

From Kyiv to Brisbane: Evgenii Vodolazkin's reflections on spiritual identity in the context of space

MONIKA SIDOR

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2023.15.1.4>

The Russian novelist Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin freely combines popular culture with the best traditions of classic Russian literature, responding to the tastes of the mass audience and satisfying the intellectual needs of the sophisticated reader. He is known for presenting the most burning issues of our times in a balanced way, refraining from journalistic indignation and accusation. The following article will address his work *Brisbane* (2018; Eng. trans. 2022), which touches on the most painful social issue of our times, the relations between Russia and Ukraine. This was already a very sensitive topic when this work first came out in 2018, and today it seems like an excellent point of reference for thinking about the context of the current tragic war and the author's attitude towards it.¹ It also helps to illustrate why a section of the Russian population does not speak out on most important matters, but the present article will focus on the work itself and on the way Vodolazkin uses it to present the issue of identity. These considerations will help to show the general direction of the writer's thoughts and shed light on his position in the current situation.

Vodolazkin's writing style is far from stoic indifference, as he frequently refers to emotions, but he does so in an extremely skillful way, transferring the significance of the work from the present into a timeless context. His own life and professional experiences, and especially his many years of work in researching Old Russian literature and his work under the direction of the prominent medievalist Dmitrii Likhachev, exuding a specific aura of tact and high culture, certainly influenced Vodolazkin's way of looking at the world and the specific choice of his way of speaking.

It is worth noting at the outset that Vodolazkin was born into a mixed Russian-Ukrainian family in Kyiv, where he spent his childhood and graduated from high school, and that he is fluent in Ukrainian with his family contacts, although he has always counted himself as being of the Russian-speaking community of the Ukrainian capital. For the above reasons the author would seem to be particularly predestined to write about Russian-Ukrainian relations with regard to identity. The novel *Brisbane*, in which the writer most clearly uses this part of his

This article was made possible by a stipend from Nanovic Institute for European Studies of the Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame, USA.

life experience, includes, among other things, very important events in the history of modern Ukraine, for example the so-called “Revolution of Dignity” (Revoliutsiia hidnosti) in 2014, but also other stories set in many other places, related in some way to the author’s biography. The novel in question has repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers dealing with imagological, xenological, and mythopoetic issues (Manchev 2021; Grimova 2020; Nogawica 2019; Sidor 2021). The approach used in the present considerations is different, not because it uses some completely new category, but because it proposes a shift of emphasis that makes it possible to see phenomena on the periphery of other discourses. It concentrates on the personal experience of the individual, on the analysis of the internal, spatially and culturally motivated sense of belonging which exposes the personal sources of modification of certain cultural phenomena, showing a perception of the world in a way that exceeds fixed images, beliefs, or stereotypes. It will present spatial references which transfer difficult reflections on identity into the sphere of spiritual reflection, by means of geopoetic research that traces geographical and cultural relations that reverse the perspectives of literary analyses and combine the discourses of various disciplines (Rybicka 2014, 62–63).

THE GEOPOETIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE HERO’S IDENTITY

The first of the geopoetic categories that will be mentioned here and which deserves a broader explanation is the autobiographical place. This concept, according to its originator Małgorzata Czermińska, combines the biography and the work of a given author, understood “broadly, as a set of all his preserved statements, i.e. works traditionally classified as literature” and refers to “a toponymically defined territory known from the biography of the writer” (2011, 183).² Vodolazkin’s novel can provide material for study of this phenomenon at various levels of interpretation. First of all, although the author does not exist in the work under his own name and does not suggest a shared identity with the protagonist, he uses authentic autobiographical locations, and the geopoetic approach takes into account such a relationship between the geo-biography of the author and the places depicted in his works. The choice of setting causes the discourse to be saturated with reflections, making it possible to capture identity issues which are particularly important to the writer. In agreement with the geography of autobiographical places of Vodolazkin himself, Kyiv, St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), Hamburg, and several other western cities appear in the book. In the writer’s life, these cities undoubtedly have formational significance and are symbols of specific stages of his life journey. It should also be noted from the outset that this list of places associated with the author’s biography does not exhaust the geographical scope of the novel’s action; in addition to specific locations, the novel also features a rather unspecified airspace as well as the city of Brisbane, mentioned only by name. This kind of departure from a clear biographical schema for justifying the places of action is, however, a starting point for further considerations, and in this sense, it can serve as the proverbial exception which proves the rule, since it shows the need for a broader, mainly cultural, understanding of the category under discussion here. For if an autobiographical place is also understood as a place which the in-

