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The Function of Imagery in *War and Peace*

Tolstoy the man, whose awe-inspiring personality haunts us still, poses an enormous obstacle to those who wish to write about his work. One frequently encounters interpretations of the novels, plays, and short stories based on Tolstoy's aims in creating them and on what his consciously held values were or are believed to have been. Unfortunately for anyone who attempts this kind of evaluation, Tolstoy, one of the most complex and baffling men who ever lived, is notorious for his self-contradictions. Although we have some good biographies, Tolstoy deserves the attention of a scholar—probably not a literary critic—with a sophisticated view of human personality and the relationship between the individual and society, who will write an analytical account of his problems comparable to Erik Erikson's widely admired *Young Man Luther*.[1] Yet even if such a book appears, it will not solve, or even simplify, the critic's task, which consists of explaining why the masterpieces move and excite us as they do. Fortunately the era of dogmatic formalism has passed, and there is no reason to insist that everything that is external to the work is irrelevant. In dealing with Tolstoy, the basic problem is that most of his opinions limit, rather than widen, our understanding. One exception to this rule suggests a fruitful approach to the complexities that lie behind the apparent simplicity of *War and Peace*.

In the well-known letter that he wrote to Nikolai Strakhov in April 1876, probably his most coherent single statement on his own work, Tolstoy stated:

> In everything, in almost everything that I have written, the necessity of collecting thoughts linked among themselves for expressing myself has guided me, but every thought expressed separately loses its meaning, [and] is frightfully degraded when it is taken from the linkage in which it is located. The linkage itself is composed not of thought (I think) but of something else, and to express the basis of this thought is possible only indirectly—by describing images, actions, positions in words.[2] (17:433)

Tolstoy goes on to say that critics should "guide readers in that endless labyrinth of linkages of which the essence of art consists." I have explored the

1. Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1958).

2. Volume and page numbers after quotations from Tolstoy refer to the following edition: L. N. Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh,* ed. N. N. Akopova et al. (Moscow, 1960–65).

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theoretical implications of this statement in detail elsewhere;[3] here a few comments must suffice to make clear the assumptions of the present study.

Tolstoy's concept of the novel as an "endless labyrinth of linkages" corresponds to the view set forth by Joseph Frank in his famous article "Spatial Form in Modern Literature."[4] Frank observes that in the work of T. S. Eliot and his contemporaries the "primary reference of any word-group is to something inside the poem itself. . . ."[5] Where Tolstoy speaks of "an infinite labyrinth of linkages," Frank notes that the novels of Proust and Joyce are built up of an "infinite number of references and cross-references which relate to one another independently of time sequence." In *War and Peace* the "linkages" or "references and cross-references" relate to each other in a consistent, coherent fashion. Because of this consistency within the work, one can make valid generalizations about it on the basis of a limited number of examples. Nothing in *War and Peace* is superfluous or the result of a chance idea or virtuoso display, for every gesture, every posture, every action of every major character—and every image—forms a part of an overall pattern.[6] Some years ago Andrew Lytle suggested that this was the case when he noted with regard to the universality of *War and Peace*, "No one person, then, could carry the burden of meaning. Only the recurring image could contain it."[7] It is the recurring image, or linkage, in *War and Peace* which constitutes the subject of investigation of this paper.

Obviously an exhaustive survey of the imagery in *War and Peace* would require a full-length monograph; as a *Vorstudium* to such a study, I offer here only a sufficient number of examples, taken principally from narrative passages, to demonstrate the coherence and function of imagery in the work. In a sense the present essay develops the approach suggested by the title of Andrew Lytle's article cited above, "The Image as Guide to Meaning in the Historical Novel." By "the function of imagery" is understood here the manner in which the systematic, interrelated imagery provides a basis for interpretation of the work.

Detailed study of the imagery in *War and Peace* reveals two sets of

3. See the author's "Notes on Spatial Form in Tolstoy," *Sewanee Review*, 78, no. 3 (Summer 1970): 517–30.

4. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *Sewanee Review*, 53 (1945): 221–40, 433–56, 643–53; a revised and expanded version of the essay is included in Frank's book *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick, 1963).

5. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," p. 232.

6. See, for example, Ralph Matlaw's astute comments on repetition, such as this one about Prince Andrei: "Some of the moments that he considers the best of his life and others that are among the most important—in all these he stands framed by a window or a door, not in the freedom of earth and sky." Ralph E. Matlaw, "Introduction," *Tolstoy: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), p. 5.

7. Andrew Lytle, "The Image as Guide to Meaning in the Historical Novel," *Sewanee Review*, 61 (1953): 415.

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images, which can be loosely classified as organic and nonorganic—that is, images which refer to animals and plants and those which refer to machines and inanimate objects.[8] Both sets of images first appear in the fiction, and link it with the historical essays in which they also appear; indeed, images constitute the principal method of reasoning in the essays. The images provide the basis both for the conception of history and the conception of character, and bring these aspects of the work together. But severe problems of interpretation arise because *War and Peace* contains these two sets of images; as we shall see, the two sets of images, the organic and the nonorganic, lead to two opposing, mutually irreconcilable interpretations of *War and Peace*. Let us examine, then, the organic and nonorganic images first in the fiction, and then in the nonfiction.

In the critical literature on Tolstoy one finds frequent references to *War and Peace* as an "epic"; and one does not have to accept the panegyric overtones of the Soviet term *roman-epopeia* to feel that "epic" is indeed the proper term for a work of such dimensions. But size is not its only epic quality. Similes—often of a length to deserve the name "epic similes"—constitute a large portion of the imagery. An image in *War and Peace* usually, but not always, first occurs as a simile, but subsequently the conjunction "like" disappears, and the image becomes a metaphor. Some of the images may be more properly called analogies than similes, and a few images first appear as metaphors, not similes.

