

PHD DISSERTATION THESES

**LILI BOROS**

***WAR AND PEACE* BY L. N. TOLSTOY**

POETICS ASSOCIATED WITH  
LITERARY SENTIMENTALISM AND EUROPEAN VISUAL ART

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## **I. Subjects of the dissertation, method of approach**

The poetic analysis of Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy's novel entitled *War and Peace* is approached by this dissertation through the perspective of visual representation and the sentimental tradition. I studied parts of text where various modes of visual representation are employed – such as the description of facial features, the visual formulation of the characters' external appearance, the presentation of natural settings, and the description of artworks existing within the reality of the narrative world of the novel. I have chosen these representations as my topic because it is through these forms of depiction that the tradition of sentimentalism – within which the works of Karamzin and Rousseau are to be examined – is most strongly manifested poetically. My studies of the novel from the standpoint of visibility lead me to the traditions of various image types and garden styles, which developed in different periods of art history. During this process, an extremely complex practice of tradition building came to light in Tolstoy's novel. It became apparent that Tolstoy's garden, image and nature representations were rooted not only in the literary, but also in the fine art tradition. Thus, the connection of the aspects of visual poetics and sentimentalism was prompted by the text of the novel itself.

The analysis has shown that visual representations in *War and Peace* pertain, almost without exception, to the characters of the novel. This is not to say that only the depictions of their figures meet the criteria of visual characteristics, but rather that the perception of objects, artworks, landscapes and spaces relates to the figures of the protagonists – and becomes part of their characterization – not only as a way of seeing, but also as a way of thinking. There is more to it than this, however: this way of thinking is most often a narrative detail in the process of understanding the self (the transformation of the individual protagonists can be comprehended through the interpretation of the visual), while the process of transformation itself, in contrast – or in juxtaposition – to thoughts, brings emotions and the psyche's inner processes to the fore. In the system of characters, my attention has been mainly directed at Liza Bolkonskaya, Prince Andrei, and Princess Maria, considered to be a melancholic protagonist, as well as at Julie and Mlle Bourienne, both of whom are regarded as quasi-melancholic.

From the literature of Russian and European sentimentalism, two works become subject to examination: N. M. Karamzin's *Poor Liza* (1791) and J.-J. Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), whose intertextual connections I explore from not only the perspective of the poetic function of visibility and landscape depiction, but also from a vantage point that considers the use of names in literature. The involvement of this perspective is fully justified by Tolstoy's text, as the name as concrete lingual formation draws the reader's attention to the presence of individual works as pretexts (e.g. Julie as Heloise, in the articulation of the old prince). In the second chapter, I extend my discussion to the cultural historical aspects of the topos of the garden, as – both in the novel and in the pretexts of the work – this topos is richly activated, covering many parts of the texts, connected to the contexts of visual art and, explicitly, literature. Through the depiction of gardens as the focal point, we gain insight into the thinking of the sentimentalists. The reason for this is that, in its method of representation, sentimentalism itself also brings the garden as locus to the fore. And this, in almost every case, emphasises the problem of representation, which cannot be separated from the ways in which the forms of visual representation become accentuated in Tolstoy's novel, in a certain respect turning back to sentimental texts.

Literary interpretations of *War and Peace*, in general, tend to emphasize approaches and problems that can be categorized along the following themes: the hidden perspective in *War and Peace* as regards the philosophy of history, the function of the "Epilogue," the narrative structure of the novel, the type of protagonists in the novel, a comparative literary examination of war and peace imagery, the shift in Tolstoyan landscape descriptions from the sentimental-romantic canon towards realism, the Rousseauian origins of Tolstoy's social critique and views on nature, the poetic role of the garden as locus. Most of the literature on the Rousseau-Tolstoy problematic explores Rousseau's influence on Tolstoy from the perspective of the history of ideas. Building on these findings while also moving beyond them methodologically, the dissertation addresses concrete parallels in the text with the objective of capturing, via the process of poetic analysis, the tradition of sentimentalism within a framework of not only interpreting metaphors and motifs, but also elucidating the textual modes of shaping characters and renewing the generic discourse of the novel. All this is done through the formulation of a historical context

that keeps sentimentalism and visual poetics in unity by linking distinct fields of art (literature and fine arts). Among the existing poetic analyses of *War and Peace*, none analyse this epic novel from the perspective of visuality.

