

Review

The Perception of Time and Space: Crossing the Spatiotemporal Boundaries in Vladimir Nabokov's *Mary* and in Grigol Robakidze's *The Snake's Skin*

G.Sankar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Dr.RR & Dr.SR Technical University, Chennai-Tamilnadu, India-600062. Email: vijaya.sankar028@gmail.com. Phone: +919578153435

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The perception of narrative time and space is a complex cognitive process. During the act of reading, a reader interacts with the narrative world by perceiving its temporal and spatial dimensions. Due to the human ability to perceive narrative time and space, the reader can understand deeper meaning of fiction. The article presents a comparative study of the perception of time and space in Russian and Georgian émigré literature of the 20th century. The article deals with the concept of time and space in Vladimir Nabokov's *Mary* and in Grigol Robakidze's *The Snake's Skin*. The author of the article has presented an analysis of the reader's perception of narrative time and space taking into account the protagonists' experience and their perception of time and space in the novels.

Keywords: perception, time, space, memory, metaphysical world, Cognitive poetics, Vladimir Nabokov, *Mary*, Grigol Robakidze, *The Snake's Skin*.

INTRODUCTION

"But what is the voice of the present? Nothing.

The present is only a point, and the voice we hear

is always that of the future or that of the past."

— Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres*

"Pure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time, time free of content,

context and running commentary – this is my time and theme.

All the rest is numerical symbol or some aspect of Space."

— Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada*

What happens with a person in the act of reading? Is reading just the act of looking at a series of written symbols and obtaining meaning from them? Victor Nell speaks of being "lost in a book" and explores the phenomenon of the state of being "transported": the reader's "absorption" and "entrancement" create "a pleasure [...] as rousing, colourful and transfiguring as anything out there in the real world" (1988, 1). Richard J. Gerrig (1993) likewise uses the metaphor of "being transported" in fiction. Some researchers define reading as a cognitive process which frees the human mind from ontological time and space. Thus, for example, according to Dannenberg:

The reading experience is a *willing construction of belief* by the reader—the temporary refugee from the real world. A narrative world is thus a mental construction that provides a place of escape and liberty for the human mind to move to beyond the framework of its true ontological spatiotemporal boundaries. The reading of fiction can thus be described as the *cognitive simulation of ontological liberation*. (2008, 21, emphases in the original)

Due to the fact that any literary narrative has its spatiotemporal model, reading can be described as a process of the reader's involvement and movement in narrative time and space. Furthermore, the reader's understanding of fiction is shaped by his or her perceptual ability – the ability to perceive the narrative world, taking into account the time and space dimensions of the world. According to Culpeper, in the process of reading fiction:

[The reader is] constructing a mental representation not only of each character, but also a representation of each character's representation [...] of the other characters, [...] a representation of the time and space within which the characters appear, as well as a representation of what the writer of the text intends [the reader] to understand by the text. (2009, 148)

Hence, reading of fiction can be defined as a cognitive constructive process. It is the temporary process of the reader's liberation from the ontological world, and his or her integration in fictional environment of the narrative world. The reader, thus, is the traveller who crosses the space-time boundaries of the literary narrative.

Narrative, in turn, is not only a way of telling about a series of events; it is more than an account or a story: narrative is "a way of constructing and shaping worlds, identities and experiences. Narrative is, in this sense, simultaneously a practice and an object shaped by historical, social, political [...] practices" (Bansel, 2013, 5), and also by personal experience of the author.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the political and social changes in Russia, initiated by the Bolshevik Revolution, led to the formation of emigration. At that time, a lot of people left their homes and went to Europe. Among them were the writers Vladimir Nabokov and Grigol Robakidze.

Nabokov's and Robakidze's émigré experience had a great impact on their literary works, esp. on their early works. Therefore in the writers' first novels there is a peculiar concept of time and space which is worth studying.

The objective of this article is to study and compare the

perception of time and space in Nabokov's *Mary* and in Robakidze's *The Snake's Skin*. For this purpose, the article is divided into four mutually connected parts, with an introduction and a conclusion as separate parts. The first part of the article refers to the definition of important concepts such as time and space. Later in this section the role of perception in understanding narrative time and space is analysed. The second part of the article emphasizes the importance of Cognitive poetics as a relatively new literary paradigm which has presented a new approach to literature. The third part of the article is the study of the perception of time and space in *Mary*. In this section, the protagonist's and the reader's perception of the narrative time and space are analysed and compared. The fourth part of the article presents a comparative analysis of the protagonist's and the reader's perception of the space-time dimension of *The Snake's Skin*. At the end of the article, in the Conclusion the peculiarities of the protagonists' and the reader's perception of time and space of both novels are compared.

