

“ONE STEP BEYOND THE LINE”:
THE SENSORY EXPERIENCE OF THE BATTLEFIELD IN
LEO TOLSTOY’S “WAR AND PEACE”

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Note on Translation

Before we begin, I must address the linguistic limitations of this thesis. In order to convey war's multi-sensory assault on the individual, a close-reading of relevant passages of Tolstoy's novel is central to my argument. I acknowledge the importance of word choices in the original Russian text, however, as a non-Russian speaker I was unable to refer to either the original text nor the voluminous studies of Russian critics. Therefore, my research – including its primary and secondary sources - is situated in general, rather than specifically Russian, literary studies.

The translation of *War and Peace* I have chosen is by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, published by Alfred A. Knopf. This translation keeps Tolstoy's original rhythm, idiosyncrasies, and repetition, remaining faithful to his word choices, including military terms. The translators' intention was for the English to sound as close to the original Russian as possible, thus introducing new generations not only to Russian writing, but to a novel considered (by many) to be almost impenetrable.

Abstract

War and Peace is Tolstoy's harrowing indictment of the Napoleonic Wars, laying bare the shattered expectations, illusions, and lives of a generation of young Russians. In this thesis I show how the methods employed by inter-disciplinary sensory historians can be applied to the novel, demonstrating how it can be read not simply as a depiction of war but as a sensory reaction to it. More than simply telling us what happened, Tolstoy uses a representation of the senses to explore the lived, or 'felt,' experience behind the established historical narratives, offering bitter truths rather than familiar tropes that valorise war. The battlefield left an indelible impact on those who experienced it, and I demonstrate how Tolstoy uses the senses holistically to bring this space to life and how this sensory assault takes his characters to the limits of human experience. As readers, we accompany them into battle, where we must smell the rotting earth, gunpowder, and corpses; hear the screams of thousands of wounded and dying soldiers; and look, and keep looking, at the terrible sights. Further, I argue that the sensory assault is a morally affective experience. From the roaring cannons of the battlefield to the stench of a field hospital and the horrors of amputation, the senses frequently play important roles in not only motivating characters' actions but in shaping them. Tolstoy not only uses the senses in and of themselves, but also as a crucial component in bearing witness. Anticipating the ethical questions of Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Tolstoy invites, and even implores his characters to relate and react to the suffering of others, placing them in horrific situations where they must regard the humanity of the victims, and make a response with emotion, conscience, and compassion. Moreover, Tolstoy puts us, as readers, into relationship with his characters – their combat stress, injury, and war-weariness – that we might understand the influences under which they act (or fail to act) because we are affected by them, too. As scene after scene demands attention, we are obliged not to turn away, that we might have compassion for the countless nameless, faceless soldiers left to fester and writhe on the battlefields.

Introduction

“We’re told about the rules of war, about chivalry, about parlaying, sparing the unfortunate, and so on. It’s all nonsense [...] War isn’t a courtesy, it’s the vilest thing in the world, and we must not play at war. We must take this terrible necessity sternly and seriously. That’s the whole point: to cast off the lie, and if it’s war it’s war, and not a game.”

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
(III.II.XXV.775)

In Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1868-69), Count Nikolai Rostov is asked by his fellow soldiers for an account of how he was wounded during the Battle of Schöngrabern. Tolstoy tells us that Nikolai “began telling the story with the intention of telling it exactly how it had been” (I.III.VII.242) but instead spun a compelling narrative about “how he cut his way into [the fray], hacking right and left; how his sabre tasted flesh, how he fell exhausted, and so on” (242). Substituting the bloody carnage for a more enjoyable “untruth” (242), Nikolai grew “more and more animated as it went along” (242), telling his audience:

about his Schöngrabern action in just the way that those who take part in battles usually tell about them, that is, in the way they would like it to have been, the way they have heard others tell it, the way it could be told more beautifully, but not at all the way it had been ... If he had told the truth to these listeners, who, like himself, had already heard accounts of attacks numerous times and had formed for themselves a definite notion of what an attack was, and were expecting exactly the same sort of account – they either would not have believed him or, worse still, would have thought it was [Nikolai’s] own fault that what usually happens in stories of cavalry attacks had not happened with him. (242)

This account – “the usual version” (242) – assumes the guise of truth, but Nikolai recites “a version of battle that has more to do with how battles *ought to be* than how they really are” (McLoughlin 22). His audience sees the battlefield through the distorting lens of convention, without “the horrible sounds of death and destruction ... the boom and crackle and whine and thud of weaponry; human cries, screams and shouts; the sounds of ... armies moving ... and weird aural hallucinations” (23). Therefore, without describing the chaos and complex emotions associated with it, Nikolai’s tale reveals the gap between the battlefield experience and its recounting. As Gary Saul Morson has noted, “*War and Peace* is not only a story about war, it is also a story about stories about war” (Morson 100). Throughout the novel, when characters like Nikolai try to give an account to others, or even to “tell themselves what they are seeing or have seen” (110), the narrative is necessarily falsified as “they structure, change, and distort it” (111).

Nikolai discovers that telling the truth about war “is very difficult” (I.III.VII.242) and Tolstoy calls attention to the fact that war stories are always told in a different space – physically, emotionally, and psychologically - from which the experience occurred. So, can we really expect Nikolai to find the right words, or a potent technique, for conveying the magnitude of his experience?

The battlefield features recurrently in *War and Peace*, marked by “that terrible dividing line of uncertainty and fear” (I.II.XIX.188). It defies easy classification: blood-soaked earth and field hospitals, filth, heat, cold, stench, hunger, squalor, disease and rotting flesh, severed limbs and mutilated bodies, cannons and explosions, taken together to create an environment of utter horror. It assaults the senses. It is devastating in its impact: those who enter the battlefield are “transformed permanently by its sights, experiences, and demands” (McLoughlin 106). Indeed, “the physical setting of battle and its terrible dynamics” (Orwin 8) have no peace-time equivalent. Nevertheless, David Howes writes that “[f]or all that war is ‘senseless,’ ‘unrepresentable,’ and even ‘unthinkable,’ it leaves a material and sensory legacy that behoves us to try and comprehend” (Howes xix). Thus, an examination of the battlefield, not merely in terms of terrain, maps, places, and names, but through the representation of the senses – sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch – reveals how Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* can lay claim to telling the truth about war. That is, war in its “full, complicated texture” (Saunders et al. 7).

Leo Tolstoy had first-hand military experience, having served as a soldier in the Crimean War (1853-56), and as a writer he sought new methods with which to defamiliarize readers accustomed to romanticised, orderly, and sanitised depictions of war. Responding to the challenge of representing war’s extremity as an experience, Tolstoy shows how sensory descriptions might be conveyed to “show what writing can do with the ineffable and intractable” (McLoughlin 8). His record of the Crimean War, known as *Sevastopol Sketches* (1855), conjures the sense-scape of Sevastopol for readers with no direct experience of the conflict, conveying what it felt like to fight in a battle, to be wounded, to march beyond exhaustion, to kill, and watch others die. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy’s use of sensory language defines the way his characters experience warfare. Potent sights, smells, and sounds – both real and imagined – affect characters in emotionally powerful ways; not least because the senses frequently play important roles not only in motivating their actions but in shaping them. Told through the voices of aristocrats, soldiers, and civilians, Tolstoy’s narrative of the Napoleonic Wars is an inherently sensory one. *War and Peace* is riddled with the sights, sounds, stench, and feel of violence. Battles are fought in forests and wheat-fields, on frozen steppes and exposed tracts of land that look like open-air theatres, and by evoking the immediacy, texture, and visceral impact of these sites, Tolstoy

shows us the ways in which the senses are filtered. Moreover, we see in his characters' bodies the signs of combat stress, injury, and war-weariness, and alongside them, we hear shells whistling and screaming across the sky; smell the rotting corpses and amputated limbs; and watch as wounded soldiers are left to fester and writhe on the battlefields.

Much scholarship on Tolstoy's work in general, and on *War and Peace* in particular, has focused on the author's philosophical and psychological insights. Likewise, the topic of death in Tolstoy's novels and short stories has not only been the subject of numerous specialised studies, but seems inseparable from discussions about his writing. Studies on *War and Peace* pay much attention to the novel as a visual spectacle, discussing the interaction between the verbal and the visual, Tolstoy's adoption of visual and pictorial techniques, use of optical illusion, and modes of seeing. Thus, rather than rehearsing similar arguments, my aim is to contribute to scholarship by taking a more holistic approach, looking at how Tolstoy incorporates multiple senses – tactile, olfactory, gastronomical, aural, and visual – into his descriptions of the battlefield. This thesis engages with the interdisciplinary field of “sensory history,” an area of anthropological, historical, and cultural inquiry that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s from the work of Alain Corbin, Constance Classen, David Howes, and Mark M. Smith. The field offers a unique perspective for examining the complexity of historical events and experiences by considering the role of the senses in shaping lived experience. More than imaginatively recreating history, or merely describing how people saw, heard, smelled, tasted and touched aspects of life, sensory history seeks to uncover the meanings the senses had for specific societies, the ways in which individuals thought about themselves and responded to the conditions in which they worked and lived. Sensory history is “a way of becoming more attuned to the past” (Smith 4) and offers a record of the past that is almost palpable. It is a method that can also transform close-readings of historical fiction: novels that contain not only characters and plot, but also the traces that historical events leave behind. Rather than an objective chronicle of events, the rich sensory world of *War and Peace* grants access to a society long vanished and creates an overall picture of the Napoleonic Wars as seen from the Russian side. In 1870, Russian philosopher, Nikolai Strakhov, wrote four essays about *War and Peace*, and noted that it was “[a] complete picture of human life. A complete picture of Russia of those days” (Strakhov 277). Indeed, in *War and Peace* “history is not ‘fictionalised’ but validated by fiction, while the historical background, in turn, helps to create the illusion of unconditional reality” (Ungurianu 59) and the novel “gradually became perceived as more authoritative than any other accounts of the contemporaries of 1812” (61). Kenneth Mumma writes that:

[i]nasmuch as *War and Peace* is a work of historical fiction, Tolstoy has not simply painted a fictional narrative on the canvas of history. Rather he has spun the threads of the lives of historical figures, imagined characters, fictitious circumstances and historical details and events into a fabric that blurs the distinctions between fact and fiction. (Mumma 1)

As readers, Tolstoy invites us to enter the lives of his characters - representative of once-living civilians and combatants - to share emotionally and physically in their fate and “in the complexities of their lived experience” (Kaufman 69).¹ Caught in the maelstrom of events, his young patriots are impulsive, intellectual, lusty, and fatally over-confident; they are “all distinct, all fascinating, because they [are] all in their different ways, utterly human, truer than any biographer could make his subject” (Hemmings 556). Therefore, while this thesis explores the range of sights, smells, and sounds of the battlefield, I engage with a sensory methodology in order to uncover the meanings these senses carry for Tolstoy’s characters and the ways in which the senses affect how they respond. Through various characters – including Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, Nikolai Rostov, and Pierre Bezukhov – we see the emotional turmoil and unpredictable behaviour of individual men in a uniquely horrific environment. And it is precisely our engagement with them – characters whose very survival depends on their ability to make sense of their experience – that help us, as readers, make sense of the indescribable. By making a close-reading examination of the battlefield experience I will explore how Tolstoy’s descriptions of touch, smell, hearing, taste, and sight articulate how his characters feel about themselves and the war.

Furthermore, using Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) as a point of reference, I will examine how Tolstoy appeals to our empathy and compassion when his characters bear witness to pain and suffering. I argue that Tolstoy’s sensory descriptions insist on a response, urging us to not only imagine but to feel what his characters are feeling. Indeed, Tolstoy takes his characters to the limits of human experience and, in doing so, challenges us to confront the awful reality of war. If we consider the characters and their over-exposure to war, we can ask ourselves whether such an experience would numb us or drive us to compassion. Tolstoy’s emphasis on the senses not only probes the limits of empathy, but, like Sontag, he raises “questions about the ethics of regarding the pain of others” (Knapp 221). Tolstoy’s

¹ While Tolstoy was selective about what he chose to depict, he undertook extensive historical research in order to provide his narrative with a realistic backdrop. He borrowed extracts from the memoirs and correspondences of Russian witnesses to the events of 1812; memoirs of combatants of various ranks, including Napoleon himself; he interviewed surviving eye-witnesses and elderly friends and relatives served as inspiration for his characters (his characters’ names are slightly modified historical names of Russian aristocratic families). He studied periodicals and newspapers of the era and purchased books documenting the social and political trends of the era, along with making visits to the battlefields. See: Ungurianu, pp. 26-41.

characters “do not know what to do or say when faced with the pain of others” (223), but the senses prove to be affecting witnesses. Battle exposes Andrei, Nikolai, and Pierre to experiences that had been, until then, beyond their ability to comprehend and, if they survived them, altered them physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Tolstoy suggests that to understand a battle we must conceive of it as an experience that will affect both participants and onlookers. Thus, above mere storytelling, *War and Peace* contains a moral dimension: that the screams of thousands of wounded and dying soldiers on the battlefield demand not only representation, but our attention.

The Patriotic War: Russia Against Napoleon

The Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) were a series of interconnected battles following the French Revolutionary Wars. When Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) seized power in France,² he “refused to accept reasonable limits on his power” (Germani 112) and embarked on an aggressive campaign to impose a single-state regime on the nations of Europe. His grand vision resulted in unprecedented death and destruction, costing millions of lives. The battles raged continuously for nearly thirteen years, mobilising enormous armies, and engulfing Europe from Spain to North Africa. The linear tactics and technology of warfare remained unchanged since the eighteenth-century: on land, brightly uniformed soldiers marched or rode into battle accompanied by drums; cannons fired point-blank into charging cavalry; soldiers pierced each other with bayonets, or engaged in hand-to-hand combat with sabres and pistols. On sea, vast fleets of wooden sailing ships were blockaded, taken, or destroyed. Napoleon’s greatest weapon was his Grande Armée: a brutal and motivated army of one million French, Polish, German, and Italian soldiers. Michael Hughes writes that the Armée had a “cult-like attachment to their leader” (Hughes 14), and throughout Europe they crushed the allied coalitions³ in decisive victories that were unprecedented in their speed, efficiency, and cruelty.⁴

² In 1799 Napoleon enacted a coup d’etat to gain power in France, declaring himself Emperor in 1804.

³ Napoleon waged political and large-scale economic warfare against various coalitions of European nations, including Austria, Prussia, Britain, Spain, and Russia.

⁴ See: Dwyer for an analysis of eye-witness testimonies to the excessive cruelty and massacres committed by the Grande Armée. He writes that “these reports, graphic and detailed right down to the manner of the killing and the reaction of some of the victims, illustrate the ... types of extreme violence one most commonly encounters in accounts of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, namely the slaughter associated with the sacking of towns, the killing of prisoners, and the abuse of civilians and of women in particular. Mass killings and atrocities were so widespread that they would appear to be an integral if not an accepted part of warfare during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods” (Dwyer 383)

By 1810, Britain and Russia were the only countries left undefeated, and when Russia withdrew from Napoleon's Continental System,⁵ Napoleon retaliated by marching his Grande Armée into Russia in the summer of 1812. Hoping to win a decisive victory and ill-prepared for an extended campaign, Napoleon was instead thwarted by the Russians' strategy of retreat and 'scorched earth policy,' forcing his 680,000 soldiers further and deeper into the vast steppes and farmlands of Russia.⁶ The two armies battled in scores of towns and fields across Russia, with major engagements at Smolensk and Borodino,⁷ creating a monstrous landscape of flattened wheat-fields, smouldering grass, and blood-soaked soil. Artillery destroyed forests and reduced buildings to rubble; the relentless firing of cannons was deafening; and the stench of decaying flesh hung in the air. Fields were littered with fortifications and the rotting corpses of horses and soldiers lying where they fell.⁸ The carnage was incomprehensible: all told, nearly one million soldiers and civilians died. The invasion was unlike any war Napoleon had previously fought: this was war on all fronts. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy writes:

[f]rom the time of the burning of Smolensk, a war began that did not fit any of the former traditions of war. The burning of towns and villages, the retreats after battles, the blow struck at Borodino and then another retreat, the abandoning and burning of Moscow, the hunt for marauders, the cutting off of the transport, the partisan war – these were all deviations from the rules. (IV.III.II.1032-33)

⁵ "The Continental System" was Napoleon's attempt to blockade Britain's trade routes, and thus destroy British exports and economy. French-controlled ports denied access to British vessels, and as time passed, Napoleon's efforts to enforce the blockade incited more conflict, especially the devastating wars that raged across the Iberian Peninsula from 1808 to 1814. Both Russia and France were militarily powerful countries with ambitions to expand. However, relations between the two nations soured when Napoleon was met with strong Russian resistance to French dominance in Europe. Further, Russia could not survive without British trade, and defied Napoleon by allowing British goods into Europe via the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. In an attempt to force Tsar Alexander I to comply, Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812. See: Nestor, pp. 354-355.

⁶ Whenever the Grande Armée attempted to attack, the Russians adopted a strategy of retreat, burying anything of value, burning their barns, villages, and crops, and taking cattle and horses deep into the forests. Stockpiles of food and clothing were destroyed. When Napoleon arrived in Moscow in September 1812, he found it burning and deserted. Lack of food for soldiers and fodder for horses led to starvation. The destruction to the Russian territory was a terrible cost for citizens and invaders alike.

⁷ During the Battle of Smolensk (16-18 August, 1812), French artillery burned the city to the ground. There were over 20,000 military casualties and 14,000 civilians missing or dead. The Battle of Borodino (7 September, 1812) involved 250,000 troops and cost 70,000 lives.

⁸ The following year, once the snows had thawed, farmers would bury "a total of 58,521 corpses and the carcasses of 35,478 horses" (Austen 383). After Napoleon abandoned Moscow, the Russians found 25,000 dead bodies and animal carcasses that had been left to rot in the streets. The smell was so dreadful it affected the breathing of those living 15 kilometres away. See: www.napolun.com/mirror/napoleonistyka.atspace.com/Borodino_battle.htm.

Indeed, it was history's first example of 'total war' and an epic military disaster.⁹ By the time he reached Moscow three months later, Napoleon had lost over 100,000 of his soldiers to the battlefield, and 200,000 to injury, exhaustion, and disease.¹⁰ On October 19, the French began to leave Moscow; the first snow began to fall on November 6 and, lacking adequate clothing and tents, soldiers froze to death overnight.¹¹ Food supplies ran out, and the men resorted to eating their dead, or:

eating horses that had fallen several days before, consuming all flesh, right to the bone. Unguarded live horses were quickly slaughtered and eaten if their owners were inattentive. The liver and heart were the most sought-after parts. Bloody scuffles occurred as men fought over horse meat. (Welling and Rich 497)

Roads froze or turned to quagmires of mud. Men lost noses, fingers, and toes to frostbite. Many developed snow blindness. It was so cold that soldiers died as they walked; others simply lay down and died. Hundreds drowned in freezing rivers crossing hastily-constructed bridges. Pursued by the Russians, Napoleon's Grande Armée left Russian soil with less than 10,000 men.¹²

⁹ There is no general consensus for the meaning of 'total war' but historian David Bell calls the period of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815) "the first total war." Logistically and technologically, the use of muskets, cannons, sailing ships, and soldiers riding or marching into battle, cannot equate to what we imagine a "total war" to be. In applying this term, Bell means a war without limits in which every military and civilian resource is mobilised (and often sacrificed) for the objective. It is a fusion of war and politics in which the usual and accepted rules of war that limited violence inflicted upon non-combatants was unsustainable, and civilian casualties became a common by-product of warfare. Guerrilla warfare was waged without restraint against the enemy by soldiers and civilians alike. Combined with the conscription, mobilisation, and deployment of mass armies, the scale of warfare itself was altered. Viktor Taki writes that "Napoleon's invasion was the first war in centuries to affect the Russian interior; it accordingly led to an unprecedented mobilisation of society beyond [the] military class" (Taki 264). See also: Bell; Brouers.

¹⁰ Barely one month into the campaign, typhus and dysentery claimed the lives of 80,000 soldiers; thousands more died as typhus decimated the ranks during the retreat. At least 100,000 died from wounds on the battlefield but it is estimated that as many as 200,000 died from disease alone. Many more died from heat exhaustion or froze to death. 50,000 were left behind in hospitals and 100,000 became prisoners of war.

¹¹ Bruce Paton writes that during the six weeks of retreat, temperatures dropped between -37°C and -40°C. For the blizzard conditions and the effects on soldiers' bodies, see: Brenstrum; Paton pp. 316-319; and Taki, pp. 287-288. Dr Achilles Rose wrote an eyewitness account of the retreat and the severity of the cold, which resulted in (among other afflictions): "[m]utilation of hands and feet, loss of the nose, of an ear, weakness of sight, deafness, complete or incomplete, neuralgia, rheumatism, palsies, chronic diarrhoea, pectoral affections" (Rose 38). Rose devoted an entire paragraph to the description of the effect of frost on the body of an individual soldier. See: Rose, pp. 37-46.

¹² The suffering of the Grande Armée was immortalised in large-scale history paintings throughout the rest of the 19th century by both French and Russian artists. Among the most visceral and sensorially evocative are: Joseph Ferdinand Boissard de Boisdenier. *Episode in the Retreat from Russia*. 1835; Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet. *Épisode de la campagne de Russie*. 1836; and Vasily Vereshchagin, *The Night Bivouac of the Great Army*. 1896-97.

A Novel About War

As a vast panorama of Russia during the Napoleonic Wars, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is widely regarded to be the best war novel ever written. However, it is “not only a story about war” (Morson, 100) but about the stories that soldiers and citizens tell themselves, and others, in order to make sense of the arbitrary chaos and horror. From the drawing rooms of St Petersburg to the blood and dirt of the battlefield, Tolstoy shows us what happens to an idealistic generation when their cocoon-like existence is ruptured, and what drives their choices, emotions, and behaviour when confronted with a state of total war. Beginning in 1805 and ending in 1812 with the Battle of Borodino, the burning of Moscow, and Napoleon's retreat, *War and Peace* “render[s] a cross section of the entire Russian war generation” (Clay 38), presenting a broad chronicle of the invasion and its impact on the lives of five aristocratic families. Along with a supporting cast of servants, peasants, armies, and historical figures that include Tsar Alexander I, General Kutuzov (the Supreme Commander of the Russian Imperial Army), and Napoleon himself, it is a grand narrative of the beauty and ugliness of life, and as his characters are caught up in the destruction wrought upon Russia, Tolstoy lays bare the very “texture of human experience” (Forrest 73).

Tolstoy writes that war requires a lack of humility, as “millions of men, renouncing their human feelings and their reason, had to go from west to east and kill their own kind” (III.I.I.605), and his characters openly and naïvely celebrate war, warriors, and the battlefield: Nikolai Rostov imagines battle is an exciting exercise in cutting people down, charging into battle “not know[ing] himself how or why he was doing it” (III.I.XV.653); Andrei Bolkonsky seeks glory and desires that he never becomes “a human being and come to love or pity someone, or start thinking about what is just and what isn't” (III.I.XII.644); Pierre Bezukhov travels to Borodino in a tall hat and green trousers “to be where those puffs of smoke, those gleaming bayonets and cannons, those movements, those sounds were” (III.II.XXXI.790); and Petya Rostov believes the battlefield is a “magical kingdom in which everything [is] possible” (IV.II.X.1055). As the novel progresses, and war begins to rob them of their humanity, a shift occurs in these characters, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically. Based in part on his own experiences, Tolstoy shows us what warfare actually looks and sounds like, and how the battles really were, rather than what his characters think battles ought to be. He presents us with the “confusion of the battlefield, the chaos and din and carnage that rendered friend and foe indistinguishable” (Forrest 60). It is an experience that throws Andrei, Nikolai, and Pierre out of

joint and in desperate search for ways in which to make sense of, or glean any meaning from, that experience.

War as Blood, Suffering, and Death

During the Crimean War (1853-1856), Tolstoy served as a second lieutenant attached to the Battery of the 14th Artillery Brigade.¹³ For nearly three years, he had been fighting in the Caucasus, the Russian Empire's mountainous southern frontier.¹⁴ In 1854 he was transferred to the besieged port city of Sevastopol, where for eleven months, it was battered with heavy shelling.¹⁵ Tolstoy was among those who bore witness to the carnage and reported what he experienced. His trilogy of dispatches from the siege – *Sevastopol Sketches* (1855) – became the foundation of *War and Peace* as he sought “to challenge traditional misconceptions about war ... and to replace them by an understanding of what it is really like” (De Haard 257). Indeed, war is “an experience you could not invent” (McLean 201) and Tolstoy had “experienced all its chaos and horror” (201). Thus, the vividness and immediacy of the *Sketches* is due to the fact that Tolstoy “had known it first-hand” (201).

The Crimean War was the first ‘arm-chair war,’ covered in real-time by war correspondents and the first to be documented through photography. While these photographs present a substantial record of the participants and landscapes of war, the medium could not yet capture the action of battle; the orderly, sanitised, and static images not only present an incomplete record of the war, but impacted both how the war was seen and understood. Thus, the war gave rise to an evolution of narrative techniques and war reporting, one that “encouraged a critical perspective on war itself” (Gusejnova 10). Known as ‘Sevastopol in December,’ ‘Sevastopol in May,’ and ‘Sevastopol in August,’ Tolstoy's *Sketches* “exist on a liminal boundary between reportage and fiction” (Watchel 176) and, in an era of intense press censorship, provided the reading public with accounts of battle that “impress[ed] upon the

¹³ The Crimean War, in which Britain and its allies fought against the expansion of the Russian Empire, was the first conflict to involve war correspondents and the first to be photographed; civilians on the home-front could read accounts of battles soon after they took place and look at images produced as postcards. It was also the last war to be conducted by the old codes of chivalry, yet modern rifles and weaponry enabled slaughter on a mass scale. As such, it was an ill-conceived, disorganised conflict that cost 750,000 lives.

¹⁴ The Russian Empire's invasion into the Caucasus in 1817 sparked decades of battles and grinding counter-insurgency campaigns. More than 290,000 died before the conflict finally ended in 1864.

¹⁵ The Crimean War was fought on the Crimean Peninsula and a major target for Britain was the Russian naval base at Sevastopol which housed Russia's Black Sea Fleet. The Siege of Sevastopol (1854-1855) was the longest and most crucial phase of the war. As the city was shelled from land and sea, the Russians repaired their fortifications and network of trenches, unwilling to allow the city to be bombarded into submission. The year-long siege wounded and killed 170,000 soldiers.

readers the experience of suffering” (Gusejnova 7). Tolstoy structures war as a catalogue of impressions and announces that he will show us “war, not from its conventional, beautiful, and brilliant side, with music and drum-beat, with fluttering flags and galloping generals, but ... war in its real phase – in blood, in suffering, in death” (Tolstoy 11). His eye for detail and ability to recount the exhaustion, confusion, and horror on the battlefield subverts conventional war reporting, using words, images, and sounds to create “multiple, often contradictory sensory experiences” (Gusejnova 11). More than a document of the siege, *Sevastopol Sketches* are “a crucible of narrative experimentation” (Tapp 201) and a “project of making sense of sensory impressions ... exploring how experience could attain truthful narrative representation” (202). Blending a range of senses and experiences, Tolstoy tells us what we will see, hear, touch, and feel when we accompany him on a tour of Sevastopol. He creates a sense of *being there*: the stench of rotting flesh and muddy trenches; the sight of blood-spattered streets and blood-stained doctors; the roar of the sea and the humming of bees; and the whistling, howling, pinging, and booming of bullets and shells. Indeed, “we see, hear, and feel more than it was customary for European readers to bear” (Gusejnova 19) when he “expose[s] the disordered chaos of battle” (Tapp 212).

His first sketch, ‘Sevastopol in December,’ describes the “repulsive disorder” (Tolstoy 7) of Sevastopol where no one has managed to remove the “half-decomposed carcass of a brown horse” (5) or the “hundreds of bodies” (59) lying “with stiffened limbs” (56). By revealing not objective details of battle but rather focusing on what sights, sounds, and smells overwhelm the observer, Tolstoy creates “a whole world of feelings” (51). Indeed, he is interested in showing how humanity reacts to warfare and “[i]n his effort to make the siege of Sevastopol real, live, and dramatic, he takes extreme measures to involve the reader” (Knapp 219). The reader, directly addressed as “you,” is invited to participate imaginatively as an observer, stepping through “yellow, liquid, foul-smelling mud” (Tolstoy 15) as explosions “crash” (64) and “thunder” (64) and “roar” (64), and recoiling from the sight of men with body parts “torn away” (18). As “you” walk around the besieged city, “you step” (5), “you gaze” (6), “you inquire” (8), “you ask” (10), and “you hear” (5) as this unmediated and uncensored experience of the battlefield reveals the “excessive horror” (13) of what the war has done.

Tolstoy’s aim is to put “you” in relationship with those on the battlefield, telling “you” that “everyone is thoroughly frightened” (7), describing the corporeal aspects of this experience – the sweating, the parched mouths, pale faces, and trembling – and stating that bravery is only “a peculiar boastful frame of mind” (12), not least where soldiers are presented in the agonies of injury and death. Indeed, after “you” have toured the city, Tolstoy introduces “you” to

Sevastopol's victims: the soldiers "crawling, twisting, and groaning" in "intolerable agony" (10). Of the severing of limbs at a field hospital, he observes:

You have just opened the door when the sight and smell of forty or fifty seriously wounded men and of those who have undergone amputation – some in hammocks, the majority upon the floor – suddenly strike you [...] The doctors are busy with the repulsive but beneficent work of amputation. You see the sharp, curved knife enter the healthy, white body, you see the wounded man suddenly regain consciousness with a piercing cry and curses, you see the army surgeon fling the amputated arm into a corner, you see another wounded man, lying in a litter in the same apartment, shrink convulsively and groan as he gazes at the operation upon his comrade, not so much from physical pain as from the moral torture of anticipation. (8-11)

While such scenes can be harrowing, that quality alone does not make them effective. Rather, it is Tolstoy's invitation to regard the suffering of others, to communicate the pain of others in such a way that his readers might be prompted to examine "their own unthinking, unfeeling attitude toward the events unfolding in Crimea" (Gusejnova 9). Upon leaving this "house of pain" (Tolstoy 11), Tolstoy insists that this act of listening to the soldiers groaning in pain and misery, of seeing arms, legs, and hands lying in piles, rotting, unburied and uncared for, is to "draw from the sight of these sufferings a consciousness of your nothingness" (11) and to "realise, in an entirely new way, the true significance of those sounds of gunfire" (15). As Gary Saul Morson suggests, "[t]here is no way to simply 'read about' Sevastopol (Morson 474), rather 'one bears witness' (474). Thus, the question: 'what does the sight of the blood, suffering, and death of others do to 'you'?" (Knapp 228).

Gavin Williams writes that "war may provide a fertile ground in which to explore the politics of sensory experience" (Williams xx). Tolstoy was extremely patriotic, fighting in three military campaigns over five years, but it was during this time that he began to express doubts about the experience that "planted the seeds of his later pacifism" (Green 168) and his conversion to vegetarianism.¹⁶ Indeed, Tolstoy used his early writings, including the writing of *Sevastopol Sketches* and *War and Peace*, as a way of working out the "politics of sensory experience" (Williams xx) that later translated into his political philosophy.¹⁷ Liza Knapp writes that "the early descriptions of war in his fiction are as much his legacy of pacifism as his later overt

¹⁶ Tolstoy's stance on pacifism and non-violent resistance was outlined in *What I Believe* (1885). In this work he discussed his personal philosophies, his general views on life, and his profound existential crisis with regard to the Russian Orthodox Church.

