



Military Prose in Russian Literature in the 1990s–2000s

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Abstract: The formation of a new military prose took place in the conditions of an undeclared war, which formed a stable anti-militarist public consciousness, which made significant adjustments to modern historical reconstructions. With all the variety of artistic approaches and stylistic incarnations, modern prose about the Great Patriotic War is aimed at solving the main issue - the price of Victory. The new military prose merges with the literature of the "lost generation", assimilates the experience of existentialist prose, the techniques of modernist writing, and enters the field of genre experiments.

Key words: modern military prose, battle tradition, individual style, genre experiment.

I. Introduction

The works about the Great Patriotic War, created in the last two decades, cannot be considered without connection with the controversial historical, social and literary context of the turn of the century. The formation of a new artistic paradigm in the 1980s–1990s took place in the conditions of an undeclared (Afghan, then Chechen) war, which formed a stable anti-militarist public consciousness, which made significant adjustments to modern historical reconstructions. It is obvious that V. Bogomolov and V. Kondratiev's «trench truth», the prose and journalism of D. Granin and A. Adamovich, V. Bykov and V. Astafiev prepared a new view of the war. Nevertheless, the inexorable course of time from year to year narrows the circle of authors with personal front-line experience, and the knowledge and assessments of new generations about the war are of a secondary, indirect, borrowed nature. The movement of military prose in the last decade of the 20th century is determined by a variety of artistic approaches that actualize the battle tradition of Leo Tolstoy in different ways.

II. Literature review

At the end of the century, first, Tolstoy's pacifism (war is "an event contrary to the human mind and all human nature") and harsh realism in the depiction of war ("in blood, in suffering, in death"), reaching naturalistic forms, turned out to be in demand. For example, let's compare the publications of the mid-1990s: two stories ("Rebel Island" by Y. Nagibin and "Block Hell" by M. Kuraev) and two novels ("Bridgehead" by V. Astafiev and "The General and His Army" by G. Vladimov). The construction of the plot in the stories of Y. Nagibin and M. Kuraev is given a push

in modern times. For Nagibin, this is an extreme situation of rebellion in the novels of V. Astafiev and G. Vladimov, the undisputed leaders of 1995, awarded the most prestigious literary awards, received a wide response in criticism (L. Anninsky, T. Vakhitova, I. Dedkov, N. Ivanova, A. Marchenko, A. Nemzer and many others). The unintentional, but symbolic coincidence in time and place of action of two such dissimilar works contrasts with the difference in writers' approaches. V. Astafiev is a participant in the Great Patriotic War, who suffered his truth about the war, the truth about obscurity, blood, rage, betrayal, almost omnipotently triumphant evil.

III. Analysis

The style of his novel is distinguished by extreme expressiveness, almost Avvakum passion, intransigence, extreme maximalism and naturalism, compositional and speech contrasts. Astafiev of the 1990s, who has completely lost his romantic illusions, is utterly bitter towards the Soviet regime, paints hopelessly tragic pictures. So, in the chapter "Crossing" a true apocalypse, a universal phantasmagoria, pitch hell on earth is presented. The picture of mass murder horrified the writer himself: Bushes were burning on the island, doused in advance with a combustible mixture from airplanes, people rushing about in panic were shot from machine guns, silenced by mines, the river thickened and thickened from human porridge, guns whipped more and more furiously, drowning the Germans, not allowing them to raise their heads. However, the enemy was well dug in and covered, in addition, after some minutes, night bombers appeared, hanging lanterns above the ground, began their deadly work - they dropped bombs, and in the light of rockets, the river rose with stones, fragments, lumps of rags and meat. Old and young, conscious and unconscious, volunteers and draft offices mobilized, penitentiaries and guardsmen, Russians and non-Russians, they all shouted the same words: "Mom! God! God!" and "Sentry! Help!". Moreover, the machine guns whipped them and whipped them, poured them with multi-colored streams. They clutched at each other, wounded and untouched by bullets and shrapnel, people went under the water in bundles; the river bulged with bubbles, foamed with red breakers [Astafiev 1994: 88]. In addition, this is the same river in which Prince Vladimir baptized Rus', a river that washed the bodies of our distant ancestors with its waters in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Astafiev furiously destroys the old canons, arguing that the people - the sufferer abandoned by God - is mortal and destroyable, it is diverse and diverse, and it has everything: both greatness and abomination. The novel gives the impression of a painful shock, piercing pain for the people, a particle of which the writer himself feels himself to be. If Astafiev's work emphasizes the physiological aspect in the depiction of war, then G. Vladimov's novel *The General and His Army* [Vladimov 1994] analyzes its strategy and psychology.

