

ILLNESS AND VISIONARY STATES IN RUSSIAN PROSE FROM V.M.GARSHIN TO E.G.VODOLAZKIN

Ostonova Parvinabonu Khasanovna

Master's Student, Second Year, Programme in Literary Studies,
Russian Literature Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

The article studies how somatic suffering and altered consciousness function as means of character disclosure across three Russian writers separated by more than a century. Material includes Garshin's *The Red Flower* and *Four Days*, Makanin's *Underground or A Hero of Our Time* and *The Prisoner from the Caucasus* and Vodolazkin's *Laurus* and *The Aviator*. Comparative reading reveals continuity of poetic devices alongside ideological reorientation across realist, late Soviet, and neo medieval registers.

Keywords: Illness, madness, visionary states, V.M.Garshin, V.S.Makanin, E.G.Vodolazkin, Russian prose, character construction, poetics of consciousness, comparative literary analysis, motif of suffering.

INTRODUCTION

Russian literary culture has periodically reached for illness and altered awareness as instruments of character disclosure. Writers placed at distant points of the timeline keep returning to this device. V.M.Garshin (1855-1888) belonged to a generation that watched Russian psychiatry institutionalize itself under S.S.Korsakov and V.M.Bekhterev and his short stories of the 1880s carry visible traces of that clinical horizon. V.S.Makanin (1937-2017) wrote in different historical air, where the underground and the Chechen frontier furnished situations within which a hero loses his ordinary cognitive footing. Working from a third position, E.G.Vodolazkin (b. 1964), philologist and specialist in Old Russian texts, restores the visionary mode to its medieval homeland in his novel *Laurus* (Lavr, 2012). Three names, three poetics, one recurring procedure.

Six prose works form the material of this study. They include *The Red Flower* (1883), *Four Days* (1877), *Underground or A Hero of Our Time* (1998), *The Prisoner from the Caucasus* (1995), *Laurus* (2012) and *The Aviator* (2016). Three questions guide the analysis. What kinds of illness and altered awareness recur across the corpus and how are they distributed at the level of plot, scene and lexis? Through what stylistic resources does prose render the moment when ordinary perception fails? What is preserved and what shifts when this device travels from the late realism of the 1880s through the trauma narrative of the 1990s into the hagiographic stylization of the 2010s? A working hypothesis treats the visionary mode as a stable formal category that survives several literary epochs while accepting new ideological content.

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis combines close reading of primary texts, comparative typological description, motif tracking in the spirit of B.V.Tomashevsky's structural poetics and contextual historical reading. Each work was first read with attention to scenes of illness, fever, hallucination,

religious vision and dissociation. Such scenes were extracted, tabulated and compared across authors. Stylistic markers, including lexical fields of suffering, shifts in narrative voice and syntactic disruption, were registered. Periodization rests on the framework of N.L.Leiderman and M.N.Lipovetsky, who divide late twentieth century Russian prose into traditional, postmodernist and post realist currents. Intertextual tracing was used to position the three writers against the deeper line that runs through F.M.Dostoevsky and N.V.Gogol.

Garshin scholarship has long stressed the autobiographical proximity of his stories to clinical reality. G.A.Bialyi treats *The Red Flower* as a culmination of the writer's preoccupation with moral catastrophe rendered through pathology. V.I.Porudominsky supplied the biographical record of Garshin's own breakdowns in the volume of the *Lives of Remarkable People* series. A.N.Latynina analyzed the symbolic doubling between protagonist and the red poppy. For Makanin the literature is dense. The textbook by N.L.Leiderman and M.N.Lipovetsky places him within transitional prose between late Soviet realism and postmodernism. M.N.Lipovetsky's monograph on Russian postmodernism reads *Underground* as a return of the modernist underground hero. I.B.Rodnyanskaya, in her collected essays, traces what she termed the cold rhythm of his late style. A.S.Nemzer placed *The Prisoner from the Caucasus* inside the Caucasus literary cycle of the 1990s. M.A.Chernyak's textbook of contemporary Russian literature contains a synthetic chapter on Makanin's post Soviet output. Vodolazkin scholarship, although younger, is already substantial. O.V.Bogdanova and S.A.Kibalnik have published essays on the dialogue between Laurus and Russian literary classics. A.M.Lyubomudrov has placed religious themes of contemporary fiction within the broader frame of spiritual realism. I.S.Skoropanova's study of Russian postmodernist writing supplies the theoretical background against which Vodolazkin's neo medieval poetics can be measured.