¹⁷ His early war writings included "The Raid: A Volunteer's Story" (1853); "The Wood felling" (1855); The Two Hussars (1856); and "The Cossacks" (1863). See: Emerson, pp. 1855-1858.

statements on war and non-violent resistance” (Knapp 172). In *Sevastopol Sketches*, he insists that we “pay attention to the corpses, to the sight, the smell, and feel of them” (170) so that “[t]he stench of decomposing flesh and the sight of amputated limbs makes it impossible to return to the security of former conceptions of life and death” (168). In 1857, during a trip to Paris, Tolstoy “was stupid and callous enough” (qtd. in Christian 132) to witness an execution by guillotine.¹⁸ He was so sickened and disturbed by the sight and sound that he wrote “the guillotine kept me awake a long time and made me reflect” (95). Indeed, “the grim spectacle continued to gnaw at his conscience and arouse his moral indignation” (Meyers 279), and he wrote in a letter: “I saw many atrocities in the war and in the Caucasus, but I should have been less sickened to see a man torn to pieces before my eyes than I was by this perfected, elegant machine” (qtd. in Troyat 167). He returned to the subject again in 1884 in his autobiographical book, *A Confession*, noting:

[w]hen I saw the head part from the body and each part fall separately into a box with a thud, I understood – not in my mind, but with my whole being – that no rational doctrine of progress would satisfy that act, and that if every man now living in the world and every man who had lived since the beginning of time were to maintain ... that this execution was indispensable, I shall know that it was not indispensable, but it was wrong. (167)

Dušan Bjelić writes that the experience in Paris “place[d] him on the path of the ethics of non-violence” (Bjelić 162), and Dmitry Shlapentokh notes that “[a]lready in the writings that Tolstoy composed just after the execution, one could see the philosophical outlines of *War and Peace*” (Shlapentokh 27). In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy makes it clear “that there are conventional ways of recounting battles that are inherently false” (Jones 67) and demands that his readers “see *through* them to the real experience” (67). Thus, the novel is full of violence, with scenes of duels, battlefield slaughter, cavalry charges, hand-to-hand combat, executions, and guerrilla attacks by Russians banding together “as instinctively as dogs bite to death a rabid stray dog” (IV.III.III.1035). But in confirmation of his developing philosophy, he denounces this violence as a crime, writing:

On the twelfth of June, the forces of western Europe crossed the borders of Russia, and war began – that is, an event took place contrary to human reason and to the whole of human nature. Millions of people committed against each other such a countless number

¹⁸ The execution of François Richeaux, for the crimes of theft and murder, took place on April 6, 1857, in front of a crowd of 12,000 – 15,000. Tolstoy left Paris soon after, telling a family member that “Paris made me so sick that I almost lost my mind” (qtd. in Bunin 291).

of villainies, deceptions, betrayals ... robberies, arsons, and murders as the annals of all the law courts in the world could not assemble in whole centuries. (III.I.I.603)

And by the late 1870s, Tolstoy had “rejected completely his earlier experiences in the army as bloody and inhuman” (Yokota-Murakami 225). He “spent the rest of his life bitterly denouncing the violence human beings inflict on each other” (Christoyannopoulos 564) by using tracts, essays, and stories “deliberately crafted to incite the reader to feel the injustice, the absurdity, and the suffering caused. One is made to feel for the victims, and one is left pondering how one would react is confronted with the same treatment” (573).¹⁹ He advocated that “resistance to war and militarism begins at the level of individual conscience, translated into individual action” (Atack 215) and that “a spark of resistance by one or a few individuals might set ablaze a cumulative participation” (Higgs 477).

In addition to his renunciation of war, Tolstoy converted to vegetarianism, concluding that “as long as there are slaughterhouses there will be battlefields” (qtd. in Crossman 24).²⁰ In order to make his point, he visited a slaughterhouse in Toula and recorded the experience in his essay, *The First Step*, published in 1900, which details everything from the blood and violence to the “heavy, disgusting, fetid smell” (Tolstoy 52).²¹ He makes striking parallels between soldiers and butchers, noting their suppression of “sympathy and pity toward living creatures like [themselves]” (51), and the descriptions are designed to provoke revulsion, from the animals “twitching” (54), “twisting” (54) and “writhing” (56) and “squeal[ing] loudly and piercingly” (51), to the butcher “in a frock besmeared with blood ... smoking a cigarette” (57). Tolstoy not only wonders how anyone can “bear the sight of suffering” (58) but declares that “[w]e cannot pretend that we do not know this ... that if we refuse to look at what we do not wish to see that it will not exist” (59). He concludes that “virtue is incompatible with beefsteaks” (59) and thus vegetarianism is not merely the answer, but the only way “to lead good lives” (59). Of this crisis

¹⁹ Tolstoy’s pacifism and ideas of non-violent resistance were based upon a close-reading of the Christian Gospels, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5, 6, and 7). Most of Tolstoy’s writings were banned from publication in Russia but were widely published abroad, inspiring people like Gandhi “who credits Tolstoy for impressing upon him the importance of a firm moral commitment to non-violence” (Christoyannopoulos, 575), and Tolstoy’s tracts “urg[ed] young men to oppose the military draft” (Emerson, 1855). He also influenced Martin Luther King Jr and other non-violent activists in the 20th century.

²⁰ This quote appeared in Tolstoy’s article “Count Tolstoi on the Slaughterhouse” published in a London magazine, *The Vegetarian*, in 1893.

²¹ His essay made an explicit link between vegetarianism and humanitarianism and was promoted by vegetarian societies internationally. His essays and short stories (those relating to diet and other topics) appeared in vegetarian periodicals. See: Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life*, 1893; Alston, pp. 174-177; and a 1932 lecture by his former personal secretary, Valentin Bulgakov, “Leo Tolstoy and Vegetarianism,” given in Germany at the 8th World Vegetarian Congress.

of conscience, Terence Magness writes that “without [Tolstoy’s] experience in the battlefield, it would not have been possible for him to write of war as effectively as he did” (Magness 13) but also that “the years spent in military service were crucial towards the formation of his later views” (13). Indeed, Tolstoy’s experience as a war veteran is reflected in his detailed battle scenes and insights into the psychology of warfare. His descriptions are “sharp, accessible and potent” (Christoyannopoulos 563), making the sensory experience of war and violence comprehensible for those who have never experienced combat. He wants us to *feel* it. Moreover, such descriptions, and later those of the slaughterhouse, “encourage ethical reflection” (574) and act “as an invitation” (574) for his readers to adopt and endorse a “firm moral commitment to non-violence” (575).

Methodology: War and the Senses

Jeff Love asserts that “the sheer prominence of *War and Peace* as an object of critical attention can hardly be overestimated” (Love 10). Many have written on the novel, its idiosyncrasies, and limitations. Nevertheless, Tolstoy conceived of *War and Peace* as “a challenge to the genre of the novel ... as a challenge to all narrative, both fictional and nonfictional” (Morson 1) and as such remains an inexhaustible topic for debate. Indeed, as Donna Tussing Orwin contends: “[t]he issues in Tolstoy’s novel are too complex to be comprehended satisfactorily within a single academic discipline [...] therefore, we can and should measure it by criteria from different disciplines” (Orwin 2). Considering what kinds of analytical tools and critical discourses are most helpful when rethinking *War and Peace*, I make a case for a sensory methodology, showing how methods employed by sensory historians can be applied to the novel; that *War and Peace* can be read not simply as a depiction of war but as a sensory reaction to it.

Soldiers inhabit a uniquely awful sensory environment. In his essay about *War and Peace*, Tolstoy describes at length how he came to realise, from his experiences in Sevastopol, that no account of war, even by eye-witnesses, could be accurate. He writes that when you ask soldiers immediately after battle “they will tell you what all these men experienced and saw, and you will form a majestic, complex, diverse, oppressive, and vague impression; and from no one ... will you learn how it all went” (Tolstoy 1220). He writes of the “boastful falsity” (1221) and “inevitability of untruths” (1221) that arise and the “inclination to high-flown speech, in which falsehood and distortion often touch not only the events, but also the understanding of the events” (1221). War is an experience that is difficult, if not impossible, to communicate to those who were not there; its innate alterity is something outside the range of most normal experience,

and yet “even as it resists representation, conflict demands it” (McLoughlin 7). Tolstoy does not argue that all war stories are false, but rejects the prevailing narratives that valorise war; the ones Nikolai Rostov might tell around a card table while showing off battle scars. Therefore, Tolstoy does not dismantle these stories as much as strive to build new ones. Like *Sevastopol Sketches*, his experimental techniques grant to *War and Peace* the authenticity of the Napoleonic battlefield as it might have been experienced. Tolstoy “strives for a new form of realism” (Weir 71) and while filtered through his imagination and his fictional characters, his visceral descriptions of the carnage underscore the brutal and dehumanising nature of war. Writing in the besieged Sevastopol, Tolstoy “gesture[s] toward authentic battlefield experiences” (Tapp 201) by “creat[ing] a set of narrative and pictorial devices that enabled a leap of imagination ... to make it impossible to be indifferent even to distant suffering” (Gusejnova 21). He renders palpable the “peculiar, thick, heavy, offensive atmosphere” (Tolstoy 39) when we hear “[t]he dull murmur of diverse groans, sighs, [and] death rattles” (39); we feel the rain “pour[ing] down in floods” (64), smell the “stinking mud” (16) and observe the “sunburned” (17) faces. Importantly, the “resounding roar” (122), the “crimson glow of the explosions” (128), and the bullets falling “like hail” (123) create a rising sense of danger. He writes:

You seem to hear not far from you the thud of the cannon-ball; on all sides, you seem to hear the varied sounds of balls – humming like bees, whistling sharply, or in a whine like a cord – you hear the frightful roar of the fusillade, which seems to shake you all through with some horrible fright. (15)

Rather than the abstract idea that ‘war is hell,’ such attention to the role of the senses articulates the war in a way that we can understand the intractable, ineffable, chaotic violence that in *War and Peace*, Nikolai, Pierre, and Andrei discover over and over again. Gwynne Gallagher writes that the “senses are universal to all people and are the most basic tools with which humans understand their environment and therefore using sensory language is a logical technique by which authors can describe war in a way that audiences can readily understand” (Gallagher 68). Although as readers we may not have any direct combat knowledge or experience, “through detailed descriptions utilising the senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste, [we] are able to imagine clearly what the experience would be like” (Gallagher 80). We accompany Tolstoy’s characters into battle rather than staying on the side-lines. Like them, we must smell the rotting earth and gunpowder, feel the “burning and rending pain” (I.III.XIX.290), hear the “cries and moans” (286), and look, and keep looking, at the terrible sights.

In the introduction to *Modern Conflict and the Senses* (2017), Cornish, Saunders, and Smith write: “[g]iven that we perceive and experience through the senses, it is curious that, until recent times, relatively little attention has been focused on how the senses respond to the extremes to which people are exposed to conflict in all its forms” (Saunders et al. 1). David Howes argues that “the sensory studies approach has created a new engagement with conflict” (Howes xix) and that by studying the soldiers’ bodies and senses alongside the landscape and detritus of war, this approach “bring[s] home the truth that war is first and foremost an assault on the senses” (xx). Joanna Bourke concurs, observing that “war is hell on the senses” (Bourke 375). She argues that war assaults the senses in a way that “have no counterpart in the civilian world” (375) and thus war “provides a unique context within which to study the senses” (376). In a similar vein, Constance Classen highlights the unbearable experience of war on a soldier’s body in her introduction to *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire, 1800-1920* (2001). She writes that we study the senses “to acquire direct experience of the landscapes and machinery of war” (Classen xx) and that “[t]hese studies bring home the truth that war is first and foremost an assault on the senses” (xx).

Mark M. Smith provides a model of how to proceed. Smith has been at the forefront of much of the recent innovative work on the senses, stressing their role in “shaping people’s experiences ... how they understood their worlds” (Smith 482). In his exploration of the American Civil War, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege* (2014), he adopts a new analytical framework, showing how a sensory method can refashion familiar narratives of wartime experience both on the battlefield and on the home-front. Rather than prioritising the war’s destructive violence, Smith re-examines historical sources – including previously overlooked material – as “a new way of understanding how [the] war was experienced by those present” (7). Historicising each of the senses across five chapters, Smith argues that the sensory assault – from relentless cannon-fire, to the confusion of colours, dust, and smoke; the taste of rotten meat and unclean water; the feel of disease and amputation; and the smell of death – affected the conduct of the war itself. For civilians and soldiers alike, the experience was “unimaginable” (3). Smith writes that war:

would injure and pollute eyes, subjecting them to new, confusing sights; expose ears to sounds discordant and inhuman; bombard noses with odours rank, fetid, and impure; treat skin with a new, brutal contempt; and initiate radical changes in taste ... [it was] a war whose sensory experience overwhelmed refined sensibilities and effaced the very notion of civility. (3)

As Smith observes throughout, it was not only the newness of wartime sensations but also the scale and reach of the war that overwhelmed and overturned one's sense of place and purpose; that the senses intermingled to create an emotional landscape that affected how one "understood the smells of battle, the tastes of sieges, the traumatic pain of injury, the sights of engagement, and the sounds of strife, loss, and victory" (5). Indeed, the violence of the sensory assault becomes etched "on the memory in ways other experiences cannot approach, memory so powerful it can be relived, over and over again" (7).

Closely related to Smith's examination, *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense* (2019) reconstructs the experience of the Crimean War by looking at the role of sound on both the battlefield and the home-front. Editor Gavin Williams writes that the battlefield is "an environment fundamentally different from our own" (Williams xxi) and therefore the senses are the perfect tool to "make tangible the experience of living through a war, both for the combatants and for those far removed from the battlefields" (xxx). This volume is useful not only for its analysis of sensory history, but it covers in its topics Tolstoy's recreation of multi-sensory experiences in *Sevastopol Sketches*. The contributing essayists – Dina Gusejnova and Alyson Tapp – are concerned with how Tolstoy's battlefield writing intimately connects the senses with their affect. *Sevastopol Sketches* are an expression of personal experience, but this is also a shareable experience: we see the soldiers at Sevastopol suffer and we feel an emotional response. This response is not merely affinity (that we can imagine *being* them), but rather it is a moral response predicated on our openness, as readers, to engage with a mode of experience totally unlike anything we ourselves have known. Indeed, this affect, produced in and through the senses, promotes critical and self-reflexive empathy, inviting us to engage, to look, and to *feel* for another. In "Sympathy and Synesthesia: Tolstoy's Place in the Intellectual History of Cosmopolitanism," Gusejnova writes that the Crimean War was where Tolstoy "acquired a distinctive tone of voice" (Gusejnova 6) and "the war inspired him to fragment his experience into a series of impressions of visual, auditory, and textual encounter" (6). Tolstoy's unconventional juxtaposition of visual imagery and sounds "turn[ed] the theatre of war into an ever more immersive experience" (6) and he "enjoined his readers to witness war synesthetically" (7). In "Earwitness: Sense and Sensemaking in Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Stories*," Tapp argues that "[w]ar demands representation, yet struggles to find adequate depiction" (Tapp 196) and for Tolstoy, "[t]he battlefield provides a limit case for exploring the process of sense-making" (203). When the visual is obscured – by thick smoke or mist – Tolstoy makes the sounds of bombardment "not just audible, but tangible" (207). He "place[s] the reader inside" (207) the battlefield, assailing us with a "succession of sounds" (207) – from explosions to shouts – so that

we experience “the apprehension of mortal danger and ... fear” (210). Tapp concludes that Tolstoy recreates these sounds not for their own sake “but in order to make sense, both psychological and moral” (213) of the arbitrary chaos.

Saunders, Cornish, and Smith write that “the sensory experience of war also helps temper the seductive power of celebratory war history” (Saunders et al. 7). Accordingly, I am not only interested in Tolstoy’s use of sensory language but how its use triggers what could constitute an ethical or moral response. While Susan Sontag writes about photographic images of war, and Tolstoy’s narrative centres on fictional characters, the ethical questions are the same. Therefore, I make a case for Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) as useful for this thesis because Sontag is concerned not only with war photography, but with the moral dilemma of bearing witness. Within Sontag’s essay she covers images of the Crimean War, American Civil War, the Spanish Civil, the two World Wars, and the horrors of places like Rwanda, Somalia, Afghanistan and Sarajevo, extending her discussion to artists’ renderings of war in other media, such as Goya’s *Disasters of War* series (1810-1820) and Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937). It is therefore not unreasonable to apply the same rationale of ‘*regarding*’ to works of war literature. Sontag considers what it is that we feel when confronted with images of carnage and suffering, since such horror brings with it both “shame and shock” (Sontag 42). Writing that “[w]e can’t imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is” (125), Sontag engages with the ethics of distance and the ubiquity of images that make us “indifferent” (100) and “unwilling to engage” (100). Sontag not only asks “can you look at this?” (41) but suggests that the most important question is “what to do with the feelings that are aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated [and] if one feels that there is nothing ‘we’ can do ... then one gets bored, cynical, apathetic” (101). Thus, Sontag critiques our failure to comprehend the horror of war, insisting that in order to be moved at all, we must look: “[t]his is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what war does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*” (8). War rips and breaks apart Tolstoy’s characters. This “tear[ing]” (8) and “rend[ing]” (8) is expressed in their exhilaration, delirium, and psychological breakdowns, their terrible injuries and irreparable traumas. In some cases, all they can do is run away. Tolstoy shows us how his characters communicate, alleviate, or ignore the suffering of others. He also invites *our* sympathy and compassion. Like us, his characters are human and flawed, and thus when our imagination is stimulated, we are able to feel and respond, deepening our relationship with them and their world. That we, along with his characters, might *regard the pain of others*.

Indeed, Beverley Southgate suggests that “Tolstoy’s ultimate concern in *War and Peace* is with morality ... it is his ethical dimension that ultimately shines through – his concern, that is,

with how humans might live better and avoid in future such inhumanity as he bears witness to” (Southgate 242). Similarly, Gary Rosenshield points to this ethical dimension when he states that “Tolstoy will hold his characters morally responsible for their actions because they think that they have free will and act on the understanding that they are indeed responsible for what they do” (Rosenhield 133). Alongside Sontag, Rosenshield provides a model for thinking about suffering, writing that it “plays an important but unusual role in *War and Peace*” (642) and is “closely associated with revelation, change, and the dramatization of the ravages of war” (642). He pays close attention to the ways in which Tolstoy “uses pain as a catalyst for characters’ spiritual illumination” (642) and as an entry point for their “witnessing the pain of others” (642). Throughout *Physical Pain and Justice: Greek Tragedy and the Russian Novel* (2017), Rosenshield examines the extent to which Tolstoy uses pain “as the main device” (xii) to dramatize the suffering on the Napoleonic battlefields. He looks not only at the victims, but at “those who inflict pain, and those who observe pain, the witnesses, both as *dramatis personae* and audience or reader” (xiii). He emphasises the complex relationship between victims and witnesses, claiming “[t]hose who witness the infliction of pain can experience indifference and even pleasure ... But they can also sympathise with, and feel compassion for, the victims” (xiii). Therefore, Tolstoy “exploits the device of witnessing to make his heroes search deeper into themselves” (xxiv) because the act of bearing witness is “essential for eliciting ... compassion” (xxiv).

I cannot catalogue the sensory totality of the novel within the limited scope of this thesis. However, I will use key scenes to demonstrate how Tolstoy uses the senses in and of themselves, but also as a crucial component in bearing witness. Indeed, while there is much to be learned by exploring the battlefield generally, it is the implications of the sensory assault that allow us to understand how “[w]ar impacts the senses in powerful, enduring, and sometimes crushing ways” (Cornish, Saunders, and Smith 6). This thesis is divided into two chapters, each of which uses close-reading analysis to locate sensory evidence, showing how central the senses are to communicating how the battlefield is experienced, survived, and remembered. In Chapter One, I focus on the battlefields of Ulm, Schöngrabern, Austerlitz, and Borodino, and the guerrilla warfare beyond, to examine the ways in which sight and sound affect the characters’ abilities to navigate and understand their surroundings. I will explore the alterity and chaos of the battlefield through the experiences of Nikolai Rostov, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, Pierre Bezukhov, and Petya Rostov. For each of them, war is a seductive fiction, and on the battlefield, they are unable to reconcile expectations with what they see and hear. I will show how Tolstoy defamiliarizes the landscape, making it unrecognisable as home, and how the shock of intense

new sights and sounds displaces these characters physically and psychologically from their ordinary lives. In Chapter Two, I emphasise the emotional impact of sight, sound, smell, and touch as the characters (and us as readers) confront the death and suffering of others, examining the extent to which the sensory assault is a morally affective experience. I argue that Tolstoy forces us to look closely at the carnage, that he attempts to close the distance between his characters and the pain of others. Tolstoy ensures that Nikolai, Andrei, and Pierre bear some responsibility for what they witness by exposing them to a field hospital with a stench so powerful it has lasting psychological effects; a soldier's loud and bloody amputation; and the execution of prisoners of war. I contend that the cumulative effect of these scenes is disquieting because they are described in terms of their sensory effect on others, and thus the distance between ourselves and the characters becomes ever smaller. And, that we can understand the influences under which the characters act (or fail to act) because we are affected by them, too. The moral imperative is thus extended to us, as readers, when we alone bear witness to the murder of Mikhail Vereshchagin during the fall of Moscow.

Chapter One: What Lies Beyond the Line

“One step beyond that line, reminiscent of that line separating the living from the dead, and it’s the unknown, suffering, and death. And what is there? Who is there? There, beyond this field, and the tree, and the roof lit by the sun? No one knows, and you would like to know; and you’re afraid to cross the line, and would like to cross it; and you know that sooner or later you will have to cross it and find out what is on the other side of the line, as you will inevitably find out what is there on the other side of death.”

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
(I.II.VIII.143)

On the eve of battle at Schöngrabern,²² Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, on a tour of the front line, encounters a battalion of Russian soldiers “building little lean-tos, laughing merrily and talking among themselves” (I.II.XV.174). As he steps into the camp, we are given an immersive and tactile ‘slice of life,’ a glimpse into what these young soldiers saw, felt, heard, smelled, and tasted. Set in a densely wooded area above the small town, the encampment is sketched as a cosy enclave; a small tract of earth seemingly protected from the ever-present possibility of death. The soldiers appear relaxed, even comfortable, some sitting “by the campfires, dressed or naked, drying their shirts and foot cloths, or mending boots and greatcoats” (175) while others have abandoned their posts in favour of sheltering from the “cold wind” (174). From cutting firewood to setting up tents, performing guard duty, and digging latrines, the minutiae of ordinary humanity comes into sharp focus. We do not listen to them talk of strategy and tactics, rather we see how they eat, work, and wait. Shirtless soldiers are “shovelling out red clay” (174) for latrines, while others are “dragging doors, benches, and fences from the village” (173) to serve as tables. Inside their tents, “several officers with flushed and languorous faces” (173) dine on “bread and cheese” (173). Outside, in the improvised kitchen, lower ranks eat kasha²³ from wooden bowls

²² The Battle of Schöngrabern took place on 16 November, 1805, at the town of Schöngrabern, in Lower Austria. It was a strategic engagement between General Bagration’s rear-guard and the French under Marshal Murat. Murat’s aim was to trap the Russians, allowing Napoleon to surround them, and Russian forces set up a defensive position in order to protect General Kutuzov’s troops advancing from the north. The fighting began late in the afternoon, with the heaviest fighting occurring at night, illuminated by the burning buildings of Schöngrabern. Total deaths reached nearly 3,000, with another 931 wounded. Tolstoy’s military experience was with an artillery battery, and the episodes at Schöngrabern are among his most vivid descriptions of battle, seen from the point of view of an artillery battery under devastating enemy fire.

²³ Kasha is a toasted grain porridge (often made with onions or stewed meat) with a texture similar to risotto and a nutty, earthy aroma. It is known in Russia as the most patriotic of foods, a linchpin of Russian cuisine, and a staple of the Russian military. In the 12th and 14th centuries, the word ‘kasha’ was used as a synonym for ‘feast’ and was often a central dish in collective meals, especially at harvest time.

while those still awaiting dinner “look greedily at the steaming cauldrons” (175). A group of soldiers are enjoying a sip of vodka from their “canteen caps” (175) and Andrei tells us that “[t]he soldiers, with pious faces, brought the caps to their mouths, upended them and, rinsing their mouths and wiping them on their greatcoat sleeves, walked away from the sergeant major with cheered faces” (175). We are given very little time or sufficient background to know these soldiers as individuals, nor are they defined by uniforms or the weapons they carry.²⁴

Nevertheless, the scene is humming with the presence of real lives, an assemblage of colourful actions and facial expressions, with life breathed into their smallest gestures. Such simply sketched images of a homely, communal encampment have a cumulative effect, creating a portrait that hints at the peaceful world ‘back home’ before the onward surge towards death.

Indeed, Andrei finds in this camp unexpected life and laughter. Some of the most striking images are of the men at their most vulnerable - shoeless, shirtless, eating, and toileting. Separating himself from the collective of soldiers, Andrei looks at this camp as if from afar, finding the fragility of the scene haunting: “[a]ll the faces were as calm as though everything was happening not in view of the enemy, prior to an action in which at least half the division would be left on the field, but somewhere in their home country, in expectation of a peaceful stay” (175). This camp is one of the few tangible links in the narrative between the front line and home front. Thus, a barrier has been drawn around it, isolating it from its surroundings, rendering the enemy invisible and inaccessible.

As Andrei leaves the encampment, and as the sounds and smells enveloping the site recede into the background, he discerns an excitement brimming in the troops; a desire not only to see action but consumed with an inner curiosity that drives them forward to meet their French adversaries. The soldiers stationed at the line gather large crowds of spectators, pointing at the French “like people displaying something rare” (175) and making “their observations to all who came” (175). Andrei notes that the soldiers “gazed, laughing, at their strange and foreign-looking enemies [and] [s]ince early morning, though it was forbidden to go near the line, the officers had been unable to ward off the curious” (175). The strange seduction the front line holds for these soldiers is thereafter expressed in an extended passage which records the laughter, the insults and garbled French phrases, and the “[p]eals of such healthy and merry guffawing [that] crossed the line” (177).

²⁴ Russia had a population of approximately 45 million, 95% of which were peasants who formed the bulk of the soldiers. The Russian Imperial Army was in most respects a traditional monarchical army commanded by aristocrats. The average Russian was conscripted for a term of 25 years from the age of 19. However, while they were peasants by birth, their induction into the army severed their contact with peasant society. Freed from serfdom, they became homogenised patriotic citizens, with all the privileges that entailed. Nevertheless, while well-trained and excellent fighters, most were fully or semi-illiterate.

Although he has had no actual combat experience, it is Andrei who recognises what is at stake in the upcoming battle. The French line lies ahead, and with it, the invisible line of fear and uncertainty that Nikolai Rostov will later describe as “the terrible line of the unknown” (I.II.XIX.188). It is this line that forces Andrei to act with intelligence and purpose, and with a meticulous attention to detail. As he surveys his surroundings and draws plans for the upcoming battle, he reminds us that across the line, in spite of the moment of levity, “the guns remained loaded” (I.II.XVI.177). Beyond this line, most of these soldiers will die, witness the deaths of others, or be the cause of others’ deaths. Over this line, life as they know it will be left behind. Indeed, when the battle begins, it is so sudden that “[t]he earth seemed to gasp from the terrible blow” (I.II.XVI.178).

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the battlefield loomed large in the public imagination. It was a time when the romantic ideals of heroism, sacrifice, chivalry, and duty were highly influential in shaping understandings of battle. Great battles were immortalised in painting, tableaux, dioramas, literature, and theatrical performances that “appealed to the hunger of the audience for the sensational” (Kuijpers and van der Haven 14), with horror, pain, and death often remaining invisible. The imagined and idealised battlefield was devoid of “the utterly chaotic character of the real battlefield, the turmoil of shouts, sounds, smoke, dust and corpses, the multi-sensory and emotional experiences related to that space” (11). Mieszkowski writes that viewing audiences “could participate vicariously in the imaginative exercise of witnessing the battle ‘as it must have been’ [and] the emergence of these mediated spectatorial dynamics blurred the boundary between experiences of combatants and the representation of these experiences” (Mieszkowski 6). Indeed, “images of battlefields, strewn with bodies of dead and mutilated soldiers and civilians, became a powerful tool of ideological enforcement” (Shaw 4) but real suffering was “kept within the bounds of propriety” (4) and “at a delightful distance” (5). For audiences, the reality of war was “removed from their immediate sensory perception” (Favret 9), and for those who had never been there, it was impossible to know what the battlefield was like. Thus, with little or no knowledge of the world beyond their homes, and fuelled by patriotic fervour, many young men headed to war with great expectations, ill-prepared for the long marches to distant lands; the hunger, thirst, fatigue, and exposure to extremes of weather; the smoke-infused field of battle; and the sights, sounds, and smells of dead, maimed, and dying men.

Mieszkowski describes the Napoleonic battlefield as “an unrivalled scene of force and destruction” (Mieszkowski 14) in which “massive collisions of men under arms ... acquired the scale and force of natural disasters ... [with] few, if any clear lines of sight” (64-65). The majority

of battles were completed in a single day of fighting, sometimes barely an afternoon. On other occasions, there might be a number of separate but closely-related battles fought in rapid succession over a few days. Yet there was no standard pattern and encounters varied widely according to circumstance and strategic location. Thus, such innocuous terrain as ploughed fields, villages, barren hillsides, and pastures often became the scene of heavy fighting, pushing soldiers to physical, emotional, and sensory limits: the smoke and noise of artillery; the screams of wounded men and horses; the cacophony of drums and trumpets; the shock of exploding shells and bouncing cannon balls; and the smell of gunpowder, blood, and death. Wounded men lifted from the fields were placed in the wagons used for wheat and grain; churned up meadows were pitted with craters; and the dead were burned, buried in mass graves, or their bones simply ground for fertiliser.²⁵

As much as the fields of battle look like home- in as much as they appear known, stable, and familiar - they are “a world apart” (Kuijpers and van der Haven 3).²⁶ Kate McLoughlin writes that the battlefield is not merely a disputed territory to be defended or conquered, but a zone both “geographical and psycho-physical, somewhere between space and place” (McLoughlin 105). Once its tenuous boundary has been crossed, it becomes a “specially charged space ... subject to its own laws” (99) such that “the individual who enters it is transformed permanently by its sights, experiences, and demands” (105). Therefore, the battlefield is not only the ground that the men walk and fight upon, but a virtual crossing in the mind, or through the senses. Tolstoy’s accounts of the battlefield are marked by extraordinary attention to topographical detail, and he gives us this degree of specificity in order to move beyond its limitations.²⁷ Indeed, Mark Smith writes that when “leaving the safety of maps – we confront something very different” (Smith 146). Throughout *War and Peace*, the battlefield is referred to as “the unknown” (I.II.XVI.178), a place “from which there will be no innocent return”

²⁵ In the early 19th century, bone was discovered to be a valuable fertiliser. Demand was so high that European farmers, along with a contracted scavenging company from Britain, raided the Napoleonic battlefields. From the battlefields of Austerlitz to Waterloo, all visible bones were collected and ground into fertiliser for both personal and commercial use. For eye-witness and historical records of the aftermath of Napoleonic battles, see: www.shannonselin.com/2016/07/napoleonic-battlefield-cleanup.htm

²⁶ In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy makes a point of connecting the battlefield with the natural landscape, so that the distinction between home and hell, innocence and insanity, war and peace, are constantly shifting and blurring in the chaos. Most of the battles in the novel occur during harvest time. He tells us, for example, that “the battle of Borodino did not take place on a chosen and fortified position” (III.II.XIX.756) but rather on “Russian soil” (III.II.XXV.772), where the clash of armies leave “broken rye, beaten down as if by hail” (III.I.XXIII.767). Orwin writes that on such fields, “[m]en are the grain mowed down” (Orwin 139).

²⁷ In 1867, Tolstoy spent two days surveying the terrain at Borodino. He made a map of the battlefield, recording his own maps of troop movements and correcting what he saw as mistakes in historical maps of the battle. He includes in the novel a map of the Borodino battlefield (III.II.XIX.757) that illustrates the intended and actual position of the armies on the day. For more on Tolstoy’s map, see: Brunson, pp. 101, 122; Enberg-Pederson, pp. 313-315.

(McLoughlin 84); characters variously describe its boundaries as a “line that seemed so terrible” (I.II.XIX.188); “the line separating the living from the dead” (I.II.VIII.143); and a “new, incomprehensible terrain” (I.III.XIV.270). Beyond this line the formerly contained enemy will assert itself; the battle will rage on without any sense of direction or meaning, and in the chaos, it will become difficult to tell friend from foe. There is little middle ground between death and survival, compassion and cruelty, rather what awaits them is “[a] hundred million of the most varied possibilities, which will be decided instantly by who runs or will run away, theirs or ours, by whether this one or that one is killed” (III.II.XXV.773). As much a state of mind as a physical space, the battlefield thus represents a line that all soldiers must cross “and the question of whether they would or would not cross that line, and how they would cross it, troubled them” (I.II.XIX.188). Indeed, beyond the line, lies the truth about war.

Nikolai Rostov: Feeling the Fog, Looking Inwards

Writing of the battlefield, Kate McLoughlin notes that “an individual immediately becomes different from those who have not entered it” (McLoughlin 84). Inexperienced albeit with considerable confidence and optimism, Count Nikolai Ilyich Rostov maintains an undying belief in the heroism, glory, virtues, and privileges to be gained as part of the war machine. Feeling stifled and coddled by his family, he has embraced a military career without reservation, leaving university to join the hussars as a cadet in 1805.²⁸ His frustrations flare whenever he is forced to defend his decision “as if it was a shameful calumny” (40). When we first meet Nikolai, Tolstoy draws our attention to Nikolai’s youth, describing him as “a curly-haired young man, not very tall, and with an open expression of the face” (I.I.IX.40). He is impetuous and flirtatious, animated with a “coquettish smile” (42), and “[o]n his upper lip a little black hair had already appeared” (40). However, despite his faint moustache, Nikolai lacks maturity. He is a young man whose ideas of men in battle have been shaped not by war itself, but by war stories. Nikolai has little experience of the world, let alone the mechanics of killing – a task for which he is wholly unequipped. Thus, Tolstoy subjects Nikolai to a painful process in which ideas about courage, heroism, and patriotic devotion are slowly (but surely and effectively) dismantled before his eyes.

