UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

# CLOUD, CALF, AND CANNON:

# AN ECOLOGICAL READING OF *WAR AND PEACE*

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

IAN R. HILL
Norman, Oklahoma
2022

CLOUD, CALF, AND CANNON:
AN ECOLOGICAL READING OF *WAR AND PEACE*

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Rita Keresztesi, Chair

Dr. Dustin Condren

Dr. James Zeigler

Table of Contents

## Abstract

This essay engages in an ecocritical–spatial reading of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* focused on the narrator's conscientious and equitable treatment of nature, animals, and topography. Where traditional historical–temporal readings tend to break the book into constituent elements, typically emphasizing Tolstoy's historiography, this essay offers a synthetic reading made possible by an often-overlooked ecological theme. On a grand level, I argue that the narrator formulates the biosphere, not just humans, as his object of interest and defines war as a result of humans acting unnaturally and failing to think ecologically. More specifically, I argue that war and nature emerge simultaneously in *War and Peace* and appear intentionally fused throughout, that the book locates the practicability of war in soldiers subordinating each other as animals, and that war effaces the projective quality of landscape and forces soldiers to see and inhabit it as it really is—as unfamiliar and basically meaningless topography. I conclude that the narrator's thoughtful depiction of nature, sympathy for animals, and respect for the reality of topography are core to the book's rhetoric and form. To overlook these features is to overlook *War and Peace*.

**Introduction**

Despite occupying a conspicuous position in the literary canon and drawing analysis from all quarters, there is still much to say about *War and Peace*. Foremost among its unsunned facets is the attention Leo Tolstoy's narrator pays to the natural world and all its inhabitants, not just humanity. Though nature often makes glancing appearances in the surrounding criticism, only a few focused ecocritical readings of Tolstoy's works exist—namely Anastassiya Adrianova's "Eco-Spirituality in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*" and Rebecca Gould's "Topographies of Anticolonialism: The Ecopoetical Sublime in the Caucasus from Tolstoy to Mamakaev." This paper aims to fill, at least partially, the notable void of ecocriticism based on *War and Peace*. While the book takes a subtler approach to nature-writing than its American peers, never verging on the pastoral, it is more fundamentally and completely ecological than most literature of the time. The narrator consistently calls attention to nature, animals, topography, and their relationship to humans and the human institution of war in ways that should not go overlooked, especially given the ecological precarity of our modern world.

This paper offers a parallel line of analysis to existing work on *War and Peace* that I hope will prove interesting to Tolstoy scholars as well as those invested in ecocriticism. Centering nature affords us a shift from a traditional historical–temporal reading to an ecocritical–spatial one, with a strong emphasis on physical location and topography. Lorraine Daston's idea of "local natures," stressing "the way organisms and topography interweave," describes my conception of *War and Peace* (15). This conception suggests an alternative definition of what exactly the book is, which has been in contention since Tolstoy first disclaimed its novelhood in his essay "Some Words About *War and Peace*" (*W&P* 1309). Many of the book's war segments and all of its historical essays violate the conventions of the novel

and eschew, or at least subordinate, dialogue, meaning it is not always dialogic—i.e., centered on "the exchange of utterances in their social and historical context" (Morson 10). Rather than limiting itself to these social utterances, which Mikhail Bakhtin identifies as essential to a novel, *War and Peace* is a narrative about "the interrelationships between living organisms and their environment" ("Ecological, adj. 1"). It is not *only* a novel and not *only* dialogic but broader, embracing nature and organisms beyond just humans. This formulation aims to supplement Bakhtin's idea of the novel rather than discard it, and in so doing, my analysis accounts for the articulate ecology and tracts of silence that make *War and Peace* so notoriously difficult to define.

On a less theoretical level, this paper argues the following: 1) that war and nature emerge simultaneously in *War and Peace* and are often united, imparting nature's fictive joy to war and highlighting that which is damaged by war; 2) that characters project upon nature, and the narrator does not approve but merely observes; 3) that the narrator does, however, allow for and participate in subjection of the sky; 4) that *War and Peace* acknowledges and positively depicts a world apart from humans, populated with animals; 5) that the narrator treats humans and animals as equals in suffering; 6) that the Russian repulsion of the French, and nineteenth-century war generally, is made possible by humans subordinating each other as animals; 7) that Platon and the dog present an exploration of the ideal human–animal relationship; 8) that although Prince Andrei explicitly attacks the hypocrisy of animal-eating, he implicitly and subconsciously attacks animal-eating itself; 9) that Tolstoy extends this argument personally and insists that abstaining from animal consumption is the first step toward a moral life; 10) that war forces its soldiers to recognize the topography as it is and invites the reader to do the same; and 11) that *War and*

*Peace* stands in contrast to contemporary works of nature-writing, exemplified by Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.

All this is not to pretend that *War and Peace* is a thoroughgoing or prophetic work of ecocriticism. Its treatment of nature is, however, distinctly ecological. Though the narrator roots himself in the 1860s, adopts a masculine persona, and refers to Russian soldiers in the first-person possessive mode, he is an omniscient non-character, godlike in more ways than one, and is often critical of humanity. His distant perspective flattens what in conventional novels is an anthropocentric hierarchy of interests, with people at the top and nature "in the background, a more-or-less picturesque backdrop to the main drama of human activity" (Tally and Battista 5). In other words, to the narrator, humans are but one element of the world and of the ecology, and he treats them, animals, and the land with equitable consideration. Humans are not the subject of *War and Peace*; the biosphere is.

Most importantly, the narrator frames the central conflict of the book—war—as tragic not because it involves great men struggling for their principles and homeland, but because it is contrary to nature. He does not implicitly condone war by engaging with degrees of rightness and wrongness or by motioning toward some meaning, purpose, or intention impelling the action, but rather dismisses the vast, combative institution as an inarticulate and ultimately purposeless breach of sanity. I argue that the narrator characterizes war as a failure to think ecologically, as a fundamentally unsustainable and *unnatural* lapse, by repeatedly stressing that it is "opposed to human reason and to human nature" (*W&P* 647). The soldiers of *War and Peace* consent to operate outside of their nature and *the* nature, thereby sacrificing their position in, and violently severing themselves from, the grander ecology. This is the most profound tragedy of the book, and the way the narrator treats it and its victims from a disinterested

perspective is much of what makes *War and Peace* so structurally and compositionally unusual. Because the book functions on a grander logic concerned with all the biosphere, it warrants its own generic title. It is not just a dialogic novel; it is an ecologic novel. *War and Peace* is ecologic, has eco-logic, and is an ecologic.

