

(Drag)ging Tolstoy into Queer Theory: On the Cross-Dressing Motif in *War and Peace*

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In *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber writes that the current popularity of cross-dressing as a theme in art and criticism “represents an under-theorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking, whether particularized as male and female, black and white, yes and no, Republican and Democrat, self and other” (11). What Garber points to here is the usefulness of cross-dressing as a tool of deconstruction, and this is exactly how it functions as a motif in *War and Peace*.

As its title suggests, *War and Peace* is built upon a series of binary oppositions: French and Russian, Moscow and Petersburg, fact and fiction, free will and predetermination, and, of course, war and peace. The novel is filled, however, with characters who are exceptional for their ability to blur these boundaries. Pierre Bezukhov, the spiritual core of the novel, is a Russian, yet sympathizes with Napoleon. Natasha Rostova comes from an aristocratic family but is able to perform traditional peasant dances. In fact, many of Tolstoy’s greatest heroes and heroines are characterized by their roguishness, by their ability

to transcend seemingly fixed boundaries. Hadji Murat fights both for and against the Russians, and Anna Karenina’s public flouting of her affair with Vronsky marks her incursion into masculine behavior.

Similarly, the characters in *War and Peace*, when cross-dressed, serve as destabilizing figures who upset social norms. When a group of mummeters dress Sonya as a boy and Nicholas Rostov as a girl, the two become engaged despite the disparity in their social standing. Mary’s admiration for the cross-dressing God’s Folk represents her temptation to eschew the traditional path of a woman (marriage and family) in favor of a life of religious devotion. Pierre’s rejection of strict masculine behavioral norms (as contrasted to Nicholas) represents his eternal quest to upset the status quo, both as a pacifist and later as a proto-Decembrist. In every instance, cross-dressing functions in *War and Peace* as a radical and liberating shift away from traditional, and often oppressive, social values.

In this way, Tolstoy anticipates what has come to be known as “the anti-social turn” in queer

theory. First articulated by Leo Bersani in *Homos*, anti-social queer theory stipulates that sexual alterity can lead to a radical redefinition of other forms of social belonging. Along with other prominent queer theorists like Michael Warner and Lee Edelman, Bersani is interested in how the breakdown of mores surrounding gender and sexuality can be a catalyst for political upheaval. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy similarly imagines sexual alterity (which includes cross-dressing) as antisocial because it allows for a critical rethinking of those institutions that are based on strict gender roles, such as the military and marriage, war and peace, respectively.

This study is also an attempt to write gender into what Gary Saul Morson has called Tolstoy's articulation of "radical indeterminacy," a phenomenon he identifies in the second epilogue to *War and Peace*. Morson argues that on the question of whether or not individuals possess free will or are rather subject to pre-determined forces, Tolstoy ultimately concludes that if there is predestiny, its functionality is inconceivable to the human mind, and thus man-made attempts to reduce phenomena into "simple and comprehensible patterns" (90) are pointless at best and violent at worst. Just as *War and Peace* was an attempt to write against "simple and oversimplified" war narratives, the novel also undoes certain narratives of gender. Many of these narratives, particularly those governing masculinity, serve the very fictions of war and heroism that so incensed Tolstoy.

Cross-dressing can be read as a resistance to systems of gender-determinism that seek to simplify and create order on human lives, and thus cross-dressing plays an important role in Tolstoy's theory of free will. Consequently, this article explores episodes of cross-dressing in *War and Peace* where the undoing of gender creates freedoms that threaten systems of social order that impose limitations on human existence.

The Mummers

The first main scene in the novel where cross-dressing is presented as socially subversive is when a group of mummers (actually the house serfs in costume) visit the Rostov home and dress the children up in gender-bending costumes as part of the Christmastime festivities. Nicholas is dressed as an old woman in a hoop skirt, Natasha is dressed as a hussar, and Sonya is dressed as a Circassian with a mustache drawn in burned cork. This scene quickly becomes focused on Nicholas and Sonya, and the adoption of different gender roles transforms the potential for their relationship. Nicholas and Sonya have had a tacit understanding since they were very young that they would marry. Though his feelings for Sonya go unchanged, Nicholas goes back and forth on whether or not he will actually defy his parents and propose to her. He feels enormous pressure from his family to marry well and thereby shore up the Rostovs' finances, and if he were to marry Sonya, his parents, particularly his mother, would be devastated. Sonya understands the predicament that Nicholas is in and never puts any pressure on him to marry her. This all changes, however, when the mummers arrive and place them in the clothes of the opposite sex.

