Patterns of Character Development in Tolstoy's War and Peace: Nicholas, Natasha, and Mary
By John Hagan

At the heart of War and Peace is the conception of the spiritual pilgrimage, of the journey toward enlightenment or truth—a subject which is central to the whole of Tolstoy's lifework. Each of the five protagonists—Prince Andrew, Pierre, Nicholas, Natasha, and Mary—is on a moral quest, undertaken consciously or unconsciously, which leads ultimately to some form of redemption. Tolstoy, in his inimitable fashion, presents five studies of profound moral education which, in the hands of any other writer, would provide the material for five separate books. Nor are these stories combined arbitrarily. Not only is the plot of the novel so constructed that all the protagonists eventually come into contact with and influence one another in decisive ways, but the stories are played off against each other in intricate patterns in such a way that rich parallels and contrasts emerge at every turn, the development of any one character thereby serving in some measure as a commentary on that of all the others. In another article I have tried to explore a number of these relationships in some detail.¹

Now I should like to go a step farther and, narrowing the focus, examine the careers of three of the protagonists. Far from being casually constructed, the life history of each protagonist follows a definite plan, passing through a number of carefully differentiated phases, and obeying a rhythm, logic, and consistency all its own. At the same time, each life history is united with the other stories by means of a certain general metaphorical conception intimately related to the fact that all are spiritual pilgrimages. The key to this unifying conception lies in the words of the novel's title, "war" and "peace." On the literal level the war is simply the Napoleonic struggle and peace is the nonmilitary activity which takes place in peacetime and wartime alike. In part, the narrative is structured so that these two realms, at first sharply separate, move closer and closer together as the war makes its way into Russia (a process climaxcd by the burning of Moscow in Book xi) and then draw away again, as the French are driven back and the fighting comes to an end. The war also functions as a catalyst in the development of each of the five protagonists: directly or indirectly, each one is touched by it, and as a consequence, a decisive change is effected in his life and outlook. But what I wish to emphasize now is that the terms "war" and "peace" as used by Tolstoy are also metaphors—metaphors for the true and false values by which the characters live, and for the states of soul which living by those values produces. The false values can create not only literal war, but strife and disorder in the soul, whereas the true values lead ultimately to spiritual peace. While the action in the public realm in War and Peace moves first toward and into literal war and then away from it, so in the private realm a comparable journey takes place within the soul of each of the protagonists. My discussion is intended to determine the specific nature of this journey—the nature of the war and the peace, together with the process by which the one replaces the other—in the stories of three of these protagonists whom the critics have least analyzed, Nicholas, Natasha, and Mary.

I

The pattern is probably clearest and least complex in the case of Nicholas, as befits the simplicity of his character. Nicholas moves from war to peace in a quite literal way by undergoing a transformation from soldier into model farmer, husband, and father—by changing, in short, from one who destroys to one who creates, from one whose values are life-denying to one whose values are life-affirming. One of the first things we learn about him when he is introduced to us at the beginning of the novel as an impetuous and enthusiastic youth is that "he is leaving the university ... and entering the military service" as a member of the Pavlograd Hussars.² When his father, the old Count, charges him with taking this step merely because of his friendship with Boris Drubetskoy, who is already an officer of the Guards, Nicholas flares up and emphatically asserts that "it is not from friendship at all; I simply feel that the army is my vocation" (WP, 1 "On the Craftsmanship of War and Peace," Essays in Criticism, xiii (1963), 17-49.
² War and Peace, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, World's Classics, 3 vols. (London, 1933), i, 50-51; L. N. Tolstoy, Sobranie SoUinenij, 20 vols. (Moscow, 1960-65), rv, 57. Henceforth these editions will be abbreviated as WP and SS, respectively, and volume and page references will be given in parentheses.
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...merits by placing Nicholas in the company of Boris Drubetskoy, whose careful, deliberate, and discreet behavior already marks him as the very different and very distasteful type of the "young man on the make." But, with all of his virtues, Nicholas, like the other two male protagonists of the novel, Andrew and Pierre, is radically flawed at this point by having fallen into the youthful errors of romanticizing war and worshipping a supposed great man of history. This hero worship, to be sure, is not a completely negative trait; there is a grain of value in it which Tolstoy brings out in Book III by contrasting Nicholas not only with Boris again, but also with Berg (Nicholas' future brother-in-law) and even Andrew. For whereas Andrew desires military glory chiefly to aggrandize himself, and whereas the equally self-centered Boris and Berg are always scheming for ways in which to further their military and social careers, Nicholas possesses the great gift of self-surrender. Though his devotion is misplaced, it is this capacity for transcending himself, for subordinating his will to something outside himself, which will eventually enable him to submit to the higher laws of nature and (through Mary) of God and thereby to achieve his final happiness and peace.