**Toward an Ecocritique of *War and Peace***

In her ecospiritual reading of *Anna Karenina,* Adrianova stresses the novel's "intimate connection between humanity and the environment" and resistance to putting people and nature into strict opposition (107). This opposition, often associated with the philosophy of deep ecology, could appear to be *Anna Karenina*'s message given its overtly ecological, anti-industrial, pro-agrarian themes (themes which are made more manifestly than in *War and Peace,* with its quieter relationship to nature); Tolstoy, however, finds in religion a way through the cynicism of deep ecology. Critical to Adrianova's interpretation is Tolstoy's ecologically rooted spirituality, which bypasses "the test of reason and logic through an appeal to religious feeling" (115). She sees in *Anna Karenina* a divine valorization of agriculture, a "longing for a simpler, preindustrial past in which humans and their environment merged through agricultural action," communicated by Tolstoy via Levin, the novel's protagonist (Adrianova 119). Where Adrianova offers a compelling reading of Tolstoy the person, this paper distinguishes between narrator and author, save in the key topic of vegetarianism, and its focus is the text of *War and Peace* rather than the biography of Tolstoy. The narrator of *War and Peace* presents as loftier and more troubled than that of *Anna Karenina*, more interested in historiography than industry and agriculture, and though certain characters do parallel Tolstoy's life and beliefs, there is no single and unshakably direct stand-in as Levin. Because *War and Peace* observes how humanity misuses nature more than how the two can achieve equilibrium, this paper sometimes strays

toward deep ecology and its attendant misanthropy, but, just as in *War and Peace*, the message is ultimately one of hope and responsibility.

Gould's reading of Tolstoy's Caucasus stories paves the way for Adrianova's and my arguments, and her focus on postcolonialism and the sublime helps articulate why ecocriticism is such a valuable lens through which to view Tolstoy's works. Gould's analysis of the "imperial sublime," which she describes as a "romantic aesthetic … yoked to the imperial mission," frames some of Tolstoy's first works as pointedly ecological (89). While earlier Russian romantics (e.g., Pushkin and Lermontov) praise the beauty and sublimity of a "bare alpine landscape that had first to be tamed and cleared by imperial instruments of war"—a landscape invented by its being conquered—Tolstoy uses sublime nature descriptions "to expose the senseless brutality of colonial conquest" (Gould 97, 91). Gould also identifies in these Caucasus stories an ethnographic "semblance of verisimilitude appropriate to nonfictional discourse and often associated with ecocritical writing" (92). Here, then, a timeline of Tolstoy's ecological efforts emerges: the early stories that Gould highlights, namely "The Raid" (1852) and *The Cossacks* (1863), resist a tradition of pastoral and jingoist nature-writing; later in Tolstoy's career, *Anna Karenina* (1878) presents a direction of ecospiritual peace and responsibility. *War and Peace*, published in full in 1869, falls between these stages and acts as a vital pivot point. Gould writes that this "later antiwar fiction … tends to rely more on discursive statements than on the poetics of indirection," thereby sacrificing the rhetorical impact of "convey[ing] the brutality of war primarily through the juxtaposition of images" (95). This paper argues the opposite—that *War and Peace* not only juxtaposes war and nature, but that it does so on a grander level than the Caucasus stories and that it lays the aesthetic and rhetorical groundwork that ultimately makes possible the more ecologically optimistic conclusion found in *Anna Karenina*.

When considering *War and Peace* as an object of analysis, it is easy to feel like Nikolenka, the narrator of Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood,* and *Youth*, trying and failing to apprehend that which he loves most: he recalls features, incidental components, moments, and details, "but the complete image escapes [him]" (10). Over 1,300 pages and a plot spanning fifteen years, through a handful of languages and hundreds of characters, Tolstoy tells a story, presents a history, and encapsulates a world. *War and Peace* is intractable, and examining it requires some orientation. Structurally, four volumes and an epilogue comprise the book; these are divided into two to five parts each, and each part is subdivided into chapters, which typically span a few pages. Of the many characters Tolstoy depicts, this paper focuses on four: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, a cynical and depressive but highly effective officer; Nikolai Rostov, an impulsive student turned cavalryman; Pierre, a good-hearted but ideologically naïve inheritor; and Platon Karataev, an aged peasant who leads a simple life and loves a dog. Because *War and Peace* repeatedly binds war with nature, most of this paper centers on standout combat passages surrounding and comprising the book's three main battles: Schön Grabern, the first of these, taking place during 1805; Austerlitz, the great Russian defeat, taking place at the end of 1805; and Borodino, the last wide-scale engagement before the French reached Moscow, taking place during 1812. Rather than treat these battles chronologically, this paper examines each multiple times by topic, beginning with nature generally.

**War and Nature**

As Raymond Williams writes, "nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language" and thus calls for some specification (219). Though *War and Peace* and this paper embrace a holistic view of nature that includes humanity, this section is concerned with the non-human world—the rivers and trees in it and the sky above it. Before the sixth chapter in the

second part of the first volume of *War and Peace* (i.e., in approximately the first 140 pages), this sort of nature is not only irrelevant but *does not exist*. The narrator mentions neither nature nor its denizens, save passingly, such as in an anecdote about a bear that this paper addresses in its section on animals.

In these early passages that focus on the "peace" half of the title's dichotomy, in the drawing rooms and studies, amid the whispers and the gossip, the narrator presents events coolly and with a certain detachment. The landscape of this part of the book is spatially flat, interior, and mostly implicit; the characters, their bodies, their speech, and their thoughts populate a world with almost no materiality. Viktor Shklovsky indicates as much when he writes that "in *War and Peace* we find no descriptions of the chairs on which the characters sit or the rooms in which they live," but instead, in Part One, we see only an unswerving focus on people ("Technique" 196). *War and Peace* is at this point a familiar nineteenth-century book about the social world and the human apparatus, and it adheres to the notion of the dialogic novel. This is *War and Peace* at its most conventionally novelistic and peace at its most peaceful, unalloyed by the tension that will harrow and eventually blur it with war in the latter stages of the book. The narrator's concern is the infrastructure of the aristocracy, and the looming threat of Napoleon—of war—is one of many topics circulating among the nobles. Volume One, Part One consists of words about words, thoughts about thoughts, and presents an aesthetics of peace that is aesthetic only because of the reader's familiarity with the opulent parlors of Russia.

This changes in Part Two: at the crossing of the river Enns, just prior to the Battle of Schön Grabern, nature and war emerge (and, from here on, often appear) simultaneously, likened to each other. In other words, as war is born into the world of *War and Peace*, so too are nature and the narrator's interest in setting and space. Gould touches on a similar function in the

Caucasus stories, writing that "the paradox of war" manifests "as an oscillation between the natural … and the unnatural" (95), but here it is a fusion rather than an oscillation. This first becomes apparent in the sixth chapter when the Russian troops cross the Enns: the visual landscape of the book suddenly blooms, and the inaugural shot of war rings out. The narrator describes "a warm, rainy, autumnal day," "a diaphanous curtain of slanting rain," sunlight breaking through, "the bend of the Danube" (of which the Enns is a tributary), an island, forests, "a mystic background of green tree-tops and bluish gorges," deer, a meadow, and more, all at once, as if these images cannot help but tumble out in a long-suppressed and ecstatic rush (*W&P* 145–46). Directly after these bracing descriptions, an officer orders his soldiers to a cannon, and they go eagerly to fling the first missile of war. As the cannon fires, the "men brightened up at the sound," and "at *the same instant* the sun came fully out from behind the clouds, and the clear sound of the solitary shot and the brilliance of the bright sunshine *merged in a single joyous and spirited impression*" (*W&P* 147; emphasis added). War and nature are, from the first shot, not only coincident but *blended*.

