4.4: Inventing a National Narrative

Space, Genre, and Ideology in Soutsos’ O Leandros (1834)

Steven Van Renterghem

Is it a sad, romantic story or political narrative? With this bold question, Dimitris Tziovas (2009: 214) highlights the problematic position of Panagiotis Soutsos’s novel O Leandros. Nevertheless, the basic storyline of the novel is simple and typical of a romance: the central couple is Leandros and Koralia, who grew up together in Constantinople and were childhood sweethearts before their lives went separate ways. At the beginning of the novel, they meet again in Athens and discover that their love has not changed. Koralia, however, is now married, so their love proves to be impossible. So that they can forget each other, Leandros leaves and travels through Greece. This attempt proves unsuccessful and when he returns to Athens, at the end of the novel, Koralia dies of anguish and he commits suicide soon afterward.

However, intertwined with the story of romance are the numerous places that Leandros visits. They played a significant role in either Antiquity or the recent Greek War of Independence (1821-1830) and so generate an openly nationalist rhetoric from the protagonist. The links between the significance of these places, the political discourse they induce and the love story are still considered problematic, as Tziovas’ question indicates.

Panagiotis Soutsos wrote this novel in 1834, in the complicated period after Greek Independence, during which Greece not only developed as a modern state but also tried to create a collective national identity through various intellectual efforts. The ideology used to legitimate this identity was that the Greek people were direct descendants of the ancient Greeks (‘Hellenism’): the true nature of the Greeks resides in them and the newly founded state was considered the resurrection of that old nature after many centuries of suppression by foreign powers. Soutsos, who belonged to the Phanariot elite [1] who had moved to Greece and who were major proponents of this ideology, was no different in trying to express such an ideological message in his novel.
In his analysis, Tziovas stresses the seemingly unclear purpose of the novel: is it making a political statement, recounting an appealing love story, introducing European romanticism in Greece or exciting the young to awareness (Tziovas 2009, 214)? He considers the diffuse composition of the novel as a reflection of the fluid and unshaped character of Greek society (215) and concludes that the novel fails to create the synthesis of (all these) contrasting ideas that is normally a prerequisite for realism and a successful novel (221).

This negative judgment is essentially not new and it has proved to be a constant in critical publications throughout the 20th century, not only for *O Leandros* but for all the novels of the 1830s and 40s. Of the tendencies that can be observed in these critical works, the earliest was the consideration of the texts as early historical or realist novels (Sachinis 1958, 39-49), primarily based on their explicitly contemporary setting. While this characterisation has now been rejected (Beaton 1994: 53, note 52), Veloudis (1996: 49) still underlines the realistic intentions of the authors.

Most scholars though have stressed the romantic character of the novel. In his prologue, Soutsos sets himself the task of introducing modern literary genres from Europe into Greece. For this reason, he chose to write an epistolary novel and explicitly refers to his examples: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sir Walter Scott, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ugo Foscolo and James Fenimore Cooper. Several studies have shown that these romantic models did indeed have a great influence on Soutsos and that there are numerous parallels and quotations in Soutsos’ novel, mainly from Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and Foscolo’s *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, but also from *Nouvelle Heloïse* by Rousseau and *René* by François René de Chateaubriand (Moullas 1992; Tonnet 1995; Samouil 1996a: 7-10; Samouil 1996b: 22-25; Veloudis 1996: 52-59). The problem with these readings is that they often depict *O Leandros* as a mere epigone.

Paradoxically, it was Tziovas who drew renewed attention to the Greek novels of the period 1830-50 by pointing out their structural affinities with the ancient adventure novels (Tziovas 1997). This observation proved a new starting point for research on these works. Recent publications have shown that Hellenist and Byzantine romance not only played a crucial role in the emergence of the first novels of the new Greek state but also influenced their plot structure (Beaton 2006; Borghart 2009) [2].

To date, these new insights have not led to a thorough analysis of *O Leandros* which encompasses all these different components. It is my conviction that the parallels with the adventure novels provide new and crucial information that helps to finally formulate a more encompassing analysis of the novel. Not only does it clarify the narrative structure and genre of the novel, but it also brings forward the important role of space in the novel.

