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# MICROCOSM AND MACROCOSM IN *WAR AND PEACE*: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF POETICS AND METAPHYSICS

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## *Introduction*

Leo Tolstoy was fascinated throughout his lifetime with the problem of how human beings search for a unifying order in a chaotic world. Two distinct, though not mutually exclusive, traditions of scholarship have grown up around this aspect of Tolstoy's art and thought. One tradition is represented by those scholars who have written about the philosophical and psychological problem of the self in Tolstoy's art. This tradition has its roots in the nineteenth-century writings of Nicholas Chernyshevsky. In an 1856 article about Tolstoy's early stories Chernyshevsky coined the phrase "*diialektika dushi*" ("dialectic of the soul") to refer to Tolstoy's representation of the inner world of his characters. He also used the phrase "*vnutrennyi monolog*" ("interior monologue") to describe the artistic technique Tolstoy used to depict that inner world.<sup>1</sup> This aspect of Tolstoy's representation of the self subsequently became the focus of much Soviet scholarship on the author.<sup>2</sup>

The second main tradition of scholarship that has been concerned with the searching self in Tolstoy goes back to an 1862 essay by Apollon Grigor'ev. In *Rannie proizvedeniia gr. L. N. Tolstogo* ("The Early Works of Count L. N. Tolstoy") Grigor'ev argues that Tolstoy was an inherently nihilistic writer in search of a positive ideal that could rescue him from his own nihilism.<sup>3</sup> Grigor'ev thus introduced a paradigm for thinking about Tolstoy that would become a cornerstone of much future criticism: the paradigm of Tolstoy as a divided man. For Grigor'ev Tolstoy was an unflinching realist who exposed the false idols of others while longing at the same time for a positive ideal that could withstand the challenge of his own analytical powers.<sup>4</sup>

If there is one work, over which representatives of both of these main lines of Tolstoy scholarship have spilled perhaps their most copious amount of ink, it would have to be *War and Peace*. In his famous essay, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*, Isaiah Berlin extends the Grigor'ev paradigm of Tolstoy as a divided man. He argues that Tolstoy's

intellectual approach to history, as developed in the theoretical essays scattered throughout the novel, are at odds with the writer's artistic treatment of history in the rest of the work. As a rational thinker, Berlin argues, Tolstoy was a determinist. He believed that life is ultimately circumscribed by objective laws. But, as an artist, Tolstoy shows that within this philosophically determined universe there also exists the possibility for creative self-expression and some degree of moral freedom on the part of the individual.<sup>5</sup>

An example of how influential Berlin's essay remains to the present day can be found in the work of the contemporary scholar Gary Saul Morson. In his recent monograph, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'*, Morson echoes Berlin's argument. As an artist, Morson argues, Tolstoy was a "fox" and did not believe in any overarching theory of life or in any unifying rational order to history. Morson takes Berlin even further. He argues that Tolstoy's opposition to the possibility of any unifying structure in the world is not merely present in *War and Peace*. It is, in fact, the major thesis of the novel itself.<sup>6</sup>

However, as I will argue, close attention to the aesthetic organization of *War and Peace* will reveal that there *is* a deep unifying principle in the work. That principle lies in the complex interlinkage of ideas and images, and in the ultimate union of individual and historical experience that this interlinkage intends to communicate. Tolstoy communicates his vision of the "whole" by means of a novelistic technique which creates a sense of the unity of many contradictory aspects of the world.

Among the contemporary scholars whom I've read, only Sergei Bocharov and George Clay have approached *War and Peace* from this angle. Rather than imposing their own theories upon Tolstoy's novel, Bocharov and Clay show how a unifying meaning of *War and Peace* emerges from the complex poetics of the work itself. Like these scholars, I will approach the novel by focussing on what Tolstoy once called "that endless labyrinth of cohesions, in which consists the essence of art."<sup>7</sup> And I will take their insights in a slightly new direction. I will show that Tolstoy's creation of a unifying order in the work is not merely a fact of the writer's aesthetics. It is also central to his metaphysics, and to the metaphysics of his characters, as well. In my reading of the novel the fictional subject and the authorial subject engage in a continual and simultaneous effort to create order out of chaos, and higher forms of meaning out of the prosaic facts of reality.