dividual has not experienced physically, yet one with which they feel a deep cultural bond (for example, through identification with literary heroes whose fortunes were set in this space, or a fascination with descriptions of the area recorded in literary monuments), the use of this term in relation to the two examples of space mentioned above (i.e., autobiographical and non-biographical) is indisputable.

Secondly, the work is conceptualized on the principle of a novel within a novel, or more precisely, two forms of prose at the same time, i.e., a biography and a diary in the same novel. For this reason, the non-fictional genres included in the structure of the text clearly indicate the possibility of exploring autobiographical and biographical places. Thus, the genealogical premise for studying autobiographical places complements the content premise.

The life of the main character, Gleb Yanovsky, is shown from two points of view and presented in two independent narratives, the first of which is written as a journal and the second as a commissioned biography by a professional writer. They emphasize the same events but from opposite directions of plot development. Very important to our reflections is the fact that the two complementary stories, both texts or novel forms, are initiated for the same reason – the fear of a serious and incurable illness, the symptoms of which have been diagnosed in Yanovsky. The world-famous guitar virtuoso fears that as the disease progresses, he will lose not only the capability of musical performance which makes him an artist, but also all the memories that define him as a person; this is actually the fear of losing his identity. In this context, it is significant to specify the reasons for commissioning the biography: Yanovsky wants a text that would finally deal with his life:

A half a dozen books have been published about me, but not a one about the squirrel, I bet. Except for Tales of Belkin. I take the piece of cardboard in two fingers, all set to let it fly. And hesitate. In essence, not a single one about my life, though. They've written about all sorts of things, just not about my life. Hmm, that's something to consider. (Vodolazkin 2022, 16)³

In this sense, the meticulous description of the protagonist's path of life is understood as arriving at the very essence of his personality. The narrative created for the above purpose is therefore reminiscent of a hagiographical work, a biography whose name contains a connotation with the kind of approach which defines a human being. In the construction schema of the biographical section of the novel *Brisbane*, rudiments of the construction of a classic medieval life are recognizable, with parts devoted to childhood, youth, the discovery of a vocation, and events in which the protagonist's proximity to the sphere of the sacred was clearly manifested. Of course, the complicated structure of Vodolazkin's text does not directly reflect archaic models of religious writing, because in this contemporary work various elements overlap, displace, or replace each other, creating a kind of palimpsest in which traces of the original writing can still be recognized. It is difficult, for example, to consider Yanovsky a model of an Orthodox saint, considering that a number of his acts are morally questionable, and from the religious point of view, plainly sinful. And yet, looking at the overall work, it becomes apparent that this is a story about striving for

holiness, understood as the final end, where not only two stories by different authors, but also the lives of other characters, and even different realities, meet.

In Yanovsky's initial desire to record the story of his life, it is easy to see the desire to get to know himself, to obtain an external description, and to attempt to confront the two perspectives of viewing his personality: his own and someone else's. At the same time, the artist is writing a journal which is supposed to help the writer in his work and to be a gauge of his self-esteem. In this complicated two-voice narrative on the subject of Yanovsky's identity, the descriptions of the places linked to his fate prove to be extremely important. I will focus here on two of them: the one indicated in the title of this article, and the one marking the beginning and end of the hero's life path: Kyiv and Brisbane.

The Ukrainian capital as Yanovsky's birthplace and at the same time the setting for a description of the mismatched and unhappy relationship of a Russian woman and a Ukrainian man (so symbolic for these times) marks out several of the aspects referencing space and identity shown in the work. This place is associated with a whole range of phenomena that are almost routinely used as material for similar studies, for example, a mythically understood home, a maturing personality, various initiation events (such as learning about evil, death, or sin), an urban space, a geographical space, the Dnieper River and a range of aquatic motifs, Russian-Ukrainian tensions, the "Maidan" as a historical symbol, father-mother discord, and, finally, distinctive elements building cultural space (including emblematic family names), reflections on language and religion, and the like. The saturation of these elements is so powerful that each of them could serve as a separate subject of study, so it will be necessary to mention only some of them here, bearing in mind, however, that they represent much richer and diverse resources.