But early in the novel this development is still a long way in the future, and, although his early values are repeatedly tested as his story goes on, for a long time the direction of his life remains unpromising.

The first hint that Nicholas will undergo a moral and intellectual growth appears when Dolokhov, who has proposed to Sonya and been refused, takes a cruel revenge by beating him at cards for a staggering sum of money. The break with Dolokhov which follows and the guilt Nicholas feels for burdening his already financially embarrassed father with the debt show him acquired a new understanding of reality and a new sense of responsibility which augur well for his future. Again, when he returns to his regiment, determined to atone for his mistake by becoming "a perfectly first-rate comrade and officer" (WP, i, 325; SS, v, 141), when he provides his own lodgings for a starving Polish family who are victims of the war, and when he undertakes to deliver to the Emperor a petition for the pardon of his good friend Denisov, who is in danger of being court-martialed, we have encouraging signs that his earlier romanticism and callow egotism are gradually being overshadowed by the virtues of sober professionalism, tenderness, and loyalty.

In spite of this, however, Nicholas continues to reveal his serious limitations by his uncritical delight in the army's restrictions, routines, and sim-
ple certainties: "When he had again entered into all the little interests of the regiment and felt himself deprived of liberty and bound in one narrow unchanging frame, he experienced the same sense of peace, of moral support, and the same sense of being at home here in his own place, as he had felt under the parental roof" (WP, I, 524; SS, V, 140). These sentiments show that same capacity for submission which Nicholas displayed earlier in his worship of the Emperor, and which are as profoundly equivocal now as they were then. To do what is "clearly, distinctly, and definitely ordered" by the higher laws of life is, from Tolstoy's point of view, man's profoundest duty and the only way in which true peace and moral support can be found. But here, for Nicholas, peace is still identified with activities dedicated only to war. The horror and meaninglessness of war begin to dawn on him only a short time later, after the Battle of Friedland in 1807, when Napoleon and Alexander meet at Tilsit to ratify the peace treaty. But although Nicholas is deeply troubled on this occasion by what seems to be Alexander's betrayal of the Russian cause, and by the stark contrast between the pompous ceremoniousness of the Emperors and the terrible realities of the hospital in which he has just visited Denisov, he at once suppresses such radically disturbing feelings by drinking and by settling himself once again into the comfortable mindlessness of military routine.

Thus, though various episodes in the first six books of the novel clearly prepare Nicholas for his transition from the values of war to the values of peace, they do not actually effect it. The decisive moments occur, as I have indicated, during the scenes of the hunt and the Christmas games in Book VII. In the former Nicholas discovers for the first time a delight in the land, and in the latter he resolves for the first time to marry. "The autumn in Otradnoe with the hunting, and the winter with the Christmas holidays and Sonya's love," as Tolstoy sums up at the beginning of Book IX, Chapter XII, "had opened out to him a vista of tranquil rural joys and peace such as he had never known before, and which now allured him" (WP, II, 309; SS, VI, 65).

Hunting is a "new pursuit" for Nicholas, and one into which he throws himself with all the "passionate enthusiasm" of an "ardent young sportsman" who is "being carried away by that irresistible passion for sport which makes a man forget all his previous resolutions, as a lover forgets in the presence of his mistress" (WP, II, 105–107; SS, V, 270–272). The success or failure of the hunting per se, however, counts less than something else. Indeed, though he is discouraged when he fails to catch not only the wolf, but even a fox and a hare, his discouragement vanishes almost at once, and he goes on immediately afterward to spend a delightful evening at "Uncle's," where he joins his sister Natasha in her "spontaneous merriment" and thrills to Uncle's marvelously natural singing (WP, II, 128; SS, V, 292). The things that matter most to Nicholas, even from the beginning of his hunting experiences, are the physical activity, the way of life, the land, and the people who live close to the land, with which the hunting can bring him into intimate, restorative contact, as with the heart of nature and the life-force itself.