Time, Space, and Perception

In her book *Measuring Time, Making History*, Lynn Hunt says: "Time feels like an essential and defining feature of human life [...]. We all have a direct experience of time, or so we think, and yet it is the dimension of our lives about which there is the greatest philosophical and cosmological disagreement" (2008, 4). Actually, the ideas of time and space have occupied human thought for thousands of years. One of the earliest and the most famous discussions about the nature and experience of time occurs in the autobiographical *Confessions* of St. Augustine, written between AD 397 and AD 398. There is a long and fascinating exploration of time in Book XI of the *Confessions*. St. Augustine writes:

There are [...] a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things. Some such different times do exist in the mind, but nowhere else that I can see. The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is expectation. (1974, XI.20.26.)

It is obvious that time depends on consciousness, since time can only exist for a conscious mind. In fact, "[i]t is only through the human faculties of memory, imagination, and attention that time comes into being" (Gomel, 2010, 4). However, time is invisible and unimaginable; it is impossible to see either time or something in the time. St. Augustine writes: "One may claim to be able to see something in the past or in the future, but all that one sees are its images, traces or signs" (Mooij, 2005, 68).

According to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), time and space are the two fundamental categories of human cognition. They define the way in which the human mind experiences, and thinks about, the world. Kant writes: "[S]pace and time are both *pure forms of intuition* and *pure intuitions*. They are *pure forms of intuition* because they must precede and structure all experience of individual outer objects and inner states [...]" (as cited in Guyer, 1998/2004, online, emphases in the original). In other words, time and space define the way in which people "intuit" external events and facts, but also internal events. However, according to Kant, it is impossible to know whether time is "real," that is, a property of the world itself; people's cognitive apparatus is such that the outer as well as the inner world inevitably appear to them as structured by time (Klein, 2009, 8).

One of the 20th century philosophers – Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* (1984) states that time requires narratives to manifest itself fully. The narratives, in turn, are comprehensible due to the aspect of time they contain. Ricoeur writes:

[B]etween the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity. To put it another way, *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.* (1984, 52, emphasis in the original)

Thus narrativity is "a wide-ranging means of knowing, describing and understanding the world" (Mooij, 2005, 241), taking into account the spatiotemporal features which are an important part of the world. The importance of the existence of time and space in any kind of narrative is obvious, because "[w]ithout a time-space system of some kind, our conceptual perceptions and constructions would have no ground to stand on and no time to exist in" (Ørstavik, n. d., 425). People's experience of time and space, in fact, lies in their perception of different narrative worlds.

Human perceptual ability and skills are very important, because they determine people's understanding of time and space. According to Maund, perception is one of the major sources of people's acquisition of knowledge about the world, particularly about the environmental world. Maund writes:

The most natural view to take of perception is that it is a process by which we acquire knowledge of an objective world. We take this world to consist of physical objects and happenings, which exist independently of us and our acts of perceiving, and which are the things we commonly perceive. (2003, 1)

The human perceptual system has a quite complicated structure. According to Margolin, "Our perceptual system does not simply record information about the external world but actually organizes and interprets it. Perception consists of three stages: that of sensing, that of perceptual organization, and that of identification and recognition" (2011, 65). Therefore perception is usually understood as a process of interpreting sensory information. The process of perception can be considered as "the crux of the encounter between self and world or organism and environment, and it is the sensory organs that form the interface of this encounter" (Margolin, 2011: 64).

The very expression "the perception of time" is controversial. Robin Le Poidevin writes: "Insofar as time is something different from events, we do not perceive *time* as such, but changes or events *in* time. But, arguably, we do not perceive events only, but also their temporal relations. So, [...] we perceive spatial distances and other relations between objects" (2011, online, emphases in the original). Furthermore, there is a significant difference between people's ability to perceive time and their ability to perceive space. People's perception of time is limited and more complicated than their perception of space. Le Poidevin points out: "[...] our temporal experience is limited in a way in which our spatial experience is not. We can perceive objects that stand in a variety of spatial relations to us: near, far, to the left or right, up or down, etc" (2011, online). Such a limited experience of time could be attributed to the invisibility of time, in other words, the invisibility of the past, present, and future.

