

## ARTICLES

DINNER AT THE ENGLISH CLUB: CHARACTER ON THE MARGINS IN TOLSTOI'S *WAR AND PEACE*

Chloë Kitzinger, Princeton University

**Prelude: Anna Makarovna's stockings**

Midway through Part One of the Epilogue to Lev Tolstói's *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*, 1865–1969), a character identified only as Anna Makarovna finishes knitting a pair of stockings. By a “secret process known only to herself,” she can knit two stockings on the same needles, one inside the other. When she is done, she draws the inner stocking from the outer one, to the Rostov and Bezukhov children's ecstatic cries of “Two, two!” (1255–56; 12: 280–81).<sup>1</sup>

Set between Tolstói's didactic description of the Rostovs' and Bezukhovs' idyllic family life, and his notorious closing digression on history and the problem of free will, this scene stands out as an enigma within an ever-more-resolutely omniscient narrative. Through a near-magical relationship between container and contents, Anna Makarovna's stockings figure a set of questions evoked at the end of any mimetic work of art, but particularly one as ambitious as *War and Peace*. Once we turn the final page, what relation will this bounded fictional world turn out to bear to the world it has modeled? And what does our encounter with the text leave behind when it is over? Later in the Epilogue, Tolstói hints at the most extreme ambition possible for a work of historical representation: “So long as histories are written of separate individuals [...] and not the history of *all*, without a single exception *all*, the people who take part in an event, it is quite impossible to avoid ascribing to in-

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1. All references to *War and Peace* are to the Maude translation as revised by Amy Mandelker, followed in the form (English citation; Russian citation) by a corresponding reference to the Jubilee edition of Tolstói's collected works (volume and page). Block quotes are given in Russian below the English.

dividuals a force compelling other people to direct their activity towards a single end" (1278; 12: 305). Like the inner stocking drawn from the outer, the "history of *all*" is a puzzle that both plagues and enchants *War and Peace*. The phrase points toward an unrealizable mimetic ideal: a narrative that captures and conveys history just as it unfolded, in the experience of every living person at once.

The following discussion of *War and Peace* aims to show that this problem of mimesis—the illusion of reality cast in and by a representational work of art<sup>2</sup>—can be understood, primarily, as a problem of novelistic characterization. I will argue that the philosophy of history expounded in *War and Peace*'s digressions also functions as a guide to the unconventional character-system that Tolstoi engineered to push his novel toward the mimetic horizon of the "history of all." Tugged from the center toward the margins of his narrative by the unique promise that narrative marginality holds, Tolstoi experiments with a rich if tenuous approach to an all-embracing historical account. However, this account's dependence on the novel's own narrative and textual *bounds* sets up a paradox of representation that cannot easily be unraveled.

### **Approaching the character-system of *War and Peace*: Bagration's dinner**

Soon after Alexander I's army has lost the Battle of Austerlitz, Tolstoi's character Count Ilya Rostov organizes a banquet at the English Club in Moscow in honor of Prince Bagration. Collecting together fictional and historical players, the novel's most central protagonists and most evanescent incidental figures, the scene of this banquet extends an invitation into *War and Peace*'s vast web of characters. A brief reading will establish the key terms of my discussion.

Bagration's dinner is narrated three times in three chapters. The first narrative is one sentence long: "Next day, the 3rd of March, soon after one o'clock, two hundred and fifty members of the English Club and fifty guests were awaiting the guest of honor and hero of the Austrian campaign, Prince Bagration, to dinner" (327; 10: 14). With this sentence, almost three hundred new characters enter *War and Peace*. The second narrative embodies them more concretely in the novel:

On the third of March all the rooms in the English Club were filled with a hum of conversation, like the hum of bees swarming in spring-time. The members and guests of the club wandered hither and thither, sat, stood, met, and separated, some in uniform and some in evening dress

2. I use "mimesis" throughout this article in a sense close to Erich Auerbach's classic formulation, "represented reality" (*dargestellte Wirklichkeit*). I do not mean it in the restrictive sense of "imitation" summed up, for example, by Lubomir Doležel: "a very popular mode of reading that converts fictional persons into live people, imaginary settings into actual places, invented stories into real-life happenings" (x). On the roots of this dual sense in Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of mimesis, see Halliwell (23 ff.).

[...]. Most of those present were elderly respected men with broad self-confident faces, fat fingers, and resolute gestures and voices. (329)

3-го марта во всех комнатах Английского клуба стоял стон разговаривающих голосов, и, как пчелы на весеннем пролете, сновали взад и вперед, сидели, стояли, сходились и расходились, в мундирах, фраках [...] члены и гости клуба [...] Большинство присутствовавших были старые, почтенные люди с широкими, самоуверенными лицами, толстыми пальцами, твердыми движениями и голосами. (10: 16)

If we first encountered the members of the English Club from a distance, we are now close enough to hear the drone of their voices and see their fat fingers. The narrative description of this crowd intersperses the collective with the individual and the alien with the known. The scattered guests assemble to watch Bagration's entrance "like rye shaken together in a shovel," but when the company toasts the Emperor, "young Rostov's ecstatic voice could be heard above the three hundred others" (330; 10: 17). Such moments group the guests around Nikolai Rostov in the discourse as surely as, in the story, they group themselves around Prince Bagration.

The third narrative starts again from the beginning of the banquet, this time moving from the public sphere of ceremonious toasts at the head of the table to the private level of the guests at its middle. Focalized mainly through Pierre Bezukhov, this narrative barely touches on Bagration: the dinner becomes a backdrop to Pierre's realization that Fyodor Dolokhov is cuckolding him, to Dolokhov's insult, and to the challenge Pierre issues him at the end of the night. If the second narrative employed named fictional characters to construct an idiosyncratic perspective on a historical scene, the third makes one of these same characters the center of its attention and allows his subjective experience to dictate our view. It is Dolokhov who initiates the scene's main fictional action, provoking Pierre into a duel. But through Pierre's eyes, we read Dolokhov only from the outside: "Dolokhov looked at Pierre with clear mirthful cruel eyes, and that smile of his which seemed to say, 'Ah! This is what I like!'" (334–35; 10: 20–23)

The contrast between the representation of Pierre and the representation of Dolokhov, against the backdrop of Bagration's dinner and the now-forgotten footmen, guests, and members of the English Club, throws into relief the lines that separate three basic categories of character in *War and Peace*. I will call them *major*, *minor*, and *marginal*.

