

A Cold, White Light: The Defamiliarizing Power of Death in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*

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Abstract

JESSICA GINOCCHIO: A Cold, White Light: The Defamiliarizing Power of Death in Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*
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In this thesis, I examine the theme of death in *War and Peace* by Lev Tolstoy. Death in *War and Peace* causes changes in characters' perception of their own lives, spurring them to live "better." Tolstoy is widely understood to embed moral lessons in his novels, and, even in his early work, Tolstoy presents an ideal of the right way to live one's life. I posit several components of this Tolstoyan ideal from *War and Peace* and demonstrate that death leads characters toward this "right way" through an analysis of the role of death in the transformations of four major characters—Nikolai, Marya, Andrei, and Pierre.

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Chapter I

Introduction

American philosopher William James identified Tolstoy as a “sick soul,” a designation he based on Tolstoy’s obsession with death (James, 120-149). This preoccupation with death ripples through Tolstoy’s body of work, evident from even the titles of such stories as “The Death of Ivan Ilych” (Смерть Ивана Ильича) and “Three Deaths” (Три смерти), stories that feature death as their primary focus. In *Anna Karenina* only a single chapter is given a title: “Death” (Смерть). Death may not always be eponymous, but it is almost always thematically important, from Tolstoy’s earliest publication, the novel *Childhood* (Детство) in 1852, to such late works as “Master and Man” (Хозяин и работник) in 1895. The most famous of Tolstoy’s works, *War and Peace* (*Война и мир*), is particularly laden with death, and the ubiquity of death is not limited to the context of war. Approximately one third of major characters in the book die or are killed, and most of these are not in active military service. From Andrei’s lengthy death from a shell in battle, to his wife’s sudden death in childbirth, to the executions of Russian prisoners of war by the French, to the death of Count Bezukhov in his bed surrounded by family and caretakers, *War and Peace* depicts a striking variety of types of death. Even those who remain alive by the book’s epilogue encounter death in some way, whether witnessing the death of a loved one, the murder of a stranger, or wrestling abstractly with

the concept of mortality.

One could claim that the frequency of death in *War and Peace* is a fact of its verisimilar depiction of 19th-century life. After all, the young Tolstoy writing *War and Peace* in the 1860's had already experienced the death of both parents and two brothers. Beyond its typical, unpleasant presence in everyone's reality, death played an especially important role in Tolstoy's own life and the development of his philosophy and religious beliefs. As he describes in his lengthy 1879 essay *A Confession (Исповедь)*, existential angst caused by the horrifying combination of mortality and a lack of meaning in life spurred a spiritual and philosophical journey that led Tolstoy to eventually adopt his own version of Christianity. His personal philosophy was based on the idea that there is a "right way" to live, modeled on the teachings of Christ. In both his fiction and his nonfiction, Tolstoy explores and propagates his ideas on the Right Way.¹ The important components of the Right Way will be discussed in the Chapter II of this thesis.

The effect of death on Tolstoy's characters is that it inspires them to see their lives and world in a new light and to become better oriented towards the Right Way. The connection is best illustrated by an episode with Prince Andrei on the eve of the Battle of Borodino, when he lies in a shed and considers the looming massacre, aware of the real possibility of his death:

Все, что прежде мучило и занимало его, вдруг осветилось
холодным белым светом, без теней, без перспективы, без различия
очертаний. Вся жизнь представилась ему волшебным фонарем, в
который он долго смотрел сквозь стекло и при искусственном

¹ I will capitalize "Right Way" to signify that I am referring specifically to Tolstoy's conception of the right way to live and be in the world.

освещении. Теперь он увидал вдруг, без стекла, при ярком дневном свете, эти дурно намалеванные картины. «Да, да, вот они те волновавшие и восхищавшие и мучившие меня ложные образы, — говорил он себе, перебирая в своем воображении главные картины своего волшебного фонаря жизни, глядя теперь на них при этом холодном белом свете дня — ясной мысли о смерти. (III, 235-236).²

This quotation illustrates how death serves as a catalyst for the examination of one's life. Life's often-forgotten finiteness provides a new perspective and clarity when it does happen to come to the forefront of one's mind. This process has affinities with Victor Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarization (остранение), so I will use this term with the understanding that my usage is somewhat different from Shklovsky's.³ I will use defamiliarization to describe a psychological phenomenon that happens to characters, rather than an effect that art has on the reader. This light, the real presence of death, has

² "...All that used to torment and preoccupy him was suddenly lit up by a cold, white light, without shadows, without perspective, without clear-cut outlines. The whole of life presented itself to him as a magic lantern, into which he had long been looking through a glass and in artificial light. Now he suddenly saw these badly daubed pictures without a glass, in bright daylight. 'Yes, yes, there they are, those false images that excited and delighted and tormented me,' he said to himself, turning over in his imagination the main pictures of his magic lantern of life, looking at them now in that cold, white daylight—the clear notion of death" (*War and Peace*, Trans. Pevear & Volokhonsky, 769). All English translations of *War and Peace* quotations are Pevear and Volokhonsky's.

³ Defamiliarization, first codified in formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 article "Art as Technique" (Искусство как прием), is a well-documented technique of Tolstoy's writing. Defamiliarization is an attempt to get the reader to see an object as if with fresh eyes, by describing it in an unfamiliar way:

Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. 'If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then lives are as if they have never been.'³ And art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult... (Shklovsky, 12).

One famous example that Shklovsky gives is pulled from *War and Peace* itself: Natasha's visit to the opera. In fact, most of the examples in the original Shklovsky article are drawn from Tolstoy. The effect of defamiliarization in literature is to cause the reader to reflect more deeply on some familiar object, to examine something anew that has long been virtually ignored in daily life. However, defamiliarization can be considered to be a broader idea than an artistic device, or even artistic purpose. It can be a phenomenon of life, during which the perception of reality is suddenly altered. It is this phenomenon that Andrei experiences before Borodino. The "light" that is cast over Prince Andrei's life can be called a defamiliarizing one.

made his life appear strange. The effect of such this new perspective is self-reflection and self-examination. Scrutiny of one's life, behavior, and beliefs, the type to which Tolstoy subjected himself, is vital in finding the Right Way.

Andrei's experience is the most concise summary of the role of death throughout *War and Peace*. This function mirrors the effect that encounters with death and mortality had in Tolstoy's own life. Death brings characters a new, better perspective on their lives and the Right Way, leading them towards a more moral life, better relationships with each other, and improved understanding of their relationship with the universe and the divine.

Chapter II

Tolstoy and Death

Before embarking on a discussion of death's function in Tolstoy's fiction, it is useful to understand Tolstoy's personal relationship with death and what the concept of death even meant to him, especially at the time of writing *War and Peace*. Though in this thesis I will describe various "benefits" of death, it is important to recognize that Tolstoy did not necessarily consciously view death as something "positive." There is much ambivalence about death in his writing, the vastness of which is well represented in *War and Peace*. It is true that at times death is treated like a natural phenomenon (or even a gift from God) that should be accepted or perhaps even welcomed. At other times death is depicted as something terrible and monstrous, worthy of fear and dread.

One fundamental aspect of death is its strangeness and mystery. In *War and Peace*, there are two scenes in which Pierre is present at a death and does not understand what he is seeing. At Borodino, Pierre witnesses the death of an officer near whom he has spent much of the battle: "Вдруг что-то случилось; офицерик ахнул и, свернувшись, сел на землю, как на лету подстреленная птица. Все сделалось странно, неясно и пасмурно в глазах Пьера" (III,272).⁵ This description of death is somewhat unusual. First of all, it may not be immediately obvious to the reader that the officer is dead. Tolstoy does not ever explicitly

⁵ "Suddenly something happened; the little officer said "Ah" and, curling up, sat on the ground like a bird shot down in flight. Everything became strange, vague, and bleak in Pierre's eyes." (796)

state that the officer has been killed. Instead, the reader is given particular physical details describing exactly what happens to the officer's body. It is as if the person observing the officer's death is unaware of what has transpired, unaware that there is even such a concept of soldiers being killed in battle. Several paragraphs later, as Pierre is fleeing the redoubt, he avoids "то место, на котором сидел молоденький офицерик" (III, 273).⁶ Pierre seems to still not fully understand what has happened. This unorthodox description of death forces the reader to pause momentarily on what exactly is happening. The effect of this death on Pierre is also something of an anomaly. Pierre's emotional reaction is not one of horror, sadness, or disgust, but instead one of confusion and estrangement from reality. We are shown how witnessing this death has made everything "strange in Pierre's eyes." This description and reaction encourages the reader to think more seriously about what exactly death is, and it emphasizes that little can be known about what happens when someone dies beyond the externally visible, physical details.

The second defamiliarized depiction of death is the execution of Russian prisoners of war, which Pierre witnesses. "Он видел только, как почему-то вдруг опустился на веревках фабричный, как показалась кровь в двух местах и как самые веревки, от тяжести повисшего тела, распустились и фабричный, неестественно опустив голову и подвернув ногу, сел" (IV,503).⁷ Here the everyday image of sitting is used yet again to describe death, and again, only physical description is given of the event.

The enigmatic quality of death is also seen after Andrei dies. Marya and Natasha

⁶ "the place where the young little officer sat." (796)

⁷ "He only saw how the factory worker suddenly slumped down in the ropes for some reason, how blood appeared in two places, and how the ropes became loose under the weight of the sagging body, and the factory worker sat down, lowering his head and tucking his legs under unnaturally." (967)

are aware of something great having been accomplished. “Наташа и княжна Марья плакали тоже теперь, но они плакали не от своего личного горя; они плакали от благоговейного умиления, охватившего их души перед сознанием простого и торжественного таинства смерти, совершившегося перед ними” (IV,529).⁸ It is significant and somewhat contrary to expectation that the cause of Marya and Natasha’s tears is not grief, but of sensing that death is a great mystery. Though this is not an example of defamiliarization, there is some overlap in function between this scene and the defamiliarized deaths witnessed by Pierre. They all highlight that death is something that living beings cannot understand.

Tolstoy did not base these experiences of death on purely his imagination. As I have already mentioned, four of his immediate family members had died by the time he began to write *War and Peace*. One of them, his brother Nikolai, died in Tolstoy’s arms in 1860, only three years before he began writing *War and Peace*. Tolstoy notably did not write in his diary for an entire month after his brother’s death. One month later he writes about how at the funeral he got the idea to write a “materialist gospel.” This strongly suggests a relation between this death and the development of Tolstoy’s philosophy. He states, “Nikolenka’s death is the strongest impression on my life” (*Tolstoy’s Diaries*, 158). With the benefit of further hindsight, he mentions the event in *A Confession*:

“Умный, добрый, серьёзный человек, он заболел молодым, страдал более года и мучительно умер, не понимая, зачем он жил, и ещё менее понимая, зачем он умирает. Никакие теории ничего не могли ответить

⁸ “Natasha and Princess Marya also wept now, but they did not weep from their own personal grief; they wept from a reverent emotion that came over their souls before the awareness of the simple and solemn mystery of death that had been accomplished before them.” (986)

на эти вопросы ни мне, ни ему во время его медленного и мучительного умирания.” (*Ispoved', III*)⁹

In *A Confession*, he groups Nikolai's death with another traumatic event that happened during a trip that Tolstoy had made to Europe a few years earlier: his attendance at an execution. This occurred in Paris in March of 1857 and made him feel ill, depressed, prevented him from sleeping, and compelled him to leave Paris almost immediately (*Diaries*, 133.) Later, he would write in *A Confession* that witnessing this execution revealed to him that his belief in the progress and general good judgment of mankind was wrong, if mankind found such horrendous and sickening things necessary¹⁰. Instead of depending on traditional notions of morality and meaning, he would have to depend only on himself as judge of what is right and wrong (*A Confession*, 11). At the time of writing *A Confession*, Tolstoy saw these two events—his brother's death and the execution—as significant moments when the first manifestations of his existential and spiritual crisis temporarily appeared. Later, the doubt that interrupted Tolstoy's life at these two points would consume him more persistently. These two deaths were a beginning for Tolstoy, when he began to understand that he needed a new understanding of the world and a new philosophy.