The human ability to perceive time and space is one of the major ways to obtain important information about the narrative world of fiction. During reading fiction, each individual reader interacts with the literary text, establishing "the virtual dimension of the text by realizing a new time-sequence" (Iser, 1972, 286). In addition, "[t]he reader's historical-temporal location, identity within global and regional culture, and [...] gender are key factors influencing the individual shape of the virtual world the reader creates" (Dannenberg, 2008, 19). Obviously, the reader's virtual world has its time and space dimensions. According to Casey: "It is sensible, perhaps even irresistible, to assume that human experience begins with space and time [...]" (1996, 13). Consequently, examining the reader's experience "through the lens of time and space can provide fresh insights into the way we [the readers] construct and perceive the [literary] world" (Wilson, 2004, 88).

In the process of reading, it is important for the reader to define "when" and "where" the story takes place. In other words, the reader should be immersed in the plot – in the temporal and spatial dimensions of the narrative. The reader's emotional involvement in fiction is possible due to his or her perceptual ability. Hence, reading is a

mental activity which is related to the reader's perception and experience of the narrative time and space. However, according to Trezise:

[T]he experience of place [or space] is irreproducible in any form, including fiction: it is only accessible to the person who knows that place [or space], not as a tourist, but as one who stays long enough in an area to understand it within the context of time and human history. (1993, 137)

Consequently, taking into consideration that the characters (but not the readers) are the real "inhabitants" of fiction, insofar as the narrative space of fiction is the characters' real physical space/location, the readers perceive narrative space due to the characters' personal experience of that space.

Probably the same applies to the reader's perception of narrative time. The reader has no personal experience of the characters' physical time, because the characters' existential world, with its spatiotemporal features, is fictional for the reader. Since it is impossible for the reader to have a direct experience of the time in which the characters live, the reader perceives the story time due to the characters' experience and their perception of that time. Hence, the reader's perception of narrative time depends on, and even interacts with, the characters' cognitive interpretation of time.

Since time and space are the constituents of fiction, reading, in turn, can be understood as a process of perception of narrative time and space. Furthermore, reading is a process which has its main character; in fact, "[t]he reader is the protagonist of the reading [...]" (Evola, 2005, online). Unlike Hermeneutics which focuses primarily upon interpretation of different texts, there is a movement in the literary theory – Cognitive poetics – which applies psychology to the analysis of text, and the main object of its study is the reader.

The Role of Cognitive Poetics in Understanding Literary Narrative

Cognitive poetics is a relatively new paradigm in literary theory. According to Abrantes, the term 'Cognitive poetics' was first used in the 1970s by Reuven Tsur to describe "the interdisciplinary nature of his ongoing studies of literature [...]: he aimed at describing sound patterns in poetry [...] with respect to their effects in the reader's reception of the texts" (2010, 16). The rise of Cognitive poetics – as an interdisciplinary field of research which involves cognitive science, literary studies, and linguistics – is directly related to the cognitive turn in science in the second half of the 20th century. Its name is not even consensual yet:

Cognitive poetics (Tsur 1992, 2003; Stockwell 2002, 2005; Gavins and Steen 2003; Freeman 2006), Cognitive stylistics (Semino and Culpeper 2002), Cognitive literary studies (Brandt and Brandt 2005). "Each of the names for the new discipline denotes a specific angle or perspective over what is at the centre: the interrelation between the study of the processes of human cognition and the experience of reading and interpreting the literary text [...]" (Abrantes, 2010, 15).

The cognitive approach to literature "is not the study of texts alone, nor even specifically the study of literary texts; it is the study of literary reading" (Stockwell, 2005, 165). Cognitive analysis of fiction allows researchers to gain theoretical access to the reader's mind in order to study the reader's experience of fiction and thus explore the power narrative has on readers (Dannenberg, 2008, 20). Hence, cognitive study of fiction may be considered as the approach to the literary narrative through its reader.

