

## THE CONCEPTS OF 'SUFFERING' AND 'WAR' IN NEKRASOV'S POETRY

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**Abstract:** This article is devoted to the analysis of the concepts of 'suffering' and 'war' on the textual material of works by Nikolay Nekrasov, as well as to the determination of their significance in the conceptual worldview of the Russian language personality. The presented study examines the expression of the discursive content of these concepts in Russian and describes in detail the historical background of emergence and development, as well as the analysis of the concepts' linguistic and factual content that characterizes the disposition of the language personality of mid-19th century native speaker in Russia (diachronic aspect). The article also contains a number of observations on literary techniques used by the poet in creating the image of war in his literary works.

**Keywords:** conceptual worldview, language personality, core, lexeme, native speaker.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The legacy of Nikolay Nekrasov was actively studied by a number of literary critics (Ivanov, 2007; Mineralov, 2003), etc.; however, the concepts of 'War' and 'Suffering' based on the works of N.A. Nekrasov are being analyzed for the first time. The studies of the conceptual worldview were most prevalent in scientific thought at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, when scientific research began to be anthropocentric, and the mutual influence and interpenetration of scientific directions had intensified. The research of concepts and significant elements of national worldview takes place at the junction of linguistics, cultural studies and psychology; in the case of Nekrasov's legacy, this refers to the Russian conceptual worldview of the mid-19th century.

### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials for this study were represented by the written sources of publications by Nikolay Nekrasov, his literary works, articles, letters, notes, as well as memoirs of writer's contemporaries. The **main research method** was descriptive-analytical, backed up by the observation, historical-comparative, deductive and analytical research methods; the choice of methods was due to the purpose of the research: to describe and analyze the representation of the concepts of 'war' and 'suffering' in Nekrasov's poetic legacy.

### 3. RESULTS

As a result of the study, the authors came to the conclusion that the concepts of 'War' and 'Suffering' are among the main and defining in Nekrasov's poetry; these concepts are

also directly related to the Russian linguistic worldview, picturing the linguistic consciousness of the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century native speaker. Nekrasov had lived through two wars: the Crimean (1853–1856) and Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), so the interest that the poet manifested in matters of war is quite natural. The flashbacks of these important phenomena of public life can be traced in such works as 'Orina, the Soldier's Mother', 'June 14, 1854' ('Great shows, world destinies...'), 'In War (Hearing the terrors of the war)', 'Sasha', 'The Unhappy Ones', 'Silence', 'About the Weather', 'The Newspaper Office', 'Ballet', 'The Sorceress' (Znakharka), 'Korobeiniki', 'Court', 'Grandfather', 'Russian Women', 'Contemporaries'; the poet repeatedly addressed these issues in the poem 'Who is Happy in Russia'.

The events of the 1812 French invasion of Russia were also reflected in the works of Nekrasov, but the poet specifically contemplated on the wars that he had to witness. With the mastermind application of folklore techniques, the poet created works surprisingly congenial to the national spirit. Nekrasov truthfully and vividly showed the heavy burden of war in the poems 'Uncompressed Band', 'Hearing the terrors of the war' and others. The Crimean War reminiscent poem 'Korobeiniki' (1861), describing 'cursed' war that whips away the peasants' breadwinners, is clearly blaming the Tsar:

...Now this cursed war is on us  
 'Tis a wicked thing God knows:  
 Where there should have been a wedding  
 To the war the bridegroom goes!  
 For the foe's misdeeds we suffer  
 Russian money wide is thrown,  
 And the Black Sea's painted crimson  
 With our blood; our ships go down;  
 Lead and pewter are being wasted  
 And the peoples' heads are bowed;  
 All our lads to death are hurried,  
 Every village groans aloud.  
 (II, 127)

In the poem 'Autumn' (1877), Nekrasov judged the events of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. The poet perceived this war as universal sorrow: the day sun seemed dark 'like at night', human moans are heard at the dawn of railway cars, and the people are even unable to stay home, preoccupied with thoughts of their loved ones sent to war. Sympathizing everyday people, Nekrasov was ready to share with them this 'cup of suffering'; he sought to join the army. In the poem 'Silence', he admired the feats of ordinary sailors and soldiers - the true defenders of Sevastopol, who in the eyes of the poet remained 'the stronghold of chosen glory':

A hero-nation! In a harsh struggle  
 You have not stumbled to the end  
 Your crown of thorns now  
 Outshines the victor's crown  
 <...>  
 ...The air was drunk with blood,  
 And every house bullet pierced,  
 Instead of a stone, the road  
 Was paved with cast iron and lead...  
 <...>

They carried people there to the graveyard

Like dead bees, losing count...

