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GARSHIN'S WAR STORIES

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Abstract: The article analyzes the poetics of V.M. Garshin's war stories within the context of the historical perception of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). Primary focus is placed on the subjectivization of the narrative, naturalism, and the transformation of the "little man" image during wartime. The author explores Garshin's rejection of traditional heroic pathos in favor of an existential understanding of the value of human life.

Keywords: Garshin, Russo-Turkish War, psychologism, subjective narrative, humanism, the "little man," existential conflict.

Text of the Article

The Russo-Turkish wars of the 18th and 19th centuries were always the subject of intense emotional and intellectual discussion across broad layers of Russian society. The perception of war by its participants formed—through the periodical press, diaries, letters, and memoirs—a complex of significant facts and images that eventually became part of the national history. For a modern researcher, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms behind the perception of war, its outcomes, and its impact on the socio-political issues of the country. In this regard, the historical and literary experience of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, captured in the works of Vsevolod Garshin, allows for a profound analysis of human psychology under the conditions of military conflict.

At the center of Garshin's attention is the fate of a volunteer intellectual, a "little man" whose life is shattered by the weight of the military machine. The protagonist describes his humble life in the pages of his notebook: he is a "quiet, good-natured young man, who until now knew only his books, the lecture hall, and his family..." These heroes unconsciously distance themselves from society due to an intensified perception of events. For instance, a character in the story "The Coward" explicitly points out the sensitivity of his nervous system: "Perhaps my nerves are just wired that way, but military telegrams stating the number of killed and wounded affect me much more strongly than those around me."

The primary innovative feature of Garshin's poetics is the radical shift from the panoramic depiction of battles—typical of Leo Tolstoy's epics—to a profoundly subjective narrative. In the story "Four Days," the action is shifted from the external space of the battlefield to the inner world of a wounded soldier, Ivanov, who is abandoned among corpses.

Confessionality and Spatial Constriction. The narrative is conducted in the first person, taking the form of a personal diary or internal monologue. The hero's entire world shrinks to a few meters of ground and the decomposing corpse of an enemy nearby. This creates an effect of "microscopic" war analysis, where every minute spent waiting for death becomes an existential trial.

Garshin was one of the first in Russian prose to introduce elements of harsh naturalism. He describes war not as a parade of ideas, but as physical suffering and biological decay. In "Four Days," the stages of decomposition of a killed Turk are recorded in detail. This contrast between the beauty of a sunny day and the stench of death serves as a tool to emphasize the unnatural essence of war. The author masterfully utilizes physiological details—hallucinations, thirst, and pain—to deepen the psychological analysis.

In the story "From the Reminiscences of Private Ivanov," the author addresses a different problem—the phenomenon of man in the ranks. The specificity of the narrative here is built on a

sharp conflict between the personal "I" of the intellectual and the faceless "WE" of the soldier mass. Garshin does not idealize war; for him, it is a "common misfortune" that turns a personality into a part of a vast, blind, and merciless mechanism.

Garshin's narrative is deeply humanistic and permeated with a sense of guilt toward the "other." The realization that the killed enemy is a human being, a victim of circumstances, transforms the war story into a philosophical reflection on the value of life. Thus, Garshin rejects heroic pathos, bringing the tragedy of the individual soul to the forefront. This makes his work relevant even in the context of modern conflicts, serving as a reminder of the necessity of preserving humanity despite any historical scales.

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