This blending happens again in the form of an extended metaphor in the next chapter when a Russian officer finds himself trapped on a bridge and sees the river "rippling and eddying" below and the "living waves of soldiers" around (*W&P* 148). Another officer among underlings becomes "a fleck of white foam" atop surges; those out of place, such as "an orderly, or a townsman," become chips of wood "whirling in the river"; wagons become logs; and so on (*W&P* 148). When this bridge eventually comes under fire, Nikolai Rostov encounters his own fragility and possible death and experiences a moment of natural transcendence: he gazes "at the waters of the Danube, at the sky, and at the sun" and notices how beautiful and mysterious it all is, and then "the fear of death and of the stretchers, and love of the sun and of life, *all merged*

into one feeling of sickening agitation" (*W&P* 158; emphasis added). There are plenty more examples of this war–nature merger in *War and Peace*, such as another analogy of soldiers as a river (208), bullets that fly as "a flock of little birds" (289), the sun appearing and "with that light, as if in reply to it," a cannonade beginning (699), a shot heralding the return of the sun (1137), and soldiers compared multiple times to a "herd of cattle" (963, 1084) or beasts (1038, 1065, 1085, 1103). However, the profusion at the introduction of war is the most important, for it establishes a connection and commingling. The aesthetics of war *is* the aesthetics of nature.

To be clear, this is not simply because war takes place outdoors and peace indoors. Later in the book, as war and its accompanying chaos infiltrate previously peaceful settings and storylines, so too does nature, often in the form of analogy. Conversation becomes "the hum of bees" (*W&P* 329), Pierre acts "like a hare surrounded by hounds" when confronted by his wife Hélène (*W&P* 341), Count Rostov struggles with his financial affairs as does an animal "in a huge net" (*W&P* 552), abandoned Moscow becomes a queenless hive (*W&P* 938), repopulating Moscow becomes a reviving ant colony (*W&P* 1194), etc. Once the firing at the Enns rings the bell and summons nature into *War and Peace*, nature stays and spreads. Even with this proliferation, though, the connection between nature and war remains definitive and serves multiple purposes. The narrator routinely depicts the false gaiety of war and its soldiers, and by embellishing battles with sunlight, fields, and blue skies he emphasizes this effect. By taking advantage of the human tendency to see joy in nature (which exists apart from and outside of joy), he imparts an appropriately fictive joy to war. Moreover, this coordinated emergence and fusion demotes humans from being the book's sole focus and situates them amid the grander ecology at a crucial moment. These scenes do not simply show humans engaging in the human

activity of war; they show humans in nature *renouncing* nature—both theirs and nature generally—and suffering because of it.

### *Andrei and the Oak*

Beyond the obvious woe of nature's destruction, a more insidious and universal theme, the subjection of nature, recurs throughout *War and Peace*, and there are a few instances that warrant close analysis. The most notable of these involve an oak, the sky, and the topography, which is addressed in its own section.

The encounter with the oak is one of the most striking events in *War and Peace*, taking place over the three chapters in which Prince Andrei Bolkonsky visits the Rostovs. On his way to their estate, Prince Andrei, plunged into gloom and desponding per wont, happens upon an oak. He sees it as withered and indifferent to the surrounding cheer of spring and proceeds to personify it as a wise old cynic whom he agrees with for refusing to "yield to that fraud" of nature's rebirth (*W&P* 449). Grimly satisfied at finding a comrade in misery, Prince Andrei moves on and in the next chapter encounters and is abruptly revitalized by his love interest, Natasha Rostova. When Andrei passes the oak again on his return trip and sees it in sunlight and from a new angle, lush with foliage and trembling with life, he is "seized by an unreasoning spring-time feeling of joy and renewal" (*W&P* 452). This oak that at first appeared dead, bitter, and misanthropic a day later appears bright and lively, the perfect representative of nature. Not much has changed, though. The lighting between the two scenes differs, as does the angle of approach, and perhaps a few twigs have come to leaf in the intervening hours, but these changes are not as significant as that which occurred in Prince Andrei. This is, in a word, projection. Just as the oak never curses spring nor its birch peers, it also never basks in the bliss of life. It is an

unthinking fixture of the natural world. Whatever Prince Andrei projects upon it—whatever subject he forms it into—is but a product of his own psyche.

This is the only sequence in *War and Peace* to draw analysis from critics that could be construed as ecological, though the focus is always Prince Andrei primarily and nature circumstantially. The common reading emphasizes the prince's connectedness with the tree and even "the wider ecology" (Holmes 186): briefly unburdened from anguish, he sees and touches the nature that he had previously misunderstood and feels affirmed. Psychiatrist Jeremy Holmes identifies in Prince Andrei a shift away from self-concerned egocentrism toward empathy with others and with nature (187), and critic Laura Jepsen reads the leafing of the oak as a purely symbolic operation, mirroring Prince Andrei's reentry into life (6). These interpretations are, at best, anthropocentric and, at worst, naïve to humankind's relationship with nature. When examined from a distance with the whole of *War and Peace* in mind, the chapters with the oak do not appear as straightforward and strictly positive as some suggest. The quickness, extremity, and practical absurdity of the reversal, along with the fact that Prince Andrei's love for Natasha is one of many steps in his developmental arc and is far from its lofty conclusion, show that this is but a stage that he progresses through—*not* a moment of perfect cohesion between him, nature, and the narrator. In short, Prince Andrei misreads nature twice and in opposite ways, and the narrator does not approve or disapprove but simply presents.

### *The Sky, Its Clouds, and a Comet*

Subjection of the sky happens frequently in *War and Peace*, and these instances prove more complicated than that of the oak, as they are not framed as projection but as reception. In other words, the narrator depicts Prince Andrei not projecting onto the sky as he does the oak, but rather *receiving* something from it. This reception approaches unironic, narratively endorsed

transcendence and perhaps even succumbs to the "falseness in all our impressions of external things" that John Ruskin terms the pathetic fallacy (155) and that ecologically minded scholars sometimes refer to as the "naturalistic fallacy" (Daston 4). Prince Andrei enters the Battle of Austerlitz expecting to be proven a Napoleon, and he ends the battle lying on his back, marveling at the sky, and seeing the real Napoleon as a mite compared to the heavens. After first falling, he gazes up at the sky and wonders how he had ignored it until this point, how much more sedately its clouds move than the soldiers struggling on the field (*W&P* 298). "All is vanity," he decides, "all falsehood, except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing, but that" (*W&P* 298). Pages later, when Prince Andrei compares Napoleon to the sky, he characterizes it as "the lofty, equitable, and kindly sky which he had seen and understood" (*W&P* 309). From here on, the sky acts as a refrain for Prince Andrei: sometimes he remembers it and is renewed; other times he despairs and wonders how he ever saw anything up there in the great blue (*W&P* 416, 673). For Pierre, too, the sky is mysterious and sacred, delivering the comet that ushers him into a new life (*W&P* 644). This is also true for Nikolai, whose acknowledgment of the sky over the Enns is one of his only moments of spiritual acuity in the book (*W&P* 158).