[II, 44]

In the poem 'Silence' Nekrasov recreated the inspiring image of the destroyed Sevastopol's stronghold; described epic scale events required striking comparisons and metaphors. Reviewing the book by Ivan Vanenko, 'The siege of Sevastopol, or such are the Russians', published in *Sovremennik* ('The Contemporary') magazine, Nekrasov wrote that in all of Europe there is no writer who could 'produce something equal to the greatness of the events that are happening before us'. Such a book, according to the publisher of *Sovremennik*, could only be *The Iliad* [IX, p. 264]. To comprehend Nekrasov's attitude to the war during the Sevastopol defense, it should be remembered that for the poet's contemporary Russia, embraced by the fire of war, was embodied by the image of suffering and bleeding people. Nekrasov, both imaginatively as well as first-handed, have seen 'villages and hamlets in the dire state with mothers crying for their soldier sons, wives rocking the cradle, waiting for the breadwinners and protectors - fathers, brothers, sons ...uncompressed peasant bands, malnourished cattle, crop failure, and hunger'. Nekrasov's noble faith in the moral forces of the people of the hero-nation affected his personal poetic responses and personal confessions. This is evident from the poem 'June 14, 1854'; the same could be confirmed by the preserved verse sketch:

Oh, do not incline the victorious head  
In despair, the rational son of the fatherland,  
Do not say: alas, we died! -  
Sadness is barren and vainly reproachful.

[I, 419]

In November 1877, when the Turkish fortresses of Kars and Plevna fell under the onslaught of the Russian troops, Nekrasov wrote:

So, know, oh poet! To all mothers  
In remote villages of Russia, the saint,  
It was heard that the enemy was crushed and captured,  
And your son who's unharmed and victorious,  
Sends encouragements and regards.

[II, 533]

Until 1874, Russia had compulsory military service. The army created on the basis of this system was an army of feudal-serf type. The drafts imposed heavy stress on the tax-paying classes, depriving the families of their breadwinners; the heavy burden of recruitment was reflected in Nekrasov's poetry, which, as always, accurately reproduced real events. The crying of wives and mothers during recruitment was well pictured in the poems 'Silence' and 'Ballet'. The poem 'Who is Happy in Russia' (Chapter 'A Cheerful Season - Cheerful Songs') described such drafting as the most terrible misfortune: 'and the horror of the people at the word recruitment was like the horror of execution'. The subject of recruitment found further development and detailing in Nekrasov's creative works; the same poem tells how the landowner (*pomeshchik*) Polivanov 'disposed' of Grisha, the nephew of Jacob, to the recruits, hoping to make his bride a concubine; the son of Nenila Vlashevna was also unfairly drafted (or commandeered, Rus. lit. 'shaved his forehead'). The poem 'Grandfather' describes how the landowner stopped the wedding and ordered the village boy-bridegroom to be recruited as a soldier, and took his bride to the personal 'nunnery'. Nekrasov also gets the word out that the landlords tried to dispose of the sick or injured by drafting them to the army ('Hey, Ivan'). 19<sup>th</sup>-century peasant communities and townspeople were allowed to submit

hired recruits to the army; however, the need for high expenditures during such hired recruitments undermined their economic well-being ('The Sorceress').

Recalling the morals prevailing in the army of the age of Alexander I and Nicholas I, the hero of 'Grandfather' says: 'Well that was our time! Whoever was the boss - still the beast'. Noteworthy is that Nekrasov put purely popular assessment of the 'bosses' into the mouth of a former Decembrist officer. The question still remains, whether the attitude of Nekrasov and his heroes to the 'bosses' might change at a later time. Several changes occurred to the Russian army after the Emancipation Reform of 1861: cadet schools were established in 1884, the number of military schools was increased, and new rules were introduced in the Nikolayev General Staff Academy. However, these changes were not of meaningful nature; the class principle remained the central plank of recruiting the officer corps, which led to the separation of officers into shut-in society, the core of which was made up of the most reactionary representatives of the nobility. For Nekrasov, the military officer is 'a gentleman and a dancer thundering with a saber', 'a beautiful savage' (the poem 'Mother'), and even 'a sleeve artist' ('the Newspaper Office'). It is known that running the gauntlet was used in the Russian army until late 1863<sup>1</sup>. There were other tortures, seemingly less cruel, at first glance, but also ending sometimes with the death of the accused. Nekrasov wrote a lot about corporal punishment: the exile who had returned from Siberia ('Grandfather') told about them; military officer Shalashnikov, one of the characters of 'Who is Happy in Russia' turned out to be the masterful expert of 'beating up' the soldiers.

