

Distance and Isolation. The Role of Australia in Wojciech Gutkowski's Colonial Dream in *Journey to Kalopeia*

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Abstract

This contribution is an attempt at a different reading of Wojciech Gutkowski's *Journey to Kalopeia* (1817), which may be of interest to both Polish and Australian readers in the twenty-first century, since it tries to connect Polish history with the dream of the Antipodes represented by Australia. Gutkowski's book, unknown until 1913, when it was deemed a utopian novel of little scientific value, gained recognition in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. At that time it was studied as a political treatise and an Enlightenment model for the creation of an ideal utopian-socialist-communist state. This paper offers a new reading of the work in question, discussing its cultural-historical aspects as a precursor of a specifically Polish model of a utopian-colonial state.

Keywords: Wojciech Gutkowski, *Journey to Kalopeia*, Australia, Utopia, utopian socialism, utopian-colonial treatise.

Wojciech Gutkowski's *Journey to Kalopeia*, completed in 1817 and presented for publication at the Warsaw Scientific Society as a political treatise, was a controversial work that aroused interest only after its discovery in 1913. Published in 1956, it can be approached in many ways: as a utopia, a fairy tale, a quasi-historical account, and above all as a manifestation of socialist-communist thought which in the last decade of the 20th century can also be read as an educational treatise (Brański 67–83). This article approaches it as a colonial treatise initiating a discussion on the possibility of creating an independent Poland after the partitions. In this context *Journey to Kalopeia* was a pioneer endeavour. Even though it contained all the elements of Polish utopian colonialism, it was not known for many years in the period when other Polish concepts of utopian colonialism were being born. Gutkowski's colonial conception revealed two basic determinants of Polish colonial thought: distance and isolation.

The article offers a reading of Gutkowski's work from the perspective of political anthropology, and narrows it down to the considerations of the legitimacy of colonial policy. Using the cognitive tools characteristic of ethnohistory, the Author applies the emic/etic analytical procedure, in which the emic layer is an analysis of the conceptual systems contained in the text of Gutkowski's work as the text of culture. The etic layer, on the other hand, is constituted by studies concerning the work as made by external observers and their studies. Therefore, the Author's goal was to rediscover Gutkowski's work, not as a proposal for a new political system for Poland but as an example of a new proposal for the colonial policy. The aim of these considerations is, therefore, to analyse a specific "grammar" of Gutkowski's ideas about an ideal colonial state, the main paradigms of which were distance and geopolitical isolation. Located at the antipodes of Gutkowski's previous experiences, Australia became the site of his utopian vision. The question arises, what could Gutkowski's knowledge of Australia be in 1816?

The extent of knowledge about Australia in Polish culture became first tested in the second half of the eighteenth century, when two Polish citizens, residents of Gdansk of Scottish origin, Jan and Jerzy [John and George] Forster, took part in James Cook's voyage in the years 1772–1775 as cartographers who made maps of Australia and Oceania for the purposes of the expedition (Słabczyński 342–351). We also know that the first Pole to set foot on Australian soil was Ksawery Karnicki (born in 1750, died in 1801 in Cherbourg). Karnicki was a precursor of Polish Utopian colonialism; after the first partition of Poland in 1772, he emigrated to Chile from where he sailed as a whaler to Australia. A participant in the Bar Confederation and the American War of Independence, together with Paweł Michał Dołęga Mostowski he established the so-called "County of Bridges" or "New Poland" in Florida (Kujawińska Courtney, Penier, Chakrabarti 22). However, he did not leave any descriptions of this country. Gutkowski's knowledge about the continent was, therefore, limited to information about its part, New South Wales and its

role as a penal colony. The role of Australia in the Polish consciousness of the first decade of the nineteenth century was based more on imaginations as an island and remote space than on any specific knowledge.