The concept of a novelistic "character-system," as defined in Alex Woloch's groundbreaking study *The One vs. the Many* (2003), offers a methodological tool for beginning to discuss the distinctions between these categories. Woloch develops a theory of characterization based on the distribution of a limited amount of narrative attention among a large number of implied story-persons. He describes this dynamic using two linked terms. The "character-space" is the "charged encounter" between the narrative designation of an "individual human personality," and the space and position within the nar-

rative into which the *representation* of this personality must fit. The “character-system” is the “arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces [...] into a unified narrative structure” (14). On the basis of representative novels by Austen, Balzac, and Dickens, Woloch establishes the conventional shape of the character-system: the protagonist(s), around whom the narrative is built, will be the least subject to the violent excision, suppression, and fragmentation that results from imposing a unified form on many different stories. Characters nearest the center of narrative attention get represented most fully, while those at the margins are distorted, suppressed, and (eventually) annihilated.

Tolstoi’s *War and Peace* both exploits and experiments with the conventional contours of the novelistic character-system as Woloch describes them. The terms of the exploitation and the experiment already emerge in the triple narration of Bagration’s banquet at the English Club. Of the eight pages it occupies in the Jubilee edition, about three attend mainly to Pierre and his perception of Dolokhov, while most of the other three hundred guests and members are squeezed into forty scattered lines of collective description. Moreover, they compose a group continually in need of differentiation, arrangement around a vivid point like Nikolai Rostov’s cheer. Thus, in each narration of the banquet, we are aware of the fictional characters’ organizing centrality. And yet, the moments when Pierre and Nikolai are central to the scene combine with others when they are absorbed into the crowd of three hundred guests and members, all pressed into the service of making Bagration’s banquet part of Tolstoi’s novel. While reinforcing a configuration of characters centered around Pierre and the Rostovs, these scenes also manipulate that configuration to reveal another, centered around a presentation of the historical figure Bagration.

In this sense, *War and Peace*’s narrative attention is divided—not only among its protagonists (Pierre Bezukhov, Natasha and Nikolai Rostov, and Marya and Andrei Bolkonsky), but *between* them and the other material that the novel brings to life. Polemically inclined to decentralize the actors, historical and fictional, who move and organize his narrative, Tolstoi distributes its “space” among five major characters, dozens of minor characters, and thousands of soldiers, officers, serfs, tradesmen, workers, doctors, provincial officials, lunatics, children, horses, dogs—even (as we will see) stars.<sup>3</sup> If the protagonists’ centrality helps construct this vast and populous historical world, its very dimensions work in turn to dismantle their centrality.

*War and Peace* thus insists on the need for a third category that could bypass Woloch’s division between major characters, and characters that are

3. E. E. Zaidenshnur counts more than 500 named characters in *War and Peace* (328). The figure swells—by a necessarily indeterminate amount—if one also counts the unnamed characters and collective groups encompassed in the novel’s narration.

minor with respect to them. These are the characters I will call “marginal”—a set of figures whose vividness and authenticity depend precisely on their *exclusion* from the fictional plot and its organizing terms. Such figures reverse the logic of the conventional character-system, tapping the mimetic potential of compressing an enormous group of characters into the least possible narrative space. Seen in relation to this group, Tolstoi’s protagonists function not just to occupy their own proper “space,” but also (by dint of that occupation) to provide a crucially *small* space for the representation of others.

The proposal that Tolstoi’s protagonists are not the defining center of his texts is far from new. As Tolstoi’s contemporary Pavel Annenkov, an early reviewer of *War and Peace*, commented in 1868: “To his heroes and their private lives [Tolstoi] gives only as much space, light and air as is necessary for the bare support of their existence” (46).<sup>4</sup> Later critics, including Viktor Shklovskii and Lidiia Ginzburg, saw the decentralization of the hero as a basic feature of Tolstoi’s narrative art (cf. Shklovskii, 110; Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose* 246 ff.).<sup>5</sup>

Building on this line of argument, I hope to show that the tensions inherent in the unequal division of narrative “space” are more important to Tolstoi’s mimetic project than has yet been recognized. In *War and Peace*—through both fictional narrative, and an explicit theory of historical narration—Tolstoi weaves a system of relations and differences among characters that supports not only the illusion of his major protagonists’ lives, but also a crucial glimpse of the living historical world that can emerge *only* at the margins of their experience. He experiments, in other words, with mobilizing a novelistic character-system to portray more and more people whom the novel’s plot does not actually embrace.<sup>6</sup> We can appreciate both the potential and the limitations of the experiment by returning in more detail to the question of how *War and Peace*’s “space” is divided among major, minor, and marginal characters.

4. Scholars have traced early reviewers’ difficulty in even identifying the novel’s protagonists: see Morson, 52–59 ff.; and recently, Steiner, “Tolstoy, Liberal and Pluralist” 424 ff.

5. As Ginzburg writes, Tolstoi privileged the representation of “life in general,” the basic and shared aspects of human experience, over any one individual character’s biography. She elaborates on “life in general” in *War and Peace* in a remarkable 1944 essay which, in a different context, anticipates some of the observations about the novel’s character-system offered here (“O romane Tolstogo ‘Voina i mir’”).

6. This project might be considered a logical, though indirect, extension of that begun in the *Waverly* novels, where (as Wolfgang Iser has commented) Scott enlisted a passive and “mediocre” central hero and the perspectives of many minor characters in an attempt “to create the illusion of historical reality without confining that reality to the illusion he created” (97–100). Iser’s reading of Scott’s character-system owes most, of course, to Georg Lukács (Lukács 30–88. On Tolstoi and Scott’s tradition, see especially Lukács 86–88). On Tolstoi and Scott, see more recently Ungurianu (97–124 *passim*).