Descriptions of the cruel punishments in the army appear in the poem 'Orina, the Soldier's Mother'. The fact that gauntlet punishment was not easier to survive than enemy bullets was reflected in the 'Soldier's song' ('Who is Happy in Russia'): 'German bullets, Turkish bullets, French bullets, Russian sticks'. This is close to the proverb that existed in the army during the time of Paul I of Russia: 'A soldier must fear the corporal's stick more than the enemy bullets'. (Legend says that real author of this saying was the Prussian king Frederick the Great). Nekrasov evidentiates that pretty much everything in a despotic society is based on fear: fear is inherent not only to the oppressed but also to the oppressors; not only to soldiers but nobleman officers. The common fear has corrupted the nation, leading not only to cowardice as a character trait but also to other negative qualities: cruelty, meanness, selfishness. There can be no honor in a society based on fear; the 'Die-hard' chapter of 'Who is Happy in Russia' exposes the very notion of a noble officer's honor as an ethical category. The sons of the 'die-hard' - Guards officers - turned out to be morally weaker even than the peasants, having deceived them, without giving the promised flood meadows.

Were all the officers so dishonest? Of course, Nekrasov summarized and typified not only their images in his works; it is well-recognized that among the best part of the Russian intelligentsia (including the military) were independent-minded, honest and principled people, deeply devoted to their nation. Such, for example, was Admiral Pavel Nakhimov, commander of naval and land forces during the Siege of Sevastopol (Crimean War) and the true hero, referring to whom Nekrasov said that he was 'dear to the people' [IX, 323]; such was also the prominent Russian scientist, doctor Nikolay Pirogov, the founder of military field surgery.

The poet understood the role of conservative officers in preserving autocracy and serfdom quite well. Along with landowners and officials, they represented a major danger to the nation; according to the poet, the officers of the modern army inherited from the Decembrists neither honor nor ideas about civic duty. Nekrasov knew that there were people

<sup>1</sup> Running the gauntlet as a form of punishment was brought to Russia by foreigners at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and initially applied only to foreigners in the service of the Russian army; gauntlets became a form of corporal punishment for the Russian soldiers in 1706.

among the Guards officers who did not even disdain the execution of gendarme policing functions. In the 60s – 90s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many ‘mots collectors’ appeared among the liberal officers; the poet told in one of his poems about meetings with such officers of the garrison guardhouse. To tolerate their empty talk was more difficult than to endure dampness, hunger, and various hardships of imprisonment. Other officers represented danger ‘not only to enemies’ (Contemporaries, Part II): among them were many informers and spies.

Considering the people as the main driving force of history, Nekrasov portrayed the soldiers, as the representatives of the nation, with the greatest sympathy. Soldiers in his works constitute the ‘folk characters’ along with peasants and the urban poor. However, a soldier appears as the same peasant dressed in military uniform; Nekrasov was clearly aware that the same fate awaited both the soldier and the urban poor in the city:

They perish often now; let’s wait -  
Does the lookout freeze, poor fellow,  
Or Van’ka is it gonna be...  
(‘About the weather’, Part II)

The sympathetic image of a forgotten or frozen sentry in Russian literature had an old tradition. Derzhavin and Gogol were writing about a soldier left to the mercy of fate without any reward. Nekrasov had developed this image further:

Well, you, form number one redoubt,  
You, with St. George's Cross –  
beg from door to door!

The doctor’s assistant ‘rejected’ the soldier’s wounds, and he did not receive the ‘pension’ allowance:

Your full pension denied -  
The heart was not shot through!

Nekrasov devoted a lot of attention to depicting the psychology of the soldier’s masses in ‘Who is Happy in Russia’. Soldiers are the ‘small people’:

...The soldiers and beggars  
They pass without speaking.  
Not asking if happy  
Or grievous their lot:  
The soldier, we know,  
Shaves his beard with a gimlet,  
Has nothing but smoke  
In the winter to warm him,  
What joy can be his?

The veteran soldier Ovsyannikov, met by peasants who are the actual heroes of the poem, is happy that he survived twenty battles, and in peacetime, being ‘neither fed or hungry’, and also mercilessly beaten with sticks - did not succumb to death as well. Member of the heroic defense of Sevastopol, he told the wanderers about the great deeds committed by ordinary soldiers and sailors during the Crimean War:

Only the mountains we did not move,  
Jumping on redoubts like  
Hares, squirrels, and wild cats<sup>2</sup>.  
There I said goodbye to my legs,

<sup>2</sup>Allusion to one of the heroes of the Sevastopol defense, Black Sea Fleet sailor Peter Koshka (Russ. Lit. ‘the Cat’).