The protagonist's life is spent on long journeys and at the beginning of the narrative, he is a real modern nomad who has many living spaces well adapted to a comfortable existence, yet does not live anywhere. He spends most of his time at airports, train stations, or in hotels, which, in the words of the contemporary researcher of spaces Marc Augé, can simply be referred to as "non-places" (Augé 2011, 64). Only the first Kyiv apartment in which Yanovsky's childhood was spent is worthy, in his own opinion, of being called home:

Home. Maybe the only one in his life. Later he had lots of homes – so many that they lost their homelike quality and became residences. But an umbilical cord connected him to this one: home. A small, two-story building on Shevchenko, formerly Bibikovsky, Boulevard. On the second floor – a balcony hidden behind the branches of an old chestnut. (Vodolazkin 2022, 24)⁴

According to the specific philosophy of Vodolazkin's novel both of these types of space, marked by or devoid of properties, form the protagonist, respectively either adding color to his personality, or destroying his personality as a result of indifference. Yanovsky, as a welcome guest in all corners of the globe and a citizen of the world, suddenly begins to feel an axiological emptiness, and his existence loses clear purpose, becoming a sequence of irrelevant displacements. The concert tours, despite the variability of the places visited, become similar to each other and all produce

the same effects: they confirm the virtuoso's fame, but do not have a positive impact on his personality. The example of a casual marital infidelity committed by the protagonist after one of his distant concerts best illustrates the loss of internal balance and a disturbance of the hierarchy of values which Yanovsky experiences. As if contrary to the very definition of travel, his expeditions do not have a clearly defined destination, they are repetitive, predictable, and focused on performing practically identical tasks, degrading the personality. Using Vodolazkin's metaphor, they can collectively be called "hunting over the distance" (5). Guest performances in successive famous concert halls around the world become as it were objects in Yanovsky's collection, but they no longer shape him. In this particular situation, the specter of a debilitating disease is, on the one hand, a harbinger of the loss of identity, and on the other, an opportunity to redefine this identity and somehow preserve it in written form. Contemporary research of the aforementioned phenomenon emphasizes the exceptional significance of its spiritual aspect. Hanna Mamzer maintains that physical space is at the same time a sphere of rooting the identity and also of expressing it (2003, 144). Vodolazkin's protagonist, in writing his journal and commissioning his biography, genuinely tries to newly define who he is. The key role of his childhood in Kyiv in this task is evidenced by the fact that his foundational experiences in Kyiv are treated as orientation points in Yanovsky's renewed attempts at defining himself. Therefore, also in times of his greatest artistic and identity dilemmas, the hero includes Ukrainian folk songs in his repertoire, which symbolize the foundations of his personality.

SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF SPACIAL EXPERIENCE

Kyiv, then, is his hometown or the autobiographical place of his childhood (Czermińska 2015) in which one finds the only true home of the protagonist fully deserving of the status of a "place", according to the distinction of Yi-Fu Tuan (1987, 173–174). As the protagonist grows, the term "home" expands to include an ever-increasing spatial range – first the family street and frequently traveled routes, and then the entire city with its surroundings and the river flowing through it. It is here that the protagonist experiences a range of initial events: his first love, his first erotic experience, first contact with death, first rebellion against the world, first serious illness, and even a taste of crime. But here, too, he experiences a number of spiritual and artistic revelations, he learns to play the domra, and he discovers the meaning of religion and the beauty of literature. Vodolazkin creates a personal culture map of Kyiv which does not correspond to tourist maps, as the protagonist himself defines the priorities of culturally significant events. His activities recall the method for studying culture proposed by Franco Moretti, who applied a geographical approach to genre issues and showed relationships between specific literary themes and their location, creating original maps, and arranging an atlas from them, reflecting the geographical determinants of novel genre trends of a given period (Moretti 1998). According to the findings of the Italian literary scholar, for example, 19th-century historical novels took place in areas seen as being on the periphery. Using Moretti's method, it can be said that in Vodolazkin's individual imaginary atlas