The aim of focusing on the aforementioned works by Rousseau and Karamzin is to place *War and Peace* in a wider literary context, in order to not only identify sentimentalist motifs and metaphors, but also interpret the structure of Tolstoy's descriptions of faces and nature in comparison to the pretexts. *Sacrificiality* as the dominant personality trait of the female protagonist in *Poor Liza* also appears in *War and Peace*. In Tolstoy's novel, however, the spheres of thought related to sacrifice and suffering is split in two, as reflected in the character depictions of Sonya and Maria. As a next step, I continue my discussion of the poetics of visual representation and sentimentalism, which I begin in the first chapter, this time turning it towards a different aspect of the plot. I also examine the use of visual metaphor in the context of the sentimentalist tradition. Within this framework, I present and interpret a void – emptied out – “version” of the sentimental metaphor as brought to life by Tolstoy's construction of the storyline in relation to the marriage of Julie and Boris. I also discuss the process by which the novel fills this version with new meaning. The renewal of meaning is, thus, closely tied in with the interpretation of the literary tradition (as regards the valuation of sentimentalism).

The theoretical background and methodology of my paper is based on various literary studies. My interpretation is grounded in such scientific approaches as the theory of image (G. Boehm, H. Belting), ekphrasis research (H. Lund, L. Heller), poetic-narratological analyses (B. Eichenbaum, S. Bocharov, B. Uspensky), semiotics studies (Ju. Lotman), approaches presented in monographs that engage – within the thematic of the garden – the problematic of intermediality (D. Lihachov, E. Dmitrieva – O. Kuptsova), the deconstructive reading of text (P. de Man), as well as art history studies on garden art and on the depiction of garden art and landscapes in fine art (A. von Buttlar, W. Hofmann). These approaches and writings are different not only in terms of their subject matter, but also in terms of their methodology. It is not my aim, however, to reconcile these differences and possible discrepancies in interpretations, as the dissertation is not of a theoretical nature but, instead, endeavours to deliver a poetic analysis. Being based from case to case on a specific range of literature – and in an effort to explore each topic in the widest spectrum possible – my method differs

in the individual chapters. In the chapter discussing the topos of the garden, I offer a review that spans a number of centuries, while, in my analysis of specific excerpts from the text, I seek to provide a nuanced and extensive interpretation of motifs and metaphors within the framework of a close reading. Thus, in accordance with the spirit of the discussed problematic, I endeavour to employ both a detailed poetic analysis and a large-scale review of cultural history.

## **II. The structure of the paper and the process of analysis**

In the first chapter of the paper, I start out by examining the motifs related to the formulation of the heroine's figure (*open mouth, animalism, childishness, tameness, and suffering*), which are grounded in the tradition of faciel definitions present in the text of *New Heloise*, and, along which unhappy married life is thematized. Through this, the perception of the other – the possible interpretation of the other by the amorous man or woman – is brought to the surface. As a result, it is not only in Rousseau's pretext that the formulation of the amorous face has a key role in the process of the hero's self-interpretation: the poetic depiction of the transformation of Tolstoy's hero is also largely rooted in the visual representation of Princess Bolkonskaya's face. The ekphrasis of the *portrait* and the *tomb*, from the perspective of the poetic function, complement the representation of the face. The visual metaphor of the *oak* plays a central role in the semantic construction of Andrei Bolkonsky's process of transformation and self-understanding. Aside from the visual metaphor of the oak tree, other visual representations also play a special role in the development of Bolkonsky's character. These portrayals within the plot are linked with the figure of Andrei's wife, Liza Bolkonskaya; thus the depiction of the heroine's face, as well as the representation of her tomb and portrait (the ekphrasis), all represent parts of Andrei's process of self-understanding. According to their roles in the plot, these representations (just as the mirror, fulfilling a similar function in the *syuzhet*), when interiorized by the hero, prompt him to be immersed in self-reflection, while "description", in terms of its substance, is repositioned in the character's inner dialogue. From the metaphor of the oak/tree, I arrive at the *melancholic tree*, which contains landscape description elements that are also known from N.M. Karamzin's *Poor Liza*. The meaning which unfolds through these details