### *Prince Andrew at Schoen Grabern*

Let's now examine how this striving takes place in the concrete aesthetic language of the text itself. I will begin my analysis by focusing first on the scene in Part Two of the novel in which Prince Andrew Bolkonsky surveys the battlefield on the night before the battle of Schoen Grabern. This scene is an important one, both for what it tells us about Prince Andrew's psychol-

ogy and for the way in which it encapsulates some of the novel's larger philosophical concerns. The chapter opens with this paragraph:

Having ridden round the whole line from right flank to left, Prince Andrew made his way up to the battery from which the staff officer had told him the whole field could be seen. Here he dismounted, and stopped beside the farthest of the four unlimbered cannons. Before the guns an artillery sentry was pacing up and down; he stood at attention when the officer arrived, but at a sign resumed his measured, monotonous pacing. Behind the guns were their limbers and still farther back picket ropes and artillerymen's bonfires. To the left, not far from the farthest cannon, was a small, newly constructed wattle shed from which came the sound of officer's voices in eager conversation. (9, 215; 188)<sup>8</sup>

What Andrew wants to do in this scene is to understand the whole picture of the upcoming battle by means of a panoramic view of the battle sight taken from a single perspective. By showing the reader details of camp life—the pacing of the sentry, the bonfires of the artillery men, and the wattle shed from which come the officer's voices—Tolstoy creates a sense of the interaction of diverse human experiences which no single human perspective could fully embrace. Only the narrator can see the totality of the situation.

Andrew's attempt to locate a vantage point from which he may see the "whole" thus exists in tension with the fact that there is a larger whole of which he is himself unconsciously part. So, too, the novel presents a vision of nineteenth-century Russian life in which each human being, who struggles for modest meaning in his or her everyday life, is also an unconscious participant in a major moment in Russian history.

In the next paragraph the narrator subsumes Andrew's act of surveying the field as an "event" into his own "story" of the night before the Battle of Schoen Grabern:

It was true that a view over nearly the whole Russian position and the greater part of the enemy's opened out from this battery. Just facing it, on the crest of the opposite hill, the village of Schoen Grabern could be seen, and in three places to the left and right the French troops amid the smoke of their campfires, the greater part of whom were evidently in the village itself and behind the hill. To the left from that village, amid the smoke, was something resembling a battery, but it was impossible to see it clearly with the naked eye. Our right flank was posted on a rather steep incline which dominated the French position. Our infantry were stationed there, and at the farthest point the dragoons. In the center, where Tushin's battery stood, and from which Prince Andrew was surveying the position, was the easiest and most direct descent and ascent to the brook separating us from Schoen Grabern. On the left our troops were close to a copse, in which smoked the bonfires of our infantry who were felling wood. The French line was wider than ours, and it was plain that they could easily outflank us on both sides. Behind our position was a steep and deep dip, making it difficult for artillery and cavalry to retire. Prince Andrew took out his notebook and, leaning on the cannon, sketched a plan of the position. (9, 215–16; 188)

The narrator does not merely relay facts in an objective, impersonal manner, but he actually becomes a conscious, humanized raconteur. For in-

stance, he uses the colloquial expression *khorošenko* in the phrase *nel'zia bylo rassmotret' khorošen'ko* ("it was impossible to see it clearly"). And he makes frequent reference to "our" flank, infantry, and position. And yet at the same time that the narrator comes down to earth and momentarily becomes one of "us," he also rises above "us" and reveals things that "we," in our limited awareness, fail to perceive. The narrator tells us, for instance, that the position Andrew occupies "was the easiest and most direct descent and ascent to the brook separating us from Schoen Grabern." This becomes an important detail several lines later when we see Andrew drawing up plans for the upcoming battle. Andrew's position affords him a naive enthusiasm about the prospects of success in the battle that the more wide-seeing narrator does not have. The reader understands the irony here: Andrew will not be able to prepare a fully adequate plan because he fails to see *all* of the details that such a plan would need to include.

The fact of Andrew's limited perspective is underscored in another detail several lines later in the same scene: "All the time he had been beside the gun, he had heard the voices of the officers distinctly, but as often happens [*kak eto chasto byvaet*] had not understood a word of what they were saying" (9, 216–17; 189). In the previous paragraph the narrator showed us the larger physical context of which Prince Andrew was not fully aware. Now we are told that Prince Andrew's failure to understand the officers' voices is one instance of a larger pattern of human nature, to which once again only the narrator is privy. It seems that Andrew's failure to pay full attention to his surroundings is both a unique event, occurring in a specific time and place, and also an expression of a universal human shortcoming: the tendency of human beings "as often happens" to overlook the details of their immediate surroundings. This sentence thus completes a line of artistic and philosophical development. In the first paragraph Prince Andrew's act of surveying the field of battle was a mere fact, seemingly insignificant in and of itself. In the second paragraph, however, that act becomes a "fact" in the narrator's self-consciously told "story." And finally, in the third paragraph it is linked to a "fact" of human nature. The reader's perception of Andrew's actions thus continually expands outward towards an ever-increasing level of universality.