The sky as mystical, otherworldly, sublime, and benevolent affects characters more than anything else in nature despite it being none of these things. Whatever mystery or godlike transcendence dwells above is but a fabrication of the viewer stuck below, marveling—typically by being forced onto their back—at that which they usually ignore out of physical necessity, for human concerns exist on and below the horizon. Meanwhile, the most clear-headed conception of the sky comes from Tushin, one of the few characters whom the narrator neither blatantly mocks nor treats with subtle irony. He says, "whatever we may say about the soul going to the sky … we know there is no sky but only an atmosphere" (*W&P* 189). Even Prince Andrei

concedes in his first encounter with the sky that "it does not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace" (*W&P* 298).

Despite these examples of lucidity from characters, the narrator himself vacillates and eventually falters at the Battle of Borodino. The most overt lapse comes at the end of the battle when the narrator personally subjects the sky to anthropomorphism. As thousands lay dead across the battlefield and the remaining soldiers fight on, exhausted and inertial, the narrator executes what is for him a rare technique—the personification and occupation of nature. "Clouds gathered," he writes, "and drops of rain began to fall on the dead and wounded, on the frightened, exhausted, and hesitating men, as if to say: 'Enough, men! Enough! Cease… Come to your senses! What are you doing?'" (*W&P* 878). It is one of the more horrific scenes of the book, and the narrator deems it so significant that he breaches his usual neutrality and interpellates nature, implying that to the normally impartial clouds there is nothing more important than what those small, warlike creatures are doing below. The bloodshed is so extensive that the very clouds cannot help but take notice and lament. Even beyond the obviously figurative styling of this description, the suggestion that nature notices, pities, and protests stands out in *War and Peace* for being so unusual. This lapse could be explained on a linguistic level; while in English "sky" and "heavens" share only a winking or poetic synonymy, in Russian, "sky" (*небо*) and "heaven" or "heavens" (*небеса*) are much more concretely related. Whether through some mythopoetic–linguistic predisposition or deliberate anthropocentric sentiment, the narrator draws a line: nature exists apart and unto itself, a misunderstood victim that characters recklessly mutilate and project upon, *until* a certain point when human concerns override all else. Nature then adopts an active, explicitly divine role.

## War and Animals

A benefit of characterizing *War and Peace* as ecological is that the term includes "[concern] with environmental issues," which this and the following segment address directly ("Ecological, adj. 2"). One of the key interests of environmentalism is animals—how they are treated, depicted, and seen—and in *War and Peace*, they appear often and receive thought-provoking commentary from both the characters and the narrator. This section focuses on 1) wild animals generally, including the bear that stands as nature's only representative for the first part of the book, 2) soldier–animal interaction, 3) horses specifically, and 4) animal rights sentiments as expressed by Platon Karataev, Prince Andrei, and Tolstoy himself.

### *Wild Animals*

Prior to the ringing of nature's bell at the Enns, when *War and Peace* consists of drawing rooms, whispered conversations, and parties, a group of dissipating young men gathers and ends up, as if by matter of course, tormenting a bear. The bear's presence in the debauchery is not even the main event; that dubious honor goes to Dolokhov's drinking game on a windowsill. A bear is simply there, somehow existing in St. Petersburg, and the narrator treats it as incidental, as a disposable element of the scene. Pierre dances with this bear in a fit of ecstasy, and at some point that the narrator reports but does not describe, he and the other young men tie a police officer to its back and drop the two in a canal, leading to Pierre's expulsion from St. Petersburg (*W&P* 37, 39). This expulsion, caused in part by the abuse of an animal, acts as the impetus that starts the longest-lasting and arguably most central character arc in the book. The bear subplot is as alienating as it is brief, and though it may seem humorous in synopsis, it is delivered levelly. Some readers may find these events amusing given how early they appear and how ridiculously they contrast with the mannered chapters surrounding them, but in retrospect, with *War and*

*Peace* and Pierre's complete story in mind, the bear takes on a clearer meaning. Here is what nature is in the civil world: a plaything to misuse and discard, barely notable by itself. It is only when the book shifts to war that the characters and narrator must face the grander form of nature, including its wild tenants, that the urban effectively erases.

In the latter half of the book, as the French invasion disrupts Russia's civil order, animals begin to reclaim two significant and microcosmic zones: the Bolkonsky estate at Bald Hills and Moscow itself. The former of these reclamations occurs shortly before the Battle of Borodino, as the French sack Smolensk and drive the Russians toward Moscow. Prince Andrei takes a detour from the main road to inspect his home, and there he finds that "grass had already begun to grow on the garden paths, and horses and calves were straying in the English park," and that "a piebald mare and her foal were wandering in front of the house among the rose bushes" (*W&P* 753). Most of the human inhabitants are gone, save for a few docile serfs, and Bald Hills is materially gutted, with "everything precious and valuable … removed" (*W&P* 754). What remains is a peaceful husk already being recovered and overgrown by nature—seen most strikingly in the presence of animals and their children. Though the narrator presents a specific place relevant to a principal character, it is reasonable to assume that what happens at Bald Hills happens elsewhere in western Russia, on all those estates and in all those villages that were not burned or occupied. During this period of wartime invasion, animals emerge from their hiding places and their domesticated labor to explore the abandoned world, and the narrator watches with sympathy.

Following the Battle of Borodino, after the Russian army retreats and the mortally wounded French army pushes eastward, Moscow evacuates and is left to the French, to the fires, and to the animals. During the gutting, one moment told from three perspectives indicates a vast animal presence that had previously gone unnoticed or ignored. A French officer reports that

some Russians have barricaded themselves in the Kremlin and set up an ambush; they wheel their guns to the doors and fire, and "a few instants after the echoes of the reports resounding over the stone-built Kremlin had died away, the French heard a strange sound above their heads. Thousands of crows rose above the walls and circled in the air, cawing and noisily flapping their wings" (*W&P* 961). This sudden and unexpected flurry of previously covert animal life reprises twice in the following chapters. Someone from the fleeing Rostov party looks back at Moscow, quails at it burning, and remarks, "O Lord! You can even see the crows flying off. Lord have mercy on us sinners!" (*W&P* 982). Later, when Pierre is captured as a suspected incendiary, he wakes up one day, notices and is thrilled by nature, and "hear[s] the noise of the crows flying from Moscow" (*W&P* 1090). This swarm, thousands strong, briefly unites disparate plotlines and draws the reader's attention to the new, and perhaps rightful, occupants of Moscow. Though the Rostov attendant and Pierre project their own evacuations onto nature by perceiving the crows as flying off, the first description—the description directly from the narrator, unfiltered through any character—shows the crows cawing loudly, circling, and *staying*. Just as Natasha marvels at the thought of someone remembering so much that they recall the world before their birth (*W&P* 559), the narrator is drawn to the idea of the animal world before and after the presence of humanity. He, unlike his characters, recognizes in the crows not an evacuation mimicking the movement of the Russians, but rather a glorious assertion of presence.