**Unfolding the character-system: Anna Pavlovna Scherer's salon**

*War and Peace* opens at Anna Pavlovna Scherer's St. Petersburg salon. It starts with dialogue, as in a play, and there is little encouragement to delve beneath this dramatic surface. Not only are the characters described in external focalization; they are also continually related to the categories and classes to which they belong. Thus, Vasili Kuragin "spoke in that refined French in which our grandfathers not only spoke but thought, and with the gentle, patronizing intonation natural [*svoistvennyi*] to a man of importance who had grown old in society and at court" (3–4; 9: 4); "Prince Vasili did not reply though, with the quickness of memory and perception befitting [*svoistvennoi*] a man of the world, he indicated..." (7; 9: 8). Or: "Anna Pavlovna, with the womanly and courtier-like quickness and tact habitual [*svoistvennoi*] to her..." (6; 9: 7). The adjective "*svoistvennyi*" (proper, characteristic) tolls through these descriptions like a bell. Vasili Kuragin and Anna Pavlovna Scherer lend themselves to easy characterization because they are types of all the sets they belong to, types (in a sense) of their very selves.

Indeed, as the guests pass through Anna Pavlovna's salon—compared to a "workshop" whose "conversational machine" the foreman Anna Pavlovna keeps smoothly running (11; 9: 12)—the salon itself is revealed as a machine for the mass-production of characters, created in transit between instance and type. *Each* guest is led up to greet Anna Pavlovna's aunt, and *all* escape with a feeling of relief; *all* are cheered to see the lively, pregnant Lise Bolkon-skaya, and *each* is encouraged by her smile to think he is being "specially amiable" (9; 9: 10).

It is this machine, both social and narrative, whose works Pierre Bezukhov threatens to gum almost as soon as he enters the novel:

One of the next arrivals was a stout, heavily built young man with close-cropped hair, spectacles, the light-colored breeches fashionable at that time, a very high ruffle and a brown dress-coat. [...] Anna Pavlovna greeted him with the nod she accorded to the lowest hierarchy in her drawing-room. *But in spite of this lowest grade greeting, a look of anxiety and fear, as at the sight of something too large and uncharacteristic of the place, came over her face when she saw Pierre enter.* Though he was certainly rather bigger than the other men in the room, her anxiety could only have reference to the clever though shy, but observant and natural, expression which distinguished him from everyone else in that drawing-room. (10, my italics, translation modified)

Вскоре после маленькой княгини вошел массивный, толстый молодой человек с стриженной головой, в очках, светлых панталонах по тогдашней моде, с высоким жабо и в коричневом фраке. [...] Анна Павловна приветствовала его поклоном, относящимся к людям самой низшей иерархии в ее салоне. *Но, несмотря на это низшее по своему сорту приветствие, при виде вошедшего Пьера в лице Анны Павловны изобразилось беспокойство и страх, подобно тому, который выражается при виде чего-нибудь слишком огромного и несвойственного месту.* Хотя, действительно, Пьер был несколько больше других мужчин в комнате, но этот страх мог относиться только к тому умному и вместе робкому, наблюдательному и естественному взгляду, отличавшему его от всех в этой гостиной. (9: 11, my italics)

The early clue to Pierre's exceptionality in the discourse is not in the initial description of him; it is in Anna Pavlovna's immediate inkling of something "uncharacteristic" (*nesvoistvennogo*) of the space of her salon. If Pierre's observant, unstudied gaze sets him off socially from all the other guests, it also sets him off technically from all the other characters. There is a visible gap between Pierre "himself," and the public figure that the salon allows him to present. The impression this strategy produces is not so much that Pierre *is* not narrated purely from the outside, as that—alone among all the well-defined social players around him—he *cannot* be.

If a flat character (in E. M. Forster's tenacious formulation) is one who "never surprises" (81), we can say that Tolstoi introduces his first protagonist into a room full of flat minor characters who imply willfully "flat" people, invested in performing their own conformity to a stable, pre-established type.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the opening in the salon makes an exceptionally strong mimetic claim; it primes us to believe that the aspects of the novel's represented world that appear artificial are artificial of their own accord, not of the novel's. Conversely and comparatively, through Pierre, we see the standard the novel sets for what is substantial, natural, and alive. Aligned with this narrative technique in the discourse, Andrei Bolkonsky's characterization of Pierre approaches the level of the meta-fictional: "You are dear to me, especially since you are the one living person among our whole circle" (31; 9: 36).

This relational technique for establishing the illusion of the "living" character is not unique to Pierre's entrance. Natasha Rostova, for example, first appears under strikingly similar conditions, interrupting the empty formalities of her parents' conversation with the Karagins:

A silence ensued. [...] The visitor's daughter was already smoothing down her dress with an inquiring look at her mother, when suddenly from the next room were heard male and female feet running to the door and the crash of a chair falling over, and a girl of thirteen, hiding something in the folds of her short muslin skirt, darted in and stopped short in the middle of the room. It was evident that she had not intended her flight to bring her so far. Behind her in the doorway appeared a student with a crimson coat-collar, an officer of the Guards, a girl of fifteen, and a plump rosy-faced boy in a short jacket. (41, translation modified)

Наступило молчание. [...] Дочь гостя уже оправляла платье, вопросительно глядя на мать, как вдруг из соседней комнаты послышался бег к двери нескольких мужских и женских ног, грохот зацепленного и поваленного стула, и в комнату вбежала тринадцатилетняя девочка, запахнув что-то короткою кисейною юбкою, и остановилась по середине комнаты. Очевидно было, она нечаянно, с нерассчитанного бега, заскочила так далеко. В дверях в ту же минуту показались студент с малиновым воротником, гвардейский офицер, пятнадцатилетняя девочка и толстый румяный мальчик в детской курточке. (9: 46-47)

It is as much the background of silence and formality as the figure of Natasha herself that creates such a vivid impression of animated motion. She stands

7. It can be taken as a measure of the success of the Russian realists' manipulations of the conventions of mimetic illusion that Forster himself found a paucity of flat characters in Russian novels, "where they would be a decided help" (74).

out in relief against not only the Rostovs and Karagins in the drawing room, but also the figures framed behind her in the doorway, and even her doll Mimi, which she has hidden under her skirt (41; 9: 47). Natasha appears as if she had stumbled into form, both social and narrative, rather than having been created by it—as she is first described, “not pretty, but alive” (41, translation modified; 9: 47).