of 11 centuries of Russian literature, historical works appear mainly in the vicinity of Kyiv. In searching for a context that brings out the uniqueness of the approach to culture and space implemented in the novel *Brisbane*, it is also worth quoting the idea of Roberto Dainotto's positionality and cultural hybridity (1996, 494; 2000, 15) as well as Homi Bhabha's third space of enunciation (2010, 22, 84, 112). Belonging to the postcolonial trend of literary studies, these scholars point out the various possibilities of identifying literary texts in relation to places where they are created: from showing the consequences of regionalism to highlighting the ambiguity and effectiveness of cultural mimicry which is marked at the junction of two cultures operating in the same space. Vodolazkin clearly avoids the contemporary discourse showing culture as a field of domination, leverage, and oppression. His work shows acceptance of the idea that the development of literature can be presented in the form of a set of places that define its character, and that each recipient, due to geographical location, understands specific texts differently. The writer clearly shows a certain self-location of the protagonist, which is conditioned by his sensitivity, not only literary but also artistic in general; but he is far from a regionalist approach. Yanovsky appears as the representative of two different territories and the two cities symbolizing them, Kyiv and St. Petersburg. His name, recalling the figure of Nikolai Gogol, clearly emphasizes this double affiliation. Like Gogol, Vodolazkin's protagonist leaves his family space so as to continue with his creativity in the capital of the empire. Yanovsky does not antagonize Russian and Ukrainian culture; according to his cultural map, Kyiv is his city of origin, the city of his literary roots, and the place where the first written words in this cultural circle appeared. Vodolazkin attaches great weight to these beginnings and words, understood virtually religiously: "It's hard to explain. I think music... and painting too, probably... Ultimately, they exist only because the word exists" (2022, 34).⁵

In this sense the history of culture with which the hero identifies belongs to Kyiv and it is completely natural to write about it from the perspective of this city. This statement takes on an even more radical form in Yanovsky's personal opinions: the history of the culture of this part of the world must be written in Kyiv, so any description of the individual life of a Russian cannot omit the tradition of Kyivan Rus. Significant in this context is the pseudonym of the writer to whom the guitar virtuoso commissions his biography. It is Nestor, and thus the heir of the Old Russian historiographer, authorized to write history thanks to his cultural affinity with Kyiv.

In the events from Yanovsky's life re-created by Nestor, one can find many other signs of the guitarist's bond to the tradition of Kyivan Rus. In combination with the writer's pseudonym, Yanovsky's first name, Gleb, is read in connection with the same cultural heritage. As the plot unfolds, a whole sequence of occurrences, symbols, and names continues along this line. There is for example the old man Mefodii (Methodius), a spiritual teacher and mentor in Gleb's process of discovering religion. The very process of pursuing faith can be seen as a repetition of the history of the Christianizing of Rus, with the symbolic act of bringing Gleb to the priest Peter, whose name obviously refers to the first apostle, here signifying the deposit of the wisdom of the Church.

Kyiv is the cradle of Yanovsky's cultural awareness, his specific experience of civilization. William Mitchell asserts that landscape can be treated as a medium of cultural expression (1994, 14), and in this sense a particular setting, whether accompanying our everyday life, or preserved in the form of a work of art, reflects a particular variety of culture. This is clearly Vodolazkin's premise, and everything in the description of Kyiv, and later of St. Petersburg, helps to define the artistic and spiritual character of the protagonist. His ideas on literature, art, creativity, and history originated in Kyiv and allude to the beginnings of Russian literature. As can be seen from an analysis of Nestor's personal notes and biographical sketches, within the conglomeration of categories that make up the concept of identity, Yanovsky especially values belonging to a certain cultural and geographical group. Although contemporary researchers of identity point to the operation of "national landscape ideologies that are charged with affective and symbolic meaning" (Edensor 2004, 59) and argue that "the interconnection of elements of national space creates colloquial and symbolic imaginary geographies that confirm the dominant role of the nation as a spatial entity" (92), such a specific mythologization of the landscape does not signify acknowledgement of a specific national ideology. Identity in the work is not a feeling of connectedness to a concrete state or nation, but first of all a connectedness to a certain physical space and then to a specific culture. The choice of Russianness is for him the absurd choice between father and mother and much more important is his choice of culture, the choice of his medieval Kyiv roots. It is the awareness of these beginnings which set Yanovsky along his further journey, to his youth in St. Petersburg and maturity in the West. The protagonist's approach to identity is perhaps best described in the words of his grandfather: "a man is like a tree, he is from here and nowhere else" (Vodolazkin 2022, 339),⁶ which do not mean belonging to a nation so much as to a certain homeland created by a culture, artistic sensitivity, awareness of a wealth of history, and ideological heritage.

