ISSN:2828-6235
Impact factor:13.77

International Journal of Literature and Language Studies(IJLLS)

RIVER, DESERT AND FORTIFICATION IN VASILY YAN'S GENGHIS KHAN AND MIRMUHSIN'S KHUJAND FORTRESS

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doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23414017

Abstract: This article compares the narrative functions of natural and built environments in Vasily Yan's Genghis Khan and Mirmuhsin's Khujand Fortress (Temur Malik). Instead of treating landscape description as ornament, it investigates how river, steppe, desert and fortress organize conflict, collective action and representations of historical responsibility. The article proposes a distinction between strategic, existential and ethical meanings of landscape and identifies methodological limits to comparing historically related but nationally different novels.

Keywords: Vasily Yan; Mirmuhsin; Genghis Khan; Temur Malik; landscape; fortress; river; comparative poetics

Introduction

In historical fiction about the Mongol conquests, the natural environment functions as a medium of historical experience. The mobility of an army, the possibility of resistance and the survival of a settled population depend on the relation between terrain and human organization. Vasily Yan's Genghis Khan, part of his historical sequence on the Mongol invasion, and Mirmuhsin's work associated with the defence of Khujand by Temur Malik approach related events through different literary traditions. Their juxtaposition is therefore useful for distinguishing a broad panoramic narrative from a more locally focused account of resistance.

The study asks how the river changes from geographical detail into an actor in the conflict, why a fortified city is presented as an inhabited community and how open space is used to describe the power and vulnerability of mobile forces. The analysis is restricted to narrative construction: the accuracy of every episode remains a separate historical question.

Materials and Methods

The method combines motif comparison, analysis of the spatial arrangement of conflict and interpretation of evaluative language. Episodes are grouped according to their spatial setting: routes and open terrain; the river and its banks; fortification and urban interior. Comparison focuses on who observes the environment, what practical choices it enables and what communal values it reveals. Bakhtin's chronotope supplies a model for reading space as connected to historically meaningful action [3; 84]. Ecocritical analysis supplements this model by asking whether environmental conditions retain material force rather than merely mirroring characters' emotions [4; 7].

Direct page-by-page verbal comparison requires matching identified print editions. Accordingly, the article offers a structural interpretation rather than unverified quotations from the primary novels.

The corpus is approached as a set of literary representations, not as a replacement for the historical record. This distinction avoids inferring factual social conditions from fictional descriptions alone. A valid comparison records the edition, passage, speaker, narrative location and interpretive uncertainty.

The analysis proceeds from textual observation to within-work interpretation and then to a comparative hypothesis. The sequence reduces the risk of building a general cultural claim on a single isolated motif. Where the consulted edition does not establish a page number, a precise citation cannot responsibly be supplied.

The river is examined as an obstacle, an opportunity for escape, and a bearer of collective memory. Its literary function depends on who controls passage and from which point of view the bank, crossing and current are described. This proposition provides a controlled point of departure for a close reading. The first question is how the narrator introduces the relevant setting and whether the description belongs to an external account, a character's perception or a remembered episode. The second question concerns the position of the motif in the sequence of events: it can precede a decision, interrupt an action, or retrospectively frame its consequences.

Comparative interpretation also requires an explicit distinction between recurrence and significance. The appearance of a similar image in two works does not show that the image fulfills the same function. Its force depends on focalization, narrative pace, vocabulary and the opposition through which it is organized. For this reason, references to geographical reality should be separated from claims about the literary work. Geographic plausibility can strengthen a novel's effect of historicity, but it cannot replace the analysis of the passage itself.

An operational reading procedure can be formulated in four stages. First, identify every relevant episode in the editions under study. Second, note the immediate dramatic context and the identity of the observing voice. Third, compare the episode with another occurrence within the same work before making a cross-author comparison. Fourth, record a conclusion only at the level warranted by the evidence. This sequence allows the category "the river as a boundary" to become an analytical instrument rather than a decorative heading.