To make clear the nature and importance of this development Tolstoy uses two distinct patterns of symbolic images. One is especially subtle because it first appears much later, in Book IX, Chapter XV, and works retrospectively. At that point Nicholas achieves his first personal victory in combat by striking and capturing a young French officer. Instead of feeling elated, however, as he would have felt at the beginning of the novel, he experiences only a profound "moral nausea" (WP, II, 322; SS, VI, 77). The reason is, of course, that the hunting experiences in Book VII have helped to alter radically all his former values. But how does Tolstoy make us understand this? He does so, quite naturally and effectively, by comparing the war itself to a hunt and Nicholas in his role of soldier to a huntsman: "Rostov, with his keen sportsman's eye, was one of the first to catch sight of these blue French dragoons pursuing our uhlans... He acted as he did when hunting, without reflecting or considering... With the same feeling with which he had galloped across the path of a wolf, Rostov gave rein to his Donets horse" (WP, II, 320–321; SS, VI, 75–76). From this point on, in fact, a comparison of the French to a wounded animal and of the Russians to its hunter becomes one of the novel's important tropes: "The French invaders, like an infuriated animal that has in its onslaught received a mortal wound, felt that they were perishing" (WP, II, 545; SS, VI, 299); "The French did not move. As a bleeding, mortally wounded animal licks its wounds, they remained inert in Moscow for five weeks" (WP, III, 7; SS, VI, 304); "The beast wounded at Borodino was lying where the fleeing hunter had left him" (WP, III, 229; SS, VII, 82); and so on (see WP, III, 252, 275, 343, 377; SS, VII, 107, 129, 195, 225). By thus imaging two kinds of hunt—a metaphorical hunt, as here, in the realm of war; and a literal hunt, at Otradnoe in Book VII, in the
realm of peace—Tolstoy enables us to measure Nicholas’ spiritual growth by contrasting the “moral nausea” now aroused in him by the former with the delight he previously took in the latter. Image and idea fuse perfectly.

The second symbolic image which Tolstoy uses to dramatize the significance of the hunting chapter in Book vii is that of physical liberation. The phrase “narrow unchanging frame,” used earlier to describe the army routines which heretofore have provided Nicholas with security and satisfaction, was not chosen casually. This “frame” is now becoming a constriction from which Nicholas is unconsciously about to break out into the freedom of the natural world and discover the true law of his being. Accordingly, at the beginning of Book vii, Chapter iii, Tolstoy develops an image of his awakening on the day of the wolf hunt:

On the 15th, when young Rostov in his dressing-gown looked out of the window, he saw it was an unsurpassable morning for hunting: it was as if the sky were melting and sinking to the earth without any wind. The only motion in the air was that of the dripping microscopic particles of drizzling mist. The bare twigs in the garden were hung with transparent drops which fell on the freshly fallen leaves. The earth in the kitchen-garden looked wet and black and glistened like poppy-seed and at a short distance merged into the dull moist veil of mist. Nicholas went out into the wet and muddy porch. (WP, ii, 106; SS, v, 271)

These actions—the looking through the window, the fusing of earth and sky suggested by the mist, the dripping of the water, and the moving from indoors to outdoors—all mirror the expansion, the ripening, the liberation, the fulfillment which are now becoming a constriction from which Nicholas is unconsciously about to break out into the freedom of the natural world and discover the true law of his being. Accordingly, at the beginning of Book vii, Chapter iii, Tolstoy develops an image of his awakening on the day of the wolf hunt:

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Metaphors of physical liberation also appear several chapters later to provide a transition to the second phase of Nicholas’ development in Book vii—his decision to marry. Although Christmas has come, in the Rostov household there is only a stifling atmosphere of gloom, lethargy, and irritability, created chiefly by Natasha’s unhappiness at being separated from Prince Andrew, her betrothed. Suddenly, however, on the third day of Christmas week, a group of mummers bursts upon the scene, “bringing in with them the cold from outside and a feeling of gaiety” (WP, ii, 147; SS, v, 311). As they push their way into the ballroom, “where, shyly at first and then more and more merrily and heartily,” they start “singing, dancing, and playing Christmas games,” the members of the household, caught by their spirit, also don costumes, and Nicholas poses “a drive in his troyka” to—significantly—Uncle’s, where he found such delight and freedom in the autumn. The atmosphere has now totally changed: “a merry holiday tone... passing from one to another grew stronger and stronger and reached its climax when they all came out into the frost and got into the sledges, talking, calling to one another, laughing and shouting” (WP, ii, 148; SS, v, 312). The marvelous ride through the moonlit snow follows immediately, with Nicholas racing the lead sledge and emerging the victor.