It is also natural to see connections between these events and scenes in Tolstoy's fiction. There is a parallel between Tolstoy's interpretation of the Paris execution, and Pierre's reaction to the execution of the prisoners of war. The grotesque depiction of the

⁹ “An intelligent and serious-minded man, he was still young when he fell ill, he suffered for more than a year and died in agony, without having understood why he had lived or why he was dying. There was no theory that could have answered these questions to my satisfaction or his during the period of his drawn-out and agonizing process of dying.” (*A Confession*, 11)

¹⁰ Tolstoy also writes in detail about this event in a letter written 24-25 March/5-6 April 1857 from Paris to V. P. Botkin. (*Tolstoy's Letters*, 95)

execution of Vereshchagin by an angry mob evokes the type of disgust that Tolstoy felt that day in Paris.¹¹ Tolstoy's aversion toward the audience at the execution, who seemingly casually accept the necessity of such horrific executions, is translated into the direct complicity of the audience in the death of the innocent Vereshchagin.¹²

Death is a puzzle for Tolstoy, a great mystery, but it is also a formidable force. In *War and Peace*, this can be seen in Andrei's deathbed dream, in which he feels he has to lock the door to keep death out and is seized by fear. Here death is referred to by the neuter pronoun "оно," even though the feminine pronoun would be grammatically appropriate for the feminine noun "смерть." The use of this neuter pronoun stresses the referent with which it actually agrees, even though that referent occurs after the first usage of оно: "Что-то не человеческое" (IV,527).¹³ This emphasis on the neuter "что-то" rather than the feminine "смерть," makes what is behind the door seem more alien and mysterious.¹⁴ However, the death of Andrei's dream does have animate qualities: it can open a door. It is also stronger than Andrei, who in the dream is not injured but healthy. At the end of this dream, after death overpowers Andrei and enters the room, Andrei wakes up, causing him to believe that "смерть—пробуждение" (IV, 528).¹⁵ In the course of only several minutes, Andrei's own understanding of death has been transformed from one of dread and

¹¹ It is also interesting to note that Tolstoy portrays the violent aspects of the French Revolution as absurd and incomprehensible in Part II of the Epilogue, and Pierre, during the nascent stages of his own spiritual crisis, makes frequent reference to the events of the French Revolution, particularly executions.

¹² Though no direct fictional manifestation can be found in *War and Peace*, the death of Tolstoy's brothers was clearly influential on the death of Nikolai Levin in *Anna Karenina*.

¹³ "Something inhuman" (985)

¹⁴ Interestingly, Tolstoy uses the feminine pronoun in "Death of Ivan Ilych," which Kathleen Parthe discusses in her essay "The Metamorphosis of Death in Tolstoy."

¹⁵ "Death is an awakening" (985)

resistance to one of understanding and acceptance. He has ceased seeing death as some sort of bogeyman threatening him to a natural process undeserving of fear. This new understanding of death is similar to one seen elsewhere: the idea of death as something acceptable and even attractive.

The death-as-monster idea is a memorable component from *A Confession*:

Давно уже рассказана восточная басня про путника, застигнутого в степи разъярённым зверем. Спасаясь от зверя, путник вскакивает в безводный колодезь, но на дне колодца видит дракона, разинувшего пасть, чтобы пожрать его. И несчастный, не смея вылезть, чтобы не погибнуть от разъярённого зверя, не смея и спрыгнуть на дно колодца, чтобы не быть пожранным драконом, ухватывается за ветви растущего в расщелинах колодца дикого куста и держится на нём. Руки его ослабевают, и он чувствует, что скоро должен будет отдаться гибели, с обеих сторон ждущей его... (*Ispoved'*, IV)¹⁶

Here death is represented both by the wild beast and the dragon, and the inevitability of human mortality rendered by the traveler's hopeless suspension between the monsters. If we are to believe Tolstoy, this fable was not his invention, but he does use the image of the traveler hanging over the gaping maw of death throughout his essay repeatedly to illustrate the human condition of mortality. The traveler in the well is not saved, nor does the dragon transform into something less fierce, as Andrei's "something inhuman" turned into the

¹⁶“An old eastern fable tells of a traveler taken unawares on a plain by a ferocious wild beast. To escape the beast the traveler jumps down a dried-up well, but at the bottom of the well he sees a dragon with open jaws waiting to devour him. And the poor chap, not daring to climb out and be killed by the ferocious beast, and not daring to drop down to the bottom of the well and be devoured by the dragon, grabs hold of a branch on a wild bush growing in a crevice of the well, and hangs to it. His arms are weakening, and he knows that he will soon have to face the destruction that awaits him on both sides...” (*A Confession*, 19)

much more pleasant idea of “awakening.”

In contrast to the monstrous, frightful appearance of death seen in the fable about the well and Andrei’s dream, there is the views of death espoused by the Mason Iosef Bazdeev and Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*, in which death appears to be something almost desirable and positive. Pierre’s two sages are representative of a stage that Tolstoy went through during his philosophical development. After beginning to question the meaning of life, Tolstoy turned to the learned world for answers. He studied both science and philosophy, hoping to assuage the illness he felt in his soul. The beliefs of Bazdeev and Karataev exemplify the answers that Tolstoy found when reading philosophy, embodied for Tolstoy in four names: Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon, and the Buddha. Bazdeev is representative of the conclusion Tolstoy drew from philosophy that life is a vain burden that “must be got rid of” (*A Confession*, 35). In the Masons’ seventh tenet is the idea put forward by these philosophers in Tolstoy’s *Confession*: life is full of ills and sufferings, and so therefore death, a release from such suffering, is good and should be welcomed (*A Confession*, 31-35). Pierre marvels that Bazdeev still loves death when Bazdeev falls seriously ill, even if he does not feel morally prepared for it (II, 618). Death as some sort of reward can also be seen in Karataev’s story that he tells the other prisoners about a man framed for murder. While in jail, this innocent convict prays to God for death. When the convict finally dies, despite having just been exonerated, Karataev characterizes this death thus: “А его уж Бог простил — помер” (IV, 633).¹⁷ It is clear that Tolstoy lent some credence to this attitude toward death at some points in his life, but it is unclear exactly when and how much.

¹⁷ “But God had already forgiven him—he was dead.” (1063)

Tolstoy invites his reader to contemplate the nature of death and the existence of an afterlife several times in the novel. He does this by showing characters of various walks of life thinking about and discussing the topic. For instance, after his injury at Austerlitz, Prince Andrei envies the certainty he believes his sister Marya has about death: “хорошо бы это было, ежели бы все было так ясно и просто, как оно кажется княжне Марье. Как хорошо бы было знать, где искать помощи в этой жизни и чего ждать после нее, там, за гробом!” (I, 418).¹⁸ Comments such as these underscore the fact that an afterlife is not a foregone conclusion in the world of *War and Peace*.¹⁹

Early in the book, a group of artilleryists sits in a tent before the Battle of Austerlitz, discussing the existence of a soul and an afterlife. Tushin, a positive character, argues “я говорю, что коли бы возможно было знать, что будет после смерти, тогда бы и смерти из нас никто не боялся. Так-то, голубчик... А все боишься... Боишься неизвестности, вот чего. Как там ни говори, что душа на небо пойдет. . . ведь это мы знаем, что неба нет, а сфера одна ” (I, 258).²⁰

Even youth who are not at war are susceptible to such philosophizing. There is a short discussion between the Rostov youth about the essence of the soul and eternity:

Соня: Это метампсихоза. Египтяне верили, что наши души были в животных и опять пойдут в животных.

¹⁸ “It would be good if everything was as clear and simple as it seems to Princess Marya. How good it would be to know where to look for help in this life and what to expect after it, there, beyond the grave!...” (293)

¹⁹ Whether Tolstoy ever believed in an afterlife is difficult to say. Though one might surmise from his fiction that he does believe in life after death, according to R. F. Christian, “[Tolstoy] had no strong faith in a life after death, although his views on the subject were not rigid.” (“Introduction,” *New Essays on Tolstoy*, 10)

²⁰ “I say that if it were possible to know what there will be after death, none of us would be afraid of death. That’s so, dear heart...But you’re still afraid...Afraid of the unknown, that’s what. However much we say that the soul will go to heaven...we know that there is no heaven, but only atmosphere.” (178)

Наташа: Нет, знаешь, я не верю этому, чтобы мы были в животных. А я знаю наверное, что мы были ангелами там где-то и здесь были, и от этого все помним. . .

Николай: Ежели бы мы были ангелами, так за что же мы попали ниже? Нет, это не может быть!

Наташа: Не ниже, кто тебе сказал, что ниже? . . . Почему я знаю, чем я была прежде, ведь душа бессмертна. . . стало быть, ежели я буду жить всегда, так я и прежде жила, целую вечность жила.

Диммлер: Да, но трудно нам представить вечность.

Наташа: Отчего же трудно представить вечность? Нынче будет, завтра будет, всегда будет, и вчера было и третьего дня было.....²¹(II, 732)²²

The effect of these scenes is twofold. First, they emphasize that death and mortality looms over everyone without exception. It is a very real fact of life, immediate and worthy of attention by all, including children. Even brave soldiers, such as Tushin, grapple with the fear of their own deaths. Second, these conversations help elevate death's status in the book from a fact of life to a philosophical problem. This philosophical problem is one of the main currents running through all of Tolstoy's body of work, from his fiction, to his published essays, to his personal diaries.

²¹ I've converted the format of this quote to include only dialogue.

²² Sonya: 'That's metempsychosis. The Egyptians believed that our souls were in animals and will go back into animals.'

Natasha: 'No, you know, I don't believe we were animals. I know for certain that we were angels somewhere, and visited here, and so we remember everything....'

Nikolai: 'If we were angels once, why did we end up lower? No, that can't be!'

Natasha: 'Not lower, who told you it's lower?...Now do I know what I used to be? The soul is immortal...which means, if I will live forever, then I also lived before, lived for the whole eternity.'

Dimmler: 'Yes, but it's hard for us to imagine eternity.'

