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EXTENDED METAPHOR: THE POETICS OF TAT'IANA TOLSTAIA

Tat’iana Tolstaia, writing in the literary magazine _Voprosy literatury_, noted that the “key metaphor (kliuchevaia metafora)” in the novels of Vladimir Makanin “‘floods’ the text; it can be picked up anywhere.” This concept of a key metaphor can also be applied to Tolstaia’s own works. The metaphor seems to be the hero in many of her works; indeed, her texts are littered with metaphors which provide important keys for interpreting her works.

Helena Goscilo, who has written a number of pioneering studies on Tolstaia, also commented: “Several of Tolstaia’s most successful efforts build on what may be called a matrix metaphor, a device favored in the 1920s by one of the mentors of the Serapion Brother, Evgenii Zamiatin.”

This matrix metaphor could be considered the key metaphor, since the central metaphor (“mother” metaphor) appears repeatedly and it gives birth to a related metaphor (“child” metaphor).

Tolstaia’s short work _On the Golden Porch_ tells of a woman reminiscing over her childhood at a dacha. From the beginning of this work we have a key metaphor — the garden representing childhood. The work begins:

In the beginning was a garden. Childhood was a garden.

Following this there is a description of a bright and colorful garden. The garden metaphorically describes the woman’s childhood, one full of happiness and color. The time frame of childhood is shifted to the special frame and visual imagery of a garden. The metaphor is employed many times throughout the text, becoming an extended metaphor.

As childhood is coming to an end, the garden is described as follows:

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Looking back once, with unbelieving fingers we felt the smoked glass behind which our garden waved a hankie before going down for the last time.\(^4\)

This garden clearly personifies a childhood that is coming to a close. From the beginning to this point, in about 70 percent of the text — in other words, in the framework of the two previously mentioned two metaphors — Tolstaia is giving a fulsome account of her festive childhood.

For example, in the scene depicting the neighbor, Uncle Pasha, returning from a day’s work, his garden is described as a “Paradise”. Here the words, *Sad* (garden), *Rai* (paradise), and *Dom* (house), are capitalized. Tolstaia is emphasizing that Garden, Paradise, and Uncle Pasha’s House share the same quality.

In the scene where Uncle Pasha is sleeping, various objects are listed swimming above his head, such as the attic, the roof, the chimney, the moon and so on. The passage goes: “[They swam] across the garden, through dreams.”\(^5\)

Here garden and dream are the same. Garden, which was used as a metaphor for childhood, is also likened to paradise and a dream; it is sublimated into a festive utopia.

To our heroine, the small girl, Uncle Pasha is an alluring figure, and his house with its velvet, lace and golden frames appears stocked with fabulous treasures. However, when the heroine visits again over twenty years later, she is surprised to discover that Uncle Pasha is only a shabby old man. What appeared to be treasures to the girl’s eyes are nothing but “dust, ashes, rot.” Childhood is truly over, and the many dreams of that golden time have been lost.

However, childhood did not end suddenly. Although the girl was not aware of it, the carnival-like garden slowly changed in appearance. In the beginning the garden was without end or fences. Likewise, childhood was a time of limitless freedom. However, the garden came to be enclosed by a wire fence, broken glass is sprinkled at strategic points, and there is the appearance of a scary yellow dog. We have here a metaphoric description of shadows slowly creeping over childhood.

Fantasy and reality are in conflict, and fantasy is, unfortunately, betrayed by reality. This theme-melody of the imaginary world at variance with reality appears not only in *On the Golden Porch*, but in Tolstaia’s other works in a slightly altered forms. It is the common bass register of the “Tolstaia Suite.”