Paradoxically, this process is mirrored by an opposite movement in Andrew's own perception of his surroundings. "Suddenly, however, he was struck by a voice coming from the shed, and its tone was so sincere that he could not but listen" (9, 217; 189). Significantly, Tolstoy does not describe Andrew here as an actively perceiving subject. He describes the hero more like an object than a subject of his surroundings. Andrew has been "struck" by the sound of the voices (*zvuk . . . porazil ego*), and when he does begin to listen to the sound, he does so "involuntarily" (*nevol'no*), as though under the influence of some higher force. The

rhymed pair of words *vdrug-zvuk* serves to underscore the suddenness of the sound by suggesting through the verbal association of the vowel *u* that “suddenly” (*vdrug*) and “sound” (*zvuk*) possess some sort of inherent interlinkage. This verbal rhyme serves another function, as well. It creates the impression of a unity of experience, of the organic wholeness and completeness of the moment itself.

At the very moment, then, that Andrew’s perception begins to focus on the minute details of his surroundings, the text creates the impression of a larger unifying order with which those details are organically linked. The reader’s vision, which is becoming wider and directed towards universal experience, coexists with Andrew’s perception, which is now becoming narrower and more focussed on specific details. It is as though Tolstoy intends for the reader to recognize that minute details and universal experience are so organically linked in this text that an increase in our perception of one necessarily occurs simultaneously with an increase in our awareness of the other.

What Andrew seeks in this moment of the novel is an embodiment of what he seeks at the philosophical level throughout the work: a sense of mastery over his environment, a sense that he is a creative subject and not merely a created object of his world. It is this psychological need mentally to “conquer” the world that motivates Andrew’s aspiration throughout the novel to become, like Napoleon, a literal conqueror. This side of Prince Andrew’s character is most evident in the novel in those moments when he is philosophizing with Pierre or alone to himself.<sup>9</sup> But the artistic richness of *War and Peace* lies, in part, in the author’s capacity to see *in even a most unphilosophical and seemingly unprivileged moment*, such as the one we are analyzing, a manifestation of this deeper philosophical and psychological core of Andrew’s character.

Andrew’s imaginative narrative of the upcoming battle may thus be read as an act of authorship in the deepest sense of the word: authorship as an act of sense-making, of creating meaning out of chaos; authorship as an act of self-mastery. Indeed, there is a similarity between Andrew’s surveying of the field of battle and Tolstoy’s own “surveying” of the massive landscape of human life in this novel. It seems that the instinct for mastery over his world that we find in Andrew has been implanted in him by a creator who himself possesses an instinct to harness and give form, artistic form, to the staggering vastness of human life.

#### *From Microcosm to Macrocosm*

If we distance ourselves for a moment from the passage we have been considering and view it and its denouement (the battle that begins in the next chapter) in relation to the rest of Book Two, then we discover that in this small section of the work Tolstoy tells a human story that is told

elsewhere in Book Two and throughout the novel. It is the story of how an individual experiences the painful dissolution of his idealistic vision of the world. Andrew will learn that battles do not happen in reality as they do in the imagination. He will lose the illusion that the elegant constructs of his intellect may be reproduced in the context of lived experience.

Prince Andrew is not the only character for whom the confrontation of the real and the ideal is a central problem in the novel. Nicholas Rostov is another such character. In moving our attention from Andrew to Nicholas, we are not so much changing the direction of our analysis as we are shifting our lens from one to another manifestation of the same essential story line. For all the differences between them, Rostov and Bolkonsky are united by a human commonality. Both characters are idealists who have joined the war effort in search of higher meaning in their lives. And both of them will go through a painful process of disillusionment as a result of their first major military experience.

Tolstoy artistically creates a sense of this commonality in the way he structures, for instance, the plot of Book Two. Early in the book Tolstoy describes how Andrew becomes impatient with two soldiers who joke after the news of a lost campaign. "What's the matter?" exclaimed Prince Andrew standing still in his excitement. "Don't you understand that either we are officers serving our Tsar and our country, rejoicing in the successes and grieving at the misfortunes of our common cause, or we are merely lackeys who care nothing for their master's business" (9, 155; 133). The joking soldiers are able to separate the news of the military defeat from their personal lives. For Andrew that defeat becomes a personal defeat, a challenge to his personal sense of meaning and honor. Andrew's patriotism here stems from his need for a sense of clarity and purpose in his world. For him it is a world in which laughing soldiers, like the vagaries of history, continually challenge the nobleman's idealistic aspirations.