When he sees Sonya dressed as a man, Nicholas thinks to himself, "If only I had seen her before as she is now, I would have asked her long ago what to do, and I would have done whatever she asked of me, and all would have been well" (PSS 10: 289). Suddenly, what earlier had seemed impossible now becomes a foregone conclusion. What happens to Nicholas and Sonya in this moment? Why this sudden transformation?

I would argue that by including the Russian Christmastide (святки) ritual of cross-dressing, Tolstoy points out that the barrier that prevents Sonya and Nicholas from being together is as much about oppressive gender roles as it is about class. In this scene, the requirements for Nicholas as a man

and for Sonya as a woman fade into the background, allowing for their true desires to rise to the surface. In many ways, when Nicholas and Sonya dress up in drag, they are not transforming into new beings (as the mummings did), but they are exposing who they have been all along. Dressed as a woman, Nicholas does not feel pressure to ensure financial security for his family. The chains of male responsibility are broken for a short period of time, and Nicholas feels free to pursue a life of happiness and self-fulfillment. Sonya experiences a similar transformation. As a man, she no longer has to abide by the social conventions that prevent women from taking an active role in matters of courtship. Indeed, the text focuses on the transformation brought on by Sonya's male costume; she becomes an active participant in her own fate:

Sonya's costume was the best. The fake mustache and eyebrows suited her unusually well. Everyone told her she looked great. She was not like her usual self, but was rather in a lively and energetic mood. Some inner voice told her that now or never her fate would be decided, and in her male attire she seemed like a different person. (*PSS* 10: 281)

With her new mustache, Sonya no longer has to be coy about what she wants from Nicholas. As a man, Sonya feels able to take control and is no longer afraid to be open about her expectations and demands.

It is important to point out that her courage comes in part from encountering a new more feminine Nicholas:

Sonya also saw Nicholas differently. He was not the Nicholas she had known and always somewhat feared. He was in a woman's dress, with tousled hair and a happy smile that was new to Sonya. She ran quickly towards him. (*PSS* 10: 288)

The two passionately embrace, and for as long as they are in costume, they have no doubts about their future together. The ecstasy that Sonya and Nicholas feel when they see each other derives from their adoption of qualities normally associated with other sex. Sonya no longer has to play the role of timid, aloof, passive young woman. She feels for the first time in her relationship with Nicholas that she has the right to ask for what she wants. She is free to be aggressive in her pursuit of him, and without hesitation runs and embraces him. Nicholas, as a woman, is relieved of the pressure he has felt to marry well and to ensure the family's financial prosperity. The deep sense of happiness this scene creates for the characters and perhaps for the reader expose the anxiety that strict gender norms can prompt in the individual and the ecstasy that ensues when these norms are interrupted.

Ruth Warner has also written about this scene and has cited the importance of the specific day of the Christmastide rituals that Tolstoy chooses for this transformative moment. Warner explains that Tolstoy places this scene on the third day of the two-week long celebrations, the day that revolves around mummings, dancing, and fortune telling. Still in men's clothing, Sonya dares to participate in the most frightening of the divination rituals taking place. She sets off for the barn where she is to wait alone and listen for noises that will tell her more about her romantic fate. As Warner points out, Sonya goes to the barn to find her "intended," but the divination ritual is never carried out as Nicholas finds her and the two, enraptured by their new cross-dressed appearances, retreat to the barn to be alone. Sonya's plan to control her fate by finding her "intended" is pushed aside by this spontaneous romantic connection to Nicholas that will ultimately prove to be ephemeral (63).

Indeed, Nicholas' decision to propose to Sonya during the Christmastide rituals is not only ephemeral, but subversively so. Whereas Nicholas' eventual marriage to the wealthy Princess Mary will secure his family's fortune for generations to

come, a marriage to Sonya will only be fulfilling for Nicholas in his own lifetime. Such a marriage does not take into account the financial future of their children. It rejects marriage as a union based on futurity.