²⁸ Tolstoy tells us that Nikolai joined the regiment of the Pavlogradsky Hussars. The hussars were a light cavalry, armed with sabres, carbines, and short pistols. They sported brightly-coloured uniforms inspired by the uniforms of the early Hungarian hussars. The main feature of the hussars was the speed and abruptness of their attacks. This required bravery and even recklessness. The Pavlogradsky regiment distinguished itself at the Battle of Schöngrabern (1805), and fought at the battles of Austerlitz (1805), Eylau (1807), and Friedland (1807).

The Battle of Ulm took place from 15-20 October, 1805, as the opening skirmish of the war, in which the French strategically worked to block supply lines in Austria.²⁹ When Nikolai arrives in Austria, he is billeted in a small village where the soldiers pass the time eating, drinking, and gambling. Nikolai's first taste of battle comes when his regiment is tasked with burning the bridge over the Enns River, thus destroying it before 210,000 French troops arrive. As the prelude to battle, Tolstoy gives us a panoramic description of Nikolai's surroundings, in which all is "visible and clear in the distance, as if freshly varnished" (I.II.VI.137), telling us that "[t]he day was warm, autumnal and rainy" (137). We are shown "[t]he little town with its white houses and red roofs, the cathedral, and the bridge ... boats and an island, and a castle with a park surrounded by the waters of the Enns falling into the Danube ... the towers of a convent [and] the pine forest with its wild and untouched look" (137). The enemy is merely "a puff of milk-white smoke" (138); "spots that appeared on the horizon" (143); and "sounds of bugles and ... shouts" (138). Against this pastoral passage, Tolstoy immediately sets Nikolai's genteel pretensions in sharp relief. As cannonballs fly overhead "with a rapid, steady whistling" (I.II.VIII.144) Nikolai has "the happy air of a school boy" (144) as he contemplates the myriad ways in which he might distinguish himself in battle. He feels "perfectly happy" (144) as he looks around for the approval of the officers, hoping they will notice "how calmly he stood under fire" (144); his only disappointment lies in the fact "[t]here was no one to cut down (as he had always pictured battle to himself)" (148). Yet what Nikolai fails to register is "that strict, menacing, inaccessible, and elusive line that separates two enemy armies" (143) has been breached, and as the Russian troops and their horses bottleneck on the bridge, smashing against the railings with bayonets drawn, Nikolai watches on, daydreaming about the "blue, calm, and deep" (148) sky, and "the waters of the Danube" (148).

McLoughlin writes that the battlefield is "simultaneously real and imagined" (McLoughlin 86), both "vividly known and constantly strange" (86). Tolstoy shows us the "real" (86) and the "vividly known" (86): we are with the soldiers as their "feet mov[e] over the sticky mud that covered the planks of the bridge" (I.II.VII.139), as they push, press, and "crush" (139) against the railings carrying their heavy "packs, bayonets [and] long muskets" (139). We hear the desperate shouting and the "cannonball[s] whistling over their heads" (I.II.VIII.143), and we see the "frightened faces" (142). Indeed, we are there with Nikolai as "he [gets] into the slimy, trampled mud, stumble[s], and f[alls] on his hands" (I.II.VIII.147). Yet it is the preoccupation with the "imagined" (McLoughlin 86) that keeps Nikolai from functioning as a soldier: he could

²⁹ The battle resulted in the destruction of the Austrian army and the conquest of Vienna. 10,000 men were killed or wounded.

not even “help set fire to the bridge, because, unlike the other soldiers, he had not brought a plait of straw with him” (I.II.VIII.148). Despite the thick smoke and gunfire that “went crackling and rattling over the bridge” (148), Nikolai’s daydreaming is only cut short when it sounds “as if someone had spilled nuts” (148). As Nikolai imagines “spilled nuts” (148), French grapeshot is cutting down his fellow soldiers; while others are “shouting something, and ... runn[ing] back somewhere” (148), Nikolai stands still and “look[s] about” (148). Tolstoy writes that Nikolai “did not think of what the call for a stretcher meant” (146), and when he hears a wounded man’s cries, he turns away, instead “searching for something” (148); that “something” (148) being the sky, the sun, and the “glisten[ing] Danube, where all is peace [and] happiness” (148). The lack of clarity on the battlefield leaves him with a “painfully disturbing impression” (149), not only because he senses “death above [him], around [him]” (148) but because it is “noisy” (I.II.VII.139) with everyone in a “hurry” (I.II.VIII.148). Nikolai has escaped unscathed but left disappointed by the experience, relieved only that “nobody noticed” (149) his brief moment of fear; he does not, and cannot, imagine his own insignificance in battle. Thus, in showing Nikolai’s great lack, Tolstoy shows us what he misses. A few days later at Schöngrabern, he will be under fire again, and once again, Nikolai will imagine himself a hero. However, once fatigued and pushed to his limits, Nikolai will learn quickly that reaction on the battlefield cannot be taught, organised, or rehearsed.

In the passages describing the Battle of Schöngrabern, Tolstoy describes the battle in terms of visions, hallucinations, or a character’s frenzied inner experience precisely because he wants to defamiliarize us with conventional portrayals of war. His characters come to the battlefield with an idea of absolutes – of order, method, and outcome: the battlefield at Schöngrabern, for example, is first seen through the eyes of Prince Andrei, who takes out a “notebook [and] drew a plan of the disposition of the troops for himself” (I.II.XVI.177). Andrei’s “eyes [run] over the vast space” (I.II.XVII.179) as he seeks a certain mastery over the battlefield, to mentally conquer it, to create meaning out of its inevitable chaos. According to Gary Saul Morson, “battle is characterised both by vigorous attempts to impose order and by the sudden collapse of order” (Morson 98), and Andrei’s plan, his “pencilled notes” (I.II.XVI.177), and his recommendations, “hang over the ensuing chaos of battle with stinging irony” (Love 87). In the chaos of battle, senses are shifted or misattributed; troops are “disordered” (I.II.XVIII.186); the retreat “hasty and noisy” (I.II.XIX.186); and the commander of the battery appeared “in a state of feverish delirium” (I.XX.XX.193). It is a total bloodbath, and as morning dawns, Andrei admits that the defence of the battery “was all so strange, so unlike what he had

hoped for” (I.II.XXI.199). Likewise, Nikolai will need to reframe, or entirely rebuild, the subjective truth he has assigned to his idea of the battlefield.

Cut off by the French line and sheltering in the woods, Nikolai’s regiment must “attack in order to cut a path for themselves” (I.II.XIX.188). The Russians and French face-off in close proximity with “no one between [them]” (188), and this chance encounter reminds the soldiers that “there lay between them ... the line separating the living from the dead” (188). However, having recovered from his missteps at Ulm, Nikolai is once again consumed with expectation, “sensing that the time had come at last to experience the delight of an attack, of which he had heard so much” (188). He is impatient, having “guessed his movements ahead of time” (188), and at the command to charge, Nikolai gallops ahead of his regiment, racing across the open field, charging at no one in particular. Alone in the middle of the field, Nikolai can no longer identify “that line which had so sharply separated the two armies” (189). Confused, he feels “as in a dream, that he was racing on with an unnatural speed and at the same time he was staying in place” (188). Tolstoy reveals that Nikolai has fallen and his horse, Little Rook, killed:

[i]nstead of moving horses and hussar backs, he saw the immobile earth and stubble around him. There was warm blood under him ... Little Rook tried to get up on his forelegs, but fell back, pinning his rider’s leg. Blood flowed from under the horse’s head. The horse thrashed and could not get up. (189)

When Nikolai realises that he is not dead, only injured, he notices “something superfluous hanging from his left arm” (189) and becomes disorientated, wondering “[h]as something happened to me?” (189). Nikolai not only loses his bearings in relation to the battle - “[w]here ours were, where the French were – he did not know” (189) - but he misidentifies the enemy as “some people” (189) coming to help him because “the enemy’s intention to kill him seemed impossible” (189). It is not until he sees a soldier’s “strange shako” (189) and hears “strange, non-Russian” (189) voices that Nikolai recognises danger.³⁰ Indeed, he “look[s] at the approaching Frenchmen, and though but a moment before he had been galloping to get at them and hack them to pieces, their proximity now seemed so awful that he could not believe his eyes” (189). Now, thinking not of battle, but rather his home in Russia, he cries: “[w]ho are they? Why are they running? Can it be they’re running to me? Can it be? And why? To kill me? Me, whom everybody loves so?” (189). Placed in terrible proximity to the enemy, all Nikolai can do is throw his pistol at the Frenchman and run away.

³⁰ A shako is a tall cylindrical military helmet worn by the French. They were adorned with chevrons and brass accents, often with plumes and visors.

Nothing in Nikolai's imagination has prepared him for the unexpected chaos of the battlefield; he is unable to interpret battle even as it unfolds. Morson writes that more than anything, it is the chaos that allows us to see "the divergence between actual experience and reported experience" (Morson 108), and as readers we are free to recognise the significance of the incomplete information. In order to fill such gaps, Tolstoy reveals the impact of Nikolai's experience. The rupture begins on the battlefield when he misidentifies the enemy, but it is in the hours after, that Tolstoy shows us how Nikolai's very thoughts are disordered.³¹ Cold, shivering, and feverish, Nikolai sits in excruciating pain while all around him he hears the sounds of the wounded – "the groaning, moaning, and cursing in pain – merging with the darkness" (Rosenshield 647). Above him, a canopy of black sky hovers only a short distance from the glow of the campfires. Snowflakes are swirling and "the sounds of voices, footsteps, and horses' hooves treading in the mud, the crackling of firewood far and near merged into one rippling hum" (I.II.XXI.196). Tolstoy conveys these sounds of war as not merely unsettling, but invasive:

[i]t was as if an invisible, gloomy river were flowing in the darkness, all in one direction, with a hum of whispers, talk, and the sounds of hooves and wheels. In the general hum, the groans and voices of the wounded sounded most clearly of all in the gloom of the night. Their groans seemed to fill all the gloom surrounding the troops. Their groans and the gloom of night were one and the same. (196)

Even the shadows torment him:

"And when will it all end?" thought [Nikolai], looking at the shifting shadows before him. The pain in his arm was becoming more and more tormenting. Sleep drew him irresistibly, red circles danced before his eyes, and the impressions of those voices and those faces and a feeling of loneliness merged with the feeling of pain. It was they, these soldiers, wounded and not wounded – it was they who crushed and weighed down and twisted the sinews and burned the flesh of his racked arm and shoulder. (200)

Nikolai feels that everyone around him is causing his pain; he sees the soldiers pulling on his wounded arm. He not only images but *feels* the "crush[ing]" (200) and "twist[ing]" (200), and he knows who, and what, to blame – and why. Rosenshield suggests that the "question of why he came here sounds perfectly natural, even when we know why Tolstoy puts the 'why' in Nikolai's mouth. The feeling of impending death and excruciating pain reveal to Nikolai the senselessness of his temerity and the virtues of the life he left behind when he went to war" (Rosenshield 645).

³¹ Gary Rosenshield writes that "in relation to psychological trauma, Nikolai Rostov presents the best case for an analysis of battlefield PTSD" (Rosenshield, 23).

As the passage ends, Nikolai is dreaming of home. But in his dream, soldiers appear to struggle against his mother, his sister, his fiancée, and the Russian winter. It is to his family he wants to run, and from the soldiers he wants to escape. It is the soldiers who:

held, crushed, and pulled his arm ... so painfully and relentlessly. He tried to get away from them, but they would not let go of his shoulder for a moment, for a split second. It would not hurt, it would all be well, if they were not pulling on it; but there was no getting rid of them. (I.II.XXI.200)

Rosenshield writes that “Tolstoy places Nikolai’s pain in the context of his hero’s romantic ideals of bravery” (Rosenshield 644). On the bridge at Enns, Nikolai was so preoccupied with himself that he did not realise the bridge was being attacked. Here, at Schöngrabern, he found himself alone and trapped under his dead horse. At Enns, he felt shame at a “dismal performance” (644); at Schöngrabern, he ran “with the feeling of a hare escaping from the hounds” (I.II.XIX.189). Nikolai is acutely aware of his folly, and “feels for the first time his vulnerability” (Rosenshield 644).

Tolstoy tells us that Nikolai is looking forward to the next battle at Austerlitz, where - yet again - he hopes to finally distinguish himself. His renewed confidence is due in part to the rest, shelter, and food received since his injury, and in part to the exaggerated tales he has told family and friends about the battles, told “in just the way that those who take part in battles usually tell about them, that is, in the way he would like it to have been” (I.III.VII.242). Rosenshield writes that Nikolai’s painful experience “does not transform Nikolai on the spot, but ... sets this process in motion” (Rosenshield 649). Therefore, Nikolai must be exposed to a series of events that are “represented, interpreted, and understood as [they] occur” (Mieszkowski 36) and, rather than getting carried away in the moment, Nikolai must pay attention. At Austerlitz, Tolstoy casts Nikolai as an observer, traversing the battlefield on a mission for General Kutuzov. More than that, Nikolai is cast adrift *inside* the field, where he will be “hemmed in, limited, and borne along [into] strange, unknown, and dangerous latitudes” (I.III.XVI.270). Liza Knapp writes that Tolstoy sought to describe war in “living, dramatic reality” (Knapp 219) and in order to make his own experiences at Sevastopol “real, live, and dramatic ... Tolstoy [took] extreme measures to involve the reader” (219). We, as readers, find ourselves with Nikolai as our hapless guide. As he attempts to make his way through enemy lines, he is enveloped first in mist, then heavy fog and smoke, and as he leads us across the battlefield, we are prompted to experience dangers that are only partially known or understood. It is Tolstoy’s intention to render the battle palpable, and on Nikolai’s long ride, we can begin to

understand his confusion and fear, and the complete alterity of the battlefield. And, when all is finally clear, what Nikolai is confronted with is the slaughter of his comrades.

In December 1805, more than 150,000 soldiers clashed near Austerlitz, a small town surrounded by streams, woods, vineyards and marshes. At dawn, an impenetrable fog had descended, obscuring the battlefield and trapping the Russians on the low ground; the fighting soon developed into a confused melee over which the commanders had little control.³² On the eve of battle, Nikolai sits atop his horse, fighting off sleep. The patrol line is far from a safe haven: it is at all points a space of total exposure. A mist settles over the landscape making it almost impossible to see, and the silence is amplified by distorted, often repetitive sounds. Nikolai has little choice but to listen to (and through) this noise for signs of danger. The jumbled sounds, darkness, and mist renders the enemy an invisible yet omnipresent force. In the darkness, Nikolai is only able to see vague shapes – “some greyish, some blackish” (265), becoming paranoid about the “misty darkness” (I.III.XIII.265) where it “seemed to him that something was moving” (266). As he stares at a spot in the distance – a *tache*³³ – sounds begin to form and un-form in his mind: “[t]ache or no tache ... Nat-asha my sister my sister, dark eyes. Na ... tashka ... Nat-ashka ... take the tashka ... Na-taska ... yet, yes! Na-tashka ... attack a ... attack who?” (266). There is a moment when the sound wavers between dream and reality: “[w]hat was I thinking? I mustn’t forget ... yes, yes! Na-tashka ...” (266). This not only represents *what* Nikolai hears (or thinks he hears), but represents *how* he hears. Nikolai makes a phonic variation on his sister’s name – *Na-tash-a* – that links that links the tache (spot) to the idea of an attack. The repeated harshness of *t* and *k* in *Natasha* and *attack* take the shape of rapid rifle-fire in his imagination as “[s]uddenly it seemed to him that he was being shot at” (266). When he wakes, he hears “ahead of him where the enemy was, the drawn-out cries of thousands of voices” (266) but all he can make out is “*aaaad!* and *rrrr!*” (266). There is an eerie quality to the sound. Can it be that only Nikolai can hear it? Does it have an objective status at all? Despite its unbearable closeness, the sound never quite discloses its source or location: Nikolai hears only a “general clamour” (267). He dwells on its dislocation, asking “What is it? What do you think? ... Is it from the enemy? ... What, don’t you hear it? ... By the place it should be the enemy” (267).

³² The battle took place in Austerlitz, also known as Slavkov u Brna, in what is now the Moravian region of the Czech Republic. Although it is considered to be one of Napoleon’s greatest victories, The Battle of Austerlitz (December, 1805) was a terrible defeat for the Austro-Russian army, who lost 27,000 men on the battlefield with a further 12,000 taken prisoner by the French.

³³ *Tache* (French: a patch or spot). Also, a sabretache – a flat, leather pouch or satchel with long straps usually worn by cavalry officers on the waist-belt near their sabre. Hussars, like in Nikolai’s regiment, would have the sabretache embellished with embroidered battle honours, crests, crowns, insignias, and monograms. It could be that Nikolai sees a sabretache glistening in the distance, on one of his own regiment, or that of an approaching enemy.

Indeed, the sound should point toward meaning - an enemy attack - but is rendered an obscure, distant hum and roar, a shapeless *aaaa* and *rrrr*, that sits at the line between the “moonlit clearing” (265) and the “misty darkness” (265). Although Nikolai soon realises that he is listening to enemy soldiers shouting “*Vive l’empereur, l’empereur!*” (267), as Napoleon rides through the French camp, his confusion is the result of his inability to conjure a sound in its precise and every detail.³⁴

At daybreak, a thick fog will shroud the battlefield. Tolstoy foregrounds the episode by dramatizing the ambient noise, darkness, mist, and distance that combine to affect Nikolai’s perception. Here, Tolstoy renders the expression ‘fog of war’ as a literal fog in which Nikolai, and later the entire Russian army, cannot see.³⁵ In his seminal work, *On War* (1832), Carl von Clausewitz employed the metaphor of fog to describe not only war’s ambiguities, uncertainties, and inherent volatility, but the opacity of the battlefield itself. As Anders Enberg-Pederson notes:

[t]he enormous reach and intensity of the [Napoleonic] wars had so profoundly changed the way the world normally functions that the state of war could neither be described or understood and certainly not managed with the means inherited from the past ... How do you describe, let alone manage a phenomenon that seemed devoid of any kind of order?” (Enberg-Pederson)

Clausewitz wrote that “war is the realm of uncertainty” (Clausewitz 101) and that “all action takes place in a kind of fog” (122); a mental “fog [that] can prevent the enemy from being seen in time, a gun firing when it should, a report from reaching the commanding officer” (120). It is likely that Tolstoy read *On War* as part of his research and took poetic cues from Clausewitz’s observation that “all action takes place, so to speak, in a kind of twilight, which, like fog or moonlight, often tends to make things seem grotesque and larger than they really are” (140).³⁶

³⁴ It may also be that Nikolai is suffering combat fatigue in which his cognitive performance is impaired.

³⁵ Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian general who served in the Napoleonic Wars. He was also a military theorist, and *On War* was based on his study of military history, and in particular the battles in which he fought. He applied a scientific approach to explaining the phenomenon of war, along with an analysis of military strategy and conflict resolution. The military phrase “fog of war” is attributed to him. See: Enberg-Pederson; Kiesling; Waldman.

³⁶ Andreas Herberg-Rothe writes that “Clausewitz and his work were well-known in Russia” (Herberg-Rothe 143) and was considered by the Russians to be “one of the foremost military strategists” (143). While Herberg-Rothe claims that “we cannot be sure whether [Tolstoy] ever read any works by him” (143), it is likely Clausewitz was included in Tolstoy’s collection of research materials and the connection between the metaphorical “fog of war” and the literal fog in Nikolai’s experience is too close to be denied. While Clausewitz does not specifically use the expression “fog of war,” he employs metaphors such as “twilight” to describe a lack of clarity, and speaks of situations on the battlefield (whether real or imagined) becoming “grotesque and larger than they really are” (Clausewitz 140).

Indeed, the battlefield at Austerlitz only appears to be empty. Nikolai cannot see beyond the front line but he knows there is something beyond it, manifesting as a “strange phenomenon of ... fires and cries” (267). Nikolai must interpret his surroundings and navigate its otherworldly strangeness, and the further he rides, the more he mistakes “bushes for trees and hollows for people” (268); he sees “something like a stream” (267); objects “loomed up black in the mist” (268); and figures emerge out of the mist “looking like an enormous elephant” (267). As if articulating his fear, distorted sounds suggest something (or someone) on the other side: in the mist, “bullets were singing in various tones” (268), or “as if complaining about something, whined high up in the mist and flew out of earshot” (268). The battlefield appears unfamiliar and unstable, and increasingly difficult to navigate. He moves “slowly” (268) and “undecided[ly]” (268); his previous experience being of little relevance or application here. All certainty is rendered vague. Alone, and confined to his saddle, Nikolai is unable to see, or hear, beyond how the space *seems*. The mist obscures the truth of the battlefield and Tolstoy tells us that Nikolai is “frightened” (267).

At dawn, the Russian soldiers find themselves caught in a thick, white fog. The landscape is suddenly deprived of all its markers and the soldiers see “neither the place they were leaving nor the place they were going to” (I.III.XIV.270). Tolstoy describes the fog’s “thick[ness]” (270) with a tone of dread, anxiety, and helplessness, noting that:

[t]he fog was so thick that, though day was breaking, one could not see ten paces ahead. Bushes looked like enormous trees, level places like cliffs and slopes. Everywhere, on all sides, one might run into an enemy invisible ten paces away. But the columns marched for a long time through the same fog, going down and up hills, past gardens and fences, over new, incomprehensible terrain. (270)

It is a blinding fog, causing soldiers to “wander” (272) distractedly; they see “nothing ahead or around them” (272) and they are “unable to find their units” (272). The battlefield appears to lack a solid foundation, leaving the Russians in a precariously vulnerable position, unsure “whether all the enemy forces were six miles away from us, as we supposed, or were there in that fog” (272). The fog is soon replaced by dense smoke, and a number of deafening sounds “could not be distinguished from each other, but merged into a general roar” (I.III.XVII.282). Nikolai can “see the smoke of the cannon swirling, spreading, and merging together” (282), but the battle is a ponderous, murky mess, rendered affectively vivid yet entirely ambiguous.

With no satisfying resolution once the fog lifts, Nikolai loses his bearings and “no matter how he strained his attention, he could neither understand nor make out what was going on ... why? who? where? – it was impossible to grasp” (282). He thus becomes disorientated by

“nearby musket fire” (284) and inadvertently rides to “a place where he could never have supposed the enemy to be” (284). The cacophony of “[o]aths, shouts [and] groans [that] merged into one general clamour” (285) fills him with uncertainty, and even as fleeing Russian soldiers run across his path, he asks “What is this? What is this? Who’s being shot at? Who’s shooting?” (284). Writing of the Napoleonic battlefields, Mieszkowski notes that “the engagements were mystifying phenomena” (Mieszkowski 65) and “at best, one could take in a piece of the action, with no glimpse of the whole; at worst, surrounded by chaos, with no discernible narrative thread to organise what is transpiring” (65). Indeed, poor visibility has offered Nikolai only fleeting glimpses of the battle. Unable to see ahead, Nikolai is no longer in the ‘rush’ or thrill that the battlefield can bring, rather, it is a lonely journey that forces Nikolai into the terrors of the unknown; making him vulnerable to enemy from nowhere, and noise from everywhere. However, as the mist, fog, and smoke clear, Tolstoy reveals to Nikolai the denouement of all that has transpired:

[Nikolai] rode into that space in which the most men fleeing from Pratz had been killed. The French had not yet taken the space, but the Russians – those who were alive or wounded – had abandoned it long ago. Over the field, like sheaves on good wheat land, lay dead or wounded men, ten to fifteen to an acre. The wounded crept together by twos and threes, and one could hear their unpleasant cries and moans. (I.III.XVIII.286)

In ‘Sevastopol in December,’ Tolstoy wrote that “[as] you ascend the hill [y]ou understand all at once, and quite differently from what you have before, the significance of those sounds of shots which you heard” (Tolstoy 15). Having obscured the battlefield and rendered its sounds indecipherable, Tolstoy presents Nikolai with a sight that “leav[es] no room for vanity or posturing” (Mieszkowski 98). Nikolai’s vainglorious exploits and heroic presumptions are called into question: “he felt frightened ... afraid, not for his life, but for the courage he needed and which, he knew, could not bear the sight of these wretches” (I.III.XVIII.286), and it is with feelings of shame that recognises his own impotence. Indeed, the “fearsome sounds and the surrounding dead merged for [Nikolai] into a single impression of terror” (286).

Andrei Bolkonsky: From a Sign on the Battlefield to the Affective Vision of Life and Death

Throughout *War and Peace*, Tolstoy demonstrates how the natural environment has become part of the fighting front; how the sights and sounds of war become entangled with the landscape so that there is little refuge. The sheer length of the battle sequences underscores how Tolstoy

seems to mourn the effect of war on Russia's landscape, as the battles' preparation, execution, and clean-up occupy the bulk of the narrative. Tolstoy makes a point of rendering the beauty of the natural landscape for us, even if the soldiers themselves rarely seem to register it. As the landscape suddenly transforms from pleasant and pastoral to frightening and unfamiliar, any sense of deeper connection is jeopardised: the endless meadows and valleys are also their killing fields. Nevertheless, in *The Ultimate Battlefield Experience*, Yuval Harari writes that the "war story that ... Tolstoy helped develop describes the experience of war as an experience of learning the truth about oneself and about the world" (Harari 1). He claims a "connection between war and the revelation of truth" (6) suggesting that the battlefield experience of Prince Andrei Bolkonsky is "the most famous combat conversion of the late modern era" (5). Indeed, while his combat experience at Austerlitz, and later at Borodino, is somewhat incomplete and inconclusive, we can see the role of nature in shaping Andrei's acute anxiety over the war's futility. Tolstoy is concerned with revealing what lies "[o]ne step beyond that line" (I.II.VIII.143). War, as he reveals, is the ever-present possibility of killing and or being killed, forcing everyone who "cross[es] that line" (143) to question the inevitability of death and the need to make sense of it. As Andrei engages with the "grass, the earth, the air" (III.II.XXXVI.811) through sight, touch, and smell, we see Andrei in a state of transition, straddling "the line between life and death" (I.II.VIII.143). In *Sevastopol Sketches*, Tolstoy renders this kind of transitory experience by "evoking multiple, often contradictory sensory experiences" (Gusejnova 11) and thus offering "insight into the individuals' consciousness at that moment" (Tapp 204). Here, Austerlitz and Borodino are reduced to fragmented sensations; we are inside Andrei's thoughts, cut off from the ferocity of battle, as he is. Ultimately, Andrei does not simply respond to his surroundings, but acts on the truth it reveals. While he fails to attain the martial glory he seeks, he comes to recognise glory in *all things*, even pain and death. Thus, when he leaves the battlefield, he cannot return to life as he once was.

At the beginning of the novel, Prince Andrei Nikolayevich Bolkonsky is a cynical yet enigmatic intellectual. He is described as handsome, "with well-defined and dry features" (I.I.IV.14), but bored, irritated, and world-weary. When he is first introduced at Anna Pavlovna's party, Tolstoy tells us that:

[e]verything in his figure, from his weary, bored gaze to his quiet, measured gait, presented the sharpest contrast with his small, lively wife. Obviously, he not only knew everyone in the drawing room, but he was also so sick of them that it was very boring for him to look at them and listen to them. (14)

Andrei finds himself trapped in a “vicious circle” (I.I.VI.29) of “[d]rawing rooms, gossip, balls, vanity, triviality” (29), believing military glory can cure his existential despair. Joining the Imperial Army as an aide-de-camp to General Kutuzov, Andrei seeks a mastery over his environment, to create order from chaos, to exchange his sense of alienation for a sense of purpose. His friend Pierre Bezukhov marvels at his:

extraordinary memory, his erudition (he had read everything, knew everything, had notions about everything!), and most of all at his ability to work and learn ... [and] Andrei’s lack of ability for dreamy philosophising (for which Pierre had a particular inclination) he saw it not as a defect, but as a strength. (I.I.VI.29)

While Pierre tells Andrei that he has “everything, everything ahead of [him]” (29), Andrei decides to enlist because “this life I lead here, this life – is not for me!” (I.I.V.25). He is disillusioned and emotionally distant, but paradoxically, it is on the battlefield where he comes to life; his sensory engagement with the landscape revealing not only his gentle humanity, but offering him moments of searing clarity.

On the battlefield of Austerlitz, the fighting has been fast and furious; the flash of fire and the smell of gunpowder, the almost blinding smoke; the terrifying approach of the cavalry; the clash of bayonets. When the French army suddenly outmanoeuvres Andrei’s regiment, the Russian soldiers, overcome with panic and confusion, abandon their guns and flee. Andrei leaps from his horse, seizes the standard, and rushes into the fray, shouting for them to return to the field and fight:

“Hurrah!” cried Prince Andrei, barely able to hold up the heavy standard, and he ran forward with unquestioning assurance that the entire battalion would run after him. And indeed, he ran only a few steps alone.

[...]

[a]bove him he heard the unceasing whistle of bullets, and soldiers ceasingly gasped and fell to left and right of him. But he did not look at them; he looked fixedly only at what was happening ahead of him – at the battery. (I.III.XVII.280)

Tolstoy tells us that “Andrei did not see how it ended” (280). Instead Andrei wonders: “What is it? Am I falling? My legs are giving way” (281). Lying gravely wounded, Andrei becomes part of the battlefield landscape. We are told that Andrei “lay bleeding profusely” (290) and the sound of his moans has gone unrecognised. People have “stood over him” (291) and “stopped over him” (291) and he “wished only that those people would help him and bring him back to life” (291)

but no attempt at one had followed. The sound and fury, the bloodshed and carnage, suddenly seem to fade away, and Andrei is surprised by the immensity of the vast, blue sky. Tolstoy writes:

[Andrei] saw nothing. Above him there was nothing but the sky, the lofty heavens, not clear, yet immeasurably lofty, with grey clouds slowly drifting across them. “How quiet, solemn, and serene, not at all as when I was running ... not like when we were running, shouting, and fighting ... it’s quite different the way the clouds creep across this lofty, infinite sky. How is it I did not see the sky before?” (281)

In the sky, unlike the earth, everything is calm. There is silence. Andrei’s perspective here is significant. He is no longer running or moving; he lies on his back, the hard earth beneath him. From this vantage point, he sees the familiar world in unfamiliar ways. Andrei’s curious, contemplative gaze invites us to look with him as he intuits that “everything is empty, everything is deception, except this infinite sky” (281). Aleksandr Voronskii writes:

[t]o see the high, boundless sky, to compare it with the recent din of battle, to think that everything is deception except this sky – here everything is very simple. Tolstoy’s device, it would seem, is extremely elementary: it is based on contrast. To the noise of battle is juxtaposed: the sky, clouds, quiet, infinity. But this would be seen by all who have been, are or will be in Prince Andrei’s position ... And we both feel and say: yes, that’s the way it was, it couldn’t have been otherwise ... Along with these thoughts about the sky other thoughts probably came into Andrei Bolkonsky’s head: lying on the battlefield he experienced other complex and differing sensations, but Tolstoy didn’t need them. He limited himself to the circle of feelings and moods which are clear to all ... the most true to life. (Voronskii 349)

Andrei’s interior monologue has a figurative, meditative, poetic form at odds with the “cries of terror” (I.III.XIX.290); the “rapid cannon fire” (I.III.XVII.282); and the explosions “killing and spattering with blood those who stood near” (I.III.XIX.289) – images that recur throughout the novel in graphic, relentless, unromantic detail. Andrei’s point of view is not necessarily stable – he is “suffering from a burning and rending pain in his head” (290), but we know from Pierre that Andrei is not prone to imaginative, romantic fantasies. Therefore, Tolstoy uses this framing, this lingering attentiveness to the “the lofty sky” (I.III.XIX.290) to create a tension between what Andrei sees and feels, and what we, as readers, have seen and heard. Andrei is positioned as part of, and also somewhat independent of, the battle narrative: while the battle rages around him, time stands still, he is rendered immobile, unable to drag himself to safety. Confronted with the facts of his finitude, Andrei’s thoughts are both personal and universal in scope: “Where is it, that lofty sky, which I never knew till now and saw today?” (290). Andrei sees the sky not merely for its own sake, rather the sky - and in turn, the battlefield - is illuminated by Andrei’s basic questions.

