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A LETTER OF DEAD SOLDIER FROM SEVASTOPOL FRONT OF
THE WORLD WAR

Cherepanova Tatyana Vladimirovna (a)*, Shapovalova Irina Vladimirovna (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Sevastopol State University, 33, Universitetskaya str., Sevastopol, Russia, cherepan71@rambler.ru

(b) Luhansk State Academy of Culture and Arts named after M. Matusovsky, 7, Red Square, Luhansk, LNR,
ish-serdolik@yandex.ru

Abstract

The attention of scientists to the epistolary heritage of the Great Patriotic War is due to the huge research potential of this source base for anthropological, philological, psychological knowledge. Understanding the linguistic and extra-linguistic layers of front-line writing created in the extreme conditions of war can reveal the essence of the combat emotional intensity that glorified the liberation of Sevastopol in 1944. A special role in understanding the state of feelings and moods of the participants of the liberation is played by letters of special content – letters to the relatives and friends of the dead fellow, telling the sad details of his death. The purpose of the study of letters from the Sevastopol front was to select messages about the death of a fellow soldier in the plenty of front-line letters and to identify the structure and functional role of its elements. The object of the study was letters of personal content from the Sevastopol front, addressed to strangers, informing about the death of their relative or familiar person. The results of the study can be used as a methodological basis to study letters addressed to the relatives of a dead fellow soldier, to get closer to understanding the anthropological content of war days, during which the death of friends becomes an expected routine. The struggle for the liberation of Sevastopol is just beginning to be comprehended in anthropological knowledge, and the plenty of letters from the front is the most important source for understanding the motives of mass heroism.

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1. Introduction

The interest in the written heritage of the Great Patriotic War arose among researchers relatively recently. The value of ego sources is determined by the high research potential of what is referred to as "trench truth", the importance of which has especially increased when the ideological restrictions of official rhetoric were removed and a vacuum appeared in the semantic space of military reality. Ego-documents, which are socio-historical evidence, allow us to understand the deep essence of the feelings and experiences of a soldier, to identify the matter of fears and concerns, the source of courage and heroism. Narrative analysis of ego-documents allows us to identify hidden meanings in personal texts, this is the subject of the works of (Elliot, 2005; Franzosi, 2010; Gallo, 2016), etc. The works of (Bulygina, 2005; Cherutova, 2015; Ivanov, 2008; Rozhdestvenskaya, 2018; Senyavskaya, 1997), etc. are devoted to the analysis of the structure and discourse of letters from the front. Special attention in the structure of the epistle from the front-line is paid to letters addressed to unfamiliar people, in which fellow soldiers report the death of their fellow fighter. Attempts to select these letters into a separate category were made in the works of Efremov and Zverev (2015), Kuznetsov (2016), etc. These letters have a different purpose than the letters of the front-line soldiers to the family. Until now, these letters have not become the object of special research by philologists, anthropologists and sociologists, and are not selected into a separate structure in the system of epistolary sources. However, it is a letter reporting the details of the death, written by eyewitnesses of the event, that is sometimes more informative and gives more details about the front-line situation than a personal letter to relatives and friends.

2. Problem Statement

The letters from the Sevastopol front are unique in their deep socio-cultural context, as the heroic history of Sevastopol is filled with tragedy and is established in the cultural code of the Russian people. Letters of a special purpose, addressed to the relatives and friends of a soldier who died in battle, perform a psychologically difficult task: their sender becomes a messenger of bereavement, which requires high moral readiness and moral strength from the author. This set of features of front-line letters for the first time became the subject of research by anthropologists and linguists.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the study was the letters from the front written by fellows of a soldier dead in the battles for the liberation of Sevastopol, personally acquainted with him and witnessed the fact of his death, addressed to his parents, wife or other relatives who are in the rear. The array of letters has not yet been investigated, has not been officially deciphered, and is presented on the state Internet resource Goskatalog.RF, in the section of the Federal State Budget Cultural Institution "Sevastopol Military Historical Museum-Reserve" of the city of Sevastopol.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the work is to identify the structure of the front-line letter to relatives and friends about the death of a fellow soldier and to determine the functional task of each of its elements, reflecting the individual's perception of the war situation.

5. Research Methods

In the structure of front-line letters, several groups are distinguished by the addressee – letters to relatives and friends, letters to the authorities, letters to the media and other mass communication bodies, letters to labour collectives and organizations, letters addressed to party departments, etc. The subject and rhetoric of these letters have significant differences, distinct emotional and semantic content. Letters to the family are distinguished by emotional involvement in concerns, the desire to reduce the overall level of anxiety of a loved one. This type of letter, as a rule, is subject to a standard protocol, which includes from three to five blocks; it consists of a greeting, a general content part and a final protocol, parting words, words of commemoration and requests (Ivanov, 2008). In the conditions of censor-monitored military correspondence, when composing the text, the author cannot ignore the fact that the letter will be available to outsiders, and may become the property of many relatives, fellow villagers, and schoolchildren. Nevertheless, personal correspondence addressed to relatives and family is the most narrowly focused, emotionally and meaningfully intimate, the author-text-reader triad is manifested in them with maximum force.