One controversial permutation of “anti-social” queer theory is found in Lee Edelman’s book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman expands on Warner’s assertion that queerness rejects “regime of the normal” in outlining one of the forms in which that rejection takes shape. Queerness, according to Edelman, inherently disavows futurity. In “The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory,” Judith Halberstam argues that the strength of Edelman’s book is its rethinking of life *trajectories*. Queer politics in an “anti-social” framework, she insists, is fundamentally about questioning the inevitability of certain life paths, including, but not limited to, marriage and children. Halberstam explains, “Queerness names the other possibilities, the other potential outcomes, the non-linear and non-inevitable trajectories that fan out from any given event and lead to unpredictable futures” (153). In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler perceives the power of drag in just that, its critique of inevitability and reality: “No political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one’s notion of the possible and the real. Drag is an example that is meant to establish that ‘reality’ is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be” (xxv).

In *War and Peace*, drag functions precisely as a way of freeing the characters from what would seem to be the more “realistic” outcomes. It is only when they are cross-dressed that Nicholas and Sonya allow themselves to make their fantasy their new reality.

The God’s Folk at Bald Hills

The ephemerality of Nicholas’ relationship to Sonya clears the way for his future wife, Princess Mary, whose path to their marriage was interestingly also at one time threatened by cross-

dressers. When Pierre arrives at Bald Hills to see Prince Andrei, he finds a group of religious wanderers called “God’s Folk” there, visiting Princess Mary. Mary is speaking to two of them alone when Andrei enters the room with Pierre. Rather abruptly, Andrei announces to Pierre that one of the God’s Folk is a woman and not a man: “Il faut que vous sachiez que c’est une femme” (You must know that this a woman) (PSS 10: 119). They are referring to Ivanushka, a woman who dresses like a man, uses masculine grammatical endings, and tries to affect a deep bass voice. Mary rebuffs Andrei for his rudeness towards her guest, but he explains that he had to make sure Pierre did not think she was alone with a man as that would be inappropriate. Tolstoy’s characterization of the God’s Folk here is surprising and mysterious. His reason for depicting one of them as a transvestite is unclear. In fact, Pierre’s entire visit to Bald Hills is rife with unexplained moments of gender ambiguity. In his monograph on the character of Pierre, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere discusses this episode at Bald Hills and enumerates the various instances in which the genders of different characters require clarification. He observes:

By the time of the visit in Bald Hills is over (just six pages of Russian text) Tolstoy has offered the reader four different situations in which the cognitive boundary between man and woman is questioned. Gender, it seems, is not as fixed as it appears. These situations might be stated in the form of four propositions made by various speakers:

Prince Andrei: Ivanushka is not a man, but a woman.

Prince Andrei: The Holy Mother is not a woman, but a general (a man)

Princess Mary: Andrei is not a woman (but a man)

Old Prince: Pierre talks like a woman, but he is a fine fellow. (142)

Rancour-Laferriere goes on to ask, “What is the overall significance of these propositions? Why does Tolstoy insert them all at once into the fairly short passage following the tête-à-tête between Pierre and Andrei?” (143). Rancour-Laferriere is more interested in Pierre’s involvement in this scene,¹ and it is no coincidence that Mary and Pierre, two of the novel’s most androgynous characters, respond positively to the cross-dressing God’s Folk. This moment, however, is more emotionally fraught for Mary. She is deeply upset by what she feels is her brother and father’s rejection of the God’s People and their way of life. Likewise, Pierre’s compassion towards them touches her deeply, and she feels that in understanding them, Pierre understands her. Mary identifies with the God’s Folk, and though she does fantasize about getting married and having children, she is also greatly tempted by the life they lead. In some ways, this early iteration of Mary before her marriage to Nicholas is a closer precursor than Sonya to later Tolstoyan spinsters like Varenka in *Anna Karenina* and Marya Pavlovna in *Resurrection* whose lives revolve around service to others.