Most strongly developed in *Pierre*, Natasha, and the other protagonists, though not exclusive to them, is an illusion I want to summarize under the term “mimetic life.” A character’s mimetic life is the impression created by and in the text that she exists autonomously, in and for herself, independent not only of narrative and authorial design, but even of narrative language.<sup>8</sup> The description of Pierre’s “shy, observant, natural” gaze, and the implication that Natasha has run into the room, and into the novel, by accident (from another place where she could have existed just as well), are instances of two technical strategies for creating this illusion. Using the conceit of freedom from *social* artifice to bolster the effect of freedom from *narrative* artifice, both passages directly assert the presence of Pierre’s and Natasha’s bodies and minds somewhere beyond the text that narrates them.<sup>9</sup>

What is most important to emphasize about “mimetic life” (as demonstrated in Pierre’s and Natasha’s entrances) is that it relies strongly on comparison and relation, as well as on the unequal allotment of what Woloch calls narrative space. Accordingly, this illusion can *only* be distributed unevenly. The same techniques that deaden some guests at Anna Pavlovna Scherer’s salon and (by contrast) enliven others are repeated, writ large, on the level of the novel’s entire character-system.

Placed at *War and Peace*’s vivid center, the Rostovs provide its richest moments of daily life and the Bolkonskys, its lingerings at the spiritual door between life and death. On its schematic periphery, the predatory Kuragins and Dolokhov engineer twists in the plot, and the ambitious Drubetskoys intro-

8. The term “mimetic life” is my own, but it can be related (for example) to James Phelan’s idea of the “mimetic” component of character, or to what Mieke Bal, following other structuralist theorists, calls the “character-effect” (Phelan 2 ff.; Bal 113 ff.). Rather than the “human” characteristics of characters, that which makes them resemble what Phelan and Bal call “possible people,” my term aims to emphasize the living quality of mimetic characters: the effect of a vivid, autonomous figure that emerges during and depends upon the act of reading. A character who neither is nor is meant to be human—like the hunting-dog Laska in Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina*—can for many readers produce the effect of vividness and autonomy that I am calling mimetic life; conversely, a character who is in every way person-like—such as Tolstoi’s idealized peasant Platon Karataev—can fail to produce this effect. By separating the effect of “life” from attributes of personhood, I hope to be able to isolate and more closely examine such distinctions.

9. Many critics, of course, have commented on the central distinction Tolstoi (following in the tradition of Rousseau) makes between social pretense and organic life, and noted that it helps organize his novels into “negative” and “positive” characters. For particularly germane analyses of *War and Peace*, see Ginzburg, “O romane L’va Tolstogo” 131; Bayley 159.



duce the novel into new narrative circles.<sup>10</sup> Correspondingly, as Boris Drubetskoy is cemented into his role as the narrative's liaison to political power—not just observing the meeting of Alexander and Napoleon at Tilsit, but *timing* it—he becomes (in Natasha's words) “so narrow, like the dining-room clock” (483; 10: 193). Though Hélène Kuragina begins by striking Pierre as statically beautiful, an antique “marble” statue, we watch through his besotted eyes as she takes on sensual “living” flesh (219; 9: 249). But once their marriage has set the plot in motion, both Pierre and the narrative try to beat Hélène back into the marble of which she was first made—or at least, to encase her in “lacquer from all the thousand gazes that have passed over her body” (492; 10: 203; cf. 343; 10: 31). Like Boris, she is adamantly and permanently distanced from what the novel represents as “life.”

This remarkably stable character-system, which can of course be described in more detail, supports *War and Peace's* gargantuan represented world. The distribution of named protagonists and families forms a network of gazes, encompassing an ever-wider field of figures and events. We follow Andrei Bolkonsky to Kutuzov's council of war on the eve of the Battle of Austerlitz and the opening of the battle on the left flank; when Andrei falls, we follow Nikolai Rostov, stationed on the right flank with Bagration, and Dolokhov in the rearguard. We follow Natasha from the Otradnoe wolf hunt to the opera boxes of Moscow, and then to the Razumovskys' chapel for the Synod's prayer for deliverance from Napoleon. Hélène Kuragina and Julie Karagina lead us through the doors of Petersburg salons; Pierre Bezukhov, into the secret rites of Freemasons. Such range becomes possible not just because of the number of named protagonists, but also because of the differentiated techniques of representation that associate each with a particular value-laden narrative sphere and “space.” Often described as a complete model of life in which everyone and everything lives, *War and Peace* in fact rests its illusion of limitless vitality and scope on the trajectories of a countable number of characters—and moreover, on clear divisions established among these characters between the living and the deadened, the artificial and the real.<sup>11</sup>

10. For prior accounts of the family or “breed” force in *War and Peace*, see Bocharov 89–100; Orwin 123–129. Bocharov and Orwin concentrate on the novel's three most prominent families: the Rostovs, the Bolkonskys, and the Kuragins. While my focus in this article lies elsewhere, I would suggest that we gain a fuller picture of the novel's character-system by expanding such an analysis to incorporate all eight of its recognizably named and represented families: the Rostovs, Bolkonskys, Bezukhovs, Kuragins, Drubetskoys, Karagins, Bergs, and Dolokhovs.

11. The vision of *War and Peace* as a complete model of life was expressed in early reviews, perhaps most clearly by Nikolai Strakhov in *Zaria* (No. 1, 1870): “Thousands of characters [*lits*], thousands of scenes, every conceivable scene of public and private life [...] everything is in the picture. And at the same time not a single figure pushes another into the background [...]” (257–58). For one of the most hyperbolic, and compelling, evolutions of this view, see Isaiah Berlin: “The celebrated lifelikeness of every object and every person in [Tolstoi's] world derives from this astonishing capacity of presenting every ingredient of it in its fullest individual

However, as I began by briefly suggesting, *War and Peace* is unusual in staging *two* kinds of ongoing competition for narrative “space.” As the novel progresses, the asymmetry between major and minor characters is overtaken by a sharper tension—between the bounded group of named characters that organizes and domesticates the novel’s narrative material, and the innumerable, largely anonymous group of marginal characters that expands the narrative and estranges us from it. Refocusing our attention on the shifting balance between these centripetal and centrifugal forces, we can turn from the question of how Tolstoi exploits the conventional shape of a novelistic character-system, to the puzzle of why he inverts it.