Prior to Austerlitz, Andrei has been in thrall to Napoleon, admiring his greatness as a general. Now, for the first time since leaving his home at Bald Hills, Andrei senses something greater than himself, his ambition, and greater even than Napoleon. This is the first and perhaps most vivid instance in which Andrei, after a period of intense melancholy, is forced out of himself by the natural world: “Yes! ... there is nothing except that. But there is not even that, there is nothing except silence, tranquillity. And thank God! ...” (281). For Andrei, life now has been skinned of its artifice, and, lying with bloodied soil at his back, he “sees the totality that lies entirely out there, in the misty infinitude of sky, excluding all that is down here, in the clearly visible pettiness of the world” (Kaufman 82). Further, this interplay between his body and nature awakens a yearning to recapture a lost sense of being, a reason for being in the world “which lies in his embracing of both the heavenly and the earthly, the hopeful and the tragic, as two equally and organically linked dimensions of human experience” (105). Indeed, Andrei suddenly “feels all earthly ambition to be dwarfed by contemplation of the mystery of nature and of human life” (Frank 78), and thus, as the sounds of battle recede into the background, Andrei’s “bruised but striving spirit” (Kaufman 110) finds a moment of profound comfort and solitude.

When we next see Andrei, he has become part of the detritus littering the battlefield. He hears Napoleon and his aides approaching and recognises himself as the object of Napoleon’s speech: when Napoleon sees Andrei lying “on his back, the staff of the standard fallen beside him” (I.III.XIX.291) he declares “*Voilà une belle mort!*” (291).³⁷ We are told that Napoleon “stopped over” (291) Andrei and looked at him. Indeed, Andrei would have made a compelling sight: a uniform of red, white and green, with gold fringed epaulettes; gorget with the Imperial crest of the two-headed eagle; gold buttons and insignia;³⁸ and although “the standard had already been taken as a trophy” (291), Napoleon notes the presence of the regimental staff.³⁹ Framed by the battle-scarred landscape, his body is worthy of recognition, esteem, and honour. Such deaths happen on the battlefield and Napoleon not only accepts this, but shows his appreciation with positive appraisal. Here, Andrei is for Napoleon a “sign to be read and

³⁷ “There’s a beautiful death”

³⁸ While not stated outright, Andrei would have been wearing a uniform of the Russian Imperial Army. A gorget is a small metal crescent worn around the neck to protect the throat from blade slashes. The double-headed eagle was the official emblem of the Russian state. Associated with the monarchy, the double-headed eagle represented Russian sovereignty and power.

³⁹ The role of the Standard-Bearer on the battlefield was of great importance, given to an honourable soldier who most closely represented the values and principles of the army, and who would willingly sacrifice his life to defend it. We know that Andrei picked up the standard and ran into the fray in an attempt to rally his confused and disorientated men, and that he had run “forward with unquestioning assurance that the entire battalion would run after him” (I.III.XVII.280). Napoleon would have seen Andrei’s rank and proximity to the standard and been doubly impressed at his valour on the battlefield; soldiers of Andrei’s rank and position rarely, if ever, engaged in fighting.

interpreted” (Mieszkowski 5), rather than an individual. He is recast by Napoleon as a dehumanised abstraction, his ‘death’ imbued with a sense of pathos only in as much as Andrei exists as an ideal, as a trace of the battle. Indeed, when Napoleon marvels at “a dead grenadier who, his face buried in the ground and his nape blackened ... one of his already stiffened arms flung far out” (I.III.XIX.291), he declares “[*d*]e beaux hommes” (291). The implied universality of the remark – they are fine men – shows an inexorable erasure of individuality. The soldiers, their faces obscured, are merely place-holders – they are anyone and no one – and ultimately Napoleon is oblivious in his ruminations on what the soldiers must have endured. Thus, Napoleon speaks only for himself. The ones he addresses cannot hear: they are voiceless corpses and silent images. Karin Beck writes that Napoleon “simply cannot read the reality around him” (Beck 3) and therefore his pronouncement is primarily concerned with the soldiers’ ideological function. Napoleon is “willing to disregard the death and pain of others in order to achieve [his] goals” (Knapp 230) and the battles that lead to suffering and death are “inevitable, predestined, and the tools of historical purpose” (Rosenshield 132). For Napoleon, soldiers are merely objects to be broken and destroyed, and their wounded bodies on display confirm Napoleon’s “self-confident, well-deserved happiness” (I.III.XV.273). Cut down in their prime and sacrificed for the cause, in Napoleon’s eyes, their ideological function transcends their manner of death.

Mieszkowski notes that “Prince Andrei, who in his capacity as a piece of the battlefield landscape is entirely indifferent to who his audience is or what they are saying about him, asks only that his viewing public ‘bring him back to life’” (Mieszkowski 88). Indeed, Andrei refuses to go quietly, making a “weak, pitiful moan” (I.III.XIX.291). When Napoleon exclaims, “Ah! he’s alive!” (291) his hero’s voice abruptly intrudes into Andrei’s consciousness like the “buzzing of a fly” (291). As the scene ends, Andrei’s presentation – as a trophy, along with other prisoners of war - affords another significant moment of clarity: he finds Napoleon’s greatness, genius, and impact are found to be drastically, feebly wanting. Tolstoy writes:

[t]hough five minutes earlier Prince Andrei had been able to say a few words to the soldiers transporting him, now, with his eyes fixed directly on Napoleon, he was silent ... To him at that moment all the interests that occupied Napoleon seemed so insignificant, his hero seemed so petty to him, with his petty vanity and joy in victory ... Looking into Napoleon’s eyes, Prince Andrei thought about the insignificance of grandeur. (293)

Andrei has admired Napoleon from afar but has now diminished in his eyes as “such a small, insignificant man compared with what was now happening” (291). Tolstoy establishes for Andrei a new vantage point. Something new has happened: life is now “beautiful to him, because he now understood it so differently” (291). The Battle of Austerlitz, which would go down in history as a

terrible loss for Russia, is one of the greatest moments of Andrei's life. In the midst of chaos, the sky – a word repeated seven times in the passage – represents what it is to see everything, even death, with clarity. Thereafter, the embodied experience of the landscape becomes Andrei's fundamental mode of perception.

Andrei is fatally wounded at the Battle of Borodino.⁴⁰ Fought on Russian soil, it was the deadliest day of the Napoleonic Wars, with 75,000 soldiers killed in little over eight hours.⁴¹ Borodino was a small village, 120 kilometres from Moscow, surrounded by undulating hills, white birch forests, and fields of grass stretching to the Kolocha River.⁴² Streams and gullies separated the French and Russian camps, and the Russians used their knowledge of the terrain to their advantage; spending two days augmenting the site with earthworks and redoubts, setting artillery in the surrounding hills, and fortifying the plateau and swampy land with materials from the partially destroyed town of Semenovskoe. However, the battlefield itself was compact – an area of 3.2 kilometres – and with 250,000 men and more than 2,000 cannons, most men were in range of artillery fire, thus transforming a slice of peaceful rural land onto a gruesome landscape in which thousands of dead and wounded soldiers and horses lay amid a field of shattered equipment. Tolstoy tells us that:

several tens of thousands of men lay in various positions and uniforms in the fields and meadows that belonged to the Davydov family and to crown peasants of the villages of Borodino, Gorky, Shevardino, and Semyonovskoe had at the same time gathered crops and pastured cattle. At the dressing stations, the grass and soil were soaked with blood over the space of three acres. (I.II.XXXIX.818)

⁴⁰ The Battle of Borodino took place on 7 September, 1812 during the invasion of Russia. Until now, the Russians had avoided a decisive battle with the French by engaging in small-scale skirmishes before withdrawing deep into the countryside. As the French marched toward Moscow, the Russians chose a field on the outskirts of Borodino to intercept the advance. In the novel, Tolstoy writes “[w]hy was the battle of Borodino fought? Neither for the French nor for the Russians did it make the slightest sense. The most immediate result of it was and had to be – for the Russians, that we came nearer to the destruction of Moscow (which we feared more than anything in the world); and for the French, that they came nearer to the destruction of their whole army (which they also feared more than anything in the world)” (III.II.XIX.753).

⁴¹ Of the carnage at Borodino, historian Gwynne Dyer notes that it was equivalent to “a fully-loaded 747 crashing, with no survivors, every 5 minutes for eight hours” (qtd. in McLynn 519).

⁴² Borodino contained only a few wooden buildings, but the town's white-washed church – The Church of Smolensk Icon – was significant because it housed the Smolensk Icon of the Virgin, an image revered as a protector against Russian enemies. On the eve of battle, the icon was removed from the church and taken through the battlefield and the Russian camp to inspire the army; in *War and Peace*, the veneration of the icon is witnessed by Pierre (III.II.XXI.753). The church bell-tower overlooked the battlefield and was used by the Russians as an observation point. The church was damaged by French artillery fire, and again during World War II. A full restoration was spearheaded by Russian film-maker Sergei Bondarchuk for his epic film adaptation of *War and Peace* in 1965, after which it was preserved as a national shrine.

Orwin writes that “[t]he account of the Battle of Borodino in *War and Peace* is Leo Tolstoy’s most extensive treatment of a single day’s action . . . mix[ing] war psychology with his theories of war in his description of the battle” (Orwin 123). But rather than merely telling us *what really happened*, I suggest that Tolstoy creates a world of chaos, rot, and stench that explores the affective, sensory relationships between bodies, landscape and violence. Indeed, as Mark Smith contends, paying “careful attention to the senses can help us better experience the familiar” (Smith 6). Much has been written on the destructive nature of Borodino, but “[m]en do more in battle than just run for their lives” (Orwin 126). As they are overwhelmed by “enormous impersonal force[s]” (126), they see things they have not seen before; sounds, smells, and the sense of touch all acquire new meanings and “we see men at their most free from others” (126). For Andrei, epiphany and terrible carnage come together to form one spectacular moment in which a shell explodes in front of him. In the moments beforehand, we are directed away from the action toward the sight, sound, and touch of the battlefield. Finding himself in a meadow, not unlike that of his estate at Bogucharovo, Andrei’s seemingly self-indulgent preoccupation with “dragging his feet [and] scuffing up the grass” (III.II.XXXVI.810) holds the possibility for transcendence. The surplus of sensory detail in these scenes reintroduce order and harmony into the landscape that, for however briefly, makes the battle itself pale in significance.

Andrei, more than any other character in the novel, asks big questions about nature, society, and his place in the world; and, since Austerlitz, he has been the most open and sustained in his search for answers. It is worth mentioning here, an episode after Austerlitz in which Andrei comes upon an “old, angry, scornful, and ugly” (I.III.I.419) oak tree. Andrei’s wife, Lise, has died in childbirth on his return from battle, and like the oak tree, he is now “angry and scornful” (419). His attention is drawn to the oak’s “huge, gnarled, ungainly, unsymmetrically spread arms and fingers” (419), its “broken bark covered with old scars” (419). The oak tree appears to Andrei as an impassive and constant presence, indifferent to human conflict and unmoved by vanity. Quite contrary to romantic convention, this oak tree “did not want to see either the springtime or the sun” (419) and, against a backdrop of “smiling birches” (419), it stands firm against the world’s “hopes and deceptions” (419). A month later, Andrei again encounters the oak and finds it thick with foliage: “the old oak, quite transformed” (I.III.III.423). He recalls “Austerlitz with the lofty sky” (423) and determines that “the best moments of his life” (423) are interwoven with natural forces larger and more constant than himself. Events may have caused “broken bark” (I.III.I.419) and given him “old scars” (419) but Andrei’s “life isn’t over at the age of thirty-one” (423). Thus, under pressure on the battlefield – his first battle leading a regiment – Andrei finds the landscape of Borodino is wrapped in personal associations.

For Andrei, it is not merely the space where “men lay in pools of blood” (III.II.XXXIV.804) but a meadow with dry clay, fragrant wormwood, and grasses – the landscape of *home*.

Andrei’s regiment is being held in reserve on a “trampled oat-field [in] the space between Semyonovskoe and the battery” (III.II.XXXV.808) and ahead, beyond a “mysterious zone of smoke ... without ceasing, flew cannonballs with a hissing, rapid whistle, and slowly whistling shells” (809). We are told that the regiment are suffering “the relentless terror of death” (809) because “[w]ith each new blow, the chances of survival for those who had not yet been killed grew less and less” (809). However, the regiment have amused themselves by building “little houses from the clods of the field or plaited little baskets out of straw” (809). Tolstoy writes that:

[t]hey all seemed fully immersed in these occupations. When men were wounded or killed, when stretchers were carried past, when our troops retreated, when large masses of the enemy were seen through the smoke, no one paid any attention to these circumstances ... the greatest attention was accorded to totally extraneous events, which had no relation to the battle. It was as if the attention of these morally exhausted men found rest in these ordinary everyday events. (809)

Their position “on a trampled oat field” (808) provides little cover, exposing them to enemy fire and flying shrapnel, yet Tolstoy’s rendering of the regiment’s mood, manner, and actions all gesture toward the possibility of perceiving a world beyond the immediate context of the battle. As a result, Tolstoy focuses our attention on the fragmentary subjectivities of this group rather than the efforts of those “in the very heat of battle” (III.II.XXXIII.800). One soldier “crumbl[es] some dry clay between his palms” (809); another “work[s] the leather and readjust[s] the buckle of his bandolier” (809). Indeed, like his men, Andrei “finds rest” (809) in the “ordinary” (809). Experiencing a sense of calm, clarity, and natural remove, he “pace[s] up and down the meadow next to the oat field from one edge to the other, his hands behind his back, his head bowed” (809). Tolstoy writes that Andrei:

paced over the meadow, dragging his feet, scuffing up the grass, and observing that the dust covered his boots. Now he took big steps, trying to get into the footprints left on the meadow by the mowers; then he counted the steps ... then he pulled off the flowers of the wormwood that grew along the edge, and rubbed those flowers between his palms, sniffing the fragrantly bitter, strong smell. (810)

At once visual and tactile, the meadow represents the duality of Andrei’s character as the soldier who destroys – “dragging” (810) and “scuffing” (810) – and a farmer. There is a sense of knowing in his touch – “rub[bing] those flowers between his palms” (810). This is a man of the

land, bound by military duty but driven by the soil under his feet. More than that, he actively seeks connection: “trying to get into footprints left on the meadow” (810). After Austerlitz he had renounced active duty, retiring to his estate at Bogucharovo which “lay in flat country, covered with fields and young woods” (II.II.XI.381).⁴³ Feeling at peace, he had planted “a young garden” (381) and “[t]he fences were sturdy and new ... the paths were straight ... [e]verything bore the stamp of neatness and efficiency” (381). It was at Bogucharovo that Andrei “saw again that high, eternal sky he had seen as he lay on the battlefield, and something long asleep, something that was best in him, suddenly awakened joyful and young in his soul” (II.II.XII.389).

Cannonballs are falling all around and are getting steadily closer but the bush of wormwood “on the border between the field and the meadow” (III.II.XXXVI.810) is utterly indifferent to the armies’ intentions; it simply *is*. However, the wormwood is more than an example of Tolstoy’s realist observation, it is an invitation for Andrei to lapse into a reverie not unlike that at Austerlitz. The flowers of the wormwood would be silky to the touch, the smell rich and aromatic, and as Andrei enjoys the wormwood, its texture and “fragrantly bitter, strong smell” (810), he is transported to a different world.⁴⁴ The field of battle imprints itself on Andrei’s body and mind, and his sensory immersion in the meadow extends into his desire to go home. Kelvin Low writes that smells are “conduits that are often associated with experiences, people and places” (Low 690) and as such are “[f]illed with emotional weight.” (698). Indeed, smells have the “power to evoke emotionally charged memories” (Beer 11) and for Andrei, the wormwood evokes feelings of bitter-sweetness: this might be the last thing he ever touches. This moment of connectedness with Russian soil is framed not by feelings of well-being, but rather sadness, longing, and displacement. As the death and bitterness of the battlefield are mixed with sweeter, more personal recollections, Andrei listens to the sounds of the battle “with a weary ear” (III.II.XXXVI.810) and “tr[ies] to take big strides so as to reach the edge” (810) of the meadow. Beyond the edge of the meadow lies the edge of the battlefield, and beyond that, lies the “existence of other human interests” (III.II.V.703) and the agrarian life Andrei has built for himself since Austerlitz. We are reminded of the night before Borodino when he realises that his

⁴³ With regards to Andrei’s connection to the land, it is not insignificant that his estate is settled among the “first- and second-growth stands of fir and birch” (II.II.XI.381) and that the battlefield at Borodino was set in a “birch and fir forest” (III.II.XXI.761). A landscape with long rows of birch trees is considered to be “quintessentially Russian” (Martin 7). In Russian, the word for birch tree is “bereza,” meaning “to keep” or “to take care of,” and birches were often planted around homes and villages to form a protective wall. On the evening before battle Andrei sees “the birches with their light and shade” (III.II.XXV.770) but they now “appeared as something dreadful and menacing” (770).

⁴⁴ Wormwood is a short herbaceous plant with silvery grey leaves and tiny yellow flowers and a bitter aftertaste. It is an ingredient in absinthe (due to its hallucinatory properties) and is often used for stomach ailments. Foreshadowing Andrei’s fatal stomach wound, his handling of the plant could be seen as an omen. Indeed, the word “wormwood” means a state of bitterness or grief.

former life had been like pictures in a “magic lantern” (I.II.XXIV.769) and he sees now that he had been “looking through a glass and in artificial light” (769). He sees now that he is a man whose spirit is too fragile for the war in which he is involved, fearing now the loss of “his soul, vividly, almost with certainty, simply, and terribly” (769). However, there cannot be, at least for a sustained period, a purely unmediated connection with the world outside the battlefield and Andrei foresees his appointment with death: “Here it comes ... This one’s for us” (III.II.XXXVI.810). And when death comes, the cannonball sounds “like a little bird whistling over in quick flight” (810). Elsewhere in the novel, cannonballs are described as shrieking, crying, rumbling, complaining, and screaming. Here, the cannonball assumes the simplicity of a singing bird.

After the “thud” (810), Andrei experiences the sensation of being trapped in the present. As the shell lies before him, “smoking, spinning like a top” (810), Andrei stands, undecided, watching, waiting, and wondering: “[c]an this be death?” (810). In his account of Captain Praskukhin’s death in ‘Sevastopol in May,’ Tolstoy describes the thoughts of a man realising that he is fatally wounded: panic, terror, confusion, a longing for life. An exploding cannonball kills Praskukhin instantly, but in the few seconds before death, “a whole world of feelings, thoughts, and hopes flashed through his imagination” (Tolstoy 51). Tolstoy allows us to hear and see Praskukhin’s flashes of memory, telling us that “a second passed, which seemed an hour” (51) as he thought of “the woman whom he loved” (51), “a man who had insulted him five years before” (51), and “a thousand other memories” (51). Tolstoy concludes by telling us that “he had been killed on the spot by a shell splinter that had struck him in the middle of the chest” (53). Here, Andrei remains still, realising that he is going to die. The scene is agonisingly long but it serves as a ‘breathing space’ before his ‘last breath.’ We can imagine his face assumes a haunted visage as he looks “with completely new envious eyes at the grass, at the wormwood, and at the little stream of smoke curling up from the spinning black ball” (III.II.XXXVI.810). No sooner does Andrei think about how much he loves “this grass, the earth, the air” (811) than the shell explodes. The event is instantaneous but at the same time composed of discrete incidents:

[t]here was the sound of an explosion, a whistling of splinters as if from a shattered window, a choking smell of powder – and Prince Andrei hurtled sideways and, raising his arm, fell on his chest. Several officers ran to him. From the right side of his stomach a large stain of blood was spreading onto the grass. (811)

The moment comes quickly – all the senses are employed – yet when the explosion itself arrives, it is hardly there at all: a sound, the smell of powder, a shower of fragments, and we are already in the aftermath, surveying the damage. Rosenshield notes that “Tolstoy does not need to call

attention to Andrei's pain; it is assumed" (Rosenshield 119). Indeed, Andrei is "breathing in heavy gasps" (III.II.XXXVI.811) and his men shout in panic at the severity of such a wound.

In a reversal of his experience at Austerlitz, Andrei finds himself lying with "his face lowered to the grass" (811). We can imagine the smell of the grass, the feel of it against his skin, the warmth of the blood as it spreads beneath him. Andrei is fatally wounded at the moment he regains his "passionate fit of love for life" (812), and as his blood soaks into Russian soil, there is a dramatic sense of immediacy and lost innocence. While Andrei is known, the multitude of dead and wounded remain unknown, unnamed. Tolstoy tells us that the landscape was littered with "men and horses [lying] in pools of blood, singly and in heaps" (III.II.XXXIV.804) and that "[o]ver the whole field, once so gaily beautiful ... there now hung the murk of dampness and smoke and the strangely acidic smell of saltpetre and blood" (III.II.XXXIX.818). The battlefield renders the natural world tainted and the soldiers' lives bleak and insignificant. However, it is the seemingly inconsequential sky at Austerlitz, and the grass, dirt, straw, and wormwood at Borodino that brings the horror of war into sharp relief. As the Borodino chapters end, Tolstoy writes that the "rain began to sprinkle on the dead ... as if it were saying: 'Enough now, men. Stop now'" (818).

Pierre Bezukhov: The Blurred Vision of a War Spectator

When Count Pytor 'Pierre' Kirillovich Bezukhov travels to the front line at Borodino in his white summer hat, he is motivated simply by the desire *to look*. As the greatest show on home soil unfolds, he hopes to see a battle akin to "a game of chess" (III.II.XXV.773), in which the clash of armies will present a coherent narrative and definitive conclusion. As such, he approaches the battlefield with confidence, complacency, and almost comic naïvety. Sitting comfortably in his carriage, Pierre travels along the Smolensk road from Mozhaïsk, passing by those wounded "in yesterday's action" (III.II.XX.758) who are walking or crowded into carts that "bounced up and down on the stones" (758). Not intending to get his hands dirty, Pierre wears tailored green trousers and a white hat; the soldiers' uniforms are tattered, and their wounds "bandaged with rags" (758). His attention is captured by "the bright August morning" (758) and "the bells ring[ing] merrily" (758) from the nearby cathedral. The soldiers watch Pierre with curiosity, but their faces are "pale, with compressed lips and frowning brows" (758) while Pierre cannot fathom that "twenty thousand were inevitably doomed to wounds and death" (758). At best, Pierre comes to Borodino with little comprehension of battlefields as a whole; at worst, he will be surrounded by chaos, with no discernible way to rationalise it. Even as Andrei

tells him that war is the collision of “[a] hundred million of the most varied possibilities” (III.II.XXV.773), Pierre’s expectations constitute what Mieszkowski calls the “war imaginary” (Mieszkowski 5). Writing of the blurred distinctions between representing and experiencing war, Mieszkowski notes that:

Napoleonic combat manifested itself as both an awesome destructive force and a field of signs of be read and interpreted. Whether as a soldier, a bystander or a civilian reading a newspaper, the individual confronted battles with a range of ideals and prejudices about what warfare was, a set of expectations. (Mieszkowski 5)

Pierre’s idea of warfare embodies the fantasy of conducting battles according to rules, strategy, and logic. Asked what he is doing so close to the battle, the bespectacled Pierre replies that he simply wants to “have a look” (III.II.XX.759). Nevertheless, like the observer at Sevastopol, Pierre will soon “behold war, not from its conventional, beautiful and brilliant side [but] war in its real phase – in blood, in suffering, in death” (Tolstoy 11). Indeed, it is not until he experiences the unflinching truth that “everything bec[omes] strange, vague, and bleak in Pierre’s eyes” (III.II.XXXI.796).

At the beginning of the novel he is introduced as “a massive, fat young man with a cropped head, spectacles, light-coloured trousers of the latest fashion, a high jabot, and a brown tailcoat” (I.I.II.9). He is the “illegitimate son of a famous courtier” (9) and has been educated abroad. Throughout *War and Peace*, Pierre Bezukhov just wants to look. He is described as like “a child in a toy shop” (I.I.III.10) wanting to look “everywhere at once” (10). He visits Vorontsovo to watch the launch of a hot-air balloon,⁴⁵ and travels to Borodino as a war tourist. As the primary voyeur in the novel, Pierre’s vision is crucial. Tolstoy gives us access to all the events happening in Pierre’s life, detailing all that Pierre sees and does not see. Pierre’s vision is compromised by near-sightedness and spectacles, but Tolstoy grants to him many opportunities to observe. Pierre is an intellectual dandy or flâneur, what Charles Baudelaire called a “passionate spectator” (Baudelaire 9). In his 1863 essay, “The Painter of Modern Life,” Charles Baudelaire proposed a figure he called a “flâneur” (4), an aesthete or dandy who desires “to see the world, to be at the centre of the world” (9) and thus the flâneur wandered the streets of 19th century Paris, looking and listening, enjoying the unmediated experience of the sights, sounds, and smells the city had to offer. Illegitimate by birth, Pierre is an outsider. His name is French, and having

⁴⁵ Vorontsovo is a Russian estate where in 1812, a German engineer by the name of Franz Leppich attempted to create a weaponised hot-air balloon for the fight against Napoleon’s Grande Armée. The plan was to bomb the French from the air, but it was still incomplete at the time of the Battle of Borodino. It was ultimately dismantled. Tolstoy narrates the event in the chapter preceding Borodino (III.II.XVIII.751).

been raised in Paris, he is ignorant of the unwritten rules of Russian society and is thus judged to be “something all too enormous and unsuited to the place” (I.I.II.9). Lisa Steiner writes that having “just returned from Switzerland ... would make [Pierre] one of the rare Russians of the era to have ... experienced Europe” (Steiner 109), and thus his position as a tourist/visitor/outsider provokes discomfort among the Russian aristocrats, not only for his hero-worship of Napoleon, but because of his “intelligent and at the same time shy, observant, and natural gaze which distinguished him from everyone else” (I.I.II.9). Therefore, Pierre is “[l]iving in the world of society but not truly a part of it” (Kaufman 117) and assumes the role of an idle man of leisure, constantly seeking out new experiences. Indeed, Pierre is “on his way to experience Russia” (Steiner 109).

Without combat experience, training, or purpose, Pierre takes a front-row seat to the theatre of war. We follow him as he makes his way from the hillside of Mozhaïsk, to the riverbank at Borodino, and on to the Raevsky Redoubt at the centre of the battlefield. Pierre’s first glimpse of Borodino is the most affecting example of his attitude. On the day before battle, he is intrigued by the field that “opened out before him like an amphitheatre” (III.II.XXI.761) but disappointed that it “was not the battlefield he expected to see” (761). It is a “vast panorama” (761) but:

[e]verything Pierre saw to right and left were so indefinite that neither the left nor the right side of the field fully satisfied his notions. Everywhere there were fields, clearings, troops, woods, smoking campfires, villages, barrows, streams ... and as much as he tried to make it out, on this living terrain he could not find a position and could not even distinguish our troops from the enemy’s. (761).

Even the soldiers do not conform to his expectations. He is irritated that instead of military drills, they sing, laugh and talk loudly, and ultimately their fate as individuals barely registers.

On the morning of battle, Pierre oversleeps but is delighted to find “the whole terrain was covered with troops and the smoke of gunfire” (III.II.XXX.789). His chosen vantage point atop a hill at Gorky will distance Pierre sufficiently for him to enjoy the spectacle with few, if any qualms.⁴⁶ The battlefield offers Pierre a powerfully visual experience as a “spectacle” (789) and his eyes linger on the colour and composition, surveying the sight for meaning and beauty as one might contemplate a great battle painting.⁴⁷ Mieszkowski notes that “[u]nder the influence of ...

⁴⁶ See: Enberg-Pederson, pp. 322.

⁴⁷ Tolstoy tells us that Pierre “had just arrived from abroad, where he had been educated” (I.I.II.9). It is likely then, that Pierre would have visited museums and galleries and viewed large-scale battle paintings or panoramas. See: Brunson, pp. 105-126.

military mythology, what one ‘saw’ with one’s mind’s eye – how the waves of men and arms *should* have appeared - was deemed at least as reliable as what could be seen with one’s retina” (Mieszkowski 5) and “the ideal war spectator was characterised not as an eagle-eyed first-hand witness but as an individual with unique creative faculties” (5). Tolstoy writes that Pierre sees:

[t]he slanting rays of the bright sun, rising behind and to the left ... cast over it, in the clear morning air, a piercing light of a pink and golden hue, and long, dark shadows. The distant woods, ending the panorama, as if carved from some precious yellow-green stone, displayed the curved line of its treetops on the horizon.
(III.II.XXX.789)

Through Pierre’s eyes, the battlefield becomes a formal painterly composition that includes dramatic colour and lighting effects, and his impressions are described with “language reminiscent of the colours, chiaroscuro, and materials of the fine arts” (Brunson, 107). He is transfixed by a mist that “turns translucent in the sun” (III.II.XXX.789) and “puffs of cannon smoke” (790) that move across the battlefield in “a play of purple, grey, and milky white” (790). However, Pierre’s battlefield is not static: everything is “moving, or seemed to be moving” (789); the smoke “swell[s], billow[s], merge[s] (790) or rises like “balloons” (790). The day “smelled of autumn” (III.II.XXXI.792) and the smoke from cannons emitted “little echoes” (790). Pierre declares the battlefield “lively” (III.II.XXX.789) and “majestic” (789). His perception of sound is rendered child-like: cannons “poof-poof!” (790) and “boom-boom!” (790), while the muskets “trat-ta-ta-tat” (790). Separated from the battlefield less by his vantage point than by his calm detachment, Pierre is “almost painfully innocent of military matters” (Love 60); in his eyes, the battlefield is a space where “nothing is difficult, or painful, or complex” (Brunson 107) and what he perceives is “an anesthetised picture of war, lovely and safe, yet morally dangerous” (107). Indeed, Viktor Taki writes that: “the appeal of the bloody spectacle of battle, like the enjoyment of a raging storm, depends on the subject’s exemption from the fate of those who have fallen victim to these calamities” (Taki 290). Likewise, writing of *Sevastopol Sketches*, Morson notes that “you” are turned into a “tourist of death” (Morson 469) and argues that battlefield sightseeing is “singularly inappropriate” (470). Here at Borodino, Tolstoy extends this “anti-tourist theme of clash between visual seductions and the ghastly reality of war” (Layton 54). Unable to resist the “tourist allure” (54) of the battlefield, the idly curious Pierre seeks to experience its sensations before returning to the comfort of his lodgings. His presence is not merely “singularly inappropriate” (Morson 469) but his sensory observations are “removed and aestheticized” (Brunson, 125). Pierre cannot seem to grasp the complexity of what he observes, let alone appreciate the ferocity and horror of the action.

It is perhaps significant here that the name ‘Pierre Bezukhov’ translates as ‘Peter Earless.’ Morson notes that Pierre “cannot hear the particular, indistinct signals of daily life by which more prudent folk govern their lives, because he is always attending to some distant call” (Morson 66). Indeed, it is inevitable that Pierre becomes dissatisfied with his vantage point. So enraptured is he with the smoke and the intriguing sounds, that he follows a group of soldiers down the embankment in order to get a closer look. Since his arrival at Borodino, Pierre’s singular vision and his inability to listen has gestured toward the mute images of battle he has seen or imagined. As Pierre descends, Tolstoy reveals what he has in mind. That is, Tolstoy “severs the link between the ... perspective from the heights and the events on the ground” (Enberg-Pederson 325). He writes that Pierre has the “feeling that his spectacles were falling off” (III.II.XXXI.791), and indeed, it is on the battlefield Tolstoy will remove all ambiguity, bringing the battle into sharp focus, denying Pierre the ability to envision, to suppose, and to speculate.

Tolstoy sets the scene by describing Pierre’s misjudged blunder onto the battlefield. Unaware of his intrusion, Pierre traverses the field looking for better vantage points, the soldiers “all look[ing] with equally displeased and questioning eyes at this fat man in a white hat, who for some reason was trampling them with his horse” (III.II.XXXI.791). He is frustrated that all the soldiers seem “busy with some invisible but obviously important matters” (791) and are unable to give him directions. Tolstoy writes:

Pierre saw that there was a bridge ahead of him, and that on both sides of the bridge, and on the meadow, among those rows of mowed hay he had noticed the day before, soldiers were doing something in the smoke; but despite the incessant shooting that was going on there, it never occurred to him that this was precisely the field of battle. He did not hear the sounds of the bullets whining on all sides, and the shells that flew over his head, did not see the enemy on the other side of the river, and for a long time did not see the dead and wounded, though many fell not far from him. With a smile that never left his face, he looked about him. (791)

Tolstoy tells us that “Pierre had no notion” (793) of where he was, or how fateful his decision to join the garrison at Raevsky Redoubt,⁴⁸ where he paces up and down “the battery under fire as calmly as if it were a boulevard” (793). Indeed, Pierre “was not interested in what was going on there” (III.II.XXXI.795). The battlefield is by nature defined by its “impenetrability and incomprehensibility” (Mieszkowski, 64) but lacks what Pierre seeks: “[t]here is no grand scene of

⁴⁸ Tolstoy writes that Pierre has no comprehension of where he is: “Pierre paid no particular attention to this redoubt. He did not know that for him it would be the most memorable place on the battlefield of Borodino” (III.II.XXXII.767). The Raevsky Redoubt was a large open-backed earthwork in the centre of the battlefield with nineteen mounted cannons and several regiments of Russian troops. The redoubt was the site of the fiercest fighting of the battle, and the battle for its capture lasted more than fifteen hours. It is not until the Redoubt is destroyed that Pierre loses his false sense of security.

battle and no overarching narrative” (75). Instead, Pierre finds it to be a series of disparate, fragmented sights and encounters, none of which appear essentially connected; Pierre’s *being there* is no guarantee that he sees the battle for what it is. Therefore, Tolstoy sets in motion an all-consuming event that overwhelms Pierre’s sensory capacities: a barrage of “whistling” (III.II.XXXI.796) cannonballs strike Raevsky Redoubt.

