

An Analysis on the Russian Cultural Characteristics of "Battle for Sevastopol" From Overt and Covert Progressions

Yuan Li^{1,*}

¹College of Foreign Languages, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 1164972541@qq.com

ABSTRACT

"Female Sniper" (also known as "Battle of Sevastopol") takes the defense of Sevastopol during World War II as the background, telling the military career of the top Soviet sniper Pavlichenko Lyudmila. This article interprets the film based on the dual narrative process proposed by Chinese scholar Shen Dan. The dual narrative process includes the plot development that has been widely concerned by critics so far, that is, the "overt plots"; the other is the "covert progressions" hidden behind the explicit plots. The "covert progressions" are a narrative undercurrent that run side by side with the development of the plot from beginning to end, and the two complement or subvert each other in various ways. The overt plots of the film focus on the fierceness of the war and the huge destructive effect, and then show the Russian nation's responsibility in the face of fascists and the nation's historical sense of suffering. The covert progressions present Russian Messianic consciousness three-dimensionally from the three dimensions of religion, politics, and spirit.

Keywords: *overt plots, covert progressions, love, suffering consciousness, messianic consciousness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Narrative process is a hot topic in the narrative educational circles. The American rhetorical narrative critic James Phelan first regarded narrative as a process in his book "Reading Characters, Reading Plots: Characters, Processes, and Narrative Interpretations" published in 1989. The research on the narrative process of Phelan and later is mostly centered on a single narrative process based on unstable factors in the plot.[1] Chinese scholar Shen Dan found that there are dual narrative processes in many narrative works. One is the development of plots that critics have paid attention to so far, that is, "overt plots"[2]; the other is the "covert progressions" hidden behind overt plots. "The covert progression is a narrative undercurrent that runs side by side with the development of the plot from beginning to end. The two complement or subvert each other in various ways. The covert progressions play a very important role in expressing the theme and aesthetic value of the work.[3] It breaks the shackles of plot development in traditional narratology and provides a new framework for interpreting narrative works. The film "Battle for Sevastopol" presents a dual narrative process that is mutually independent and interactive, with ups and downs, and together they contribute to the expression of the thematic meaning — accusing war, cherishing the consciousness of national

suffering, and highlighting the Russian national messianic consciousness.

II. THE OVERT PLOTS OF ACCUSING WAR AND CHERISHING THE NATIONAL SUFFERING CONSCIOUSNESS

A. Overt plots: the destructive nature of wars

The overt plots mainly advance the plot development with the three romances that Lyudmila encounters on the battlefield. Lyudmila first had a secret affection for the brave superior Makarov, who was fighting side by side, and took the initiative to show love. In order not to distract each other, Makarov had to suppress the surging flames of love. Makarov died unfortunately, and his gun was transferred to Lyudmila. She took the sniper rifle regardless of her severely injured physical condition. In order to be brave for love, she once again "unified man and gun", and the endless love and determination of revenge supported her to move forward. It was Leonid who succeeded Makarov. The tragedy of the war and the unknown of tomorrow made everyone know how to love their beloved. The frequent shooting of the same enemy outlined the relationship between the two in flames of wars. "This person is like a rainbow, and you can only know its existence when you meet it". Their love is bold and passionate. When the artillery struck, Leonid

protected Lyudmila, and Lyudmila survived alone. She was still arranged to face a German sniper despite her severe physical and mental damage. Lyudmila had no intention of confronting, however, the boss's words "You are for Leonid" poked directly at her weakness. She turned her mind and raised her gun to go out to battle. Doctor Boris always loved Lyudmila. He was afraid of war, initially refused to go to the battlefield, and was contemptuously rebuked as a coward. But the courage to "dare to be the first" overcame fear, and let him run to the battlefield and follow Lyudmila. He was the first man to fall in love with Lyudmila, and witnessed the lingering friendship between his loved one and the previous two in turn, but still silently guarded. At the time of the Soviet army retreat, he gave the only retreat certificate to Lyudmila and faced death. "Do you remember the ring? I have always known that it will be given to you one day". On the threshold of life and death, she heard the most touching words of love from Boris. However, when the ancestral ring has ownership, there is an extra day of sacrifice. The three lines of love are unforgettable, sorrowfully playing the song of "ice and fire" on the battlefield.