The organic images usually describe residents of Moscow—specifically the Rostov family—and historical events in and near Moscow. They first appear in the initial Moscow scene, Natasha's name day. When we meet the major characters of the Rostov family while they are still young, Sonya is described in the following way: "By the smoothness of her movements, the softness and suppleness of her small limbs, and her slightly sly and restrained manner she reminded one of a pretty, but not yet filled out kitten which will be a beautiful cat" (4: 57). This comparison is repeated as a metaphor further down on the same page, and again on the following page: "It was apparent that the kitten had settled down only to jump up still more energetically and play with her cousin, as soon as they, like Boris and Natasha, could get out of the drawing room. . . . The cat, fixing her eyes upon him [Nikolai], seemed ready any second to begin playing and show its cat nature."

Ultimately, this simile becomes a leitmotiv, like Lise Bolkonsky's short upper lip, or Denisov's inability to pronounce the letter *r*. Thus at one point Natasha glances at "that curled-up, sleeping little kitten with her enormous

8. Because of the implicit value judgment present in the words, I deliberately avoid here the use of the natural-unnatural dichotomy, which might seem preferable.

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braid of hair" (5:216). In the epilogue, however, the image serves a different purpose: it demonstrates the justice of Nikolai's marrying Marya, not Sonya. The perceptive Natasha proposes a new comparison, which the narrator combines with the old one:

> "I used to wish terribly that Nicolas would marry her [Sonya], but I always had an intimation that it wouldn't happen. She is a *sterile flower*, you know, like in a strawberry plant? Sometimes I feel sorry for her, but sometimes I think that she doesn't feel it as we would." . . . Indeed, it seemed that Sonya did not find her position difficult, and had completely made her peace with her designation [*naznachenie*] as a *sterile flower*. . . . It seemed that like a cat she attached herself not to people, but to the house. (7:291; Tolstoy's emphasis)

After reading the epilogue, we realize that Sonya's concern with things, not people—her basic difference from the Rostovs—has been implicit throughout the novel. When the Rostovs flee Moscow, for example, she packs household furniture, while Natasha worries about the wounded soldiers. Thus this series of similes yields a clue to the nature of the characters in *War and Peace*: They are organic entities, like plants or animals, in the literal sense that they follow a predetermined development. The beginning of the work contains all the character traits present at the end. The only possible change results from an "outering," or coming to the fore, of an immutable inner essence; except in the agonies of death itself, this change is always a matter of degree and never of kind.[9]

Nikolai and Natasha, with their spontaneity and directness, form the center of the organic life among the characters; thus organic images are constantly associated with them, although no individual image becomes a leitmotiv. For example, Marya Dmitrievna, in the name day scene, refers to Natasha and Sonya as "these little birds" (4:84); upon Nikolai's arrival home in 1806 Natasha "hopped like a goat, constantly in the same place" (5:9).

Nikolai responds deeply to war and hunting, and a chain of organic images, which becomes very significant in the historical essays, relates these two similar activities when he is present. When, in his second military encounter, near Schön Graben, Nikolai falls wounded to the ground, he gets up and runs "with the feeling of a rabbit running away from dogs" (4:255). A more complex character than most critical opinion about him would suggest, Nikolai forgets this feeling during the hunt scene, which, as the principal manifestation of organic life, contains virtually no imagery. Subsequently the hunt scene provides the frame of reference within which Nikolai views war after he becomes an experienced soldier. Thus, at Ostrovna in 1812, he is

9. I plan to develop this view, which contradicts that of most scholars who have written on Tolstoy, in the separate essay that such a major issue deserves.

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described as "both an expert [on horses] and a hunter" (6:72); we read that "Rostov, with his sharp hunter's eye was one of the first to catch sight of these blue French dragoons. . . . Rostov, as at a hunt, looked at what was going on before him. . . ." When he leads his squadron to the attack, "He did all this, as he did on a hunt, without thinking, without pondering" (6:75).[10]

In the first epilogue, the inarticulate Nikolai has recourse to a most revealing organic image when he tries to clarify to himself (and to Marya) his relationship to his wife: "Do I love my wife? I don't love her, but I just don't know how to tell you. . . . Well, do I love my finger? I don't love it, but just try to cut it off . . ." (7:296). This curious, defiant assertion suggests that ideally relationships should be organic entities in the sense that characters are. (Whether the actual relationship between Nikolai and Marya could be called organic is another matter.) Nikolai echoes here a statement by the most complete representative of the organic life, Platon Karataev, who explains to Pierre how he became a soldier: "So father says, 'All the children,' he says, 'are equal in my eyes; no matter what finger you cut off, it still hurts'" (7:57).[11]

In Moscow organic bonds exist not only in families but in unrelated groups as well. The organic similes used in the portrayal of Moscow suggest that natural order prevails in the city. They first appear in the description of the dinner at the English Club in honor of Bagration. In the very first sentence of this scene we find that the members and guests "scurried [*snovali*] back and forth, like bees in their spring flight" (5:21). When Bagration himself appears, "The guests, dispersed in various rooms of the main hall, crowded into one bunch, like shaken rye in a shovel" (5:23). There was a crush at the door: "At the doors of the main hall there was no possibility of passing by because of the crowded members and guests who pushed against each other and who tried to examine Bagration *as though he were a rare animal* over each other's shoulders" (5:23–24; my emphasis).

But this impression of disorder is misleading; as we shall see, water occupies a position intermediate between the organic and nonorganic, and suggests here that each person instinctively senses his place in an established hierarchy: "Three hundred men distributed themselves in the dining room according to rank and importance; those who were more important sat closer to the guest who was being honored: just as naturally as water flows more deeply where the land is lower" (5:24–25). If no foreigners are present,

10. An additional linkage appears when, at the beginning of the hunt scene, Petya Rostov shouts, "Shchetny rossam vse prepony" (5:273), a line from the patriotic cantata by Pavel Kutuzov which was delivered at the dinner for Bagration at the English Club (5:26).

11. The simile used for Karataev is equally revealing: "His words and actions poured out of him as evenly, inevitably, and directly *as fragrance exudes from a flower*" (7:60; my emphasis).

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groups of Russians are usually described in this manner throughout the book. Much later, for instance, Russian soldiers make camp "like a huge, many-limbed animal" (7:216); and they do so as spontaneously as the men at the English Club submit to the social hierarchy. The statement "The Russian army . . . naturally took that direction in which an abundance of food pulled it" (7:81) anticipates the analogy. Thus individuals and both personal and group relations among the Russians of Moscow are presented in the fiction as organic entities.