As cannonballs “smack” (796) into the battery “[o]ne after another” (796), the intensity of raw, immediate sensations finally engages Pierre’s eyes and ears: “Pierre, who previously had not heard these sounds, now heard nothing else” (796). A cannonball strikes the ground near him, filling his eyes with dirt and the “terrible shock” (796) throwing him down while the “deafening roar, crash, and whistling rang in his ears” (796). Unable to fight or escape, Pierre must hunker down. As the soldiers shake with fear and scramble to reload the cannons, and as others are killed and maimed, torn limb from limb by explosions, the battery becomes “the sole refuge from all the horrors that surrounded him” (797). The noises together constitute an overwhelming cacophony, making it difficult for him to focus, and he strains to decipher what is being said around him. He perceives only that “some people were doing something” (797), the soldiers are “shouting something” (797) before “falling” (797) and “stumbling” (797). Tolstoy does not grant Pierre what was available to him as a spectator and the battle becomes frighteningly unreadable. He is effectively trapped in the soldiers’ perspective, for which he is unprepared and cannot control; there are now blind spots and obscurities, and the “roar of gunfire, musketry, and cannonades” (III.II.XXXII.798) gives no respite but only “intensifie[s] to the point of despair” (798).

This soundscape is paired with equally disturbing sights. For the first time, he sees the dead and wounded, the “scorched grass” (III.II.XXXI.797), the “pool[s] of blood” (III.II.XXXII.798) covering “the same little meadow with the fragrant rows of hay over which he had ridden the day before” (III.II.XXXI.792). Rather than the aesthetic cues he had established for himself, the field is filled with gore and viscera, and the sound of men and horses “shriek[ing] long and piercingly” (III.XXXII.797). Distance had rendered the battlefield an abstraction, allowing Pierre to create a narrative of flickering light and colour, of tiny campfires emitting bulbous “puffs of smoke” (III.II.XXXI.790) and “indefinite masses of troops” (III.II.XXI.761). Now, Pierre’s physical proximity to the dirt, grime, and tragedy allows him to observe the unglamorous details, and his “war imaginary” (Mieszkowski 5) is “transformed into a literal bombardment of the senses” (Enberg-Pederson 323). Indeed:

[w]here Pierre until now has barely registered the dangers that surrounded him, the cannonade jolts his sensorium into action but it immediately overloads and shuts down.

Hissing, screeching, dazzling, blinding, war is a phenomenon that does not merely disrupt logical thought – it is an experiential state that even the senses are unfit to handle. (323)

It is on the battlefield proper that Pierre's senses are pushed to the limit, and he is "bombarded with impressions until ... he passes out" (326).

Pierre ventured to Borodino to "have a look" (III.II.XX.759) but the reality proves unforgiving of any prior misconceptions. There are moments that provided for him a sense of "delight" (III.II.XXX.789) but his impressions of what it might be like at Borodino are supplanted by actually *being there*. Indeed, Borodino is nothing like it "seemed" (789). Pierre's "panorama" (789) shakes, rattles, and booms, and it is clouded in smoke, dirt, and blood. In the end, there is no clean resolution, no one to heroically rally the troops, and nowhere to take a breath. Helpless and in shock, Pierre flees the battlefield, unable to reconcile his former expectations with all he has seen and heard. Indeed, after Borodino, Pierre has had enough, has *seen* enough, and assumes everyone else has, too: "now they'll stop it, now they'll be horrified by what they've done" (III.II.XXXII.798). But what follows Borodino are fields of bloody corpses; refugees; murdered civilians; prisoner-of-war camps; executions; and the long retreat from Moscow. Bloody, graphic, and gruesome, these 'images' become much harder for Pierre to look at. Thus, even when he becomes a prisoner of war, Pierre chooses to avert his gaze, directing his attention elsewhere. He finally realises the limits of war's conventional representation and thus his own limited perspective, concluding that "only in ordinary conditions will he be able to understand himself and all he has experienced" (III.III.VIII.840).

Petya Rostov: The Great Expectations of a Child Soldier

As the youngest of the Rostov siblings, Pyotr 'Petya' Illyich plays only a minor role in the novel, and is rarely drawn in much detail beyond his youth, impetuosity, and determination. His admiration for his elder brother, Nikolai, his anxiety to join the military, and his boyish enthusiasm for combat are all portrayed in scenes in which he often speaks little more than a sentence. However, in the last days of the invasion, in a forest near the village of Shamshevo, Tolstoy places Petya at the very limit of his experience. It is late 1812, and the Grande Armée, marching westward from Moscow, are beleaguered by a partisan, or guerrilla, war waged by the Russians.⁴⁹ In this latter part of the novel, Tolstoy sets out a world dominated by the violence of

⁴⁹ Also known as the 'Partisan War.' The term 'partisan' became popular during the invasion of 1812, especially after Borodino and the retreat of the Grande Armée. Established by the Russian army command, the guerrilla units –

reprisal, thus creating a set of emotional points distinct from what we have previously experienced. Sixteen-year-old Petya is the very opposite of a nihilistic, cynical, and misanthropic soldier. Naïve and impressionable, he is the family's "little patriot" (III.I.XX.670), but he subscribes to a romantic notion of war that cauterises any real understanding, and thus his battlefield experience is at best a terrible tragedy. Ill-prepared for battle, Petya's desire for agency and independence are disastrously indulged, and when his skull is "pierced by a bullet" (IV.III.XI.1058), the finesse and bravura of his self-created dream-scape is a blunt, brutal reminder that he cannot alter the rules.

We first meet Petya when he is a young child dreaming of battlefield glory. Nikolai has just seen action at Schöngrabern and a letter has arrived home. While his mother and sister cry over Nikolai's wounding, Petya "pace[s] the room, in big resolute strides" (I.III.VI.234) and declares: "[i]f I were in Nikolushka's place, I'd have killed even more of those French-men ... they're so disgusting! I'd have cut down so many, there'd be a whole pile" (234). When Nikolai returns on furlough, Petya's primary interest lies in Nikolai's sabre, which he "seized" (II.I.I.300) with a "feeling of rapture" (300). When we next meet him, Petya is "a handsome, ruddy fifteen-year-old boy with plump red lips" (III.I.XX.668) and "a breaking voice" (670). Even in the military he remains unchanged, appearing as "a very young boy with a broad red-cheeked face, and quick merry eyes" (IV.III.IV.1039). Petya had been preparing to attend university but "had secretly decided to join the hussars" (III.I.XX.668) against his parents' wishes. The moment he declares his intentions in a "shrill" (670) voice, plays out in humiliating fashion:

"Well, so, papa dear, I'd say definitely – and mama, too, like it or not – I'd say definitely that you'll let me go into military service, because otherwise I can't ... that's all ..."

[...]

"Well, well" [his father] said. "Another warrior! Forget this foolishness: you must study." "It's not foolishness, papa ... and the main thing is that anyhow I can't study anything now, when ..." Petya stopped, blushed hotly, and managed to bring out: "... when the fatherland is in danger."

"Enough, enough, it's foolishness ..."

"But you said yourself that we'd sacrifice everything."

each with 500 men from cavalry and regular regiments – hit the enemy by disrupting communication and supply lines, as well as violent, surprise attacks. In addition, the peasantry carried out their own fight against the French by destroying crops and provisions, organising ambushes, burning their homes and barns, and ruthlessly killing French prisoners.

“Petya, be quiet, I’m telling you ... I’m telling you it’s nonsense, the milk isn’t dry on your lips, and you want to serve in the army! Well, well, I’m telling you ...” (670-71)

What is most resonant in Petya’s scenes is not his starry-eyed idealism, but his inability to master the art of being a “grown-up” (III.I.XXI.672). Tolstoy writes that “[a]fter the resolute refusal he had received, Petya went to his room and, locking himself in, wept bitterly” (672) and “came to tea, silent and gloomy, with tearful eyes” (672). He resolves to visit the Kremlin where he might petition the Tsar and explain “that he, Count Rostov, despite his youth, wished to serve the fatherland, that youth could be no hinderance to devotion, and that he was prepared” (672). In order to make his case, Petya designs his clothing, hairstyle, and manner of walking “to make himself look like an old man ... like a grown-up” (672). George Clay writes that Petya’s decision to visit the Tsar:

grow[s] out of the gung-ho patriotism that we have associated with the boy for as long as we have known him. Six years of Rostov patriotism and envious admiration for his older brother are behind the Kremlin visit. And that visit acts as a major support for everything to do with Petya that follows. (Clay 105)

Indeed, at the Kremlin, Petya feels validated. The crowd that fills the Kremlin for a military display shout “Hurrah! Hur-r-rah! Hurrah! (III.I.XXI.673) and Petya is overcome a “feeling of rapture” (674). He weeps “tears of joy” (674), shouts “in a frantic voice” (674) until he is “hoarse” (675), and resolves “that tomorrow, whatever it might cost him, he would be in the military” (674). Petya’s obsession with growing up is grafted onto his military fantasy, and thereafter, this single-mindedness takes on an almost religious zeal.

In 1812, we find Petya volunteering to take a message to Vasily Denisov, the commander of the guerrilla force that is targeting the French army in the area surrounding Smolensk. Writing of this developing ‘Partisan War,’ Tolstoy tells us that “this kind of warfare does not fit into any rules” (IV.III.II.1033) and “thousands of men of the enemy army – lingering marauders, foragers – were exterminated by the Cossacks and muzhiks, who killed these men off as unconsciously as dogs bite to death a rabid stray dog” (IV.III.III.1035). Indeed, Viktor Taki writes that:

[a]s the war became total during the 1812 campaign, it unleashed violence among foreign and Russian soldiers, as well as the civilian population, that swept aside all notions of restraint [...] [t]he progressive disintegration of Napoleon’s army transformed a growing number of its soldiers into demoralized and suffering wretches who were no longer capable of fighting or even pillaging and instead became merely passive objects of vengeance perpetrated by Russian soldiers and civilians. (Taki 284-85)

This phase of the war was “above all a vicious cycle of violence” (286) and we learn that Petya’s father has endeavoured to find him a commission in a “less dangerous location” (III.I.XXI.670).⁵⁰ Nevertheless, despite a comfortable commission, Petya has evaded orders and demanded reassignments. The general who has sent Petya to Denisov has expressly forbidden Petya from taking part in any further action; furious at the way he had galloped into the line of fire during a recent battle.⁵¹ Petya decides not to tell anyone of the order, and instead attaches himself to the guerrilla unit. Petya cannot help himself. He has:

constantly been in a state of happily excited joy that he was grown up, and in constantly rapturous haste not to miss any occasion for real heroism. He was very happy with what he had seen and experienced in the army but at the same time it seemed to him all the time that he was not where what was most real and heroic was now happening. And he hurried to get where he was not. (IV.III.VII.1045)

Denisov’s unit is hunkered down in a large forest where “a field of spring wheat descended over a low knoll” (IV.III.IV.1040). In the distance “across a steep ravine” (1040) can be seen “a small village and a manor house with broken-down roofs” (1040). Petya treads carefully over “the roots and wet leaves” (1040) and “drops of water [fell] from the branches of the trees” (1040). The ground is “swampy” (1041).

Petya is no longer at home and imagines true happiness in the company of Denisov’s men. He ecstatically insinuates himself to camp life, talking loudly about knives, raisins, coffee pots, and flints. He offers up his “five pounds of raisins” (IV.III.VII.1046) to the soldiers, despite his love for sweets, and excitedly tries on a French uniform. He dines with them, “tearing at a greasy hunk of fragrant mutton with his hands, which dripped with fat” (1046); and Tolstoy tells us that Petya is again “in a rapturous, child-like state” (1046), confident that the soldiers “ha[ve] the same love for him” (1046). However, Petya’s fatal flaw is his impulsivity and imprudence. He had “begged so pitifully to be sent” (1045) to Denisov, but upon arriving, immediately disobeys orders. Likewise, he insinuates himself into Denisov’s raiding party before immediately demanding responsibility, imploring: “[o]nly, please, give me full command, so that I can be in command” (1046). Petya aspires to battlefield glory; in this he resembles his brother, Nikolai, and Prince Andrei, before their disillusionment set in. But unlike them, Petya’s fantasies

⁵⁰ On the ‘Partisan War,’ see: Hartley, pp. 181-200; and its horrors, see: Taki, pp. 285-288.

⁵¹ Petya served during the Battle of Vyazma on November 3, 1812. More a skirmish than a battle, the Russians defeated the French rear guard on the road to Smolensk by firing cannons into the French convoy. The French had no choice but to retreat across an open field, and in retaliation, set fire to the town of Vyasma after locking its inhabitants inside their homes. Tolstoy tells us little of Petya’s involvement other than noting the General’s anger at “Petya’s mad behaviour at the Battle of Vyazma” (IV.III.VII.1045).

of warfare grow, even when faced with the horror of guerrilla tactics. He idolises Fyodor Dolokhov, who advocates the slaughter of prisoners of war, and “thrill[s] with excitement” (IV.III.IX.1050) at sneaking into the French camp. Petya “joyfully” (IV.III.X.1053) recounts details of the raid, replacing any signs of real terror with an erroneous collection of amusing, heroic anecdotes. We are not told explicitly what thoughts Petya’s mind entertains, but dressing and posing as a French soldier – or indeed, posing *with* French soldiers, produces for Petya a disordered and distracting experience of the present. At this point, Petya literally loses himself in a fantasy. Unwilling to sleep and fighting fatigue, Petya imagines himself to be in a magical fairy-land. Then, once asleep, he becomes the conductor of a beautiful symphony.

Justin Weir writes that “war dehumanises soldiers, and a faint distraction saves them, if only for a moment, from the terror” (Weir 89). However, Petya’s mindless disposition leaves him ill-prepared for tomorrow’s battle. He imagines himself:

in a magical kingdom, in which there was nothing resembling reality. Maybe the big black spot was indeed a guardhouse, but maybe it was a cave that led into the very depths of the earth. Maybe the red spot was a fire, but maybe it was the eye of a huge monster. Maybe he was sitting, not on a wagon, but on a terribly tall tower, from which, if you fell, it would take you a whole day, a whole month to reach the earth – you would keep falling and never get there. (IV.III.X.1054)

Throughout the novel, Tolstoy establishes the Rostov domain as an idyll, its ideal qualities symbolised by its separation from the wider world. Otradnoye, the Rostov’s “magnificent ancestral house” (II.IV.VIII.514) is invested with fairy-tale qualities: it is a “magic kingdom” (514), a “magical plain drenched in moonlight, with stars strewn over it” (II.IV.X.525), with snow “sparkling like sugar” (524), and “some sort of magical forest with flowing dark shadows” (II.IV.XI.526). It seems that Petya has transported these qualities to the forest at Shamshevo, where shadows become towers and caves, and a dying fire becomes the eye of a monster, cloaking the battlefield in romantic hues and childhood dreams. It is perhaps interesting to note here that Tolstoy foreshadows Petya’s death during a scene at Otradnoye, when, after staying up all night during Christmas festivities, an exhausted Petya is “carried out and laid like a dead body” (II.IV.VII.513).

Petya is surrounded by “the sound of falling [rain]drops and the closer sound of horses munching ... soft, as if whispering voices” (IV.III.X.1053), and as he is dozing off, “[d]rops dripped. Quiet talk went on. Horses neighed and scuffled. Someone snored” (1055). The rhythmic sound of his sabre being sharpened against a whetstone – “Ozhik, zhik, ozhik, zhik” (1055) – lulls him into “a harmonious chorus of music” (1055). In the drips, the “bzhik, zhik,

zhik” (1055) of the sabre, and the “scuff[ling] and neigh[ing]” (1055) of the horses Petya begins to hear an orchestra that “trembled, began to harmonise, scattered and merged, and ... all joined in the same sweet solemn hymn” (1055). With imagined instruments at his command, Petya conducts his orchestra “and the sounds obeyed him” (1055). Throughout history, music has been ubiquitous on the battlefield. The sounds of bugles, drums, and song accompanied soldiers into combat, keeping rhythm and time as they marched, transmitting commands, and boosting morale. The sights, sounds, and smells of the battlefield were overwhelming. Writing of the American Civil War, James Davis notes that military bands and drummer boys “could soothe listeners by [playing] familiar, less martial pieces, helping calm nerves and distract troops from the combat to come” (Davis 147) and that music in general “proved a civilising force on the savage battlefield, an aesthetic salve that reminded the combatants that they were not barbarous despite the carnage that surrounded them” (162-163). Indeed:

[w]hile the soldiers ... may not have been able to stop the noise, with music they could control one small part of their sensory world. A piece of music became a buffer between the listener and the sound of war. It could block undesirable sounds, or at least provide distraction from the unsettling racket. Yet music’s aesthetic potential simultaneously empowered listeners ... it is the ultimate organisation of sound and hence the antithesis of noise. (17)

Tolstoy loved music, and *War and Peace* contains singing (folk songs and opera), dancing (waltzes, ballet, and mazurka), symphonies, drums, bugles, and the sounds of the balalaika.⁵² Tolstoy also examines the affective qualities of music in a martial context. Early in the novel, he introduces a Russian regiment stationed in Austria who have “walked seven hundred miles” (I.II.I.112) with their “boots falling to pieces” (112). Tolstoy then devotes a chapter to the role of the regimental band as this “well ordered mass of two thousand men” (112) marched further on to their lodgings “where they hoped to find footgear, mend their clothes, and get some rest after hard marching” (I.II.II.118). We are introduced to “[t]he drummer and the lead singer” (120) and Tolstoy writes that “[t]he soldiers swung their arms in time with the song, striding freely along and involuntarily keeping in step. From behind the company came the sound of wheels, the creaking of springs, and the trampling of horses” (120). This impromptu orchestra of soldiers, “wheels” (120), “springs” (120), and “horses” (120) provides a much welcome amusement, and the soldiers “expressed pleasure at the sounds of the song” (120). Indeed, the song “arouse[s] a

⁵² The balalaika is a triangular, three-stringed instrument. It is a vital component in the performance of traditional Russian folk music. It features prominently in *War and Peace* when the Rostov children, Petya included, visit an old family friend and are exposed, for the first time, to Russian music in its traditional setting.

cheerful, merry feeling” (121) and the men march “merrily and briskly” (120). Even the regimental commanders “talk[ed] to the sounds of the song” (121) and one of them “adjust[s] the pace of his horse to the pace of the company” (121). And, just as the song in Austria sets the tempo and influences the regiment’s mood, so too does music have an affective hold on Petya.

Emerson writes that Petya is “musically primed” (Emerson 23). That is, Petya is attuned to creative expression due to his family, who are always singing, dancing, and playing games. Indeed, Tolstoy tells us that “Petya was musical” (IV.III.X.1055) like his brother, Nikolai, and sister, Natasha. Here, as with the soldiers in Austria, non-musical sounds – rain-drops, a whetstone, snoring, and horses eating – offer Petya an “affective atmosphere” (Gallagher et al 625); that is, an all-encompassing mood which stirs emotion and impacts an individual’s body.⁵³ Further, they provide a tempo with which Petya can build a greater “choral symphony” (Emerson 23). Davis notes that soldiers played music as a way of constructing “sonic and emotional order on the environment” (Davis 19) and “reconstructing something that [is] fundamentally pleasing” (17). As the sounds envelop Petya, he derives pleasure from their familiarity and comfort – especially the snoring – and their regularity and harmony are “attractive to him” (IV.III.X.1055). The music is “brilliant and victorious” (1055) and he feels “joyful” (1055). Petya calls out commands: “[s]ofter, softer now, fade away” (1055); “[f]uller now, merrier. More, more joyful” (1055); and exclaims: “Ah, how lovely that is!” (1055). The sounds of impending battle and the incredible calm beforehand are contained in Petya’s imaginary orchestra, and Petya’s senses revel in the seemingly limitless possibilities of his youth. Indeed, he is only “sorry there was no one to share in it” (1055). However, as his symphony reaches its emotional climax, Petya “fe[els] frightened” (1055). Indeed, Emerson writes that “[i]n Tolstoy’s fiction, music is frequently present at transitions between life and death” (Emerson 23) and “Petya’s triumphant symphony occurs at such a threshold” (23). Petya pays attention only to his own needs and desires, his own sense of “emotional order” (Davis 19), and the accelerating rhythm of his symphony portends his rapidly approaching death.

Throughout much of the 18th and 19th centuries, children and youth were an unremarkable feature of military life – often acting as drummers, scouts, servants, or messengers who marched alongside the soldiers.⁵⁴ However, David Rosen writes that “childhood is a highly distinct stage of life characterised by innocence, vulnerability, and the need for protection ...

⁵³ Riedel and Torvinen write about the affective atmosphere of music, and music’s relationship to emotions, in a new publication, *Music as Atmosphere: Collective Feelings and Affective Sounds*, 2019.

⁵⁴ It is perhaps not a coincidence that in the guerrilla camp there is a “captive drummer boy” (IV.III.VII.1044). Petya is drawn to the boy and gives him some warm food, and the boy is treated kindly by Denisov.

rendering childhood and military life incompatible” (Rosen 1). It never occurs to Petya that he might be incompatible not only with military life in general, but with the lifestyle, tactics, and manoeuvres of a guerrilla regiment. He imagines himself as an ever-ready soldier, but is unwilling to follow orders. Disobeying first his parents, then his general and Denisov, and conducting an imaginary orchestra, Petya foolishly assumes he can predict and therefore exploit events, imposing his own will, behaving in ways that endanger both himself and the regiment. But no amount of wishful thinking can deny the fact that this camp overlooking the French position is not, and never will be, a “magical kingdom” (IV.III.X.1054). If Petya’s battlefield experience had ended with his dream, he might simply be a child who survives war by engaging in unnecessary risks alongside his comrades. However, in his dream, he seeks to control all the instruments, notes, and melodies, when in reality, he is merely *one* of them.

When battle commences at dawn, Tolstoy reveals the cold, hard, disenchanting truth. Petya can hardly contain his excitement: his eyes “burned with fire, a chill ran down his spine, and something trembled rapidly and regularly over all his body” (IV.III.XI.1057). Hearing the sound of whistling bullets and seeing the dense, undulating smoke, he gallops down the road ahead of Denisov’s men. Letting out a giant “Hurra-a-h!” (1057), he disregards Denisov’s orders, and his joyful charge toward the incoming bullets is a chaotic, breathless blur.⁵⁵ Tolstoy tells us that Petya:

galloped towards the place from which the shots were coming and where the powder smoke was thickest. A volley of shots rang out, stray bullets whined and splatted into something ... Petya galloped on his horse across the manor courtyard, and, instead of hanging the reins, waved both arms somehow strangely and quickly, and kept slipping further and further to one side in his saddle. (1057)

The “something” (1057) is, or includes, Petya. Somewhere deep in that cloud of smoke a bullet pierces his skull and kills him. When Petya falls from his horse, “he is no longer the conductor of a ravishing symphony” (McSweeney, 174), but rather “his arms and legs jerked rapidly [and] his head did not move” (1058). We do not need to see the moment of impact – the word “splatted” (1057) allows us to imagine. When Denisov finds him, Petya’s face is “stained with blood and mud and already turning pale” (1058) and he is lying “motionless with outstretched arms” (1058). Dolokhov’s reaction is to order all French prisoners shot. Denisov, however, grips the railings of a nearby fence and howls his grief, remembering Petya’s “excellent raisins” (1058). It

⁵⁵ Petya’s “Hurra-a-ah!” echoes the “Hurrah!” heard during Petya’s visit to the Kremlin. Petya “shouted ‘Hurrah!’ in a frantic voice” (III.I.XXI.674) and “in a voice now grown hoarse” (675). Indeed, he was surrounded by a crowd shouting “Hurrah! Hur-r-ah! Hurrah!” (673).

is interesting to note here Denisov's reaction. Looking at the boy's blood and mud-stained face, he remembers Petya's fondness for sweet things, his generosity with his raisins. Denisov reconstructs Petya's experience in the camp, not through Petya's over-excitability or his tragic death, but through positive associations with food. Nick Fox and Pam Alldred note that "food is an important 'site' of memory" (Fox and Alldred 6) and indeed, Petya is remembered as a "sensorial experience" (Low 690) by another soldier. The extravagant treat of juicy, seedless raisins leaves a lasting impression around the campfire, a "reminder of springtime" (IV.III.VII.1047) when contrasted with the bitter "vodka" (1046) and greasy "mutton" (1046) consumed by the soldiers. Petya gifts to the soldiers a "peculiar atmosphere of affection" (Leon 145), and subsequently, for those left behind, Petya's identity is "mediated and recalled" (Low 695) by gastronomical memories. Indeed, the raisins are what Low calls a "symbol of the self" (691): like the raisins, Petya is out of place on the battlefield: he is too sweet (youthful and unsullied) and too seedless (he contains nothing hard or bitter). In other words, he is "excellent" (IV.III.XI.1058). Further, Low writes that the senses are linked to "emotional states of being" (Low 694), that "notions of nostalgia, familiarity and comfort also emerge when one recollects the embodied past" (700). When Denisov "went to the wattle fence, and caught hold of it" (IV.III.XI.1058) he expelled an agonising howl - "sounds, similar to a dog's barking" (1058) - that takes the other soldiers by surprise. For Denisov, grief and the affective recollections of Petya's raisins are "inscribed in the body" (Low 703).

Petya enters the military *after* the major battles – Schöngrabern, Austerlitz, and Borodino – and he was thus "was very happy with what he had seen and experienced in the army" (IV.III.VII.1045). But Petya has never been away from home and has scant knowledge of the world outside Moscow and Otradnoye. Petya knows little of battle but what is in his imagination, or relayed from stories told by Nikolai, where central truths of war have all but vanished. Thus, everything is subject to Petya's imagination and unfettered optimism. He makes sense of the battlefield through direct feeling, spending much of his time "in a rapturous, childlike state" (1046) or "a state of happily excited joy" (1045). He tells the soldiers he is "used to something sweet" (1046), shares his "wonderful raisins" (1046), and creates a "sweet hymn" (IV.III.X.1055). The battlefield offers Petya a place of homely pleasure: "vodka, a flask of rum, white bread, and roast mutton with salt" (IV.III.VII.1046); the comforting sounds of soldiers snoring and animals munching; and the rhythmic sound of steel on the whetstone that lulls him into a dreamy state. He imagines "[t]he sky was as magical as the earth" (IV.III.IX.1055) and that it "came right down, so that he could touch it with his hand" (1055).

Tolstoy gives myriad details about how Petya feels, what he wants, his moments of joy or exaltation, and above all, what he dreams. But Petya is never satisfied and is always in motion, “hurry[ing] to get where he was not” (IV.III.VII.1045). For Petya, war is a seductive fiction, the battlefield his idea of heaven, but he never truly sees it. He had “begged” (1045) to join the regiment but the danger and entropy of guerrilla warfare are lost on him; he pretends that he “understood everything, though he decidedly did not understand a word” (IV.III.V.1041). Consequently, Tolstoy reveals the limitations of Petya’s experience by obscuring his vision on several occasions: by “total darkness” (IV.III.IX.1050), “mist” (IV.III.XI.1057), and “dense, undulating smoke” (1057). Indeed, it is into this “dense” (1057) smoke, “where the powder smoke was thickest” (1057), that Petya disappears, and his lack of understanding finally becomes his lack of sight. Petya’s control over his dream instruments leads to his inability to listen to Denisov and his loss of control on the battlefield. His end comes in one brief sentence: “[h]is head was pierced by a bullet” (1058). No death could be more unheroic and unromantic. But it is the truth of war. Petya governs his desires and emotions unsuccessfully and ends “motionless” (1058) and “lifeless” (1058). In the cold light of day, Petya’s magic kingdom dissolves. On wet, muddy ground, near a smouldering campfire, the fantasy “vanished from sight, vanished completely, and never was” (IV.III.X.1054).

Chapter Two: Regarding the Pain of Others

“He now remembered the connection between him and this man, who was looking at him dully through the tears that filled his swollen eyes. Prince Andrei remembered everything, and a rapturous pity and love for this man filled his happy heart. Prince Andrei could no longer restrain himself, and he wept tender, loving tears over people, over himself, and over their and his own errors. Compassion, love for our brothers, for those who love us, love for those who hate us, love for our enemies – yes.”

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
(III.II.XXXVIII.814)

Napoleon Bonaparte was fond of looking over the battlefields, “inspecting the dead and the moaning maimed, tak[ing] pride in the pain and suffering, the carnage, he ha[d] created” (Rosenshield 663). But at Borodino, we are told that Napoleon had never “seen such horror, so many men killed on such a small space” (III.II.XXV.805). Tolstoy writes that:

[t]he dreadful sight of the battlefield covered with corpses and wounded ... made an unexpected impression on Napoleon, who ordinarily liked to survey the dead and wounded, thereby testing his inner strength (as he thought). On that day the terrible sight of the battlefield overcame that inner strength, in which he placed his merit and greatness. He hastily left the battlefield ... he sat on a camp chair, involuntarily listening to the gunfire and not raising his eyes. With sickly anguish he awaited the end of this action, of which he considered himself the cause but which he was unable to stop. Personal feeling for a brief moment got the upper hand ... [Napoleon] transferred to himself the sufferings and death he had seen on the battlefield. (III. II.XXXVII.815)

For the first time, Napoleon’s eyes are opened. He feels an instinctive, sympathetic identification with the bodies by virtue of his own vulnerable flesh – he is suffering a head-cold and bladder infection – but the identification frightens him; he is overwhelmed with a fear of his own mortality. He is both drawn to the sight and repelled by it – feeling (and afraid to feel) that he is (or could be) just like these men. He reacts viscerally because he imagines his own body wounded, too. The sudden contemporaneity of these bodies shocks him and for a “brief moment” (815) Napoleon’s “human feeling” (815) provokes a desire “for neither Moscow, nor victory, nor glory ... the only thing he wished for now was rest, tranquillity, and freedom” (814). Napoleon’s experience here may be introspective, self-referential, and self-serving but “more

than all the other participants in this affair, [he] bore upon himself the whole weight of what was happening” (815).⁵⁶

In her essay, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag examines the meaning, uses and ethics of war photography and the economy of indifference towards others. Within her essay are countless images of carnage and suffering – from the Crimean War to Afghanistan – that she uses to articulate the moral dilemma of viewing images from a distance. She claims that “[w]e don’t get it. We truly can’t imagine what it’s like, we can’t imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is” (Sontag 126), and the ubiquity of such images encourages passivity, writing that “people don’t become inured to what they are shown – if that is the right way to describe what happens – because of the quantity of images dumped on them. It is passivity that dulls feeling” (102). Indeed, over-exposure to images “render[s] us less and less willing to respond with compassionate acts toward the victims of violence” (Brintnall 119-120). Sontag admits that looking at the suffering of others can be unbearable, that there is a response of “shame as well as shock” (Sontag 42) because most of us lack the influence or ability to alleviate such suffering. She is clear, however, that on its own, the feeling of sympathy is not a sufficient response, that “painful, stirring images supply only a spark” (103). Therefore, we have a choice: do we look away, or do we look *closer*? And by looking closer, the emotion of shame may prompt indignation and action.

Tolstoy writes that Napoleon’s mind is awakened to the suffering of others, venturing that Napoleon’s “moment” (III.II.XXXVIII.815) might be transformative when he notes Napoleon’s “sickly anguish” (815). However, Sontag writes that “[c]ompassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers” (Sontag 10). Tolstoy cannot say that Napoleon would *never* understand the meaning of his actions, but rather that they *might* provoke change. Thus, Tolstoy makes it clear that Napoleon’s change of heart is fragile: it is but a “brief moment” (III.II.XXXVIII.815). The scene concludes with Napoleon’s conscience darkening so that “the horror of what happened did not strike his soul” (817). Knapp writes that “[t]he vulnerability Napoleon feels, as he is moved for the first time by the pain and death of others, humanises him ... [t]he next step would have been for Napoleon, the epitome of selfish behaviour, to feel brotherly love for these men” (Knapp 230). Instead, Napoleon gives the order to continue; the comfort he feels in issuing a command superseding “truth and goodness and everything human” (III.II.XXXVIII.815).