provides an interpretation of the nature of *deception* and – within the framework of the poem that appears in the novel – connects landscape depiction with the elements of facial representation (e.g. smiling). In this way, the visual metaphor of the two *trees* in *War and Peace*, offers different articulations of *deception*: while the *oak* as a void metaphor connected to Andrei – and constructing, at the same time, a parallel with his ability to be reborn – is renewed through a new meaning, the *melancholic tree* that appears as related to Julie's and Boris' figures, quite to the contrary, gives us a finally emptied out version of the sentimental trope. The visual metaphor of the melancholic tree is unfolded in the text so that no similarities are perceived by the characters of the love story between the pretextual events and the events experienced in their own lives (in other words, no *self-reflection* emerges). In contrast, the metaphor of the oak tree actually becomes part of Prince Andrei's process of self-understanding, of which the creation and interpretation of the visual metaphor is an integral part.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, I similarly interpret (certain parts of) *Poor Liza* and the epistolary novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* by studying how the face, nature, and the garden are represented visually. Relying on the interpretation of the personal name as intertextual sign, it is in this part of the dissertation that I also look at Tolstoy's epic novel in light of the "Liza texts" (V. N. Toporov's term).

In *New Heloise*, the language of love, which is often provided by visual elements, is linked to the circle of motifs around *propriety* and *decorum*. At the same time, the work, in not straying too far from the contrast of *the natural* and *the artificial*, is also about the *depictability of emotions* and the hero's act of self-creation through his visualization of the other person in his imagination. While in case of Tolstoy's work, the portrait and description of the young princess' face occupy a different position in the plot and the evolution of the *syuzhet*, they nevertheless articulate the hero's ability to renew himself (self-creation). This path leads the male protagonist in the direction of seeking happiness. Saint-Preux can ultimately enter into union with Julie only by crossing the boundary of reality. Tolstoy's protagonists – Andrei Bolkonsky, Pierre, and Princess Maria – seek the answer to the question whether such a union is possible in reality, while, for other characters, it can only happen clearly in the realm of the imagination (Mlle Bourienne, Sonya).

The approach of sentimentalism and visuality from the perspective of poetics necessitated the interpretation of Karamzin's *Poor Liza* – by identifying the poetic functions of the landscape depictions in the novel – to be given in a separate subchapter. Liza Bolkonskaya is connected to Karamzin's heroine not as a result of the figures' taking on the characteristics of another literary figure, but through the motif of sacrificiability (which places Tolstoy's Liza in a different circle of the "Liza texts:" that of Dostoevsky's Lizaveta Ivanovna and Pushkin's female protagonist by the same name).

I separately explore the roles of the authors discussed in the context of *War and Peace* in the Russian literary tradition. Within this framework, it is necessary to recognize and stress the differences between the ways of conceptualization formed by Rousseau and Karamzin. The essence of the problems examined in the novels of Karamzin and Rousseau can be expressed as follows: while, according to Rousseau, *courteousness* conceals one's real nature, Karamzin advocates that courteousness and etiquette create unity in the chaos of general moral relativity. In Lotman's view, this dual effect in Rousseau's approach – the simultaneous presence of polemic and conformity – was distinctly characteristic of late 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian culture and became the central problem of the next era of Russian literature, from Lermontov to Tolstoy. From here, I move onto Tolstoy, in whose work the problem posed by Rousseau and Karamzin is given a prominent role, however, not from a philosophical or history-of-ideas perspective, but within the context of studying Tolstoy's stance, which can be grasped through his poetic articulation of the garden.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, continuing the analysis along the theme of Tolstoy's depiction of the garden, I trace the representation of the *winter garden* in the text. This leads me closer to uncovering the ways in which the poetic "instruments" of sentimentalism are used in the Tolstoy novel and how the process of sentimental-romantic disillusionment unfolds in the syuzhet (Andrei Bolkonsky and Princess Maria). The question of whether the path travelled by the hero can be traced by his relationship to the garden (old Prince Bolkonsky) is also shed light on. While exploring this system of connections, it becomes apparent that *War and Peace* continues the tradition of the Rousseauian protagonists' relationship to the garden, whereby a change in the garden is linked to the transformation of their inner lives.