It is in Kyiv that Yanovsky first notices contradictions between the Ukrainian and Russian strands of his history. Being raised from birth in a bilingual and bi-national world, he accepts its variety and colorations, but time and again signals come to him that this world is built upon contrasts. The impetus for his first reflections on this topic is an analysis of language differences. It is worth noting that the word which sparked the protagonist's vigilance is one associated with space and fate, "*nymb*" [way], understood in a whole host of meanings, becomes a symbol of identity, combining contradictions, as the word itself does, which, depending on the language of communication, can take either masculine or feminine gender (Vodolazkin 2022, 65). Language, then, is a territory of symbolic exchange and replacement of meanings (Rybicka 2014, 47).

The protagonist does not fully accept the need to define himself nationally and believes that he will be able to reconcile both nationalities and both cultures by taking a middle ground. His arrival in Kyiv at the time of the "Revolution of Dignity" is a good illustration of his ideas and aspirations. First of all, he feels "at home"; he crosses himself at the sight of the Lavra, demonstrating an ongoing spiritual affiliation to the space of his ancestors; he walks through an area of special symbolism

and recalls the places of his childhood with sentiment. Secondly, driven by a desire to feel even greater solidarity with his own space, he heads to the Maidan to talk to the protesters. However, the finale of this meeting reveals the naivety of Yanovsky's beliefs, as he is accused of espionage and barely escapes with his life.

Compared to Kyiv, St. Petersburg, in accordance with its established cultural role, is a city opening to the West, a city which has achieved maturity, a city in many respects cruel, ruled by heartless officials, but also where the clarity of Russia's colonizing tendencies fades. An important role in the cultural description of this second capital is played by the fact that it is here that the hero experiences an ideological burden, which – though shown in an ironic code reminiscent of the style of Gogol – strongly influences the overall significance of Leningrad in the novel. This image is softened by a very symbolic meeting in this city with his future wife, whose German origin also clearly defines the cultural tradition of St. Petersburg.

A clear counterbalance to all the places shown in the work is the Australian city of Brisbane, which is almost a mythical destination for Yanovsky's mother's dreams of travel. For the unhappy and love-starved woman, it abides as the embodiment of the mythical Arcadia or earthly paradise. The location of Brisbane corresponds to the belief, encoded in Old Russian culture, which, as we have established, is symbolized in Vodolazkin's book by Kyiv, in the existence of a paradise on the outskirts of the known world. Irina's dreams of a "pilgrimage" to the Australian agglomeration are in fact the equivalent of a longing for the Fortunate Isles, which must be sublimated in the conditions of a socialist state. In a specific belief system based on the culture of Kyivan Rus culture, which forms the whole network of ideology for Yanovsky and those closest to him, Soviet ideology may deny the existence of paradise, but that does not mean that such a place does not exist. Moreover, based on data provided by the Kyiv tradition, it is possible to indicate an explicit location for it. In Yanovsky's later memoirs, his mother leaves, during a period of political transformation, for the city of her dreams and her future husband, a native Australian with the meaningful surname of Cook, who lives there. In this way, associations, intuitions, and allusions complement the cultural map created by Vodolazkin, re-creating and adapting the world of Old Russian traditions, legends and beliefs to the present. The idea of a medieval paradise, supplemented by information from the present day, means a real place, but without losing an aura of mystery and even a certain ephemerality. Indeed, Vodolazkin's heroes mention that serious studies exist which question the reality of Australia's existence (352). Brisbane, as befits the true Old Russian paradise, is far away, has a specific geographical location, guarantees all residents the satisfaction of all needs, spiritual and material; the elimination of all social inequalities; and compensation for harm and misfortune, and at the same time there is no way to definitively prove its existence. Contact with the inhabitants of a city in the Antipodes, for example, cannot be granted the status of evidence, because in the Old Russian tradition the world is inhabited by real and fantastic characters, and contact between them depends only on having a suitable attitude. This characterization of Brisbane is curiously confirmed when it is revealed that the mother of Yanovsky – who regularly mentions that he maintains constant contact with his mother living in Australia – never reached her destination and has been long dead.