With a hellish rumble, whistling deaf,  
From Russian hunger almost died!  
(‘Soldier’s song’)

Using his inherent poetic instinct, Nekrasov shows that only ordinary people can understand the suffering of a warrior offended by the authorities and help him with what they can: snacks, a loaf of bread, and a ladle of water:

...the peasants come crowding,  
Surrounding the soldier,  
And some a kopéck give,  
And others give half:  
In no time a rouble  
Is piled on the dishes.

The integrity of the characters and the moral nobility of ordinary soldiers, given by the poet with expressive strokes, bare the callousness and egoism of their officers even more. Nekrasov wrote that the image of an ordinary soldier should take a fitting place in Russian literature, and condemned Alexander Bestuzhev (Marlinsky) for the fact that soldiers and officers in his works appeared ‘in the unnatural mantle of medieval warriors’. Contrarily, Leo Tolstoy, according to Nekrasov, ‘renders ...several types of Russian soldiers, types that can serve as a key to understanding the spirit, concepts, habits, and generally the constituent elements of the military class. A few more such essays and military life will cease to be a dark mystery’ [IX, 332].

In his September 1855 Review, Nekrasov informed readers on the publication of the story ‘Eight Months in French Captivity’, stressing that Tatorsky (the author) was a new face in literature: an *army soldier*, a native of the city of Shuya in Vladimir Province. ‘He was struck by two bullets in the arm fighting the Battle of the Alma, he was captured, detained in Constantinople and Toulon, he lost his arm, but finally made it back to the city of Odessa... His story presents undoubted signs of observation, humor, and, certainly, a talent...<sup>3</sup> Russia is so rich in talents!’ [IX, 332]. Later Nekrasov continued to publish the stories of ordinary soldiers and sailors (literary adapted by N. P. Sokalsky, the writer from Odessa) in *Sovremennik* magazine. Thus, essays and memoirs of eyewitnesses such as ‘Hospital in Constantinople’, ‘Life in the Sevastopol battery’ (A Sailor’s Story), ‘Battle of Sinop’ were revealed to the public; these unassuming stories contained a lot of harsh truth. ‘...And this is why,’ the researcher fairly concludes, ‘military essays and stories published in *Sovremennik*, as Panayev described in a letter to Tolstoy, were read greedily by all Russia.’”

A Russian soldier, under the gray trench coat of which the poet saw a simple peasant, suffered a considerable amount of evil from various kinds of fraud. The poem ‘A Recent Time’ told about club regulars, who eagerly listened to the news on the course of the Crimean War and were interested not in the heroic feats of its participants on the battlefield, but in the deeds of those ‘who had a lick of the spoon by diminishing soldiers’ rations’. The poem ‘Contemporaries’ is listing the stories about the manufacturers who built the battleship, which sink to the bottom right off the bat, who made grenades that wounded their own soldiers; the poem also mentioned the French industrialists, provided their army with ‘clay bullets’

<sup>3</sup>Об этом же произведении Таторского Некрасов писал 17 сентября 1855 г. И. С. Тургеневу: «...солдат... должно быть, человек с большим талантом – наблюдательность, юмор, меткость – и бездна русского. Я в восторге» (X, 250).

during 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war. This last circumstance could be taken as a hint by Russian readers. After all, Russian hustlers during the Crimean War managed to 'supply' their army with rotten products, fusty overcoats, and even wooden chocks instead of flintlocks.

The value of the poetry of Nikolay Nekrasov can hardly be overestimated. Russian revolutionary Georgi Plekhanov pen-pictured the patriotic influence of the poetry of the great democrat on the military: 'I was then in the last class of a military gymnasium. After dinner, we sat in a group of several people and read Nekrasov. As soon as we finished 'The Railway', there was a signal calling us to the frontline training. We hid the book and went to the arsenal behind the guns, being under the strong impression of everything we had just read. When we started forming-up, my friend S. came up to me and whispered, clutching a rifle barrel in his hand: 'Oh, I'd take this gun and go to fight for the Russian people!' These words, whispered a few steps away from the military authorities, deeply bumped into my memory...' (Nekrasov, 1949). The poems of N. A. Nekrasov were raised to struggle the broad masses of not only the peasant and urban poor, but also the soldiers, opening their eyes to the real essence of the war.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Language is not only a means of communication but also a sufficiently bright and informative material for picturing the national or ethnic character. Modern linguists often associate language differences with the nature of the mentality of a given people or nation. Psycholinguistics is engaged in studying the peculiarities of the mentality of the linguo-cultural community expressed in language; the term 'conceptual worldview' is actively used within this scientific framework. A conceptual worldview is understood as a picture created by thinking in the mind of a native speaker. 'The most important signs of the conceptual picture of the world are integrity, consistency, continuity, and dynamism <...> a conceptual worldview can be defined as a system of information on the objects that is relevant and potentially represented in the activity of an individual' (Golovan, 2001:24). The conceptual worldview is a dynamic entity; therefore, it is possible to consider language data both in synchronic and diachronic aspects. The presented article examines the concepts of 'Suffering' and 'War' based on the works of the famous Russian poet Nikolay Nekrasov, whose creative period relates to the second half of the 19th century, that is, concepts are analyzed in a diachronic aspect. The very term 'concept' is comprehended by authors as 'a cultural lump in the human mind' (Stepanov, 1997).