Letters addressed to the relatives and friends of the dead fellow soldier were also subjected to military censorship, which "... accustomed the writers to the standard language of describing military events" (Rozhdestvenskaya, 2018, p. 81). These letters are part of a personal correspondence that does not imply a personal acquaintance of the addresser with the addressee. The fact that there is no personal context puts these letters in a separate category, which represents a special research potential as a storage of the most objective data about the concerns of the fighters, the combat situation, everyday military life and routine. These messages are inspired, according to Efremov and Zverev (2015), with a kind of "realism" and "...contained such details that the consciousness of a modern person, spoiled by psychologism, would seem nightmarish" (p. 144). As scientific methods to study the structure and functions of front-line writing, the methods of source and narrative analysis were used, which allowed us to see the features of the structuring of the narrative text, to identify the functional denomination of each block of writing, to understand the contextual plan of their rhetorical means, taking into account the fact that a person even before the narration knows the purpose and meaning of his message (Kuznetsov, 2016).

6. Findings

After studying the array of front-line letters, it was found that the text of the letter informing about the death of a comrade or fellow soldier implements a completely similar protocol. It differs in many ways from interpersonal correspondence. In the greeting part, the author respectfully addresses the

mother, father or wife of the dead person, but only in rare cases calls the full name. The addresser often does not know the names, being guided either by the available information from correspondence, stories or knowing only the last name of the fighter: "Dear citizen Milchenko Olga Ignatyevna!", "Comrade Giskina!", "Hello, mumsie, brother and sister of my front-line brother...", "Hello Comrade Babicheva" (here and further on, the text of the letters is given in the original, some parts of the text are lost). This is followed by the traditional greeting and self-presentation for front-line rhetoric to determine their place and role in communication: "This letter is written to you by a friend of your husband, Trofim Fedorovich Plotnikov, Yegor Timofeyevich." In the case of uncertain authorship, a certain collective author is presented: "Your son Ivan Andreevich Gryazev served in our unit." The collective author is represented by the commander or political commissar of a military unit, whose duties did not include sending out informal correspondence, but often the officers took it upon themselves to pay the last debt of memory to the family and friends of the dead soldier. More often, the letters were written by fellow soldiers experiencing sincere grief from the loss of a friend.

The letters of the command staff are characterized by a scarcity of emotional colouring, their content mainly performs an informative function. However, even in these objective messages, there are a few words of compassion, personal emotional involvement: "... I, the commander of the unit, would not like to write about my favourites and my comrades, writing somehow with difficulty leads the hand ... to the lines...". In the text, the presence of elements of propaganda and patriotic influence on the addressee is noticeable. The party and Komsomol affiliation of the fighter is emphasized, his merits in ideological work are underlined. From the letter of Major Sukach to Gryazev, the father of Lieutenant Gryazev, we learn about that "as an officer and working as a Komsomol member of our unit, he justified all his knowledge and abilities... to educate the Komsomol... youth and all the soldiers of the Red Army loyalty to our Motherland... and the organizer of all the victories of the Sevastopol people of the communist party".

The texts of letters written by those who were personally familiar or were friends with the dead – these are fellow soldiers, medical workers, and countrymen – have expressed emotional content. The volume of such letters is always significantly larger and is equal to the volume of interpersonal correspondence.

The second block of the letter is devoted to the description of the place and circumstances of the death of the fighter. The most tragic section in several letters is filled with details and physiological details of the injury, suffering and agony of the dying person. For example, the message of Lieutenant Rudenko to Preidzis, brother of Preidzis: "He was wounded in the back and the spine was shattered. I sent him to the hospital myself, he was in memory, talking. We never expected him to die." Front-line letter of the Junior Lieutenant of the medical service Kuzina to the commander of the sanitary platoon, Giskina Tamara: "He was surrounded with despicable vile people, and he had to shoot himself into the temple. But not quite was still alive when the Germans broke into the trench. And they strangled him by the throat with their despicable vile hands." Excessive realism allowed, on the one hand, to perpetuate the event in the memory of relatives, on the other – was the proof of the death of a soldier, whose body was personally buried by his fellow soldier. The place of burial in Sevastopol and its suburbs is often indicated.