Natasha: 'Why is it hard to imagine eternity? There will be today, there will be tomorrow, there will be always, and there was yesterday, and there was the day before...'(522)

Chapter III

The Right Way

The notion of an ideally moral life, the Right Way, is an important theme of *War and Peace*. Though Tolstoy's writing became more and more clearly moralistic through time, the idea that there is a Right Way to live, a moral truth that all should aspire to, exists from the very beginning. What exactly that Right Way entailed underwent some evolution (such as his view of romantic relationships between *War and Peace* and *Kreutzer Sonata*), though much of it (e.g. compassion, connection to land) remained consistent throughout Tolstoy's whole body of work. We will focus on what the Right Way meant for Tolstoy when he was writing *War and Peace*. Evidence for these values can be found in *War and Peace* itself, though they are further elucidated in Tolstoy's other works. Though Tolstoy often appears to be straightforward and explicit about his values in his nonfiction and his diaries, he has a tendency to contradict himself. Therefore, there is no place where Tolstoy, especially early Tolstoy, outlines his entire moral code. Despite such an absence, it is not difficult to distill the components of this Right Way from his fiction and writings. Some of the most vital parts of this Right Way are:

- 1) Love of life, especially mundane, everyday experiences, and submission to its forces.
- 2) Searching for and desiring "ultimate truth" and "ultimate

purpose.” One of the important ultimate truths that Tolstoy has in mind is belief in the divine.

- 3) Adherence to traditional family roles and living a “simple” life in the country, in which one’s main concerns are about farming and raising a family.
- 4) Unity, peace, and reconciliation of all people in the world.

Tolstoy’s supreme valuation of the love of life is expressed most clearly in a letter written in 1865, which perhaps also sheds some light on the purpose of *War and Peace* and instructs us on how it should best be read:

The aim of an artist is not to solve a problem irrefutably, but to make people love life in all its countless inexhaustible manifestations. If I were to be told that I could write a novel whereby I might irrefutably establish what seemed to me the correct point of view on all social problems, I would not even devote two hours’ work to such a novel; but if I were to be told that what I should write would be read in 20 years’ time by those who are now children, and that they would laugh and cry over it and love life, I would devote all my own life and all my energies to it. (*Tolstoy’s Letters*, 197)

The character in *War and Peace* who best embodies the value of love of life and submission to the forces of it is Natasha Rostova. When she is first introduced in the novel, she is running into a room. This initial presentation of Natasha ties her with motion, energy, and life force unlike anything possessed by the other characters. It is her ecstatic exuberance as she admires the beautiful night sky that causes Prince Andrei to be enchanted with her. By the end of the novel, Natasha has become a giver of life, a devoted

mother, who cares only about her family and their well-being. Her devotion is so complete that she has ceased looking after her appearance and insists on nursing her own children (contrary to the practice of other noble women).

Part of the love of life is the idea of acceptance and submission to the ebbs, flows, and forces of life, whether these forces are great or small. Natasha also embodies this aspect quite well. Natasha is living correctly by being completely open to life and to the flow and change of her emotions. Also epitomizing this idea is the figure of Field Marshal Kutuzov. Kutuzov has the “ability to submit instinctively to the impersonal forces over which he has no control” (Kaufman, 79).²³ Kutuzov’s wisdom and success as a commander is rooted in this ability, in contrast to Andrei’s belief that everything can be controlled and predicted by the human intellect. On a larger scale, Tolstoy illustrates in the text and explains in his expository parts on history, that it is wrong of Napoleon to believe that he has control over battles and events. History is not controlled by individual men, but shaped by unseen forces.²⁴

The second component of the Right Way, the search for ultimate truth and meaning, is embodied best in *War and Peace* by Prince Andrei and Pierre. This search in itself is meaningful and good. R. F. Christian asserts the significance of “seekers” like Prince Andrei and Pierre for Tolstoy: “it is not *necessary* to be a seeker in order to earn Tolstoy’s commendation; but all seekers are commended by him” (Christian, 151). These characters in this way are psychologically similar to Tolstoy himself; they share this

²³ Kaufman here emphasizes that Kutuzov’s wisdom is related to his battle experience: “With his scarred face and blind eye, Kutuzov’s very being testifies to his brushes with death in battle.” (79).

²⁴ For a good study on this topic, see Gary Saul Morson’s essay “*War and Peace*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*.

property of “seeking” with him, though they do not necessarily share many biographical details with him.²⁵ Whether they settle on the precise “right” answer or not, death is one of the forces of propulsion that drive the seekers forward in their search and help them close in on the Right Way, and the search in itself is something inherently good.

In Tolstoy, there are many levels of important truths. One of the most obvious types of truth is metaphysical truth. Despite what one would be led to believe by Tolstoy’s own account of the evolution of his spiritual beliefs in *A Confession*, even as early as *War and Peace*, belief in some sort of divine power is central to Tolstoy’s ideas about what this ultimate meaning and truth is. In *War and Peace*, both Andrei and Pierre are led to belief about a higher power and order of the universe. Natasha finally “heals” and becomes normal again after the affair with Anatole after visiting a church and taking communion.²⁶

One integral part of this truth-seeking is the understanding that one has to think about ethics. In Tolstoy’s diaries and essays like *A Confession*, it is clear that Tolstoy did not like the idea of just accepting socially prescribed moral laws. He himself searched for what he believed to be true and right; he was against thoughtlessly adopting convention. This can be seen when Tolstoy reflects on the activities of his youth:

Без ужаса, омерзения и боли сердечной не могу вспомнить об этих годах.

Я убивал людей на войне, вызывал на дуэли, чтоб убить, проигрывал в карты, проедал труды мужиков, казнил их, блудил, обманывал.

Ложь, воровство, любодения всех родов, пьянство, насилие,

²⁵ Konstantin Levin from *Anna Karenina* shares both psychological and biographical similarities with Tolstoy.

²⁶ Konstantin Levin’s revelation at the end of *Anna Karenina*, which also was written before Tolstoy’s traditionally recognized conversion, is an acceptance of God.

убийство... Не было преступления, которого бы я не совершал, и за всё это меня хвалили, считали и считают мои сверстники сравнительно нравственным человеком. (Isproved', II)²⁷

In hindsight, it has become clear to Tolstoy that the activities he engaged in as a young man were immoral, despite how commonplace it was for young men like him to act in this way and how society accepted this sort of behavior as acceptable for a moral person. He has started to rely on other sources for moral guidance besides social norms. Tolstoy's moral positions continued to evolve throughout his life, indicating the significance and difficulty of the seeker's path. The weightiness and hardship of this search accounts for the evolution of Tolstoy's ethical ideals over time. In *War and Peace*, Pierre is the character who most embodies the ideal of the search for the truth and the Right Way itself.

Worldly truths are also very important to Tolstoy. For example, the theory of historical forces put forward in the last parts of *War and Peace* by Tolstoy is also a type of truth. These explanations for historical development, in addition to reasons for human behavior and the deeper reality beyond social conventions found in *War and Peace*, are another type of truth. Characters' discovery of these types of truths—such as Nikolai Rostov's revelation about war and Pierre's discovery about the French executioners' lack of agency—will be explicated later in this thesis.

Readers of Tolstoy will likely associate the third component, the virtue of a simple, rural family life to Tolstoy's subsequent work after *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, in the character of Konstantin Levin. It is true that this value is much more clearly emphasized in

²⁷ "I can never recall those years without a feeling of horror, revulsion and heartache. I killed men on the battlefield, challenged men to be killed in duels, gambled money away, stuffed myself on peasant labour, punished the peasants, reveled in fornication and deception. Lying, stealing, every kind of promiscuity, drunkenness, violence, murder...there was no crime that I did not commit, and because of all that I have been praised, I have been considered—I still am considered—a comparatively moral person." (7)

post-*War and Peace* Tolstoy, but in *War and Peace*'s epilogue, four major characters have seemingly found their "happy endings" living in the country and managing their family and estates. This value is an important part of the discoveries of Nikolai Rostov and Pierre. Tolstoy's personal devotion to his family's estate, Yasnaya Polyana, participation in the labor of the harvest, and fondness for hunting demonstrate the weight of this ideal in his own life.

The fourth component of the Right Way for Tolstoy was the reconciliation of and unity among people of the world. He espoused the idea of universal love and helping others. This value was important in Tolstoy's whole life, from the days of his early childhood, when his older brother Nikolai told the five-year-old Lev that "the secret to human happiness was written on a little green stick which was buried in the woods... When the secret was revealed, people would not only be happy, but they would also cease to be ill, and would no longer be angry with each other. At that point, everybody would become 'ant brothers'" (Bartlett, 52). The Tolstoy brothers would often pretend to be these "ant brothers," probably a child's interpretation of the Moravian brethren and their values of unity, liberty, and love. (In Russian, моравский and муравей are phonetically similar.) This game from their childhood, in which they imagined a utopia of brotherly love, was so important to Tolstoy that he asked to be buried in the spot where this "green stick" was supposedly buried at Yasnaya Polyana (Bartlett, 52). Tolstoy's later charitable acts and spiritual writings demonstrate his continued, or even increased, devotion to these ideals.

This theme is important in *War and Peace*, and it is central to epiphanies experienced by Andrei, Pierre, and Natasha.²⁸ A striking demonstration occurs in the scene

²⁸ The epiphanies of Andrei and Pierre will be discussed later in this thesis.

with Natasha in church after her near-ruinous drama with Anatole Kuragin. With the words of the prayer “Миром,--все вместе, без различия сословий, без вражды, а соединенные братской любовью--будем молиться,”²⁹ Natasha begins an internal process of forgiving and loving her enemies, including Anatole (III, 90). Richard Gustafson posits that this idea of “victory over war and enmity, division and discord, the triumph of peace” is the central idea of *War and Peace* and that Tolstoy may have intended the “мир” of the title to imply “total unity” rather than only the absence of violence (Gustafson, 40). Additionally, if the value of love of life is embodied primarily in Natasha, Christ-like selflessness and love for others is represented by Princess Marya. Princess Marya has little physical beauty, except her luminous eyes, which she is completely unaware of, because she “никогда не видела хорошего выражения своих глаз, того выражения, которое они принимали в те минуты, когда она не думала о себе” (I, 140)³⁰

With this understanding of these components of the Right Way, we can now look at the episodes where death leads characters to it.

²⁹ “As one world—all together, without distinction of rank, without enmity, but united in brotherly love—let us pray.” (661)

³⁰ [she] had never seen the good expression of those eyes, the expression they had in moments when she was not thinking of herself.” (91)

Chapter IV

War and Peace

While I will approach my examination of *War and Peace* by character, it may be useful to begin with death's first appearance in the book. Already in Part One of *War and Peace*, death makes its presence known and establishes its function as a trigger for examination and analysis. Before war has even begun, Count Bezukhov, the father of the illegitimate Pierre, dies. This death is juxtaposed with the high society parties that are also featured in Part One. Tolstoy is deeply critical of this superficial society, plagued by misguided, idle hypocrites. The natural yet unpleasant phenomenon of Count Bezukhov's death starkly contrasts to society, which unnaturally strives to be pleasant and proper. As R. F. Christian writes, "The contrast between the natural and the conventional is an important theme of *War and Peace*" (Christian, 102). The gathering of society people and doctors in the Count's house is the epitome of social posturing. The doctors show off their expertise, the visitors wonder aloud about the inheritance, and one of the princesses can switch seemingly effortlessly between displays of grief and small-talk in French about the weather. The selfish, money-grubbing, and manipulative behavior of Prince Vassily, Princess Catiche, and Anna Mikhailovna as they fight over the Count's will seems especially vile when there is a sick and suffering man in the next room. When death actually occurs, some of these negative characters experience a change and behave more

genuinely and compassionately, even if only temporarily. Catiche sobs and abandons her hold on a disputed document. Prince Vassily has a visceral reaction, collapsing in despair on a couch:

“Ах, мой друг!” сказал он, взяв Пьера за локоть, и в голосе его была искренность и слабость, которых Пьер никогда прежде не замечал в нем. “Сколько мы грешим, сколько мы обманываем, и все для чего? Мне шестой десяток, мой друг. . . ведь мне. . . Все кончится смертью, все. Смерть ужасна.” Он заплакал. (I, 133)³¹

It is significant that Vassily does not use any French in these words, contrary to his usual habit. In *War and Peace*, speaking French is often a sign of the falsity and unnaturalness of high society. Vassily has this temporary moment of reflection on the value of his life, inspired by witnessing a real death. Importantly, Vassily’s attention is immediately drawn to the moral aspects of life, and he seems to be aware that he has not been living the Right Way. In contrast, Anna Mikhailovna does not experience any change. She, the paragon of false feelings and self-centeredness, continues speaking only in French, telling Pierre how he should feel about his illegitimate father’s death, how he should act, and later completely inventing stories about how the incident occurred. That all of this occurs around a man suffering on his deathbed, shows in sharp relief how skewed the values and cares of high society are. Compared to the pain of a dying man and the mortality of every person (which Vassily has realized in horror), money is a petty concern.