Wojciech Gutkowski (1775–1826) was a Polish military engineer, a lieutenant colonel in the Engineer Corps, military educator, writer, freemason, economist, the author of a utopian novel and a representative of Polish political thought of the Enlightenment period. For financial reasons, he started his service in the army very early, as a minelayer in a military school at the age of 14 (in 1789). On 1st May 1794, he was promoted to the Conductor of Military Engineering rank, with an assignment to the Zajączek Corps. In this formation, he went through the uprising campaign of 1794. After the final partition of Poland, he remained in Lublin and devoted himself to agronomic studies and the study of foreign writings on technology, inventions and industry. On 12th January 1807, he joined the Polish army in the rank of captain, and after a short service in the 4th Infantry Regiment he was assigned to the Engineer Corps. In 1808, Gutkowski became a lecturer at the Company School of Artillery and Engineers located in the Warsaw Arsenal, and when this school was renamed The Elementary School of Artillery and Engineers in 1810, he was entrusted with the post of commandant or second-in-command and then promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Thanks to his conscientious work and the support of Prince Józef Poniatowski, he also became deputy head of the Engineer Corps. In 1811, he was appointed an associate member of the Society of Friends of Learning as a person “proficient in mathematics, agricultural works and the improvement of young people in the sciences of war”.

He fought in the War of 1812 on the Bug River and during the retreat found himself in Germany. He survived the siege of Wittenberg and was taken prisoner by the Austrians. In 1814 he returned to Poland. He continued to serve in the Engineer Corps in the army of the Kingdom of Poland and was appointed commander of engineers in Lublin. While staying in Zamość as a professor of architecture at the Zamojskie Lyceum, in 1803 Gutkowski published, first under a joint editorship with B. Kukulnik and then exclusively under his own editorship, 18 volumes of the *Zamojski Dziennik Ekonomiczny* [*Zamość Economic Journal*] that contained encyclopaedic information on agronomy, technology and raw materials important for agriculture and rural architectural engineering. In 1806, he published the *Economic Catechism for Farmers* (a practical guide to animal husbandry, fruit farming, horticulture, arable farming, etc.).¹ He also translated into Polish and published A. H. Meltzer's work *Description and Imaginings of a New Machine Invented for Sowing Grain*. During this period, he promoted the technological advancement of agriculture in the “physiocratic” spirit. In 1805, he published his translation of Bossi's textbook *Fundamentals of the Drawing Rules*. Thanks to his scientific

¹ All translations mine own, if not otherwise indicated.

mobility, he was appointed, at a young age, a corresponding member of the Imperial Economic Society in St. Petersburg (probably as early as 1803) and in 1810 became a member of the Royal Economic and Agricultural Society in Warsaw.

The Lublin period of his life was connected with both his prominent career in the Freemasonry of the Kingdom of Poland and his activity in the organisation of local scientific endeavours. Already at the turn of 1811 and 1812, he was a member of the Warsaw Lodge of Isis, in 1816 he was a member of the Lodge of Equality in Lublin and in 1818, during the election of the “officials of the Lower Chapter” of the True Unity Lodge in the Lublin Valley, he was appointed Master of Ceremonies. Two years later, he was a Scottish Knight of Saint Andrew: fifth degree, in the Lodge of Equality. Together with other prominent Lublin Freemasons in 1816, he developed a vigorous campaign to establish a provincial branch of the Royal Economic and Agricultural Society in Lublin. He drafted the statute of this Society and two years later the statute of the Lublin Society of the Friends of Learning. At this time he also edited “The Rules and Duties of Cadets of the Elementary School of Artillery and Engineering” and in 1812 published an excerpt from Carnot’s book on the defence of fortresses (Bartyś 1983).

In 1817 Gutkowski wrote the utopian novel entitled *Journey to Kalopeia, the Happiest Country in the World, where without Money and without Property, Wealth and Industry, Light and All Goods Are in Greatest Abundance, and where Volume Two of the History of the Life of Boleslaus II, King of Poland, Is to Be Found*.² The narrative was probably written in 1814 and presented by Gutkowski to the Society of Friends of Learning on 24th November 1817. It tells of a utopian land of happiness in Australia founded by the surviving Boleslaus II the Bold who turns it into New Poland. The citizens of this land, the Kalops (Kalop is a Pole, in Polish: “Polak” spelled backwards), live in the greatest system in the world and are not inclined, under any circumstances, to leave it. The elected Committee of the Science Department strongly condemned the novel on the basis of a critical review by Stanisław Węgrzecki and rejected it on the pretext that it was not a scientific work but a novel (Gross 20–21).