### *Soldiers and Animals*

The most telling passages about animals have to do with how they and soldiers interact—how they understand each other and function as equals in the narrator's eyes and how the narrator "relates the thoughts of animals with the same assurance that he uses in describing those

of people" (Morson 45). An examination of these moments requires some orientation in the broader field of animal studies.

In his 1789 *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* Jeremy Bentham seeks to define the "insuperable line" that must separate all humans from all animals to justify the way in which humans treat animals (qtd. in Singer 7). He asks, "is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse?" and argues that adult horses and dogs are "more rational, as well as more conversable" than human babies (Bentham 144). "It turns out," writes critic Greg Garrard, "to be impossible to draw that line in such a way that all animals are excluded and all humans are included," even when measuring by such intellectual divisions as reason and discourse (146–47). Bentham concludes that "the question is not, Can they *reason?* or Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" (144). Suffering, then, is "the vital characteristic" that entitles a being to "equal consideration" (Singer 7). The narrator of *War and Peace* recognizes and respects this, for he treats animals' suffering seriously and presents their confusion and dislocation as tragic, not humorous; he does not join in with the soldiers who cackle at the dog terrified by the falling shell nor the hare frightened by the clamor of war, and he dwells on the wounds and corpses of horses just as much as those of men (869, 824). In suffering, animals and humans are peers, and the narrator of *War and Peace* agrees with Bentham that this calls for equal consideration.

Such consideration helps explain why soldiers and armies are so routinely compared to animals, particularly in the last third of the book when suffering reaches its peak. The "War and Nature" section of this paper pointed toward several such analogies, and these deserve a closer look, starting above the ranks, in the sky. As the narrator lifts high over the terrain and theorizes about war and historiography, he adopts and repeatedly returns to an extended metaphor in

which the French figure as a herd of cattle or, more commonly, a beast wounded and driven by the Russian army, the hunter. It is a pitiful image, and it is one that the narrator clings to amid a sudden flurry of analogies near the book's end. In this metaphor, though, the hunter is not absolutely triumphant, for just as the French army withers and wastes, so too does the Russian: "the rapidity of the Russian pursuit," says the narrator, "was just as destructive to our army as the flight of the French was to theirs," meaning that if there even is a victory, it is pyrrhic at best (*W&P* 1165). Both armies—both the wounded beast and its hunter—suffer to the same degree in a shared, internecine plight. In highlighting this, the narrator comments on the spiritual fatality of hunting (i.e., the self-harm of pursuing and imposing suffering on a fellow sufferer) and on the equivalence of humans and animals in the capacity to suffer.

Within the ranks, deaf to the narrator's judgments, soldiers refer to each other as animals (e.g., "Now then, you foxes!" and "Oh, you crows! You're chickens!" [*W&P* 853]). This serves a few purposes best illustrated by two passages. In the first of these, when Pierre wanders the field at Borodino in his gentlemanly garb, the soldiers' "feeling of hostile distrust" because of his incongruous appearance "gradually began to change into a kindly and bantering sympathy, such as [they] feel for their dogs, cocks, goats, and in general for the animals that live with the regiment" (*W&P* 850). Later, in one of his absolute statements on death, the narrator says, "when seeing a dying animal a man feels a sense of horror: substance similar to his own is perishing before his eyes. But when it is a beloved and intimate human being that is dying, besides this horror at the extinction of life there is a severance, a spiritual wound" (*W&P* 1157). Synthesizing this pair of excerpts clarifies how and why soldiers treat each other as animals in war. It is a protection mechanism. Soldiers care for fellow soldiers as they care for their animals, with a breezy lightheartedness that disallows the absolute abjection—the "severance" and "spiritual

wound" (*W&P* 1157)—that normally accompanies the death of another human. This kindness, typified by "bantering sympathy" (*W&P* 850), fosters a camaraderie that is easy to enter and just as easy to exit in the event of death. If there were no "lower" beings for soldiers to compare each other to, they could not help but recognize their comrades as whole and complete humans and weigh their lives accordingly. At the first death, stomachs would turn, the "severance" and "spiritual wound" would erupt, and the troops would throw down their arms in recognition of the terrible crime they were all agreeing to commit. In short, because soldiers deliberately lower one another to the status of animals to ease their own mental burden, war—a breach of nature in every sense—is made possible. This is best expressed in the soldiers' treatment of their closest companions, horses.

### *Horses*

"What would *War and Peace* be without horses?" an ecocritical writer may ask (Clark 190). Simply put, *War and Peace* would not be. As the animals most common and dear to the regiment, it is upon their backs that war is made both logistically and spiritually possible. Because horses exist and interact so closely with war, and because they are of a "substance similar" to humans, soldiers can more easily subordinate one another and accept the toll of battle without going mad at their complicity in the bloodshed (*W&*P 1157). Horses present three more spiritual benefits to the soldiery: they act as a lightning rod for flashes of rage that might otherwise lead to conflict in the ranks (a put-upon colonel "[strikes] his horse with his long muscular legs as if it were to blame for everything," and Denisov hits his horse thrice with a whip instead of hitting his men [*W&P* 155, 1117]); they offer a commodity for soldiers to intrigue over, lust after, and flaunt about (best exemplified in Nikolai's constant cycling through prized horses, seeking new horses to buy, admiring and envying others' horses, and assessing the

value of horses); and they fulfill a need for companionship, though it is an ephemeral, projective, parasitic, and generally cruel sort of companionship. Logistically, horses mobilize weapons and masses of men that could not otherwise be mobilized in the early nineteenth century. Without horses, there is no war; without war, there is no *War and Peace*.

Just as the narrator bestows tiny, characterizing details on random passersby who never appear outside a single sentence, he describes horses with familiarity, precision, and interest—as individuals with individualizing traits and personalities. Here is Kutuzov's "plump little white horse," a perfect companion to the fat and precariously situated commander-in-chief (*W&P* 1170); there is a "light bay bob-tailed ambler" ambling along (*W&P* 762); here, a cornet's anxious, overeager mount, "[prancing] excitedly from foot to foot uncertain with which to start" (*W&P* 129); there, a group of horses, each "groomed till its coat shone like satin and every hair of its wetted mane lay smooth" (*W&P* 260); here, a "handsome black horse" and "beautiful relay horses covered with embroidered cloths" (*W&P* 294); and there, "a poor small lean Kirghiz mount with an enormous tail and mane and a bleeding mouth" (*W&P* 1116). Now suffering, here is "an unharnessed horse with a broken leg, that lay screaming piteously beside the harnessed horses," blood "gushing from its leg as from a spring" (*W&P* 206); there, "another horse lay, like Pierre, on the ground, uttering prolonged and piercing cries" (*W&P* 855). These last two examples reveal peripheral benefits to the narrator's focus on animals. Rather than show the violence done to humans, especially early in the book, the narrator spares *War and Peace* from the censors by lingering on the violence done to horses; this proves effective because soldiers and horses are made equivalent, because these moments are so gruesome, and because the narrator clearly cares for their suffering. Deep in the final volume, when the need for self-censorship relaxes, the narrator does not abandon the pain of horses but maintains the equation:

"all around lay the flesh of different animals—from men to horses—in various stages of decomposition" (*W&P* 1141).