The contrast between the behavior of Petersburg socialites and Count Bezukhov’s death is a microcosm for what is happening throughout the whole novel. The juxtaposition

³¹ “‘Ah, my friend!’ he said, taking Pierre by the elbow; and in his voice there was sincerity and weakness, such as Pierre had never noticed in him before. ‘We sin so much, we deceive so much, and all for what? I’m over fifty, my friend...I’ll...Everything ends in death, everything. Death is terrible.’ He wept.”

of war and high society shows the ridiculousness of the Petersburg circles and their aloof discussions about geopolitics, military strategy, and their cursory attempts to help the war effort. Bagration's appearance at an event at the English Club in Moscow strikingly illustrates this. "Он шел, не зная, куда девать руки, застенчиво и неловко, по паркету приемной: ему привычнее и легче было ходить под пулями по вспаханному полю. . ." (II, 440).³² Bagration is an unambiguously positive character, and there is a correlation between characters feeling uncomfortable in society and their likeability (Pierre being the central example). The imminence of death and danger, such as during a battle, tends to dissolve the false constructs of society, allowing characters to act more freely and naturally. The narrator states this as almost a truism in Part IV: "...Нигде человек не бывает свободнее, как во время сражения, где дело идет о жизни и смерти" (IV, 548).³³ In the comfortable world of Petersburg high society, where death is rarely encountered, social conventions are most powerful.

Nikolai Rostov

Just because death and danger trigger more natural behavior doesn't mean that war is somehow natural. War is a social construction as well, and it is also shown in a critical light. This is epitomized in the experience of Nikolai Rostov. Early in the novel, Nikolai is devoted to the tsar, the military, and believes in the cause of war. He has volunteered for military service, because he feels a "призвание к военной службе" (I, 73).³⁴ Nikolai is

³² "He walked over the parquet of the reception hall bashfully and awkwardly, not knowing what to do with his hands; it was easier and more usual for him to walk under bullets over a plowed field..." (309)

³³ "Nowhere is a man more free than in a battle, where it is a question of life and death." (1000)

³⁴ "calling for military service." (41)

shown early in the novel rapturously admiring the tsar and willing to sacrifice his life for him. Much later, after the tsar and Napoleon have entered into an alliance, Nikolai's value system of loyalty, patriotism and valor begins to unravel:

В душе поднимались страшные сомненья. То ему вспоминался Денисов с своими изменившимся выражением, со своею покорностью и весь госпиталь с этими оторванными руками и ногами, с этой грязью и болезнями. Ему так живо казалось, что он теперь чувствует этот больничный запах мертвого тела, что он оглядывался, чтобы понять, откуда мог происходить этот запах. То ему вспоминался этот самодовольный Бонапарте с своей белой ручкой, который был теперь император, которого любит и уважает император Александр. Для чего же оторванные руки, ноги, убитые люди? [...] Он заставлял себя на таких странных мыслях, что пугался их. (II, 588)³⁵

The correctness of his former judgments of the military chain of command and the tsar himself are covered with the shadow of doubt. This quote establishes a connection between the death and carnage witnessed at the military hospital and the actions of his once-beloved Alexander I and his military commanders. This connection is so strong that Nikolai has trouble discerning what is memory and what is present reality. His memory of the horrible stench of death is so strong and immediate to him. Nikolai feels that there is something wrong and unjust happening around him, represented by such images as the corpse in the

³⁵ "Terrible doubts arose in his soul. Now he remembered Denisov with his changed expression, his submission, and the whole hospital with those torn-off arms and legs, that filth and disease. He imagined so vividly now that hospital stench of dead flesh that he looked around to see where the stench could be coming from. Then he remembered that self-satisfied Bonaparte with his white little hand, who was now an emperor, whom the emperor Alexander liked and respected. Why, then, those torn-off arms and legs, those dead people? [...] He caught himself in such strange thoughts that it made him frightened." (416)

military hospital that has not been removed from the ward with the other patients.

These doubts do not compel Nikolai to leave the military, but they resurface when he has a close encounter with a French soldier in battle and sees his “невражеское лицо, а самое простое, комнатное лицо” (III, 80).³⁶ Nikolai does not know what to do with him. Vexed by his hesitation and the fact that he is later rewarded for his performance in the battle, Nikolai thinks, “Он думал, что я убью его. За что ж мне убивать его? У меня рука дрогнула. А мне дали Георгиевский крест. Ничего, ничего не понимаю!” (III, 81).³⁷ His conception of war is transformed by seeing his enemy as a scared young man, a human, just like Nikolai himself. That this French soldier was afraid to die, just as Nikolai is afraid to die, makes the whole idea of war seem absurd. Rather than seeing himself as a soldier dutifully serving his country for a common good, he is forced to see the act he almost committed as murder, the killing of another human being without any reason at all.

After this incident, Nikolai is not shown in combat again. The rest of Nikolai’s story is devoted to his meeting Princess Marya and negotiating the idea of his marriage to her with his earlier promise to Sonya. Nikolai is not present at the Battle of Borodino. We are told that Nikolai received the news of his assignment in Voronezh, far from the war zone, “с величайшим удовольствием” (IV, 472).³⁸ As he travels through the countryside, that he has acquired a new perspective on the world is made explicit:

Только тот, кто испытал это, то есть пробыл несколько месяцев не
переставая в атмосфере военной, боевой жизни, может понять то

³⁶ “not an enemy’s face, but a most simple, homelike face.” (653)

³⁷ “He thought I’d kill him. Why should I kill him? My hand faltered. And they gave me the St. George Cross. I understand nothing, nothing!” (655)

³⁸ “with the greatest satisfaction” (944)

наслаждение, которое испытывал Николай, когда он выбрался из того района, до которого достигали войска своими фуражировками, подвозами провианта, гошпиталями; когда он, без солдат, фур, грязных следов присутствия лагеря, увидел деревни с мужиками и бабами, помещичьи дома, поля с пасущимся скотом, станционные дома с заснувшими зрителями. Он почувствовал такую радость, как будто в первый раз все это видел. (IV, 472)³⁹

While there is no specific mention of death in this quotation, the reference to the hospital is a reminder of the horrific human suffering and death that Nikolai has seen during his military career. Additionally, frequent encounters with death and dying people are a fact of the “военной, боевой жизни” that Nikolai is so happy to leave. It is as if Nikolai is seeing the Russian countryside for the first time, demonstrating the how his experiences have changed his perspective on his life. Here Nikolai has come to appreciate everyday occurrences, the stuff of daily life. This reorientation away from military glory towards an appreciation of the Russian countryside and simple elements of life is a definite step toward the Right Way. It is shortly after this scene that Nikolai starts considering the idea of marriage to Princess Marya. From this point onward, Nikolai’s goals will be completely different than they were before. His efforts will be concentrated on his potential marriage and eventually the running of his estate and family. This sort of rural family life is the Tolstoyan ideal in *War and Peace*.

³⁹ “Only someone who has experienced it—that is, who has spent several months on end in an atmosphere of active duty—can understand the pleasure Nikolai experienced when he got out of the area over which the troops spread their foraging operations, supply trains, and hospitals; when, instead of soldiers, carts, the dirty traces of a camp’s presence, he saw villages with peasant men and women, landowners’ houses, fields with grazing cattle, posting stations with sleeping stationmasters. He felt such joy as if he were seeing it all for the first time.” (945)

Marya Bolkonskaya

The effect of death on Princess Marya is one primarily of interpersonal reconciliation. Death plays an instrumental part in repairing the relationship between Princess Marya Bolkonskaya and her father, which for most of the book is cold. The old prince emotionally abuses his daughter (and the rest of the household), and Marya lives in submissive fear of him. Though their main reconciliation occurs over the old prince's deathbed, there is a previous instance where the idea of death pushes at least one of them toward tenderness. Breaking their usual tense, cold rapport, Marya tries to embrace her horrified father at the arrival of (untrue) news of Prince Andrei's death at Austerlitz. The old Prince "крикнул [...] пронзительно, как будто желая прогнать княжну этим криком" (II, 457).⁴⁰ The princess has an altogether different reaction:

...Лицо ее изменилось и что-то просияло в ее лучистых прекрасных глазах. Как будто радость, высшая радость, независимая от печалей и радостей этого мира, разлилась сверх той сильной печали, которая была в ней. Она забыла весь страх к отцу, подошла к нему, взяла его за руку, потянула к себе и обняла за сухую, жилистую шею. (II, 457-458)⁴¹

Here, Marya experiences a moment of changed perception because of Andrei's supposed death. She is drawn into some higher relations to her father, above their usual conflicts, by

⁴⁰ "...shrilly, as if wanting to drive the princess away with this cry..." (321)

⁴¹ "Her face changed and something lit up in her luminous, beautiful eyes. It was as if joy, the supreme joy, independent of the sorrows and joys of this world, poured over the deep sorrow that was in her. She forgot all her fear of her father, went up to him, took him by the hand, pulled him to her, and embraced his dry, sinewy neck." (322)

the presumed death of a mutual loved one. Sorrow is not shown to be her primary emotion here, and she is paying more attention to the negative state of her father than her own personal grief. However, this feeling is noticeably one-sided. Because his cry did not push his daughter away, the old prince pulls his face away from hers and sends her to tell Liza the news. Even within Marya, this high feeling does not last.