The God’s Folk also represent Mary’s desire to leave Bald Hills and have a life beyond that of a daughter caring for her father. Overall, Mary’s close identification with the cross-dressing God’s Folk indicates her desire for a life not determined by her gender, for a destiny outside of marriage and familial obligations. The God’s Folk also represent a rejection to systems of logic and order. Prince Andrei cannot listen to their stories of miracles, and leaves the room. Pierre, however, stays and listens in what will become a pattern of Pierre participating in conversations that other men cannot comprehend.

Turning Away From Cross-dressing

When Nicholas and Mary do finally meet and fall in love, their struggles to live up to the demands of masculinity and femininity, respectively, briefly

disappear, and suddenly they resemble perfect male and female archetypes. Mary, who for so long has failed to affect the femininity of Mademoiselle Bourienne or Princess Lise, is able, if only momentarily, to embody a type of femininity: the damsel in distress. When Nicholas and his men go to the town of Bogucharovo to look for provisions, they are approached by one of Princess Mary’s domestic serfs, who explains that Mary and the women of the house are trapped on the estate. The serfs have revolted against her and are ready to prevent her from leaving. When Nicholas and his men arrive, Mary tries to escape, but her coachman, mistaking Nicholas and his men for the French, flees, abandoning the princess, who begins crying uncontrollably. Nicholas, as he stands before Mary, who is visibly frightened and unsure of what to do, immediately recognizes the scenario as fitting into a narrative convention: “Rostov immediately imagined that there was something romantic in this meeting. ‘A poor defenseless girl, overcome with grief, at the mercy of crude, rebellious peasants’” (*PSS* 11: 160). Nicholas is excited at the prospect of enacting this familiar storyline and subdues the rebellious peasants with more force and determination than he had ever shown in war. Nicholas, who had so long struggled on the battlefield and frequently felt impotent as a soldier, suddenly becomes valiant and powerful in this scene. He succeeds in quelling the small rebellion.

This bravery and staunchness contrasts with a similar moment in which the reality of Nicholas’ experiences in battle failed to live up to the glorious fictions of traditional war narratives. After surviving a chaotic cavalry attack on the battlefield, Nicholas runs back to tell the other men what happened:

He began telling the story with the intention of telling everything exactly as it was, but imperceptibly, unwittingly, and unavoidably wavered from the truth. If he had told the truth

to his listeners, who like himself had already heard many stories about attacks and had formed a definite idea of what an attack was like, and were expecting to hear a similar story now, they would not have believed him. (PSS 9: 295)

This passage offers key insight into Nicholas' character. He invariably tries to live up to a set of expectations, whether they be the expectations of a literary genre or those of his male gender. In the scene of the peasant rebellion on Mary's estate, he actually succeeds in living up to both simultaneously.

John Givens has also written about this scene, arguing that indeed, all of Tolstoy's young war heroes beginning with *Sevastopol Sketches* learn the danger of narrativizing their experiences on the battlefields after encountering the true chaos of war. I would argue that Nicholas, however, does not completely learn his lesson and does indeed revert to narrative, but replaces his role of war hero with that of romantic hero. Givens points out that in these scenes where Tolstoy lays bare the functionality of narrative, he is "making strange" the events of the novel (23). Indeed, if the definition of the keystone Formalist concept of "making it strange" (остранение) is "to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (Shklovsky 12), then it can be said that Mary and Nicholas' first meeting is about perceptions, particularly perceptions of gender, and how they fuel narratives in art and in life.

Like Nicholas, Mary struggles throughout her life to live up to the demands of compulsory femininity. When Mademoiselle Bourienne and Lise help her get dressed for Anatole's visit, Mary is overcome with discomfort and anxiety. Her meeting with Anatole is similarly distressing. Unlike Mademoiselle Bourienne and Lise, two women decidedly comfortable with their femininity, Mary feels uneasy in a fancy dress with her hair done up. Accordingly, when she sees

Mademoiselle Bourienne and Anatole kissing behind her back, she experiences neither anger nor dismay, but relief. She is immediately excited about making this match for her friend Mademoiselle Bourienne and almost gleefully gives up her designs on Anatole. However, Mary, like Nicholas, eventually finds a comfort in fitting into certain gendered narratives that allow her life choices to be predetermined by outside forces.