Let us now turn from the organic to the nonorganic images in the fiction. In part they serve to complete the organic-Moscow, nonorganic-St. Petersburg contrast, which is a basic principle of organization in the work and is presented as a contrast between content and form: "Among the innumerable subdivisions which one can make in the phenomena of life, one may subdivide them all into those in which content is dominant, and others in which form is dominant. Among the latter, in opposition to village, country, provincial, and even Moscow life, one may place St. Petersburg life, especially salon life. This life is unchangeable" (6:145). This opposition is not, however, systematically carried through in the imagery. Unlike the organic images, the nonorganic images in the fiction do not cluster around a particular place but are applied to characters who assert their will by using reason, or attempt to influence the course of events. Several, but not all, such characters live in St. Petersburg.

Nonorganic similes, some of which merely suggest alienation without being explicitly mechanical, begin in the opening scene of the novel, Anna Pavlovna Scherer's soiree in St. Petersburg; those images that appear here tend to recur again and again. In this respect, the soiree plays as seminal a role as the dinner for Bagration at the English Club, which stands in contrast to it. Narrative comments about the guest of honor at both occasions reveal systematic differences. The men at the English Club examined Bagration "as though he were a rare animal"; the narrator refers to Anna Pavlovna's guest as a dead animal: "Anna Pavlovna, obviously, was treating her guests to him. As a good maître d'hôtel serves as something supernaturally beautiful the piece of beef that one would not want to eat if one saw it in a dirty kitchen, so on this evening Anna Pavlovna served [*servirovala*] to her guests first the viscount, then the abbot as something supernaturally refined" (4:18). Specific details load the repetition of the comparison with irony: "And the viscount was served to the company in the most elegant and advantageous light, like a roast beef on a hot platter garnished with parsley."

An interest in novelty, the concern with form to which the narrator alludes above, characterizes St. Petersburg society. Thus, "Anna Pavlovna's second soiree was the same as the first; only the novelty to which Anna Pavlovna treated her guests was not now Mortemart, but a diplomat who had arrived from Berlin . . ." (4:276). Then, at the third soiree, a character whom we

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already know is the principal attraction: "The person to whom, like a novelty, Anna Pavlovna was treating her guests that evening was Boris Drubetskoy, who had just arrived as a courier from the Prussian army, and in the Prussian army was aide-de-camp to a very important personage" (5:98–99). A striking confirmation of the systematic nature of the imagery in *War and Peace* is the fact that in each case the guest of honor has just arrived from the West.

Since no natural order exists in St. Petersburg, Anna Pavlovna's guests cannot act instinctively, as do members of the English Club in Moscow. Anna Pavlovna regulates the conversation in the following manner: "Like the foreman of a spinning mill who has placed the workmen at their places, and goes around the plant, noticing a spindle which has stopped, or the unusual, loudly squeaking sound of a spindle, rushes over to check it or to set it in proper motion—thus Anna Pavlovna went around her drawing room, went up to a circle that had fallen silent or was talking too much and with a single word or rearrangement adjusted a steady, proper conversation machine" (4:17). The heavy irony typical of the whole scene permeates the simile, of course, and continues into the next section of the text, which begins, "Anna Pavlovna's soiree was launched. The spindles on various sides hummed regularly and incessantly." Let us turn now from the significance and function of Anna Pavlovna's salon to a brief consideration of one of the recurring images which appears in the first soiree.

As Prince Vasilii Kuragin pays Anna Pavlovna a courtly compliment, he speaks, "by habit, like a wound-up clock, saying things that he did not even want people to believe" (4:8). To trace references to clocks through the novel is to discover similarities among characters which are not always immediately apparent. For varying reasons, and in varying ways, these characters all lead nonorganic lives. After deciding to break off her childhood infatuation and "engagement" with Boris, Natasha declares that he "is not to my taste—he is so narrow, like the dining room clock" (5:216). If the comparison lacks physical verisimilitude, it has a certain emotional cogency. Two older characters, Iosef Bazdeev and the old prince Bolkonsky, while not explicitly compared to clocks, are associated with them; significantly they are both men of the eighteenth century, a deist and a rationalist respectively.

Prince Bolkonsky, a man estranged from himself and from his family, regulates his life by the clock: "His entrances for dinner took place under one and the same immutable conditions, and not only at one and the same hour, but also at one and the same minute" (4:119). When Prince Andrei arrives, he checks his watch to ascertain whether his father has changed his schedule, and later the old prince enters the dining room as the clock strikes (pp. 132, 138). Although extended discussion of the function of such leitmotivs would be out of place here, they indicate the strained, artificial qualities of the lives of father and son—qualities which they both overcome on their deathbeds. The high-

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placed Mason, Iosef Bazdeev, employs clock imagery in the widespread eighteenth-century fashion when he encounters Pierre at a posting station. When Pierre confesses that he does not believe in God, Bazdeev tells him: "You are more stupid and insane than a small child who, playing with the parts of a cleverly made clock, would have the boldness to say that because he does not understand the purpose [*naznachenie*] of this clock, he does not believe in the master who made it" (5:80).

Such an analogy both suggests the rationalistic orientation of Masonry, which Pierre will first embrace and then reject, and anticipates the mechanical imagery that describes the movement of history in the essays.

Before proceeding to the organic similes in the historical essays, we must pause to note that the organic processes of existence—birth and death—are consistently described as "mysterious." As Lise Bolkonsky gives birth, "The *mystery, the most triumphant* in the world, continued to *take place*" (5:45). The same words describe Natasha's and Marya's reaction to Andrei's death: "They cried from the pious reverence that gripped their souls before the awareness of the simple and *triumphant mystery* of death which *had taken place* before them" (*7:77*; my emphasis). Organic group action, as among the peasants, is also mysterious. The peasants at Bogucharovo refuse to supply carts for Princess Marya because of "those mysterious streams of national Russian life whose causes and significance are so inexplicable for contemporaries" (6:164). If organic processes are mysterious, and life consists of organic processes, it follows that life is mysterious, and causality a chimera. The feeble attempts of historians to "explain" such a mystery are thus doomed. The hostility toward academic historians which permeates the essays derives from this position.