Following these considerations, this paper proceeds as follows:

1. I will explore the semantic implications of the narrative structure of both the ancient adventure novel and the European romantic novel in *O Leandros*. I will point out similarities and differences with these two models and clarify how these are significant in the build-up and meaning of the novel.
2. I will foreground the important role of space in this novel, focusing on both the contemporary environment and the historical sites of Greece and show how their interaction is crucial to the interpretation of the novel.
3. Finally, I will discuss the relationship between these elements and their historical context, showing how the novel is an exponent of Hellenism in its reclaiming of Greece’s past, but also conveys an allegorical message that functions in the process of nation-building.

https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature_and_Literacy/Book%3A_The_Ideologies_of_Lived_Space_in_Literary_Te…

Updated: Sun, 14 Jun 2020 12:13:17 GMT
Powered by
Space and Time as Equals: Bakhtin’s Chronotope Theory

For adequate handling of this combination of narrative structure and the role of space, the chronotope theory of the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin is ideal. In the 1930s, he developed this concept to effectively describe the structure and the evolutions of the Western novel [3]. It focuses on the combination of two fundamental components of a narrative: passage of time and movement in space. This resulted in the concept of the ‘chronotope’, a specific organization of time and space that represents a specific world construction and is a defining feature of a prose genre. An important feature of this theory is the emancipation of the aspect of ‘space’. While before it was only considered as merely a background, in Bakhtin’s theory it becomes a crucial element in the genre of the novel, both formally and semantically.

Bakhtin defined the generic structure of the ancient romances as the ‘adventure chronotope’ which consists of three parts. The two outer parts have similar characteristics and depict a home-world where a love story develops relatively naturally: the first part is typically the encounter of the central couple, the second is at the end of the story when they are reunited and marry. These parts are defined as ‘biographical time-space’, because time evolves in a natural, logical way and the setting is familiar and realistic.

The middle section is defined as ‘adventure time-space’, in which the couple gets separated and experience several adventures that have no direct influence on the outcome of the love story or their psychology. Most of these adventures are standardized motifs of the genre, topoi such as pirates, kidnapping, storms, and persistent admirers. The organization of time and space in this section is devoid of any logical or chronological order but is ruled by chance. Adventures could easily be changed in order (reversibility in time) or take place at another location (interchangeability of space). The function of the events and places, therefore, is primarily to be found at a symbolic and ideological level. The setting does not have an impact on the overall stereotypical plot, but does have implications for the meaning of the individual novel. Space thus acquires a symbolic function within the message of the novel.

Recently Borghart and De Temmerman (2010) have further clarified this symbolic functioning of the adventure novel. Noticing the similarities in the symbolic meaning of spaces and events in adventure novels from different periods in Greek literary history, they argue that the revival of the ancient Greek romance in Byzantine and Modern Greek literature can be linked with a specific set of cultural-historical circumstances, i.e. an awareness of an (proto-)ethnic, or (proto-)national, identity and an unease among the intellectual elite about the political situation of their time. In this way, they conclude, the genre itself acquires ideological meaning and is ideally suited to express political unease and group identity.

If we now look at the narrative structure of the adventure novel and its characteristic organization of time and space, we can see that it is clearly traceable in O Leandros. Starting with the concept of time, a first observation is that the ‘biographical’ development of the love story indeed takes place in a limited period of time, with the first letter dated 13th December 1833 and the last one 4th April 1834. In addition, there are several temporal sub-layers, created by encounters, stories, and references: Classical Antiquity (mainly Athens in the fourth/fifth century BCE), the War of Independence and the end of Ottoman occupation, but also the broader contemporary social and political situation of Greece. All of this clearly goes beyond the specific ‘biographical’ episode. Although there are important references to Antiquity in the first biographical time-space section, the interplay between these different time levels is more characteristic of the adventure section (see below).
With regard to the aspect of space, the more neglected field of analysis in literary studies, the semantic implications are similar to those inherent for the organization of time but more complex. While the home location of the love story is 1833 Athens, already in the first section a crucial tension between contemporary settings and historical places is evident. Ancient sites induce both inspirations for and regrets of a glorious past lost. Functioning as lieux de mémoire, they help shape a view of Greek identity. The contemporary cities of Greece, on the other hand, are examples of decay, in addition to being places for the future as arenas of the current political battles. Although this opposition between old and new spaces is already present in the first section of the novel, it is in the adventure section that the political and ideological role of space is made explicit: important locations from the recent War of Independence are intertwined with ancient sites, resulting in a web of connotations which I will explore below. Indeed, we could say that while time remains rather stable and chronological throughout the novel, it is the different places that trigger the memories and emotions of the characters. Space in this way is symbolically more important than time. A special case must be made of nature: it functions in a typically romantic way, as a reflection of the moods of the protagonists, and in so doing it reinforces these connotations.

By considering all these elements together, my close reading of the novel O Leandros, will result in an allegorical interpretation. It is based on the assessment that the fate of the love couple Leandros and Koralia is linked with the identity of independent Greece and that the developments in their love indirectly express an explicit message about the country's political future. In this way, a coherent message is brought forward throughout the different components of the novel: the openly political passages, the narrative deep structure of the genre (in Bakhtinian terms), the symbolic meaning of time and especially space and finally the fate of the loving couple [4].

