultural heritage in Latvia by translating and publishing literature, analysing foreign culture, its latest trends was felt. Latvian culture accepted new foreign trends. Changes in Latvian literature at that time were similar to those in Europe, with a slight difference (Berelis 1999, 41). New trends that had developed in the West, came to light. Processes in Latvia showed

that the old culture was not replaced by the new one, they started interacting, often within the works of the same writer (Tabūns 2003, 28). Cultural openness significantly changed the understanding of 'one's own' and 'alien', interaction between the culture of Latvia and that of other nations intensified, the borders of Latvian culture expanded, the conception of centre and periphery changed.

At that time it was Russian culture that had the greatest impact on the development of Latvian literature. Cultures of the both countries were close due to their typological similarity and genetic contacts (implications and borrowings). At the turn of the century Russian and Latvian cultures were ready to accept European cultural heritage. Authors found significant sources of motifs in German, English, French, Polish, Scandinavian literature. The paradigm of modernism has been developing in both cultures, and European cultural experiences were taken in as a model in this process; moreover, the sources addressed and referred to by Latvian and Russian literature were similar. The parallel development of two, Latvian and Russian, literatures was determined not only by their geographical closeness but mainly by their great interest in the aesthetic phenomenon at the turn of the century. It manifested itself in a special interest in the philosophical ideas of Neo-Kantianism, the conceptions of Arthur Schopenhauer, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, Henri Bergson, etc. (Sproģe, Vāvere 2002, 14).

During the intensification of the dialogue between the cultures characteristic during the turn of the 19th – 20th century, the literary talent of Antons Austriņš, the writer and poet whose works are in the periphery of the modern literary canon, started developing. Although today his works are not popular his significant contribution to literature has been emphasized by many critics; for instance, Edgars Damburs held that Austriņš is one of the most original writers who can hardly be compared to anyone in Latvian literature (Damburs 1960, 5), Kārlis Egle noted that Austriņš is true, open and natural (Egle 1972, 237). His works were valued by many contemporary figures: Kālis Jēkabsons emphasized the power of his words (Jēkabsons 1938), Alfrēds Goba pointed at Austriņš' wide knowledge of foreign literature what allowed him to experiment with cultural codes (Goba 1929, XXV), Leons Paegle held that Latvianism and great love of nature are emphasized in his works (Paegle 1920).

The **aim** of the present study is to analyse the relations between centre and periphery and the manifestation of the category of periphery in Antons Austriņš' works.

The methodological basis for the study is the comparative, biographical, literary historical, semiotic and structural methods as well as the method of border studies. The totality of these methods allows for a successful description of the main categories considered in the study taking into consideration the peculiarities of Austriņš' creative activity.

The spatial system in Antons Austriņš' prose: journey as the conceptual dominant

The spirit of the age determined the development of Austriņš' personality, which also influenced his creative searches and specificity of his literary works saturated with foreign cultural codes. One of the main peculiarities of Austriņš' works is the implementation of the idea of overcoming and broadening cultural borders. It is vividly expressed in both the impressively quantitative indices of the involvement of various cultural codes in his creative works and the developed spatially national system. The dominant of the dialogue between cultures and, respectively, the idea of cultural borders in Austriņš' works have been determined not only by general cultural openness at the turn of the century but also by the writer's individual life experience and character traits.

While analysing the categories of centre and periphery in Austriņš' works the issue of the relationship between nature, culture and civilization is of essential importance, which became remarkably topical in the culture of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. To great extent it was determined by awareness of the spiritual crisis. Searching for its reasons philosophers turned to analysis of the development of human history and exploration of various stages and cycles, in the result of which the notion of civilization became topical. At the beginning of the 20th century, the work of Oswald Spengler *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*) was popular; the author summarized ideas of many thinkers related to the problem of nature, culture and civilization, he conceptualized them by indicating that world culture moved into the development stage typical of civilization. Following Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas, Spengler drew a strict demarcation line between culture and civilization. Culture envisages the dominant of creative beginning, the renaissance of high art, society during the stage of cultural development possesses, highly intellectual and artistic values and ideals. In the stage of the development of civilization, humanity's creative energy dies, what prevails is a problematic character of world perception; the issues of religion and metaphysics are replaced by the questions of ethics and social life. People and the nation are replaced by interested masses, cosmopolitanism is prevalent. Natural space is conquered and dominated by urban space. Spengler holds that the world develops cyclically; in different eras culture moves towards civilization but civilization means death of this culture, i.e. the end of a certain era. In the 19th century culture entered into the phase of the development of civilization and therefore its destruction was expected soon (Spengler 1991).

