



PSYCHOLOGICAL PORTRAITURE IN RUSSIAN PROSE OF THE 19TH– 20TH CENTURIES: GARSHIN, MAKANIN, VODOLAZKIN

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Annotation *The article explores psychological portraiture in Russian literature through the works of Garshin, Makanin, and Vodolazkin. It shows how suffering, existential pressure, and spirituality shape the depiction of inner life across different historical periods, revealing continuity and innovation in portraying the Russian soul.*

Keywords. *psychological portraiture Russian literature Garshin Makanin Vodolazkin suffering existentialism spirituality continuity*

Introduction. Psychological portraiture holds a distinctive role in Russian literature, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries, when writers sought to probe into the innermost recesses of the human mind. Unlike literary traditions that often rely on external characterization, Russian prose consistently emphasizes inner life, spiritual crises, and moral choices. Writers such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov established a tradition of psychological exploration, where the soul of the character was depicted as more important than physical appearance or social status. Within this continuum, Garshin, Makanin, and Vodolazkin stand as writers who—though separated by historical context—carry forward the Russian interest in revealing the depths of the psyche.

This study will examine three case examples: Garshin, whose short but influential 19th-century works depict the suffering and fragility of human consciousness; Makanin, who reflects the tensions and existential crises of late Soviet society; and Vodolazkin, who continues the psychological tradition in the



21st century by linking inner life with spirituality, time, and faith. Through their works, one can trace both continuity and innovation in Russian psychological portraiture, revealing how literature responds to new historical conditions while remaining faithful to a uniquely Russian model of the human soul.

V. M. Garshin: Psychological Depth through Suffering and Conflict.

Vsevolod Garshin (1855–1888) produced a relatively small body of literature, but his psychological acuity places him among the notable figures of late 19th-century Russian prose. His own life—marked by depression, illness, and ultimately suicide—influenced the themes of his fiction. Garshin's works focus on individuals in moments of crisis, where psychological portraiture emerges from a detailed description of suffering, madness, and inner conflict.

In 'Four Days,' Garshin depicts the inner monologue of a wounded soldier abandoned on the battlefield. Stranded between life and death, the soldier oscillates between despair and philosophical reflection. The use of fragmented consciousness, vivid sensory detail, and memories of home creates a realistic yet symbolic picture of human endurance. Here, psychological portraiture does not merely describe emotion—it dramatizes the boundary between physical survival and metaphysical resignation.

In 'The Red Flower,' Garshin goes further by portraying insanity from within. The protagonist's obsession with a single flower inside an asylum becomes a metaphor for the struggle of good against evil. While madness isolates the character, the reader is drawn into his worldview, experiencing both terror and sympathy. By merging subjective hallucination with symbolic meaning, Garshin creates a psychological portrait that is simultaneously clinical and allegorical. This technique foreshadows modernist explorations of the fractured self.

Overall, Garshin's contribution to psychological prose lies in his ability to merge intimate detail with universal moral conflict. His characters are not broad social types but fragile individuals, whose inner turmoil reflects both personal suffering and broader human questions.

**V. Makanin: Portraiture under Social and Existential Pressure.**

Vladimir Makanin (1937–2017) continues the Russian psychological tradition in the context of the late 20th century, a period marked by ideological pressure, censorship, and later, post-Soviet transformation. Unlike Garshin's tragic yet symbolic figures, Makanin's characters often confront absurd or alienating social systems. His psychological portraits highlight the struggle of ordinary individuals to preserve authenticity in the face of dehumanization.

One of his most widely read works, 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus,' demonstrates this dynamic. The narrative centers on the uneasy relationship between a Russian soldier and his Chechen captive. Instead of portraying them as mere representatives of warring sides, Makanin delves into their hesitation, fleeting empathy, and shared humanity. The psychological portrait emerges not only from inner monologue but also from gestures, silences, and contradictions that reveal the instability of identity in wartime. This text illustrates Makanin's preference for showing psychology in action—through conflict and choice—rather than through extended introspection alone.

In 'Underground, or A Hero of Our Time,' Makanin constructs a complex first-person narrative where the protagonist, an aging intellectual, articulates his alienation from society. The fragmented style, oscillating between confession, justification, and irony, reflects the fragmented state of consciousness itself. By invoking Lermontov's famous novel, Makanin reinterprets the archetype of the 'superfluous man' for the 20th century. The psychological portrait here is both deeply personal and culturally resonant, engaging with Russia's literary tradition while reflecting the anxieties of its own era.

Makanin's characters reveal the pressures exerted by ideology, violence, and social marginalization. Yet, within these constraints, they remain capable of moral choice. His psychological portraiture thus combines realism with existential inquiry, making his work a bridge between the Russian classical tradition and contemporary philosophical concerns.

**E. Vodolazkin: Spiritual Dimensions of Psychological Portraiture.**

Eugene Vodolazkin (b. 1964) brings psychological portraiture into the 21st century, but unlike Garshin or Makanin, his emphasis lies on spirituality, time, and metaphysics. A philologist by training, Vodolazkin integrates historical, philosophical, and theological perspectives into his fiction. His works exemplify how psychological portraiture can transcend the individual and encompass questions of memory, eternity, and divine order.

In 'Laurus,' the protagonist's life is portrayed as a pilgrimage, where every act and thought is measured against spiritual salvation. The narrative bends time, moving seamlessly between centuries, thus situating the individual's psychology in a timeless Christian framework. The portrait of Laurus is psychological not in a clinical sense but in a spiritual one: his doubts, prayers, and sacrifices illustrate the soul's striving toward God.

In 'The Aviator,' the diary form allows for a reconstruction of consciousness through memory. The protagonist, Innokenty, awakens in the 21st century after being cryogenically preserved, and his fragmented recollections form the structure of the narrative. His psychology is depicted through the tension between memory and present reality, between personal history and collective trauma. This innovative approach demonstrates Vodolazkin's interest in how memory constitutes identity and how the psyche is inseparable from historical context.

By merging psychological depth with metaphysical scope, Vodolazkin redefines the genre of psychological prose for a globalized, postmodern audience. His portraits suggest that the human psyche cannot be understood without reference to time, history, and eternity.

Conclusion. The analysis of Garshin, Makanin, and Vodolazkin demonstrates both continuity and innovation in Russian psychological portraiture. Garshin emphasizes the intensity of suffering and madness, creating symbolic yet realistic depictions of fragile consciousness. Makanin highlights the existential pressures of late Soviet life, showing how individuals navigate alienation and violence while retaining fragments of moral agency. Vodolazkin, finally, expands



psychological portraiture into the spiritual and metaphysical realm, portraying the human psyche as inseparable from memory, time, and eternity.

Together, these three writers represent different historical stages of Russian prose, yet their shared focus on inner life underscores a fundamental trait of Russian literature: the conviction that the deepest truths about humanity are found not in external description but in the recesses of the soul. This enduring tradition confirms the uniqueness of Russian psychological writing, which continues to inspire readers and scholars worldwide.

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