Later in the same book the young Rostov learns, like Andrew, that those around him do not always admire or share his noble intentions. For instance, after Rostov publicly exposes a certain Telyanin, an elderly soldier who has stolen Denisov's money, he is chided by the staff captain for confronting Telyanin in front of other officers. Rostov responds: "I'm not to blame that the conversation began in the presence of other officers. Perhaps I ought not to have spoken before them, but I am not a diplomatist. That's why I joined the hussars, thinking that here one would not need finesse" (9, 164; 141). Rostov is, by his own admission, not a diplomat. He believes in an absolute code of honor and considers it his responsibility to uphold it. The scene reveals however that there are many competing codes of honor in the military world and that Rostov's is merely one among them.

Both Bolkonsky and Rostov, then, share a pride, an intensity of spirit, and often a single-mindedness in their worldviews. And both confront the

imperfect realities of a world in which history does not happen as they would wish, and in which the definition of the good is not absolute. The unique experiences of these two very different characters unfold separately and without direct relation to one another in Book Two. The two characters are not even aware of each other's existence at this point in the novel. And yet even as their stories are told separately in this book, they also echo one another, like two parallel subjects of a single musical fugue.

Tolstoy powerfully reinforces the unity of their two storylines in the double ending of Book Two. The author juxtaposes the disenchanting Andrew to the wounded Rostov. Andrew's story ends with these lines: "Prince Andrew gave him [Tushin] a look, but said nothing and went away. He felt sad and depressed. It was all so strange, so unlike what he had hoped" (9, 243; 212). Then with his characteristically cinematic intuition, Tolstoy shifts the lens immediately to Rostov, who lies wounded and reflects in agony on his pain: "Nobody wants me!" he exclaims several paragraphs later. "There is no one to help me or pity me. Yet I was once at home, strong, happy, and loved" (9, 244; 213).

Both of these moments occur simultaneously, although in distinct places. And both of them poignantly express the disintegration of each character's earlier ideals and each one's feeling of isolation in the world. By juxtaposing these parallel situations, Tolstoy artistically creates for the reader a sense of a common human experience that connects the confusion and isolation that each character feels individually. While it appears to each character that he suffers alone, the reader recognizes that their suffering is part of some larger order of things to which only their creator, and we, the readers, are privy.

From the point of view of the characters themselves this is perhaps shallow consolation. It surely does not lessen their emotional pain. But the early Tolstoy was too honest a writer to offer artificial solutions to the challenge of life. Instead, in *War and Peace* he gives us another sort of "answer" to that challenge: the aesthetic response. He transforms the tragedy of life into an art-form that combines the rhythmic principle of poetry with an unflinching attention to the particular details of lived experience, characteristic of realist prose. The rhythmic principle in the novel is not merely verbal, as one critic has recently argued.<sup>10</sup> (It is verbal, in part, as we saw with *vdrug-zvuk*.) But the rhythmic principle is also thematic. That is, there are situations and experiences that play off of one another in a manner similar to the way that parallel sounds and rhythms interact with one another in poetry.<sup>11</sup>

R. F. Christian has spoken of what he calls "situation rhymes" in Tolstoy's novel.<sup>12</sup> For Christian these "situation rhymes" are a fact of Tolstoy's aesthetics. What I am arguing here is that this artistic technique is organically linked to the author's metaphysics, as well. By means of inter-



nal resonances within the text itself, Tolstoy artistically links the truth of a single moment in an individual's life to the larger truth of our shared human experience. Tolstoy creates an artistic world that reveals the imperfections of each individual's lived experience and which is permeated at the same time by the reconciling harmonies of a poem or a musical performance.