All of this is a preparation for the key scene of Nicholas’ romantic encounter with Sonya in the next chapter (xi), where the imagery of liberation, fusing elements of both the mumming and the hunt-morning scenes, reaches a culmination. In the spirit of the Christmas games being played at the Melyukovs’, Sonya has decided to test her fortune by waiting in the barn, but Nicholas hurries out the front way to intercept her: “Nicholas went hastily to the front porch, saying he felt too hot. The crowd of people really had made the house stuffy. ... ’I am a fool, a fool! what have I been waiting for?’ thought Nicholas, and running out from the porch he went round the corner of the house and along the path that led to the back porch” (WP, ii, 155; SS, v, 318). A few moments later his meeting with Sonya and their declaration of mutual love has settled his fate: before the end of his furlough he has “firmly decided, after putting his affairs in order in the regiment, to retire from the army and return and marry” her (WP, ii, 161; SS, v, 324).

By the end of Book vii, then, the decisive turning point in Nicholas’ career has been reached, and the book has served one of its principal functions in the structure of War and Peace as a whole. The rest of Nicholas’ story is simply a working-out of the implications and consequences of his “passionate enthusiasm” for the hunt and his decision to retire from the army and marry. Although now he takes to hunting as an...
escape from the estate management which he loathes, whereas at the end of the novel he will harmoniously combine these activities, and although now he believes that it is Sonya whom he will marry, whereas at the end he actually marries Mary, he has, in effect, renounced one set of life values and acquired quite another. Nothing less than a revolution has quietly taken place in his soul.

II

Tolstoy's careful planning is also exhibited by the story of Natasha. The crucial turning point in her life too occurs in Book vii; but whereas her brother Nicholas moves literally from war to peace, she charts metaphorically a contrasting course from peace to war. At the very time he is beginning to grow out of his youthful errors, she is about to begin committing hers.

Through Book vii, Chapter vii, Natasha is one of the loveliest images in fiction of the innocence and happiness of sheltered, aristocratic girlhood. She is, of course, by no means a paragon: with all of the charm of her vibrant nature, she is distinctly marked by a number of flaws—vanity, superficiality, and naively romantic feeling, to name the most important—which are plainly going to lead her astray and cause her to suffer. She is more than a little akin to her genial but heedless father, whose good-natured extravagance nearly brings the family to financial ruin. Even one of the qualities we find most attractive in her—her great intuitive receptivity which makes her so wonderfully responsive to every facet of life around her—will, in her adolescence, become a source of danger when it fuses with her strongly emerging sexuality. But until the middle of Book vii all of these developments are in the future. Although Natasha has been through a number of significant experiences (falling in and out of love with Boris Drubetskoy, rejecting a proposal from Denisov, attending her first grand ball as a six-teen-year-old debutante, dancing there with the handsome Prince Andrew, falling in love with him and becoming his fiancée), these experiences have been quite conventional, and while they will contribute in the long run to her growth, they have not yet radically changed her. In the first seven chapters of Book vii, Natasha, as her mother puts it, is still "living through the last days of her girlhood" (WP, ii, 103; SS, v, 268). She is still in a condition of peace.

Tolstoy dramatizes this fact in many ways. When speaking to Nicholas about her romance with Prince Andrew, for instance, Natasha says, "I feel at peace and settled. I know that no better man than he exists, and I am calm and contented now" (WP, ii, 102; SS, v, 267). Nicholas himself sees her as "even-tempered and calm, and quite as cheerful as of old" (WP, ii, 103; SS, v, 268). Her happiness is shown at its height in the scenes of the hunt and of the evening at Uncle's. There is, indeed, an extremely effective counterpoint working here, for while the same scenes represent the whole new set of values toward which Nicholas is beginning to turn, they also represent the state of blissful innocence from which Natasha is about to fall. She insists upon Nicholas taking her and Petya with him on the hunt, calling it "my greatest pleasure" (WP, ii, 110; SS, v, 273). A few moments later we see her, "muffled up in shawls which did not hide her eager face and shining eyes," sitting "easily and confidently on her black Arabchik" and reining him in "without effort with a firm hand" (WP, ii, 110; SS, v, 275).

