



THE SEMANTICS OF LIMINAL SPACE IN THE CAUCASIAN WORKS OF LERMONTOV AND TOLSTOY

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ABSTRACT

The study of the semantics of “liminal” space in the Caucasian works of Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов and Лев Николаевич Толстой reveals the transformation of Russian self-consciousness in the 19th century—from romantic escapism to critical realism.

1. The Concept of Frontier and Liminality

In literary studies, “liminal space” is understood as a transitional zone between the “own” (civilization, Russia, law) and the “other” (wild nature, the Caucasus, freedom)¹.

For Lermontov, the border functions as a metaphysical threshold—a test of the hero’s existential strength.

For Tolstoy, the border becomes an existential impasse and a space for searching for the “natural man”².

2. Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov: The Caucasus as a Vertical Boundary

Lermontov conceptualizes the Caucasian space primarily in vertical terms.

Top vs Bottom: The mountains serve as a bridge to the heavens, the dwelling place of demons or saints (e.g., Мцыри)³. The boundary here lies not on the ground but between the earthly and the transcendent realms.

The Terek River: In works such as «A Hero of our Time», the river functions as a living border separating the safety of the fortress from the dangerous yet alluring beyond⁴.

The Hero at the Edge: Grigoriy Pechorin constantly seeks the “edge” (a duel on a cliff, the jump in “The Fatalist”), where proximity to death becomes the only way to overcome existential boredom⁵.

3. Lev Nikolayevich Tol: The Caucasus as a Horizontal Boundary

¹ Юрий Михайлович Лотман. *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. — 1992.

² Валерий Иванович Тюпа. *Analytics of the Artistic*. — 2001.

³ Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов. *A Hero of Our Time; Mtsyri*.

⁴ Сьюзен Лейтон. *Russian Literature and Empire*. — 1994.

⁵ Лев Николаевич Толстой. *Hadji Murat*.

Tolstoy transforms the spatial model into a social and ethical dimension in *Kazaki* and *Hadji-Murat*.

The Line (Cordon): In *The Cossacks*, the border is a physical line that the protagonist attempts to cross. However, the internal boundary—formed by culture and upbringing—proves insurmountable².

The Forest as Labyrinth: In *Hadji Murat*, the forest becomes a contact zone where the laws of civilization dissolve and conflicting truths collide⁵.

Demythologization: Unlike Lermontov's romanticized landscape, Tolstoy presents the frontier in realistic detail—military posts, patrols, and everyday hardship. The border is no longer symbolic but material and deadly⁴.

4. Key Motifs for Analysis

- Window/Door in the fortress — transition from confinement to infinity
- Road (Georgian Military Road) — transformation of the individual
- Aul vs Fortress — architectural opposition reflecting existential conflict

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- 4.Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов. A Hero of Our Time.
- 5.Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов. Mtsyri.
- 6.Лев Николаевич Толстой. The Cossacks.
- 7.Лев Николаевич Толстой. Hadji Murat