Prologue: the Resurrection of Greece

Already in the prologue Soutsos seems to indicate that his novel is not simply presenting a story, but sending an ideological message. For example, he tells the complete story in the prologue, eliminating any curiosity about the outcome. This point can hardly be understated, because it is a clear deviation from his models. All European epistolary novels of the time upheld the illusion that real letters were being presented and that the author was in fact merely an editor attempting to retrace what had happened. Panagiotis Soutsos seems to have been one of the first authors in Europe not to do so, and it is clear he had good reasons: he invites the reader not to look at the novel as a simple story, but to read between the lines.

More concretely, he hints at the allegorical link between the couple and their country through lexical association. The focus is on space. He explicitly writes about his motherland as a territory that recently had been reconquered:

Εἰς τὴν ἀναγεννήσεως Ἑλλάδα τολμώμενην ἡμεῖς πρῶτοι νὰ δόσαμεν εἰς τὸ κοινὸν τὸν Λέανδρον.

Translation: In the reborn Greece, we as the first dare to give to the public O Leandros. (my underlining)

A few lines further, when he describes how the couple meets again in Athens after many years, he uses the same crucial word:

Αἱ πρῶται ερωτικὲς εντοπώσεις, τὰς ὥσπερ ὁ χρόνος οὐ εὑρίσκῃ νὰ εξακλίφῃ, ἀναγεννήσεις ἑσπερώταται (…)

https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature_and_Literacy/Book%3A_The_Ideologies_of_Lived_Space_in_Literary_Te…
Updated: Sun, 14 Jun 2020 12:13:17 GMT
Powered by
Translation: Their first feelings of love, which time had not been able to extinguish, were **reborn** even stronger. (my underlining)

Referring in this way to the ideology of Hellenism and the idea of the rebirth of Antiquity, the narrator implies that time has not been able to destroy the vitality of Greece, just as it could not destroy the couple’s love. Finally, the prologue explicitly stresses the nationalist program of the novel in two ways. For one thing, it describes Leandros as a fervent nationalist who strives for liberty, progress, and unity while having his hopes set on the young King Otto. For another, Soutsos dedicates his novel to Greek youth and exhorts them to build the future of the country and to achieve – as he calls it – “the enlightenment of Greece”.

**τον φωτισμόν της Ελλάδος**

*An explicit reference to the Enlightenment ideals that greatly influenced the Phanariot intellectuals.*

Thus, in his prologue, Soutsos presents the key ideas for the interpretation of the novel. Now let us see how this works in detail in the story itself.

---

**Biographical Time-Space I: Love and Freedom**

In the first part of the novel, the first biographical time-space section, we encounter Leandros and Koralia and their impossible love. Even at this early stage, several aspects of their love and their personality are very similar to the characterisation of the protagonists in the ancient Greek romance. One of these is the impeccable ethos of virtue and pure, ethical behavior (Létoublon 1993: 119-123). Koralia, for instance, remains faithful to her husband throughout the story and her sense of virtue is often praised. Leandros for his part frequently scorns the ethics and hypocrisy of his own day and sets up the morals of the ancients as an example. In the prologue the author puts it as follows:

[Ο συγγραφέας] παραστά την μεν Κοραλίαν γυναίκα ενάρετον και οίκτον αξίζαν, τον δὲ Λεάνδρον σεβόμενον την ιερότητα του Υμναίου. (prologue, 76)

**Translation:** [The author] represents Koralia as a virtuous woman, worthy of our compassion, and Leandros as a man who respects the sanctity of marriage [5].

Secondly, both protagonists accept their situation as a whim of fate they cannot do anything about. Koralia writes in a letter:

**Translation:** Iron fate has separated us with eternal barriers. Nature made us to be happy together, but on earth no such heavenly destiny awaits us. Leandros! The fate of man comprises situations against which resistance is in vain…

The fact that the protagonists have no grip on the events in their lives and are at the mercy of fate and chance is also a
topos in the ancient and Byzantine romance [6].

As they continue to meet and talk, their impossible love is nonetheless represented as beautiful and positive, a feature that is underscored by specific literary means. On the one hand, their relationship is linked with antiquity. To this end, Soutsos inserts numerous quotations of classical authors in Leandros’ letters, the majority of which emphasize various aspects of the couple’s love. These include a fragment from Aristotle in which Virtue bestows love on the soul (Δ’ 81), and Leandros’ romantic obsession with Koralia is illustrated with the famous fragment 31 of Sappho describing the physical symptoms of being in love (IΣΤ’ 95) [7]. On the other hand, their love is illustrated with peaceful images of nature and the season of spring (H’ 85, IA’, IB’ 87-88, IE’ 93). The symbolic meaning of these images is foregrounded by the fact that they occur in letters written in winter [9].