One of the hunters says that she resembles "Di- ana in her passion for the chase as well as in her beauty" (WP, ii, 121; SS, v, 286)—and, it might be added, in her virginity. When the hare is finally captured, she "screamed joyously, ecstatically, and so piercingly that it set every one's ears tingling" (WP, ii, 125; SS, v, 290). Later, at Uncle's, this mood continues. At first her gaiety is inspired simply by the strangeness of Uncle's peasant-like way of life, which is so different from her own. But gradually, as a result of her susceptibility, she begins to feel "so light-hearted and happy in these novel surroundings that she only feared the trap would come for her too soon" (WP, ii, 129; SS, v, 293). The artificial class barriers which have kept her—a "young countess, educated by an emigre French governess" and "reared in silks and velvets" (WP, ii, 132; SS, v, 297)—separated from such a household as Uncle's fall away, and she achieves for the first time a profound instinctive rapport with a simple, natural, Russian life, to which she herself is so unconsciously akin. Only once is her mood darkened, when she thinks of Prince Andrew far away in the army and, with unwitting irony, asks herself, "Where is he now?" (WP, ii, 133; SS, v, 297), the very question she will later ask as she stands over his corpse. But this mood "lasted only a second. 'Don't dare to think about it,' she said to herself, and sat down again smilingly beside 'Uncle,' begging him to play something more" (WP, ii, 133; SS, v, 297).

These scenes mark the farthest reach of Natasha's girlish contentment. The words she speaks to Nicholas at the end of Chapter vii, as they ride home from Uncle's—"I know that I shall never again be as happy and tranquil as I
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am now" (WP, p. 135; SS, v, 299)—are prophetic. In the very next chapter, as she broods upon Andrew's absence, her mood begins to darken, and her soul is invaded by sorrow and disorder. While Nicholas' thoughts are turning ever more seriously to the ideal of marriage and family happiness, Natasha is beginning to feel that for herself such an ideal is becoming unattainable, and with the arrival of the Christmas season, her loneliness, restlessness, boredom, frustration, and general malaise increase almost unbearably. "Ah, how afraid I am for her, how afraid I am!" the countess reflects. "Her maternal instinct told her that Natasha had too much of something, and that because of this she would not be happy" (WP, p. 147; SS, v, 310). The appearance of the mummers, the enchanting ride through the snow, and the games at the Melyukovs' revive Natasha's spirits, but only momentarily. When Sonya claims to have seen a vision of Andrew "lying down" (another unwitting forecast of his death), she is filled with horror; and as her separation from him continues to lengthen, she grows "more agitated and impatient every day. The thought that her best days . . . were being vainly wasted with no advantage to any one, tormented her incessantly" (WP, p. 162; SS, v, 325). Thus, though Natasha's fall does not take place until the next book, when Anatole Kuragin enters her life, by the end of Book VII the necessary conditions for that fall have already been firmly established. A movement from peace to war has taken place in her soul and remains only to be completed by the actuality of the near-disaster to which it leads.