⁵⁶ Tolstoy’s Napoleon is a fictional creation. Nevertheless, as readers, we are not expected to distinguish between Napoleon as a character and Napoleon as a historical figure. Tolstoy creates the impression that the scenes involving Napoleon are plausibly consistent with the historical record. Indeed, the presence of Napoleon vouches for the authenticity of characters such as Nikolai, Pierre, and Andrei.

War and Peace, like *Sevastopol Sketches*, is a harrowing indictment of war. Not merely a set piece of social and military history but immersive and deeply human, the novel reminds us to never think of war in sterile or abstract terms. Therefore, Tolstoy's use of sensory description is crucial not in and of itself, but that we, along with his characters, might *regard the pain of others*. Knapp writes that "Tolstoy understood that to act on the reader's conscience, he should move the reader" (Knapp 225) and thus "sought 'to exhibit' his subject, the war, in a living dramatic reality" (219). Therefore, in order to "eliminate the aesthetic distance normally assumed in reading" (Morson 388), Tolstoy "attempts to put 'you' in relationship with others and their pain" (Knapp 221). Tolstoy's technique of second-person narration gives "you" the sense of both being *in the moment*, and watching the scene unfold, thus when he asks "[w]hat does the sight of this blood, suffering and death do to you?" (227), his descriptions of "hundreds of men crawl[ing], twist[ing], and groan[ing] ... some amid the corpses in the flower-strewn vale, others on stretchers, on cots, and on the blood-stained floor of the hospital" (Tolstoy 56) make the question difficult to ignore. Indeed, the horrors of his *Sevastopol Sketches* "elicit a particular kind of sympathy, and also a particular kind of shame, from the reader" (Gusejnova 20). The sights, sounds, and smells of the battlefield are chosen for "their affective qualities, their ways of working on human minds" (15). More than that, the universality of the five senses ensures that Tolstoy's descriptions extend "well beyond conventional boundaries of social and geographical proximity and distance" (12).

In *War and Peace*, as in *Sevastopol*, Tolstoy renders war in its "true expression" (Tolstoy 11). Throughout the novel he "perpetuate[s] continual outrage" (Rosenshiel 132) by shifting our attention back and forth from the violence to the aftermath. As scene after scene demands attention, we are obliged not to turn away, but to imagine the bodies being gouged, lanced, trampled, and hit with cannonballs; to recoil at the sight of twitching and convulsing amputees; listen to the "screeching screaming, howling, and crying tens of thousands of wounded soldiers" (133); and take note of the stench, that it might stick in our nostrils. However, the scale and scope of the carnage, the sheer ubiquity of the violent imagery, means that it is easy to get lost in the excess. Tolstoy's answer, much like Sontag's, is that we begin by looking and persist in doing so. In the novel, there is no "you" like in *Sevastopol Sketches*, rather Nikolai, Andrei, and Pierre "are for Tolstoy witnesses of the carnage" (Rosenshiel 106). It is through their eyes and ears that we experience the battles from Schöngrabern to Borodino. Importantly, they guide us through the aftermath: to a field hospital with a stench so powerful it can be relived over and over again; to an operating tent awash with blood and amputated limbs; to the execution of prisoners of war during the freezing march from Moscow. Importantly, Nikolai, Andrei, and

Pierre are each placed in the position of regarding the pain of others, and when their “moment” comes, they must decide whether they will “transfer” to themselves the suffering and death they behold, or turn away. This act of *regarding* is further extended to us. In lieu of a central character’s point of view, we are the only ones to bear witness to the murder of Moscow student Mikhail Vereshchagin, a historical event which took place on the morning of September 2, 1812.⁵⁷ The scenes do not constitute a large portion of *War and Peace*, nor does it feature principal characters. Yet, “while the death of one may seem insignificant in comparison to the losses at Austerlitz or Borodino” (Galloway 2) of all the scenes of carnage we find in the novel, it is to this single act of wartime cruelty that Tolstoy applies his most extensive use of sensory detail. Vereshchagin is an identified, civilian victim of 1812, and Tolstoy confronts us with the visceral, physical experience of his death: he is beaten to death by a frenzied mob. As Vereshchagin howls in lamentation, Sontag’s question of *regarding* comes to the fore: “can you bear to look at this?” (Sontag 41). In each case, Tolstoy invites, and even implores his characters to look. But he insists that mere witnessing is not enough. Thus, Nikolai, Andrei, and Pierre are put into horrific situations to which they (and we) must relate and react. While they cannot necessarily alleviate the suffering of others, the moral challenge Tolstoy poses – from a squalid hospital to a field of execution – is to look at the victims, regard their humanity, and make a response with emotion, conscience, and compassion.

Nikolai Rostov: From the Stench of a Hospital to a Change of Heart

Nikolai Rostov is a pampered young man from a happy family. He is “the best of sons, a hero, their darling Nikolushka” (II.I.303), and while he possesses many admirable traits, his pride and vanity stems from the sheltered existence provided by his well-meaning, but ineffectual parents. Thus, unused to the slightest discomfort, Nikolai expects from the military (and the world at large), “the same peace, the same support ... as he had felt under the parental roof” (I.II.XV.395). At the Battle of Enns, Nikolai prefers to safe-guard his own well-being than risk his life fighting the French, fearing the loss of “so much happiness” (I.II.IX.148) that exists “in [him] alone” (148). At the Battle of Schöngrabern, he finds himself running from the enemy,

⁵⁷ Mikhail N. Vereshchagin (1789-1812) was the son of a merchant, accused of treason and killed at the hands of a mob during the fall of Moscow. Used as a scapegoat by the Governor of Moscow, Fyodor Rastopchin (1763-1826) on trumped-up charges of spreading French propaganda, Vereshchagin’s only fault was that he had translated an article from a French newspaper; he showed the translation to his friends, and read it aloud to relatives. His murder was well-known to many who lived through 1812. Andrei Zorin writes “the Vereshchagin episode, described repeatedly from first, second, and third-hand accounts by shocked contemporaries [was] analysed in detail in the historical literature” (Zorin 228).

unable to imagine that anyone would want to harm *him*, “[w]hom everybody loves so” (I.II.XIX.189). Later, he sits by a campfire, writhing in pain, confused by all that has happened to him. His arm hurts, he is covered in blood, and he is overcome by “[a] feverish trembling” (I.II.XXI.196). But irritating him above all, are the sounds of the groaning and moaning wounded: “[w]ho are they? Why are they here? What do they want?” (200). What Nikolai fails to register is that “they” are his fellow soldiers, each of whom are seeking comfort and relief from their suffering. The conditions are discouraging for all – Tolstoy refers five times to the “gloom” (196) – yet Nikolai feels only his own pain: “Nobody needs me! ... There’s nobody to help me or pity me. And once I was at home, strong, cheerful, loved” (200). Tolstoy tells us that Schöngrabern was a bloodbath, and while Nikolai is merely “bruised” (195), a badly wounded soldier looks at him “with compassion and commiseration” (196), wanting to “help [Nikolai] in some way but couldn’t” (196). Nikolai’s self-pity renders him unable to reciprocate; the wounded men are merely “shifting shadows” (200) he wants to be “rid of” (200).

However, in spite of Nikolai’s lack of compassion, Rosenshield writes that “Tolstoy makes all the major characters in the novel experience a shock or traumatic experience of some kind before undergoing significant change” (Rosenshield 648); that “Nikolai’s traumatic experiences and pain do not have dramatic immediate effects [but] they plant seeds that later take root” (648). Thus, the wounded, shrieking, and moaning soldiers fleeing the battlefield of Austerlitz is for Nikolai a moment of emotional crisis. For the first time he is confronted with a reality larger than himself and his experience of “terrible pain [has] ma[de] him more sensitive to the pain and suffering that is taking place around him” (146-47). Nikolai’s attitude and privileges have afforded a distance from suffering, and it is this distance that partially explains his inability to regard the pain of others. He has been able to tell himself, in Sontag’s words, that “[t]his is not happening to *me*, I’m not ill, I’m not dying, I’m not trapped in a war,” (Sontag 78). He has always charged into battle not knowing “how or why he was doing it ... not thinking, not reflecting” (III.I.XV.653). But now, as he surveys the carnage, the “fearsome sounds and the surrounding dead merged for [Nikolai] into a single impression of terror and pity” (I.III.XVIII.286). In the case of Austerlitz, Nikolai is moved by what he sees, fearing that he will lose the courage needed to complete his mission for General Kutuzov. But he cannot merely look; Tolstoy wants him to be more than a witness.

In ‘Sevastopol in December,’ the narrator shows “you” various sights and urges “you” to look at them. In the most gruelling episode, “you” enter a hospital, where the wounded writhe in agony and blood-stained doctors perform grisly amputations. In *War and Peace*, Nikolai visits a squalid military hospital in a Prussian village where violence is more than seen or heard: it can be

smelled. Two chapters previously, Tolstoy hints at the horror to come when he writes that “in the hospitals, death was such a certainty that soldiers sick with fever and bloated from bad food preferred to go on serving, forcing themselves to drag their feet to the front than to go to the hospital” (II.II.XV.396). Indeed, writing of the rudimentary hospital system during the Russian campaign, Dr Achilles Rose (1839-1916) noted that:

the designation ‘hospital’ is hardly applicable, for everything was wanting; the patients in infected air, crowded, and surrounded by uncleanness, without food or medicines. These hospitals were in reality death-houses ... there were 10 thousand wounded in the so-called hospitals and among the unfortunates, typhus and hospital gangrene developed rapidly; the sick lying on the floor without even straw. (Rose 32)

Nikolai takes advantage of the armistice after the Battle of Friedland⁵⁸ to visit the hospital where his friend, Vasily Dmitrich Denisov, lies wounded with a festering injury. Tolstoy tells us that the town has been “twice ravaged by Russian and French troops” (II.II.XVII.402) and Nikolai immediately notices the damaged and rotting infrastructure. The town:

[w]ith its broken roofs and fences and its littered streets, with ragged inhabitants ... [t]he hospital was housed in a stone building with a portion of its windows and window frames broken, which stood in a yard with the remains of a dismantled fence. Several soldiers, bandaged and pale, and swollen, were walking about in it, presented an especially dismal sight. (402)

The hospital itself is more “pest-house” (402) than aid station, full of broken, lacerated, and amputated bodies, along with an outbreak of typhoid.⁵⁹ When Nikolai asks to look through the hospital, and the doctor replies “[w]hat is there to look at?” (403), Tolstoy hints that sight is no longer the primary method by which Nikolai will regard the pain of others. Further, by privileging Nikolai’s sense of smell, the foulness of the hospital subverts expectations about what Nikolai will see and do once he enters.

Crossing the threshold, Nikolai is immediately “enveloped by the stench of rotting flesh” (402). At this point, the outside world ceases to exist. Tolstoy removes peripheral noise in order to convey the thick, oppressive atmosphere. Smith writes that during the American Civil War, “the non-visual senses played their own roles in shaping experience, sometimes in concert with

⁵⁸ The Battle of Friedland took place on June 14, 1807. The Russians suffered around 30,000 casualties; the French 10,000. The armistice was signed between the Tsar and Napoleon on 7 July, in the town of Tilsit.

⁵⁹ Typhoid Fever results from fecally-contaminated water, and was particularly widespread in the crowded army camps and hospitals during the Napoleonic Wars. Patients developed skin lesions called ‘rose spots,’ diarrhoea, respiratory distress, and fever. With little effective treatments, the disease was most often fatal.

vision, sometimes independently of it” (Smith 7). Here, Tolstoy makes Nikolai’s sense of smell knowable, or at least imaginable, by allowing sight and smell to “blend and interact” (8). The hospital is quarantined – confined, enclosed, and lacking ventilation. The interior is “brightly lit by the sun through the large windows” (II.II.XVII.403) contributing to an overall feeling of suffocation; there is a distinct lack of fresh air, while outside “it was summer [and] so pleasant in the fields” (402). Ill-equipped and understaffed, the hospital’s only remaining doctor cares for four hundred patients, all of whom are crowded together on the bare floors. No one has yet removed the dead.⁶⁰ The smell is primal, immediate, and emotive: it is “so strong that [Nikolai] held his hand to his nose and had to stop and gather his strength to go further” (403). More than an ‘odour’ or ‘smell,’ the word ‘stench’ has a foul, rancid quality. Tolstoy repeats the word five times throughout the scene, replaced only once with “smell of dead flesh” (II.II.XVIII.405). Tolstoy describes the stench’s airborne quality as it moves and intensifies:

[Nikolai] entered the soldiers’ wards. Here, the stench, which he had managed to get used to in the corridor, was still stronger. The stench here was slightly different: it was sharper, and one could sense that it was coming precisely from here. (II.II.XVII.403)

It is an atmosphere so thick that Nikolai would not only be able to smell, but to touch and taste the stench: it would be in his clothes and hair, and in his lungs. We can imagine it on his skin and in his throat. In perverse harmony, the stench matches the sights. There are “swollen” bodies (402) and “purple-red faces” (404). One man is “gaunt as a skeleton” (404); another whose leg “was missing above the knee” (404); and “a small, thin man without an arm” (II.II.XVIII.405). There are “rolled-up eyes” (405), faces of “waxen pallor” (II.II.XVII.404), and men “lying there on the floor, on straw and overcoats” (403).

The aroma of sickness is emphasised not only through the repetition of the word “sick” (404) but the colour yellow: the “yellow man on crutches” (403); “thin, yellow faces” (403); a “soldier with a yellow, stern face” (403). Yellow is inscribed on their skin, and the infectious colour evokes sourness, not merely a sulphur colour but perhaps also the stench of stale urine and bile, or vomit. Along with the yellow streaming in the windows, a yellow miasma pervades the interior of the hospital.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Medical care was extremely poor by modern standards. Many casualties were left on the battlefields for days, while those who were rescued were treated in filthy, unsanitary conditions by overworked and understaffed doctors. If they survived treatment, they were taken to hospitals in converted churches, barns, and homes, often left to lie on the floor, deprived of adequate care, comfort, ventilation, and pain relief, and they died in their thousands.

⁶¹ Yellowing of the skin is symptomatic of Typhoid Fever. In addition, the colour yellow featured prominently in the works of 19th century writers and artists as representing sickness, disease, and death, poor health, contamination of the body, or madness.

Nikolai “has never expected to see what he saw” (404), and at grave risk of catching disease himself, he moves from room to room. The “smell of dead flesh” (II.II.XVIII.405) follows him. He has seen the dead and wounded on the battlefield, but he is horrified by the suffering he sees here: one man is banging his head against the floor, muttering for water; another lies “without moving, his head thrown back” (II.II.XVII.404); another with “only the whites of his eyes showing” (404). A dead body with fluids seeping into the floor beneath, has not been removed and it sends a chill down Nikolai’s spine.

At Schöngrabern, he had been injured and despaired that there was “no one to help [him] or pity [him]” (I.II.XXI.200). However, many subsequent factors cushioned the trauma: he was given food, rest, shelter, and letters from home; he was awarded a medal for bravery and given furlough. Here, the soldiers “fastened their eyes on [him] with [an] expression of hope for help, of reproach and envy for another man’s health” (II.II.XVII.404) and “surrounded [him] as a newly arrived person from the free world” (II.II.XVIII.405). In ‘Sevastopol in December,’ Tolstoy shows the compassion of a woman caring for wounded and dying strangers. Here, at the hospital in Prussia, her words echo: “[so] what if he is a stranger, one must still have pity” (Tolstoy 10). Nikolai fears that “there is nothing to be done” (II.II.XVII.404) but is struck by the “meaningful gaze” (404) of a wounded soldier who implores him: “we’re people, too, not dogs” (404). Nikolai is morally outraged. This stench does not exist in a vacuum: the men, their wounds, and their suffering are a direct result of the battlefield. They are soldiers, like him. Nikolai is spurred to action: “Take him away, give him water” (404), “Let’s go, let’s go!” (404). This is, in Nikolai’s own limited way, an act of brotherly love for men he had once considered “so dirty, so coarse, so vile that he was offended by their nearness” (I.III.X.255). He is moved by their suffering and decides to deliver a petition to the Tsar on their behalf.

The stench of the hospital represents war in its most wretched form. It becomes a defining moment for Nikolai, and as he moves on from the hospital, and on to other assignments, he begins to have “terrible doubts” (II.II.XXI.416) about the war when he contrasts “that self-satisfied Bonaparte” (416) with “all those torn-off arms and legs, those dead people” (416). He asks: “Why?” (416). Indeed, Nikolai is heart-sick; because of the stench, he *feels*, and he cannot extinguish it. Tolstoy writes that:

[p]ainful work was going on in [Nikolai’s] mind, which he could not bring to an end ... the whole hospital with those torn-off arms and legs, that filth and disease. He imagined so vividly now that hospital stench and he looked around him to see where the stench could be coming from [...] the inner work that had arisen in him, not being resolved ... pained him. He was afraid to give himself to his thoughts yet he could not get rid of them. (416)

Nikolai's attempts to ignore or excise the stench fill him with anxiety. The stench lingers despite the lack of an identifiable source. Orwin writes that "[w]hen such a character survives his initiation into the realities of war, we see him revising his attitude in response to them" (Orwin 227). At the hospital Nikolai saw, not "shifting shadows" (I.II.XXI.200) but the true faces of war: "pale and swollen" (II.II.XVII.402), "gaunt" (404) and "waxen" (404) and "young" (404). Indeed, it was the "still freckled face" (404) of a dead young soldier that "followed after him" (II.II.XVIII.405). He is "pained" (II.II.XXI.416) not only by the memory, but by the feeling that the moral outrage "that had arisen in him" (416) has not yet been "resolved" (416). Therefore, this awakening to the suffering of others "in no small way makes possible the soldier Nikolai becomes in 1812" (Rosenshield 648). During the Battle of Ostrovno on 25 July, 1812, Nikolai is involved in a cavalry attack.⁶² A French soldier is galloping toward Nikolai. Tolstoy writes:

[a] moment later [Nikolai's] horse struck the officer's horse in the rump with its breast, almost knocking it down, and at the same moment Nikolai, not knowing why himself, raised his sabre and struck the Frenchman with it. The moment he did this, all [Nikolai's] animation suddenly vanished. The officer fell ... Reigning in his horse, [Nikolai] sought his enemy with his eyes, to see whom he had vanquished. The French dragoon officer was hopping on the ground with one foot, the other being caught in the stirrup. Narrowing his eyes fearfully, as if expecting a new blow any second, he winced, looking up at [Nikolai] from below with an expression of terror. His face, pale and mud-spattered, fair-headed, young, with a dimple on his chin and light blue eyes, was not at all for the battlefield, not an enemy's face, but a simple, homelike face. (III.I.XV.653)

They are enemies, certainly, but Nikolai stays his hand. At that moment, an "unpleasant feeling ... wrung his heart. Something unclear, confused, something he was unable to explain to himself, had been revealed to him" (654). This soldier has features not unlike his own, nor the "freckled" (II.II.XVII.404) face at the hospital. Nikolai begins to doubt what he is doing, and what is being done around him, and he feels "awkward" (III.I.XV.654) and "ashamed" (654). Tolstoy tells us of the lingering effects: "[t]hat whole day and the next, [Nikolai's] friends and comrades noticed that he was not dull, not angry, but silent, pensive, and concentrated" (654). Nikolai is haunted by the Frenchman's "expression of terror" (653) and wonders "why should I kill him?" (655), or indeed anyone else "even more afraid than we are!" (654). Orwin writes that Nikolai "loses his appetite for war once he has ... looked into the utterly human eyes of his supposed enemy" (Orwin 227).

⁶² The Battle of Ostrovno took place on 25-26 July, 1812, near the village of Ostrovno in Belarus. The battle comprised of skirmishes and cavalry charges. The battle ended with a Russian retreat and the loss of 3,700 Russian lives. See: Philippart, pp. 241-246.

The cumulative effect of his injury at Schöngrabern, the stench, and the faces of young soldiers causes for Nikolai an emotional rupture. No longer content to unthinkingly “cut and slash” (II.II.XXI.417), he is overcome with “remorse” (III.I.XVI.654). His romantic ideas of heroism, along with the medal he once received for bravery, now “nauseated him morally” (654), and he admits that he “understand[s] nothing, nothing!” (655).

Andrei Bolkonsky: The Compassion Triggered by a Soldier’s Shared Flesh

The Russian campaign was a catastrophe for all involved. In terms of the ‘cost of war,’ it is not merely the size of the armies and their equipment, but the sheer number of bodies and animal carcasses that were left behind on the invasion routes and battlefields.⁶³ As readers, we can accept Tolstoy’s claim that the reality of combat is found “in blood, in suffering, in death” (Tolstoy 11), but extreme violence alone cannot help us to comprehend the carnage, nor reconcile our minds to such staggering gore. Tolstoy’s realism lies less in his graphic depictions of what combat does to a soldier’s body than in his placing of the “shrieking individual ... firmly within the human sphere” (Orwin 134). That is, we are given access to the pain of nameless, faceless thousands “shrieking” (134) on the battlefield, through our identification with *one*. At Borodino, we find Andrei standing in the middle of an oat field during an artillery barrage. Rosenshield writes that when one of the cannonballs lands at Andrei’s feet, “the most serious of his wounds is to his abdomen, which has been penetrated by shell fragments ... a wound from which few could hope to survive in 1812” (Rosenshield 655).⁶⁴ The scenes of Andrei moaning in pain, hallucinating, and lapsing into unconsciousness “are longer and more detailed than those of his wounding at Austerlitz: they comprise three separate sections over two-hundred pages” (654-55). The purpose is thus: that while Andrei’s wounding “feeds a different narrative than the pain suffered by the masses of common soldiers” (105), Tolstoy uses his suffering to call attention to “the tens of thousands of bodies screeching, moaning, and crying out in unrelievable pain” (105). Furthermore, it is a moment of profound change for Andrei, in which he witnesses the agony of an enemy and feels nothing but compassion.

⁶³ Janet Hartley writes that the “invasion left rotting bodies and carcasses on the land, which had to be cleared when they thawed in the spring - in Smolensk province alone it was estimated in December 1812, there were 172,566 corpses and 128,739 animal carcasses to be cleared” (Hartley 85). Pits held many of the bodies, and others were burned. Many were left on the battlefields to rot.

⁶⁴ Rosenshield notes that “[t]hose attending [Andrei] at the dressing station, including the doctor, assume the wound is fatal” (Rosenshield 655). Indeed, as a rule, when cannonballs hit the head, chest, or abdomen, there is little hope. Serrated shell fragments inflicted lacerations and contaminated wounds, leading to heavy bleeding, damaged vessels, infection, and cardiac arrest. See: Bockeria et. al., pp. 624-628.

Tolstoy tells us that Andrei “was in charge of a regiment” (III.II.V.701) and cares for “the well-being of his men” (701), that he is “solicitous of his men and officers and affectionate with them” (701). His regiment refer to him as “*our prince*; they were proud of him and loved him” (701). It is important to note, however, that “as soon as he ran into anyone from his former life ... he at once bristled up again; he became spiteful, mocking, and contemptuous” (701).

Andrei is pale and haggard like his men and he is anxious about their proximity to death. In early August, along the Smolensk road, Andrei comes across his men swimming in a dirty pond. There are “sounds of slapping, shrieking, and hooting” (703) but Andrei cannot participate in their enjoyment, because he projects onto this innocent moment a terrible future. Indeed, it is here that Tolstoy makes the explicit comparison of flesh to cannon fodder; a parallel that finds ultimate denouement in the dead on the battlefield and the wounded and dying men crowded around the field hospital.⁶⁵ Tolstoy begins by describing the landscape as an extension of war’s touch. He describes the August heat and drought in almost apocalyptic terms. In ‘Sevastopol in May,’ he states that the “angel of death has never ceased to hover over them” (Tolstoy 21). Here, at Smolensk, the hot dust hangs “motionless over the halted troops” (II.II.V.703), the swamps have dried up, the “wheat was scorched” (700), and the cattle are starving. The dust is “suffocating” (700) and the soldiers “suffocated in th[e] unstirring atmosphere” (700). The sun “scorched and burned Andrei’s back unbearably” (703), and the “muddy green pond” (703) is “dirty” (704) and full of “slime” (703). Tolstoy writes:

Prince Andrei smelled the slime and freshness of the pond. He wanted to go into the water – however dirty it was. He glanced around the pond, from which came shouts and loud laughter. The small, muddy green pond had evidently risen some eight inches, overflowing the dam, because it was filled with the naked human bodies of soldiers flopping about in it, white with brick-red hands, faces, and necks. All that naked, white human flesh, with whoops and guffaws, was flopping about in the dirty puddle like carp in a bucket. (703)

⁶⁵ The idea of soldiers as ‘food’ or ‘fodder’ for battle dates back to the 16th century. During the Napoleonic Wars, field officers and low ranked soldiers were considered dispensable, and the wounded were left on the battlefield to die. The expression ‘chair à canon’ (cannon fodder) is attributed to a French writer, François-René de Chateaubriand. In his pamphlet “De Bonaparte et des Bourbons” (On Bonaparte and the Bourbons), published in 1814, he wrote: “the contempt for the lives of the men and France herself have come to the point of calling the conscripts the ‘raw material’ and ‘the cannon fodder’” (Chateaubriand 28). See also: Heuer, pp. 131.

Through Andrei's eyes, we are given an array of virtually abstract images – a pond, slime, bodies, carp⁶⁶ – yet we are shown more than we expect, preparing us for what is to come. We see the men enjoying respite, but Andrei is horrified by the sight of so much naked flesh. The fragile, moist flesh – alive and merrily “flopping about” (703) – will be mutilated, or left bloated on the battlefield. Their faces, necks, and hands are covered with “brick-red” (703) clay, foreshadowing their blood-soaked bodies. Andrei sees that none of the men seem aware of this: they “whoop” (703) and laugh, and in their excitement do not care that the pond is muddying their unblemished flesh. In ‘Sevastopol in December,’ Tolstoy writes of the surgeon’s “sharp curved knife enter[ing] the healthy white flesh” (Tolstoy 11). Put in such terms, the sight of these soldiers’ bodies can scarcely seem anything but horrifying: “[o]n the banks, on the dam, in the pond, everywhere there was white, healthy, muscular flesh” (III.II.V.703-04). Their nakedness is ultimately a deceptive illusion; any attempt to escape from the war is inherently futile and it hangs over the “merriment” (703) at the pond with stinging irony. Andrei’s sense of dread at his own bodily mortality is set in sharp relief:

“Flesh, the body, chair a canon!” he thought, looking at his naked body, and he shuddered, not so much from the cold as from revulsion and horror, incomprehensible to himself, at the sight of this enormous number of bodies splashing about in the dirty pond. (704)

Andrei shudders looking at the bodies, including his own. Andrei sees and hears that his men are more than lumps of flesh – they are complete human beings, comprised of both fleshly body and spirit. Their pleasure – “whoops and guffaws ... and merriment” (703) – and physical enjoyment – “run[ning] and div[ing] into the water” (703) – make Andrei feel “particularly sad” (703): the reality of war will be written on and experienced through the thinking, feeling, bodies of his men. Andrei shares their risk. All soldiers, regardless of rank, are flesh and blood. This is a truth to which Tolstoy will repeatedly return, and in the carnage at Borodino we will see, not nameless, faceless masses, but “that same flesh” (III.II.XXXVIII.812-13).

By sunset on September 7, the sweeping, rural topography of Borodino was scorched and cratered, littered with dead horses and human remains. Both the French and Russians were too exhausted to continue.⁶⁷ Lying on the battlefield with the dead, unable to move or crawl

⁶⁶ Carp of all types have firm, white flesh. Rivers in the Smolensk region are rich with oily fresh-water fish such as carp.

⁶⁷ The combined total casualties of this single day (almost 80,000) exceeded those of most of the other Napoleonic battles (Waterloo, 47,000) and those of the later American Civil War (Antietam, 26,000; Gettysburg, 51,000). The body recovery and burials continued until May 1813.

away, the wounded suffered shock, dehydration, and hypothermia, and left to the mercy of wild animals and flocks of buzzards. Thousands more would die in improvised hospitals over the following days,⁶⁸ or die from neglect, having been left at surrounding farms and villages with little or nothing to eat. Indeed, Tolstoy writes that Borodino was a “terrible sight” (III.II.XXXVII.815), that the fields are “strewn with dead and mutilated men” (815) and “crows, scenting blood, crowing impatiently, flew about in the birches” (III.II.XXXVI.811).⁶⁹

After Austerlitz, Andrei and other “hopeless wounded” (I.III.XIX.294) were left in the care of local inhabitants but Tolstoy does not tell us the details of his recovery. At Borodino, Tolstoy “does not isolate Andrei’s suffering from that of other soldiers” (Rosenshield 655). The field hospital is somewhere that healthy flesh cannot go: the wounded are treated in three makeshift tents, but outside these tents are wounded soldiers covering an area of “more than five acres” (III.II.XXXVI.811). The soldiers are “bloodied” (811) and “dejected” (811), and from the tents come the sounds of “angry screams” (811) and “pitifully wailing” (811). The doctors have “bloody hands” (812) and wear “bloodied apron[s]” (812). In great physical distress, “Andrei is placed in the midst of dozens of others injured and maimed like himself” (Rosenshield 663). Amid the profusion of bodies, he is struck by “the same flesh” (III.II.XXXVII.813) that had “filled the dirty pond” (813). Indeed:

everything he saw around him merged for him into a general impression of bared, bloody human flesh, which seemed to fill this low tent, as several weeks ago, on that hot August day, the same flesh had filled the dirty pond on the Smolensk road. Yes, it was the same flesh, the same *chair á canon*, the sight of which already then, as if foretelling the present, had filled him with horror. (813)

The soldiers’ “whoops and guffaws” (III.II.V.703) at the pond are replaced with “loud, angry screams” (III.II.XXXVII.813), and the wounded men “wheezed, moaned, wept, shouted, [and] cursed” (812). In the tent, the word “shrieking” (III.II.V.703) takes on a different meaning: at the pond there was joyful “shrieking and hooting” (703), here there is a “piercing, ringing, drawn-out

⁶⁸ Bockeria writes that “the main causes of soldier deaths on the battlefield could be haemorrhagic shock, wound shock in extensive injury, as well as craniocerebral trauma (brain contusion), and pneumothorax [collapsed lungs]. Long thereafter, the wounded could die of secondary bleeding, wound infections, wound dystrophy, and sepsis” (Bockeria et al. 625). Musket-balls, grapeshot, and sabre slashes could be lethal enough that even superficial wounds could be fatal. Field hospitals were unhygienic, and without antibiotics, common infections, and conditions like diarrhoea, were deadly. See also: Binder and Quade, pp. 66-77.

⁶⁹ In the aftermath, Dr Achilles Rose notes that he: “saw 50 thousand cadavers lying still unburied, broken wagons, demolished cannons, helmets, cuirasses, guns spread all over – a horrid sight! Wherever the victims had fallen in large numbers one could see clouds of birds of prey rending the air with their sinister cries” (Rose 35).

shriek” (III.II.XXXVII.813) that accompanies an amputation. Andrei is surrounded by “pitiful moans on all sides” (812). His own pain is sharp, gnawing, burning, heavy, exhausting, unbearable, and constant, causing him to “lose consciousness” (813). Because he cannot articulate his pain, it is confirmed by others; Tolstoy leaves much to our imaginations, but their cries, shrieks, and moans speak to Andrei’s suffering. Andrei’s trauma is neither unique nor exceptional, but our emotional connection to Andrei throughout the novel serves to make visible the suffering of others.

On the battlefield we know that Andrei’s wound is fatal when his men cry: “Ah, my God! My God! What is it? ... The stomach! That’s the end! Ah, my God!” (III.II.XXXVI.811). Such exclamation, combined with the “large stain of blood ... spreading onto the grass” (811) leave little doubt, and while the wounds of others are implied, Tolstoy specifies the damage to Andrei’s body: in the hospital tent we see that “the shattered hip bones had been removed, the shreds of flesh had been cut off” (813). Words alone cannot come close to a literal description of Andrei’s “tormenting pain” (812) but Tolstoy feeds our knowledge of the battle – the booming cannons, explosions, and “whistling of splinters” (III.II.XXXVI.811) – into our understanding of what the wounds must be like. Thus, Andrei’s body in pain represents itself but also the bodies of thousands.