The concepts of 'War' and 'Suffering' were analyzed in a number of scientific studies by linguists and historians, psychologists, philosophers, cultural and political scientists, and sociologists. The concept of 'Suffering' was the subject of study of the thesis research by N.A. Azarenko; the linguist featured this concept as the main representative of the theme of childhood in the works of F.M. Dostoevsky (Azarenko, 2010). The ethical and psychological component of the concepts of 'Suffering' and 'Pain' was also reviewed in the article by Noel Bueno-Gomez (Bueno-Gomez, 2017). The concept of 'War' in a comparative aspect on the material of the Russian and English languages was considered in the work of L.N. Venediktova. (Venediktova, 2004); the British view on the problems of war is reflected in the book of Angus Calder (Calder, 2012). The concepts of 'War' and 'Suffering' are often the subjects of a single study; the topic of war and associated suffering came into the view of scientists at various times. Thus, the main battles of the World War II, as well as the particular characteristics of the concept of 'War', were analyzed in the book by John Gooch (Gooch, 2012); the reflection of this concept in British culture is discussed in the book by Samuel Hynes (2011). Jean-Michel Veranneman examined the influence of the World War II on Belgian society (Veranneman, 2014); the works of Enver Redžić and Robert Donia contains an analysis of the influence of war on the life of the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the

same period (Redžić, Donia, 2004). The causes of World War II in an international context were researched in the study conducted by Frank McDonough (McDonough, 2011), and also in the works of Gordon Martel (1999) and Jonathan Wright (2007). The confrontation between Finland and Russia was in the spotlight of the investigation by Bair Irincheev (2012). The particular characteristics of secondary (school) and higher education during World War II were the subjects of analysis in Roy Lowe's book (2012). The role of the army and features of its functioning during the World War II were at the center of research by Gerhard Lee Weinberg (Weinberg, 2005); the sufferings caused by the bombing of the civilian population were the subject of research by Yuki Tanaka (Tanaka, 2010). Hannah Diamond explored the characteristics of women's lives in France during the same period (Hanna Diamond, 2015).

**The scientific value** of the presented study is determined by the description and analysis of the concepts of 'War' and 'Suffering' in the creative heritage of Nikolay Nekrasov in the context of the linguistic consciousness of a representative of the Russian linguistic culture of the second half of the 19th century.

**The topical continuity** of the study is due to the fact that the concepts of 'War' and 'Suffering' are described and analyzed on the basis of the works of the prominent Russian poet, writer, critic, and publisher Nikolay Nekrasov, who's creative heritage is of utmost significance for the Russian culture and the Russian worldview.

**The novelty** of the study is due to the fact that the concepts of 'Suffering' and 'War' are analyzed for the first time, on the basis of the creative legacy of N.A. Nekrasov and with the involvement of a large array of information on the historical background of the formation of these concepts in the Russian worldview of the second half of the 19th century.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be stated with confidence that the concepts of 'Suffering' and 'War' are quite vividly and diversely represented in the poetry of A.N. Nekrasov. The core of the concept of 'Suffering' is made up of such lexemes as 'pain', 'patience', and 'grief'. The core of the concept of 'War' is represented by such lexemes and phrases as 'Russian soldier', 'Russian people', 'enemy', 'blood', and 'fear'. Historicism and archaism constitute a special part of the sphere of concepts: The Gauntlets, St. George Cross, etc. The concepts of 'Suffering' and 'War' illustrate the perception of the world of the native Russian speaker linguistic personality of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The materials of the article can be quite beneficial to linguists, literary critics, journalists, as well as to a wide range of readers interested in the creative heritage of Nikolay Nekrasov, the history of Russia, and the perception of the linguistic consciousness of the Russian language speakers.

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