Thus, in comparing the works of Tolstoy and Rousseau, it is apparent that *New*

*Heloise* also contains the story of unveiling the utopian illusion, which unfolds in *War and Peace* – in contrast to the epistolary novel – being based on the syuzhet-structuring principle of antitheses and parallels. The *image-like* nature of utopian idyll and illusion in Tolstoy's novel is also a Rousseauian legacy. A variation on the idyllic image of familial happiness is evoked in Nikolai Rostov's formulation. The examples of happy marriages that appear in the epilogue of *War and Peace* (Pierre and Natasha, Nikolai Rostov and Princess Maria) are interpreted as a development of thematic "predictions," which are representative of the heroes' desire for familial happiness. Tolstoy dedicated an entire novel to the realization of familial happiness. *Family Happiness* is presented from a perspective of the realizability of idyll and happiness that is fulfilled through the family. At this point, I once again arrive at Rousseau's family utopia, which is articulated, albeit not at all self-evidently, in *New Heloise*.

In the last chapter of the dissertation, I turn to the individual figures of the novel and make distinctions between the various protagonist types, by tracing melancholic traits in their personality and examining their relationship to melancholy in general. For this, it is necessary to track changes in the concept of melancholy in the European cultural domain. In interpreting the motives behind the characters' actions, I examine how all this connects to the otherwise also prominent theme of the novel – the question of marriage based on love. Through their attitude toward melancholy, various types of protagonists can be identified. This identification requires a nuancing of the concept of self-reflection; while some treat it as a cliché, the assumed pose can also indicate conscious behaviour, which is too systematic to be interpreted as an unconscious expression. The typological categorization of the characters also shows parallels interpreted in terms of the cultural concept of the garden in relation to the aspects of the *natural* vs. *artificial*. While the falseness and deception of sentimental-melancholic behaviour is articulated in the novel, Tolstoy's text shows, these once again becoming real and relivable.

The possibility of reinterpreting tradition is connected, at the level of the protagonists' world (Andrei Bolkonsky), to a rebirth of emotions and the faith in the renewal of life. This problematic also gains interpretation in the context of love. In constructing the meaning of rebirth, which is realized as a result of love, the visual elements of the text – namely, the visual metaphors of the *tree* and the *oak* – play a



crucial role. The complexity of this metaphor and the problem of tradition stem from the fact that the landscape and garden depictions in the novel originate not only from the tradition of sentimentalism in literature and fine art (cf. the solitary oak as the obligatory component of 18<sup>th</sup> century gardens), but also from the painting tradition of the preceding century (cf. the withered oak tree as a symbol of the ephemeral nature of human existence was already a central theme in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch landscape painting).

### **III. Conclusions and summary**

My dissertation, which discusses the traditions of sentimentalism in the context of the problem of visibility, studying the continuation and transformation of the sentimental motif system, in *War and Peace* comes to conclusions both in terms of narration and character formulation. The tradition of sentimentalism lives on in Tolstoy's novel, not only in its intellectual legacy as a whole, but also in its important details. Upon exploring the metaphor of the *oak* with respect to art history and the history of garden architecture, it becomes clear that Andrei's oak and the melancholic tree are not only connected through the motif system of the work: this particular motif complex can be traced back to a whole tradition revealing itself in the history of culture. The analysis proves that the reinterpretation of this metaphor also goes hand in hand with changes in the character of the protagonist: in *Poor Liza*, shifts in the psyche can be followed through the transformation of the natural environment, which is provided in the narrative text by the repeated appearance of the oak forest. At the same time, reflections on this by the female protagonist are not identifiable in Liza's utterances. The semantic novelty in Tolstoy's character formulation is in how Prince Andrei reflects on the oak and on natural details, and how their sight renders him capable of (inner) speech. What takes place in the text is not only the filling of the metaphor with new meaning, but also the renewal of the relationship between the hero and nature.