Plenty of named and recurring horses populate *War and Peace*, too. Among these are Rook, Nikolai's first horse, eager to please, whom he looks down upon as cheap and damaged, feels a sympathy with, and yet fails to mourn, referring to him as "the horse" when he is killed (*W&P* 138, 200); Bedouin, Denisov's "black thoroughbred," a "good horse" whom Nikolai buys after losing Rook and parades before the emperor (*W&P* 150, 153, 263); Karabakh, young Petya Rostov's horse, whom he recognizes in darkness, talks to for comfort, kisses, and is habitually nipped by (*W&P* 1113, 1136); Viflyanka, old Count Rostov's horse; and Emperor Alexander's horse, who is, for whatever reason, left unnamed. These last two warrant special attention. Viflyanka only appears briefly, but he is introduced and named twice within two pages ("a sorrel gelding called Viflyanka" and "his good, sleek, well-fed and comfortable horse, Viflyanka, which was turning grey like himself" [*W&P* 530–31]), perhaps showing the narrator's awareness that readers overlook and easily forget animals. After all, no human character need be named twice in such quick succession. Emperor Alexander's horse, described as beautiful and "well-trained," is at first "unconcerned" with all the surrounding activity but later becomes confused, "not understanding the significance of the firing, nor of the nearness of the Emperor Francis's black cob, nor of all that was being said, thought, and felt that day by its rider" (*W&P* 272, 296). This demonstrates that the narrator does *not* do the easy and literarily attractive thing of just using horses as extensions of their riders, as means of complementary characterization. The emperor's horse has his own life and mind, and in this moment he is opposed to his rider and overwhelmed by the system of war into which he has been impressed.

*Platon, Andrei, and Tolstoy on Animal Rights*

"It's the horses' saints' day," says Platon Karataev after issuing a prayer; "we should pity the animals too" (*W&P* 1045). Though he occupies only a small section near the end of *War and Peace*, Platon is integral to Pierre's narrative arc and to the book's depiction of ideal human–animal interaction. He and the dog he loves function as a truly symbiotic unit, more friendly than most pairs in the book, and they are, in some ways, halves of the same character, acting as the only source of brightness in an otherwise crushing subplot of imprisonment and forced marches. They first appear on the same page: "a little dog" and Platon the peasant, who is referred to as "little falcon" and who, upon meeting Pierre, refers to him as "little falcon" too (*W&P* 1042–43). Platon and the dog also seem to be meeting each other at this point, for the dog receives little description by the narrator or attention from Platon, aside from a push and a touch and a bantering exclamation of surprise when the dog curls up at his feet (*W&P* 1045). In the very next chapter, this blithe sympathy warms, and the narrator states confidently that Platon "loved his dog" as he loves everyone (*W&P* 1047). The dog develops into a character one morning when Pierre goes outside:

> [he] stopped by the door to play with a little blue-grey dog with a long body and short bandy legs, that jumped about him. This little dog lived in their shed, sleeping beside Karataev at night; it sometimes made excursions into the town but always returned again. Probably it had never had an owner, and it still belonged to nobody and had no name … Its lack of a master, a name, and even of a breed or any definite colour, did not seem to trouble the blue-grey dog in the least. Its furry tail stood up firm and round as a plume, its bandy legs served it so well that it would often gracefully lift a hind leg and run very easily and quickly on three legs, as if disdaining to use all four. Everything pleased it. (*W&P* 1085)

The dog lives his own life not determined or defined by anyone else, and he visits people because he likes them, not because he is claimed as property.

After the French move Platon, Pierre, and their fellow prisoners from derelict Moscow, the dog's spirits increase. He runs along the road, frolicking and frisking, and, in a detail that the narrator presents neither as grotesque nor reprehensible, eats all he wants of the dead horses and men littering the roadside (*W&P* 1142). The narrator does not judge or shy from the aspects of animal life that tend to estrange humans and allow them to subordinate animals. He presents the potentially uncomfortable reality of the dog as dog, not as one of the "furry children" that people so dangerously imagine (Haraway 2065), and he balances this by also showing the artless sincerity, devotion, and love dogs feel for their friends: when Platon lags from the train of prisoners and is executed by the French, he starts to howl, while Pierre, deliberately ignorant to the fate of his friend, wonders why the "stupid beast" is making such noise (*W&P* 1145). About this moment, Slavic critic Gary Saul Morson writes that the dog "feels the pity Pierre has overcome" (267). Though Morson misrepresents pity as a uniquely human domain, implying that the goodness of the dog's reaction must be something other than merely animal, he draws out two important points—that the dog acts better than does Pierre in this situation, and that war necessitates an "overcoming" of basic human nature. The last appearance of the dog happens in the following chapter, when he sits by another soldier, "wagging his tail" again and reminding the prisoners and the reader of Platon (*W&P* 1146). In this relationship, the narrator presents a silent and equal companionship with a creature of nature; the dog chooses Platon with characteristic intuition, and Platon bonds with the dog without claiming or restricting him.

The most explicit statement about animal rights in *War and Peace* comes from Prince Andrei as he despairs about the purposeless insanity of war. During a diatribe in which he declares to Pierre that "the aim of war is murder," Prince Andrei inserts a spiteful aside about the hypocrisy of "a lady who faints when she sees a calf being killed" and "is so kind-hearted that

she can't look at blood, but enjoys eating the calf served up with sauce" (*W&P* 831–32). This is a curious observation because, though forward-thinking, Prince Andrei does not lead a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle. The real crime to him is the hypocrisy of someone expressing "magnanimity and sensibility" toward a being whom they would just as easily eat in another context (*W&P* 831). Prince Andrei would do no such thing; he recognizes and practically condones the bloodiness of food production and refuses to mislead himself, just as he sees and participates in the bloodiness of war but refuses to engage in "chivalry" and "rules"—mechanisms meant to ameliorate the cruelty and senselessness of humans killing humans (*W&P* 831). Despite his target being a morally comfortable hypocrisy, the fact that Prince Andrei uses the calf as an example points toward an awareness of something *wrong* in eating animals. He attacks the rules of war, but his true target is war itself; in the same way, he attacks the magnanimous lady for her hypocrisy, revealing a subconscious inkling that the entire calf premise is rotten. Prince Andrei may not follow his impression to its logical conclusion, but Tolstoy comes closer.

Thus far, this paper has distinguished between Tolstoy and the narrator of *War and Peace* and avoided biographizing either. Here, an exception proves instructive. Long after he published and disowned *War and Peace*, Tolstoy adopted a vegetarian—perhaps even vegan, by today's standards—lifestyle, best captured in the final two sections of his 1892 essay "The First Step." In these passages, he explores how the eating of animals is immoral and contrary to human nature, vividly recounts his trips to a slaughterhouse, and draws conclusions about the importance of an abstemious lifestyle, especially to those striving for morality. It is a powerful and disturbing essay in which Tolstoy employs the full force of his descriptive capabilities, delivering more detail (particularly detail of color and smell) than is his habit. Even more so than the horses in *War and Peace*, the oxen and bulls and rams herded to the abattoir are each characterized, and

their writhing, convulsive deaths—their being skinned alive, throats cut with sickening nonchalance, tails cracked and twisted to drive them forward into the killing chamber—are protracted and upsetting. Everywhere is blood. The floor is brown and shining; the men and the boys are smeared all over; the very air is thick with the reek of it. It might be easy to dismiss the scenes in the slaughterhouse as manipulative if Tolstoy had not been there himself, concluding that "it was horribly revolting" (*Essays* 90).