The supposition that Tolstoy might find the male/female binary oppressive and valorize androgyny complicates what has been a tendency to depict Tolstoy as a misogynist who "killed" his heroine in *Anna Karenina* for abandoning her roles of wife and mother. In *Framing Anna Karenina*, Amy Mandelker lists the various charges of misogyny that have been levied against Tolstoy in recent criticism:

Feminist critiques of Tolstoy document and register his multiple verbal assaults on his wife (and, by extension, women), his transformation of the married Natalia Rostova into a domestic drone, his "murder" of Anna Karenina, his relegation of his heroines to endless childbirth, nursing, and drudgery, and his hypostatization of the "ideal" woman into a de-sexed, plain Madonna, Princess Maria, Dolly Oblonskaya. (19)

However, Mandelker's book undoes this "myth of misogyny" (15) by exploring how "de-sexing" itself could have been liberating for women at a time when their fates were often determined by male sexual desire. One could argue that Mary is not *violently* "desexed" by Tolstoy, but rather that she was comfortable leading a life that is, by traditional standards, relatively unfeminine. It was when other characters like Lise and Mademoiselle Bourienne try to force Mary into more traditional female roles, to force her sex upon her, that she was truly victimized. Yet she, like Nicholas, does eventually succumb and performs perfectly in her role of damsel in distress.

Given that for Tolstoy, much of *War and Peace* was devoted to transcending narrative clichés, what does it mean that Mary and Nicholas' first meeting is so conventional? Based on what we know about Mary and Nicholas, the successful embodiment of gender stereotypes we see in the scene is a rare experience for each of them, and as we learn rather quickly, it cannot be sustained. When the other soldiers joke to Nicholas that he went to look for hay but came back with one of the wealthiest heiresses in Russia, he becomes angry because this thought occurred to him as well. In fact, he had begun to contemplate how Mary's wealth could help shore up his family's finances. Thus, the moment the roles are reversed, and it is Princess Mary who is coming to Nicholas' rescue, the dream vanishes and the rest of their relationship is defined by trying to recapture it.

Their eventual marriage, though generally fulfilling, is punctuated by periods of unhappiness that are rooted in their respective struggles to sustain the fictions of masculinity and femininity. Nicholas brutally beats his serfs and displays a patriotism rooted in a love for order more so than in a love for country. When Nicholas and Mary visit Pierre and Natasha, Natasha confides that Pierre is very good with children and even jokes that "Pierre nurses them (их нянчит) well" (PSS 12: 273). Nicholas is quick to make his aversion to babies known, as if the very thought of the "maternal" closeness Pierre enjoys with his children is disconcerting and repulsive.

Mary, though initially attracted to Nicholas' masculinity, finds his brutality towards the serfs unnerving. When contemplating the happiness she feels in her marriage with Nicholas, Mary finds herself troubled by a longing for a more spiritual sort of fulfillment that she does not experience with her husband:

Her face lit up with a smile, but in the very same moment, she sighed, and the look in her profound eyes expressed a quiet sadness. It was

as if, even with all the happiness she felt, there was still a different kind of happiness, unattainable in this life, of which she involuntarily thought of in this moment. (PSS 12: 265)

The other happiness could be the spiritual joy she would have felt had she embarked on a life of religious devotion, like that of the cross-dressed God's Folk. It is important to point out that Pierre—in many ways Mary's spiritual counterpoint in the novel—is able to have both. While he enjoys his home life with Natasha, Pierre is frequently away, pursuing his political projects and social experiments. Pierre is able to have both familial and spiritual happiness, but Mary, as a woman, must choose.

Happy Androgynes

The other marriage the epilogue explores in depth is Pierre and Natasha's. Unlike Nicholas and Mary, whose love is propelled by a story in which each "succeeds" at embodying masculinity and femininity, Pierre and Natasha's love for each other is repeatedly de-gendered through Tolstoy's use of androgynous imagery to describe their bond.²

Pierre first shares his feelings for Natasha with the French soldier whose life he saves. As the two men start talking about women and love, the French soldier describes his numerous love affairs, and brags about his sexual exploits. Pierre immediately protests that his feelings for Natasha, in contrast, are not lustful. In fact, in every instance, Pierre affirms his love for Natasha and simultaneously denies her sexuality and even her femininity. Insecure about whether Natasha returns his feelings, Pierre imagines her thinking: "Doesn't he know that he is just a man, and that I... I am something completely different, something much higher" (PSS 12: 229). In contrast, when Pierre falls in love with Hélène, his language emphasizes her womanhood. Tolstoy writes that Hélène appeared to Pierre as if to say, "Had you not noticed that I am a woman? Yes, I am a woman"

(PSS 13: 478). Pierre's marriage to H el ene brings him only misery, whereas his marriage to Natasha, who transcends the status of "woman" to become "something much higher," something beyond gender, proves fulfilling.