After this criticism, *Journey to Kalopeia* was forgotten for many years, and so was its author who did not sign the work. It was not until 1913 that W. M. Kozłowski published an article on Gutkowski’s work, using one of his manuscripts (Kozłowski 313–331). He emphasised the Polish character of the work and its extraordinary originality, indicating that the text is not only a political treatise (Najdowski 8–9). Signs of authentic interest in the work appeared only in 1956, when Zygmunt Gross edited the text and provided an introduction. In his

² Original title in Polish: *Podróż do Kalopei, do kraju najszcześniejszego na świecie, gdzie bez pieniędzy i bez własności bogactwa, przemysł, światło i dobre wszystkie mienie jak najwięcej wygórowało i gdzie tom drugi historii życia Bolesława II, króla polskiego, znajduje się*. This paper follows the edition by Z. Gross (Warsaw 1956).

review of the book as well as in the introduction Janusz Górski refers to the Polish tradition of socialist utopianism and the plebeian current in Polish social thought (Górski 49). Similarly, Leszek Guzicki (1964) in his doctoral dissertation and later in a related article draws attention to the socio-economic dimension of Gutkowski's work and to his utopian-socialist conceptions. An intriguing interpretation of the *Journey* is provided in the criticism of Janusz Marchewa (1975), who perceives in it a manifestation of Polish messianism and the millenarianism of the Polish socialist concepts. In his 1976 publication on the Polish socialist thought in the 19th and 20th centuries, Marian Żychowski refers to the *Journey* as one of its first manifestations. Irena Koberdowa goes much further, attributing Gutkowski's "communist" views to his idea of creating model industrial and agricultural settlements (103). *Journey to Kalopeia* becomes the departure point for Rett Ludwikowski's reflections on the main currents of political thought in the years 1815–1890 (466). Maria Borucka-Arctowa (1957) finds an undercurrent of the anti-feudal ideology in the *Journey*, while Bogdan Suchodolski (1963) notices links between its Author's beliefs and the thought of Thomas More as well as the French Enlightenment movement of Étienne-Gabriel Morelly. The volume by Julian Bartyś (1983) devoted to Gutkowski and his work is, on the other hand, characterised by superficiality and a perfunctory approach to the sources. In the 1990s, Roman Andrzej Tokarczyk (1993) mentioned Gutkowski's *Journey to Kalopeia* when writing about Polish Utopian thought (33).

All these past studies examine Gutkowski's work in the context of his life and views in a one-sided, socio-political manner. It is no coincidence that studies written under different socio-political circumstances in Poland focused exclusively on its political and innovative aspects, placing Gutkowski's text in the socialist or even communist tradition of the Polish Enlightenment. It is also no coincidence that another aspect of this novel has been overlooked; namely, its supposed purpose, to be read as a colonial treatise since at that time the Polish colonial thought was out of the question. In my opinion, however, it is necessary to look at the work from this perspective and ask where, why and how Kalopeia or mythical "new Poland" was founded. These questions, in turn, generate yet another one concerning the extent of knowledge about Australia in Poland at the time Gutkowski was writing his work.

The very existence of *Journey* means that already at the time of the partitions of Poland there emerged the idea of creating a new free country in a very remote area of the world. Looking at the plot of the *Journey* one can notice one characteristic feature. The state of the Kalops was established as anew on an unknown land, on an island, without any surrounding neighbours. This brings to mind another outstanding writer and thinker of the Polish Enlightenment, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, who admired Great Britain and envied it its insular location and the lack of hostile neighbours:

Ah, how good it is to be an *island* (Author's emphasis); how it would ALL have been torn apart long ago, if England, like us, had been situated among predatory and invading peoples (Niemcewicz 99–100).

Gutkowski writes in the introduction to his novel that his protagonist, a land-owner who owned several villages, sold them or entrusted the management to his brother.