Their relationship sharply deteriorates as the war approaches and senility develops in the old prince. Knowing that death is not far off, the old prince accuses his daughter of making it difficult for him to die in peace. Even Marya, strained by his worsening cruelty, realizes that she is looking for signs of the approaching end of her father's illness and hoping to find them. "С отвращением к себе самой" she realizes that she "[хочет] его смерти" (III, 163).⁴²

However, when death becomes imminent, there is a shift in their relationship. On the eve of the old prince's death, Marya hears her father calling for her in the night. She is afraid and does not go to him. When she is called to him in the morning, "Левая рука сжала ее руку так, что видно было, что он уже давно ждал ее" (III, 165).⁴³ This is a contrast from his earlier recoiling from physical contact. The old prince struggles to speak, but manages to tell her that he has been thinking of her, tries to call her a tender name, and strokes her hair. "Княжна Марья не могла разобрать; но наверное, по выражению его взгляда, сказано было нежное, ласкающее слово, которого он никогда не говорил" (165).⁴⁴ That this is the first time in Marya's life that he has expressed tenderness towards

⁴² "But what else could there be? What did I want? I want his death," she cried out with loathing for herself." (715)

⁴³ "His left hand pressed hers so hard that it was clear he had long been waiting for her." (715)

⁴⁴ "Princess Marya could not make it out, but certainly, by the expression of his gaze, it was a tender, caressing word such as he had never spoken before." (716)

her is significant. It is possible even to infer that such tenderness was not even conferred on her as a child. In return, Marya understands “ничего, кроме страстной любви к отцу, любви, которой, ей казалось, она не знала до этой минуты.” (III,166).⁴⁵ Now, when the final moments come, not only does Marya not wish for his death, but denies the possibility of it, exclaiming, “Это не правда!” and “Нет, он не умер, это не может быть!” (III, 167).⁴⁶ Only in the final hours of the prince’s life is their relationship repaired, and mutual love appears.

Prince Bolkonsky’s death has the additional effect of reconciling Princess Marya and Mlle Bourienne, whose relationship had become tense during the old prince’s worsening illness. When Mlle Bourienne enters Marya’s room, kisses her, and weeps, Marya remembers “Все прежние столкновения с нею, ревность к ней” but realizes “как несправедливы были те упреки, которые княжна Марья в душе своей делала ей” and “ей стало жалко ее” (III, 174).⁴⁷ In Bourienne’s statement that “все бывшие недоразумения должны уничтожиться перед великим горем” (III, 174),⁴⁸ the role of death in their reconciliation is made explicit. There are no more conflicts between them during the rest of the book.

Andrei’s impending death not only creates feelings of reconciliation and love in Andrei, but it also reconciles the two women in his life. When Marya and Natasha first met, neither of them liked each other. Natasha found Marya to be cruel, and Marya did not

⁴⁵ “...[nothing] except for her passionate love for her father, a love which, it seemed to her, she had not known till that moment.” (717)

⁴⁶ “It’s not true!” and “No, he hasn’t died, it can’t be!” (718).

⁴⁷ “...all her former clashes with her, her jealousy of her”; “how unfair were the reproaches she had made to her in her heart.”; “she felt sorry for her.” (723)

⁴⁸ “all the old misunderstandings should be turned to naught before their great grief.” (723)

approve of Natasha for her brother. When Princess Marya arrives to see her injured brother:

Княжна оглянулась и увидела почти вбегающую Наташу, ту Наташу, которая в то давнишнее свидание в Москве так не понравилась ей.

Но не успела княжна взглянуть на лицо этой Наташи, как она поняла, что это был ее искренний товарищ по горю, и потому ее друг. Она бросилась ей навстречу и, обняв ее, заплакала на ее плече. (IV, 517)⁴⁹

Natasha, too, forgets her former negative opinion of Princess Marya, and relates to her all of her opinions of Andrei's condition. Marya even has the ability to understand what Natasha has trouble expressing in words: that Andrei has "softened" and that because of this he will probably die. For the remainder of the book, there is a mutual understanding between Marya and Natasha, the depth and meaningfulness of which is highlighted by their ability to wordlessly communicate with each other.

Andrei Bolkonsky

Just as Nikolai is forced to reevaluate warfare and his role in it after directly confronting death, Prince Andrei does the same after his serious wound at the Battle of Austerlitz. Despite that Napoleon is the enemy, Andrei in the beginning of the novel

⁴⁹ "The princess looked and saw Natasha almost running in, that Natasha whom she had so disliked when they had met in Moscow long ago. But the princess had barely glanced at the face of this Natasha when she understood that this was a sincere companion in grief, and therefore her friend. She rushed to meet her, and, embracing her, burst into tears on her shoulder." (977)

admires Napoleon and other great commanders. He, like Nikolai Rostov, longs for military glory. It is hard to imagine a more valorous and glorious image than Andrei taking up the standard and charging toward the French alone, yelling “Hurrah” and prompting the entire battalion to stop retreating and join him. One might imagine that this heroic act would cause Andrei to feel fulfilled in his purpose. However, something hits Andrei in the head, and “немного это больно было, а главное, неприятно, потому что боль эта развлекала его и мешала ему видеть то, на что он смотрел” (I, 400)⁵⁰. As he falls, at first Andrei tries to remain aware of the situation around him. That his wound stops him from seeing the battle any longer is a representation of the shift in perspective that is about to happen inside of him. His attention is drawn to something else:

Над ним ничего уже, кроме неба,--высокого неба, не ясного, но все-таки неизмеримо высокого, с тихо ползущими по нем серыми облаками. «Как тихо, спокойно и торжественно, совсем не так, как я бежал,— подумал князь Андрей, --не так, как мы бегали, кричали и дрались. . . Как же я не видал прежде этого высокого неба? И как я счастлив, что узнал его наконец. Да! Все пустое, все обман, кроме этого бесконечного неба. Ничего, ничего нет, кроме его. Но и того даже нет, ничего нет, кроме тишины, успокоения. И слава Богу!. . . (I, 401)⁵¹

⁵⁰ “It was slightly painful and above all unpleasant, because the pain distracted him and kept him from seeing what he had been looking at.” (280)

⁵¹ “There was nothing over him now except the sky—the lofty sky, not clear, but still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds slowly creeping across it. ‘How quiet, clam, and solemn, not at all like when I was running,’ thought Prince Andrei, ‘not like when we were running, shouting, and fighting; . . .How is it I haven’t seen this lofty sky before? And how happy I am that I’ve finally come to know it. Yes! Everything is empty, everything is a deception, except this infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing except that. But there is not even that, there is nothing except silence, tranquility. And thank God...!’” (281)

This moment of near-death signifies the first change in Andrei's view of life. Though Andrei has, of course, seen the sky almost every day of his life, his physical weakness, his closeness to death, defamiliarizes this well-known part of nature. There are many references to the Right Way in this scene. Andrei much prefers the peace and quiet of the sky to violence and strife. The reference to a "lie" is also significant. Andrei has realized that the conventional values that he has inherited from his father and others are worthless and false. He must find new values, like a true seeker. Additionally, the reference to God at the end of the passage seems cursory, a mere expression, but it does carry some weight. Even if Andrei has not become a believer in God at this moment, this word "God" serves as a marker of budding spiritual concerns.

When the narrator returns to Andrei, Napoleon is approaching. Thinking Andrei dead, Napoleon says, "*Voilà une belle mort*" (I, 415).⁵² Since Andrei previously admired Napoleon, one would expect a reaction of admiration, respect, or at least attention, but after his near-death experience, something unexpected happens:

Но он слышал эти слова, как бы он слышал жужжание мухи. Он не только не интересовался ими, но он и не заметил, а тотчас же забыл их. . . Он знал, что это был Наполеон—его герой, но в эту минуту Наполеон казался ему столь маленьким, ничтожным человеком в сравнении с тем, что происходило теперь между его душой и этим выскоким, бесконечным небом с бегущими по нем облаками" (I, 415)⁵³

⁵² "There's a fine death." (291)

⁵³ "But he heard these words as if he was hearing the buzzing of a fly. He not only was not interested, he did not even notice, and at once forgot them. He had a burning in his head; he felt that he was losing blood, and he saw above him that distant, lofty, and eternal sky. He knew that it was Napoleon—his hero—but at the

Not caring about Napoleon's words, he only wishes that he could be brought back to life, "которая казалась ему столь прекрасною, потому что он так иначе понимал ее теперь. (I, 415).⁵⁴ Later, when gathered with other Russian prisoners, Andrei encounters Napoleon again, and although he is now physically able to speak, refuses because "Ему так ничтожны казались в эту минуту все интересы, занимавшие Наполеона, так мелочен казался ему сам герой его, с этим мелким тщеславием и радостью победы, в сравнении с тем высоким, справедливым и добрым небом..." (I, 417).⁵⁵ These "petty" and "insignificant" things that he is now noticing in Napoleon were values that he formerly held and has now renounced after his brush with death. The obvious value that has arisen in their place is a love of life. However, the choice to refer to the sky as "kindly" is significant. It hints at that compassionate factor of the Right Way. Compassion and empathy are qualities that Napoleon completely lacks.

Andrei is unique among Tolstoy's characters in that he gets two "deaths." He makes some steps toward the Right Way after the first injury, but some of them (such as his love of life) are not permanent. He is wounded again during the Battle of Borodino, and this time the wound eventually is fatal. During the battle, facing the shell that will inflict his mortal wound, Andrei discovers yet again a passion for life and the world:

"Неужели это смерть?—думал князь Андрей, совершенно новым, завистливым взглядом глядя на траву, на полынь и на струйку дыма,

moment, Napoleon seemed to him such a small, insignificant man compared with what was now happening between his soul and this lofty, infinite sky with clouds racing across it." (291)

⁵⁴ "which seemed so beautiful to him, because he now understood it so differently." (291)

⁵⁵ "To him at that moment all the interests that occupied Napoleon seemed insignificant, his hero himself seemed so petty to him, with his petty vanity and joy in victory, compared with that lofty, just and kindly sky..." (293)

вьющуюся от вертящегося черного мячика. Я не могу, я не хочу умереть, я люблю жизнь, люблю эту траву, землю, воздух. . .” (III, 292).⁵⁶

In this scene there are two very important objects: the grass and the shell. The shell has not exploded yet, Andrei has not yet been injured, but he has already identified the shell as “death.” The grass, on the other hand, is associated with life. It is significant that the symbol of life for Andrei in this moment is something so common as grass. In the defamiliarizing light of death, this most ordinary of plants is imbued with the entire meaning of life. Equally commonplace elements—air and soil—become metonymies for life itself. The life that Andrei realizes he loves is not any sort of extraordinary or special life; it is a life composed of simple things like grass, air, and earth. These extremely familiar things are suddenly meaningful for Andrei in a whole new way.

The second effect of Andrei’s wound is reconciliation with Anatole Kuragin at the field hospital. In a strange twist of fate, the reason that Anatole and Andrei are even in the military is because of their rivalry. Anatole joined to escape Andrei, who was coming to St. Petersburg to confront him. Andrei rejoined the military to hunt Anatole down. His reaction when he finally sees Anatole in the military hospital, weeping over his amputated leg, is much different than the one that could have been expected if they had met months earlier as Andrei had intended:

Князь Андрей вспомнил все, и восторженная жалость и любовь к этому человеку наполнили его счастливое сердце.

Князь Андрей не мог удерживаться более и заплакал нежными,

⁵⁶ “‘Can this be death,’ thought Prince Andrei, gazing with completely new, envious eyes at the grass, the wormwood, and at the little stream of smoke curling up from the spinning black ball. ‘I can’t. I don’t want to die, I love life, I love this grass, the earth the air....’ (811).

любовными слезами над людьми, над собой и над их и своими заблуждениями.