When not describing the nightmare of slaughter, Tolstoy focuses on the moral slip of humans eating animals when, as he repeats over and again, such consumption is not necessary. To live morally, one must first examine the basics of life, starting with "our relation to food, to which no one paid any attention" (*Essays* 82–83). Tolstoy points out how strange it is that humans have grown accustomed to killing and eating animals and how easy it is to coax strangers, even slaughterers, into admitting pity for animals and agreeing that their deaths are not necessary. Here enters a tension that Tolstoy does not resolve: what is horrible is not "the suffering and death of the animals, but that man suppresses in himself, unnecessarily, the highest spiritual capacity—that of sympathy and pity toward living creatures like himself—and by violating his own feelings becomes cruel" (*Essays* 84). Despite spending so much time and effort describing the killing in the slaughterhouse, despite being unable to restrain the pity he feels and the horror he experiences, Tolstoy refuses to call on the reader to abstain for the animals' sake. Instead, he calls on the reader to realize their human potential for goodness—to lead a moral life, which necessarily includes (and begins with) abstention from meat. It is a bizarre conflict, more concerned with spirituality than pathos, and it echoes Prince Andrei's incomplete and ultimately skewed statement on animal rights.

That very statement reprises in this essay, except this time it is not filtered through a narrator who, in turn, filters it through a character, but it comes directly from Tolstoy as Tolstoy. In one of many instances of him stripping Prince Andrei of his thoughts and expressing them as his own (Shklovsky, *Theory* 74), Tolstoy presents the same image of a "kind, refined lady" who

> will devour the carcasses of these animals with full assurance that she is doing right, at the same time asserting two contradictory propositions: First, that she is, as her doctor assures her, so delicate that she cannot be sustained by vegetable food alone, and that for her feeble organism flesh is indispensable; and, secondly, that she is so sensitive that she is unable, not only herself to inflict suffering on animals, but even to bear the sight of suffering. Whereas the poor lady is weak precisely because she has been taught to live upon food unnatural to man; and she cannot avoid causing suffering to animals—for she eats them. (*Essays* 90)

Rather than focus on the hypocrisy as does Prince Andrei, Tolstoy presents the scenario and leaves it, continuing in the next section by saying that "we cannot pretend we do not know this" and again reinforcing that the killing and eating "is quite unnecessary" (*Essays* 90). It is interesting that decades after writing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy, having now visited slaughterhouses and thrown off meat, revisits the same idea with less artifice; he had these feelings before, but it took years to act upon them, to look closer, to overcome the shame at seeing the suffering he condoned (*Essays* 83).

In "The First Step," the conflict between Tolstoy the moralist and Tolstoy the feeling human is undisguised. Though he concludes that people need not cease eating meat to be moral, he defines the trip to morality as beginning with the cessation of eating meat; though he insists that the true horror of food production resides in humans going against their nature, he lingers on the blood and the viscera and the suffering with undeniable distress. He allows his personal tensions to appear and develop in the form of his essay, and it is fitting, for the debate on animal rights pivots around experiencing, revealing, and eliminating cognitive dissonance. It is

disconcerting that over a century later the issue remains contested and that Tolstoy's optimism about the widespread growth of vegetarianism is proven premature.

**War and Topography**

Animals die and humans kill them, but at least there exists the sympathy of similar substance and the potential to refrain from that killing. For the landscape, however, there exists no such sympathy, and those activists who defend it struggle with the indifferent, the alien, and the effectively unreal. This is because landscape is a human construct, formed through the human gaze and necessarily referent to and dependent on the viewer. There is no inherent delimitation, perspective, or meaning to a plot of land. As literary critic Stephen Bending writes, the fiction of the landscape is "brought into being by a point of view, and if that point of view is physical, it is also ideological, intellectual, and emotional" and is, as such, selfish (1). For the purposes of this section, *landscape* is distinct from *topography*, the unfeeling physical reality of nature, little more than a surface between the world's interior and the outer void. In her 2019 treatise *Against Nature*, Daston writes that "we are outfitted with senses that convey the surface of things … our way of probing the viscera of the world is to turn them into yet more surfaces" (65). Because humans operate upon this perpetual surface, and because humans cannot help but project landscape wherever they go, the landscape–topography binary warrants examination. This is particularly true in the case of *War and Peace* since war valorizes the place upon which it erupts, and for a fleeting moment, nature and its contours dictate human activity.

Topography does not become landscape until a person sees it—until a person subjectifies and interpellates it as an avatar of self. Daston points out that "we are not content to receive appearances," to take in the topography as it is, because "we want to make them as well. To be real for us, a thing must *appear*" (66; emphasis added). Since landscape is perspective, it is

essentially protean, changing dramatically with something as simple as a step to the side. On a small scale, this is the case with Prince Andrei and his opposite formations of the oak. On a wider scale, this happens in scenes of battle when the landscape changes because the humans upon it change by entering a mode of strategy. Terrain in war, as seen especially in the Battle of Borodino, appears to explode, stretching vertically and presenting a loud multiplicity of landforms and features. Everything is steep, hilly, high, low, winding, and varied, and masses of people, horses, and wagons constantly move up and down, navigating this exaggerated, almost dreamy topography as seen from a distance, typically by Pierre. The narrator becomes concerned with forests, copses, woods, meadows, mounds, streams, rye-fields, and more, all presented at once and in sweeping panorama, obscured only by smoke or mist (*W&P* 812, 816, 823, 846–48). In the Battle of Borodino and other combat encounters, the narrator and his characters become concerned with the terrain as a real, concrete thing, beyond it being an object to project upon or better understand ourselves by. The soldiers physically *go into* what had been to them an image, and that image, landscape, reverts to something closer—still distorted, but *closer*—to topography, to an obstacle to navigate, see, and work around rather than to mold and personify.

When Pierre goes looking for the battlefield, he is surprised to find that there is no such thing, "but only fields, meadows, troops, woods, the smoke of camp-fires, villages, mounds, and streams" (*W&P* 816). He enters a tract of land expecting to project upon it military positions, tactically important points of interest, and clearly defined French and Russian sides, and when he finds nothing but topography, its features deaestheticize and defamiliarize, and he glimpses nature's unlimited sprawl. Pierre trembles before the fallacy of landscape. Suddenly, because of the coincidence of countless moving pieces, he and the soldiers have stopped here at this spot in nature, at this basically meaningless place, to do battle. It is not *right*, and no amount of

projection, no angle can reconcile the events with the place. The battlefield does not exist, the landscape does not exist, and in this moment the warring Russians and French are forced to occupy a point from which they can derive no comfort or sanity; they are forced to exist, die upon, and resorb into the indifferent and chaotic topography, and it is maddening.