But there is more to the pattern of Natasha's story than this. If it is analogous to the pattern of Nicholas' story in that the latter too has its center in the transition between antithetical values which takes place in Book VII, it is also analogous in that this transition is retrospectively underscored by an almost identical technique: as in Nicholas' story we have two kinds of hunt, so in Natasha's we have two kinds of singing. The first kind is that which she hears at Uncle's, and which Tolstoy describes as "like the song of a bird" (WP, p. 133; SS, v, 297), for Uncle's singing has all the unconsciousness, the spontaneity, and the inevitability of a force of nature. Much later in the novel, the same metaphor is chosen to characterize the singing of the exemplary Platon Kataev, who saves Pierre from despair by virtue of an even greater harmony with nature: "He did not sing like a trained singer who knows he is listened to, but like the birds, evidently giving vent to the sounds in the same way that one stretches oneself, or walks about to get rid of stiffness, and the sounds were always high-pitched, mournful, delicate, and almost feminine" (WP, p. 203; SS, vii, 59). This reference to the "feminine" quality of Platon's voice reminds us, moreover, that Natasha herself has been shown to have a beautiful, untrained voice: "While that untrained voice with its incorrect breathing and labored transitions was sounding, even the connoisseurs said nothing, but only delighted in it and wished to hear it again" (WP, p. 451; SS, v, 69). All three characters—Natasha, Uncle, and Platon—are thus related by their possession of a similar gift, a gift which testifies to the vital naturalness of their lives. In striking contrast to this is the kind of singing, by trained voices and professional performers, which Natasha hears in Moscow at the opera (Bk. viii, Chs. ix-x). Here, as Tolstoy makes clear by employing his heaviest-handed satire, everything is dominated by "artificiality." The point, of course, is that it is while she is here at the opera that Natasha first becomes infatuated with Anatole Kuragin and is thereby nearly led to her ruin. Thus, just as Nicholas' different reactions to the hunts in the realms of peace and war were an index to the great change taking place in his values, so now the contrast between the singing at Uncle's and at the opera corresponds exactly to the contrast between the states of happiness and misery—of peace and war—in the life of Natasha.

Tolstoy dramatizes the transition between these two phases of Natasha's life by going still farther. In addition to the general contrast between the scene at Uncle's and the scene at the opera, he establishes a much more subtle one between Natasha's responses to these occasions. At Uncle's, as already noted, she first appears as a young countess, "reared in silks and velvets," who finds everything there an amusing novelty; when she enters the house, she winks at Nicholas, and both burst "into a peal of ringing laughter even before they had a pretext ready to account for it" (WP, p. 128; SS, v, 292). But as the eve-
ning wears on, she finds herself growing more and more in tune with her surroundings, until at last she is eating Uncle’s peasant cookery with the greatest relish, spontaneously dancing the folk dance, and discovering in Uncle’s and the coachman’s singing “the acme of musical delight” (WP, II, 130; SS, v, 294–295). She moves, in short, from a realm of artifice to the realm of nature, and this, like Nicholas’ breaking out of the “narrow unchanging frame” of army routines, is represented as a vital liberation. At the opera, however, Natasha’s emotions chart a course which is exactly the reverse. The artificiality of the performance at first repels her, and Tolstoy leaves no doubt in our minds that this is a thoroughly healthy, uncorrupted, natural reaction. But as the atmosphere of the theatre begins to intoxicate her, and, particularly, as Anatole begins to attract her attention with his flattering glances, which cause her to grow increasingly interested in him, the opera seems less and less bizarre and more and more “simple and natural” (WP, II, 201; SS, v, 362), until by the end of the third act she is sharing the box of Anatole’s depraved sister Hélène and joining the crowd in its wild enthusiasm for the leading singer. In so doing, she has moved completely from the realm of nature to the realm of artifice; thus, when, a moment later, with almost melodramatic appropriateness, “a whiff of cold air came into Hélène’s box, the door opened and Anatole entered” (WP, II, 204; SS, v, 365), her downfall has become inevitable. Finally, Tolstoy dramatizes the pivotal significance of this moment in Natasha’s life in yet another way, for it is paralleled a few chapters later, at the opening of Book IX, by the beginning of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia. Just as Natasha, who has been virtually identified in the scene at Uncle’s with the spirit of the Russian land and people (her dancing, for example, shows that she “was able to understand all that was in Anisya and in Anisya’s father and mother and aunt, and in every Russian man and woman” [WP, II, 132–133; SS, v, 297]), is nearly violated by Anatole, so the Russian land and people are actually violated by Napoleon, who at one point even thinks of Moscow, spread out before him, as a beautiful woman whom he is about to rape (WP, III, 70; SS, vi, 366). The personal and national calamities each become metaphors of the other.