Antons Austriņš' prose vividly presents literary searches of the 20th century, attempts to become part of the common context of European and world literature without losing one's individual worldview. Various aspects of the problem of the centre – periphery relations are brightly manifested in the characterization of the spatial system in Austriņš' prose. The most essential units in Austriņš' spatial system are Riga, Petersburg, Vecpiebalga and Latgale. They may also be attributed

to understanding of civilization, culture and nature, where civilization and culture are usually related to centre but nature represents periphery.

The structure-forming, conceptual category of Austriņš' life, his individuality and creative activity, is travelling. That was determined by both his conscious wish to get acquainted with other cultures indirectly and directly, and the twists and turns of his fate, which made the writer unwillingly become a fugitive for a long time. Austriņš participated in the 1905 demonstration, got injured and, being prosecuted by the ruling political power, was forced to remain a fugitive and hide until 1917. Being a fugitive for the long period of eleven years (1906–1917), Austriņš several times stayed in Riga, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Novgorod and Finland, and found a new ideal for himself, a place of residence in Latgale, which he then mythologized in his poetry and sketches. Later, in 1922 and 1923, the writer willingly used the opportunity to go to Italy and Spain. The culture of those countries gave him a lot of motifs for his literary works. The most significant cultural spaces in A. Austriņš' life are the ones that make the spatially national dominants his creative activity.

The influence of Austriņš' life complexities on the spatial structure developed in his works is manifested not only at the emotionally semantic level but also at the levels of structure and genre. The majority of Austriņš' prose works are sketches, the most significant genre the peculiarity of which is documentality. The genre of a literary sketch has the characteristics of journalism and belles-lettres; it simultaneously is both a documentary description of reality and the aesthetic cognition of the world. Many of the author's works have the features of an autobiography.

The most essential peculiarity of the world model developed in Austriņš' works is increased focus on the descriptions of space, attempts to find something unique in every space. Hence, the spatial aspect in the system of Austriņš' prose plays a conceptually significant role and to a great extent this particularity is determined by Austriņš' consciousness of an eternal wanderer.

Analysing the importance of the category of the road in culture, Mikhail Bakhtin points out the immense importance of the chronotope of the road in literature: there is hardly any work that does not contain any variation of the motifs of the road, but a lot of works are structured on the basis of the chronotope of the road, meetings and adventures (Бахтин 1975, 248). Within the road chronotope time merges with space, they become united, therefore metaphorization of the road is so rich: "the path of life", "to step on a new road", etc. (Ibid., 392).

For Austriņš, the symbolic, metaphoric meaning of space is of great significance. Any movement in space is important for the character. Firstly, because it implies getting into another space and this is connected to an entirely different, likely opposite, sense of the world. Secondly, because a journey is essential as an independent category itself, it provides the character with an opportunity to feel like a seeker, a person who will never achieve perfection. The character's wish to be on the road, his dissatisfaction with the space of a permanent dwelling place

characterize the contradictory character with split consciousness who aspires to find inner harmony.

Ideological dominants of prose – nature, culture, civilization

In Austrīņš' prose, the city is the object of the characters' aspiration; it attracts people notwithstanding the fact that it is contradictory, imperfect and chaotic. A. Austrīņš' characters, slightly harmonizing themselves, only for a moment stay in some ideal, glorified rural space but then again set off and return to the city.

Igors Šuvajevs points out that the city is the space where modern problems manifest themselves most (Š u v a j e v s 1990, 24). The city as the generator of order with its definite mode of life involves man into culture but technization functions in the opposite way (Ibid., 28). The space of the city also determines the basic peculiarity of the consciousness of individuals living there, i.e. being split, their contradictoriness. In Austrīņš' prose, one would not encounter characters-townspeople, whose consciousness and spirit are harmonious. Harmony is to be found in nature, in the ideal there should be a balance between culture and nature, which Austrīņš' characters experience only for a moment. The town / city is variable, it develops and one can feel the rhythm of life there.

St. Petersburg is described in many sketches and in the chronicle novel *Garā jūdze (The Long Mile)*. This city is not only the scene of action but also a spatial metaphor that reflects the main character's experience, his identity search and worldview. The depiction of St. Petersburg not only entails the description of the material world and the specific urban aura but also provides the notion of the character's scale of values and the system of opinions.