*Pierre Bezukhov: The Tolstoyan Searcher Par Excellence*

Like Prince Andrew and Nicholas Rostov, Pierre Bezukhov searches passionately for meaning in his world. But there is in Pierre a richness, a depth, and a mythical largeness that few of the other characters in the work possess. One critic has aptly called Pierre the novel's "central image" and the "main hero."<sup>13</sup> Pierre is one of the only male characters who was present both in Tolstoy's earliest conception of the work and who also survived its numerous revisions. Pierre's experiences became for Tolstoy the embodiment of the "great era" that captured the writer's imagination.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout most of the novel the interrelationship between Pierre's personal drama and that of the Russian nation remains metaphorical. But sometimes these two story-lines directly intersect one another, as in the case of Pierre's witnessing of the Battle of Borodino in Book Ten. In that scene Pierre is both the surveyor and the surveyed. He is both a free actor in a private drama of his own devising and also a participant in the larger historical and human drama depicted by the novel as a whole. As he looks out over the battlefield and attempts to understand what is happening, Pierre does not realize that both his friend, Prince Andrew, and his future brother-in-law, Nicholas Rostov, experience parallel moments in the novel: Prince Andrew, as he surveys the battlefield of Schoen Grabern in Book Two, and Nicholas, as he attempts to make sense of the meeting of Alexander and Napoleon at Tilsit at the end of Book Five. Nor does Pierre realize that he is present at the pivotal battle in Russia's war against Napoleon. Pierre's presence at that event has an air of grandeur and solemnity, of which only his creator, and the reader, is cognizant.

Throughout the novel the path of the individual, like that of the nation, is long and painful and full of error and failure along the way. In Tolstoy's artistic imagination the experience of failure and that of triumph represent two essential elements of an organically unified path of human development. Just as Tolstoy cannot "write about our triumph in the struggle against Bonaparte's France without having described our failures and our shame" (13, 54; 1364), so the author cannot speak of the wisdom attained by Pierre at the novel's end without telling us about the many mistakes and illusions he experiences along the way. Tolstoy's desire to understand historical truth leads him ever further into the national past. So, too, the author's wish to depict the truth of Pierre leads him ever deeper into the

cesspool of the character's youthful failures and shame. The author's vision is constantly widening and deepening. It unites in its broad purview an ever expanding totality of human and historical experience.

This process of artistic composition and philosophical discovery in Tolstoy mirrors, interestingly, the process by which Pierre himself comes to understand the world. Like Tolstoy, Pierre is continually expanding his conception of truth throughout the novel, without ever fully abandoning his belief that such a truth exists. The novel and the hero thus follow common paths of evolution in Tolstoy's mind. They are inseparably linked facets of a single creative organism. Pierre thus becomes the repository for, indeed the human embodiment of, one of the novel's overarching philosophical concerns: the problem of man's search for a higher unifying order. Pierre is obsessed with the problem of the good. This is a trait he shares more with his literary descendent, Levin of *Anna Karenina*, than with either of the other two main male protagonists in *War and Peace*. Like Levin, Pierre seeks answers to life's vexing questions that may be applied both to himself and also to the world at large. For Pierre the good life is one that is lived both for the sake of moral self-perfection and for the perfection of his fellow man.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of the novel Pierre is an admirer of Napoleon and a defender of revolutionary principles. He will then become an advocate of the principles of Freemasonry; a social reformer on his estate; the knight who saves Natasha from her illicit elopement with Anatole Kuragin; the savior of a girl caught in the Moscow fire; and finally, the savior of Russia, who, he believes, must end Napoleon's rule. When seen together, these events offer the reader a sense of that quality of character that makes Pierre special in the novel. His uniqueness lies not so much in what he does, but in the high moral seriousness with which he approaches everything he undertakes. Failure after failure, disillusionment after disillusionment, Pierre keeps coming back, challenging life, demanding of it an answer to the accursed question, *Zachem?* ("What for?"). Pierre remains convinced that there is a truth to life, and that it is his responsibility to discover it and live in accordance with it. But Pierre hopes to find that truth in a single idea or theory, in a particular experience or moment of revelation. In each new truth that Pierre discovers along the path he attempts to discern *the* Truth of life. Tolstoy shows us, however, that the truth Pierre seeks lies elsewhere: not in *an* experience or *an* idea, but in the totality of experiences and in the totality of ideas, which he adopts, discards, and then resurrects again throughout the course of his searching.

What is true of Pierre's larger personal trajectory in the novel is also true of the broader ideological interaction between Pierre and Prince Andrew in the work. In the same way that Tolstoy represents each new stage in Pierre's development as part of an on-going and organically unified pro-

cess, so Tolstoy will also represent each one of Pierre's intellectual positions in the novel as a microcosm of a larger Tolstoyan truth about human life. The author shows us this, for example, in Pierre's debates with Prince Andrew at Bogucharova and Bald Hills in Book Five. Pierre attempts to convince his friend of the existence of a unifying order in the world. Prince Andrew responds with the pithy line: "Yes, that is Herder's theory" (10, 117: 421). Prince Andrew's observation reveals that Pierre's ideas come from a specific intellectual tradition and could therefore be opposed by any other line of reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