To be clear, topography is not hostile. It derives no pleasure from agitating or confounding those who damage it, just as it feels no pain when they dig trenches into it. Rather, humans, especially when mechanized, exist in tension with topography, and war makes them face this fact. Soldiers become alienated from the world they inhabit as they are compelled to see and occupy it in ways that are new to them but that would be familiar to an older type of human. Such circumstances render the landscape uncanny, and this uncanniness—this disconcerting realization of unfamiliarity *coupled* with a return to a half-remembered, dormant past—reveals how incongruent humanity and nature have become. Animals live in what climes they can by nature, and their existence consists of navigating the topography as topography. Humans, on the other hand, go everywhere, subjecting and discarding, and it takes something as drastic as war to jolt them and show the selfishness of their relationship with nature.

### *Conclusion via Thoreau*

*War and Peace* begins with maps, presents scenes and plots determined by topographical features, and engages in natural descriptions predominantly in or around battles. In other words, Tolstoy's book invites the reader to consider landscape and its artificiality. In this we find the most important contrast between *War and Peace* and other nature-focused books of the nineteenth century, exemplified here by Thoreau's *Walden*. Where Tolstoy's narrator avoids loving, pastoral descriptions of nature, Thoreau goes to great lengths to render the titular pond and its surrounding environs in the most aesthetically pleasing light, which founding ecocritic

Lawrence Buell describes as "ransacking the local terrain for picturesque views" (535). Where Tolstoy's narrator draws a definite and often cynical distinction between humanity and nature, Thoreau cannot "get past the Emersonian axiom that 'Nature must be viewed humanly to be viewed at all'" (Buell 534). Most crucially, where *War and Peace* highlights the disconnect between topography and landscape, Thoreau "like[s] to see land as landscape, as scene" (Buell 539). Nature in *War and Peace* is abused and misunderstood by the characters, but nature in *Walden* is beautiful, in some way mystical, and friendly and healthy to humanity, so long as humanity listens. There is little crossover in the way the two authors depict the natural world. However, the opposite extremes that Tolstoy and Thoreau represent bend back toward each other, as does a horseshoe, in the misanthropy they occasionally evince—Tolstoy with his lofty, overwhelming criticism of humanity and Thoreau with his desire to isolate and free himself from civilization and too much human company.

Where Tolstoy and Thoreau share productive common ground is in their treatment, or at least ideal treatment, of animals. While Thoreau was not consistently vegetarian, the chapter "Higher Laws" in *Walden* espouses a forward-thinking, animal rights–focused philosophy: "whatever my own practice may be," he writes, "I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals" (147). This is a nice sentiment, though it is strange that he did not do what Tolstoy did and abstain from what he calls animal food. Thoreau's compunction with eating animals abides mainly in the "filth" of it and in the instinctual disgust he feels it entails (146), which contrasts with Tolstoy's stated reason for his vegetarianism—that exercising mercy on lower beings is the first step in living a moral life. Both authors sense something wrong in killing and eating animals when it is unnecessary and when there are better, cleaner foods at hand, and both justify their belief obliquely and

anthropocentrically, without prioritizing animal rights. This is the point of greatest crossover in their treatment of the non-human world.

Apart from these feelings and a vague tendency toward misanthropy, *Walden*, and by extension most nineteenth-century nature-writing, is not like *War and Peace*. Tolstoy's book depicts the multiplicity of life. It is not *about* nature or *about* war, though it muses on the former and assimilates the latter as a device. Because the narrator does not lose sight of civilization at large, of the gears turning behind the scenes, he can better analyze war and how it fits into humanity and nature's wider movements. *War and Peace* does not promote or pretend to understand nature, and the moments of combat in which characters must inhabit, conform to, and see nature are ecological only in secondary effect. As with Prince Andrei castigating hypocrisy primarily and the consumption of animals secondarily, the narrator primarily seeks to show humans who have forsaken their nature, who have displaced themselves into odd spaces, and who are struggling to cope, and as a byproduct, he secondarily and implicitly addresses how humans abuse the world around them. Nature, then, occupies a quiet but important rhetorical role, one that is perhaps more operative than in works that idealize nature.

Even if it didn't have dialogue or named characters, even if it didn't have family drama or romance, *War and Peace* would still be a long book, and it would still be a powerful book. What would be left is a compelling, protracted, and omnisciently stark description of one element of nature—humanity—violating its nature and jeopardizing an entire ecology because of it. Between tracts of essays, the narrator treats animals and the topography with much more care than is typical, and in scenes of battle, humans shrink from characters into mere bodies engaged in the unsustainable and unnatural tragedy that is war.

Works Cited

Adrianova, Anastassiya. “Eco-Spirituality in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*.” *Natural Communions: Religion and Public Life*, edited by Gabriel R. Ricci, Routledge, 2019, pp. 106–138.

Bending, Stephen. “Literature and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century.” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2015. https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-133

Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Earlymodern texts.com, 2017. http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/bentham1780.pdf.

Buell, Lawrence. “Thoreau and the Natural Environment.” *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, edited by William Rossi, Norton Critical Editions, 2008, pp. 527–543.

Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Daston, Lorraine. *Against Nature*. MIT Press, 2019.

“Ecological, adj. 1 and 2.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/249591.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*. Routledge, 2012.

Gould, Rebecca. “Topographies of Anticolonialism: The Ecopoetical Sublime in the Caucasus from Tolstoy to Mamakaev.” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2013, pp. 87–107.

Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness. The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, et al., 2018, pp. 2065–2071.

Holmes, Jeremy. “Tolstoy’s Oak Tree Metaphor: Depression, Recovery and Psychiatric ‘Spiritual Ecology.’” *BJPsych Advances*, vol. 21, 2015, pp. 185–187.

Jepsen, Laura. “Prince Andrey as Epic Hero in Tolstoy’s ‘War and Peace.’” *South Atlantic Bulletin*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1969, pp. 5–7.

Morson, Gary Saul. *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in ‘War and Peace.’* Stanford University Press, 1987.

Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters.* Volume three, Project Gutenberg, 2012. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/38923.

Shklovsky, Viktor. “Technique of Writing Craft.” *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, edited by Alexandra Berlina, 2017, pp. 178–201.

---. *Theory of Prose*. Translated by Benjamin Sher. Dalkey Archive Press, 1991.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. HarperCollins, 1975.

Tally Jr., Robert T., and Christine M. Battista. “Introduction: Ecocritical Geographies, Geocritical Ecologies, and the Spaces of Modernity.” *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism*, 2016, pp. 1–15.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden. Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, edited by William Rossi, Norton Critical Editions, 2008, pp. 5–226.

Tolstoy, Leo. *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*. Translated by Rosemary Edmonds. Penguin Books, 1964.

---. *Essays and Letters*. Translated by Aylmer Maude. Billing and Sons, 1903. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=cbRHAQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA90.

---. *War and Peace*. Translated by Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford University Press, 1976.