In the first historical essay one of the absolute distinctions so characteristic of *War and Peace* appears: "There are two sides of life in every man: his personal life, which is the more free, the more abstract his interests, and his elemental, swarm life when a man inevitably fulfills the laws prescribed to him" (6:10). We see, however, very little of what is described here as "personal life"; probably only Andrei, after he accepts death, is free in this sense. Most of the other characters, and especially the Rostovs, live the "elemental, swarm" life which—certain passages in the historical essays argue—constitutes the stuff of history. Such an argument must discredit academic inquiry, which assumes the validity of cause and effect: "And the botanist who finds that an apple falls because the stem rotted, and the like, will be as right, and as wrong, as the child standing beneath who says that the apple fell because he wanted to eat it, and he prayed about it. Just as right and just as wrong will be he who says that Napoleon entered Moscow because he wanted to, and perished because Alexander wanted his downfall . . ." (6:12).

In the second epilogue we are told of historians who believe in the reality

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of political power: "These historians resemble the botanist who, noticing that certain plants grow from the seed in a dicotyledonous form, would insist that everything that grows, grows only by doubling its cotyledons, and that the palm, and the mushroom, and even the oak, branching out in its full growth and not having double cotyledons, depart from the theory" (7: 347–48). Thus, one cannot establish causality in the "elemental, swarm life"; this important passage provides the assumptions for the attack on the concepts of genius (i.e., causality) and chance (i.e., absence of causality) which occupies most of the first epilogue. The organic similes in the historical essays imply that these categories simply do not exist within *War and Peace.*

Bees, as creatures that carry out complex patterns of existence purely by instinct, serve as an excellent paradigm for the role of individuals in history. An echo of the comparison of members of the English Club to bees appears in the novel's longest simile, which describes the manner in which the residents of Moscow flee before the French army:

> Meanwhile, Moscow was empty. There were still people in it, a fiftieth of all the former residents remained, but it was empty. It was empty as a bee hive that is dying out, and that has lost its queen, is empty.
>
> In a hive that has lost its queen there is no life, but to a superficial glance it seems as lively as others.
>
> The bees circle around the queenless hive in the hot rays of the afternoon sun just as happily as around the live hives; it smells of honey from afar in the same way, and in the same way, bees fly in and out of it. . . . (6: 370)

And so on in loving detail for two full pages. The analogy explains the historical event in the following passage, one of the many oppositions between Napoleon and the organic life: "Moscow was empty in this way when Napoleon, tired, restless and frowning, paced back and forth near the Kamer-Kollezhsky rampart, awaiting that superficial, but necessary, by his lights, observation of the proprieties—a deputation" (6: 372). When Napoleon's disruption of the organic life of Moscow ends, the image of the queenless hive is reversed; however, ants, not bees, provide the basis for the comparison:

> Just as it is difficult to explain why and where ants hurry from an overturned anthill, some from the hill, dragging refuse, eggs, and dead bodies, others back into the hill, why they collide, catch each other, fight—it would be just as difficult to explain the reasons that forced the Russians after the exit of the French to crowd together in that place that was formerly called Moscow.
>
> But likewise, as, looking at ants dispersed around a destroyed anthill, despite the complete destruction of the anthill, it is apparent from the tenacity, energy, and from the innumerability of the swarming insects, that everything is destroyed except something indestructible and immate-

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> rial which constitutes the entire force of the anthill—likewise Moscow, too, in October despite the fact that there was no authority, no churches, no holy objects, no riches, no houses, was the same Moscow as it had been in August. Everything was destroyed, except something immaterial, but mighty and indestructible. (7:240–41)

The bee reappears in the final usage of insect imagery, an account of the mystery of life:

> A bee sitting on a flower has stung a child. And the child fears bees, and says that the goal of a bee consists of stinging people. A poet admires the bee . . . and says that the goal of the bee consists of drinking in the aroma of the flowers. . . . But the ultimate goal of the bee is not exhausted by one or the other, nor a third, which the human mind is capable of discovering. The higher the human mind rises in discovering these goals, the more obvious the inaccessibility of the ultimate goal becomes. (7:276–77)

It will be observed that these similes relate to civilians—men of peace. What of those who are engaged in the other half of the title of the work—war?

The historical essays continue, and develop in detail, the linkages between war and hunting that figure so prominently in the portrayal of Nikolai Rostov. The references to Nikolai as a hunter while in battle begin to extend to the entire Russian army. Thus the French army becomes an animal, and the battle of Borodino becomes a wound: "The French invasion, like an infuriated beast that has received a mortal wound on its run, felt its demise; but it could not stop, just as the Russian army, which was twice as weak, could not help moving back" (6:299). The description of the retreat of the French from Moscow picks up the image:

> Like a mortally wounded animal which, dripping blood, licks its wounds, they [the French] remain five weeks in Moscow without undertaking anything, and suddenly without any new reason, run back: They rush onto the Kaluga road (and after a victory, since again the field of battle was theirs near Maloiaroslavets), without entering into one serious battle, run still faster to Smolensk, beyond Smolensk, beyond Vilno, beyond the Berezina, and further. (6:304–5)

The simile subsequently occurs three more times:

> The animal wounded near Borodino lay there somewhere, where the hunter who had run away had left it; but whether it was alive, whether it was strong, or was only hiding, the hunter did not know. Suddenly the moan of this animal was heard.
>
> The moan of this wounded animal, the French army, which revealed its demise, was Loriston's epistle to Kutuzov with a request for peace. (7:82)
>
> The position of the entire [French] army was similar to the position

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> of a wounded animal which feels its demise and does not know what it is doing. To study the clever maneuvers of Napoleon and his army, and his goal from the time of his entrance into Moscow to the destruction of this army is the same as studying the significance of the dying leaps and shudders of a mortally wounded animal. Very often a wounded animal, hearing a rustle, rushes toward the hunter's gun, runs forward and backward, and hastens its own end. Napoleon, under the pressure of the entire army, did the same. The rustle of the battle of Tarutino frightened the beast, and it rushed forward toward the gun, ran up to the hunter, turned back again, forward again, backward again, and finally, like any beast, ran backward along the most disadvantageous and dangerous path, but along an old familiar trail. (7:107)

> The unresolved question of whether the wound inflicted at Borodino was mortal had been hanging over Kutuzov's head for a whole month. (7:129)

The third quotation here introduces the scene in which Kutuzov learns of Napoleon's withdrawal from Moscow, which he takes as a sign that Russia has been saved.