This information not only exposes Yanovsky's attitude towards accepting phenomena from the supernatural sphere, but also reveals a change in his approach to dying.

Death, which at first frightens the protagonist, through his realization that he belongs to the world of medieval Kyiv culture and deciphering death from the Old Russian perspective, comes to mean not the loss of identity, but its fulfillment. It is only in the spiritual paradise that a man is truly himself: false, superficial characteristics and all antagonisms cease to have meaning, and words that had previously seemed so important to the hero lose their value. Yanovsky's last summarizing remarks, his last utterance in the novel before a final silence, is therefore a declaration of faith in an earthly, Old Russian paradise. Brisbane is thus the goal of the protagonist's wanderings, a real spiritual homeland, to which everyone is heading, regardless of their place of birth or later spatial repositionings. This connection to a spiritual homeland makes all other intermediate attachments of secondary importance. All life experience, all journeys, and any other feelings of belonging to some space, are only stages in understanding one's true identity, which is a spiritual belonging to paradise.

CONCLUSION

In this way the fate of the protagonist is arranged as a symbolic journey from Kyiv, the city of his childhood, to Brisbane, the city of eternal happiness. The individual sections of this journey, which at the same time are stages in the formation of his identity, determine the successive displacements which are undertaken up until the moment of death, understood at first as the loss of personality but later as its full realization. Both of these places, despite their geographical distance from each other, are stages in which the protagonist's identity is realized. And their embodiment takes place on the principles of Old Russian tradition, originating in Kyiv. In his discourse on space, Vodolazkin encodes the spiritual dimension of culture, which can serve as an ever-living source not only of artistic inspiration, but also of deep analyses and observations concerning the contemporary world. The writer does not provide simple answers to key questions troubling researchers of Russian-Ukrainian identity relations but directs related reflections to issues of spirituality and tradition. He is aware of antagonisms and problems that, as he shows, have a pedigree longer than his protagonist's life, but the perspective he proposes for viewing them is that of Brisbane, that is to say, eternity. For neither the fictitious hero of the novel Yanovsky, nor the writer Vodolazkin, is attached to any of the cities of his biography, and thus neither the countries in which he spends his life, because most of all he is a man heading to his spiritual homeland, distant Brisbane, the eternal paradise.

NOTES

- ¹ Vodolazkin, as far as the author of this text has been able to determine, refrains from openly commenting on the Russian attack on Ukraine, emphasizing instead the spiritual consequences of the conflict, thinking about the possibilities of spiritual reconciliation.

- ² Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by present author.
- ³ “Обо мене издано уже с полдюжины книг, а вот о белке, пожалуй, ни одной. Разве что *Повести Белкина*. Беру кусочек картона двумя пальцами, всё готово для полета. Медлю. В сущности, о моей жизни тоже – ни одной. О чем угодно писали, только не о жизни. М-да, есть о чем подумать...” (2019, 24)
- ⁴ “Дом. Единственный, возможно, в его жизни. Потом домов было много – так много, что они потеряли свое домовое качество и стали местом жительство. А с этим связывала пуповина: Дом. Маленький, двухэтажный, стоял на бульваре Шевченко, бывшем Бибиковском. На втором этаже – балкон, скрытый в ветвях старого каштана” (2019, 33).
- ⁵ “Я думаю, музыка... да и живопись, наверное... В конечном счете они существуют только потому, что существует слово” (2019, 45).
- ⁶ “людина – як дерево, вона звідси і більше ніде” (2019, 399)

