

PSYCHOLOGISM IN WAR PROSE NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF INNER EXPERIENCE AND MORAL CHOICE

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Abstract. *This article examines psychologism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century war prose as a system of narrative techniques that render inner experience under extreme historical pressure. War writing repeatedly stages the collision between the public grammar of duty, ideology, and collective memory and the private microdrama of fear, shame, compassion, and moral hesitation. The study proposes an analytical model that links forms of focalization, interior speech, sensory detail, temporal fracture, and ethical evaluation to the representation of combat stress and post-traumatic memory. On the basis of comparative readings of Russian, European, and Anglo-American traditions, the article shows how psychologism becomes a structural principle: it shapes plot dynamics, organizes character relations, and converts external action into an event of consciousness.*

Keywords: *psychologism, war prose, focalization, interior monologue, trauma narrative, moral choice, memory, narrative ethics.*

Introduction.

Psychologism in war prose is not simply an accumulation of *inner states* attached to action, it is a poetics of experience in which the battlefield becomes readable through the shifting textures of consciousness. War literature traditionally confronts a paradox. Combat is spectacularly external, yet its decisive meanings are often internal, delayed, and ethically unstable. By psychologism this article understands a complex of representational strategies

that translate extreme situations into mental events, perception, decision, shock, recollection, and self-judgment, so that the narrative truth of war emerges from the character's inner labor rather than from the chronology of battles alone. The analysis is oriented toward future research in comparative war studies, because psychologism functions as a transnational narrative resource that links Russian psychological prose to broader modernist and postmodernist approaches to memory, trauma, and moral agency.

Methods and Literature Review.

The study employs comparative narratological analysis, close reading, and contextual interpretation. Narratological tools are used to describe focalization, modes of speech and thought representation (interior monologue, free indirect discourse), and temporal organization (analepsis, ellipsis, iterative narration). Close reading isolates textual microdevices, sensory cues, syntactic compression, rhetorical questions, evaluative lexicon, that serve as *signals* of consciousness under stress. Contextual interpretation situates these devices within the ethical horizon of war writing: how narrative form organizes responsibility, grief, and the legitimacy of violence. The aim is to build a transferable analytical framework applicable to corpora-based studies of war prose and to cross-cultural teaching modules on narrative psychology.

Research on psychologism is grounded in the tradition of psychological prose theory, where L.Ginzburg conceptualized narrative attention to inner life as a historically variable aesthetic program. Dialogic and ethical dimensions of narration, central for war writing, draw on M.Bakhtin's understanding of voice, evaluation, and the eventness of discourse. Modern narratology (G.Genette) provides a descriptive vocabulary for focalization and temporal order, while P.Ricoeur's philosophy of time and narrative clarifies how memory reshapes sequence into meaning. The cultural history of war experience has been influentially mapped by P.Fussell, who demonstrated how combat realities transform rhetorical norms and narrative credibility. Trauma theory (C.Caruth)

explains why war narratives often rely on belatedness, repetition, and fragmentation rather than linear causality. Studies of testimony and witnessing (S.Felman, D.Laub) illuminate the ethics of representing suffering and the limits of direct expression. Within literary criticism, E.Auerbach's account of stylistic seriousness and the representation of everyday detail helps describe how war prose produces *weight* through ordinary speech and concrete perception. For the Russian tradition specifically, work on the *front-line* and postwar canon frequently emphasizes psychological authenticity and moral testing, with V.Grossman and Y.Bondarev often read as key figures in the articulation of conscience, responsibility, and the burden of survival. For contemporary Anglophone war prose, discussions of memory, narration, and moral injury often converge around T.O'Brien's strategies of unstable truth and the narration of guilt.

Results.

Across war prose traditions, psychologism emerges first as a regime of focalization. The narrative camera contracts from panoramic combat scenes toward *proximate perception*, where the decisive facts are not strategic but sensory and evaluative. In Y.Bondarev's *Hot Snow*, battle is repeatedly reframed through the soldier's narrowed field of attention, metallic cold, the sting of breath, the momentary loss of hearing after explosion, so that courage is rendered as a bodily and mental synchronization rather than heroic rhetoric. This aligns with Ginzburg's thesis that psychological prose often privileges transitional mental states, hesitation, self-correction, sudden moral clarity, over completed *portraits* of character (Ginzburg). In V.Grossman's *Life and Fate*, the psychological register expands to include ethical introspection: characters read themselves, judge themselves, and sometimes resist their own fear through small acts of inner refusal; war becomes an arena where the self is rewritten in real time. The result is a narrative economy in which external action functions

as a trigger for inner events, and the true *plot* becomes the movement from perception to evaluation.

Secondly, psychologism in war prose is structured by the fracture of time: the war present is continually invaded by involuntary memory, anticipatory dread, and retrospective self-interpretation. Genette's categories help describe how analepsis and ellipsis become psychological markers rather than mere compositional choices (Genette). In Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the front-line present is punctured by sudden recollections of prewar youth; these memories do not console but intensify alienation, because the remembered self no longer matches the living body in uniform. In Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, emotional numbness and compressed syntax accompany the protagonist's attempt to survive without metaphysical explanations; the narrative often *understates* trauma, turning silence into a sign of inner exhaustion. In T.O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, the narrative explicitly questions stable truth: stories are retold, contradicted, and morally reweighted, producing a poetics of belated understanding that resonates with Ricoeur's view that narrative time is configured by emplotment rather than by chronology (Ricoeur). Thus, temporal dislocation functions as an instrument of psychologism: it represents how war is lived as an uneven sequence of shocks and aftershocks.