Pierre's marriage to Natasha reads as not merely the joining of two lives, but the joining of two genders into an androgynous whole. They agree on everything. They intuit one another's thoughts and feelings. Natasha gains a lot of weight over the years and is little concerned with her appearance, explaining that to attract her husband would have seemed as strange as trying to attract herself. Pierre and Natasha become one integrated being. Even before they are married, when Pierre is thinking about proposing, he says to himself: "Can it be that that hand, that face, those eyes, all these treasures of feminine charm that are so foreign to me now, can it be that one day, they will be mine forever, as familiar to me as I am to myself?" (Tolstoy 15: 163). Rancour-Lafferiere argues that their closeness is a product of Pierre's narcissism and that their ability to intuit one another's thoughts and feelings is simply symptomatic of Natasha being swallowed up by Pierre's ego. However, as Rancour-Lafferiere himself points out, this sort of violent egotism is not in keeping with Pierre's character. Furthermore, such an analysis does not account for the symbiotic nature of Pierre and Natasha's marriage: Natasha's thoughts do not simply mirror Pierre's; his mirror hers as well.

Their marriage is much closer to what Leo Bersani defines in *Intimacies* (2008) as "impersonal narcissism" in which "the self the subject sees reflected in the other is not the unique personality central to moderns notions of individualism" (*Intimacies* 87) The subject, in this instance, sees himself in the other, and in that knowledge of the other, comes to see and know himself. "The fundamental premise of 'impersonal narcissism,'" he explains, "is that to love the other's potential self is a form of self-love" (126). Bersani contrasts "impersonal narcissism" with conventional forms

of love that draw up borders between the two subjects and protect the boundaries of each individual's ego. The proliferation of gendered boundaries creates feelings of estrangement and animosity in Nicholas and Mary's marriage. They frequently fail to communicate, and Tolstoy writes that during Mary's pregnancies, they feel especially hostile and alienated from one another. In *Intimacies*, Bersani is writing against a love based on difference—most importantly, sexual difference—and the concept of "impersonal narcissism" is an apt model for theorizing Pierre and Natasha's androgynous marriage.

Cross-dressing comes up again not only in Nicholas and Mary's relationship, but also in Pierre and Natasha's. After Natasha's scandal with Anatole, she is devastated and declares that she never wants to see another man again. She declares that to her, all men are nothing more than Nastasya Ivanovna, the cross-dressing buffoon who lives on the Rostov estate. Immediately after thinking this, she says she would be glad to see only one person, Pierre.

This connection between Pierre and Nastasya Ivanovna is appropriate given Pierre's androgynous characterization throughout the novel. From the very beginning of *War and Peace*, Pierre is the only male character who seems capable of empathizing with the women around him, and unlike the other male characters, the glory of war is not apparent to him. Whereas he easily commiserates with the women of the novel who stay behind, he struggles to identify with men like his friends Andrei and Nicholas Rostov, who never question the war and leap at the chance to fight.

Pierre, as a character, is largely defined by his hybridity. He is a Russian with a French name who first appears in the novel as a Napoleon sympathizer. He is also of mixed social background, inheriting his father's entire estate despite being illegitimate.

Shortly into the novel, he goes to visit his friend Prince Andrei and his wife Lise. Lise expresses

frustration over Andrei's decision to leave for war while she is still pregnant. Lise genders the discussion, arguing that war only makes sense to men and that women are more prone to pacifism. Pierre sides with the women, stating that he too does not understand the need to fight. When Andrei exclaims that he does not comprehend his wife's fear of childbirth, Pierre's response to Lise reveals empathy: "I assure you, I myself have experienced..." (PSS 9: 33). He speaks as if he, Pierre, a man, could somehow identify with being pregnant. A man who can navigate the female realm, Pierre can speak to women freely and openly, though Andrei, a paragon of masculinity, also loves him.