REFERENCES

- Augé, Marc. 2011. *Nie-Miejsca: wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*. Trans. by Roman Chymkowski. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo PWN.
- Bhabha, Homi. 2010. *Miejsca kultury*. Trans. by Tomasz Dobrogoszcz. Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Czermińska, Małgorzata. 2011. “Miejsca autobiograficzne. Propozycja w ramach geopoetyki.” *Teksty Drugie* 5, 183–200.
- Czermińska, Małgorzata. 2015. “Przestrzenne odniesienia czasowych faz biografii.” In *Przestrzenie geo(bio)graficzne w literaturze*, ed. by Elżbieta Konończuk and Elżbieta Sidoruk, 11–39. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku.
- Dainotto, Roberto. 1996. “All the Regions Do Smilingly Revolt’: The Literature of Place and Region.” *Critical Inquiry* 22, 3: 486–505. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/448803>.
- Dainotto, Roberto. 2000. *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures and Communities*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Edensor, Tim. 2004. *Tożsamość narodowa, kultura popularna i życie codzienne*. Trans. by Agata Sadza. Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Grimova, Oľga. 2020. “Osobennosti povestvovatel’noi struktury v romane E. G. Vodolazkina ‘Brisben’” *Novyi filologicheskii vestnik* 55, 4: 239–248.
- Mamzer, Hanna. 2003. *Tożsamość w podróży. Wielokulturowość a kształtowanie tożsamości jednostki*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Manchev, Aleksandr. 2021. “Problema samoidentifikatsii geroev russkikh romanov XXI veka: E. Vodolazkin, A. Ivanov, A. Chudakov.” *Gumanitarnoe prostranstvo* 10, 3: 421–427.
- Mitchell, William John Thomas. 1994. “Imperial Landscape.” In *Landscape and Power*, ed. by William John Thomas Mitchell, 5–34. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Moretti, Franco. 1998. *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900*. London: Verso.
- Moretti, Franco. 2014. “Przypuszczenia na temat literatury światowej.” Trans. by Przemysław Czapliński. *Teksty Drugie* 4: 131–147.
- Nogawica, Izabela. 2019. “Obraz Ukraińców w powieści ‘Brisbane’ Jewgienija Wodolazkina.” *Slavica Wratislaviensia* 170: 65–74.
- Rybicka, Elżbieta. 2014. *Geopoetyka: Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*. Krakow: Universitas.
- Sidor, Monika. 2021. “Od kulturowego pojmowania przestrzeni ku rozważaniom o wieczności. Dyskurs przestrzenny w powieści ‘Brisbane’ Jewgienija Wodolazkina.” *Studia Rossica Posnaniensia* 46, 2: 79–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/strp.2021.46.2.6>.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1987. *Przestrzeń i miejsce*. Trans. by Agnieszka Morawińska. Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Vodolazkin, Eugene. 2022. *Brisbane*. Trans. by Marian Schwartz. Walden and New York: Plough Publishing House. Kindle version.
- Vodolazkin, Evgenii. 2019. *Brisben. Roman*. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo AST.

From Kyiv to Brisbane: Evgenii Vodolazkin's reflections on spiritual identity in the context of space

Space. Identity. Geopoetics. Kyivan Rus. Culture. Landscape. Evgenii Vodolazkin.

This article deals with cultural identification and perception of space in the novel *Brisbane* (2018, Eng. trans. 2022) by Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin. The writer presents controversial problems of Russian and Ukrainian relations placing the question of cultural identification of the hero in the centre of his reflections. Despite the fact that the novel depicts many important events from the history of today's Ukraine, in some sense showing the author's attitude to them, the core of Vodolazkin's narration is to expose the issue of particular cultural formation, created in the period of medieval Rus, whose spiritual capital was located in Kyiv. Employing the methods of contemporary research in terms of the geopoetics of place, this article scrutinizes many structural elements of the novel, which as an effect of reading in special code opens the field for analyses of such problems as autobiographical place, symbol of the home, opposition of space and place, and descriptions of the landscape. This study makes it possible to conclude that places depicted in Vodolazkin's work define the hero not only in the geographical aspect but mainly in the spiritual one, as a man who belongs to the world of Kyivan Rus culture and who finds signposts for understanding complicated questions of the present in the enduring medieval worldview.

Monika Sidor, hab. PhD, professor of KUL
Department of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Literature
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
Al. Raławickie 14
20-950 Lublin
Poland
monika.sidor@kul.pl
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8290-8682>