After the partition of our country in 1796, I became so melancholy that the effects of this melancholy started to get worse and worse, so I decided to leave the country and travel around the world to distract myself a little.³

Subsequently, he visits various countries, makes his observations and focuses on Kalopeia, “the happiest country in the world, equal to a paradise on earth”, located in New Holland (Australia), where he travels together with French engineers. Next, he moves towards the interior, into the colony of New South Wales and to the English-managed Port Jackson near Botany Bay (56). There he meets the representatives of the indigenous population and describes them as follows:

They are engaged in hunting, grazing cattle and sheep, the meat of which they are fond of; they cover themselves with somewhat leathery skins and they also have a type of sheepskin duvets. (58)

Soon he even gets to know their language and hospitality:

[A]nd with the inhabitants we have become well acquainted, who would be glad to keep us with them forever. (59)

About the country itself he writes:

The land, which is very fertile, gives them the opportunity to keep numerous flocks, but in spite of this they move from place to place together with their huts. (59)

The narrator then sets off for the interior describing the river journey in these words:

³ It concerns a French naval officer, L.A. Bogueville, who described the lands he visited on his voyage around the world, and these descriptions gained wide readership in the first half of the 19th century (Gutkowski 267).

I had to pass through several cataracts [...] Having thus sailed some thirty miles, I met fewer and fewer people, and on approaching any more populous region, I noticed dreadful forests and thickets on the lofty mountains, almost hiding in the clouds. (59)

He meets local people and asks them about the area:

When questioned about the size of these forests [...] they replied that no one dares to venture deeply into them, that they are impassable for the density of the trees, the decaying beds, for the rocks, cliffs, swamps, and for the multitude of predatory animals found in these parts. They have heard from their predecessors that great hordes armed with boats travelled along the river in order to find a better place to live. They understand, therefore, that either predatory animals or numerous cannibals killed and devoured the expeditions. For a long time no one has ventured deep into these parts on the grounds that they would never come back. (60)

These impenetrable thickets, the richness of the untamed nature and its wildness, as well as the myth of cannibals become elements constitutive for the construction of the isolated place to which the protagonist is heading:

[A]fter seven days of the most horrible sights and imaginings [...], where in the evening the peculiarly shrill roaring of various animals against the rocks filled us all with fear and silence, on the eighth day we saw the countryside opening up. (61)

Through this barrier of isolation the protagonist reaches the “Kaloepen Border”, marked by a brick pillar with a representation of the Sun, on which there are inscriptions in Polish, French, English and Latin informing the newcomers about the state border and the laws observed beyond it. Here he encounters a reality completely different from the rumours:

Such inscriptions in various languages, elaborately carved, [and] the beautiful structure of the stone pillar, clearly indicated that we were entering a refined country. (62)

When he meets the inhabitants who speak Polish and who find out that they are dealing with Poles:

the mutual contentment and [the joy of] conversations will be easily guessed by everyone, when a thorough knowledge of the language facilitated such. [...] Throughout the conversation the two locals showed much light and knowledge, [they] were somewhat modestly dressed, but so tastefully that we took them for heirs or eminent persons of the court in this settlement (63).

The natives they meet turn out to be shepherds of extraordinary beauty and wisdom. The guests are invited to the seat of the headman of the municipality who declares that:

The Kalops have particular respect for the Poles, although they do not know them, which comes from the fact that the first founder of their country and the [giver of] the happiness they experience and which is not to be found anywhere else in the world was a Pole, which is why the Polish language became the national language. (66)

When visiting the community, it turns out that it represents an extraordinary richness and manifestations of such thriftiness “that even in England a farm could not match it” (67).

In addition, all modern inventions are available, such as the telegraph, and the life of the inhabitants is regulated according to a set order. The communities have been named: Caution, Attention, Vigilance, Eavesdroppers, which is supposed to protect the inhabitants from enemy attacks. The narrator learns about the complicated system of power and social advancement, the system of defence organisation, the high development of civilisation and of the military, and then he gains the knowledge of Kalop customs. The citizen of this country remains from birth to death under the protection of the state and the state religion. There is no private property and all goods are commonly owned and collectively produced. No one suffers from hunger or poverty. Everyone has equal access to all common goods, to education and to work. Social hierarchy is based on clerical hierarchy, and everyone occupying successive layers within the organisation remains in a functional relation to the State. The protagonist becomes acquainted with the foundation myth of the Kaloepen State or “New Poland” in the antipodes. Its perfection creates a sense of isolation from the rest of the world since nobody wants to leave this paradise. Interestingly, Kaloepia has no foreign policy, is absolutely self-sufficient, and protects its economic and social achievements. There is a complete separation of Church and State there, which is reinforced by the foundation myth.