“Сострадание, любовь к братьям, к любящим, любовь к ненавидящим нас, любовь к врагам - да, та любовь, которую проповедовал Бог на земле, которой меня учила княжна Марья и которой я не понимал; вот отчего мне жалко было жизни, вот оно то, что еще оставалось мне, ежели бы я был жив. Но теперь уже поздно. Я знаю это!” (III, 297-298)⁵⁷

The two men do not speak to each other. If there is any mutual communication at all, it occurs in their simultaneous weeping and pained gazes. In a place pervaded by death, Andrei, a mortally wounded man, experiences a first taste of universal, divine love toward another mortally wounded man, his former enemy. It is important here that Andrei remembers what the conflict was about, and even with the circumstances of their conflict in his head, still weeps with love for Anatole. Tolstoy does not let us believe that Andrei in his pain has forgotten what happened. Here Andrei discovers compassion, another cardinal tenet of the Right Way. It is not only compassion for a fellow human being, but compassion for a former enemy.

Also significant here is Andrei’s reference to Christ. The mortally wounded Andrei begins to orient himself toward the spiritual. Earlier in the novel, Andrei did not share Marya’s faith, doubted the power of Marya’s icons, and debated the newly-converted

⁵⁷ “Prince Andrei remembered everything, and a rapturous pity and love for this man filled his happy heart. Prince Andrei could no longer restrain himself, and he wept tender, loving tears over people, over himself, and over their and his own errors. ‘Compassion, love for our brothers, for those who love us, love for those who hate us, love for our enemies—yes, that love which God preached on earth, which Princess Marya taught me, and which I didn’t understand; that’s why I was sorry about life, that’s what was still left for me, if I was to live. But now it’s too late. I know it!’” (814)

Pierre on issues of spirituality. Now that he is dying, he expresses a belief in God for the first time. This value of Christ and Christ's teachings will persist as he approaches death.

This reconciliation with Anatole is not the first time that Andrei has "softened" toward someone because of the mortal danger of war. Before Austerlitz, Andrei acknowledges the immediate possibility of his death:

“Да, очень может быть, завтра убьют,” подумал он. И вдруг, при этой мысли о смерти, целый ряд воспоминаний, самых далеких и самых задушевных, восстал в его воображении; он вспоминал последнее прощание с отцом и женою; он вспомнил первые времена своей любви к ней; вспомнил о ее беременности, и ему стало жалко и ее и себя. . . (I, 377)⁵⁸

This is the first time the reader sees Andrei's affection toward his wife. So far in the book, there has been only their bickering and strained parting, in which Liza faints and Andrei leaves for war before she wakes up. He interacts with her “как у посторонней” (I, 55).⁵⁹

After Andrei is taken from the field hospital at Borodino, seven days pass for him before the narration turns to him again.⁶⁰ At this point, Andrei is in a bad physical state—his wound is festering, he is in great pain, and he passes in and out of fevered consciousness. Further underscoring his new spiritual, Christian consciousness, Andrei requests to have the Gospels brought to him on his bed: “Он вспомнил, что у него было

⁵⁸ “‘Yes, I may very well be killed tomorrow,’ he thought. And suddenly, with that thought of death, a whole series of the most remote and soul-felt memories arose in his imagination; he remembered his last farewell from his father and wife; he remembered the first time of his love for her; remembered her pregnancy and he felt sorry for her and himself...” (264)

⁵⁹ “...as if she were a stranger.” (28)

⁶⁰ One could interpret this “seven” days as significant, since “seven” occurs very frequently in the Bible.

теперь новое счастье и что это счастье имело что-то такое общее с Евангелием” (III, 439)⁶¹. In his article on the scene with Prince Andrei and Natasha at Mytishchi, John Weeks notes the connection between Andrei’s physical state and his spiritual one. That Andrei wants the Gospels to be placed under him for support is not an accident. He thinks the book will soothe his pain and support him, both physically and psychologically/spiritually. His thought that one should “любить Бога во всех проявлениях”⁶² indicates a sincere change in Andrei’s belief system, from a secular one to one in which there not only is a deity, but a real notion of how humans should relate to the divine (III, 441).

At Mytishchi Andrei also meets Natasha for the first time since her betrayal. Immediately after learning what happened between Natasha and Anatole, Prince Andrei had stated that he could not forgive Natasha. Pierre notices the “презрение и [злоба]”⁶³ that all of the Bolkonskys have toward the Rostovs (II, 836). Now that he is dying and reflecting on his new discovery of the ideal of love, Andrei’s attitude toward Natasha shifts:

И он живо представил себе Наташу не так, как он представлял себе ее прежде, со одною ее прелестью, радостной для себя; но в первый раз представил себе ее душу. И он понял ее чувство, ее страдания, стыд, раскаянье. Он теперь в первый раз понял всю жестокость своего

⁶¹ “He remembered that he now had a new happiness, and that that happiness had something to do with the Gospel.” (920)

⁶² “to love God in all His manifestations” (921)

⁶³ “contempt and spite” (597)

отказа, видел жестокость своего разрыва с нею. (III, 442)⁶⁴

Here, the repetition of the words “for the first time” are markers of the process of Andrei’s perception changing . Andrei thought he knew Natasha well, but he realizes that he did not truly know her at all. Andrei is not only letting go of his hostile feelings toward Natasha, a positive step toward the ideal of reconciliation and unity, but he even realizes the error of his previous, selfish love for her. He sees her more than just a charming girl; he sees her in her full depth as a fellow human being. Andrei achieves more than just the expulsion of enmity in this scene. He feels compassion, and by imagining Natasha’s soul, he becomes closer, more united, with her than ever before.

The nearness of death has a particularly significant effect on Andrei, because he is one of the novel’s “planners.” One of the major themes of *War and Peace* is the contingency of life and the inefficacy of making elaborate plans. Tolstoy attributes the success of two Russian generals, Bagration and Kutuzov, to their understanding of this fact in the context of battle. Prince Andrei, like the German generals, is not aware of the impotence of human rationality and planning in a world governed by forces outside of individual control. Just like the Germans, Andrei has developed a battle strategy before Austerlitz that he regrets he never gets a chance to show the Council of War. The wiser military man, Kutuzov, knows that getting enough sleep before a battle is more valuable than the maps, charts, and plans. The way the battles play out supports Kutuzov’s philosophy.

Not only does death annihilate Andrei’s ability to plan and focus on the future and

⁶⁴ “And he vividly pictured Natasha to himself, not as he had pictured her before, with her loveliness alone, which brought him joy; but for the first time he pictured her soul. And he understood her feeling, her suffering, shame, repentance. For the first time he understood all the cruelty of his refusal, saw the cruelty of his break with her.” (921)

force him to be present in the moment, his fevered state makes it literally impossible for him to even control his own thoughts:

Все силы его души были деятельнее, яснее, чем когда-нибудь, но они действовали вне его воли. Самые разнообразные мысли и представления одновременно владели им. Иногда мысль его вдруг начинала работать, и с такой силой, ясностью и глубиной, с какою никогда она не была в силах действовать в здоровом состоянии; но вдруг, посредине своей работы, она обрывалась, заменялась каким-нибудь неожиданным представлением, и не было сил возвратиться к ней. (III, 441)⁶⁵

Here, Andrei's illness is pushing him into the Right Way with or without his consent. In the grip of his fever, Andrei has no choice but to acquiesce to the forces of life beyond his control and suspend his processes of reasoning.

Even once Andrei's fever has subsided and his thoughts are more coherent, Andrei still demonstrates a hesitation to plan for the future. Even though he is reconciled with Natasha and clearly still loves her, both of them are unwilling to discuss their potential future because of the "висящий вопрос жизни или смерти не только над Болконским, но над Россией заслонял все другие предположения" (III, 444).⁶⁶

Andrei's discovery of love for Anatole, his reconciliation with Natasha, and the

⁶⁵ "The forces of his soul were all clearer and more active than ever, but they acted outside his will. The most diverse thoughts and notions took hold of him simultaneously. Sometimes his thought suddenly began to work, and with such strength, clarity, and depth as it had never been able to do in healthy conditions; but suddenly, in the middle of its work, it broke off and was replaced by some unexpected notion, and he was unable to return to it." (920)

⁶⁶ "the unresolved question of life and death hanging not only over Bolkonsky but over Russia shut out all other conjectures." (923)

focus on the present caused by his fevered delirium represent the first phase of his process of dying and a general motion toward the Right Way. However, after Andrei's dream (discussed in Chapter II), he enters another stage of his dying. Natasha is immediately aware of a change having come over him after he realizes that death is an awakening. Andrei is no longer afraid of death and accepts its nearness. He has become oriented away from the earthly and toward the spiritual. He has trouble relating to Natasha and Marya with their worldly concerns because "он понимал что-то другое, такое, чего не понимали и не могли понять живые и что поглощало его всего" (IV, 521).⁶⁷ At one point, Andrei reminds himself of a Bible verse that helps elucidate his new condition: "Птицы небесные ни сеют, ни жнут, но Отец ваш питает их" (IV, 523).⁶⁸ This is a paraphrase of a portion of Matthew 6:26, a verse from the Sermon on the Mount. In this section of the Sermon, Christ encourages people to not fret over their worldly possessions and lives because people should "make the Kingdom of God [their] primary concern." (*Holy Bible*, Matthew 6:33). This suggests that Andrei's new preoccupation is the divine. Natasha and Marya, despite their position still among the living, do have at least some understanding of what has happened to Andrei: "Они обе видели, как он глубже и глубже, медленно и спокойно, опускался от них куда-то туда, и обе знали, что это должно быть и что это хорошо" (IV, 529).⁶⁹ Though they are grieved that this new orientation apparently means that Andrei will certainly die, they do understand his new spiritual concern to be good.

⁶⁷ "he understood something else, such as the living could not understand, and which absorbed him entirely." (979)

⁶⁸ "The birds of the air neither sow nor reap, but your Father feeds them." (981)

⁶⁹ "They both saw how he sank deeper and deeper, slowly and peacefully, somewhere away from them, and they both knew that it had to be so, and that it was good." (986)

Pierre Bezukhov

Besides Andrei, the other major “seeker” in *War and Peace* is Pierre Bezukhov. Unlike Andrei, Pierre does not die, but he does encounter the possibility of his own death and witnesses the deaths of others many times throughout the novel. While the impact of death on Pierre’s journey toward the Right Way is much less explicit and direct than it is for Princess Marya and Prince Andrei, the idea of death and mortality is undeniably present at many of the vital turning points for Pierre during the novel.