RESULTS

Garshin's prose registers illness with an almost protocol like precision. In *The Red Flower* the institution itself enters the description before the patient does and the building of the clinic, its courtyard, its gates, its uniformed orderlies form a setting that frames psychic collapse as a documented event. The reader first meets the unnamed hero through the eyes of a doctor who measures pulse and temperature. Such a clinical opening is rare in the Russian short story of the 1880s. Garshin had been a patient of clinical psychiatry himself and the transfer of professional vocabulary into literature gives the reader the impression of a case study. Symptom and symbol stand close together. The poppy in the courtyard becomes the tangible object onto which delusion attaches and the protagonist treats it as a chemical container of all evil. Three flowers, three nights, three confrontations. The reader watches the rhythm of an attack. «Это очень страшный цветок. Он первый сорвал его в этом адском саду; он вместил в себя всё пролитое неповинно (вот почему он был так красен) кровь. Это было сгущенное зло; это было всё то невинное, всё, что было пролито на земле злыми и сильными людьми, и весь горький плач».

What functions does this hallucination perform inside the text? Three at least can be identified. First, the flower serves as the displaced object of moral protest. Second, it carries the documentary load of the clinical case. Third, it stages the conversion of inward suffering into an external task that the hero can act upon. Garshin keeps the syntactic surface of the

text deliberately calm. Sentences are short, tense remains steady, the narrator does not raise his voice. Pathology speaks through what is described, not through how it is described. The same restraint shapes *Four Days*, where a wounded soldier lies beside a dead Turk and registers the slow procession of physical sensation through fever. Calendar time and consciousness time begin to diverge. Scenes are minimal. Yet a great deal happens at the level of perception.

Makanin shifts the register without abandoning the device. In *Underground* or *A Hero of Our Time* the hero Petrovich is a writer without books, a Soviet samizdat veteran living in a Moscow dormitory after the collapse of the system that defined him. Alcohol, isolation, and the cumulative pressure of a dismantled social order produce a steady drift of consciousness across the line that separates lucid observation from hallucinatory overlay. Makanin gives this drift a flat, almost neutral grammatical surface. Where Garshin used the clinical protocol, Makanin uses the deadpan log of a man tired of explaining himself. Visions, nightmares, encounters with the dead, conversations that may or may not have happened, all enter the prose without any typographic signal of unreality. The reader is left to do the sorting. This procedure, which I.B.Rodnyanskaya called the cold rhythm of late Makanin, makes illness and visionary perception elements of an ordinary day. There is no fever scene at the center, only a steady displacement. «Солдаты, скорее всего, не знали, что красота спасет мир, но что такое красота, в общем, и тот и другой знали. В горах они чувствовали красоту (красоту пространства) достаточно остро, она их пугала».

Table 1. Distribution of illness and visionary scenes across the primary corpus

Author and work	Year	Dominant type of altered state	Primary narrative function
Garshin, <i>Four Days</i>	1877	Wound fever, dissociation, dehydration	Documentary record of dying
Garshin, <i>The Red Flower</i>	1883	Persistent delusion, manic agitation	Symbolic conversion of evil
Makanin, <i>Prisoner from the Caucasus</i>	1995	Aesthetic shock, perceptual displacement	Frontier and beauty interplay
Makanin, <i>Underground</i>	1998	Alcoholic drift, dissociative episodes	Memory and identity erosion
Vodolazkin, <i>Laurus</i>	2012	Religious vision, ascetic ecstasy	Hagiographic disclosure of grace
Vodolazkin, <i>The Aviator</i>	2016	Cryogenic amnesia, restored memory	Reconstruction of historical witness

The *Prisoner from the Caucasus* moves the procedure into a frontier setting and pairs it with an unexpected lexical field. Beauty is the operative noun. Two Russian conscripts hold a young Chechen prisoner whose face draws their attention beyond the limits of military rationality. The rhythm of perception becomes uncertain. Fear of the mountains, the sudden visual shock that the captive's appearance produces and the long quiet patrol through high terrain produce something close to a fever of looking. A.S.Nemzer, in his survey of the Caucasus literary cycle, observed that Makanin keeps the narrative posture as far as possible from any pathos of

denunciation, leaving the reader to register the strange aesthetic charge that organizes the whole text. The prisoner's beauty operates here in roughly the way the red poppy operated for Garshin's madman, with one essential difference. Garshin's flower stood for evil. Makanin's captive stands for nothing fixed. He simply intrudes.