The results of the second chapter can be summarized in stating that *landscape as a mode of perception* first plays a role in the development of landscaped parks, and then the *emergence into consciousness* of the connection between landscape and human psyche comes into its own in German romantic landscape painting (this is the

reason why this became the exclusive theme). The relationship between the human being and nature manifests in the garden (the realm where culture and nature meet). This, however, can be traced back not only to the tradition of sentimentalism, but also to the Christian culture of Europe. Similarly, the desire to restore a lost paradise is also a notion that gains expression in the first garden depictions. Thus, in examining *War and Peace* from the perspective of sentimentalism, a cultural historical study of the topos of the garden reveals that it acts as an interpretive mediator between the two traditions of representation. An exploration of the art historical aspects of the garden topos also justifies the inclusion of *Julie, or the New Heloise* in the analysis, during which, by extending the viewpoint of examination toward representation through portraiture, it becomes apparent that the relationship of the amorous man and woman is associated with crossing the boundaries between reality and imagination. The problematic of *naturalness* and *artificiality* emerge not only in garden depictions, but in portrait representations, too. Natural is that which is full of life and capable of perception. A Rousseauian reading of *War and Peace*, allows to draw the conclusion that the meaning formulation in the pretext is, thus, graspable in Tolstoy's work as processes which mobilize an identical problematic albeit moving in opposite directions: the portrait and tomb of his dead wife come to life for Andrei, which, understandably, makes him capable of coping with the words emerging in his created imagination and interpreting past events (in the plot, it is the death of his wife that makes his rebirth possible). I conclude that a reflection on the tradition of sentimentalism is partly linked to the problem of how a *work of art can be experienced*, on the one hand, and how a *story can be narrated*, on the other – it is about the *applicability* of tradition itself. This is integrally connected with the problem of artificiality (cf. the characters employ literary clichés and story schemes for interpreting their own lives, or regard these as the token of their path to happiness) and *natural* love relationships, both modelled in Tolstoy's novel.

The experience gained from studying Rousseau's work, consequently, greatly contributes to interpreting Tolstoy's protagonists. A lifeless work of art is brought to life by the feeling heart of a man – the figures of Tolstoy's novel can be perceived by readers as authentic if they themselves are endowed with the capacity to perceive and experience from the inside; if there is no emotion (love) behind them, they are just as lifeless and vacant as the empty metaphors that have been instrumental in

formulating their character. As a result of the analysis detailed in the dissertation, I have arrived at the thought that what Tolstoy says about the human being, he says about the relationship between the human being and nature. Thus, it is no accident that the closing chapter of the dissertation focuses on the melancholic hero.

In *War and Peace*, we, of course, encounter conscious art-theoretical reflection (metatext): Tolstoy ponders the nature of representation itself. His visual thinking is strongly metaphoric and symbolic; it, in fact, at certain places points towards impressionism. As a final conclusion, we can state that it is not only the *visual metaphor* as such, which proves to be renewed, but also *visual representation*, which, in turn, leads to the question: what kind of realism is determined by subjectivity. The return to sentimentalism and romanticism in the dissertation is thus based on no arbitrary choice, but guided by the path marked out in the text. At the same time, landscape depictions are only interesting if they are filtered through another mode of visual thinking. This, in turn, marks a new direction in interpretation along the lines of the examination of visual intertextuality and the visual paradigm of image types in Tolstoy's work. The joint discussion of the garden and the portrait paves the way for the interpretation of Tolstoy's next great novel, *Anna Karenina*, while the aspects of social inequality and the problematic of the consequences of one's actions (cf. *Poor Liza*) are inseparable from the novel *Resurrection*.