According to Stockwell, in the act of reading, the readers "are in the role of *side-participants*. As in traditional theatre, the audience is behind an invisible fourth wall, overhearing the literary world rather than actually participating in it. However, the sense of potential participation is strong" (2005, 153, emphasis in the original). Cognitive processes which take place in the reader's consciousness, on the one hand, make reading of fiction "attractive and pleasurable, since it involves an aspect of 'dressing up' in another's [i.e. in the characters'] ideas" (Stockwell, 2005, 153). On the other hand, cognitive processes allow researchers to consider reading as the reader's travel through time and space of the fictional world.

In order to explain the act of reading, Cognitive poetics uses the metaphor of "transportation." According to Stockwell:

First, there must be a reader (traveller) who is transported. This involves the reader adapting themselves to new conditions, taking on assumed characteristics and attitudes, even assumed perceptions and beliefs, in order to make sense of the literary scene. In order to engage in the simple deictic projection [...] that allows us to track a character's point of view, we must take on an imagined model of that other point of perception and belief. (2005, 152)

To put it simply, any literary narrative is just the impacting factor which causes a reaction in the reader's mind, thus creating a new phenomenon for cognitive research. Cognitive research of the conceptual systems the reader's mind uses to understand time and space can help researchers to see "how particular plot strategies in fiction tap into deep sources of meaning in the human mind" (Dannenberg, 2008, 20).

The Perception of Time and Space in Nabokov's *Mary*

Mary (Russian: Машенька, Mashen'ka) is Vladimir Nabokov's debut work, written in Russian during Nabokov's émigré life in Berlin. The novel was first published in 1926 under the author's pen name "V. Sirin." The novel was translated into English by Michael Glenny, and, in 1970, it was published as *Mary*.

The novel consists of two interchangeable narrative worlds. One part of the narrative takes place in Berlin. In this part there is told about one week in the main character's life. The protagonist is a young Russian émigré, Lev Ganin, who lives in a Berlin boarding house along with other Russian émigrés who have fled their country because of the Russian Revolution. Ganin is going to leave Berlin in order to change his monotonous life. Unexpectedly, Ganin sees a photograph of his long-lost first love Mary. Thus he discovers that his next door neighbour Aleksey Alfyorov is Mary's husband. Alfyorov is looking forward to his wife who is arriving from Russia to live with him in Berlin. But not only Alfyorov is looking forward to Mary's arrival. Ganin is also waiting for Mary, planning to escape with her. Therefore, on the day of Mary's arrival, Ganin goes to the railway station to meet her there. However, at the last moment, Ganin changes his mind and leaves Berlin without Mary.

In the other part of the narrative, Ganin's young life in Russia is described. This part of the narrative mainly consists of this character's series of recollections of Mary. Ganin enters time and space of his memories due to Mary's photograph. Consequently, the photograph transfers Ganin from his physical world to the metaphysical world of his memories. While remembering Mary, Ganin is mentally immersed in the process of the reconstruction of his past. Furthermore, Ganin's stream of memories has a chronological order. The protagonist remembers his young life in Russia starting from a particular time in his life – the summer when he first saw Mary, and fell in love with her. Thus, Ganin's past is "filtered" through his consciousness making him re-experience his past feelings towards Mary. While remembering Mary, Ganin mentally comes to the end of his past love affair with her, as if freeing himself from the fetters of the past.

Consequently, in the process of reading *Mary*, a reader can observe two narrative worlds: the protagonist's existential world and the world of the protagonist's memories. Both worlds have their spatial and temporal dimensions. In addition, the worlds often interfere and cross each other, thus erasing the boundaries between them. As a result, space and time of the protagonist's recollections fill his physical world. Thus, Ganin's "Russian years" enter the plot of the novel.

The protagonist's past years are restored only through the lens of his memories. Due to his vivid memories, Ganin reconstructs and re-experiences his past. In

addition, the protagonist sees his past as if it were his present. Ganin seems to live in a virtual world of his memories; furthermore, for him "it was not simply reminiscence but a life that was much more real, much more intense than the life lived by his shadow in Berlin" (Nabokov, n. d., online). While remembering the past, Ganin "did not feel any discrepancy between actual time and that other time in which he relived the past, since his memory did not take account of every moment and skipped over the blank unmemorable stretches, only illuminating those connected with Mary" (Nabokov, n. d., online).