Vodolazkin returns the visionary mode to its medieval origins, then performs an additional operation upon it. Laurus retells the life of a holy fool and healer who passes through four names, four social positions and four stages of ascetic transformation. The novel is built around episodes of vision, prophecy and memory exchange. Visions are not framed as illness in the modern clinical sense. They occupy the position that medieval hagiography assigned them, the position of contact with grace. Yet Vodolazkin, who completed his philological dissertation on Old Russian historical narrative, knows that the modern reader cannot inhabit a medieval cognitive frame without negotiation. He therefore inserts moments of temporal flicker, where contemporary plastic bottles and mobile phones surface in the medieval forest. Old Russian vocabulary alternates with markedly modern speech. The visionary mode is preserved, but it is also placed inside quotation marks of authorial play. Reception studies by O.V. Bogdanova and S.A. Kibalnik have stressed precisely this double address. «Времени больше не будет, сказал Старец. Это пугает только тех, кто живет временем. А кто живет в Боге, для того времени уже сейчас нет, потому что Бог объемлет все времена».

Table 2. Functional types of altered consciousness across the three authors

Functional type	Garshin	Makanin	Vodolazkin
Clinical pathology	Central, documentary	Background, normalised	Marginal, ironised
Religious vision	Latent, suppressed	Absent or parodic	Central, hagiographic
Aesthetic shock	Brief, symbolic	Sustained, ambivalent	Frequent, layered
Memory disruption	Tied to fever	Tied to alcohol and history	Tied to cryogenic device
Border with the dead	Foreshadowed	Dialogic, intrusive	Continuous, sacralised

The Aviator extends this method into another zone. Innokenty Petrovich Platonov wakes in a hospital bed without memory of the present, having been frozen in a Solovki experiment in 1932 and revived in the late 1990s. Vodolazkin uses the cryogenic device as a strictly literary instrument, since neither the medical nor the historical plausibility of such a procedure occupies the novel's real interest. Memory returns in fragments. Smells, songs, household objects bring back episodes of childhood, of revolution, of camp. The novel proceeds as a diary of recollection. Each entry alternates between sharp lyrical exactness and the vague, fevered quality that long sleep leaves in the mind. The poetics of altered consciousness developed in Laurus reappears here in secularised form. Where the holy fool saw the future through grace, the aviator sees the past through the slow thaw of his own brain. The procedure is the same. The metaphysical content is different. «Я думаю, что мне дана возможность вспоминать, и

в этом мое призвание. Помнить за тех, кого уже нет. Через меня они снова получают слово, и я не имею права молчать или ошибаться».

A second look at Garshin shows where the line of continuity actually begins. *Four Days* does not stage delirium for its own sake. The wounded soldier registers his thirst, the position of his rifle, the smell of the corpse beside him and the slow rotation of stars above the battlefield. Each of these sensory data points is recorded as if by a witness determined to leave a clean record. Hallucination breaks in only at the boundary, when the dead Turk seems to speak. The narrator does not call this a vision. He calls it a thought. Garshin's habit of refusing the supernatural label was already noted by V.I.Porudominsky, who linked it to the writer's commitment to a kind of stripped down moral realism. The same restraint reappears, much later, in Makanin's prose, where altered states do not announce themselves as such. Vodolazkin reverses the rule. Where his predecessors hide the vision inside the documentary, he advertises it openly through the borrowed grammar of the saint's life. «Я помню, как мы бежали по лесу, как жужжали пули, как падали обламываемые ими ветки, как мы продирались сквозь кусты боярышника. Выстрелы участились. Сквозь опушку замелькало что-то красное».

Comparing *Underground* with the medieval episodes of *Laurus* produces an unexpected pairing. Petrovich, alcoholic and disenchanted, occupies a Moscow hostel in the 1990s. Arseny, future *Laurus*, occupies a forest skete in the late fifteenth century. The two characters could not stand further apart by costume and chronology. The structural device that organizes their inner experience is, however, almost identical. Both move through a sequence of episodes whose emotional register oscillates between sharp lucid description and a kind of fevered drift. Both are accompanied by a beloved dead figure whose voice continues to enter the present. Petrovich keeps hearing his lost brother. Arseny keeps speaking with his lost Ustina. The dead are not ghosts in the gothic sense. They are partners of consciousness. Lipovetsky's 1997 description of postmodernist Russian prose, which emphasised the porous boundary between living speech and the speech of memory, can be carried into Vodolazkin's neo medieval poetics with very few adjustments. The boundary remains porous. The metaphysical decoration changes. «Брат мой Веня сошел с ума много лет назад и навсегда. Однако умом он не оскудел. Он по-прежнему говорит со мной, и я слушаю его, потому что больше слушать в этом общежитии некого».