Two variations of the comparison of the French army to an animal deserve attention. While in Moscow, "this army, like a herd that has been let loose, trampling under foot the fodder that might save it from starvation, disintegrated and perished with every day it remained in Moscow" (7:106). An additional linkage appears between the Russians' patriotic defense of their homeland, an organic act, and hunting. The Russian army, while driving out the French, is compared to a gardener who drives out an animal that has wandered into his garden (7:192). We find the analogy repeated a few pages later: "The Russian army had to act like a whip for a fleeing animal. And the experienced driver knew that it is most advantageous to hold the whip raised, threatening with it, and not beat a fleeing animal about the head with it" (7:195). In a similar context, the French army is a tree: "The guerrillas annihilated the Grand Army by parts. They picked up the fallen leaves which of themselves poured from the dried-out tree—the French army—and sometimes they shook this tree" (7:143).

The final organic simile is not animate, but inanimate: water. Unlike bees, water is totally inert; as a lifeless substance completely subject to external forces, it links the organic and nonorganic similes. As we have seen, the water simile first occurs at the dinner for Bagration in the English Club; the "mysterious streams" of peasant life at Bogucharovo hint at it as well. The figure, which has obvious advantages in expressing the movement of an indivisible organic whole, first occurs with specific references to the movement of history in the explanation of Rostopchin's failure to govern Moscow; the narrator describes his various erratic actions, and concludes, "[He] tried with his small

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hand now to encourage, now to hold back the flow of the mighty popular current which carried him away with it" (6: 317). A similar idea then receives detailed development:

> It seems to every administrator in calm, unstormy times that the entire population under his jurisdiction moves only by his exertions, and in this consciousness of his necessity every administrator feels the principal reward for his labors. It is comprehensible that while the historical sea is calm, it must seem to the administrator-guide with his fragile little dinghy, pushing against the ship of the people with a pole and moving himself, that the ship against which he is pushing moves by his own exertions. But it is enough for a storm to come up and the sea to become disturbed and the ship move itself, and then delusion is impossible. The ship moves in its mighty, independent course, the pole does not reach to the moving ship, and the ruler goes from the position of a master, the source of strength, to the position of a trifling, useless and weak man. (6: 386)

There is a distant reference to this passage in the following lines, which refer to Napoleon's departure from Moscow: "Napoleon, who seems to us the leader of all this motion (as the figure carved on the bow of a ship seemed to primitives the force that guided the ship), Napoleon during the entire time of his activity was like a child who, holding strings fastened within a carriage, imagines that he is driving it" (7: 107). The ship-and-sea image returns late in the second epilogue, and iterates the principle that great events and men who are called great may appear simultaneously, but no causal connection exists between them: "When a ship moves in one direction, one and the same stream remains before it; when it frequently changes direction, the streams that run before it also frequently change. But wherever it turns, there is always the stream which precedes its movement" (7: 359).

A most significant variation of the water image used in the scene at the English Club occurs when the French enter Moscow. By their intrusion the French disturb the natural order of the city. Whereas water found its level at the English Club, it cannot do so in these new circumstances, and disappears:

> There were no residents of Moscow, and the soldiers, like water into sand, were soaked up into it, and spread out in an irregular ring on all sides from the Kremlin, which they entered first. . . . There was an enormous amount of riches, and there was no visible end to them; everywhere around the place that the French occupied there were still unexplored, unoccupied places in which, so it seemed to the French, there were still more riches. And Moscow more and more soaked them into herself. Precisely, as a result of pouring water onto dry earth, the water and the dry land disappear; precisely in the same way as a result of hungry troops entering a prosperous, empty city, the troops were annihilated and the prosperous city was annihilated; and mud appeared; and fires and looting appeared. (6: 400)

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The subsequent assertion that the French troops became morally degraded because of their looting rests on this simile.

The first epilogue begins with the image of the "historical sea" (*istoricheskoe more*), in connection with which the key word "mysterious" is applied to history for the first time. Here was the state of affairs during "what historians call" the reactionary period of Alexander I's reign: "Seven years passed after 1812. The disturbed historical sea of Europe had settled into its banks. It seemed to have grown quiet; but the mysterious forces that move mankind (mysterious because the laws defining their movements are unknown to us), continued their action. . . . The historical sea did not, as before, move from one bank to another in spurts; it seethed in the depths" (7:264). The diplomats just before Napoleon's Hundred Days have a position analogous to Rostopchin's before the entry of the French into Moscow:

> The movement of nations begins to settle into its banks. The waves of the large movement rushed back, and on the sea, which had grown quiet, circles form, on which whirl diplomats, imagining that it is precisely they who produce the quieting of movement.
>
> But the sea that had grown quiet rises again. It seems to the diplomats that they and their disagreements are the reason for this new exertion of forces; they await a war between their governments; the position seems unresolvable to them. But the wave whose rise they feel does not come from the direction from which they expect it. The same wave with the same point of departure—Paris—arises. The last tremor of movement from the West takes place, the tremor that was to resolve the seemingly unresolvable diplomatic difficulties and put an end to the military movement of this period. (7:274)

This comparison is repeated almost word for word in the second epilogue (7:332–33).