At this point space functions as an important symbolic background: nature romantically reflects the mood of the love affair, while archaeological sites work as memories of ancient glory and construct the idea of Hellenism in the novel. The couple takes several walks through Athens, where they are surrounded by ancient monuments. During those walks they discuss life and hint at the ideological-political message of the novel. An example from one of Koralia’s letters:

Translation: Don’t you feel the melancholy that I feel walking in the midst of the old ruins and these new buildings? Doesn’t the comparison of the great past of Greece with its puny present make you sad?

This extract initiates a basic theme which will be developed further in the novel, i.e. that Greece is to follow the example set by its illustrious past, but is not succeeding in doing so at the present time. Such passages are signs of a social spleen, which in this first part is primarily elaborated as a typically romantic phenomenon and does not yet have many political undertones. Leandros especially is characterised as a romantic hero reacting against society:

Translation: To behave like an ant, unknowing, to gather underground in midsummer my food for the winter and to die at the end, leaving behind as heirs other little ants... No! That is not my destiny! In Greek society, where everything is small and without horizon, is it then almost a crime to have a soul that tends towards heavenly feelings? O love!

This mood of romantic Weltschmerz is characteristic mostly of the earlier letters of the novel. At the end of the first biographical time-space section, optimistic thoughts prevail and the love of the protagonists and independent Greece are increasingly tied together. In a very lyrical letter Leandros literally combines these two fundamental principles, Love and Freedom, by representing them as ancient goddesses in the midst of nature (IE’, 92- 94):
Translation: My Greece is the Elysium of the world, and my acres are the Elysium of Greece. In that beautiful valley, where the Graces and the Muses dance and sing, lives the sweet goddess of my hearth, almighty Freedom. Just a few years ago I saw this goddess in battle dress, descending from Thermopylae with her hands dripping with blood (…) [9]. She comes into my hut, which is adorned with books, in the company of the gold-clad goddess Love and they both sit down at my hearth, my household gods.

These two passages again reveal the symbolic function of space in the novel: while contemporary society is depressing, the idyllic nature of Greece exudes a feeling of hope for both the love couple and the country.

Adventure Time-space: Historical Spaces and a National Narrative

The situation of the central couple proves to be emotionally unbearable: Koralia falls seriously ill and persuades Leandros to go on a journey, hoping that once they lose sight of one another, their passion will die out. With his departure, we enter the second section, the adventure time-space. Leandros has only just left when he gets caught up in a storm, loses his way and is saved by a monk (ΛΓ’, 108). In the ancient romances, a storm (often with a shipwreck) is a standard way of initiating new adventures (Létoublon 1993, 175-180). From our perspective, this can be read as an intertextual trigger for the adventure time-space episode.

The tone of the first part of Leandros’ voyage is very pessimistic: he recalls with melancholy the happy hours he passed with Koralia, he expresses his aversion towards society and more and more often contemplates suicide. Gradually, his romantic Weltschmerz becomes more intense and acquires a political overtone. Early on in his trip Leandros meets a young man who had been a prisoner of war, became blind and now lives in difficult circumstances with his wife and two children. And yet he sees hope in the young King Otto, who had first been mentioned in the prologue and who here is introduced as the personification of Greek independence. Space becomes very tangible and political:

Translation: The strength of his hand can move the whole of the Greek race from the Bosporus to Crete, and his nod will be the signal for a complete revolution. (…) Greece is reborn.

In this way, Panagiotis Soutsos fuses his political ideals with the image of the new king. These are usually viewed by scholars in the context of broader ideological trends. There is the element of Hellenism: the belief that Modern Greece is the reincarnation of Ancient Hellas and the hope that all Greek areas will once again be reunited in one state [10]. The influence of the French Revolution and Enlightenment thought is apparent in a fervent desire for freedom and a constitutional state. Finally, Vagenas has successfully shown that views of society of Panagiotis Soutsos and his brother...
Alexandros were influenced by the utopian socialist philosophy of Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), who advocated the development of an egalitarian society with social progression based on merit [11].

But at the same time, the political stands that Soutsos takes in his novel are linked with the concrete political situation of his day. When Ioannis Kapodistrias became the first president of Greece in 1828, an intricate power play ensued between different influential groups that had had a hand in the battle for independence. Initially, the Soutsos brothers joined the Kapodistrias administration, but they soon left due to his notoriously authoritative style [12]. They subsequently joined the group known as the ‘French faction’, led by the politician Ioannis Kolletis, who stood for a liberal constitution and the rights of Greeks outside the borders of the current state (see Clogg 1994: 215). The government of the country remained in the hands of members of the Kapodistrian camp even after his death in 1831. Panagiotis Soutsos agitated strongly against the corruption and hypocrisy of the ministers of this ‘Russian faction’, who continued the political line Kapodistrias set out [13]. In the novel, this is expressed through fierce criticism directed at the political upper class. In the letters M’, MA’ and MB’ (115-118), the protagonist rages against the corruption of the politicians of his day, culminating in a satirical description of a meeting with one of them at his house, surrounded by fawning lackeys. Leandros’ political pessimism increases unrelentingly, up to the point where he believes that not even Otto can turn the situation around:

Translation: In vain does our King of Greece, a man of pure mind and heart, not only as king, but also as the first citizen of Greece, live without pomp and circumstance. In vain do the Regents, who are by no means abusive of men, hate intrigue and try to introduce rectitude. O politicians these days! What a joke!