At such moments, Ganin was losing connection with his reality, crossing spatiotemporal boundaries between the real world and the virtual world of his memories. In fact, the protagonist "did not feel time. His shadow lived in the boarding house [...], but he was in Russia, living through his memories, as if they were his reality"[1] (Nabokov, 1990, 73). Thus, the protagonist was gradually moving from his real world to the imaginary world. In addition, to the protagonist there was "no discrepancy [...] between the course of life past and life present" (Nabokov, n. d., online). Consequently, in *Mary*, the author managed to convey not only the protagonist's memory of the past events, but also the protagonist's memory of experiencing the events.

The frequent interruptions of the protagonist's stream of memories with the events which happen in his real life (i.e. in his physical world) break the chronology of narration in *Mary*. Nevertheless, each of the narrative worlds keeps its chronology. In other words, the events which happen in the protagonist's present, and the events which took place in the past, are narrated in chronological order.

The author's specific narrative style: the frequent shift of the narration from the description of the protagonist's memories of the past to the description of the protagonist's present days, complicates the readers' perception and their interpretation of the novel. According to Semino: "There are cases where the construction of a text world requires knowledge that is not yet included in the readers' encyclopaedia, so that readers will, for a time at least, find it difficult to construct a text world while reading" (2009, 46). Thus, at first the readers may perceive Ganin's past as his present time because of the lack of information about the character's past in the readers' mind. This informational crisis in the readers' consciousness leads them to the perception of the protagonist's past years through the prism of the protagonist's present days in Berlin. Hence, at first, the readers cognitively interpret time and space of the protagonist's recollections as his physical time and space, but not as the dimensions of the protagonist's metaphysical world.

According to Teresa Bridgeman, "[t]o read narrative is to engage with an alternative world that has its own

temporal and spatial structures. The rules that govern these structures may or may not resemble those of the readers' world" (2007, 52). In the process of reading *Mary*, on the one hand, the readers, while physically staying in their real time and space, trace the protagonist's movement through the temporal and spatial levels of his past and present. On the other hand, the readers are mentally travelling through the fictional world of the novel, "jumping" from one time-space level to another. Thus, the readers are crossing the virtual borders of the narrative time and space. Marie-Laure Ryan sees this process as the readers' "progress through the narrative text" when the readers "gather spatial information into a cognitive map or mental model of narrative space" (Ryan, 2003, online). Furthermore, according to Ryan, "[t]hese mental models, which are built to a larger extent on the basis of the movements of characters, enable readers to visualize these movements within a containing space" (n. d., online).

In the plot of *Mary* there is an obvious dominance of the protagonist's metaphysical time and space over his physical time and space. The reason of it is that very often the protagonist mentally transfers a part of his past – which reminds him about his first love – into his present world. Remembering *Mary*, Ganin is passing from one recollection of *Mary* to the next recollection of her. Thus, he mentally moves forward through past time and space, coming from the past to the present. As a result, the protagonist's past life enters his present life, becoming a part of his ontological world. Therefore it seems to Ganin that "the past life, which was perfect, passes evenly through Berlin weekdays" (Nabokov, n. d., online). The reader, in turn, in establishing these interrelations between the past and the present of the main character, actually causes "the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of [space-time] connections. These connections are the product of the reader's mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not the text itself – for this consists just of sentences, statements, information, etc" (Iser, 1972, 283).

The readers perceive the space of *Mary*, forming images in their consciousness, due to the objects which fill the space. Perceiving the narrative space, the readers bring the fictional space in the world of their consciousness. Furthermore, the existence of chronology in the narrative helps the readers to organize the mental images, which were formed during the readers' cognitive interpretation of the story, in the chronological order.

By the end of the novel, the week in the protagonist's life comes to the end. At that time, it seems (to the reader) that the protagonist's recollections of his first love have been exhausted. Both the protagonist and the reader come to the end of the story, and their journey ends at the same time.

The Perception of Space and Time in Robakidze's *The Snake's Skin*

The Snake's Skin is Grigol Robakidze's first novel which was first published in Georgian in 1926. Two years later, Robakidze translated the novel into German, and it was published in Germany with an introduction by Austrian writer Stefan Zweig.

In *The Snake's Skin*, the author presents his philosophical reflections on the subject of emigration and exile. The plot of the novel is quite complex and confusing. The narrative space consists of two worlds: the protagonist's physical world and the metaphysical world of his memories, visions, and dreams.