Ultimately the organic images in the essays point to an overarching divine order: "There are no causes of an historical event and there can be none, except the sole cause of all causes" (7:78–79). As Napoleon begins to penetrate further into Russia, we find the following flat statement: "Providence forced all these people, striving for the achievement of their personal goals, to act together for the fulfillment of one enormous result, of which not a single person (neither Napoleon nor Alexander, nor even less any of the participants of the war) had the slightest expectation" (6:115). Later the simple assertion that "the course of world events is preordained from above" (6:251) appears without further explanation. Providence produces an organic order (or, rather, one manifests the other), and like all organic orders, it is mysterious. At the battle of Borodino we are told: "But although toward the end of the battle the people felt the full horror of their act, although they would even have been

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glad to stop, some incomprehensible, mysterious force still continued to guide them . . ." (6:297).

If Providence is mysterious, one can easily understand why the first epilogue specifically excludes the possibility of historical evaluation: "It is impossible to say that the activity of Napoleon and Alexander was useful or harmful, because we cannot say what it was useful for, or what it was harmful to" (7:266). Thus the concept first indicated in the fiction, that individuals, families, and nations all constitute discrete entities which are nevertheless locked in an organic order, is continued in the essays by means of these images. The union of man and nature thus established is a major source of the enormous emotional power of the work, and gives it a mythical, deeply satisfying atmosphere. The nonorganic images in the essays present a more varied pattern.

Though the function of the organic images remains the same throughout the book, the function of the nonorganic similes undergoes a sharp change between the fiction and the historical essays, a change that excludes the possibility of developing a single, all-embracing interpretation of *War and Peace.* When applied to fictional characters, nonorganic similes illustrate artificial behavior—form without content. However, in the historical essays the nonorganic images (which are almost exclusively mechanical) illustrate the movements of history, and contradict at every turn the implications of the organic images. If the organic images suggest unity and inevitability, the nonorganic images imply fragmentation and causality. If the essays state that "there are no causes of historical events" and that the will of Providence is mysterious, they also state the opposite possibility as well. Thus we find the assertion, "There are laws that govern events" (7:79). As the discussion of why a locomotive moves demonstrates (7:341), it is easy to find the first cause, which is identified with the unknowable will of Providence when organic images are used. Contradicting the vitalistic implications of the organic images, the nonorganic images in the essays imply that both physical substances and mankind are totally inert, and that therefore equations can describe them equally well. The use of equations as an extreme instance of an abstract, mechanical view of history forms the basis for the use of the nonorganic images in the essays, and deserves a brief perusal before we proceed to the images themselves.

In the essay that begins part 3 of *War and Peace,* calculus—although the word itself never appears—is applied to the problems of history:

> This new branch of mathematics, unknown to the ancients, by admitting infinitely small quantities, that is, those by which the principal condition of motion (absolute continuity) is re-established, in the examination of questions of movement by this very thing corrects that inevitable error which the human mind cannot help making in examining disparate units of motion instead of incessant motion.

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> In finding laws of historical motion precisely the same thing takes place.
>
> The movement of mankind, flowing from an innumerable quantity of human whims, occurs incessantly. . . . Only by admitting the infinitely small unit for observation—the differential of history, that is, homogeneous inclinations of people—and by achieving the art of integrating (taking the sums of these infinitely small units), can we hope to comprehend the laws of history. (6:301–2)

Somewhat later in the novel, algebra clarifies the matter of the spirit of the troops as a force in battles:

> . . . Force (the amount of movement) equals mass times speed.
>
> In military affairs, the force of the troops is also the mass multiplied by a certain something, a certain unknown x. . . .
>
> The spirit of the troops multiplied by the mass gives the force. To define and express the significance of the spirit of the troops, this unknown multiplier, is the task of scholarship. (7:141–42)

An example follows in which "four on one side were killed, and fifteen on the other":

> Therefore, four were equal to fifteen and therefore, $4x = 15y$. Therefore, $x : y = 15 : 4$. This equation does not give the significance of the unknown, but it gives the relationship between two unknowns. And by bringing together in such equations of historical entities taken separately (battles, campaigns, periods of wars), a series of numbers will be obtained in which laws must exist and may be discovered.

The argument that the direction an army takes constitutes a vector (although here, too, the word itself never appears) of "an innumerable quantity of free forces" (7:95) rests on an essentially similar analogy, and it need not be given in detail here.

Nonorganic (and exclusively mechanical) similes that illustrate the processes of history are applied to only one character, Kutuzov. The narrator explains why generals are overrated, and humble soldiers like Dokhturov are underrated, in terms similar to those Bazdeev employed to rebuke Pierre for his pride:

> It is natural that for a person who does not understand the process of a machine, and sees it in action, it should appear that the most important part of the machine is the chip that has accidentally fallen into it, and rattles, and disturbs its work. A person who does not understand the construction of a machine cannot understand that it is not the ruinous, disturbing chip, but the small transmission gear which rotates inaudibly, which is one of the most essential parts of the machine. (7:124–25)

This prepares us for the statement, "Kutuzov . . . was also, like Dokhturov,

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one of those gears that do not shake or make noise, and constitute the most essential part of the machine" (7:128).

Generally, however, mechanical similes are applied to groups such as armies, which become specific physical bodies whose motions are described by the equations and physical laws already mentioned. The image of a rolling ball (billiard balls are implied, but—like calculus and algebra—never mentioned) is usually employed in conjunction with the wounded animal simile: "After the blow which had been given, the French army could still roll to Moscow; but there, without new exertions on the part of the Russian army, it necessarily perished, bleeding from the mortal wound inflicted at Borodino" (6:299). A few pages later, more details appear in the same image:

> The French army with constantly increasing force of momentum rushes to Moscow, to the goal of its movement. The force of its momentum as it approaches its goal increases like the increase in speed of a falling body as it approaches the ground. . . . Near Borodino a collision takes place. Neither one nor the other army disintegrates, but the Russian army retreats immediately after the collision as inevitably as a ball rolls away after colliding with another ball which bears down on it with greater force; and just as inevitably the ball of invasion rolling away in a headlong fashion (although it has lost all its force in the collision) rolls across an additional space. (6:304)