But is the reader meant to disregard what Pierre has said? Not at all. To do this would be simply to replace one limited truth, Pierre's metaphysical idealism, with another, Prince Andrew's rational skepticism. Instead, we are meant to recognize a higher truth altogether in this passage, a truth that lies neither in Pierre's nor Andrew's intellectual position. It lies rather in the permanent and irresolvable dialogue between these two positions, between these two distinct approaches to the "facts" of the world. Whereas Pierre fantasizes about the possibility of a reign of goodness and truth on earth, Andrew acknowledges only those facts that he himself can rationally perceive. What convinces Andrew is the reality of suffering that he has personally witnessed by this point in the novel. He now sees the world for what it is. He sees the world too much for what it is, in fact. This is what leads him to his current state of inaction and despair. In his debates with Pierre Prince Andrew exposes the logical fallacies of his friend's arguments, while never attempting to pursue a coherent position of his own. And yet, even in his role as the devil's advocate, Prince Andrew does present, unwittingly, a position. He argues that in a world devoid of any higher purpose the pursuit of self-interest is as good a justification for one's life as any other.

Tolstoy thus shows us that Prince Andrew is psychologically more similar to than different from Pierre. Like Pierre, he is incapable of living a life that cannot be justified by some higher good. He feels compelled to explain and defend the form of existence he has chosen for himself. Beneath Prince Andrew's self-proclaimed nihilism, then, lies the same desire for philosophical order that he has always possessed. Before Prince Andrew believed in the values of political power and military greatness. Now he advocates radical individualism. In effect, he believes in nothing but himself, on principle.

Tolstoy creates a sense of the ultimate unity between the world views of the two characters in the ferry raft scene at Bald Hills. He subsumes their perspectives into a unifying vision of life, in which ideological conflict and contradiction become permanent elements in a larger Tolstoyan truth of human experience. But even in that unity, we find a slight dissonance. The author *does* finally choose between the ideologies of his two debating

characters. He *does* place his accent on one vision of the world over the other. Of the two ideological positions Pierre's is revealed to be the more right, the more true. Not because he argues it more persuasively than Prince Andrew argues his position — it is full of logical fallacies, in fact — but because it is the only intellectual position that is in sync with the force of nature itself:

There was perfect stillness. Pierre became silent. The raft had long since stopped and only the waves of the current beat softly against it below. Prince Andrew felt as if the sound of the waves kept up a refrain to Pierre's words, whispering: 'It is true, believe it.' (10, 117; 422)

The whispering emanating from the waves is, of course, a projection of Prince Andrew's imagination. But this does not diminish its significance. The fact that Prince Andrew, disillusioned with life at this point in the novel, should hear such whispering at all reveals the power of the message contained in Pierre's words. His words illuminate something that Prince Andrew and the reader have felt to be true all along: that underlying the chaos of everyday experience there *is* a higher truth to life.

Prince Andrew will be the one to destroy the moment of epiphany. He suddenly interjects into the silence: "Yes, if only it were so! However, it is time to get on" (10, 118; 422). The impulse to undermine an experience of inner peace is always present in Prince Andrew. In this he is not so different from Pierre, who himself seldom experiences a sublime moment of epiphany in the novel without immediately attempting to interpret it or transform it into an intellectual abstraction. But there is an important difference between the way in which the two characters exhibit this common tendency in the novel. Prince Andrew cannot hold onto the immediacy of the moment, because he instinctively rejects it as illusory, as false. Pierre cannot hold onto it because he often wants to create out of a sublime moment a grand theory about life in general.

In this respect, too, Pierre's, and not Prince Andrew's, perception of the world comes closer to that of the Tolstoyan narrator. Whereas Prince Andrew often overlooks individual moments altogether, Pierre tends to transform those moments into microcosms of a larger philosophical order. Pierre does this because the chaos of reality is too much for him to bear. Tolstoy does it because he sees in that very chaos a potential richness that can be embraced and celebrated on its own terms.

Pierre wants to stop the flux of life. Only then can he find his unifying idea. Tolstoy shows the world to us in all of its organic fluidity and teeming particularity. Therein lies *his* unifying idea. Tolstoy shows us men and women not as he wishes them to be, but as they, in fact, are: stupid, shrewd, corrupt, moral, irredeemable, rich with potential. For Pierre human potential manifests itself in man's ability to realize an ideal of moral and social goodness on earth, as he himself attempts to do throughout the

novel. For Tolstoy human potentiality is reflected in something less grandiose than this. It is manifested in the basic and real humanity of the characters themselves. It is expressed in that simple and sunny *joie de vivre* with which men and women go about their daily business of living and struggling in the world.