The composition of Vladimov's work is drawn almost flawlessly, the circle of historical, cultural, folklore and literary reminiscences is unusually rich, and the narration is analytical and psychological. The protagonist of the novel, General Kobrisov, removed from command, on the army "Willis" is sent to Moscow, to Headquarters, repeatedly mentally returning to the key episode - the scene of the meeting of the military council about the capture of Predslavl (Kiev). He painfully plays to himself every detail of his conversation with Marshal Zhukov, because of which he finds himself in disgrace.

The essence of the difference between the positions of the general and the marshal is in the question of the price of victory, the tactical expediency of losses in labor ("Save Russia at the cost of Russia") and the price of a soldier's life, pity and compassion. Kobrisov "feels sorry for these people," but the great commander does not perceive the word "feelingful", regarding Kobrisov's position as indecisiveness and cowardice. Already at the entrance to Poklonnaya Gora, the disgraced

general hears on the radio a victorious report about the capture of Myryatin and, violating the order of the marshal, turns the car back - towards the Dnieper, to the soldiers left by him.

G. Vladimov builds his book on a document and creative imagination; he almost romanticizes the Great and Sacred. Yet ... Both novels (Astafieva and Vladimov) converge on one painful point of our time - the question of the price of Victory. "Did you win? "We just overwhelmed the fascists with our corpses," exclaims the maximalist Astafiev. In addition, the hero of Vladimov's novel, General Kobrisov, reflects on the four-layer Russian tactics, when "three layers lie down, the fourth passes." It is here that the intersection point is located, which raises the decisive moment to a higher degree. With all the variety of artistic approaches and stylistic incarnations, modern military prose strives to solve the main question - the price of a soldier's life, the price of Victory. The new military ("Afghan") prose (S. Aleksievich, O. Ermakov) clearly announced the change in artistic optics and moral accents. The modern world, through the prism of the terrible experience of the Afghan war, appeared as a world shocked, shuddering, having lost its orientation, its human essence.

IV. Discussion

The emphasis in the depiction of war is shifting to the problem of the deformation of the human psyche, infected with a virus of violence, hatred and revenge. The opening of a new topic belongs to the Belarusian writer and journalist S. Aleksievich, as indicated by the very title of her book - "Zinc Boys" [Aleksievich 1990] (the dead in Afghanistan were brought home in zinc coffins). The work belongs to the documentary-artistic genre — the "genre of voices", according to the author's definition. There are more than sixty such voices in the story: pilots and paratroopers, intelligence officers and signalmen, doctors and librarians, mothers and wives of the dead. Everyone talks about his or her pain, but in the general chorus (polyphony of voices), there is a multifaceted image of an undeclared war. The writer sees the task of the book in "tearing off the hypocritical veil of silence, gutting false slogans", recording the memories of "trench people" who carried out other people's orders, capturing people's memory and pain, understanding, sorting out, immersing a person in herself. "My path is from person to person, from document to image," the author explains his strategy.

The "voices" of the heroes of the book are divided into three chapters - "Day One", "Day Two", "Day Three" (as three days of creation) and are framed by the author's sections "From diary entries before the book" and "From diary entries after the book". Her position embodies the female point of view on war ("war is a product of male nature"), the position of an "absolute pacifist". Each of the chapters is preceded by a biblical quotation, and the author admonishes his telephone opponent either with the Gospel of Matthew or with the Book of Genesis.

Transmitting the stories of the "Afghans", she does not comment on them, leaving the reader alone with someone else's pain. The heroes of the new military prose differ from their predecessors in that they exist in a very hostile world: alien nature, alien mountains, alien roads, alien faces. They do not have a sense of inner rightness; they are experiencing a painful psychological breakdown - the collapse of illusions about fellowship of soldiers, about the fulfillment of international duty. Having renounced false ideas, they fall into unbelief, pessimism, and experience a state of alienation from the world and from themselves. If for S. Aleksievich the main problem is the deformation of ideas, the question is how faith breaks down; For O. Ermakov, who passed through Afghanistan, the most important problem is the deformation of the human psyche, the question of what happens to a person in a war. After a successful debut with Afghan Stories [Ermakov 1989], he publishes the first novel about the Afghan war, The Sign of the Beast, in Znamya magazine [Ermakov 1992]. Soviet boy placed in a "border situation".

The subject of Ermakov's novel is the psychology of man in war. The analysis of psychology is provided by a specific method of splitting the author's consciousness. The author and his hero live in two spheres at once: in the realm of natural eternity and in the tightness of human time. The war that Yermakov portrays in his novel is the last war of a dying empire, a war that has no clear meaning to its participants, a war without causes and goals - it is like the very element of war, it is a disease, an epidemic caused by a virus of violence and hatred. This is evidenced by the epigraph taken from the "Revelation of John the Theologian": And the smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever, and they will have no rest, day or night, worshiping the beast and his image and receiving the mark of his name. The Beast is the Antichrist, a cruel servant of the devil, a false prophet who seduces and destroys people who worship the Antichrist. Each character in the novel bears the "mark of the beast", the bloody reflection of war. Blinded by it, the man kills himself and orders others to kill. He is at war with space, time, matter, himself. Under the apocalyptic "sign of the beast», the author means the consent to enter into mutual responsibility of hatred, to become a link in the chain of violence and revenge.