For Andrei, there is no reality besides pain. Its shape and duration are indeterminate: the pain “distracted him” (812) and “he was left alone for a time” (III.II.XXXVII.813). At this point, Tolstoy “does not need to call attention to Andrei’s pain; it is assumed” (Rosenshield 655). Rather, Tolstoy invites Andrei to *regard the pain of others*. Rosenshield argues that “everyone knows Andrei will die, including the doctor and Andrei himself. With recovery impossible, pain must play a different role from the one played at Austerlitz: not to preserve life but to provide the conditions and insights necessary for Andrei’s death” (120). Tolstoy had originally planned to kill Andrei at Austerlitz, and A.N Wilson writes that “Andrei, who begins [the novel] as mere cannon fodder – a hero who can be killed off at Austerlitz with maximum emotional effect ... becomes something much deeper” (Wilson 224-25). Indeed, Tolstoy uses Andrei’s physical pain as a marker of shared experience. When the cannonball drops in the field near Andrei, he wonders: “Can this be death? ... I can’t, I don’t want to die, I love life” (III.II.XXXVI.811). Indeed, “he is thinking about life, about not wanting to die” (Rosenshield 658) and thus, “there are elements of Andrei’s love of life and his desire to live, all of which occur to him while enduring extreme pain” (658).⁷⁰ Tolstoy makes Andrei witness to the butchery of war but Andrei

⁷⁰ Tolstoy had intended Andrei to die a glorious death at Austerlitz, but as he became more interested in Andrei, he decided to wound him in order to find a more satisfying role for him. Rosenshield writes that “since Tolstoy had

does not merely listen to the screams and howls. The act of witnessing elicits compassion and forgiveness.

Andrei wakes up to witness the horrors of amputation. Muskets, artillery, and sabres caused catastrophic injuries, and amputation was the only choice battlefield surgeons had when there was little hope of saving damaged limbs. The operation, intended to prevent complications such as gangrene, was often performed without anaesthesia, and in some cases left patients with infections and severed nerves. Often patients died from shock.⁷¹ During the Napoleonic Wars, the wounded were often left on the battlefield to die. However, Napoleon's chief surgeon, Baron Dominique-Jean Larrey (1766-1842), had compassion for the soldiers – regardless of rank or nationality – and advocated timely medical care on the battlefield.⁷² He “believed that early amputation and care reduced suffering, morbidity, and mortality” (Skandalakis et al. 1397) and concluded that “when a limb is so much injured by a gunshot wound that it cannot be saved, it should be amputated immediately. The first 24 hours is the only period during which the system remains tranquil, and we should hasten during this time, in all dangerous disease, to adopt the necessary remedy” (Larrey 79-80). At Borodino, amputation was the fastest way to quickly treat the largest number of patients, and up to two hundred amputations were performed in the following 24 hours. Larrey worked by candlelight with medical knives and saws, on makeshift operating tables (wooden planks or doors taken off their hinges). Phil Nestor writes that Larrey “was able to perform most amputations in less than two minutes” (Nestor 4), holding “a bloodied scalpel between his teeth as he tied off severed blood vessels with his bare hands” (4).

already decided to keep Andrei alive, it is hard to imagine a negative role for pain here” (Rosenshield 645). See also: Jepsen, pp.5-7.

⁷¹ Surgeon and anatomist Sir Charles Bell (1774-1842) volunteered to care for the wounded after the Battle of Waterloo (1815). He performed countless amputations and documented his experience in drawings and watercolours, detailing not only the nature of the wounds but the pain, shock, and agony of the patients. The images offer a rare glimpse into the horrific aftermath of 19th century warfare, and Shaw writes that Bell “never entirely recovered from the harrowing effects of treating vast numbers of grievously injured, sick, and dying men” (Shaw 191). Bell himself wrote: “it is impossible to convey to you the picture of human misery continually before my eyes ... it was a strange thing to feel my clothes stiff with blood, and my arms powerless with the exertion of using the knife” (Bell 207). On battlefield wounds and amputation, see also: Duffy, pp. 53-55; Horáčková and Benešová; Skandalakis et al.; Welling, pp. 790-793; and for Charles Bell's illustrations, see Krylov et al., 32-36; Shaw, pp. 188-191.

⁷² Larrey is considered the father of modern battlefield medicine, and among his many innovations were resuscitation and triage on the battlefield, the creation of field hospitals, and ambulances with trained staff. He served Napoleon in sixty battles over twenty-five campaigns. He was wounded at Austerlitz and Waterloo. His reputation as a battlefield surgeon was well-known, and at Borodino he cared for both French and Russian soldiers, the Russian aristocrats, who spoke French, asked for him by name to perform their amputations. During the Russian campaign he “documented the pathophysiology of cold injury” (Skandalakis et al. 1397) and “observed that those with frozen legs felt almost no pain during an amputation and that low temperatures and ice could actually be used to prevent shock” (Remba et al. 269).

The amputation tent was a “nightmarish scene with patients screaming, moaning and sobbing, surgeons shouting orders, unable to muffle the sounds of the bone saw at work, all of this and the din of battle nearby. The floor was awash with blood and discarded human tissue” (4). Of his experience at Borodino, Larrey wrote: “[a] great number of wounds, created by artillery, required the amputation of one or two limbs. I accomplished, in the first twenty-four hours, around two hundred; they would have had a better outcome if all our wounded had a place, straw to lie on, blankets and food. We were unhappily lacking all resources” (Larrey 57-58).

In ‘Sevastopol in December,’ Tolstoy represents the body at war by dismembering it before our eyes. He describes the fear of those awaiting the procedure, the arms of doctors with blood up to the elbows, and amputated limbs thrown in the corner; the pain is compared to a “consuming, internal fire” (Tolstoy 10). At Borodino, as Andrei watches on, the amputations are represented in the same terms as the amputations at Sevastopol. The first man, an unnamed Tatar⁷³ is being held down while a doctor “cut[s] at something in his brown, muscular back” (III.II.XXX.VII.813). He is grunting “Unh, unh, unh!” (813) as the shrapnel is removed and “begins to strain, pull, and shriek” (813). The second man is familiar: it is Andrei’s personal enemy: Anatole Kuragin.⁷⁴ Tolstoy writes:

[s]everal assistants leaned their weight on the man’s chest and held him down. One big sturdy white leg kept jerking quickly and rhythmically with a feverish quivering. The man sobbed and sputtered convulsively.

[...]

The doctors were bustling about [the] wounded man, the shape of whose head seemed familiar to Prince Andrei; they were lifting him and calming him. “Show me ... Oooh! oh! oooh!” his moaning, broken by sobs, was heard, frightened and resigned to his suffering.

[...]

The wounded man was shown his cut-off leg in a boot caked with blood!

[...]

In the unfortunate, sobbing, exhausted man whose leg had just been removed, he recognised Anatole Kuragin. They were holding him up in their arms and offering him

⁷³ The Tatars are an ethnolinguistic group native to west-central Russia. Tolstoy writes that this man is “a Tatar, probably a Cossack” (III.II.XXXII.813). During the French invasion, the Cossacks enforced the scorched-earth policy and engaged in guerrilla warfare, and at the Battle of Borodino, 19,000 Cossack horsemen mounted raids against the French.

⁷⁴ Natasha Rostova had accepted Andrei’s marriage proposal before attempting to elope with Anatole Kuragin. Broken-hearted, Andrei returns to active military service, hoping to find Anatole and challenge him to a duel.

water in a glass, the rim of which he could not catch in his trembling, swollen lips. Anatole was sobbing deeply. (814)

Again, white, naked flesh meets with an ugly end. Anatole sobs at the sight of his amputated leg and at the sound, Andrei “wanted to weep” (814). Indeed:

Whether it was because he was dying without glory, or because he was sorry to part with life, or from those memories of long-lost childhood, or because he was suffering, others were suffering, and this man was moaning so pitifully before him, [Andrei] wanted to weep child-like, kind, almost joyful tears. (814)

Lying next to Anatole and listening to him sob, Andrei “remembered the connection between him and this man, who was looking at him dully through the tears that filled his swollen eyes ... and a rapturous pity and love for this man filled his happy heart” (814). Indeed, Andrei “wept tender, loving tears over people, over himself, over their and his own errors” (814), feeling overwhelming “[c]ompassion, love for [his] brothers ... for [his] enemies” (814). Andrei sees Anatole no longer as an enemy but recognises in him the same “white human flesh” (III.II.V.703). He and Anatole are the same “*chair à canon*” (704). Andrei takes no pleasure in Anatole’s suffering, feeling only pity and compassion as both lie in the same makeshift hospital on the same battlefield.⁷⁵ Denis de Rougemont observes that “[s]uffering and understanding are deeply connected; death and awareness are in league” (de Rougemont 51), and Andrei emerges from this experience of unparalleled violence and suffering with a transformed consciousness. Andrei’s wounds will not heal; he will die in a few weeks’ time, but his suffering has opened his mind. Tolstoy had told us of Andrei’s tendency to be “spiteful, mocking, and contemptuous” (III.II.V.701) to those “from his former life” (701), but from the pitiful, sobbing, spluttering, shrieking, and groaning of the wounded comes Andrei’s redeeming moment of compassion.

It is impossible to appreciate the savagery, the barbarity of the fighting, let alone the sheer carnage at Borodino. As Sontag suggests, when dealing only with numbers, we can lose sight of the bodies that are left broken by the machinery of war; body counts simply erase the violence inflicted on individual bodies and numb our emotional response to the suffering. Tolstoy shows us the grisly violence. The wounds are shocking and grotesque. However, the purpose in Tolstoy’s expansive, detailed portrayal of violence is for us to remember the humanity, the “bared human flesh” (III.II.XXXVII.813) of the soldiers. Humbled by suffering,

⁷⁵ See: “Episode 6,” *War and Peace* television mini-series BBC, 2016. Laid out in the makeshift hospital, Anatole’s leg is sawn off with graphically realistic sound effects. The blood-heavy scene culminates in Andrei’s act of compassion. Their eyes meet, and as Andrei watches Anatole shake in pain, he extends his arm to Anatole, and Anatole grasps his hand. They weep. The camera cranes away revealing the horrific amputation and blood-soaked tent as Andrei and Anatole share a heart-breaking moment of reconciliation.

Andrei ‘transfers’ to himself the wounded flesh of others, weeping compassionately as he responds to the pain of his enemy. Compassion not merely for one, but for all.

Pierre Bezukhov: Suffering Out of Sight – and Mind?

When discussing the impact of war photography, Sontag writes of an “invitation to look” (Sontag 45). It is an invitation which, if left open, can prompt us to reflect on our relationship to the suffering of others, how we might offer comfort, or aid those we see in the images. Sontag does not suggest that the images will tell us *how* to respond, but rather they are an invitation to think. Some might refuse the invitation; some might accept it, pause, then move on; and some might commit themselves to action. Thus, Sontag stresses the importance of *who* it is that is looking: we are either drawn to the images as “spectators, or cowards, unable to look” (34). Throughout *War and Peace*, Tolstoy grants the bespectacled Pierre Bezukhov many opportunities, in Sontag’s words, to “pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine” (104). Moreover, episodes of adversity and proximity to suffering offer Pierre an “invitation” (45) to reach across the real (or imagined) distance between himself and others, that he might adequately respond to the uncertainty, hardship, and horror of total war.

At Borodino, Pierre expected a visual feast, a set-piece of colour and troop movements to rival anything depicted by great painters or historians. Seen from his vantage point above the battlefield, Borodino is indeed a “spectacle” (III.II.XXX.789) but on the field proper, he soon discovers the dead, the maimed, and the “faces disfigured by suffering” (III.II.XXXII.798). He experiences an excess of shocking images: “the scorched grass” (797); a horse lying on the ground “shriek[ing]” (797); a soldier’s body “still twitching” (798); and “pool[s] of blood” (798). Tolstoy tells us that:

[t]he one thing Pierre now desired with all the forces of his soul was to get away as quickly as possible from those dreadful impressions in which he had lived that day, to return to the ordinary conditions of life, and fall peacefully asleep in a room on his own bed. (III.III.VIII.840)

Furthermore, the images replay over and over in his dreams, accompanied “with an almost lifelike clarity ... the boom-boom-boom of gunfire, groans, cries, the smack of projectiles” (III.III.IX.842) and he “smelled blood and powder” (842). As Part IV begins, the Russian army is retreating and Moscow is in flames; the French capture Pierre and he is forced to join their long march as a prisoner-of-war. Overcome with a sense of inertia and emotional paralysis, Pierre is at the very limits of empathy, at “almost the final limits of privation that a man can

endure” (IV.II.XII.1012). Sontag writes that with overexposure to atrocity “[w]e become callous. In the end, such images just make us a little less able to feel, to have our conscience pricked” (Sontag 82). Indeed, the ubiquity of horror dulls Pierre to the pain of others. We are told that Pierre now has “weary eyes” (III.III.X.845) and is in a “state of irritation” (III.III.XXVIII.900). He feels he has seen enough; his awareness wanes, he loses the capacity to focus, and compassion fatigue sets in. Pierre can dismiss all he has seen. Thus, when his moment of *regarding* comes, he “withhold[s] his compassion” (Steiner 126).

By the time Napoleon’s Grande Armée entered Moscow on September 14, 1812, the city had been abandoned by much of the population. Looting and chaos followed; fires broke out across the city, killing thousands and leaving Napoleon’s army with little food and shelter for the coming winter.⁷⁶ The French responded with mass executions; Napoleon ordered the formation of military courts and people were seized in the streets. An eye-witness wrote that “street after street greeted the eye with perpetual ruin” (qtd. in Schmidt 42). Tolstoy writes that the city is being destroyed not by “the savagery of the French” (III.III.XXVI.897) but by the “inhabitants [who had] left it” (898). Nevertheless, with his descriptions of Moscow, Tolstoy presents us with a much wider landscape of carnage, an ever-changing terrain of war. As the city burns, Pierre is overcome by the “smell of smoke and burning in the air” (III.III.XXXIII.924) along with “the sensation of heat” (927), and is repeatedly confronted with grotesque and pitiful sights: a “corpse smeared with soot for the fun of it” (IV.II.XIV.1018); a sick man left to die; a man with a “smashed-in face” (III.III.XXIII.881); women “decked out in bright colours, heavily rouged” (1018). The sights demand attention, but “everything [Pierre] saw and heard went on before him as in a dream” (III.III.XXVII.898). We are told that Pierre “behaved like an ostrich, which hides its head in a bush as not to be seen” (III.III.XVIII.868) and “heard and saw nothing around him” (III.III.XXXIII.924).

As he wanders around the city, Pierre is arrested and falsely accused of arson. On September 8, 1812, he is led with other prisoners to a place called Devichye Field.⁷⁷ Tolstoy sets the scene:

⁷⁶ When the fires died down three days later, about 75% of the wooden city was destroyed and left 12,000 dead from burns, disease, starvation, and injury. However, the Russians refused to surrender and Napoleon was forced to retreat with his sick and starving army. See: Zemtsov, pp. 502-523.

⁷⁷ Many alleged arsonists were executed by French soldiers. This place, also known as Virgins’ or Maidens’ Field, is located in the grounds of the Novodevichy Convent in south-west Moscow near Moskva River. The complex consists of fifteen buildings topped with golden domes, and a six-tiered bell tower, and sits on the banks of a lake that freezes in winter and a popular place to skate. Surrounded by meadows, parks, and gardens, the convent was desired by the Russian nobility as a place of burial. In 1812, the nuns managed to save the cloister from destruction when Napoleon’s army attempted to blow up the convent.

[t]he day was clear and sunny after the rain, and the air was extraordinarily pure ... the smoke rose in columns in the pure air. Flames were not to be seen anywhere, but columns of smoke rose on all sides, and the whole of Moscow, all that Pierre could see of it, was one charred ruin. On all sides one could see waste spaces with stoves and chimneys and occasionally the scorched walls of stone houses. Pierre looked at the charred ruins and did not recognise the familiar quarters of the city. Here and there he could see intact churches. The Kremlin, undestroyed, stood white in the distance, with its towers and Ivan the Great. Nearby, the domes of the Novodevichye Convent were gleaming merrily, and the ringing of its bells could be heard especially clearly. (IV.I.X.962)⁷⁸

At the site of execution, Pierre sees “the kitchen garden, where a post stood ... a large pit had been dug, with freshly dug-up earth beside it, and a large crowd of people ... standing in a semicircle around the pit and the post” (IV.I.XI.965). This is not a battlefield, with soldiers in the heat of battle, but a simple, domestic “kitchen garden” (965). But, the garden, once fragrant, colourful, and productive, is reduced to a pit, a post, and a pile of “freshly dug-up earth” (965). What Tolstoy describes is a world of violence, in which no help will be offered to the victims, in which the earth is empty and bare, and all human feeling has vanished. The prisoners are “placed in a certain order” (965) by a “senior officer [speaking] coldly and calmly” (966). The French soldiers, awaiting their instructions, stand “in lines” (965).⁷⁹

Before they are blindfolded, the first pair of prisoners “looked silently around them, as a wounded animal looks at the approaching hunter” (966). They are “thin” (965) with “shaved heads” (965); one was “crossing himself” (966), the other “ma[king] a movement with his lips similar to a smile” (966). They are frail and exposed. But Pierre is unable to look at either the prisoners nor the events about to take place: “he turned away so as not to see what was going to happen. Suddenly there was a crackle and a boom that seemed [to] him louder than the most terrible peals of thunder” (966). Pierre’s inability to look is countered by the second pair of victims, who “with the same eyes” (966) as the first, “looked at everyone” (966), silently pleading for compassion. The prisoners’ failure to garner a response is reflected in Pierre’s refusal, for a second time, to bear witness: he “did not want to look and again turned away” (966) and their

⁷⁸ “Ivan the Great” refers to the Ivan the Great Bell Tower, the tallest structure of the Kremlin complex. It was named for Ivan III of Russia, who served as the Grand Prince of Moscow from 1462-1505. Standing eighty-one metres tall, it contains 34 bells and is capped with golden cupolas. In 1812, it survived the Grande Armée’s attempt to destroy it with explosives during their retreat from Moscow.

⁷⁹ Tolstoy describes the soldiers as standing “in lines” (IV.I.XI.965). We are told nothing of them but what they are doing and wearing: “blue uniforms with red epaulettes, in leggings and shakos” (965). Rendered almost inhuman, this line of faceless, uniformed soldiers serves to highlight the physical and emotional distress of the victims. A similar composition can be seen in two significant paintings depicting executions during the Napoleonic Wars: Francisco Goya. *The Third of May, 1808 (Execution of the Defenders of Madrid)*. 1814; Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin. *In Defeated Moscow (Arsonists, or the Shooting in the Kremlin)*, 24 September, 1812. 1897-1898.

suffering only “flashed for a second in Pierre’s soul” (966). Robert Louis Jackson argues that there are moral obligations attached to “the experience of looking at violence” (Jackson 4), what he refers to as “the accountability of sight” (4). However, as Sontag concedes, “shock can wear off. Even if it doesn’t, one can *not* look. People have means to defend themselves against what is upsetting” (Sontag 73). Pierre choosing not to look reduces the victims to objects that disappear into anonymity, and failing to reciprocate their gaze dehumanises them. Indeed, the burden of looking is too great. Pierre cannot help them – he, too, is a prisoner – he cannot help them escape, nor alleviate their physical suffering, nor stay the hands of the executioners.

Nevertheless, it is within his capability to extend a hand, offer a kind look, or an encouraging smile that would make their fear bearable. Pierre himself is longing for human contact, and has repeatedly and actively searched it out. At his trial he noticed that one of the soldiers “see[s] him as a human being” (IV.I.X.964) and gave Pierre “such a human look” (965). Indeed, Pierre appreciates that the French have been relatively kind to him, that they were “children of the human race, that they were brothers” (964). He has time to contemplate his *own place* in the world, and yet cannot extend the same simple humanity to these victims. Pierre is also facing death, but looking away reduces his capacity to respond with anything resembling emotional vigour.⁸⁰

As the fifth victim - a “factory worker” (967) - is approached by the soldiers, “he jumped away in horror and clutched at Pierre” (967). At this moment, Pierre is offered an opportunity to reflect on the man’s plight with pity, to extend a simple gesture - an embrace or a kind word - but instead reacts violently: “Pierre shuddered and tore free of him” (967). Whether motivated by revulsion or fear, Pierre’s impulse is toward self-preservation. However, this victim is not passive – he has made himself known to Pierre through touch. This visceral sensation cuts through Pierre’s wilful blindness, and Jackson writes that at this point in proceedings “Pierre cannot take upon himself the responsibility of *not* looking. Not looking, now, is no longer merely physically closing one’s eyes to a set of visual images but ignoring the meaning of the scene” (Jackson 65). I suggest, with regards to the “meaning of the scene” (25), that this “kitchen garden” (IV.I.XI.965) is a microcosm of the whole. Tolstoy writes that with the French invasion “the Russian nest was devastated and destroyed” (IV.I.X.962), and likewise, the garden has become ugly, no longer home. Ever the outsider, Pierre has thus far failed to stand in solidarity with his fellow Russians against soldiers who cannot be bargained or reasoned with. Indeed, a

⁸⁰ When Prince Andrei is lying at the field hospital suffering with his fatal wound, he is unable to move but he feels the pain of those suffering around him. He can do no more than look and weep for them. Pierre actively chooses to avert his eyes when he has the ability to make a small difference to the victims who seek his gaze.

cross-section of the Russian population are represented in the garden: an aristocrat (Pierre); a “household serf” (965); a “muzhik” (965); and a “factory worker” (966) – all captives, all powerless in a tide of events from which there is no escape. Pierre can no longer claim mere bystander status; he must confront not only his own mortality, but the fate of his father’s homeland. Thus, as Jackson suggests, the sight prompts Pierre to acknowledge not only the executions and the perpetrators, but the vulnerability, suffering, and dignity of the victims.

At this point, Tolstoy removes Pierre’s metaphorical ‘blind-fold.’⁸¹ He invites Pierre to not merely focus on the violent acts but turn his attention to the humanity of the victims, to look at their plight with compassion. Indeed, Pierre can “no longer make himself turn away or close his eyes” (967) but watches every detail. The factory worker’s eyes are “glittering” (967) as he searches the crowd for a friendly face, and just before he is blindfolded, he:

wrapped himself into his smock and scratched his leg with his bare foot ... he straightened the knot at the back of his head, which hurt him; then when he was put up against the bloody post, he leaned back, and, feeling comfortable in that position, straightened up, placed his feet level, and leaned back comfortably. (967)

In this moment, Pierre “d[oes] not hear the slightest sound of the shots” (967) but notices:

how the factory worker suddenly slumped down in the ropes ... how blood appeared in two places, and how the ropes became loose under the weight of the sagging body, and [how] the factory worker sat down, lowering his head and tucking his legs under unnaturally. (967)

Pierre looks down into the pit, where the corpses lie tangled together. While Pierre failed to *see* the factory worker in life, now the man’s sole purpose is to be seen:

lying there, his knees up close to his head, one shoulder higher than the other. And that shoulder was rising and falling convulsively and regularly. But shovelfuls of earth were already being strewn over the whole body. (967)

All Pierre wanted was for the executions to be “done more quickly” (IV.I.XI.965) but now confronted with the execution pit, the sight shatters him: the bodies, without dignity or burial rites, are dumped like rubbish. Pierre is arbitrarily spared death but cannot understand what is

⁸¹ Earlier in the novel, briefly Pierre embraced the idea of Freemasonry as a way to reform his bad habits. The masons blindfold Pierre and he stumbles around in the dark. Here, an intricate ritual of initiation unfolds at the end of which Pierre takes an oath of allegiance and is ultimately allowed to see the light – the blindfold is released. Afterward, Pierre plans and attempts multiple projects, among them the emancipation of his serfs. However, Pierre lacks commitment and his projects inevitably fail.

said to him. He “now looked with senseless eyes” (IV.I.XII.968) at his surroundings. Indeed, he feels that everything he knows has “collapsed into a heap of meaningless trash” (968), that the whole “world [has] collapse[d] in front of his eyes” (969).

Nevertheless, as Sontag attests, “[c]ompassion is an unstable emotion” (Sontag 101), and when Pierre is spared, he reverts to his old ways soon enough. Pierre’s willingness to turn away from suffering is most clearly evidenced in the sickness and death of Platon Karataev, a man Pierre first notices through his sense of smell. Pierre is taken to a “small, devastated and befouled church” (IV.I.XII.968) and then to a shed built “out of charred boards, beams, and rafters” (968). In the darkness, Pierre cannot at first see Karataev, but “Pierre first noticed [him] by the strong smell of sweat that came from him with his every movement” (969). Karataev is thereafter rendered less a man than as an abstraction. Pierre is intrigued by Karataev’s roundness: “his head was perfectly round, his back, chest, shoulders, even his arms ... were round; his pleasant smile and his large, brown, tender eyes were round” (969). This depersonalisation of Karataev is telling: in Pierre’s eyes, Karataev is less a fully-rounded man than simply “round” (IV.I.XII.969), a symbol more than an individual.⁸² Indeed, Pierre does not *see* Karataev; he is more a sensory *experience* that embodies “the unfathomable, round, and eternal ... spirit of simplicity and truth” (IV.I.XIII.974). His “words” (974) and “acts” (974) seem like “fragrance com[ing] from a flower” (974); his voice is “melodious” (IV.I.XII.969); and he “adorn[s] his speech with endearments” (IV.I.XIII.973). Pierre enjoys Karataev’s “folkish ways” (972), his “regular snoring” (972) and “small round wrinkles” (972) but to Pierre’s ears, Karataev’s “words did not make any sense” (974). And yet, Karataev is kind, charitable, pleasant, and happy. He comforts Pierre: “don’t grieve, little friend” (969), and hands him a potato sprinkled with salt. Karataev has nothing to offer but a kind word and a potato, but his response is the only “appropriate response [which is] ‘aid’ for the sufferer and ‘alleviation’ of the suffering” (Gustafson 151). This quiet, sincere gesture – and the simple touch of their hands as the potato is shared – is a “loving service” (151), and Pierre relishes every mouthful.⁸³ Pierre spends four weeks in captivity with Karataev, opportunity enough to reflect on their shared vulnerability. Tolstoy tells us that Pierre “had changed very much during that time ... [t]he lower part of his face was overgrown with a beard and a moustache; his hair, grown long and full of lice, now formed a tangled, curly cap ... his feet were bare” (IV.II.XI.1009). Pierre suffers great hardship but is buoyed by Karataev’s care and optimism.

⁸² It is interesting to note here that Pierre was once *round* but now “no longer seemed fat” (IV.II.XI.1009).

⁸³ On the role of touch for emotional support, reassurance, and understanding, see: Helsin and Alper, pp. 47-75.

Pierre travels, along with Karataev, as the Grande Armée begins their retreat. The journey would have taken them back “through the battlefield of Borodino, passing 30,000 decomposing corpses, frozen in the litter of battle” (Welling and Rich, 496). All that can be heard are “the rumble of wheels” (IV.II.XIV.1017) and “the tramp of feet” (1018); the road is lined on both sides with dead horses and when the convey stops, the “prisoners received their ration of meat in horseflesh” (1019). As the days pass, the convoy slowly diminishes, and those who cannot keep up are shot. Karataev is sick, and as he loses strength, Pierre increasingly distances himself. Tolstoy writes that:

Karataev ... came down with a fever ... and as he grew weaker, Pierre withdrew from him. Pierre did not know why, but ever since Karataev had begun to weaken, he had had to make an effort to approach him. and approaching him and listening to the quiet moaning with which Karataev usually lay down during their halts, and sensing the increased smell that Karataev now gave off, Pierre moved further away from him and did not think about him. (IV.III.XII.1060)

Pierre’s primary concern is with his own well-being: “the main thing was his bare feet, covered with sores and scabs” (1060). Since the march began, Pierre has chosen not to *see* traumatic images. Tolstoy tells us that “Pierre did not see people separately but saw their movement” (IV.II.XIV.1018) and that “everything Pierre saw made almost no impression on him – as if his soul, preparing for a difficult struggle, refused to receive impressions that might weaken it” (1018). This is also reflected in Pierre’s inability to shriek, to shout, to cry, to make any loud sound at all. His skin, used to fine fabric, is rubbed coarse by “a dirty, tattered shirt” (IV.II.XI.1009), a “soldier’s trousers, tied with string at the ankles” (1009), and a “kaftan” (1009). His lips are parched. His stomach is hollow. He is “limping” (IV.III.XII.1060) and his feet are “frightful to look at” (1060). Tolstoy writes that:

[o]nly now did Pierre fully appreciate for the first time the enjoyment of food when he wanted to eat, of drink when he wanted to drink, of sleep when he wanted to sleep, of warmth when he was cold, of talking to someone when he wanted to talk and to hear a human voice. The satisfaction of his needs – for good food, cleanliness, freedom – now that he was deprived of them all, seemed perfect happiness. (IV.II.XII.1013)

Therefore, in order to orientate himself in this distressing new world, Pierre actively imagines new details; colourful sensory details that, over time, assimilate into Pierre’s recollection of events. Hunger compels Pierre to chew and consume anything to survive, and the meagre, tainted food is rendered a fragrant memory. Indeed, suppressing his sense of smell and taste, Pierre imagines a “saltpetre bouquet” (IV.III.XII.1060), while his gastronomic impression of

horsemeat is that it is “tasty” (1060).⁸⁴ He recalls “no great cold spells” (1060); that the walking made him “hot” (1060); and the lice “warmed” (1060) his body.⁸⁵ The campfires held the promise of warmth and camaraderie. The experience is altogether “agreeable” (1060) and “pleasant” (1060), full of colourful language and distorted recollections that protect Pierre from further emotional or physical pain: “[t]he harder the situation became, the more terrible the future, the more independent of the situation he found himself in were the joyful and calming thoughts, memories and images that came to him” (1060-61). These thoughts and images do not readily conform to logic – French and Russian accounts of the retreat attest to the severe hunger, cold, and suffering – but in doing so, Pierre lays claim to a *different* experience. Indeed, Pierre “thought of other things” (1060).

Thus, as time passes and Karataev’s condition worsens, Pierre is unnerved by Karataev’s “weak, sickly voice and seeing his pitiful face” (IV.III.XIII.1061). In his eye-witness account, Dr Achilles Rose wrote that the experience:

[s]evered were all bonds of brotherly love, extinguished all human feeling toward those who, from exhaustion, had fallen on the road. Many men, among them his former best comrades and even relatives, would fall upon such an unfortunate one to divest him of his clothing and other belongings, to leave him naked on the snow, inevitably to die. The impulse of self-preservation overmastered everything in them. (Rose 41)

Prior to the moment when two soldiers shoot Karataev, Pierre notices him sitting against a tree. Karataev looks imploringly at his friend, and Tolstoy writes that:

Karataev looked at Pierre with his kind, round eyes, now veiled with tears, and was evidently calling him over, wanting to say something. But Pierre was too afraid for himself. He pretended that he had not seen his look and hurriedly walked away. (IV.III.XIV.1063-64)

⁸⁴ A ‘bouquet’ is a wine-tasting descriptor relating to the layer of smells and aromas perceived in wine, often derived from the process of fermentation and aging. Despite the coarse and unrefined meat, this word-choice is no doubt related to Pierre’s cultured Parisian upbringing, his palate, his civility, and inherent sense of connoisseurship; the irony being that the stench would have been unbearable. Horsemeat was the most common meat available and tasted terrible. Rose wrote that “[t]he meat which the soldiers ate was either that of exhausted and sick horses which had not been able to walk any further, or of such as had been lying dead on the road for some time” (Rose 40). The meat was often sprinkled with saltpetre in lieu of salt. Saltpetre was dangerous to consume, containing sulphur, charcoal, and potassium nitrate. Horse brains, heart, and liver were sought-after treats, often skewered over a fire, or put in a stew with melted snow, gunpowder, blood, axel grease, tallow candles, or leather belts. Sometimes there was “fricassee of cat” (Haymond 182) or dog. For more on the Grande Armée’s horsemeat diet, improvised recipes, and eye-witness accounts, see: Haymond, pp. 182-183.

⁸⁵ In 2001, workers digging a trench in Vilnius, Lithuania (800km west of Moscow), uncovered a mass grave containing 2,000 corpses. Researchers led by Dr Didier Raoult concluded that the bodies belonged to soldiers from Napoleon’s Grande Armée who had succumbed to typhus. Spread by lice, the disease ravaged the retreating army and it is estimated that only 3,000 were still alive by June 1813. See: Raoult, pp. 112-120; and Talty’s medical study of the Napoleonic invasion which graphically details the effects of typhoid on the French troops.