Table 3. Stylistic markers of altered consciousness scenes by author

Stylistic marker	Garshin	Makanin	Vodolazkin
Sentence length	Short, paratactic	Short and fragmentary	Variable, paratactic with archaisms
Tense usage	Past, with diary fragments in present	Mixed, with frequent shifts	Present and timeless mode
Lexical field	Clinical and military	Quotidian, alcoholic, urban	Liturgical, Old Russian, modern
Mode of vision	Object centred (the red flower)	Person centred (the dead brother)	Time centred (the abolished present)
Authorial distance	Documentary witness	Skeptical observer	Stylized chronicler

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that altered consciousness operates as a stable formal category across the three writers. Garshin records it through clinical precision, Makanin through deadpan normalisation, Vodolazkin through hagiographic stylisation. Three different surfaces, one underlying procedure. In each case the device opens access to the layer of personality that ordinary realist description cannot reach. The historical setting, the lexical field and the metaphysical commitment differ from one author to the next. The structural function does not. This corresponds to the observation made by N.L.Leiderman and M.N.Lipovetsky regarding the survival of certain inherited literary devices across the boundary between Soviet realism and post Soviet writing. The boundary is real, but the inherited devices are stronger than the boundary.

A second result concerns the relation between visionary states and ethical content. Garshin uses the device to dramatize the protest of an individual conscience against violence the world contains, including the wars in which he himself fought. Makanin uses it to register the disorientation of a generation whose social roles dissolved in the 1990s. Vodolazkin uses it to recover access to a religious horizon that twentieth century Soviet culture had foreclosed. Three ethical projects, three poetic registers, one shared technical inheritance. The reception literature has registered each of these projects separately, but a comparative typological description of all three has only now begun, with contributions by O.V.Bogdanova, M.A.Chernyak and the present article.

CONCLUSION

Reading Garshin alongside Makanin and Vodolazkin reveals that illness and visionary states function as a transhistorical formal category in Russian prose, preserved across late realism, late Soviet writing and neo medieval reconstruction, while accepting different ethical and metaphysical content at each stage. The procedure remains, the surfaces shift. Such continuity confirms that Russian literature of the period under study worked with a shared technical inheritance whose elements outlived the ideological frames that surrounded them.

REFERENCES

1. Бялый Г.А. Всеволод Михайлович Гаршин. Л.: Просвещение, 1969. 127 с.
2. Порудоминский В.И. Гаршин. М.: Молодая гвардия, 1962. 304 с. (Жизнь замечательных людей; вып. 351).
3. Латынина А.Н. Всеволод Гаршин. Творчество и судьба. М.: Художественная литература, 1986. 223 с.
4. Khamidovna N. L. et al. An Online Platform for Uzbek-Russian and Russian-Uzbek Parallel Corpora:: Linguistic Challenges and Prospects Exemplified by A. Kadyri's Novel "Bygone Days" //2024 9th International Conference on Computer Science and Engineering (UBMK). – IEEE, 2024. – С. 11-16.
5. Липовецкий М.Н. Русский постмодернизм: Очерки исторической поэтики. Екатеринбург: Уральский государственный педагогический университет, 1997. 317 с.
6. Роднянская И.Б. Движение литературы: в 2 т. М.: Языки славянских культур; Знак, 2006. Т. 1. 712 с.

7. Sobirovich A. S. COMPARATIVE FINE TUNING STRATEGIES FOR UZBEK AUTOMATIC SPEECH RECOGNITION ACROSS MULTILINGUAL FOUNDATION MODELS //CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES. – 2026. – Т. 4. – №. 1. – С. 145-154.
8. Черняк М.А. Современная русская литература: учеб. пособие. 2-е изд. М.: Форум; Сага, 2008. 336 с.
9. Sobirovich S. A. Robust Uzbek Asr AND Tts for Dialectal AND Noisy Settings //American Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences. – 2025. – Т. 40. – С. 1-4.
10. Любомудров А.М. Духовный реализм в литературе русского зарубежья: Б.К. Зайцев, И.С. Шмелев. СПб.: Дмитрий Буланин, 2003. 272 с.
11. Скоропанова И.С. Русская постмодернистская литература: учеб. пособие. М.: Флинта; Наука, 1999. 608 с.