### Unsettling the character-system: Part Two of the Epilogue and the Battle of Krasnoe

By the midpoint of *War and Peace*, it is no longer always the case that we enter historical scenes through the network of known fictional characters’ gazes, or even that we are passed directly from familiar characters’ eyes to unfamiliar ones. Book Three, for example, contains an eight-chapter sequence (19–26) in which not a single known fictional character is mentioned. This narrative space is devoted instead to Napoleon’s interior monologue as he waits for emissaries from Moscow, or to the Russian troops, officers, and shopkeepers who crowd onto the city’s bridges. In the novel’s first half, such anonymous figures are most often used to surround and set off the protagonists’ experiences. In its second, they themselves become the subjects of experience, their actions, the primary focus of narration.

Halfway through, the novel’s fictional picture thus starts to change places with its historical frame. Classically, this change has been understood as a split between family novel and national epic, which preserves evolving “stages of composition” in the published texts of *War and Peace*—Tolstoi’s expansion of his book’s subject from the story of a few families, to the history of Napoleon’s 1812 invasion of Russia, to an account (in the digressions and Epilogue) of the very logic of history.<sup>12</sup> However, I want to propose that a single formal and conceptual thread runs through this generic transformation. Much though Tolstoi would have resented the suggestion, his reflections

essence, in all its many dimensions, as it were [...] always as a solid object, seen simultaneously from near and far, in natural, unaltering daylight, from all possible angles of vision, set in an absolutely specific context in time and space—an event fully present to the senses or the imagination in all its facets, with every nuance sharply and firmly articulated” (41).

12. Boris Eikhenbaum gives the canonical version of this argument in his *Lev Tolstoi* (516 ff.). Both Kathryn Feuer and Evelina Zaidenshnur, after extensive work with Tolstoi’s drafts, express skepticism about the novel’s origin as an unmixed family chronicle; each identifies an initial political (Feuer) or national-historical (Zaidenshnur) conception for the novel that influences all future drafts and layers (Feuer 44–53 and 200–206; Zaidenshnur 5–10 and 391n2). Feuer, however, retains the framework of “stages of composition,” in the last of which “the fictional heroes and heroines retired from their roles as chief bearers and witnesses of events” (210).

on the problems of historical agency, causality, and freedom may be most salient to his readers as a guide to the principles that progressively reshape the character-system of *War and Peace* itself.<sup>13</sup>

Part Two of the Epilogue begins with a declaration of skepticism about historical narrative that stems from the divide between the lives of people in a group, and the words with which the historian tries to capture them: “History is the life of nations and of humanity. To directly seize and encompass in words, to describe the life of humanity or even of a single nation, appears impossible” (1270, translation modified; 12: 296). Here as in my brief analysis of the “living” Pierre and Natasha, I suggest the concept “life” should be interpreted, in part, as a standard of mimetic representation. In other words, Tolstoi is confronting the sphere of *historical* narration with the impasse behind the concept of the *novelistic* character-system: the problem of evoking the independent “lives” of many people within a single narrative.<sup>14</sup>

He frames that impasse not in formal, but in metaphysical terms. His argument focuses on the divide between the essential sense of freedom that lies at the heart of any individual’s conscious experience, and the absolute laws of cause and effect that objectively determine the course of historical events. Anyone who is alive, and thus conscious of being able to direct her own actions, cannot believe that she is really subject to absolute laws. Conversely, anyone who asserts that groups of people or nations are acting according to the necessity of these laws cannot account for the sense of freedom that the living individuals who make up these groups must feel.

So here is Tolstoi’s own conception of the representational problem of one and many: “the activity of the millions who migrate, burn houses, abandon agriculture, and destroy one another, never is expressed in the account of the activity of some dozen people who did not burn houses, practice agriculture, or slay their fellow creatures [...] The life of the nations is not contained in the lives of a few men, for the connection between those men and the nations has not been found” (1283, 1284; 12: 312, 313). Only a narrative framed in terms of events themselves, and not in terms of the force of the individual “heroes” who putatively caused them, has a chance of showing that the many who take part in the event play a greater role in it than the few who accept responsibility for it (1292; 12: 321–22). But on the other hand, to narrate in terms of the

13. Among the surprisingly few prior critical accounts relating Tolstoi’s theory of history to his practices of characterization are Holquist 215 ff.; Love Chapter Five; and (most recently) Steiner, “The Ends of ‘Personality’” and “Tolstoy, Liberal and Pluralist.” All these readings focus on named, central protagonists; here I offer an account of the Epilogue’s relevance to the novel’s entire character-system.

14. “Life” is also, of course, a term charged throughout Tolstoi’s novel with theological and philosophical meaning—captured particularly evocatively in Pierre’s famous dream (just after Platon Karataev’s death) of water drops separating from and merging with one another on the surface of a globe (12: 158). On “life” in *War and Peace* with special attention to Pierre’s dream, see for example Orwin (123–40) and Gustafson (72–82).

accomplished event is to leave out individual wills entirely—to leave out precisely that consciousness of free will which “forms the essence of [...] life” (1294; 12: 324)—and thus again to fall short of the ideal of capturing many *lives* in text. True history can only be a “history of all,” but it is governed by laws so absolute that no living individual, conscious of her own sense of open-ended freedom, could believe them.

It follows that the historian must balance between two equally flawed alternatives: to relate the subjective experience that *every* participant in an event has of himself as free; or to present the event in terms of absolute laws, contradicting the sense of freedom each participant cannot help but feel. In practice, historical description thus becomes a necessarily inadequate compromise. Seeing an actual event as an accomplished fact, a historian draws conclusions about how “a certain measure of freedom and a certain measure of inevitability”—always inversely proportional to one another—interact in his own understanding of it. The historian’s viewpoint depends on his knowledge of three factors: “(1) The relation to the external world of the man who commits the deeds. (2) His relation to time. (3) His relation to the causes leading to the action” (1297–98; 12: 329). The better we know the circumstances in which an action was performed; the less present in time the action is to us; and the more clearly we see the chain of causation that produced the action—that is, “the simpler the action we are observing and the less complex the character and mind of the man in question,” the more necessary that action seems (1300; 12: 331). Conversely, the less fully and objectively we can define an action and an acting subject, the freer that action and subject seem to be. Focusing on freedom’s manifestations in world events, historians asymptotically approach the laws of which, in order to experience life, each individual must remain ignorant.<sup>15</sup>

Tolstoi thus assumes that there is no ultimate solution to the problem of writing a “history of all”—neither in a book like *War and Peace*, nor in more traditional historical chronicles.<sup>16</sup> But although Part Two of the Epilogue cannot solve this philosophical and narrative paradox, it does help explain how Tolstoi himself negotiates it. Keeping in mind the gap he posits between two *kinds* of truth a historical account can honor—the sense of freedom that defines individual “life” from within, and the necessity to which the event and

15. This, as I understand it, is the essence of Jeff Love’s conclusion in his detailed reconstruction of Tolstoi’s philosophical argument in the digressions and Part Two of the Epilogue (72–95 and 123–56).