Lyudmila watched the three lovers leave, experiencing the sorrow and cold of life. "I really pity the shimmering bones abandoned by the Wuding River, they are still the dream lovers that the young women miss in their spring boudoirs". For her, liking has no result, and the one loved has no return and no grave. For the departed lover, there is nowhere to live on this shore, and there is no beauty on the other shore. "The pain is so persistent, moving patiently like a snail; the happiness is so short, flying across the autumn field like the tail of a rabbit", this is not only the epitaph of Pavlichenko Lyudmila, but also the epitaph of the times. Love is the eternal and bright theme of mankind. The living and multiplying of mankind, the origin and development of civilization, and the splendor of literature and art all have the participation of love. Russians cherish love. In proverbs that express the Russian national mind, they write about love like this: "Нет того любее, как люди людям любви. (Nothing is more precious than love between people)" and "С милым век коротать - жизнь не горевать. (Lovers' being together is the greatest happiness, they can sacrifice everything for love)". The famous Russian thinker Berdiaev once said: "Love is not an aspect of life, love is the whole of life." It can be seen that in the hearts of Russians, love has the greatest value and is the meaning of human existence and life. War itself means destruction. It eats away lives and wipes out the most sincere, true and pure things of mankind represented by love.

B. Presentation of the Russian national suffering consciousness

In the course of a thousand years of history, in the vast national space, the Russian nation has experienced foreign invasion (Tatar shackles, Mongolian invasion, the two Great Patriotic War, etc.) and domestic ruling class oppression and exploitation (serfdom shackles, great purge, Gulag persecution, collapse of the Soviet Union); the nation suffered a lot and the people were in deep trouble. Russian thinker Berdiaev once lamented: "The historical destiny of the Russian people is unfortunate and full of suffering, developing at a catastrophic speed through the fracture and mutation of civilization." [4] Looking back at Russia's history of thousands of years full of predestined fates, its ability to confront a person with the danger of death and he will fight to live, as well as nirvana of phoenix is the national thought and national spirit. Among them, the awareness of suffering of this nation is a special value, which is intertwined with patriotism and salvationism, forming a huge cohesion, and it is also the driving force for the survival and development of this nation". The consciousness of suffering penetrates into the blood and soul of the Russian nation, and it is deeply imprinted in the national memory. [4] In World War II, the Soviet Union paid an extremely heavy price for winning this war, losing more than 27 million people and thousands of towns and villages being destroyed. Every year, May 9th is the anniversary of the victory of the Great Patriotic War in Russia. It is a national holiday, and all the people of the place turned out for this. Almost no family did not participate in World War II. "Battle for Sevastopol" is a tragic reappearance of the Soviet-German battlefield. The director "includes the vast content of social life and grand social events into his artistic care, so that his film is beating with a strong pulse of the times". [5]

According to the trend of the film's overt plot, the Russian people complained bitterly about the tragedy of war, remembered the suffering, and called for peace. Although World War II was over, the Russians chose not to forget. The war of a generation, the witness of a generation, and the reflection of a generation must be remembered by the younger generation. The ingenious grafting of Simonov's¹ poetry in the image of a child in the film is an example: "If you don't want to lose your home/home where you live with your mother and wife/face the fascists holding guns/remember, no one will save this/except you/please remember, no one will kill a despicable enemy/except you... to kill the fascists/they should mourn everywhere...". The children forcefully accused the fascists, and their world was full of war clouds. "I just remember that my childhood was

¹ Note: Konstantin Mikhailovich Simonov: Soviet writer, novelist, poet and playwright who participated in the Anti-Fascist Patriotic War.

surrounded by incomprehensible and frightening words, melancholy and depressed.... At that time, we did not know there was a world without war, the only world we knew was the world of war. And the people in the war are the only people we know." [6] Alexievich once recorded the "childhood" in World War II in "I'm a Female Soldier, I'm Also a Woman". Children's world is war, children's life is exile, and children's future is to shoulder the banner of justice to wipe out fascists and go to the battlefield.

The suffering consciousness of the Russian nation has been transformed into a huge national cohesion and a belief in guarding the country. The female sniper Lyudmila is one of them. War is the responsibility of men, and women in Russia are also as excellent as their male peers. They sacrificed themselves to the whirlpool of suffering and went to the battlefield — raising their guns to defend the country's people. The children's powerful poetry reading further encouraged Lyudmila and her soldiers to fight against fascists. The honor of the top-level female sniper is based on the trauma of losing beloved ones and the faint physical injury caused by artillery fire. Each combatant is a double symbol of mental suffering and physical suffering. Those who die are memorialized, and those who survive are stained with blood. They are heroes of suffering.