The protagonist is a young Georgian émigré, Archibald Mekeshi, who travels through Russia, Iran, Europe, and Georgia, as if trying to escape his thoughts and memories of his father and his homeland. The novel takes place in 1917, but the memories of the protagonist – his mental flashbacks – occasionally transfer the narrative to the distant past (Avetisian, 2013, 3). A photograph of the protagonist's father and manuscripts about the history of his family transfer the protagonist to the metaphysical world of his memories, visions, and thoughts. Therefore in the novel, "[t]he focus lies not so much on the perception of the exterior, but on the mental processes that it entails [...]" (Abrantes, 2010, 111).

The Snake's Skin is an example of Robakidze's complex narrative technique. The frequent use of external analepsis in the novel moves the plotline to the distant past, thus breaking chronology of events in the narrative. In fact, there is the crisis of time in *The Snake's Skin*. Thus, for example, it seems to the protagonist that:

[t]he reality bifurcates. A perceiver of the reality also bifurcates. In such space, people could see themselves; they could see their alter ego. At such moments, time stops. There is only the past. The present disappears. The future just flashes from time to time—as an idea or a thought—in one's mind. There is only the past: the past which is just a recollection of a dream.[2] (Robakidze, 1988, 119)

At such moments, the protagonist "is diving into the sunlit space. Everything visible is just a shadow of the past: its burning trace. It seems [to Archibald Mekeshi] that there is nothing. Everything is a memory of the past. And the past is an ancient story which is already over" (Robakidze, 1988, 119).[3] Thus the protagonist, actually, exists in the endless cycle that has no temporal dimension, and which consists of the fragments of the history of his family, myth, and his philosophical reflections. The situation makes his state of mind complicated. In fact, Archibald Mekeshi's life is a continuous torture, because his memories of the past

make him suffer. It is difficult for the protagonist to get rid of the pain they bring into his life.

In the novel there is a frequent intersection of the protagonist's physical space with the metaphysical space of his memories and visions. Very often, Archibald Mekeshi is immersed in the stream of consciousness, and a reader can see the protagonist in the process of wandering through the labyrinth of his memories. In addition, there is an absolute chaos in the protagonist's mind, because his memories are more like hallucinations. Thus, Robakidze's protagonist not only moves through his physical/real space and time, but he also crosses spatiotemporal boundaries of the transcendental world.

In *The Snake's Skin*, due to the author's description of the protagonist's travel through the virtual space of his memories, the spatial frames of the plot are considerably expanded. However, the protagonist's movement through the space of his memories is completely chaotic because of a lack of temporal indicators in the narrative. The lack of time indicators leads to the absence of chronology in the novel. In fact, such model of the narrative world complicates the reader's perception and interpretation of the novel.

Obviously, if the structure of fiction has a chronological order, readers cognitively arrange the components of the story space into a coherent, linear structure. The violation of the sequence of events in the narrative – the presence of flashbacks and/or flash-forwards complicates the readers' perception of the narrative world. Therefore in the process of reading *The Snake's Skin*, it can be difficult for the reader to understand "where" and "when" exactly the protagonist's stream of consciousness begins, and when it is interrupted by the events which take place in the protagonist's reality. Thus, very often, it is difficult to define the borders between the protagonist's real world and the world of his consciousness. This complicates the reader's perception of the order of events in the novel. As a result, during reading *The Snake's Skin*, the reader is as if wandering through a labyrinth of the narrative worlds.

It is obvious that there is the dominance of "topos" over "chronos" in the plot of *The Snake's Skin*. In other words, in the process of reading the novel, the reader can feel the superiority of space over time. Furthermore, it seems occasionally that space has absorbed time in the narrative. In fact, in the novel time "freezes" and "petrifies," and the traces which time left on the things, as for example the ruins of the fortress, remind the reader about the existence of time in the narrative. This is a rather significant fact that determines the reader's cognitive interpretation of the novel.

The Snake's Skin has a peculiar narrative structure. Thus, for example, some chapters of the novel start and end with the same sentences/paragraphs, forming a repetition in the narrative. Such form of narrative

structure can be defined as Robakidze's attempt to create the effect of eternal return in the novel; it is the return to the same space/place and time.

It is obvious that Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of "eternal return/recurrence" has influenced the main theme and the narrative structure of *The Snake's Skin*. Robakidze's interest in the theory of "eternal return" may be explained by the fact that the theory presents a cyclical model of existence; consequently, it presents the cyclical model of time and space. Actually, Robakidze's belief in the cyclicity of existence has determined and formed the space-time model of *The Snake's Skin*.