The image of St. Petersburg created by the writer entails both his own, individual reception of the city, and the additional layers of St. Petersburg's text developed by Russian authors. Describing the city, Austrīņš mentions the names of Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, thus actualizing in his prose the image of St. Petersburg created by them. The most essential ideas and concepts that characterize the image of St. Petersburg in Austrīņš' prose are close co-existence of mythology and history, contradictoriness, being a fugitive, wandering, delusion, labyrinth, description of public spaces, non-existence of the concept of home, mystery, fog and lifeless city. Yuri Lotman mentions the great proportion of mythology as one of the text-forming peculiarities of the St. Petersburg text (Л о т м а н 1982, 30). Thus the image of this city has been existing for centuries – the established code of its perception is determinative over the individual perception; therefore Austrīņš' depiction of St. Petersburg, though being individual, has a lot in common with the conventional perception of St. Petersburg at the beginning of the 20th century. Vladimir Toporov points out that, while analysing particular texts, one can state the similarity and, in some cases, even concurrence of the description of St. Petersburg created by different authors. In relation to any other spatial text, in such a case one might speak about

plagiarism but not in reference to the text of St. Petersburg since the sources are not only stated but rather become the very element that is the first to be involved in the game (Топпов 2003, 25). Thus, the text of St. Petersburg acquires its characteristic monolithic character and unity.

Austriņš' St. Petersburg is presented as centre, its existence in the surrounding system of spaces is characterized by both centripetal and centrifugal forces – it is the centre of acquiring education, the intelligentsia's residence, the art centre. Although the image of St. Petersburg is not unequivocal – it is both positive and negative.

Riga is undoubtedly much closer to Austriņš' national identity. The author spent a great part of his mature life there. However, Riga in Austriņš' works is not depicted as a city that the characters might consider their native place, their home; Riga as a city subjected to the processes of industrialization, in respect of its conceptual load in Austriņš prose it is similar to St. Petersburg – its image is determined by the relations of nature, culture and civilization, the problem of their balance. Austriņš shows that the city's influence on a person is twofold, it attracts with its cultural life, great possibilities of development, but, when arriving in the city, man turns into an insignificant part of the huge mechanism of civilization. The city's space does not alter man's individuality; it only aggravates the existing contradictions.

For Austriņš, another well-known and much explored space is Latgale. His characters are related to Latgale by a peculiar correlation of 'one's own' and 'alien'. In the first decade of the 20th century, until its official consolidation with the rest of Latvia in 1917 and even longer, Latgale in Latvian population's consciousness was a strange and remote region. Even to this day it is the region that is perceived as periphery. Austriņš' attitude to the region is very different, for him it is a close and dear, admirable and ideal land, a place where time has stopped and the Golden Age is still in progress. Latgale, as depicted by Austriņš, has preserved the spirit of antiquity. Man here is wholehearted and united with nature. In Austriņš' text of Latgale, special importance is allotted to the image of Māra: Saint Māra is the symbol of Latgale and thus also the symbol of spiritual renewal.

Austriņš' depiction of Latgale may be theoretically evaluated as a provincial text. There is always an evaluating aspect in the opposition *centre – periphery*. Depending on the observer's (writer, character) position, a positive or negative evaluation of centre and periphery undergoes changes. In Austriņš' text of Latgale it is possible to distinguish two visits to this region with the span of several years in between. In the stories, in which the impressions of the first visit to Latgale are summarized, the definite semantics of a provincial text intertwine with the discourse of a fugitive. The main character who initially belongs to centre (the space of Riga) and perceives periphery (province) as a strange space, by finding *a new homeland* (Austriņš 1922, 7) in Latgale bonds himself with this space, makes its organic part. When the main characters' living space changes, changes also occur in the