Pierre's closeness with the novel's female characters is frequently connected with his disinterest in war. One of Pierre's earliest flirtations with Natasha occurs when, out of boredom, he leaves the circle of men at the Rostov home who are talking about politics, and goes to talk with the women. Tolstoy literalizes the gender divide at the table: On one side, the men are talking politics, while opposite them, the women are discussing other matters. Just as in the scene with Andrei and Lise, Pierre is the only person who is able to cross that divide and communicate with both men and women.

Pierre's gender neutrality is repeatedly linked with his neutrality during the early parts of the war. Prince Andrei's father mocks Pierre's pacifism, calling it "бабьи бредни" [old woman's nonsense] (Tolstoy 10: 123). The old Prince Bolkonsky, however, takes a strong liking to Pierre, as does everyone in the Bolkonsky home. Pierre's unique ability to communicate with everyone, male and female, French and Russian, surfaces again when he has a change of heart about Napoleon and decides to assassinate him, but instead ends up saving a Frenchman from the Russians. Even though the Frenchman eventually learns that Pierre is Russian, the two remain on good terms.

The only person who ever dislikes Pierre for that very neutrality is Nicholas, who looks disparagingly at Pierre and his life of comfort while Nicholas and his friends are off fighting: "Rostov looked disapprovingly at Pierre, first because, to his hussar eyes, Pierre appeared a rich civilian, the husband of a beauty, in general—a woman" (PSS 10: 22). Pierre's disinterest in "masculine" activities like war makes Nicholas uncomfortable, and it even offends him. This difference between Pierre and Nicholas becomes a metaphor for their contrasting politics. In the epilogue, Pierre has become a leader of a movement to reform the government. Nicholas is incensed at his brother-in-law's actions and threatens to turn him in if he should ever seriously seek to undermine the tsar. When Pierre tells Natasha about Nicholas' threat, she replies that Nicholas will always go along with whatever is accepted by society. Pierre, on the other hand, as we have seen, will always go with that which is destabilizing and unpalatable to the vacuous tastes of the upper crust. Pierre's hybridity represents a direct threat to the social order that Nicholas' rigidity upholds. Pierre's whole being, flexible in nature, offends Nicholas' reliance on systems, narrative order, and predestined roles for men and women.

From his very entrance into the novel, Pierre is always at odds with the rest of society, refusing to sacrifice his beliefs in order to belong. He makes his approval of Napoleon known at Anna Pavlovna's party and attracts the disdain of everyone present. The single most important collective action the country is taking at the time, going to war, does not appeal to Pierre (at least not for some time). He is not afraid to defy the Masons and risk expulsion from the Brotherhood. There is nothing in Pierre that ever propels him to conform.

In *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Michael Warner quotes Hannah Arendt's critique of the body: "The social could achieve a scientific character only when men had become social beings and unanimously followed certain patterns of behavior,

so that those who did not keep the rules could be considered to be asocial or abnormal” (xxvii). Warner concludes that queerness not only can be but *is* essentially anti-social—if using Arendt’s definition—for it does not conform to “normal behavior.” As Warner connects sexual alterity with non-normative behavior, Tolstoy similarly marks Pierre’s rejection of systems imposed on human behavior with gender ambiguity. Overall, what the various cross-dressing scenes in *War and Peace* all have in common is that they represent freedom from systems, patterns, and narrative devices that limit the possibilities of the human experience. The cross-dressing mummies, the God’s Folk, and the androgynous Pierre all live within a joyful chaos of unrestricted narrative potential.

Notes

All translations are my own.

1. Rancour-Lafferiere suggests that this scene might point to some repressed homosexual tendencies in Pierre.
2. The idea of the “androgynous” marriage was an integral part of European discourses on gender equality in the nineteenth century. John Stuart Mill in particular integrated androgynous imagery in his discussion of women’s rights. For more on Mill and the concept of androgynous feminism, see Urbanati.

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