The story of the protagonist is the story of the disease of the soul, which is unable to maintain personal decency (health) during a wholesale epidemic. While serving in the night guard, Gleb inadvertently kills a comrade who has deserted from the unit with the traditionally fraternal name Boris. In the course of the story, the hero loses his own name (Gleb Sviridov - Turtle - Skull), and this loss is included in the syndrome of impersonality that overtakes him, like everyone else who has taken the "mark of the beast". The finale of the novel is ambivalent, symbolic. The hero, who has served his term, seems to bifurcate: in one of his incarnations, he climbs the ladder of a plane flying to the Union, and in another, with newly arrived recruits, he returns to the "marble and tarpaulin city." In addition, this is not a mythical cycle, but the spiritual reality of unredeemed guilt for the crime committed ("and those who worship the beast will have no rest day or night"). If the heroes of prose about the Great Patriotic War fought with an inner consciousness of the struggle for a just cause, with a feeling of support from comrades-in-arms and faith in Victory, which is "one for all", then in the new military prose a person is placed in conditions that initially exclude success, he is lonely, alienated from the world and its human essence.

So the new military prose merges with the literature of the "lost generation" (Aldington, Remarque, Hemingway), assimilating the experience of existentialist prose, the methods of modernist writing (Joyce, Proust): split consciousness, associative links, symbolization and metaphorization of the narrative. With the obvious difference in the individual styles of such different authors writing about the war, it is impossible not to note the general trends, among them:

- 1) polemic in relation to the official myth of the war,
- 2) actualization of folklore and biblical imagery and symbolism,
- 3) creative assimilation of the techniques of modernist writing,
- 4) humanistic pathos of affirming human life as an absolute value.

Among the latest publications, we will name the novel by front-line writer Vladimir Bogomolov "My life, or did you dream about me?" [Bogomolov 2005, 2006, 2008]. The events in the novel begin in February 1944 with the crossing of the Oder and last until the early 1990s. Bogomolov wrote his novel-testament, actively drawing on historical and archival documents: orders from Stalin, Zhukov, excerpts from the front-line press. The author conveys the mood in the army that entered the territory of the enemy, fearlessly showing the reverse side of the war, which was hushed up earlier. About his last and main book, Bogomolov wrote: "It will not be a memoir, not memoirs, but, in the language of literary critics, "an autobiography of a fictitious person." Moreover, not fictional: I spent a whole decade in the shoes of most of the heroes; the indigenous prototypes of the main characters were officers I knew very well during the war and after it. This novel is not only

about the history of a person of my generation, it is a requiem for Russia, for its nature and morality, a requiem for the difficult, deformed destinies of several generations - tens of millions of my compatriots.

The shortlist for the 2008 National Bestseller Award included Andrey Turgenev's novel (pseudonym V. Kuritsyn) *Sleep and Believe: A Siege Novel* [Turgenev 2007]. The book contains stories about real facts and events reflected in the blockade historiography, for all that, it is not a documentary, but a work of art filled with fictitious names, episodes, plot twists and turns. Before us is Leningrad at the end of 1941. An ominous "Plan D" is being developed - the explosion of Leningrad in the event of its fall.

V. Conclusion

A young colonel of the NKVD, who is preparing an assassination attempt on the secretary of the regional committee, Marat Kirov (the prototype of Zhdanov), falls in love with yesterday's schoolgirl Varya, who is waiting for her fiancé's letters from the front. The author does not hide from the reader his attitude to what is described as a fictional love affair of literary heroes, the background (only the background!) for which was the blockade days of the city. Among the bestsellers of 2009 is Ilya Boyashov's novel "Tankman or "White Tiger"" [Boyashov 2008] about the duel between a Russian tankman and a German miracle tank. An almost epic story about the battle of a Russian hero with an overseas monster. The protagonist of the novel is an unknown tanker who was rescued from a burnt tank on the Kursk Bulge and miraculously survived. From now on, for him, the war is to find and destroy an invulnerable enemy tank, which inflicts huge damage on Soviet units. The Soviet soldier is the Warrior of Light, and his opponent is Evil incarnate in the form of a fantastic white tank without markings. So about the war has not yet been written. We have to admit: the time distance, which made the Second World War inaccessible to empathy for the younger generation, allowed it to become fertile material for constructing a different reality, and this niche was immediately occupied by the melodrama and fantasy genres popular in mass literature.

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