Boleslaus the Great, the founder emperor of our state and this happiness we are experiencing, is Boleslaus II called the Bold, king of Poland [...] who [sided] with a certain number of mighty and enlightened Polish friends persecuted almost as much as he by the clergy [...] They arranged among themselves and decided to go with Boleslaus wherever their eyes would carry them to found of a new colony. To this end, they prepared a large library, a storehouse of various tools, and persuaded and hired many of the most skilful craftsmen, artists and manufacturers, whom they later acquired in France and England, to such an extent that their entire population of both sexes amounted to over 600 people. Above all, they made sure that they did not lack anything that might serve to establish a new colony and expand the light. (130–132)

Afterwards, they set sail from Gdansk to Genoa and Lisbon, and sailing around Africa and the East Indies searched for an island. Initially, they opted for Sumatra, but it was not to be. A storm directed them to New Holland:

The Supreme Creator himself seems to have indicated to him (Boleslaus the Bold) that he should establish his colony here. Sailing around the shores of this huge island, he saw few people, and having convinced himself by circling around it that this new and still unknown land was an island, he stopped at one convenient place that was fit for ships. (132)

After a long search for a suitable area to settle in, having crossed deserts and immense mountain ranges, he found a fitting place:

The climate was mild, the land exceptionally fertile, and [inhabited by] the large population of herds playing with their flocks, which were driven from place to place and fed together with their possessions and fruits; the pleasant attitude of the inhabitants, their gentle and hospitable character, all this pleased Boleslaus the Great a great deal. (135)

They decided to establish their colony there and settle in that place using the material goods brought in by ships and then to burn the ships. From the description of Kalopeia we surmise, it was to be a land as rich in resources and as happy as the ancient mountainous and forested Arcadia (Kopaliński 53), with the difference that it was to be an enlightened country, not as primitive as its prototype. Boleslaus started with educational work with the indigenous population and persuaded them to such an extent that all the tribes voluntarily recognised the supremacy of the Polish language and culture, which happened within six years of his arrival. The natives were educated in crafts, arts and state administration. In the year 1088, therefore, he was to offer the country a constitution, the content of which the author includes in his work.⁴ Kalopeia was to be a constitutional monarchy (empire) and at the same time a functional state, where private property did not exist and universal egalitarianism prevailed. The official language was Polish and the citizens formed a nation-state by their own choice. They bore Polish surnames and these surnames testified to their righteousness (Prawdżicki, Dobraczyński⁵). In a few days, the protagonist gets to know Kalopeia as an ideal state and is even received by the monarch descending directly from Boleslaus the Great. He becomes acquainted with the calendar established by Boleslaus, the educational system, the complex administration, state holidays and rituals connected with the cycle of human life, in which the state intervenes from the cradle to the grave. He is so enchanted with the organisation of the colony that he speaks of his delight as follows:

4 "Constitution or Kalop State Laws" (Gutkowski 172-264).

5 These Polish surnames can be translated as Trueman and Goodman, respectively.

I have already spent two months in the capital, and every time I went out into the city, I could not get enough of the sights that surrounded me; every day something new and very interesting was revealed to my sight. The inhabitants of the capital number 200,000, but the city with its spacious streets, great squares and gardens occupies more space than the most extensive European cities. (168–169)

Kalopeia itself is to stretch from the Tropic of Capricorn to the island of Diemen (Tasmania). Its size is 600 Kalopean miles, with an inner sea similar to the Caspian Sea that has an underground connection with the Ocean. It lies between 37th parallel south and 160th meridian east from Tenerife's highest peak. As to the country itself:

In addition to this, about 10,000 square miles are still wild scrubs and forests, and everything is separated by mountains inaccessible on all sides, so that in the country [...] mild air temperate always prevails and neither excessive heat nor cold is experienced. [...] The people there are very handsome, witty and fair, the women peculiarly beautiful. The animals, birds and reptiles are larger than ours. (170)

The Kalops owe their beauty and development to their isolation. They travel abroad only for educational and informational purposes and to acquire the latest civilised inventions. They are isolated both geographically and politically, but not in terms of their cultivated consciousness, which is symptomatic of the Enlightenment thought. They are also supposed to be well informed about the world and at peace with all other nationalities:

I have been told that they usually pass Poles for travelling and so, in spite of the war that is going on between the various maritime nations, they are simply let loose. (171)

Reading *Journey to Kalopoeia* along these lines thus leads one to a conclusion that it is not only a political treatise, or the first socialist-communist utopia, but above all a colonial treatise, a specific utopian-colonial vision of a "New Poland" created in an isolated place, separate and remote from its author's European political and social experience. This vision found its continuators in later years and in a manner completely independent of Gutkowski's ideas (Łukowska, *Stępień* 153–172; Łukowska 2014, 543–558; Łukowska 2016, 256–264). This is a vision of the formation of a "New Poland" far from aggressive neighbours, secluded and brought into existence as a result of a very specific social contract with the indigenous population. It was to be created in a peaceful, law-abiding and perfect manner, based on modern thought and civilisational achievements, undisturbed by any outside interference.

The colonial premises on which Kalopoeia was based differ from those characteristic for Western European colonialism, and so is its model of colonial thought.

Its essence could be encapsulated through attention to five aspects: historical, political, economic, social, and cultural. In the historical aspect, Polish colonialism was born out of the loss of independence in the period of partitions as a desire to regain independence in a utopian form. It resulted in numerous examples and even real-life experiments to create a "New Poland", most often on islands, far away from Europe. In its political aspect, it focused on the creation of an independent democratic state, isolated from its neighbours, i.e. potential enemies or invaders. It manifested itself in the form of a belief in peaceful coexistence with the native inhabitants of distant areas and a belief in the possibility of convincing them to become subordinate to and a part of a superior civilisation represented and guaranteed by legal acts. The train of thought intensified in the 20th century when, with the country's regained independence, it took the form of actual attempts to establish Polish colonies on other continents. In the economic aspect, it pointed to the need to acquire new areas for agricultural purposes, manifesting itself in the legal acquisition of land and its economic exploitation together with the native and indigenous population. Such thinking later resulted in the establishment of settlement colonies on the periphery of the colonised territories. The social aspect of Polish colonial thought was apparent in the aspiration to create utopian egalitarian and agrarian societies. It expressed itself in the forms of establishing close cooperation with colonised societies, which was regulated in the form of established joint works or constitutions through a kind of social contract. The cultural aspect translated into striving for unrestricted development of national cultures and religions, without any restrictions imposed on the colonised peoples. This was to be visible in the peaceful coexistence of different cultures, customs and faiths, religious and cultural tolerance and an offer to accept Polish cultural models as a reasonable choice by the native population. In reality, the paradoxical result of this type of a model was – in cases of actual colonisation of foreign cultural areas – a much stronger integration of the Polish colonisers with the existing indigenous culture than in the identification of the colonised population with the Polish cultural models (Łukowska, Stępień 170–171).

This paper discussed Wojciech Gutkowski's work from a perspective diverging from a purely political analysis of his treatise. His work is regarded here as an innovative attempt at writing a colonial text containing a suggestion that it would be wise to break the social stalemate resulting from Poland's loss of independence. Therefore, it can be interpreted as a proposal to rebuild Poland's sovereignty "elsewhere", in isolation from the previous troublesome geopolitics. The colony was to become the source of Poland's integrity, independence and democracy, far from enemies, persecutors and partitioners. Therefore, Gutkowski's work should be approached not only or not solely from the perspective of political studies, but can be read through the lens of colonial studies, as an attempt to create an Enlightenment model of a utopian-socialist-communist state.

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