While the French occupy Moscow, the Russian army actually carries out no strategic maneuvers at all: "The ball of the Russian army which had been rolling backward in the direction of the blow given it during the entire campaign and in the battle of Borodino, took the position that was natural to it when the force of the blow was spent, since it did not receive any new blows" (7:82). For all its neatness and symmetry, this simile appears only three times, for it cannot explain the backward motion of the French army to Paris: No force was exerted in this direction. Therefore, another image is introduced, which recalls the similes of the historical sea and its waves. The military turmoil and motion were actually a lemminglike migration, which becomes a synthesis of the organic and nonorganic similes: "As if gathering and preparing themselves, the forces of the West rush to the East several times in 1805, -6, -7, and -9, growing and gaining strength. In 1811 a group of people, formed in France, merges into one huge group with nations of Central Europe. . . . The invasion rushes to the East, and reaches its ultimate goal—Moscow. . . . [But then] an opposite movement from the East to the West with a remarkable similarity to the preceding movement from the East to the West takes place. . . . Paris—the ultimate goal—is achieved" (7:272–74).

One cannot help noticing that when nonorganic images appear, the ultimate goals of history lose their mysterious, unknowable qualities. The final example in this section is also something of a synthesis, for it includes a

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reference to one of the physical laws usually invoked in nonorganic similes, and an application of the law to an organic body: "The mechanical tearing apart of a body cannot speed up beyond a certain limit the process of dissolution which is taking place. . . . It is impossible to melt a lump of snow instantaneously. A certain limit of time exists, prior to which no possible exertions of heat can melt the snow. On the contrary, the greater the heat, the stronger grows the remaining snow" (7:135). Later the assertion that the French retreat obeyed this law appears: "The French troops melted evenly in a mathematically correct progression" (7:224).

On the basis of the fragmented world view implied in these images, the kind of evaluation excluded by the organic images becomes possible. Despite all the organic similes such as the "historical sea" used in describing war, we read, "War began, that is, an event repugnant to human reason and human nature took place" (6:7). If war is "an event repugnant to human reason and human nature," Napoleon, the man who instigated the war, must be alienated from these values: "He could never understand . . . the significance of his acts, which were too opposed to goodness and truth. He could not renounce his acts, which were praised by half the world, and therefore was obliged to renounce truth and goodness and everything human" (6:293). Such a statement has no meaning, of course, unless Napoleon had the freedom to renounce his acts. And certain passages in *War and Peace* strongly suggest the existence of freedom of the will. Despite the assertion "An order is never the cause of an event" (7:355), Kutuzov's order for the Russian army to retreat from Krems to Olmütz—a conscious choice, we are told—is carried out (4:129). At other times, as the use of calculus suggests, history takes place "according to the will of hundreds of thousands of people taking part in a common cause" (6:252).

One passage in the second epilogue recapitulates the implications of both the nonorganic and the organic images so well that it deserves special attention: "In this last analysis, we arrive at the circle of eternity, to that extreme border at which the human mind arrives in any field, if it does not play with its subject. Electricity produces heat; heat produces electricity. Atoms attract each other; atoms repel each other" (7:360–61). As usual, the image becomes more meaningful if juxtaposed with a slightly different presentation in another context. In the first epilogue, we read: "As the sun and also every atom of the ether is a ball complete in itself, and is also only an atom of a whole inaccessible to man in its enormity—thus every personality carries in its own self its goals, and meanwhile carries them in order to serve common goals inaccessible to man" (7:276).

The duality in such a view of personality, a variation of the personal life, swarm life dichotomy encountered earlier, permeates *War and Peace*. Individual characters, historical events, and chemical reactions are all com-

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parable entities, and thus mysterious in the sense that no one can know why hydrogen and oxygen combine to form water. Throughout *War and Peace,* characters, like atoms, follow predetermined patterns—"common goals inaccessible to man"—and experience can have only a negligible effect on these patterns. Yet while atoms combine to form patterns that we call molecules, each one still remains a fragmented, discrete entity "complete in itself." Likewise, characters may interact with other characters, yet remain isolated from them. And, to extend the figure to a higher level, nations that interact to form a pattern of war may be profoundly different.

Thus, close examination of the imagery of *War and Peace* demonstrates that the work contains two fully developed sets, or systems, of images. The fiction alone has a consistent opposition of organic and nonorganic images, but the shift in the use of nonorganic images in the essays, which are so closely linked to the fiction, creates severe difficulties of interpretation. Whereas in the fiction nonorganic images cluster around characters who assert their will, nonorganic images in the essays are applied to characters, such as Kutuzov, who explicitly refuse to assert their will. Within the essays, numerous contradictory statements appear; we find in them both a denial of the possibility of historical evaluation and an assertion of Napoleon's alienation from truth and goodness. Similarly, there is a denial of free will and an assertion of free will; the image of the war between 1805 and 1812 as a turbulence of the "historical sea" presents war as a natural phenomenon, yet the essays also call war "an event . . . repugnant . . . to human nature." The text therefore lends itself to two opposing interpretations, and to choose one of them means to ignore the evidence for the other.[12]

Perhaps an analogy with a similar situation in the physical sciences will suggest a possible solution to this quandary. A friend tells me that modern physics can offer no single description of light; the concept of light as discrete packets, or quanta, of energy explains certain phenomena, while the concept of light as waves explains others. Whether one uses the quantum theory or the wave theory depends on the phenomenon that one wishes to explain. Like a physicist working with light, the critic who wishes to discuss *War and Peace* must adopt the general explanation which makes meaningful the specific facts that interest him. As a conclusion, I should like to suggest some ways in which this approach may be used.

The contrast between the organic and the nonorganic images provides the basis for one of two equally valid interpretations of *War and Peace*: that the work is a confrontation between organic existence (i.e., the Russians) and nonorganic existence (i.e., the French and the Germans). On another level this

12. Cf. John Hagan's comment, "Between Tolstoy's philosophy of history and his allegiance to the Orders of Nature and God, there would seem to be an unbridgeable chasm." "On the Craftsmanship of *War and Peace,*" *Essays in Criticism,* 13 (1963): 29.