16. For some recent readings that focus on pinpointing the relationship between *War and Peace* and historical narrative (beginning from Gary Saul Morson’s claim in his *Hidden in Plain View* that *War and Peace* is skeptical about *any* form of history), see Wachtel Chapter 5; Love 156 ff.; Ungurianu 120 ff.; and Tsimbaeva. In essentially dismissing Tolstoi’s concern with history and historical accuracy, Tsimbaeva may go too far, but the collaboration in *War and Peace* between fictional and non-fictional discourse demonstrated by Wachtel, Love, and Ungurianu is nevertheless unstable; as I argue, its terms are troubled from within the novel itself.

its participants are really subject—we can rewrite our description of *War and Peace's* innovative character-system.

At the core of the novel is a group of figures whose minds and characters are seen as complex, and whose actions and decisions are often represented from the inside, as ongoing and undetermined. This group includes not just the novel's protagonists, but also (in Gary Saul Morson's suggestive formulation) its "potential" protagonists: Pierre Bezukhov and Natasha Rostova; Petya Rostov and the artillery captain Tushin.<sup>17</sup> Their narratives model life experienced (in the Epilogue's terms) as freedom: they appear to be subjectively present within narration that also represents their boundaries as characters, which they themselves cannot perceive. There is, indeed, a kind of allegory about Tolstoyan freedom and necessity in such mimetic life—embedded in text and so determined, but felt as free on every reading, in the persons of the "live" protagonists themselves.

Contiguous with this core is a larger, but still bounded group of characters who appear to be less complex, more subject to the laws of the social world around them, and so easier to represent in terms of the "necessity" encompassed in abstract laws and categories: Hélène Kuragina, Boris Drubetskoy. But this representational method purposefully obscures the autonomous consciousness of such minor characters, even though (as the Epilogue's rhetoric leads us to believe) their putative inner lives must be just as fluid, and their *felt* sense of freedom just as vivid, as those of the protagonists.

Finally—and here is where we have to account for the idiosyncrasy of Tolstoy's approach—the novel pays unusual attention to an innumerable group of marginal characters, about each of whom we know so little that almost anything might be true of them. As the Epilogue contends, this ignorance produces its own vivid impression of autonomy and lived experience: not because we have access to the characters' sense of their own freedom, but because we know so little about the forces of character and historical situation that determine their actions. By showing these marginal characters just through the lens of the events in which they participate, Tolstoy gives their indefinite, free subjectivities room to unfold beyond our knowledge. Able to construct only a limited number of historically-placed "lives" from within, his novel indicates others from without, *just by* barely representing them at all.

In other words, the novel purposefully juxtaposes two perspectives on what I have called mimetic life. It points at two kinds of figures who appear to retain their own autonomous "lives" within the artifice of fictional and historical narrative: at protagonists like Natasha, and at marginal characters like the shopkeepers on the bridges of Moscow. Taken as an account of the relationship between a text and the people it narrates, Tolstoy's theory of history works to undercut the literary convention that protagonists "live" while all

17. On the concept of "creative potential," see Morson, esp. 142–189.

others cluster around their lives. If some characters appear to live because of the abundance of words that evoke their autonomous subjectivities within *War and Peace*, others appear to live because of the near-infinity of what the novel will not tell us about them.

What does this novelistic representation of marginal “life” look like?

It is safe to guess that few readers remember the four chapters near the end of *War and Peace* occupied with the Battle of Krasnoe and the campsite of a Russian infantry regiment of nine hundred soldiers. As the soldiers steam lice out of their shirts, they talk about the French soldiers they have captured and why the bodies of the French never seem to rot. Some acquire portraits and names—Makeev, “Jackdaw,” a “red-haired and red-faced man [who] was neither a sergeant nor a corporal, but being robust [...] ordered about those weaker than himself” (1175; 12: 191). We follow a group of them to look at two French prisoners begging shelter. With the fanfare of a separate paragraph, it is announced that “the exhausted French officer was Ramballe and the man with his head wrapped in the shawl was Morel, his orderly” (1179; 12: 194).

An attentive reader or re-reader may remember Ramballe as the French captain whose life Pierre saved in occupied Moscow, some two hundred pages earlier. But by producing with such triumph, at the end of the long narrative of the Krasnoe campsite, two fictional characters who are *themselves* all but marginal, the narrative subverts the logic of its own construction: coincidence is no longer in the service of coherence. So vivid a scene and group of figures tied to the fictional plot with such a slender thread serves rather, like an optical illusion, to gesture out toward an infinite mimetic world—to confront us, using a familiar set of narrative techniques, not with any one story, but with a sense of the sheer number of stories that no one has told.

The scene ends by baring this device. As Morel eats, the soldiers look up at the sky.

“O Lord, O Lord! How starry it is! Tremendous! That means a hard frost...” They all grew silent. The stars, as if knowing that no one would see them now, began to play in the dark sky. Now flaring up, now vanishing, now trembling, they were busy whispering something joyful, but mysterious, to one another. (1180, translation modified)

—Оо! Господи, Господи! Как звездно, страсть! К морозу...—И всё заглохло. Звезды, как будто зная, что теперь никто не увидит их, разыгрались в черном небе. То вспыхивая, то потухая, то вздрагивая, они хлопотливо о чем-то радостном, но таинственном, перешептывались между собою. (12: 196)

Equated with “no one,” the soldiers could not disappear more decisively from the discourse. But the scene that displaces them—“The stars, as if knowing that no one would see them now,” starting “to play in the dark sky”—represents disappearance itself as a kind of narrative utopia. Minuscule in comparison with the bulk of the novel, the passage depends on its brevity to evoke

the vastness of its objects. It draws the corners of our eyes to a world whose mysterious life stems precisely from what no one person knows about it: a mystery intended, then, to rival that of the subjective, individual life that novelistic techniques of characterization developed (in large part) to paint. Taking seriously the project of the “history of all,” one can read *War and Peace*’s entire four-volume edifice as a frame set around this virtuosic gap—a narrative space just small enough to convey the delight of being too numerous to “seize and encompass in words.”