Tolstoy's unifying truth of life does not lie in any single moment of epiphany or abstract ideal. It lies everywhere, in the voices of soldiers conversing in a wattle shed on the night before battle, in the groans of a wounded and disillusioned young soldier, in the infectious stillness of nature. And it lies within, as well: in that realm of human experience in which the heart and the head, feeling and intellect, exist in a state of continual battle with one another.

#### *Conclusion: Tolstoy's "Realism"*

In *War and Peace* Tolstoy creates the illusion of order, not by ignoring reality, but by refracting reality through the transformative lens of artistic perception. Tolstoy's vision of life in the novel combines an idealized sense of life's unity with an acute awareness of the discord that underlies that unity. The part and the whole, the real and the ideal, do not exist in permanent opposition in Tolstoy's novel. They enter finally into a symbiotic relationship. Prince Andrew and Pierre Bezukhov strive for an ideal vision of life by attempting to transcend the real. Tolstoy creates a vision of life in which the real itself, when perceived through the artistic eye, begins to acquire transcendent meaning. Tolstoy subsumes the raw materials of everyday human reality into an artistic experience, in which even the smallest detail begins to take on larger significance when seen in the context of the whole poetic fabric of which it is part.<sup>17</sup>

What Tolstoy offers us in the novel is not a vision of pure metaphysical order or of some absolute Truth of life. Nor does the author completely deny the possibility of such a unifying truth. Rather, Tolstoy emphasizes the way in which his characters continually strive for a vision of the ideal amidst the real. And Tolstoy himself enacts this very process of striving in his aesthetic organization of the work.

George Steiner once quoted Sartre as saying that the "technique of the novel always refers us back to the metaphysics of the novelist."<sup>18</sup> If Sartre and Steiner are right, then we may say that the "realist" technique in *War and Peace* points us to Tolstoy's own metaphysics of what I would like to call a highly personalized impersonality. That is, the novel expresses a vision of life in which each human action and situation is both full of individualized nuance, and therefore deeply meaningful in itself, and is also part of universal human experience and the supra-personal forces of history.

Perhaps Tolstoy's ability to create a fictional world in the novel that seems so similar to the one we inhabit in reality stems from our recognition

in Tolstoy's metaphysics of a truth about the nature of our own lives: that this life is both lived by us and happens in spite of us, that it consists both in the minute details of everyday experience, of which we seem to be the masters, and in vast, impersonal forces over which we have no control. The passages from the novel that I have analyzed illustrate how Tolstoy artistically creates a sense of the ultimate unity between these two planes. We have seen this both in Tolstoy's use of details and in the richly nuanced, omniscient narrative perspective he employs to relate those details. Both Isaiah Berlin and Gary Saul Morson have overlooked this unity in the artistic portion of the work. Sergei Bocharov and George Clay have detected it, but even they, I think, have not gone far enough. The unifying narrative perspective of the novel reveals not only Tolstoy's impressive artistic mastery of the world, as these scholars have shown.

That perspective also illuminates a uniquely Tolstoyan version of philosophical *self-mastery*. Tolstoy's artistic voice combines the part and the whole, the personal and the impersonal, in a way that Tolstoy, wavering in his own lifetime between an intense individualism and a radical self-renunciation, could never achieve. Tolstoy has internalized these opposing poles of human experience in *War and Peace*. He seems temporarily to have transformed those oppositions into a vision of human completeness and metaphysical order.

## NOTES

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- 1 See N. G. Chernyshevsky, "Detsvto i otrochestvo. Voennye rasskazy."
- 2 On the functions of interior monologues in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, see Bezrukova. On Tolstoy's representations of characters' interior monologues in the various styles of their speech, see Vinogradov. On the roots of Tolstoy's methods of psychological analysis in Lermontov's prose, see Kovalev.
- 3 *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12, 1–64.
- 4 Important twentieth-century variants of this paradigm have been developed by Eikhenbaum, Berlin, Wasiolek, Gustafson, Morson, and Orwin. See also Clay and Sankovitch.
- 5 I think that Isaiah Berlin was right when he recognized that Tolstoy's vision of the world in *War and Peace* both tends towards a unifying philosophical order and recognizes the value of individual human experience at the same time. But, as I will argue, by associating the hedgehog with the thinker and the fox with the artist in Tolstoy, Berlin draws the distinction too sharply. He fails to consider the way in which these two impulses both exist within the artistic portion of *War and Peace* and are ultimately conjoined there.
- 6 Whereas Berlin separates Tolstoy the thinker from Tolstoy the artist, Morson puts these two sides of the writer's personality back together. But he does so, it seems to me, in an unsatisfactory way. Morson persuasively shows that Tolstoy cherished ordinary moments in human life. But I think he goes too far when he links this and other aspects of Tolstoy's novel to a broader Tolstoyan thesis about the superiority of prosaic experience, meaning