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view allows one to distinguish between "good" characters (the Rostovs) and "bad" characters (the Kuragins). In addition to its other merits this interpretation can shed considerable light on the creative history of the work. Unquestionably a certain historical justification for this juxtaposition existed in the three countries at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it was only a partial one; to take merely one example, industrialization had long been present in Russia as well as in France and Germany. Of necessity, Tolstoy simplified the actual historical conditions in order to give such a juxtaposition satisfying aesthetic form. Although Viktor Shklovsky did not follow up his insight, it was to this process of simplification that he referred in his remark that a writer "chooses material not according to the principle of accuracy, but according to the principle of the convenience of the material."[13]

As Shklovsky pointed out (pp. 69–70), Tolstoy suppressed all mention of the attempts on the part of the French to employ guerrilla warfare, for in the novel guerrilla warfare constitutes part of the spontaneous reaction of the Russians to foreign invasion. (Cf. the image of the duelist who drops his sword and picks up a club when he realizes that his life is at stake, 7: 139, and that of the gardener who chases an animal from his garden.) On the Russian side, the historical figure of Davydov had to undergo drastic changes before it could emerge as Denisov, the one character who explicitly links the fictional and historical action, the slightly naïve but thoroughly charming guerrilla leader who is allowed to propose to Natasha, and even appears in the epilogue, on Nikolai's name day. Shklovsky noted that little remains of the historical Davydov (p. 10), who was interested in military strategy and who corresponded with Walter Scott. The reason, of course, is that such intellectual activity would have appeared as "nonorganic" in the completed novel. The refusal of the peasants to provide carts for Princess Marya at Bogucharovo provides an especially interesting case (pp. 77–85). The historical reasons for peasant uprisings in Russia are all too well known; but emphasis on the brutal treatment of the peasants by their masters would have destroyed the tone of the novel which Edmund Wilson once called an "idyll";[14] it would have meant a break in the natural order that prevails (prior to the epilogues, at least) in rural Russia and in Moscow. Hence the revolt has no cause; it simply—and explicitly—illustrates the mysterious quality of organic life.

Yet such interpretations rest only on the implications of the opposition between the organic and nonorganic images in the fiction. The organic images in the fiction, and especially in the essays, make possible an equally valid inter-

13. Viktor Shklovsky, *Mater'ial i stil' v romane L'va Tolstogo "Voina i mir"* (Moscow, 1928), p. 35.

14. Ivan Turgenev, *Literary Reminiscences and Autobiographical Fragments*, trans. with an introduction by David Magarshack, and an essay on Turgenev by Edmund Wilson (New York, 1958), p. 19.

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pretation of *War and Peace* as a single physical process, such as the formation of a mountain, which involves both creation and destruction. Certainly the images of the "historical sea," of the will of Providence, and of the great migration justify such an interpretation, which includes both poles of the title, war and peace, as parts of a single whole. This view of the work implies that since the course of all events is predetermined, both the order that prevails in Moscow and the tensions produced by Napoleon's invasion, which threatens that order, are therefore equivalent organic entities.

In fact, an omnipresent organic tension of growth and decay animates many of the domestic scenes. Pierre, for instance, acts as awkwardly at Natasha's name day party in Moscow as he had at Anna Pavlovna's salon; he blocks the passage of the guests to dinner there, and is rebuked by Marya Dmitrievna. Until the first epilogue, Sonya provides a continuing source of tension in the Rostov household because of her love for Nikolai. At Natasha's name day, her fear that he might marry Julie Karagina reduces her to tears. Later Nikolai and his mother nearly come to an open break because of her. Even at the English Club, the *locus classicus* of natural order, the antagonism inherent between two generations is not only evident but is also explicitly stated: "A minority of those present were casual guests—chiefly young men among whom were Denisov, Rostov, and Dolokhov, who was now again an officer in the Semenov Regiment. On the faces of the young men, especially those who were military men, was that expression of condescending respect for their elders which seems to say to the older generation, 'We are prepared to respect and honor you, but all the same, remember that the future belongs to us'" (5:21–22).

If Sonya, a member of the younger generation, causes most of the tension in the Rostov household, it is old Prince Bolkonsky who causes the tension in his family. His compulsive domineering of Marya gives her great unhappiness, and his insistence that Andrei postpone his marriage to Natasha for a year has disastrous consequences. In short, the conflict between the generations—one growing, one declining—is as prevalent as in *Fathers and Sons*, although it is not central.

In the epilogue, it would seem that all the tensions achieve resolution. Natasha realizes that Sonya was not intended to marry; since both Prince Andrei and his father are dead, Marya is able to marry Nikolai without interference and to help to improve the Rostovs' financial affairs. Yet this order is threatened again by tension in the inevitable, recurring pattern of nature. Pierre's Decembrist sympathies present a threat to public order which arouses violent antagonism in Nikolai, and evokes an intense response in Andrei's son Koko. On the personal level, tension arises between Nikolai and Marya, who prevails on him to stop beating the peasants. Marya's habit of giving the

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children graded slips on their behavior during the day gives a foreboding of future clashes between Rostov spontaneity and Bolkonsky restraint. A new cycle which includes both order and tension is about to begin.

As the natural tensions between the generations threaten the order of the microcosm, so the natural tensions between nations threaten the order of the macrocosm. The work begins with Anna Pavlovna's discussion of Napoleon's growing power, which finally results in the destruction of Moscow. The first epilogue is filled with talk of dissatisfaction with the government, and of another threat to Russia—this time from within.

Because discussing *War and Peace* in general terms presents such extraordinary difficulties, perhaps an analogy will help to summarize the present study. Andrei Saburov has suggested a felicitous—and very Tolstoyan—image for the form of this most unusual novel: "As the surface of a ball nowhere has a beginning, so in the narration of *War and Peace* there is no point which one can 'catch onto' in order to find the principal theme."[15] This, it seems to me, perfectly expresses the unique quality of the work. Just as it is impossible to see the entire surface of a ball, so there is no one theme, no one interpretation, and no one hero, and no linear movement within the work.

15. Andrei Saburov, *"Voina i mir" L. N. Tolstogo: Problematika i poetika* (Moscow, 1959), p. 32.

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