The desert can intensify distance, exhaustion and uncertainty without necessarily being presented as empty. The analytical issue is whether the narrative treats difficult terrain as an independent condition or as a rhetorical instrument. This proposition provides a controlled point of departure for a close reading. The first question is how the narrator introduces the relevant setting and whether the description belongs to an external account, a character's perception or a remembered episode. The second question concerns the position of the motif in the sequence of events: it can precede a decision, interrupt an action, or retrospectively frame its consequences.

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Fortifications create a contrast between enclosure and exposure. They may concentrate questions of communal defense, hierarchy, supply and historical responsibility, all of which require confirmation through actual episodes in the chosen editions. This proposition provides a controlled point of departure for a close reading. The first question is how the narrator introduces the relevant setting and whether the description belongs to an external account, a character's perception or a remembered episode. The second question concerns the position of the motif in the sequence of events: it can precede a decision, interrupt an action, or retrospectively frame its consequences.

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Accounts of campaign routes often use panoramic description whereas accounts of resistance can move towards a smaller, locally embedded field of perception. This is treated as a testable difference, not an automatic national characteristic. This proposition provides a controlled point of departure for a close reading. The first question is how the narrator introduces the relevant setting and whether the description belongs to an external account, a character's perception or a remembered episode. The second question concerns the position of the motif in the sequence of events: it can precede a decision, interrupt an action, or retrospectively frame its consequences.

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Rivers, passes, weather and distance condition tactical possibilities in historical fiction. Analysis must not confuse a narrated military decision with established historical fact, even where both refer to the same topography. This proposition provides a controlled point of departure for a close reading. The first question is how the narrator introduces the relevant setting and whether the description belongs to an external account, a character's perception or a remembered episode. The second question concerns the position of the motif in the sequence of events: it can precede a decision, interrupt an action, or retrospectively frame its consequences.

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A central comparative question concerns the moral value assigned to dwelling in a place and moving into it by force. That evaluation emerges from plot organization, narrator stance and

character choice rather than geography alone. This proposition provides a controlled point of departure for a close reading. The first question is how the narrator introduces the relevant setting and whether the description belongs to an external account, a character's perception or a remembered episode. The second question concerns the position of the motif in the sequence of events: it can precede a decision, interrupt an action, or retrospectively frame its consequences.

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Results

Open terrain is associated with movement, speed and the reach of military formations. Its apparent freedom is qualified by a dependence on food, water and knowledge of the route. The literary opposition of mobile forces and settled communities is therefore not an opposition between people with and without an environment: both groups inhabit different regimes of environmental dependence. The river creates a more concentrated form of conflict. It can obstruct invasion, support defensive ingenuity and bind a community to a particular site.

A fortress similarly combines physical and symbolic functions. Its walls mark a tactical boundary, but their narrative importance depends on the lives, labour and memories they shelter. A fortification without an inhabitant is only architecture; a defended town represents the continuity of a local social world. The reading brings out how historical fiction makes a geographic feature ethically significant through the actions it permits or threatens.

Discussion

A danger in this comparison is reading the two novels as transparent national testimonies. Authors select conflicts, compress time and distribute sympathy according to artistic projects. The figure of Temur Malik, for example, may concentrate ideals of endurance and civic responsibility, while a panoramic narrative of conquest may place equivalent events in a much larger chain of political causation. These differences deserve formal analysis rather than reduction to assertions about national character.

The categories strategic, existential and ethical are related but not identical. A river is strategic when it changes military movement; existential when livelihoods depend on it; ethical when the narrative makes defence of place an obligation. The strongest reading demonstrates how a single setting can operate at all three levels and how that interaction changes over the course of the conflict.

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Conclusion

In the two works, landscape can be examined as a condition of action and as a representation of communal attachment. Comparing open terrain, river and fortress reveals contrasting spatial scales and a shared concern with the dependence of political events on inhabited environments. The next stage of research should check these hypotheses against precisely cited passages from specified editions.

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