III. THE COVERT PROGRESSIONS OF HIGHLIGHTING THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL MESSIAH CONSCIOUSNESS

The covert progression is a narrative undercurrent that runs side by side with the development of the plot from beginning to end. The two don't constitute a species or composition relationship, and together with the overt plots, they contribute to the expression of the theme of the work. The overt plots of the film focus on the fierceness of the war and its huge destructive effect, thereby allowing a glimpse of the determination and responsibility of the Russian nation to defend the country and the suffering of defeating fascists.

But in the film, if you only discuss the development of the overt plots of the work, you will one-sidedly understand or even seriously misunderstand the theme, character image and artistic value of the work. The covert progression of "Battle for Sevastopol" outlines another cultural consciousness to readers, namely the Russian messianic consciousness.

Messianic consciousness is the main theme of Russian national thought and a unique spiritual existence of this nation. Messiah means "the anointed one" and is a religious concept whose core content is "God chooses the nation" and "save". Chinese scholar Guo Xiaoli pointed out in the article "The Structure and Evolution of Russian Messianic Consciousness" that messianic consciousness is a three-dimensional and

structural model, namely, religious level (Russia claims to be the heir and savior of the Orthodox Eastern Church), spiritual level (Russia regards its own national ideas as the best weapon to save the world), and political level (Russia is trying to liberate all mankind). [7]

A. Religious and spiritual level

The Orthodox Eastern Church occupies an important place in Russian culture. In the torrent of nearly a thousand years since Ross was baptized in 988 to the October Revolution of 1917, the Orthodox Eastern Church has played a huge role in unifying national thought and shaping national image, and at the same time it has cultivated national spirit and national culture. Under the baptism of war, the director transformed Lyudmila from a sniper who shot and killed fascists into an incarnation full of human love. In the film, Lyudmila watched the three lovers leave, desperate for the cruelty of the war. Her courage to go to the battlefield resolutely at first also gradually disappeared, and finally replaced by the purpose of giving love to the world. Her duel with Germany's top sniper Otto Von Singer brought this goal to a climax. The duel was originally the duty of the sniper, but after the director's choice and combination, the brilliance of the heroine's humanity and the greatness of her soul were revealed. In the peak duel, after spending the night in the cold weather and the wind and insect bites, Lyudmila fought life and death and took the initiative to expose, which caused the Germans to show weaknesses, and then she preemptively shot them to death. In the shot of fighting desperately with a gun: her forehead was painted with a big cross with blood. The cross is a symbol of Christianity and represents God's love and redemption for mankind. The symbol of the cross appeared in the Soviet army, not the German army, and the final victor was still the Soviet army. The basis for this arrangement is precisely based on the fact that Russia claims to be the successor of the Orthodox Eastern Church and is a chosen nation.

When Lyudmila confirmed the identity of the target and looked through the certificate, she also found out the wedding photos carried by the German snipers, and her tears burst into her eyes. Because she experienced the pain of her lover being swallowed by the flames of war, she understood the misery of the world's watchmen on this shore. Compared with the warm and great love of mankind, the slaughter of war has been silently condemned. The film's message has gone beyond political disputes — exposing the deserving death of fascists and showing the heroic strength of the Soviet army, but reflecting on the war and conducting soul torture from the height of human nature. Regardless of the "self" side or the enemy side, they are all flesh and blood individuals, and each individual is the love and support of parents, lovers and children.

The first people who raised their guns to defend the country brought vain, but the call to love common people is the eternal truth. Berdiaev wrote in "Russian Thought" that "The Russian nation is a nation with a divine nature. Plenty of world sympathy is a characteristic of the Russian nation." [8] "Culture and art is not simply a record of the times, it shows the true, good, beautiful, fake, ugly, and evil of human nature through your shaping of the characters and the excavation of the theme, as well as the thinking about the state of human existence, especially the penetration of human nature". [9] Lyudmila looked at the "enemy" who had been shot dead by herself but didn't close eyes, and looked at the wedding photos of him and his wife. She was convinced by the noble love of mankind. She instinctively cried bitterly and choked, stretched blood-stained fingers to close eyes for the unacquainted enemy soldier and prayed for the dead to rest in peace, embodying the honesty and kindness of human nature, and thus completing the soul salvation of herself. It is not difficult to think of the Soviet film "The Forty First" here. Marutka, who was very loyal to the Bolshevik Party, fell in love with the 41st target she should have killed — the White Army lieutenant Govoruch-Outlook (captive of the Red Army). On the isolated island, she admired the handsome military officer, but in the end, the perceptual plumpness didn't break the distinction between "ism", and "red" and "white". Knowing that she fell in deep love with the officer, she still fired gun and killed him. Undoubtedly, this method of handling fully demonstrates the tearing of human nature in class society, and the concept of class struggle penetrates the depths of her soul. This is the individual aphasia under the violence of collectivism, the castration of the value of individual existence, and "a terrible evil and deep tragedy, but evil and tragedy are not just physical rape and persecution on the outside... At a deeper level, there are spiritual violence and spiritual killing". [10] Facing the alienation of human nature, readers' hearts can't help but reflect and tremble in the judgment of human nature value.