III

There is, of course, more to Natasha’s story than I have outlined, and if space permitted it would be possible to demonstrate in detail how the remainder of it is designed just as carefully. After her near-fall in Book VIII, the second half of the novel charts her recovery—her movement back from war to peace. This movement is not, needless to say, merely a return to the peace she knew earlier. In the pivotal developments between the beginning of Book VII, where she was living through the last happy days of her girlhood, and the end of Book VIII, she has been catapulted into the adult world of evil and suffering, out of which, as the necessary condition for her new and higher happiness, she has to be reborn. Her earlier happiness is epitomized in Book VII by the uninhibited cry she utters during the hunt; it is a happiness of the earth. But her new happiness is epitomized at the end of Book VIII by the image of what is not of the earth—the comet of 1812, “which, having travelled in its orbit with inconceivable velocity through immeasurable space, seemed suddenly . . . to remain fixed in a chosen spot, vigorously holding its tail erect, shining, and displaying its white light amid countless other scintillating stars” (WP, II, 252; SS, v, 414). To be sure, it is through Pierre’s eyes that the reader sees this comet, and it is Pierre who feels it responding to what is happening in his own soul, but the same words can, with equal justice, be applied to Natasha, who, only a few chapters later, experiences remorse for her transgression, receives Holy Communion, again takes up her singing, and, above all, awakens joyfully to the fact that Pierre is now in love with her.

I mention this phase of Natasha’s story now, however, only because it is necessary for a perspective on the character development of another protagonist, Princess Mary. That Natasha’s new happiness continues to have one of its sources in that vitality and sexual energy—that naturalness and earthiness—epitomized by the hunting cry, is undeniable, for at the end of the novel she has achieved fulfillment in an exemplary Tolstoyan way by becoming Pierre’s wife and a prolific mother. But it is usually forgotten that in the course of reaching this goal she has also developed morally, achieving a transcendence of self by discovering the equally essential Tolstoyan virtues of love, humility, and self-sacrifice. By undergoing an evolution which comprises her momentary but sincerely repentant return to religion, her decision to sacrifice the family property in order to help evacuate the wounded from Moscow, her...
reconciliation with Andrew and her begging him to forgive her unfaithfulness, her passionate love and pity for all who share her grief for him, her acceptance of the rightness of his death, and her self-forgetful, healing love for her mother at the time of the death of Petya—Natasha ultimately comes to participate in the values understood from the beginning by Mary, the child of God. At the same time, by quite another process, Mary has come to appreciate the values understood from the beginning by Natasha, the child of Nature. Just as in the first half of the novel Natasha’s story counterpoints Nicholas’, so in the second half Mary’s counterpoints Natasha’s, with the result that each character is completed by the other in a vital way.

Specifically, Mary’s story is a movement from war to peace which takes the form of a struggle against her natural desire for husband and family and the resolution of that struggle. An index to this conflict is her initial hostility to Natasha, which develops at the time of the latter’s engagement to Andrew. Mary’s “involuntary envy” of Natasha’s “beauty, youth, and happiness” (WP, II, 192; SS, v, 353) springs from a desire for love and marriage which she has carefully tried to suppress. At the beginning of the novel, she is absorbed in religion, and religion alone seems to suffice her. When she receives a letter from her friend Julie Karagina, for instance, who speaks affectionately of Nicholas, she replies that a love which is far “worthier, sweeter, and better” than romantic love is “Christian love, love of one’s neighbor, love of one’s enemy” (WP, I, 117; SS, IV, 126–127). Two or three paragraphs later she refers in the same tone to Anatole’s forthcoming suit. On first reading we may be inclined to accept these remarks at face value, especially since there is much else in this letter (such as Mary’s preference for the “Epistles and Gospels” over “mythical books,” and her attack on war as a violation of the laws of the “divine Savior, Who preached love and forgiveness of injuries”) which, it soon becomes clear, is endorsed by Tolstoy himself. But the farther we read the more we see that Mary is rationalizing. There can be no doubt that her religious feelings and yearnings are genuine; her religiosity is not merely the result of sexual repression (as, for example, the religiosity of Emma Bovary so largely is). But sexual repression has led to a certain exaggeration of these feelings and yearnings, until she has come to rely almost exclusively on them as a compensation for the frustration of other desires which are equally natural for her.

At the root of the problem is the selfish posses-
love and marriage, and, on the other, a profound feeling of guilt, for to admit the existence of that desire would be to defy the father whose ambivalent behavior arouses both her fear and her reverence. She dares to assert her religious faith in the teeth of his scepticism, but not her sexuality. However cruelly he treats her, she refuses to admit to herself that he has frustrated her. Instead, she rationalizes herself into believing that religion, a solitary life devoted to serving her father and nephew (on whom she lavishes all her pent-up maternal love), and her otherworldly dream of someday becoming a holy pilgrim like her “God’s Folk” can suffice her. And her dedication to an ethic of self-sacrifice and forgiveness of injuries is, in some measure, an expression of this rationalization.