All these negative outpourings reinforce the idea that the contemporary setting works as a static, sterile space in which nothing really changes, a typical feature of the adventure time-space. This negativism reaches a climax in a scene when Leandros attends a public execution (ΜΔ’, 119-20). It shocks him deeply and calls up powerful thoughts of suicide. Political disgust and romantic longing for death are explicitly combined. At this point, it is important to note that fake executions were another trope, typical of the genre of the ancient romance. But In O Leandros it is very real, which seems to be the first reversal of a typical motif, underlining the negative state of mind of the protagonist. In line with our allegorical reading, we can observe that both the love story and the state of Greece throughout the book share a similar fate: Leandros’ love for Koralia is impossible and only death seems a solution, while the prospects for the young country are equally dim.

At this stage, something happens that will prove a turning point in the novel. Although the reader knows from other letters that Koralia is still very ill and will perhaps die, Charilaos, the friend of Leandros, decides to write telling him that Koralia is well and that she expects to see him in a month’s time (NA’ 124). Leandros is, of course, overjoyed at this news and not only suddenly regains hope for his love, but also reverses his current political outlook and optimistically looks forward to the future of his country. The importance of this passage is foregrounded by a number of intertextual references.

In the ancient romances deceit of this kind is a standard plot device, but in exactly the opposite way: something happens which makes one of the protagonists mistakenly believe that the other is dead. This typical motif of apparent death
(Scheintod) usually triggers a new episode in the series of adventures (Létoublon 1993: 185-189). In eighteenth-century romantic novels no such events occur, so such an incident is a deliberate move on the part of the author. The fact that in Soutsos’ novel Leandros is misled into believing not that Koralia is dead, but rather that she is alive and well, can hardly be a coincidence and must, therefore, be analyzed as a conscious inversion of the model [14]. This episode marks an important turn in the adventure time-space section and introduces the most optimistic and symbolically most complex episode of the novel.

In a series of letters, Leandros evokes memories of famous freedom fighters and their victories during the War of Independence that are related to the places he visits and then links them to illustrious figures and events from antiquity. Argolis or Delphi, for instance, evokes both Greece’s glorious past as well as its implied bright future. In Hydra, an important base of resistance during the war, he meets famous sea captains [15] whose achievements are compared with those at the battle of Salamis, when the Greeks defeated the Persians in 480 BCE. The most inspiring place, however, is Nafplio. Traditionally, scholars have read the opposition between Nafplio, the first capital of the Greek kingdom, and Athens, which took over this role in 1832, as a simple negative vs. positive. To support this argument they usually cite letter ΛΘ’ (114-5), where hypocritical city life is opposed to the idyllic environment of Attica. This view, however, is too simplistic. Apart from the fact that Athens is also sometimes characterized in a negative way early on in the novel (Ζ’ 84, see also above), the symbolic significance of Nafplio is expanded thoroughly in two long letters (ΝΓ’ & ΝΔ’ 125-131). The city is not only a cross-road of Antiquity, Venetian heritage and Ottoman rule, from which youth is to arise with a new kingdom, but it is also the place where Kapodistrias was murdered [16] and where King Otto arrived in Greece. Nafplio thus exemplifies the function of space in this optimistic section: as a historical site it works as a lieu de mémoire, constructing a positive national identity, while at the same time as a contemporary site associated with the arrival of Otto, it is filled with hope for the future.

And at this point in the novel, with the memory of Otto’s arrival, the king re-emerges as a crucial factor in building the Greek future. This episode actually reflects the political situation at that time: many constitutionalists believed that Otto would be an enlightened ruler who would soon allow a constitution in the Western, liberal tradition [17]. In the novel the king is directly addressed and, in a passage that contains the germs of the Megali Idea are clearly noticeable (see note 10), urged to realize the future of Greece, in which:

Ω Βασιλέ, της Ελλάδος! (…) το να φθάσουμεν όμως εις την προοπτική
ημών δόξαν και δόμων δια της συνεσείας ας εν όλης της Ελληνικής
φύλης και δια της συνεσείας των φώτων, το να φρολήθωμεν απο αιώνια
ήκαντα μεγάλους μελλόντας, και πλήρη μεγάλου εφευρέσεων, τούτο είναι
ιδιόν που έργον. (ΝΔ’, σελ. 129)

Translation: O King of Greece! But for us to reach our ancestral fame and power again through the unification of the whole Greek race and through the rebirth of the enlightened spirits, and for us to benefit from an age that is pregnant with great expectations and full of great inventions, that is your task!

