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STYLISTIC PECULARITIES OF MILITARY FICTION BY E.M. REMARQUE “ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT”

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This article aims at identifying stylistic peculiarities in the military fiction. The focus is placed on the novel “All Quiet on the Western Front” by Erich Maria Remarque, as a notable example of this genre.

Key words: stylistic peculiarities, military fiction, war, novel.

Military fiction, sometimes referred to as war novel, is not merely narration related to military issues; it is more of the chronicle of lives, events, ideas, incorporating viewpoints of warriors, where almost all ideological, aesthetic and ethical problems of a contemporary society seek solutions. This genre dates back to the ancient literature, epic poetry of the classical and medieval periods, associated with Homer, Virgil, folk sagas, just to name a few.

Many writers wrote about war, its blood and cruelty, despair and ruthlessness, countless innocent lives being destroyed; many protagonists and characters have emerged from the crucible of war, ferocious hell in the military fiction of German, Russian, American and Japanese novelists. Masterpieces of this genre appeared during the First and the Second World Wars to reflect and contemplate the horrible effect of the slaughter [1].

All Quiet on the Western Front is regarded as one the most successful novels through the last century. Three months after its publication, it was widely interpreted and discussed around the world; the novel was translated into more than twenty languages with more than thirty million copies [4]. The novel was exceptional among Erich Maria Remarque’s books, for Arch of Triumph and The Night in Lisbon were in the list of the bestsellers too, and his several works have been adapted into movies.

In terms of the plot, the story tells us about Paul Baumer who joins the army within a group of German soldiers on the Western Front during the First World War 1914–1918. Eloquent patriotic words of his instructor Kantorek inspire young men to volunteer for the army just after the beginning of the War. Paul meets Stanislaus Katczinsky, a mature soldier, who later on becomes his mentor. When they fight on the western front, Paul and his friends are involved into numerous battles, they suffer from dreadful conditions and struggle with death every single day.

The novel does not solely depict military heroes and combat actions in the war; it rather provides the reader with a profound and thorough description about the severe and tragic conditions in which the soldiers find themselves. The striking contrast between naïve dreams, battles, furious gunfire, everlasting hun-

ger, fear to be killed, moves into characters' flashbacks of serene happiness of previous, pre-war life, and finally tragic deaths of the soldiers are vividly described in detail.

Paul visits his home to spend the leave with the family but he feels that the town has not changed since he joined the army. Nevertheless, he finds out that he does not belong here anymore, he is literally thrown away from life of most of the people in his town, even his father abandons him; the only person Paul feels deep affection to, is his dead mother. Then, he feels relieved to be reunited with his friends on the front again. Paul's first military victim is an enemy soldier who he killed in face-to-face combat [3]. He stares at the man's body in great pain, having an overwhelming tragic sense, asking for the mercy and forgiveness from the corpse. He gets certain spiritual support from his friends who, trying to comfort him, say that killing is a common thing in the war, but the inner struggle devastates Paul. Finally, he is killed in October 1918 on an amazingly peaceful day and the formal report starts with the phrase "All quiet on the Western Front". The title of the novel and one of the final lines are paradoxical, as death and tranquility contradict each other.

The main idea of the novel is centered around the complex situation of soldiers who have to get back to habitual social life after army front hardship. Remarque comments in the beginning of the novel saying, "I will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war" [5]. In addition, Paul comments, "although all the boys are young, their youth has left them" [5]. These quotations speak volumes about the destiny of characters in the novel.

The story is the first-person narration where the protagonist gradually transfers into the third-person describing Paul's tragic death, to give the reader an opportunity to witness Paul's suffering and struggle.

The novel is full of symbolic imagery. The writer uses several ones to guide the reader to dwell on significant themes of the horrible effect of the war for the young people. There is a vivid metonymic symbol of aviator's boots which pass from man to man after violent death of each one. Four men use these boots but none of them survives the war. One more symbol, which is presented by the writer, is a butterfly. It is an allusion to Remarque's hobby in his childhood, i.e. collecting insects. The writer resorts to this symbol to illustrate Paul's character as that of purity and natural joy that does not fit war environment.

Remarque resorts to anaphoric repetition to stress monotonous routine of bloody military life on the front that sounds like a sad refrain, "Monotonously the lorries sway, monotonously come the calls, monotonously falls the rain" [5].

Repetition in general is one of the most powerful Remarque's stylistic devices to lay emphasis and create certain rhythm, "Dawn approaches without anything happening – only the everlasting, nerve-wracking roll behind the enemy lines, trains, trains, lorries, lorries; but what are they concentrating?" [5]

Remarque does not bother to censor vivid description of death by means of repetition again. He speaks of some men being found, “noses were cut off and their eyes poked out ... their mouths and noses were stuffed with sawdust so that they suffocated”. The story abounds in the words that pertain to the semantic field of war: death, tragedy, blood, terror, gunfire, wounds, etc.

There is one more repetition where the writer imitates high-elevated saga style with archaic forms, “Earth with thy folds, and hollows, and holes... O Earth, thou grantest us the great resisting surge of new-won life!” Earth is personified here compared to the Mother, who is begged to grant protection to her suffering children.

Though being tragic, Remarque’s prose is very poetic as well. It is achieved by personification, which adds to vividness and brightness of images, “The wind plays with our hair; it plays with our words and thoughts”, “Over us Chance hovers”, “Darknesses blacker than the night rush on us with giant strides, over us and away”. “My arms have grown wings and I’m almost afraid of going up into the sky, as though I held a couple of captive balloons in my fists” [5].

Metaphors perform an exceptionally vital role in the war novel creating a particular emotional atmosphere.

“I don’t know whether it is morning or evening, I lie in the pale cradle of the twilight, and listen for soft words which will come, soft and near – am I crying?” [5]. Here the author emphasizes the striking contrast between the war and quietness of nature.

“The front is a cage in which we must await fearfully whatever may happen”. “There’ll be a bombardment,’ that is merely his own opinion; but if he says it here, then the sentence has the sharpness of a bayonet in the moonlight, it cuts clean through the thought” [5]. These metaphors strengthen the power of destruction, inevitability of tragedy.

Among Remarque’s favourite stylistic devices, there is simile, which makes images more intensified and even physically tangible, “He had collapsed like a rotten tree”, “like a big, soft jelly-fish, (gas) floats into our shell-hole and lolls there obscenely”.

Abundance of stylistic devices and distinct narration make the prose of Erich Maria Remarque unique and his style – recognizable.

The novel “All Quiet on the Western Front” is a classic example of military prose that provides an extremely realistic portrayal of war due to specific narrative techniques and stylistic devices aimed at imposing meaning and coherence on representations of the wartime experience, even when revealing the experience itself as totally meaningless and incoherent [2].

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