Signs of the resulting conflict—the war—in Mary’s soul begin to appear relatively early and grow increasingly apparent as the novel continues, finally reaching their climax in Book x, at the time of the Prince’s first stroke. All her resentment against her father’s tyrannical stifling of her natural life now forces its way abruptly to the surface of her consciousness in the form of a desire for the old man’s death, and fills her with horror and self-loathing. After the Prince’s funeral, she looks back upon her behavior toward him in his last days with a profound feeling of guilt, and, remembering the appearance of his face while he lay in his coffin, she runs from her room, screaming hysterically. To make the significance of Mary’s crisis perfectly clear, Tolstoy resorts to the moment of the collapse itself, for when Mary sees the men hurrying toward the house to announce what has happened, she runs “out to the porch, down the flower-bordered path and into the avenue” (WP, ii, 404; SS, vi, 155), just as Nicholas “ran out from the porch . . . [and] went round the corner of the house and along the path” at the Melyukov’s when he decided to declare his love to Sonya. Mary’s liberation is thus not only effected by Nicholas, but echoes his own before he actually arrives on the scene.

Another image of liberation connected with the old Prince’s collapse and linking Mary to Nicholas is that of her seated “by the window listening to . . . [her father’s] voice which reached her from the garden” moments before he is stricken (WP, ii, 404; SS, vi, 155). Inside the house there is only the rigid, life-denying domestic routine analogous to the “narrow unchanging frame” within which Nicholas lived in the army; but outside, through the window, lies that same larger world of earth and sky that Nicholas saw when he too looked “out of the window” on the day of the wolf hunt, discovered that “it was an unsurpassable morning for hunting,” and presently stepped “out into the wet and muddy porch.” Thus, though Mary, after her father’s funeral, shuts herself behind “the closed door” of her room to brood upon “the irrevocability of death and her own spiritual baseness . . . which had shown itself during her father’s illness” (WP, ii, 417; SS, vi, 168), no sooner does the sun begin to shine “into the open window” than her thoughts take an entirely new direction: “Unconsciously she sat up, smoothed her hair, got up, and went to the window, involuntarily inhaling the freshness of the clear but windy evening. ‘Yes, you can well enjoy the evening now! He is gone and no one will hinder you,’ she said to herself, and sinking into a chair she let her head fall on the window-sill” (WP, ii, 418; SS, vi, 169). The pattern is completed when, by Chapter xiv, the world beyond the window has become specifically associated for her with Nicholas: as she rides in
her carriage to Moscow, she "leaned out of the window and smiled at something with an expression of mingled joy and sorrow.... Sometimes when she recalled his [Nicholas'] looks, his sympathy, and his words, happiness did not appear impossible to her. It was at those moments that Dunyasha [her maid] noticed her smiling as she looked out of the carriage window" (WP, ii, 436-437; SS, vi, 188).

Mary's development is now virtually finished. She must still learn to appreciate the qualities of Nicholas' sister Natasha—to overcome the hostility which has existed between them from the beginning—and to marry Nicholas; but these commitments to a "belief in life and its enjoyment" (WP, ii, 355; SS, vii, 204–205) are implicit in what has already taken place by the middle of Book x. By then the war in Mary's soul is over, and she is on her way to the attainment of peace. Her marriage takes place, like Natasha's, in 1813, the year following the end of the war between the nations. It is true that the peace she finds in marriage is only a relative one, for her religious yearnings for a "sort of happiness unattainable in this life" (WP, iii, 452; SS, vii, 297) remain as strong as ever; her soul is always striving "towards the infinite, the eternal, and the absolute, and could therefore never be at peace" (WP, iii, 480; SS, vii, 325). But this does not lessen the fact that the happiness afforded her by marriage and motherhood is a very real happiness. She has always needed both religion and marriage, both the infinite and the finite, and this need persists to the end. But while the former desire, by its very nature, can never be satisfied, the latter can be and is, and Mary is at last free from the necessity of denying that it is essential to her true fulfillment.