Pierre is initially forced to confront the imminent possibility of death during the duel with Dolokhov. Pierre’s first episode of existential crisis occurs after he thinks he has killed his rival. He must face the severity of such an act, as Nikolai was forced to confront an image of himself as a murderer rather than a soldier. Immediately after the duel, he wonders what even happened, how it came to this, and whether he is guilty in anything. He is drawn from questioning the morals behind his own actions to questioning the sense and righteousness in the historically significant actions of others:

“Людовика XVI казнили за то, что *они* говорили, что он был бесчестен и преступник ... и они были правы с своей точки зрения, так же как правы и те, которые за него умирали мученической смертью и причисляли его к лику святых. Потом Робеспьера казнили за то, что он был деспот. Кто прав, кто виноват? Никто. А жив—и живи: завтра умрешь, как мог я умереть час тому назад. И стоит ли того мучиться, когда жить остается одну секунду в сравнении с вечностью” (II, 453).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ “‘Louis XVI was executed for being, as they said, dishonest and criminal,’ came into Pierre’s head, ‘and they were right from their point of view, and equally right were those who died a martyr’s death and counted

This episode marks the beginning of a new part of Pierre's quest. He is beginning to question social norms and conventional ideas of morality. Also noteworthy is that Pierre himself senses a link between these questions and death. Though Pierre's beliefs and convictions may waver as the novel continues, his search for the answers to these serious philosophical problems is itself an important part of the Right Way. Asking questions is the first step to finding answers, if answers exist at all. From this point forward, the scope of Pierre's inquiry will grow wider and wider. The first increase in scope can be seen during his trip to St. Petersburg:

Смотритель, очевидно, врал и хотел только получить с проезжего лишние деньги. «Дурно ли это было, или хорошо? . . . Для меня хорошо, для другого проезжающего дурно, а для него самого неизбежно, потому что ему есть нечего: он горючил, что его прибил за это офицер. А офицер прибил за то, что ему ехать надо было скорее. А я стрелял в Долохова за то, что я счел себя оскорбленным. А Людовика XVI казнили за то, что его считали преступником, а через год убили тех, кто его казнил, тоже за что-то. Что дурно? Что хорошо? Что надо любить, что ненавидеть? Для чего жить, и что такое я? Что такое жизнь, что смерть? Какая сила управляет всем? (II, 493)⁷¹

him among the saints. Then Robespierre was executed because he was a despot. Who's right and who's wrong? No one. You're alive—so live: tomorrow you'll die, just as I could have died an hour ago. And is it worth suffering, when there's only a second left to lived compared with eternity.” (318)

⁷¹ “The postmaster was obviously lying and only wanted to get extra money from the traveler. ‘Is that bad, or is it good?’ Pierre asked himself. ‘For me it’s good, for some other traveler it would be bad, and for the postmaster it’s inevitable, because he has nothing to eat: he says an officer gave him a thrashing on account of that. The officer gave him a thrashing because he had to leave soon. And I shot at Dolokhov because I considered myself insulted. And Louis XVI was executed because he was considered a criminal, and a year later those who executed him were also killed for something. What is bad? What is good?’ What should one love, what hate? Why live, and what am I? What is life, what is death? What power rules over everything?” (348)

In this episode, Pierre's concern grows from purely ethical into metaphysical. Once again, Pierre's thoughts turn to death as he asks his questions. This time, he views death as an opportunity for his questions to be answered, an opportunity for the discomfort of his bewilderment to be relieved: "Умрешь—все кончится. Умрешь и все узнаешь—или перестанешь спрашивать" (II,493).⁷² Pierre thinks of death here as a potential chance to have his questions answered. If there is an afterlife, he will learn something when he gets there. However, embedded in his statement is a question. After all, Pierre has asked "What is life, what is death?" He does not know whether there will be an afterlife, and his uncertainty about what will occur when he dies is a reiteration of the fact that death is also something unknown and worthy of inquiry.

At Pierre's moment of infinite questioning and confusion, Iosif Bazdeev appears and introduces Pierre to Masonry. Pierre recognizes Bazdeev as a Mason because of his skull ring, a symbol used by the Masons to represent mortality. From this very first mention of Masonry in the text, it is tightly linked with death. The induction ceremony is filled with death symbols, including a coffin with bones and more skulls. During the induction, Pierre learns that one of the seven main tenets of Masonry concerns death. Masons are instructed to come to love death, rather than fear it, by frequently thinking about it. Their conception of death is a positive one, in which man is freed from his earthly burden into a world of bliss and comfort (II, 507).

Masonry, or Bazdeev as its representative, turns Pierre from someone unsure of what to believe into a believer in God. Despite how easily and instantly Pierre was convinced by Bazdeev to believe in God, this belief endures for approximately six years,

⁷² "You will die—and everything will end. You will die and learn everything—or stop asking." (348)

until Pierre's captivity. He is even convinced enough to argue with Andrei about an afterlife when they next meet. "Надо жить, надо любить, надо верить. . . что живем не нынче только на этом клочке земли, а жили и будем жить вечно там, во всем" (II, 552)⁷³. This is a vastly different belief than the one he expressed moments before meeting Bazdeev. Moving from atheism to Christian-oriented spirituality like this is a clear positive step in the Tolstoyan philosophy.

In addition to the new spiritual framework that Masonry gives Pierre, there are some very tangible changes to the way he views and lives his life. Immediately following his induction ceremony, Pierre feels that he "совершенно изменился и отстал от прежнего порядка и привычек жизни" (II, 513).⁷⁴ The next day, Pierre's new way of life passes its first test: an encounter with Prince Vassily, an unambiguously negative character in Pierre's life thus far. Prince Vassily tries to convince Pierre to forgive Helene. When his usual method of merely suggesting a course of action to Pierre or pretending that Pierre has already chosen a course of action (as in the moment when Pierre and Helene become engaged) is unsuccessful, Prince Vassily threatens Pierre with his powerful friends and then tries to joke with him about the whole situation. The decision that Pierre must make at this juncture about how to respond to Prince Vassily is of great significance to him:

[...]он чувствовал, что от того, что скажет сейчас, будет зависеть вся дальнейшая судьба его: пойдет ли он по старой, прежней дороге, или по той новой, которая так привлекательно была указан ему масонами и на которой он твердо верил, что найдет возрождение к

⁷³ "We must live, we must love, we must believe[...] that we do not live only today on this scrap of earth, but have lived and will live eternally there, in the all." (389)

⁷⁴ "had changed completely, and had detached himself from the former order and habits of life." (362)

НОВОЙ ЖИЗНИ. (II, 515)⁷⁵

Pierre bluntly tells Prince Vassily to leave, and the latter is so surprised by such forceful behavior from Pierre that he asks if Pierre is ill. While this does not fall into any of the categories of the Right Way that I have previously laid out, there is clearly nothing “right” about Pierre’s marriage to Helene. She and her family are the most unsympathetic characters in the novel, with perhaps the only exception of Napoleon himself. Pierre’s rejection of the influence of Helene and her father is an unambiguously positive step towards a more moral life for Pierre.

It is important to note that Freemasonry for Tolstoy is by no means a part of the Right Way. The organization of Masons is as flawed as any human institution in his eyes. Most of the Masons that Pierre meets, with the exception of Bazdeev, are insincere in their profession of Masonic values. Pierre’s utter confusion during the initiation rites serves to demonstrate just how contrived and meaningless the ceremony is. The Masons’ claim to possess some sort of mystical secret and that they charge their followers to be obedient and protective of their secrets is also quite dubious. However, some of the values that the Masons claim to hold are mostly good for Tolstoy, including *мужество*, *щедрость*, *добронравие*, and *любовь к человечеству*⁷⁶ (II, 508). Their belief in a higher power, which is instilled in Pierre, is also something positive. Overall, their effect on Pierre’s life is positive, since Pierre moves closer to the Right Way after meeting them. (Perhaps, though, this is more of an effect of Bazdeev than the Masonic order as a whole.)

The next important encounter between Pierre and death occurs years later, before

⁷⁵ “he felt that his whole future destiny would depend on what he said right now: whether he would follow the old former way, or the new one which had been shown to him so attractively by the Masons, and on which he firmly believed he would find rebirth into a new life.” (363)

⁷⁶ Courage, generosity, good morals, and love of mankind. (358)

the Battle of Borodino. As with Prince Andrei, Pierre experiences an important reconciliation there. Before the decisive battle, Dolokhov and Pierre meet by accident for the first time since their duel. Dolokhov's behavior is uncharacteristic of the irreverent and immoral character previously seen throughout the novel:

Очень рад встретить вас здесь, граф,--сказал он ему громко и не стесняясь присутствием посторонних, с особенной решительностью и торжественностью. --Накануне дня, во который Бог знает кому из нас суждено остаться в живых, я рад случаю сказать вам, что я жалею о тех недоразумениях, которые были между нами, и желал бы, чтобы вы не имели против меня ничего. Прошу вас простить меня.

Пьер, улыбаясь, глядел на Долохова, не зная, что сказать ему.

Долохов со слезами, выступившими ему на глаза, обнял и поцеловал Пьера. (III, 232)⁷⁷

The real possibility of death is explicitly linked to the peace offering in Dolokhov's words. The presence of death is much greater here than before their duel, because the experienced duelist Dolokhov did not fear standing off against Pierre, who had never fired a pistol before. All evidence suggests that this reconciliation is sincere and permanent. The descriptions of feelings and expressions provided by Tolstoy here seem designed to show that Dolokhov's words are meant to be taken seriously. It is probable that Dolokhov and Pierre meet again after Dolokhov's band of partisans free Pierre's group of prisoners, but

⁷⁷ "‘Very glad to meet you here, Count,’ he said to him loudly and unembarrassed by the presence of strangers, with particular resoluteness and solemnity. ‘On the eve of a day when God knows who of us is destined to remain alive, I’m glad of the chance to tell you that I regret the misunderstandings that occurred between us and would wish that you not have anything against me. I ask you to forgive me.’ Pierre, smiling, gazed at Dolokhov, not knowing what to say to him. Dolokhov, with tears in his eyes, embraced and kissed Pierre.” (767)

such a meeting is not described in the text. The absence of such a scene and Dolokhov's new image as a brave, partisan hero instead of a misbehaving libertine imply that the conflict between the two men is indeed over and that a lasting change has occurred in both of them because of what they have endured in war.

Pierre, a witness to the Battle of Borodino, the occupation of Moscow, and later as a prisoner of the French, also finds himself wondering about the purpose of the killing and what makes men do it. Just as the concept of war violence becomes strange when Nikolai identifies with the French soldier, Pierre's captivity seems absurd to him when he feels a human connection to his French captor Davout. Davout's judgment of Pierre is of fatal importance, because many of Pierre's fellow prisoners have been sentenced to death. Davout and Pierre share a look, in which they understand that "они оба дети человечества, что они братья" (IV, 499).⁷⁸ This human connection is broken by chance when an adjutant enters and distracts Davout. Pierre is taken away, disturbed, and believing that he is going to be executed like the other prisoners.

Одна мысль за все это время была в голове Пьера. Это была мысль о том: кто, кто же, наконец, приговорил его к казни. Это были не те люди, которые допрашивали его в комиссии: из них ни один не хотел и, очевидно, не мог этого сделать. Это не был Даву, который так человечески посмотрел на него. Еще бы одна минута, и Даву понял бы, что они делают дурно, но этой минуте помешал адъютант, который вошел. И адъютант этот, очевидно, не хотел ничего худого, но он мог бы не войти. Кто же это, наконец, казнил, убивал, лишал жизни его—Пьера со всеми его воспоминаниями, стремлениями,

⁷⁸ "they were both children of the human race, that they were brothers." (964)

надеждами, мыслями? Кто делал это? И Пьер чувствовал, что это был никто.

Это был порядок, склад обстоятельств.

Порядок какой-то убивал его—Пьера, лишал его жизни, всего, уничтожал его. (IV, 500)⁷⁹

From this moment onward, Pierre recognizes a lack of agency in the French soldiers' violent acts, and the killing becomes completely senseless, a stroke of chance or some other mysterious psychological or social force. The discovery of this terrible force marks an important step on Pierre's journey toward the ultimate truth. Pierre will encounter this force several times more before reaching his great epiphany.