Thus Leandros repeats, in very similar words, the appeal to Greek youth made by the author at the end of the prologue. This reiteration strengthens the novel’s ideological message: this generation has obtained Greece’s liberty; the next will have to provide for its future by restoring its ancient glory and uniting all Greeks.

It is important to note that all the elements that positively characterised the love between Leandros and Koralia in the first biographical time-space now return to characterise the future of Greece. Again nature charms: spring arrives and the birds sing (ΝΑ’ 128, Ε’ & ΕΑ’ 144-45). And once again quotations from classical authors are used to intensify the
sense of Greek pride. The freedom fighters are indirectly compared with the Seven against Thebes and the Turks with the defeated Persians by means of excerpts from the plays of Aeschylus (ΝΣΤ’ 133, NH’ 140). The recently obtained peace is praised through a poem by Bacchylides (ΝΔ’ 129) [18]. This literary elaboration, parallel to that in the first biographical time-space, underlines the connection between the love story and the Greek future.

After his travels, just before returning to Athens, Leandros meets an old school comrade who now lives in a hut in the hills as a philosopher [19]. This meeting seems to have the purpose of concluding the adventure time-space, as the friend summarises the political message of the novel: the Greeks must renounce the current decay and take the ethos of their ancestors as an example:

Επέλεγεν τοὺς πολιτικοὺς ὀνόματα τῆς Ἑλλάδος, τοὺς Ἐπαμεινώνδος, καὶ τὸν Ἀριστείδην, καὶ τὸν Φοκίδιον, ὥστε μεγαλοφικοὶ καὶ σύντροφοι τῆς

Translation: He praised the ancient men of Greece, Epaminondas, Aristides, and Phocion because they were men of great achievements and companions of philosophy and sobriety. And he reproved some of the Greek politicians in power today because they have compromised their dignity through miserable quarrels, lavish dinners, and a fancy wardrobe.

He also presents with a small vision of a future society that is in keeping with the socialist philosophy of Saint-Simon on which Soutsos partly based his own ideology (see note 11):

Translation: The future society (...) alive and resounding thanks to philosophers, poets, orators, architects, painters, and sculptors.

Biographical Time-space II: the Political Meaning of a Tragic End

When Leandros ends his journey, the second biographical time-space section is broached. All at once the optimism is swept away by the news of Koralia’s dire condition. The author creates a powerful contrast in two consecutive letters by inverting the behavior and perceptions of Leandros’ friend on the one hand and of Koralia on the other. This is made explicit through several echoes in content and word use. The friend enjoys nature, finds inspiration in literature and “recounts the happiness of his own life”). Koralia for her part is “bereft of any kind of happiness” and “The smell of the roses drove her almost mad with grief”.

The contrast is even apparent at a lexical level. The friend says:

Translation: I get out of bed in the morning, and then wander around in the woods with Plutarch.
Of Koralia it is said that:

\[ \text{Εγείρεται από την κλίνη, επαναπίπτει, ανοίγει βιβλίον δια να διασκεδάση, και πάλιν το κλείει.} \]

Translation: She gets out of bed, but falls back again; she opens a book to distract herself and closes it again.

Thus they both try to do the same thing, but the result and their state of mind are very different.

What follows, is a rather quick resolution of the story, in which Leandros hopelessly withdraws within himself and slips back into the romantic pessimistic thoughts he had at the beginning of the novel. After Koralia dies, he kills himself. These events constitute a drastic inversion of the expected plot of the ancient romances, which always conclude with a happy ending and the marriage of the couple. Some scholars have suggested that this is due to the influence of European Romanticism, and it is indeed clear that parallels, especially with Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, are very close [20]. Be that as it may, it does not elucidate the meaning of this pessimist ending within the framework of the adventure chronotope and its ideological implications.