perception of the opposition *centre – periphery*. An ethnographically strange place for the character, inhabitant of Vidzeme, becomes spiritually close. Krenklis, the main character of the majority of the stories, is forced to remain a fugitive and, when arriving in Latgale to his friend Rudzons, he identifies this space with centre and gives it a markedly positive evaluation by juxtaposing it with Riga and the whole world as a space of spirituality with a utilitarian, non-spiritual space. The stories, which describe the second visit to Latgale, feature a different perspective. The main character is no longer a fugitive not accepted by his homeland and therefore forced to look for a new living space, but rather a voluntary traveller who has successfully made his life in Riga. However, when the main character's life situation undergoes changes, the perception of Latgale does not vary. The space of Latgale becomes the main character's spiritual necessity. Rudzons and Krenklis do not pay any attention to the new cultural-historical situation, though sometimes they point at it, but consider the changes inessential and do not alter their previously developed perception of Latgale. The visit to Latgale in the sense of the world means a return to the ideal past. In Austrīņš' text of Latgale, in the opposition *centre – periphery* the subjective evaluation of spaces undergoes changes: periphery, province, becomes an idealized, mythologized space – the centre of the world that is the quintessence of spirituality. It is noteworthy that, notwithstanding the changes in the subjective perception of the opposition *centre – periphery*, it is not overturned to the full: for the narrator, Latgale still remains a mysterious wonderland, the mystery of which he, being a stranger, is not able to unravel but it is known to the local population. The individual, who has lost his home, finds a new homeland but it does not become his home, i.e. the emotional resemblance of Latgale to the space of childhood, homeland in its ideal variant, does not lead to the recognition of this space as the place of *his own* living place – his own home. In fact, the main character is man without home, an eternal seeker; Latgale in his perception embodies the idyll that cannot become the final destination of his search, his space, because the traveller identifies himself as modern man looking for harmony, he aspires to unravel the secret of life but he will never accomplish it.

The personality harmonizing function is characteristic of Italy and Spain, too; the writer's characters are related to these countries by their spiritual search and the unity of identity. Austrīņš creates the parallel between Italy, Spain and Latgale; it is based on the category of spirituality, which is largely determined by the dominant of Catholicism. The domination of spirituality over utilitarianism provides for the future of these countries. Austrīņš actualizes the most essential cultural signs and symbols of Italy and Spain that are associated with the respective country (Italy – La Scala, wine, chicharrones, etc., Spain – Alhambra, Alcazar of Seville).

One of the most significant features of Latgale and Italy is the mystery that attracts the main character and is related to decoding of the reasons of spirituality preservation; Austrīņš names it search of *the spirit* or *the soul of the land*, which takes place both in Italy and Latgale and not in any other space. Austrīņš' narration

is characterized by an attempt to understand these spaces, to go possibly deep into their essence. But the traveller's position denies it. In both, Latgale and Italy, only for a short while it is possible to hear the spirit of the land, perceive the mysterious nature of these spaces, it is constantly slipping away. That is what separates the traveller from the local people who are the keepers of the spirit of this land and who do not feel any mystery, they know this land and they live with it.

Both, Latgale and Italy, being essential lands in the narrator's consciousness and each having its own colouring, represent the ideal spaces that have preserved spirituality. In general, in Austriņš's creative works, the image of Italy and Rome as the eternal city in particular, helps to overcome the tragedy related to the negative influence of the historical processes and the growing power of civilization. If Latgale has managed to retain spirituality because it has not been affected by the changes of the new times and there the Golden Age is still in progress, then Italy has been preserving spirituality over the centuries. In the comparison of Italy and Latgale created by Austriņš, the author's attitude to these countries becomes evident – each of them is the value itself, each has its own bright external image though they often supplement each other; thus the conception of Austriņš's ideal model of space is developed, the most significant feature of which is the unity of culture (represented by Italy) and the sphere of nature (Latgale).

Conclusion

Overcoming borders and the enlargement of one's own space make the conceptual dominant of Austriņš's personality and creative activity; it is implemented by the means of the idea of travelling. Journey in Austriņš's prose determines the spatial structure of the model of the world; it shapes the main character's, the eternal traveller's, consciousness. The necessity to turn to the contexts of European culture is to be considered one of the most essential peculiarities of the 20th century Latvian culture. In this respect Austriņš is a bright representative of the cultural trends of his time; however, the specific peculiarity of his works is the transformation of signs and symbols of other cultures into the constituent part of his own consciousness thus broadening and perfecting individual artistic identity. In the world model developed in A. Austriņš's creative activity it is hardly possible to single out one separate cultural space that could be named one's own, one's home, where a character or a narrator would always wish to return. Every culture is important since it brings something new, ethically or aesthetically significant for the development of the characters' spiritual world. Thus, broadening the borders of cultural space, transforming *alien* into *one's own* become an essential mechanism in the development of the spiritual world.