The next episode where this force appears is during the previously-described execution scene. In carrying out the execution, the French soldiers are hurrying, and “не так, как торопятся, чтобы делать понятное для всех дело, но так, как торопятся, чтобы окончить необходимое, но неприятное и недостижимое дело” (IV, 501).⁸⁰ It is not only Pierre and the prisoners who cannot come to terms with their own imminent deaths, but the French soldiers also do not understand their own behavior. Pierre notices a French soldier after the execution “который хотел утешиться чем-нибудь в том, что

⁷⁹ “There was one thought in Pierre's head all that time. It was the thought of who, finally, had sentenced him to be executed. It was not the people of the commission that had interrogated him: not one of them would or obviously could have done it. It was not Davout, who had given him such a human look. Another moment and Davout would have understood that they were doing a bad thing, but the adjutant who came in had prevented that moment. And that adjutant obviously had not wanting anything bad, but he also might not have come in. Who was it, finally, who was executing, killing, depriving him of life, him—Pierre, with all his memories, longings, hopes, thoughts? Who was doing it? And Pierre felt that it was no one.” (965)

⁸⁰ “not as people hurry to do something everyone understands but as they hurry in order to finish a necessary but unpleasant and incomprehensible business.” (966)

было сделано, но не мог” (IV, 504).⁸¹ The senselessness of the execution and the perceived involuntary nature of the soldiers’ actions is very striking to Pierre.

As happened to Tolstoy himself after witnessing the execution in Paris, Pierre’s inability to reconcile this terrible observation with his previous belief system forces him to change that system, which which he concludes must be false:

С той минуты, как Пьер увидал это страшное убийство, совершенное людьми, не хотевшими этого делать, в душе его как будто вдруг выдернута была та пружина, на которой все держалось и представлялось живым, и все завалилось в кучу бессмысленного сора. В нем, хотя он и не отдавал себе отчета, уничтожилась вера и благоустройство мира, и в человеческую, и в свою душу, и в Бога. (IV, 505)⁸²

Once again, it is an encounter with death that compels Pierre to keep seeking. That the prisoners were killed by people who seemingly committed the murder for no reason and without any particular desire is so shocking to Pierre that he finds himself again in a state of crisis and uncertainty. Just as the previous crisis led Pierre to the guidance of the Bazdeev, this horrific experience opens Pierre to a new sage—the peasant Platon Karataev. Like Bazdeev, Karataev believes in God, and he is at peace with the ways of the world and his place in it. Under the influence of Karatev, Pierre begins to recognize what is happening to him, and the role of death in it all, after four weeks in captivity.

⁸¹ “who wanted to comfort himself at least somehow for what had been done, but could not.” (968).

⁸² “From the moment when Pierre saw this horrible murder performed by people who did not want to do it, it was as if the spring that upheld everything and made it seem alive had been pulled from his soul, and it had collapsed into a heap of meaningless trash. Though he did not account for it to himself, his faith in the world’s good order, in humanity’s and his own soul, and in God was destroyed.” (968)

Он долго в своей жизни искал с разных сторон этого успокоения, согласия с самим собою, того, что так поразило его в солдатах в Бородинском сражении, -- он искал этого в филантропии, в масонстве, в рассеянии светской жизни, в вине, в геройском подвиге самопожертвования, в романтической любви к Наташе; он искал этого путем мысли, и все эти искания и попытки все обманули его. И он, сам не думая о том, получил это успокоение и это согласие с самим собою только через ужас смерти, через лишения и через то, что он понял в Каратаеве. (IV, 565)⁸³

Pierre's captivity and his encounter with truly trying and dangerous circumstances has led him to the realization of the human inability to exert any sort of real control over the universe. This realization is what causes him to wholeheartedly laugh alone in the night at the bivouac on the way out of Moscow. He comes to find the notion that the French can hold him prisoner completely ridiculous. He realizes that the amount of freedom he has and enjoys has been the same during his captivity as it was years earlier during his "courtship" of Helene. This new understanding about the limited control he has over his circumstances, and the acceptance of this truth, is very much in line with the Right Way.

Pierre's next step in his spiritual journey is spurred yet again by death—the death of Karataev. Immediately following Karataev's execution, which Pierre has not yet consciously accepted, he has a vision in a dream. In this dream, he is told:

⁸³ "In his life he had long sought in various directions for that peace, that harmony with himself, which had struck him so much in the soldiers during the battle of Borodino—he had sought it in philanthropy, in Masonry, in the distractions of social life, in wine, in a heroic deed of self-sacrifice, in romantic love for Natasha; he had sought by way of thought, and all this seeking and trying had disappointed him. And without thinking, he had received that peace and harmony with himself only through the horror of death, through privation, and through what he had understood in Karataev." (1012)

“Жизнь есть все. Жизнь есть Бог. Все перемещается и движется, и это движение есть Бог. И пока есть жизнь, есть наслаждение самосознания божества. Любить жизнь, любить Бога. Труднее и блаженнее всего любить эту жизнь в своих страданиях, в безвинности страданий. ” (IV, 636)⁸⁴

Here we can see that Pierre has regained his belief in the divine. In addition to this very positive development, Pierre also realizes the importance of loving life, a significant part of the Right Way. This idea comes with a visual model:

Глобус этот был живой, колеблющийся шар, не имеющий размеров. Вся поверхность шара состояла из капель, плотно сжатых между собой. И капли эти все двигались, перемещались и то сливались из нескольких в одну, то из одной разделялись на многие. Каждая капля стремилась разлиться, захватить наибольшее пространство, но другие, стремясь к тому же, сжимали ее, иногда уничтожали, иногда сливались с нею.

“Вот жизнь,” сказал старичок учитель.

“Как это просто и ясно,” подумал Пьер. “Как я мог не знать этого прежде”.

В середине Бог, и каждая капля стремится расшириться, чтобы в наибольших размерах отражать его. И растет, сливается, и сжимается, и уничтожается на поверхности, уходит в глубину и опять всплывает.

⁸⁴ ‘Life is everything. Life is God. Everything shifts and moves, and this movement is God. And while there is life, there is delight in the self-awareness of the divinity. To love life is to love God. The hardest and most blissful thing is to love this life in one’s suffering, in the guiltlessness of suffering.’ (1064)

Вот он, Каратаев, вот разлился и исчез. (IV, 636)⁸⁵

This revelation of a new model of life is an expansion of Pierre's earlier realization of his lack of freedom and control in life. He sees himself in the context of the entire universe and God. This visual representation of Pierre's new understanding of the world demonstrates the spiritual idea of the immortality of the soul in the "all," the interconnectedness of the world with God, and that there are forces outside of individual control exerting a strong effect on human life. Comprehending all of these ideas puts Pierre more in line with the Right Way. That Pierre also realizes that Karataev was killed after waking from this dream shows the continued connection between encounters with death and Pierre's search. Close contact with death--in seeing the battle unfold at Borodino, in believing he was about to be executed, in seeing his fellow prisoners killed by the firing squad, and in hearing the shot that killed his new mentor and friend Karataev--pushed Pierre out of his old, false conceptions into a new understanding of the world. At each point, Pierre thought he understood everything, but at each point, encounters with senseless death and violence undermined his previous understanding and pushed him to continue his search.

⁸⁵ "This globe was a living, wavering ball of no dimensions. The entire surface of the ball consisted of drops tightly packed together. And these drops all moved and shifted, and now merged from several into one, now divided from one into many. Each drop strove to spread and take up the most space, but the others, striving to do the same, pressed it, sometimes destroying, sometimes merging with it.

'This is life,' said the old teacher.

'How simple and clear it is,' thought Pierre. 'How could I have not known before.'

'In the center is God, and each drop strives to expand in order to reflect Him in the greatest measure. It grows, merges, and shrinks, and is obliterated on the surface, goes into the depths, and again floats up. Here he is, Karataev, see, he spread and vanished' (1065)

Chapter V

Conclusion

War and Peace, like so many of Tolstoy's works, is a book with character transformations at its core. The dynamic central characters are all searching for happiness, for a better life, and for truth. Andrew Kaufman calls it "on one level, a Bildungsroman about young people who grow up, grow old, and grow wise" (Kaufman, 84). Another equally fundamental element of *War and Peace* is the ubiquity of death. As I have attempted to demonstrate, death has a thematic function of catalyzing character transformation through its power of defamiliarization.

Nikolai Rostov undergoes a radical shift in values from the time he enters the military to the time the war is reaching an end. He volunteered for the military out of a patriotic sentiment and desire for glory. By the end of the book, he is disillusioned with the idea of the glory of war, and he has turned his efforts instead toward managing his estate and raising a family. Two encounters with death played an instrumental role in this transformation: seeing the dead bodies at the military hospital and confronting his own mortality by feeling a similarity between himself and a French soldier he is about to kill.

The effect of encounters with death on Princess Marya is one of reconciliation. The old prince Bolkonsky's death brings about a love in her for her father that she had never felt before. In addition to saving their relationship in his final hours, the prince's death also brings Marya together with Mlle Bourienne. In a similar scene, Marya becomes friends

with Natasha Rostova over their shared grief over Prince Andrei's mortal wound. Not only does their old animosity vanish, but they become so close that they can communicate wordlessly.

Prince Andrei comes into direct, personal confrontation with death twice during the novel. He is seriously wounded in Austerlitz, and this event causes Andrei to abandon his previous value of military glory and greatness. He no longer considers Napoleon his hero after this incident. After his second wound, this time a fatal one, at Borodino, Andrei begins a long, multi-stage process of dying. In this process, Andrei becomes oriented toward the spiritual, reconciled with Natasha, and fever places Andrei's very thoughts outside of his control. All of this puts him closer to the Right Way.

Pierre's journey toward the Right Way is also punctuated by periodic encounters with death that inspire his search for truth. The duel with Dolokhov, an event that could potentially have killed Pierre or made him a killer, was the start of Pierre's ethical and metaphysical inquiry. Pierre's experiences during Napoleon's invasion of Moscow—witnessing an execution, followed by the murder of his friend Platon Karataev—help Pierre come to understand his position in regard to the universe and the divine.

While this thesis has included many of *War and Peace's* most striking and significant deaths, dedicated readers of Tolstoy will likely feel that there is something absent. The death of Petya Rostov, undoubtedly the most tragic in the book and one of the most memorable, brought no sort of positive character transformations, and therefore it has been omitted from this analysis. Likewise, the sad, sudden death of Princess Lise does not seem to lead anyone closer to the Right Way. These and other deaths in *War and Peace* do

not seem to have a “lesson” attached. However, these deaths and their purely tragic nature return us to Tolstoy’s ambivalence toward death discussed in Chapter II. Such a compelling variety in the presentation of death in *War and Peace*, only a portion of which has been covered in this thesis, brings up some interesting questions about Tolstoy’s purposes in including them. This author senses that the ubiquity and diversity of deaths is a manifestation of an effort by Tolstoy to explain death to himself and assuage his own fears. After all, Tolstoy was personally tormented by a fear of death.⁸⁶ *A Confession* documents his search to find a way to alleviate his terror and live comfortably with the knowledge of his own mortality. It does not seem that Tolstoy was ever successful in personally overcoming his fear of death, at least not permanently. How much did Tolstoy believe in the spiritual truths that are revealed to Andrei in *War and Peace* and later in to Ivan Ilych? Was he convinced by the more innocuous, less frightening images of death that he incorporates into his fiction? This is a question that I will leave to the reader.

⁸⁶ The night Tolstoy spent in Arzamas, which he recorded in several letters and then turned into the semi-autobiographical sketch “Memoirs of a Madman” (Записки сумасшедшего), is a single biographical event that illustrates the full depth and power of Tolstoy’s fear.

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