If the letter is written to the wife or beloved girlfriend of the dead soldier, an unambiguous statement of the fact of death removes the duty of waiting and full release from the search for the missing person. The conclusion that the statement of the details "...comprised a kind of severe benevolence: the addresser was freed from illusions and the obligation to "wait", hoping to the last for an error in the "death notice", following the call of the well-known poem by Simonov", seems convincing, especially since we find the description of the episode of death in the letters of the commanders of military units" (Efremov & Zverev, 2015). It seems that there was some unspoken protocol that imposes on fellow soldiers the duty to personally witness the fact of the death of a fighter.

The next element of the letter about the dead soldier is the assurance of revenge against the fascists for his death. From letters to letters, the promises of fellow soldiers to do everything so that the enemy is punished for the death of a Red Army soldier are present. Lexically, this block is expressive, full of metaphors, threats: "We will chop them like firewood" (the letter from Lieutenant Rudenko to Preidzis, brother of Preidzis), "His fellow soldiers swore to avenge the death of your husband... hundreds of frites were eradicated, thrown into the sea" (the letter from Lieutenant Milchenko), "...I and my fellows swore to the Motherland and swear to you that we will take revenge on the two-legged to the animals for your best friend and your loving husband..." (a letter from Plotkin to Babich). The authors use a variety of lexical phrases, the semantics of which are unambiguously interpreted in the context of inescapable sacred punishment. Reassurance of the inevitability of the enemy's death should bring psychological satisfaction to the family, remove the frustrating feeling of impunity for the murder and irreparable loss (Liang et al., 2020).

Revenge for the killed fellows and fellow soldiers became one of the socially approved and expected ways of compensation in the war. It traditionally stands in line with divine retribution and is designed to restore justice in the highest, sacred sense (Loginov, 2017).

The next structural element that occurs in most of the letters is a block of laudatory rhetoric filled with admiration for the personality of the dead person. Fellow soldiers with special warmth tell about the merits, successes, personal qualities of their friend. Following the traditional requirement in a mourning communication event, the deceased is given posthumous honours. For those who have lost a loved one, such honours allow capturing his heroic image in memory, telling about the deceased to a wide circle as a worthy defender of the fatherland: "He was a wonderful fellow and an excellent commander"; "He was also valuable... to the motherland in the battles for the city of Sevastopol"; "Your husband was a staunch and courageous Bolshevik, and he despised ... and smashed the vile enemies of the entire people".

The final element of the letter contains a farewell, which is more reserved than in letters to the family and relatives. The author only rarely offers to enter into correspondence, mostly it is not expected.

7. Conclusion

The letters that the soldiers wrote to the families and relatives of their friend, where it was reported about his death in the battles for the liberation of Sevastopol, have special emotional content, imposing on their authors the responsibility for the psychological state of the relatives of the deceased. The anthropological potential of letters of such content allows us to get closer to understanding the deep spiritual essence of the relationships that develop on the front line between fellow soldiers, comrades, and

fellow officers. Source and narrative analysis of letters made it possible to identify the structure of letters of similar content, bringing them into a special category of front-line epistles. Subordination to an unspoken protocol containing a certain sequence of elements: greeting-presentation, statement of the fact and circumstances of death, the indication of the place of burial, assurances of the inevitability of revenge for the death of a comrade, praising his personality, allows us to draw the following conclusions:

Each block of the letter has a certain psychological burden that determines the future life of the relatives and friends of the deceased, eliminating the error in the news of the death, removing from them the duty of waiting and searching. At the same time, the letter itself, which primarily tells about the fate of the deceased, is a characteristic of the addresser's personality, reflecting his subjective attitude both to the fact of death, and the general, typical moods that dominate during the battle for Sevastopol. The study of front-line letters helps to better understand the aspects and specifics of both the Great Patriotic War as a whole and its periods.

In the conditions of the front line, uncertainty and transience of life in the war, friendly relations are formed between the soldiers, forming feelings of mutual assistance and mutual assistance in the conditions of front-line life, sometimes no less deep than family links. The death of friends is perceived as a personal loss and causes deep emotional feelings. That is why the standardized protocol of a letter with the news of the death of a fellow soldier often includes a personal emotional component. This is evidence that the life of an individual in war is not devalued. Even the fact that most often such letters did not involve feedback, but it is the emotional component that helps relatives to feel the involvement of others in their bereavement from the loss of a loved one.

Letters addressed to an unknown addressee are charged with a high level of propaganda and ideology. Following the traditional memorial canon, the deceased are given honours that are revealed in the context of the righteous war for the Motherland. Realizing the psychotraumatic effect of funeral notices, the comrades of the deceased undertake to avenge his death, trying to partially reduce the degree of the drama of the loss by the fact that death is elevated to the exalted rank of death in the name of the Fatherland, which occupies the main place in the system of values of the Soviet people.

The letters reflect the general features characteristic of the collective linguistic personality of that time, which are one of the main components of the historical memory of our people. This allows understanding the psychology of human behaviour in war conditions, the values and aspirations of people of that time.

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