The characteristic features of the category of centre and periphery in A. Austriņš's prose are variability and an evaluative aspect. Depending on the observer's (writer, character) position, changes occur in the location of centre and periphery as well as in their positive or negative evaluation. The character of A. Austriņš's prose is a traveller, man without any definite place that he considers spiritual centre.

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Centras–periferija–riba: Antuono Austrinio erdvinės dominantės

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *centras, periferija, riba, erdvė, kultūra, kelionė, Austrinis.*

XIX šimtmečio pabaigoje – XX šimtmečio pradžioje latvių kultūroje įvyko ribų išplėtimas. Nacionalinių vertybių paieškos, vertybių atnaujinimas ir akcentavimas tampa akstinu susipažinti su kitų tautų kultūros paveldu. Kultūros atradimo situacija reikšmingai transformuoja sampratą apie *savą* ir *svetimą*, skatina ieškoti sąveikos tarp latvių ir kitų tautų kultūrų, išplečia latvių kultūros ribas, keičia centro ir periferijos sampratą. XIX–XX šimtmečių kaitos laikotarpiu suintensyvėjo kultūrų dialogas; tuo metu pradėjo ryškėti šiuolaikinės literatūros kanonų periferijoje atsidūrusio rašytojo ir poeto Antuono Austrinio literatūrinis talentas. Nors ir šiandien šis autorius nėra populiarus, vis dėlto jis paliko svarbų pėdsaką latvių literatūroje. Tyrimo tikslas yra analizuoti centro ir periferijos santykius ir ribos kategorijos išraiškas Antuono Austrinio kūryboje. Tyrimo pagrindą sudaro lyginimo, biografinis, literatūrinis, istorinis, semiotinis, struktūrinis metodai.

Ribų nugalėjimas, savosios erdvės išplėtimas yra konceptualinė Austrinio asmenybės ir kūrybos dominantė, realizuojama per kelionių idėjos įgyvendinimą. Kelionės Austrinio prozoje nusako pasaulio modelio erdvinę struktūrą, sukuria pagrindinio herojaus – amžinojo keliautojo – sąmonę. Kultūrinės erdvės išplėtimas, *svetimo* perkūrimas į *savo* tampa svarbiausiu dvasinio pasaulio raidos mechanizmu. Austrinio prozos herojus yra keliautojas, žmogus, neturintis vietos, kurią jis galėtų laikyti savo dvasiniu centru. Centro ir periferijos kategorijai Austrinio prozoje būdinga kaita ir vertinamasis aspektas. Priklausomai nuo stebėtojo (rašytojo, herojaus) pozicijos, keičiasi centro ir periferijos buvimo vieta ir teigiamas arba neigiamas požiūris į tai.

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S u m m a r y

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At the end of the 19th –beginning of the 20th century Latvian literature experienced broadening of borders. After the stages of searching, renewing and stressing the national values, a tendency towards learning other peoples' cultural heritage became topical. Traversing real and mental borders, expanding the space of one's own are the conceptual dominants of Antons Austriņš' personality and writing that emerge through the realization of the idea of travelling. Travelling in Austriņš' prose fiction determines the spatial structure

of the world model and forms the consciousness of the protagonist, an eternal traveller. The aim of the present study is to analyse the relations between centre and periphery and manifestation of the category of periphery in Austrīņš' works. The methodological basis for the study is the comparative, biographical, literary historical, semiotic and structural methods as well as the method of border studies. The totality of these methods allows for a successful description of the main categories considered in the study taking into consideration the peculiarities of Austrīņš' creative activity.

The necessity to refer to European culture contexts is to be regarded as one of the major peculiarities of the early 20th Latvian culture. In this respect Austrīņš is a distinct representative of the contemporary cultural trends, yet the specific feature of his writing is turning signs and accents of other cultures into part of one's own consciousness, thus expanding and developing individual artistic identity. It is impossible to highlight in the world model construed by Austrīņš in his writing any single culture space that could be called one's own, home, where the character or narrator would be willing to come back to. Each new culture is significant as it brings in something new, ethically or aesthetically significant for the development of the character's spiritual world. Thus, expansion of the borders of culture space, transforming *alien* into *one's own* become a significant mechanism for the development of the spiritual world. The characteristic features of the category of centre and periphery in Austrīņš' prose are variability and an evaluative aspect. Depending on the observer's (writer, character) position, changes occur in the location of centre and periphery as well as in their positive or negative evaluation. The character of Austrīņš' prose is a traveller, man without any definite place that he considers spiritual centre.

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