Thirdly, psychologism depends on speech and thought representation: war prose repeatedly stages a conflict between public language (orders, slogans, "correct" explanations) and private language (fearful inner commentary, moral self-address). Bakhtin's insights into heteroglossia clarify why the battlefield is also a battlefield of voices: official discourse seeks closure, while inner speech opens ambiguity and ethical pressure (Bakhtin). In Grossman, ideological phrases are frequently exposed by the character's silent counter-thought, which may be hesitant but ethically charged; the narrative creates a double register in which the same event is simultaneously *reported*

and *experienced*. In Bondarev, interior monologue often appears at moments of moral decision: the soldier's mind moves between duty, instinct, and compassion, producing a tense oscillation that cannot be reduced to propaganda. In O'Brien, the voice of confession competes with the voice of performance, and this competition itself becomes the psychological content: the narrator exposes the need to narrate as a symptom of moral injury. Psychologism here is not only introspection; it is a dialogic structure that reveals how war reshapes language from within.

Finally, psychologism is inseparable from narrative ethics: war prose must decide how to represent killing, survival, and loss without aestheticizing violence or dissolving responsibility. Fussell's cultural history of modern war shows that irony, understatement, and bitter realism become rhetorical consequences of mass violence, not optional stylistic ornaments (Fussell). In Remarque, the brutal *anti-heroic* tone produces empathy by refusing uplift; in Grossman, ethical attention is distributed across victims and perpetrators, showing how systems pressure individuals while never erasing personal choice; in Bondarev, the soldier's dignity is presented as a fragile inner stance under mechanical destruction; in O'Brien, the narrative insists that telling itself is ethically risky because stories can both reveal and beautify suffering. These patterns can be summarized as follows:

Psychological device	Narrative function in war prose	Illustrative examples
Tight internal focalization	Converts battle into lived perception and evaluative shock	Bondarev depicts combat through cold, breath, and split-second decisions; Remarque narrows vision to mud, noise, and fear

Temporal fracture (flashback, belatedness)	Represents trauma as repetition and delayed meaning	O'Brien retells events with shifting "truth"; Grossman returns to earlier moral choices under new pressure
Interior monologue / free indirect discourse	Displays moral hesitation, self- judgment, and fear without external commentary	Grossman shows silent resistance to official phrases; Bondarev stages conscience at the edge of survival
Understatement and silence	Signals emotional overload and the limits of language	Hemingway compresses feeling into minimal phrasing; Remarque uses bluntness to refuse heroic consolation
Dialogic conflict of voices	Exposes ideological pressure and preserves ethical ambiguity	Bakhtinian heteroglossia appears as tension between command language and inner speech in multiple war narratives

Discussion.

Psychologism in war prose can be interpreted as a formal answer to the epistemic crisis created by modern violence. When events exceed habitual comprehension, narrative turns toward consciousness as the primary site of truth. This is visible in Vasily Bykov's war narratives, where moral choice is dramatized as a near-physical burden: characters often confront impossible

dilemmas, and the narrative focuses on the inner labor of deciding rather than on the victorious outcome. Similarly, in Svetlana Alexievich's documentary prose about war experience, the psychological dimension is produced through polyphonic testimony: trauma appears as a pattern of repeated images, sudden pauses, and fragmented recollection, demonstrating that the *mind* of war may be collective yet irreducibly personal. These examples suggest a productive direction for future comparative work: psychologism is not confined to fiction; it migrates across genres whenever war demands a language of inner survival.

A second perspective concerns gender, intimacy, and the private sphere under wartime regimes. In Vera Panova's *Sputniki (The Train Companions)*, war is mediated through the hospital train and caregiving labor, and psychologism is realized through attentive observation of fatigue, compassion, and muted grief. The narrative shows how psychological truth is generated by routine gestures, washing, waiting, listening, rather than by combat spectacle. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, psychologism takes a paradoxical form: the protagonist's temporal dislocation and fatalistic refrain function as protective mechanisms against unbearable memory. Here war is not *remembered* linearly but returns as absurd repetition, where irony and surreal structure are the mind's defensive architecture. Such works broaden the field: psychologism can be quiet, domestic, and indirectly expressed, yet it remains anchored in ethical evaluation and the afterlife of shock.

Thirdly, psychologism is increasingly intertwined with the problem of moral injury, particularly in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century war narratives. In Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, psychological intensity is produced by sensory overload and hallucinatory reporting; the narrative voice oscillates between fascination and disgust, revealing the unstable affective economy of modern media war. In Tim O'Brien's broader reception context and in later Iraq/Afghanistan fiction, a recurrent motif is the inability to *return* to prewar identity: characters experience dissonance between social normalcy and inner

agitation, and the narrative often externalizes this through compulsive repetition, sudden anger, or emotional flattening. This trajectory suggests a future-oriented methodological implication: psychologism should be studied not only as a set of stylistic devices but also as a model of damaged agency, how literature registers the transformation of conscience when violence becomes routine.

Conclusion.

The study demonstrates that psychologism in war prose functions as a structural poetics that converts external conflict into an event of consciousness and ethical evaluation. Through internal focalization, fractured temporality, modes of interior speech, and dialogic tension between official and private language, war narratives model the mind's encounter with shock, fear, and responsibility. The comparative perspective shows that psychologism is transnational and historically adaptive: it changes with rhetorical norms, media environments, and evolving concepts of trauma and moral injury, yet it consistently protects the central human question of war prose, how to preserve a meaningful account of experience when violence threatens both language and the self.

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