### Confronting the character-system: Pierre Bezukhov’s dream

As the marginal characters of *War and Peace* limn its representational horizon, its major characters thus remain at the core of a historical narrative that swells larger and larger around them. This dynamic appears graphically in scenes—as Marya Bolkonskaya facing the inscrutable crowd of peasants in revolt at Bogucharovo, or as Petya Rostov crushed by a crowd of fellow admirers at Alexander I’s balcony. Readers of the novel’s second half may begin to feel a parallel threat. Recognizable character-spaces are overwhelmed by others we cannot name or place; a mode of life designedly impossible to narrate starts to crowd out a mode that is native to the novelistic text.

*War and Peace*, however, resists this anxiety. There is no suggestion that the figures in the collectively narrated crowd each yearn to be narrated as central and individual. Rather, what Tolstoi paints is the opposite: a *protagonist*’s desire to see himself from the outside, his formless sense of freedom written into and preserved within a story whose meaning and outcome are beyond his view. To explore this desire, in closing, I will turn to the novel’s final narration of Bagration’s dinner at the English Club.

Just after the Battle of Borodino, Pierre Bezukhov meets three soldiers who guide him on the road to Mozhaïsk. Falling asleep, he remembers the battle and the people, “they,” whom he saw there: “*They*, in Pierre’s mind, were the soldiers, those who had been at the battery, those who had given him food, and those who had prayed before the icon. *They*, those strange men he had not previously known, stood out clearly and sharply from everyone else” (904; 11: 292). Pierre’s thoughts merge into a vivid dream:

‘To be a soldier, just a soldier!’ thought Pierre as he fell asleep. ‘To enter that life-in-common completely, to be imbued with what makes them what they are. But how to cast off all the superfluous, devilish, all the burden of this outer man? [...] I might have been sent to serve as a soldier after the duel with Dolokhov.’ And the memory of the dinner at the English Club when he had challenged Dolokhov flashed through Pierre’s mind, and then he remembered his benefactor at Torzhok. And now a solemn meeting of the Lodge presented itself to his mind. It was taking place at the English Club [...] On one side of the table sat Anatole, Dolokhov, Nesvitsky, Denisov, and others like them (in his dream the category to which these men belonged was as clearly defined in his mind as the category of those he termed *they*), and he heard those people, Anatole and Dolokhov, shouting and singing loudly; yet through their shouting the voice of his benefactor was heard [...] Pierre did not understand what his benefactor was saying, but he knew (the cate-

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gories of thoughts were also quite distinct in his dream) that he was talking of goodness and the possibility of being what *they* were. And *they* with their simple, kind, firm faces surrounded his benefactor on all sides. But though they were kindly they did not look at Pierre and did not know him. Pierre wanted to attract their attention and speak. (904, translation modified)

«Солдатом быть, просто солдатом!» думал Пьер, засыпая. «Войти в эту общую жизнь всем существом, проникнуться тем, что делает их такими. Но как скинуть с себя всё это лишнее, дьявольское, всё бремя этого внешнего человека? [...] Я мог еще после дуэли с Долоховым быть послан солдатом». — И в воображении Пьера мелькнул обед в клубе, на котором он вызвал Долохова, и благодетеля в Торжке. И вот Пьеру представляется торжественная столовая ложка. Ложка эта происходит в Английском клубе. [...] С одной стороны стола сидели Анатолий, Долохов, Несвицкой [*sic*], Денисов и другие такие же (категория этих людей так же ясно была во сне определена в душе Пьера, как и категория тех людей, которых он называл *они*), и эти люди, Анатолий, Долохов, громко кричали, пели; но из-за их крика слышен был голос благодетеля [...] Пьер не понимал того, что говорил благодетель, но он знал (категория мыслей так же ясно была во сне), что благодетель говорил о добре, о возможности быть тем, чем были *они*. И *они* со всех сторон, с своими простыми, добрыми, твердыми лицами, окружали благодетеля. Но они хотя и были добры, они не смотрели на Пьера, не знали его. Пьер захотел обратить на себя их внимание и сказать. (11: 290–91)

Pierre's categories of figures—imported into his dream like “the categories of thoughts”—follow the lines of the three-level character-system proposed in this analysis. But his dream confronts us, further, with the shock of a protagonist who *sees* the system near whose center he lies. Pierre is caught between the force of the minor characters and that of the marginal; he longs at once to step outside his own novel, and to attract its attention. The desire both to be and not be at the subjective center of one's story is unfulfillable, but it makes poignantly clear Pierre's envy for the social, economic, and (not least) narrative condition represented in the pronoun “*they*.”

I am arguing, moreover, that Pierre's envy mirrors the novel's own. Springing from the representation of Pierre's “living” consciousness, this scene shows his dream of abandoning the center of the narrative whose center is the only place this kind of fictional consciousness can exist. Tolstoi urges us too to leave that center behind, diverting more and more attention from the novel's fully-realized-protagonists to its almost-fully-unrealized marginal figures. But in *War and Peace* as in the microcosm of Pierre's dream, this push toward the margins of the character-system seems guaranteed to fail. Central figures like Pierre may not only remain in memory, but remain there imperfectly enough that we will reread the novel to recapture the effect of their mimetic life. Marginal figures like Makeev or Jackdaw are likely on each of these re-readings—if we even notice them—to surprise us anew.