There are, however, other remarkable changes in this section that help clarify the reasons for this ending. The crucial opposition between the contemporary setting and the sites from the past as *lieux de memoires* is no longer valid. Indeed, space seems strikingly empty and elements with a nationalistic connotation are completely absent. There are no longer any references to Antiquity, to the War of Independence or the future of the Greek state. In view of the weight these issues have carried in previous parts of the novel, it is highly unlikely that this sudden silence is without significance. In a similarly striking way, nature as space also plays a subdued role and is no longer an idyllic, romantic safe haven. At one point it is even depicted as dangerous:

\[ \text{Την νύχτα μανιάδος εξήλθαν από τον κοιτάσμα μου εις τα πέρας δέσης, ανέβην εις τα όρη, κατέβην εις τας κουλώδες. Από τας πέρις καλύβας υποθέτοντες με} \]
\[ \text{οι γεωργοί ληστήτιν νυκτερίνων, εκένωσαν κατ’ εμόδι τα σπήλαι των. Υπήγαν υπό το περάθρον της, το πεν κατέχόν η ησυχία, η ησυχία η πρόθεσμος του θανάτου.} \]

Translation: At night I manically got out of my bed and went into the surrounding woods, climbed the mountains and descended into the valleys. The farmers from the huts nearby thought I was a night thief and emptied their guns in my direction. I went up to her window. Silence enveloped everything; silence the herald of death.

Here, the symbolic function of nature is again highlighted: the idyllic setting no longer brings comfort, but instead reflects the extreme state of the loving couple and foretells the death of the protagonist. This negative end is all the more conspicuous in view of the above-discussed structural build-up. In both the first biographical time-space and in the adventure time-space we observed an evolution from a pessimistic to an optimistic mood. In both sections, the pessimistic mood was dominated by the dark, melancholy atmosphere of European Romanticism and characterized by typical romantic features, such as a restless nature and a profound *Weltschmerz*. The optimistic part of both sections was typified by idyllic nature scenes and the use of references to Antiquity through historical places and quotations from ancient authors. In the biographical time-space the focus of this evolution was on the love affair; in the adventure time-space it was explicitly political. But in both sections the fate of the love affair and that of political Greece were clearly intertwined: whenever there is hope for the lovers, there are also great expectations for Greece. In moments of love’s despair, the hopes for Greece’s future grow small.
The second biographical time-space significantly results in the death of both the protagonists and in the symbolic absence of any kind of future for the nation. In other words, there is only a pessimistic mood, with no corresponding evolution to optimism. Considering the close link between the couple and the nation, the death of Leandros and Koralia and the impossibility of their love must have implications for the fate of the nation.

The most logical conclusion, therefore, is that the death of the couple should be read as an allegory, as a warning that strengthens the appeal for progress that Soutsos launched in the prologue. It expresses the belief that the policies of the current ruling faction are harmful to the true Greek identity and that sweeping changes need to be made in order to revive the glory of the Greeks and reunite them. In other words, the death of the goddess of Love also means the death of the goddess of Freedom.

**Conclusion**

While Tziovas claims that Panagiotis Soutsos failed to achieve synthesis in his novel, my analysis has shown the opposite. *O Leandros* follows the typical tripartite structure of the adventure novel, as described by Bakhtin’s chronotope theory. The parallels with and deviations from both the ancient adventure novel and the European romantic novel play a semantically significant role in the basic plot structure. At the same time, Soutsos infuses the historical and contemporary spaces in his novel with symbolic meaning and creates an elaborate web of connotations. This makes space a key element in understanding the ideological content of the work. Soutsos reinforces this point with a surprising move in the final part of his book, where he suddenly leaves space bare and meaningless, void of explicit nationalist and political overtones. This sudden absence has a great symbolical bearing on the message of the novel.

Within this carefully designed structure Soutsos creates an allegorical story in which he expresses his ideological ambitions for the future of his country. On the one hand, he claims Greek history for the newly founded state in order to further establish the grounds for a national identity. At the same time, he sends a particular political message for his contemporary fellow citizens.

Thus, the question of whether *O Leandros* is a sad, romantic story or a political narrative is inappropriate. It is both. With his novel, Soutsos clearly intended to contribute to the nationalist discourse of the nation as a rebirth of Antiquity (Hellenism). He aimed at further introducing European culture and Enlightenment thinking into Greece so that the country could progress. He wanted to import the genre of the romantic novel into Greek literature, which in itself is an act of introducing European culture. And with his allegorical narrative, he also expressed a clear political message, a warning for the future of Greece. All these ambitions may turn *O Leandros* into a complicated novel to assess, but it cannot be deemed a literary failure. It is, on the contrary, a formidable intellectual effort to synthesize the disparate challenges of his time into a meaningful whole: the legacy of the past, the need to build a national identity, and the latest philosophies and innovations of his day. And all this for the nation’s sake.

**Bibliography**


Soutsos, P. (1996a) O Leandros, Athens, Idryma Kosta kai Elenis Ourani


Notes

1. The Phanariots were a group of Greek merchant families in the Ottoman Empire who acquired great wealth and influence during the 17th century and who occupied numerous high posts in the Ottoman administration from the 18th century onwards. They also played an important role in the launch of the Greek War of Independence as well as in the political organisation of the new Greek state in its early years.