### **Literature published on the topic:**

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2. Визуальное представление и развитие визуальной метафоры в романе Л. Н. Толстого *Война и мир*. [Visual Representation and Visual Metaphor in Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.] *Studia Russica*, XXI. (2004) Budapest, 68–79.
3. "A vizuális metaforák szerepe Lev Tolsztoj *Háború és béke* című regényében." [The Role of Visual Metaphors in Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*] In: Árpád Kovács

(ed.): *Puskintól Tolsztojig és tovább... Tanulmányok az orosz irodalom és költészettan köréből* 2. Budapest, Argumentum, 2006, 393–412.

4. “Képtípusok és vizuális metaforák az irodalmi szöveg jelrendszerében. Lev Tolsztoj: *Háború és béke*.” [Image Types and Visual Metaphors in the Sign System of the Text. Lev Tolstoy: *War and Peace*] In: Géza Balázs – Gyula H. Varga (ed.): *Társadalom és jelek*. (= Magyar szemiotikai tanulmányok 10–11.) Budapest–Eger, Magyar Szemiotikai Társaság – Líceum Kiadó, 2006, 249–256.
5. “Szentimentális hagyomány Lev Tolsztoj *Háború és béke* című művében. Valóság és fikció: lehet-e újraírni a szentimentális történetet?” [The Tradition of Sentimentalism in Lev Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. Reality and Fiction: Can the History of Sentimentalism be Rewritten?] In: Géza Balázs – Gyula H. Varga (ed.): *Szemiotika és tipológia*. (= Magyar Szemiotikai Tanulmányok 12–14.) Budapest–Eger, Magyar Szemiotikai Társaság – Líceum Kiadó, 2007, 193–197.
6. Аспекты визуального изображения сада и дерева в романе Л. Н. Толстого «Война и мир». (Aspects of Visual Representation: the Garden and the Tree in Lev Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.) In: Katalin Kroó – Irina Avramets (ed.): *In Honour of Peeter Torop 60. A Collection of Papers from Young Scholars*. (= Olvasatok 2./ Readings 2) Budapest–Tartu, Eötvös Lóránd University Doctoral Programme – University of Tartu: Department of Semiotics, 2010, 12–35.
7. “Utópia – a kertábrázolás szentimentális hagyománya. Lev Tolsztoj: *Háború és béke*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Julie, az Új-Heloïse*.” [Utopia – the Sentimental Tradition of Garden Depiction. Lev Tolstoy: *War and Peace*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau : *Julie, or the New Heloise*] In: Katalin Kroó – Tamás Bényei (ed.): *Utópiák és ellenutópiák*. (= Párbeszéd-kötetek 4.) Budapest, L’Harmattan, 2010, 75–94.
8. “Kert, álom, illúzió. Szentimentális motívumok újraértelmezése L. Ny. Tolsztoj *Háború és béke* című regényében.” [Gardens, dreams, illusions. Reinterpreting sentimental motifs in Lev Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*] In: Géza Kocsis (ed.): *In honorem Hetesi István 70*. (= Olvasatok 3.) Budapest, ELTE Doctoral Program, 2012, 77–92.
9. «Меланхолический» герой в романе Л. Н. Толстого «Война и мир». [The

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10. “A vizuális kertmegjelenítés rousseau-i hagyománya Lev Tolsztoj *Háború és béke* című regényében.” (Элементы поэтики Руссо в визуальном изображении сада в романе Л. Н. Толстого *Война и мир*). [The Rousseauian tradition of garden depiction in Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.] In: Magdolna Ágoston (ed.): *Szó és kép a szláv népek kultúrájában és irodalmában*. (= Oroszország népeinek története 12.) Szombathely. (In Russian and Hungarian languages. Accepted for publication. Expected publication date: 2012.)