precisely the ordinary, the unnoticed, even perhaps *byt*. Morson has underestimated the significance of an essential dimension of *War and Peace*: the fact that the novel transforms a mountain of “ordinary” facts about the characters into an extraordinary vision of human life as something inexhaustible and yet organically unified. In both content and form *War and Peace* expresses Tolstoy’s own lifelong aspiration to self-transcendence, his desire artistically to create out of the ordinary and imperfect aspects of the world an extraordinary, ideal vision of life.

7 Quoted in Lomunov, vol. 2, 517.

8 The first two numbers refer to the volume and page number in L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 90 vols (Moscow, 1928–1958). The third number refers to the Maude translation in Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, George Gibian, ed.

9 We might recall, for instance, Andrew’s private meditation in Book Three before the Battle of Austerlitz. Andrew expresses his desire to leave his mark on the world. The existential angst underlying Andrew’s words is unmistakable here:

‘I don’t know what will happen and don’t want to know, and can’t, but if I want this — want glory, want to be known to men, want to be loved by them, it is not my fault that I want it and want nothing but that and live only for that. Yes, for that alone! I shall never tell anyone, but, oh God! what am I to do if I love nothing but fame and men’s esteem? Death, wounds, the loss of family — I fear nothing. And precious and dear as many persons are to me — father, sister, wife — those dearest to me — yet dreadful and unnatural as it seems, I would give them all at once for a moment of glory, of triumph over men, of love from men I don’t know and never shall know, for the love of these men here [the military leadership].’ (9, 324; 283–4).

10 On the verbal poetry in in the novel, see Sloane.

11 There is evidence from Tolstoy’s own writings that he viewed prose and poetry as closely related forms of artistic expression. In 1851 the author notes in his diary: “Where the border is between prose and poetry I will never understand; although there is a question about this subject in the study of verbal arts. But it’s impossible to understand the answer. Poetry is verse. Prose is not verse. Or: poetry is everything excluding business papers and text books.” Quoted in Lomunov, vol. 1, 71.

12 Christian 131 ff.

13 Saburov 176, 181.

14 From his earliest work on the novel Tolstoy conceived of Pierre as a member of the first generation of Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, the Decembrists of 1825. Pierre would bridge the experience of 1825 with the earlier years of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia, 1805 through 1812, which comprise the focus of the novel:

In 1856 I started writing a tale with a certain direction, the hero of which was to be a Decembrist returning with his family to Russia. [The hero’s name was to be Pytor Labazov and his wife Natalie, clearly the future Pierre and Natasha of the final version.] Without intending to do so, I moved from the present time to the year 1825, a period of error and unhappiness for my hero, and I abandoned what I had begun. But even in the year 1825 my hero was already a grown-up family man. In order to understand him, I had to move once again back to his youth, and his youth coincided with the period of 1812, so glorious for Russia. I abandoned for a second time what I had started and began to write about the year 1812. But for a third time I abandoned what I had started, not because it was necessary for me to describe the earliest days of my hero’s youth but, on the contrary, because among the half-historical, half-social, half-invented great characters of the great era, the personality of my hero was being pushed into the background, and the foreground was being occupied, with an equal interest for me, by old and young people and by men and women of that time. (13, 54; 1364)

- 15 In this respect Pierre may be linked, spiritually at least, to the tradition of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia, who, according to Philip Pomper, "are distinguishable from both intellectual workers and pure intellectuals, from the former by their concern with ultimate questions, and from the latter by their active commitment to human self-fulfillment" (Pomper 1).
- 16 Gary Saul Morson has given a name to the rhetorical technique used by Prince Andrew to reveal the contingency of Pierre's ideas. Morson calls this technique the "irony of origins" (Morson 239).
- 17 Richard Gustafson has argued that artistic details in Tolstoy always point us to some higher plane of reality. Gustafson has coined the term "emblematic realism" to describe this aspect of Tolstoy's poetics (204). For Gustafson the higher reality in Tolstoy's fiction "can always be reduced to the Christian idea of love" (4). In my reading of *War and Peace* the unifying truth of life is less theological and more fluid than this. My emphasis is on the ceaseless act, rather than on the accomplished fact, of man's search for a higher order in the world.
- 18 Steiner 6.

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