2. Tonnet (1994) had connected The Orfan of Chios of Pitsipios (1839) and the ancient romance, a year earlier but on a purely intertextual level without reference to the structural similarities of the genre on a more theoretical basis.

3. Bakhtin expounded his theories in two essays, Bakhtin (1982) and (1986). For clear summaries of his theories and a
discussion of their reception, see Beaton (2000, 3-7) and Borghart (2009, 2-4).

4. Borghart (2009) further developed this allegorical framework and applied it to the novel The Exile of 1831 by Panagiotis’ brother Alexandros.

5. Quotations are taken and referenced from Soutsos (1996a). As there is another modern edition of this novel (i.e. Soutsos 1996b), both the Greek number of the letter and the page is cited. All translations as well as highlighting are mine. A French translation with extensive explanatory notes is also available (Soutsos 2002).

6. There are several other places in O Leandros where fate is presented as the main factor in human life: KΓ’ 100, ΛΒ’ 108, ΞΓ’ 147 & ΞΣ’ 150.

7. Other quotations include two Idylles of Theocritus (Z’ 84 & K’ 98), Medea of Euripides (I’ 87) and a poem for the Anacreonta (IΑ’ 87).

8. Tziovas, among others, fails to see the true symbolic value of these nature scenes and criticises the novel for “lacking realism” (Tziovas 2009: 219).

9. The goddess in arms is a clear reference to the recent War of Independence.

10. As in 1830 large Greek populations still lived outside the new Greek state, the idea to reunite all the ethnic Greek-inhabited areas in one nation became a dominant element in the foreign and domestic politics of Greece and remained so for over a century. In 1844 Prime Minister Kolettis launched the ‘Megali Idea’, or “Great Idea”, an irredentist concept which ideologically implied the revival of the Byzantine Empire. This goal received a decisive blow in 1922 with the defeat by the Turks under Ataturk.

11. In his much cited article, Vagenas (1997) analyses both the social views in the novel as well as the symbolic meaning of the reference to the mythical King Danaos in Argolis (ΝΓ’ 126).


13. He did this not least in the newspaper Ilios, which he published and wrote together with his brother from June until December 1833, the same period in which he wrote O Leandros. The aim of the paper was to spread the recent achievements of Western European culture and to advocate the reforms necessary in Greek politics (see Fournaraki 1986: ι-κβ’). The importance of these activities for Soutsos’ novel is clear because at least four episodes in the wanderings of the protagonist are based (sometimes almost literally) on anonymous travel stories which Panagiotis wrote for the paper (Veloudis 1996: 37-38, note 37).

14. For this notion of inversions of motifs, I am very much indebted to the MA thesis of Brecht Van den Bossche, in which he analyzes the relations between Heliodorus’ Aithiopika and Alexandros Soutsos’ The Exile of 1831 and identifies several inversions in the latter novel (Van den Bossche 2008: 87-102).

15. Both the Soutsos brothers were actively involved in the War of Independence and were often on the island of Hydra. These meetings and descriptions of men such as Kountouriotis and Karaïskakis (ΝΕ’ & ΝΣ’ 131-135) in O Leandros quite likely contain many autobiographical elements (cf. Lefas 1991: 43-55). It is mainly these passages, relating events
from the revolution, which led scholars to regard this novel as historical. Also noteworthy is that the visit to Hydra is a more pessimistic passage in this second section of the adventure time-space, as it describes the impoverished and dispirited situation of these once heroic figures. Their situation was also a contentious political issue at the time: many felt that those who actually fought the Turks had been overlooked when Greece became a free country and a government had to be organised. The ‘French faction’ was particularly passionate about this issue.

16. In these letters, the murder and the figure of Kapodistrias is treated quite equivocally. On the one hand he is referred to as a tyrant and his murderers compared to Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who rid Athens of a tyrant in the fourth century BCE. On the other hand, his death is called tragic. In the paper Ilios and in Alexandros’ novel much harsher opinions are offered, such as praise for the murder. See note 12 and 13.

17. They would, however, be proven wrong, as Otto continuously resisted the implementation of a constitution. It took a military coup in 1843 to make him accept one (Clogg 1994: 51-53). It is in this passage of the novel that Otto is linked to Danaos and Saint-Simonianism. Cf. note 11.

18. Other quotations include a passage from the Deipnosophistae attributed to Callistratus (NΓ’ 127) and a verse by Bion of Smyrna (NH’ 139).

19. Though not made clear, this feature may also show the influence of ancient romance, where the heroes are often supported by a good friend or an older wise man (cf. Létoublon 1993: 93-105).

20. Indeed Tonnet (1995) and Moullas (1992) have pointed out that in the final section of the novel the parallels with Goethe are most abundant: there is the same use of diary fragments and personal notes to replace the letters, and some passages can be traced as almost literal quotations.