Karataev's dying eyes cry out for company but Pierre refuses. When Pierre hears a gunshot, he resists not only looking, but understanding, the execution. Tolstoy writes that "Pierre heard the shot clearly, but the moment he heard it, he recalled that he had not finished the calculation ... of how many marches there remained to Smolensk" (1064). Pierre is irritated by the distress of Karataev's dog - "[w]hat a fool, what's it howling about?" (1064) - and the expressions of the French soldiers, one of whom is "holding a smoking gun" (1064). Later, when awakened to sudden memories - "the shot ... the howling ... the faces of the two Frenchmen ... the absence of Karataev" (1064), Pierre is still unable to *see*. As the death begins to dawn on him, when "he was ready to understand that Karataev had been killed" (1065), Pierre again becomes distracted. Indeed:

at that same moment a memory emerged in his soul ... of an evening he had spent with a beautiful Polish woman, in the summer, on the balcony of his house in Kiev. And still not connecting the memories of that day and not drawing any conclusions about them, Pierre closed his eyes. (1065)

Pierre does not allow his senses to be touched by Karataev's suffering, and thus his friend "dies virtually unnoticed" (Cameron 89). How then are we to understand Pierre's avoidance of Karataev's glance, his unwillingness to look at him? The answer lies in the fact that Pierre *did not think of* Karataev. Jackson writes that in Pierre's arrest, captivity, and reaction of Karataev's death, Tolstoy emphasises the "dialogue of glances that occurs between Pierre, his captors, the soldiers, and victims of execution" (Jackson 60). Jackson suggests that the "act of seeing in this sense is active, cognitive, and ethical" (60) and yet Pierre can no more burden himself with the weight of Karataev's death "than he can spare thought on his raw and blistered feet" (74). Pierre's experience as a prisoner-of-war invites him to see the world in a new light, one stripped of the artifice of pre-war society. And yet, Pierre "close[s] his eyes" (IV.III.XIV.1065) to the evidence: he "pretended that he had not seen" (1064); he "did not turn to look" (1064); he "did not finish" (1065); and he did not "understand" (1065). Indeed, a dog howling over Karataev's body summons more empathy for the dead man than Pierre, who "did not see and did not hear how they shot the prisoners who lagged behind, though more than a hundred perished in that way" (IV.III.XII.1060).

Pierre is the novel's ultimate spectator. He has seen, experienced, and felt the violence and devastation of war, and after Borodino, the distance between Pierre and the suffering of others has been reduced by proximity: he is arrested, he is lined up to be executed, he is kept prisoner in the same shed, he is forced to march alongside them, he is their brother in suffering. However, he adopts an emotional distance; he cannot look *at* others, nor look *through* another's

eyes. Since Borodino he has witnessed an almost unbearable sequence of atrocity – sights which have now become almost perversely familiar. Such images prompt him to acknowledge and respond but Pierre’s impulse is to sweep them aside; their ubiquity having numbed his capacity for compassion. In Sontag’s words, his compassion “withers” (Sontag 101). He yearns for compassion from others, and it is granted in the form of Karataev, yet he cannot extend that same simple act to others. He does not, or cannot, transfer to himself the pain of others, and thus is like those who “will do anything to keep themselves from being moved” (111). Indeed, Tolstoy tells us that “everything [Pierre] saw and heard went before him as in a dream” (III.III.XXVI.898). To witness suffering is to acknowledge the ethical responsibility to act. Pierre may divert his attention as a consequence of genuine fear – that their fate might befall him – but he is guilty of what Sontag describes as a “failure of empathy” (Sontag 8). He shows signs of being infected, rather than affected, by what he has seen, and after captivity, he remembers only the “general impression of people’s misfortunes and suffering” (IV.XII.1102). For Pierre, the suffering of others becomes but a distant echo.

Mikhail Vereshchagin: The Anatomy of a Civilian Atrocity

One of Sontag’s central claims in *Regarding the Pain of Others* is that images of suffering are an “invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine” (Sontag 104). She writes that “[t]here’s nothing wrong with standing back and thinking” (118) but the “invitation” (104) is extended that might develop an appropriate response to what is jarring, foreign, and upsetting; that we pause and consider how they might be “integrated into a larger vision of how the world should be and how life should be lived” (Brintnall 132). But, as Sontag observes, when we are merely passive “voyeurs” (Sontag 42), we have the luxury of “turn[ing] away” (104). How long, then, can we look before becoming brutally indifferent? After the bloody front-line and hospital tents of Borodino, Tolstoy illustrates how war can transform erstwhile meek citizens into ruthless, beast-like creatures, by taking a single dramatic scene to describe the very specific death of one man. The scene unfolds at the point where war ends and cruelty begins: atrocity expended on an utterly defenceless victim rather than equals on the battlefield, a battle in which combatants continue to fight long after the conflict should have ended. It reflects the horror of death and violence: the war of *all against one* is at times hard to read, but grants to us the opportunity to “pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine” (Sontag 104).

In the days before Moscow fell to the French, Mikhail Vereshchagin (1789-1812) was accused by the city's governor, Count Fyodor Vasilyevich Rastopchin, of distributing French propaganda. David Galloway writes:

On the morning of September 2, 1812, a mob of angry Muscovites gathered at Rastopchin's villa. The crowd, made up of workers from the lower classes, are determined to oppose Napoleon's occupation of the city and are looking to the count for direction. Rastopchin, in an apparent effort to appease the threatening mob, orders that Vereshchagin be brought into the courtyard. There, on a direct order from the count, he was struck down and killed by the combined efforts of the soldiers and the crowd. (Galloway 2)

The most chilling aspect of the incident is the crowd, who set upon Vereshchagin and beat him to death.⁸⁶ Tolstoy's adaptation of the murder "functions as a thematic climax during the fall of Moscow, as well as an integral part of the historical chapters of the novel" (Galloway 6). It was a famous incident even before it was incorporated into *War and Peace*, and upon the novel's publication, was one of the most widely discussed scenes. We never meet Vereshchagin before this point, yet the scene compels us to witness the spectacle through the eyes of a condemned man. And although we are shielded from the final death blow, Tolstoy spares no sensory detail. We are witness to the full horror of the violence, the humanity of the murdered man, and the moral ambivalence of the crowd. While the death of one man may seem insignificant compared to the thousands on the battlefield, this episode resonates because Tolstoy simultaneously looks *at* and *into* the ugliness of the scene. Orwin writes that if "war is 'murder' then all the bloodletting during it cannot be accidental or in justifiable self-defence ... [t]he *Sevastopol Sketches* do not dramatize a single killing committed with intentional malice. In *War and Peace*, the most terrible such death is the mob killing of Vereshchagin" (Orwin 85). Indeed, by the end of the scene, Tolstoy has transformed a minor historical incident into a complex narrative that touches on almost every major theme of the novel. Thus, we are confronted with the apotheosis of war: human savagery – and invited to share in the events as eye-witnesses.

In *War and Peace*, importance is placed not so much on the events themselves as how the events are experienced – without conventional beginnings and endings – but rather as an ongoing stream of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. In Vereshchagin's case, these techniques are crucial not only to how *we* see him, but in how he himself *sees, feels, and experiences* the anticipation and pain of death. Indeed, by reporting everything that is said, felt, and seen, Tolstoy's attention

⁸⁶ Daniel Beer writes that "in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, extensive citation and discussion of this scene became almost de rigour in examinations by criminologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists of crowd psychology" (Beer 532).

to physical, psychological, and sensory detail forms the very basis of our compassion. Often our responses are built on the extent of our knowledge of another's suffering; we may be motivated to feel first concern for, then later, outrage, at the sight. However, the vividness and authenticity of Vereshchagin's death depends on its *exclusion* from the main fictional plot. As an historical figure, Mikhail Vereshchagin cannot come alive exclusively within the text, like Nikolai or Andrei, but rather he is a figure who takes shape on the periphery, since his life and death were realised in the world outside the novel. But, by investing this historical footnote with personality, emotion, and sensory detail, Tolstoy grounds the scene in human experiences to which we can become attached. Thus, in lieu of a central character's point of view, Tolstoy invites us to participate in Vereshchagin's plight, to watch the events unfold, and evaluate their significance. The key components of the scene – Vereshchagin's physical appearance and emotional reactions – account for an experience of collapsed aesthetic distance; we are able to know him as it were, *from the inside*.⁸⁷

While the armies fight in the agricultural fields, valleys, and forests of the surrounding countryside, this scene takes place in the courtyard of Rastopchin's villa (an enclosed, domestic space). Thus, the jarring change of venue, from military to civilian, from open to closed, may help to explain why the violence committed against Vereshchagin is ostensibly more horrific than violence against an entire army. Carl von Clausewitz stated that “war is the continuation of politics by other means” (Clausewitz 87), and according to the logic of this definition, war, or the idea of war, serves other locations. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis, Rastopchin's courtyard can be defined as a ‘battlefield.’ Indeed, by excluding any reality external to this one section of a large, deserted, impersonal city, Tolstoy precludes a way out. No other world exists, and if there is a world outside this courtyard, this space has enormous power to control its crazed inhabitants. This small space exists within a city already described as “smell[ing] of emptiness and rot” (III.III.XX.874) and echoing with the “discordant, scattered noise of disorder” (874). The courtyard itself is not the sole destroying power, rather it is the “infected atmosphere” (III.III.XXV.889) in a city described by Tolstoy as a “queen-less beehive” (III.III.XX.874).⁸⁸ Some inexplicable, irrational destructive force drives the crowd on to an act of frenzied and unrelenting violence, foreshadowed by the “grunts, groans, the sounds of shoving

⁸⁷ In other words, we are persuaded by Tolstoy to feel sympathy and compassion, thus disrupting the barrier between reader and the fictional world.

⁸⁸ In 1895, Gustave L. Bon proposed a theory of ‘mob psychology’ in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. See also: Waddington; Borch.

and the stamping of shifting feet” (III.III.XXV.888) that engulf the courtyard as Vereshchagin is presented to the crowd.⁸⁹

Sontag writes that a victim of war is to be understood in their singularity rather than compared with the victimisation of anyone else. Civilian casualties are silenced by violence in death or denied to opportunity to speak to their suffering. War cannot exist without bodies: bodies are traumatised, mutilated, and destroyed through war, and the reality of the experience is etched on victims’ bodies. And, so it is with Mikhail Vereshchagin, through whom Tolstoy shows the effects of violent conflict on the civilian body. Vereshchagin is described as:

a young man with a long, thin neck, half his head shaved and covered with new stubble. The young man is dressed in a once-foppish but now shabby coat of dark blue broadcloth lined with fox fur and dirty canvas convict’s trousers tucked into unpolished, thin, down-at-heel boots. Irons hung heavily on his thin, weak legs, hampering the young man’s irresolute steps. (888)

His thinness is highlighted eight times and in various combinations – thin neck, thin legs, thin boots, thin arms – and Tolstoy writes of “[h]is emaciated young face ... disfigured by a shaven head” (888). Elaine Scarry writes that “the record of war survives in the bodies, both alive and buried, of the people who were hurt there” (Scarry 113), and Vereshchagin’s disfigured head, emaciated face, and thin body, along with threadbare clothing embody, in a hyperbolic sense, the condition of civilian casualties. Indeed, Vereshchagin represents those who have survived the conditions of war (economic hardship, requisitioning, exhaustion, hunger), and as he enters the courtyard, he already carries within (and on) his body, the memories and tangible evidence of war’s violence.

However, any camaraderie with his fellow citizens has dissolved, isolating him further. Tolstoy projects onto this scene a sense of distance from all things normal. Vereshchagin is no longer at home; no longer a citizen. He is separated and displaced, set on “the lowest step of the porch” (III.III.XXV.888) and a horrified self-consciousness arises in Vereshchagin: he “pull[s] with his finger at the chafing collar of his coat, turning his long neck twice, and with a sigh, folded his slender non-working hands over his stomach in a submissive gesture” (888). Again later, he “stood in a submissive pose, stooping slightly, his hands clasped together over his stomach” (889). Chained in irons, unarmed, and deprived of his right to struggle, fight, or speak

⁸⁹ Tolstoy does not imply that the scene of Vereshchagin’s presentation to the crowd is analogous to the Passion of Jesus Christ, but there is a striking parallel between Rastopchin and Pontius Pilate, Vereshchagin and Jesus: a young accused man, undeserving of execution, and the governor’s decision to put him to death is influenced by the behaviour of the crowd outside. The scene also bears thematic and compositional resemblance to Antonio Ciseri’s painting, *Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)*. 1871.

on his own behalf, Vereshchagin can only *react* to what happens to him. His emotional pain cannot be articulated but is communicated to us in descriptions that make it visible, as when he “smiled sadly, timidly [and] shifted his feet” (889), and “look[ed] around in fright” (889). To heighten this agony, Tolstoy repeatedly draws attention to the most fragile aspect of Vereshchagin’s anatomy: the vein in his neck, which “swelled like a cord and turned blue” (889), and later “swelled with blood [as] colour rose quickly to his face” (889).

Under Rastopchin’s orders, one of the dragoons backhands Vereshchagin with the blunt edge of his sabre. The blow strikes him on the right side of the head, knocking him off balance. He turns to run. But there is nowhere to go. At this point, Vereshchagin makes himself heard; his cries of pain breaking through:

“Ah!” Vereshchagin cried out briefly and surprisedly, looking around in fright, as though he could not understand why this thing had been done to him [...] But after the exclamation of surprise that escaped Vereshchagin, he uttered a pitiful cry of pain, and that cry was the end of him. (889-890)

Writing of Tolstoy’s use of verbal expression, Mieszkowski notes that “it is not what the characters say that matters, but how they are silent or else groan, howl, roar, yell, or grunt; it is not their human words that matter, but their half-animal, inarticulate sounds, or ejaculations” (Mieszkowski 242). Here, the sound of Vereshchagin’s acute “Ah!” captures his shock. He is unable to respond or object with an exclamation of “STOP!” – he can only verbalise a cry of pain. When heard in isolation, Vereshchagin’s “Ah!” may appear to convey very little information beyond the fact that he is in distress. But when “Ah!” is placed in company with the vein in his neck “swell[ing] like cord” (III.III.XXV.889) and the “wild roar [of the crowd that] closed and swayed over him” (891), there is nothing audible or visible, nothing that can be touched, that is as palpable as Vereshchagin’s pain. He “cried out briefly” (III.III.XXV.889), utters a “cry of pain” (890), and a “cry of terror” (890). It is this cry that dissolves the “barrier of human feeling” (890) and triggers something primal in the crowd; the crowd that Tolstoy depicts as a seething, elemental force of nature, stripped of individuality and humanity. He speaks of the crowd “groaning” (889), how it moves as one mass, as a being unto itself, as an ocean with rolling waves: “like the seventh and last wave that breaks up ships, [the] last irrepressible wave surged from the back rows ... [e]ngulfing everything” (890). Tolstoy writes of a “menacing and wrathful roar” (890). David Waddington writes that “the process of anonymity, suggestibility, and contagion inevitably ensure that civilised and pro-social standards of behaviour are supplanted by a more sinister, unfeeling, and potentially barbaric ‘collective mind’” (Waddington

676). Indeed, Tolstoy tells us of the “infected atmosphere” (III.III.XXV.889) which can be related to Rastopchin: what might be called ‘contagion’ when he tells the crowd that “*we* must deal with the villain” (888), “*we* must punish the villain” (888), and the crowd “[h]earing not the words but the wrathful sound of Rastopchin’s voice ... groaned and moved closer” (889). The cumulative effect is devastating: Vereshchagin’s body, initially sacrificed to the privation and hunger of war, is now sacrificed to the dehumanising effects of the crowd, to be reduced to a set of lifeless parts to be collected and removed from the battlefield.

Tolstoy writes that at Borodino “Napoleon did not shoot anyone, and did not kill anyone. This was all done by the soldiers. Which means it was not he who killed people ... but [the killing] went on independently of him, by the will of the hundreds of thousands of people who took part in the common action” (III.II.XXVII.784-85). And so, too, Rastopchin relinquishes responsibility for Vereshchagin’s death. When the crowd rushes at Vereshchagin, they are an unthinking, unfeeling, mass. There is something primal about the representation of this terror that forces us to regard the unique suffering wrought in the war of *all against one*. Indeed, what can be understood when the crowd has lost its human face? As Vereshchagin falls “under the feet of the pushing, tearing people” (III.III.XXV.890), any solidarity the crowd might have had with their fellow Muscovite is severed. The crowd’s facelessness serves to ask disquieting questions about the war. Vereshchagin can no longer recognise his neighbours. There are no longer clear sides in this war and the mentality of the mob confuses any prior distinctions between friend and foes, ally and enemy. The crowd consume Vereshchagin; he is caught up in the crush and disappears from view. He falls as hundreds of boots trample him, scores of hands reach to stab him and tear his clothes:

[s]ome beat and tore at Vereshchagin ... And for a long time, despite all the feverish haste with which the crowd tried to finish the thing they had begun, the people who beat, strangled, and tore at Vereshchagin were unable to kill him; the crowd pressed ... from all sides ... heaving from side to side as a single mass. (890)

The crowd immobilises and beats Vereshchagin with increasing viciousness for an extended, excruciating paragraph.⁹⁰ As the crowd surges, the undercurrent of “murmur[ing]” (888) and groaning explodes into vitriolic shouts: “Hit him with an axe or something?” (890), “Crush him”

⁹⁰ Count Philippe-Paul de Ségur’s account of Vereshchagin’s death describes the frenzy of the crowd: “[t]he unfortunate lad was cut down with the badly aimed blow of a sabre. He fell, but only wounded; but perhaps the arrival of the French might have saved him if the people had not noticed he was still alive. The wild mob forced the barrier, threw themselves upon him, and tore him to pieces” (de Ségur 95-96). Count de Ségur was aide-de-camp to Napoleon. His diaries and eye-witness accounts of the campaign were published in 1824 and were one of Tolstoy’s major sources for historical material.

(890), “Use a bar!” (890). Vereshchagin’s cries are impossible to hear above the roar of the crowd, and those who cannot see, ask “Is he alive?” (889). Old neighbours, who once embraced him, now trap him.

Here, Tolstoy positions us as both within and apart from the crowd, where we are at once forced to listen to the horror we cannot see and forced to bear witness to the horror directly. We, like Vereshchagin, are confined to the courtyard. While we can, in Sontag’s words, “turn away, turn the page” (Sontag 104), Tolstoy insists that we bear witness, even as events unfold that we can comprehend only partially. Vereshchagin has been swallowed by the crowd; we search him out but cannot reach him. We cannot breach the distance but must “[w]ait for something unknown, incomprehensible, and dreadful” (III.III.XXV.889). While we are not necessarily invited to imagine *our* ability to help him, we are confronted with the inability of *anyone* to reach him in time. Importantly, Vereshchagin’s body must be left out of sight until the final reveal when Tolstoy focuses *all* eyes on the victim’s bleeding, broken body. Tolstoy closely observes that the brutality extended well beyond the final blow, writing that:

only when the victim ceased to struggle and cries were replaced by a drawn-out, rhythmic wheezing, did the crowd hurriedly begin moving around the prone, bloodstained body ... [t]he dead body with its blue face all smeared with blood and dust, and with its long, thin neck slashed ... the mangled legs ... the bloody, dust-smeared, dead, shaven-head, lolling on its long neck, trailed on the ground. (890)

We are not privy to what Vereshchagin was thinking in his final moments, but his remains offer the possibility of approximating his experience. Whether or not the bystanders and active participants *want to look*, Vereshchagin’s body exists after fact as evidence. Further, it gestures to the larger context – the war – of which it is a fragment. The act of looking at the body disbands the crowd. In these moments they recognise Vereshchagin as one of themselves, they see themselves in him: “everyone went up, glanced at what had been done, and with horror, reproach, and astonishment, pressed back again” (890). Galloway writes that “Vereshchagin is a victim of circumstance: his execution came about simply because he was a *convenient* subject for Rastopchin’s rage” (Galloway 3). Vereshchagin, the once naïve, idealistic student, has been deemed a ‘traitor’ – but given the right circumstances, so could they. Indeed, there will always be a next time, and “people shrank from the corpse” (III.III.XXV.890).⁹¹

In her study of torture, Scarry writes that pain unmakes the world of the victim, that violence “is war’s product and its cost” (Scarry 80) and Carolyn Nordstrum suggests that “war’s

⁹¹ Indeed, the French responded to the looting and rioting in Moscow with mass executions. Napoleon ordered the formation of military courts and people were arbitrarily seized in the streets and executed.

violence unmakes the world at large for both those who experience it and for those who witness it” (Nordstrum 138). Rastopchin has firmly attached to himself the idea of finding a scapegoat, and in his mind “devised causes for him to be morally calm” (III.III.XXV.891). Indeed, he rationalises that “as long as the world has existed and people have been killing each other, no man has ever committed a crime upon his own kind without calming himself with this same thought. This thought was *le bien publique*, the supposed good of other people” (891). In the aftermath, none are held accountable. However, Rastopchin begins “to have regrets” (891). The sights and sounds of the act are “deeply, bloodily engraved in his heart” (893) and produce in him acute psychological reactions and hallucinations. He thinks he can hear his own voice shouting: “Cut him down!” (893), and:

for a long time he heard the ever more distant, mad, desperate shouting, and before his eyes he saw only the surprised, frightened, bloody face of the traitor in the fur-lined coat [...] he saw the frightened and then suddenly cruel face of the dragoon who struck him, and the look of silent, timid reproach cast at him by the boy in that fox-lined coat. (893)

Rastopchin struggles with the effects this guilt produces in his body. He “turned pale” (890), he “could not stop the feverish trembling of his jaw” (891), and “an unpleasant chill ran down his spine” (891). Rastopchin has no control over this sensory attack but his response is determined: he attaches Vereshchagin to himself as a “bloody trace” (893). Indeed, “[h]e felt clearly now that the bloody trace of that memory would never heal, but that, on the contrary, the longer he lived, the more cruelly and tormentingly the terrible memory would live in his heart” (893).

Vereshchagin’s dead body exemplifies a general period of multiple shocking experiences. Sontag writes that images of war are “fashioned as an assault on the sensibility of the viewer” (Sontag 41), that behind the “invitation to look ... a voice badgers the viewer, can you bear to look at this?” (41). Indeed, the images are “shocking ... and that is the point” (20); they demand an affective response. The chilling detail of this scene – fictional but historically feasible – urges us to contemplate the consequences of war: the crowd fight a cause that has no logic behind it and the “rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be” (42). *War and Peace* is populated with wounded, torn, broken, and war-damaged bodies; bodies decimated by illness and starvation, and ravaged by death and grief. The death of Mikhail Vereshchagin is notable for the way Tolstoy makes use of the graphic violence characteristic of the novel’s battle scenes but removes the armies from the equation. Rather than a response to the suffering of wounded and dying soldiers, the death of this private citizen marks an excess in the use of force, of suffering beyond pain; it marks the progression from killing to overkill, from battlefield sacrifice to

desecration, and from war to spectacle. Philip Mercer writes that as readers: “not only do we imaginatively participate in this suffering but *we are also disposed to do something about it*: we cannot sympathise with someone and yet remain indifferent to him” (qtd. in Sklar, 42). Therefore, Tolstoy presents Vereshchagin’s death in order to transform us from passive to active witness, inviting us to pause, question, and confer meaning onto such an act of violence, that we might “live better and avoid in the future such inhumanity” (Southgate 42).

Conclusion

As Nikolai Rostov tells his comrades the story of what happened at Schöngrabern, he begins to tell a different story, much like ones he has heard before. He describes the experience “in just the way that those who take part in battles usually tell about them” (I.III.VII.242). The facts, of course, are very different: “[h]e could not simply tell them that they all set out at a trot and that he fell off his horse, dislocated his arm, and ran into the woods as fast as he could to escape a Frenchman” (242). While Nikolai does not consciously lie, the temptation to repeat well-worn narratives proves difficult to resist. The truth that Schöngrabern was a confusing and terrifying experience proves difficult, if not impossible, to communicate to those who had not undergone an identical experience. The story assumes the guise of truth, but is merely an account of what battle is generally believed, or imagined to be, but not as Nikolai has found it to be. The truth can only be experienced, and the truth is chaotic, embarrassing, terrifying, unbelievable, and painful. So, Nikolai crafts a story, and the same swaggering untruth is conveyed over and over again in letters home to his family.

This inability to convey the truth of war is integral to *War and Peace*, where Tolstoy’s characters face a jarring disconnect between their fantasies of battle and the horrible reality in which tens of thousands of men are killed. His characters, much like their historical counterparts, had only read about, talked about, or imagined war and how it would proceed. Thus, Tolstoy is concerned with presenting the truth of the battlefield, of what lies “[o]ne step beyond that line” (I.II.VIII.143). Accordingly, Tolstoy describes troops marching blindly into impenetrable fog; hussars charging to their deaths; relentless artillery bombardments; bloodied and mangled bodies; and the stench, screams, and suffering of the field hospitals. More than that, Tolstoy uses multiple sensory techniques in order to gesture toward a more personal response to carnage and death. Rather than universalising the battlefield experience, Tolstoy focuses on how each character – Nikolai, Andrei, Pierre, and Petya - experience the messy, violent, and random nature of war through their senses. More than simply telling us *what really happened*, Tolstoy allows us to see, hear, and smell what the Russian population endured, to convey “the horror and disorder of war and to show its destructive and miserable effect on the ordinary human beings caught up in it” (Holbrook 136). Indeed, “[t]his is why the war story in *War and Peace*, although depicting a great deal of exertion, strife, battle, and destruction, ultimately will have nothing heroic about it” (White 96). Tolstoy’s rendering of the sounds, smells, and sights of war are not so much a historical document as an impression of how people experienced the Napoleonic Wars.

Tolstoy was a soldier who had experienced the horrors of war first-hand. His response, however, was to think deeply about war in its human context, producing insights and sensory description such that a novel like *War and Peace* can be read as an extended argument against war. Indeed, in his later years he became “painfully aware of the world’s moral evils and of his participation in them” (Kaufman 253), renouncing war and violence, and pledging himself to a life of pacifism. Throughout *War and Peace*, Tolstoy explores in great detail both the graphic violence of combat and the soldiers’ response to that violence. He lays bare the shattered expectations, illusions, and lives of a generation of young Russians. For all their patriotism, his characters are shocked by the arbitrary chaos and cruelty, the visceral disorder of their towns and cities, and the ransacking of their countryside. More than that, they become utterly disillusioned when their names, fates, and torn flesh become mere statistics in a war they barely understand. As events unfold, they suffer “[t]he depths of confusion, hurt and loss” (18) and are “forced to find their path in a new world that has been suddenly foisted upon them” (23). For his readers, Tolstoy’s holistic use of the senses to describe this “crucible of experience” (140) offers bitter truths rather than familiar tropes and narratives. He does not shy away from the brutality of war and subsequently the “truth, illuminated by [his] fiction, is sobering” (259). Indeed, “as soon as readers become comfortable in Tolstoy’s world, the author jolts them out of their complacency, in the same way that ever-changing reality challenges characters’ firm convictions and conclusions” (25). Every small, but significant sensory detail, every touch, smell, sound, taste, and sight, take on a grand, tragic scale as this “particular moment in Russian history becomes a window into universal human experience” (24).

Indeed, sensory history emphasises the role of the senses in shaping experiences of the past by looking at the ways in which sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste functioned in particular environments. The aim is not to radically reinterpret what is already known, but to explore the lived, or ‘felt,’ experience behind the established historical narratives. Inspired by Tolstoy’s own experiences in the Crimean War, and his grandparents’ generation during the Napoleonic Wars, *War and Peace* “gives us the ‘feel’ of war rather than the logistics of campaigns and battles; [Tolstoy] gives us the territory of the battlefield rather than the map which would render it ... more orderly than it was” (White 105). Indeed, Southgate writes that Tolstoy’s descriptions of battle and the horror of the aftermath “exposed what he believed were serious inadequacies in the approach of conventional historians” (Southgate 236). As he did in *Sevastopol Sketches*, Tolstoy renders war palpable through a representation of the senses. However, the senses are not evoked “in the service of literary flourishes” (Smith 842) but rather Tolstoy pays careful attention to the sights, sounds, and smells – both real and imagined - that constituted the battlefield environment

as he knew it to be *in his experience*. We are left in no doubt of the accuracy of Tolstoy's descriptions – *this*, he says, is what the battlefield looks and sounds like.

Not a mere general, objective record of the senses, sensory history is concerned with explicit contexts or environments, and the meanings the senses produced for specific populations. Therefore, according to Smith, it is crucial to know *who* it is that is seeing, smelling, touching, and hearing. Indeed, “what we really need to know is whose nose was doing the smelling” (Smith 843). Thus, the subjective sensory experiences of Nikolai, Pierre, Andrei, and Petya reflect the time and conditions of historical individuals entangled in catastrophic events, and applying the methodology of sensory history to the battlefields of *War and Peace* allows us to better understand war's “extremity as an experience” (McLoughlin 8). We can know what it was like *for them*, and how the senses not only affected their emotions, but their actions. The war physically scarred the terrain and left an indelible impact upon those who experienced it; the landscape of home became an alien place, mired in confusion, that could barely be made sense of. The battlefield did not conform to narratives, plans, or reports, and there were few clear battle lines, ordered columns, or framed engagements. Thus, rather than glorifying war, Tolstoy shatters his characters' expectations – and ours, as readers.

Importantly, Tolstoy's use of the senses anticipates Susan Sontag's questions about bearing witness; about what it means to *regard the pain of others*. On the battlefield, war is no longer theoretical, and as conditions deteriorate, Nikolai, Pierre, and Andrei begin to wonder what it is all about. Nikolai, who had spun a war story to entertain others, begins to have “terrible doubts” (II.II.XXI.416), asking “why those torn off arms and legs, those dead men?” (416), and Andrei recognises his own, and his men's, flesh as merely “cannon fodder” (III.II.XXXVII.813). The continuous immersion in the horrors of the battlefield pushes their bodies, and their capacity for empathy, to the limit but Tolstoy demands that they bear witness to the stench, the screaming, the discomfort, and pain of others. Indeed, the sensorially-charged atmosphere of the battlefield provokes moments of overwhelming compassion. Sontag asks us to consider how we comprehend and respond to others, arguing that the importance of bearing witness to images of suffering is to recognise a sense of one's moral accountability. As Sontag observes, for images of suffering to “generate a compassionate response” (Brintnall 123), the distance between subject and spectator must be diminished. As readers of *War and Peace*, we are invited to bear witness. Tolstoy puts us in relationship with his characters and their trauma that we might have compassion for the countless nameless, faceless soldiers who fought in the Napoleonic Wars. Through an engagement with key scenes of suffering, it is clear that Sontag's analysis can serve as a point of reference for historical fiction as much as images of war. Tolstoy's sensory detail –

the blood, the screaming, the stench – possess the same potential to generate questions about *regarding the pain of others*. Indeed, it is in scenes of suffering that Tolstoy “reveals his moral purpose – to examine the causes and conditions of man’s continuing inhumanity to man” (Southgate 235). Throughout the novel, Tolstoy makes it clear that the cost of war is “terrible not least because men feel compelled to repudiate their natural feelings towards one another, and to become totally detached from one another” (243). This is no more evident than when the chaos of Borodino gives way to a breakdown of order in Moscow, and another battlefield emerges as the population descend into savagery, cruelty, and injustice.

In *Sevastopol Sketches*, Tolstoy claimed he would show the reality of war “in blood, in suffering, in death” (Tolstoy 11), that the sensory experience might reach beyond the borders of Sevastopol and affect those with no previous knowledge of war. Tolstoy’s grandparents’ generation fought at Borodino, and Tolstoy himself at Sevastopol; he lived through the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 and the Russian Revolution of 1905, but, as James Cracraft explains, Tolstoy:

did not live to witness the horrors inflicted on Europe – and especially his own country – by World War I, which broke out in August 1914. Had he done so, he would have seen his absolute, resist-no-evil pacifism put to the severest test imaginable: a general war costing millions of Russian casualties followed by invasion of the homeland, the overthrow not only of the Tsar’s government but of the republic which succeeded it, in the Bolshevik coup and a terrible civil war that alone took between three million and six million lives. Russia would be devastated by all the turmoil, Tolstoy’s wife would die of grief, and all of their children, disinherited at last by the now ruling Bolsheviks, would be scattered abroad. (Cracraft 79)

However, Tolstoy’s war writings, his essays and political tracts, urge against imperial ambition, jingoism, militarism, and aggression, and four years after his death, his ideas influenced a generation of conscientious objectors. Thus, *War and Peace* illustrates what sensory history can do. The novel is a compelling story, but it is also a document of how soldiers and citizens during that period saw, smelled, heard, and felt. Even as Tolstoy’s characters tell war stories and apply a heroic gloss to their exploits, the magnitude of the sensory assault is impossible to ignore long after they leave the battlefield. Attention to the senses foregrounds the humanity of Tolstoy’s characters, conveying the ‘feel’ of battlefields from long ago, that we might refuse to fight or be conscripted, and that we might pause to *regard the pain of others*. And thus, Tolstoy invites us to experience the battlefield as it was - in all its blood, suffering, and death – not as we imagine it to be.

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