Robakidze was also influenced by myth. According to Robakidze, myth has no time movement: it does not have past, present, and future. Robakidze writes: "There is eternal present time in myth. Thus, something that existed in the past exists today"[4] (as cited in Bakradze, 2004, 94). In the 20th century, mythological, or "mythical thinking has often been conceived of as a narrative phenomenon. Myths [...] are thus being told and transformed *by* and *in* an act of storytelling" (Ernst, 2012, online, emphases in the original). Moreover, "mythical thinking"[5] has developed a model of time that is complete and, at the same time, infinite. In such a time model, the end is a return to the starting point, and it, in turn, creates the image of endless repetition indicating the cyclicity of life.

Thus, taking into account the impact the theory of "eternal return" and "mythological thinking" had on Robakidze's worldview, it becomes obvious that in *The Snake's Skin* Robakidze tries to emphasize the importance of the past, and the indubitable existence of the past in the present. Therefore, at the end of *The Snake's Skin*, Robakidze returns the protagonist to his homeland – Georgia. Consequently, in the novel the author returns the protagonist to the place where he was born. At last, Archibald Mekeshi gets rid of the memories and visions which were troubling him during his émigré life.

CONCLUSION

Reading is the immersion of a reader in historical and cultural time and space of fiction. The reconstruction of the narrative world by the reader "integrates fictional worlds into the reader's reality" (Doležel 1988, 21). Time and space are highly significant to modernist literature: "In modernist texts, time often becomes psychological time, which is time as it is perceived by the individual or symbolic time, which is time in reference to symbols rather than history".[6]

During the act of reading *Mary* and *The Snake's Skin*, their narrative worlds enter the reader's mental world. The reader's consciousness becomes absorbed in the narratives. The reading experience can be considered as

a journey into a new world – a journey whose very attraction “resides in the exhilaration of jumping across and transgressing ontological boundaries and mentally relocating oneself far away from one’s true spatiotemporal or ontological level” (Dannenberg, 2008, 21).

The narrative structure of the novels is complicated from the beginning. Space-time organization functions in the novels “as an image of the world and as a device for activating the reader” (Lachman, 2001, 89). In the process of reading the novels, in each case, the reader cognitively constructs and interprets two various interchangeable worlds: the physical world of the protagonist, and the metaphysical world of the protagonist’s memories.

In both novels there is a frequent movement of the narration from the protagonist’s present to his past, and vice versa, which makes the reader travel, crossing the different spatiotemporal levels. Furthermore, the protagonists’ recollections of the past provide the reader with the necessary information which promotes a clear understanding of the protagonists’ state of mind.

In addition, in the novels, the world of the protagonists’ past is crossed with the world of their present. The reader cognitively interprets space-time data of both worlds, considering two opposite spheres – the “external” and the “internal” worlds of the main characters. In both cases, the reader is mentally sinking into the narrative world

“The twentieth century is an era of persecution and wandering, of searches for home but also repudiations of home [...]” (Rimmon-Kenan, 2009, 231). Because of the political situation in the Soviet Union, Nabokov and Robakidze lived in exile, and they never managed to return to their home countries. The writers always kept the recollections of their past in their consciousness. Obviously, Nabokov and Robakidze are the prototypes of their protagonists. Therefore in *Mary* and in *The Snake’s Skin* the protagonists are the émigrés who live with their memories of the past. As a result, the protagonists wander through the space-time labyrinth of their mental worlds. The reason of the wandering lies in their loss of homeland, in other words, in their “loss of roots”[7].

Abbreviations:-

[1] The translation from Russian into English is mine – V. A.

[2] The translation from Georgian into English is mine – V. A.

[3] Translation mine

[4] Translation mine

[5] “‘Mythological [or mythical] thinking’ is a term coined by Ernst Cassirer, highlighting the fact that myths, taken

as a discourse, are always connected with a certain rational type of reasoning [...]” (Ernst, 2012, online).

[6] “Modernism,” *Literary Metamorphoses*, available at <http://ats.coloradocollege.edu/co100-04-b1/author/subpage.php?subPageID=271> [accessed 9 May 2013].

[7] “And here stands man, stripped of myth, [...], in the midst of all past ages, digging and scrabbling for roots, even if he must dig for them in the most remote antiquities. [It is because of] the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home” (Nietzsche, 1967, 135-36).

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