Pierre's envy for the “*they*” of his dream points to the antinomy Tolstoi cannot solve. Even in a text as expansive as *War and Peace*, one character's mimetic life is defined in relation and by contrast to others'; it is the economies of limited narrative attention that support the illusion of a boundlessly living world. In this sense, the undetermined consciousness that is key



to an impression of “life”—both in Tolstoi’s theory of history, and in his fictional technique—requires the textual bounds of a novel for its representation. But such representation, achieving its fullest form, can only ever be asymmetrical. As *War and Peace* reaches for the mimetic horizon of the “history of all,” its protagonists reach toward the condition of marginality—of barely being narrated at all. Conversely, the novel’s gesture at the lives of crowds can only remain a gesture, a tug toward stories that become vivid precisely because they are never told.

#### Coda: “Two, two!”

Tracing Tolstoi’s attempts at universal representation through these scenes of Bagration’s dinner at the English Club, we thus follow the story of a richly vexed mimetic project—in the context not just of *War and Peace*, but of later Russian realism as a whole.

It is well known that Erich Auerbach’s seminal history of Western literary representations of reality, *Mimesis* (1947), does not contain a chapter on the Russian novel—omitted, as Auerbach wrote, because he could not read Russian works in the original (492). However, in a brief discussion near the end of *Mimesis*, he speculates that the tragic weight and high spiritual stakes attached to the everyday in Russian realism, and the widely oscillating “pendulum of [the characters’] vitality, of their actions, thoughts, and emotions,” recall the “Christian realism” of the New Testament, Augustine, and medieval mystery plays. In drawing this parallel, Auerbach invokes a specific Western European reaction: “When the great Russians, especially Dostoevski, became known in Central and Western Europe, the immense spiritual potential and the directness of expression which their amazed readers encountered in their works seemed like a revelation of how the mixture of realism and tragedy might at last attain its true fulfillment” (523).

The “amazement” of the novel-readers Auerbach describes is worth dwelling on. If *Mimesis* had had a chapter on the Russian novel, midway between Flaubert and Woolf, it might have told the story of characters so intensely vivid that they recall the moral and epistemological force of “Christian realism”: the Bible’s *demand* (again in Auerbach’s words) that we “fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history” (15). But placed between Flaubert and Woolf, this demand is so anachronistic as to look paradoxical: a fictional world real enough to its readers to demand not aesthetic absorption, but lasting belief.

The emblem for such a hybrid mimetic and textual mode cannot be the “brown stocking” that Mrs. Ramsay knits in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*—Auerbach’s image for the undifferentiated richness of modernist representation, “the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without prejudice” (552). Still less can it be the kind of stocking the deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller borrows from Walter Ben-

jamin's essay "The Image of Proust" (1929/1934), in order to illustrate the duplicity of mimetic representation as such:

The similarity of one thing to another which we are used to, which occupies us in a wakeful state, reflects only vaguely the deeper similarity of the dream world in which everything that happens appears not in identical but in similar guise, opaquely similar to itself. Children know a symbol of this world: the stocking which has the structure of this dream world when, rolled up in a laundry hamper, it is a "bag" and a "present" at the same time. And just as children do not tire of quickly changing the bag and its contents into a third thing—namely, a stocking—Proust could not get his fill of emptying the dummy, his self, at one stroke in order to keep garnering that third thing, the image which satisfied his curiosity—indeed, assuaged his homesickness. (Benjamin 239–40)

As Miller uses Benjamin to suggest, there is no subject to represent that is not already forming itself in representations. *One* stocking—the image elaborated in the gap between what was once true and what is now narrated—is enough to encapsulate the stakes of Proust's fictional world.<sup>18</sup>

Tolstoi, as we have seen, insisted on "two!"

Indeed, the image of Anna Makarovna's stockings could not more stridently counter the stocking Benjamin describes, taken as a symbol of the false correspondence between model and copy. Her "bag" really does contain a "present," an exact self-reproduction, and its revelation is a cause for wonder and delight. Anticipating the postmodern specter of one-stocking mimesis, an inextricable interchange between original and representation that defies the clear definition of both, *War and Peace* tenaciously asserts the existence of "two!": the novel's capacity both to represent the world, and (through representation) to demonstrate permanent truths about it. But writing decades even before the apex of Modernism, Tolstoi seems to be responding to a deconstructive challenge that springs from within his novel's own narrative.

I have attempted here to sketch what is perhaps the most unexpected origin of this challenge: the system that creates and sustains the vivid characterizations at the heart of *War and Peace*'s overwhelming illusion of reality. The novel dreams of a fiction that would wholly encapsulate life, and so no longer need to be fiction. But it shows, in the same breath, how fully such mimesis depends on the contingent *bounds* that limit narrative "space" and "attention," so that their asymmetrical distribution can take on aesthetic significance.

It is the stability of the novel's represented world, and of the character-system through which this world is elaborated, that makes such destabilizing visions possible. No less firmly motivated division between major, minor, and marginal characters could anchor such a shift in its own underlying narrative terms. And yet, no novel less preoccupied with the artificiality of that division could so clearly show the problem of two worlds that appear to be

18. Cf. Miller, 6–11. In his deconstruction of the mimetic relationship between model and copy, Miller in turn is following Deleuze, esp. 24–25.

one: a likeness between real and written life whose vitality depends on their inner separation.

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## Тезисы

Хлоя Кицингер

Обед в Английском клубе: Литературный герой «на полях» в романе Л.Толстого «Война и мир»

В данной работе рассматривается подход Л. Толстого к проблемам исторического повествования и миметического изображения персонажей в романе «Война и мир» (1865–69) посредством внимательного анализа новой системы характеристики в нем. Цель работы—показать, как и почему Толстой переработал традиционную систему персонажей реалистического романа, который выдвигал главных героев за счет второстепенных (см. А. Волох, «Один против многих», 2003). Его стремления шли дальше выдвижения второстепенных персонажей, так как включали изображение безликих масс людей «на полях» истории. Его виртуозные приемы в изображении этого контингента лиц дают нам образец толстовского анти-героического понимания истории, которое он излагает в своих известных отступлениях в романе; они—эти приемы и отступления—связаны как два аспекта его попытки создать всеобъемлющее миметическое изображение всех участников массового события. Эта попытка осталась не вполне завершенным экспериментом, как автор сам осознавал.

Таким образом, анализ касается не только структуры романа «Война и мир», но и также той особой роли, которую в своих поисках новых стратегий изображения сыграл русский реализм в истории развития западного литературного процесса изображения действительности.

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