Lyudmila cried for the German soldier, affirming the value and dignity of the individual, maintaining the nobility of humanity and the greatness of the soul under the inhuman conditions of wartime, and treating the great "love" of humanity with tenderness and full of glory. If people heard the roar of humanity bursting in Marutka, then Lyudmila completed the return of humanity, conveyed the Russian nation's compassion, sense of mission and sympathy for the world all along, and conformed to the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky's main idea that "within the four seas all men are brothers" as well as Tolstoy's "fraternity" thought. As Solovyov said: "Love as a feeling, its meaning and value is to effectively force us to fully recognize that others also have the absolute core

meaning that we only think we have because of egoism". [11]

B. Political level

As a branch of Christianity, the Orthodox Eastern Church was born under the rule of the Byzantine Empire. When the tsar is crowned, an anointing ceremony is required — meaning God's chosen people and the incarnation of the messiah. Therefore, the messiah consciousness of the Orthodox Eastern Church is very political. With the slogan of salvation, Russia believes that it has a special status and mission in the world, and has a strong superiority compared to other nations, and has the obligation and responsibility to save other nations.

The film kicked off with the memory of President Roosevelt's wife, recalling Pavlichenko's military career. It can be seen that the film was branded politically at the beginning. Pavlichenko went to the United States to participate in the "International Student Union" in 1942 as a Soviet student representative due to her outstanding military exploits. Her identity was based on political diplomacy. The Soviet authorities had a clear attitude. Faced with the rampant siege by the Nazis, they should bring the initiative to establish a second anti-fascist battlefield into the White House as soon as possible to obtain the response and support of the international community. Pavlichenko gave a short and loud speech: "I am 25 years old and so far, I have killed 309 fascist invaders. Do you think you have been hiding behind me for a long time?" In her blooming youth, she had already gone to the battlefield to charge forward, guarding not only the peace of a nation, but the entire homeland of the earth that included politicians and ordinary people who were not present. As a representative of Soviet political diplomacy, Pavlichenko's words and deeds are a manifestation of the Soviet Union's duty and responsibility in the world's anti-fascist war. The sentence "You have been hiding behind me for a long time" expresses the national superiority of the Soviet country to the greatest extent. It marches in front of the team and is the messiah who saves the world.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War, the film "Battle for Sevastopol" was released in Russia on April 2, 2015, and it was at the right time. After a lapse of four years, the "Chinese Russian Film Week" event once again allowed the audience to review the film, showing the value and artistic charm of the it. In addition to the overt plot of the film giving a bitter account on wars and calling for peace, there is also a covert progression of showing the Russian national messianic consciousness that can't be ignored, thus successfully

digging out the multi-layered meaning of the incident and showing the national temperament and spiritual culture of a nation and a society under the pulse of the times. The dual narrative of the film is full of ups and downs, and it is exciting, making readers have a deep resonance, which plays a very important role in digging out the theme, character image and aesthetic value of the work. It allows the audience to gain an understanding of the Russian national mind and philosophical thinking about love, suffering and humanity while relaxing, thereby improving the level of audiovisual culture. In the process of commercialization, Russian films have not forgotten the inheritance and promotion of national culture, which is worth learning from.

References

- [1] Shen Dan. Keywords of Western Literary Theory: Covert Progressions [J]. Foreign Literature, 2019(01): 81-96. (in Chinese)
- [2] Dan Shen, J. Hillis Miller. Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction: Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots[M]. Routledge, 2014.
- [3] Shen Dan.. Keywords of Western Literary Theory: Covert Progressions [J]. Foreign Literature, 2019(01): 81-96. (in Chinese)
- [4] Guo Xiaoli. The Suffering Consciousness of the Russian Nation [J]. Russian Studies, 2005(4): 71. (in Chinese)
- [5] Huang Jun. On the Consciousness of "Philosophy-Macro" and "Modeling-Space" of Film Directors [A]. Wang Liangheng. Film Studies, China Radio and Television Publishing House [C].1997:165. (in Chinese)
- [6] [Belarus] S.A. Alexievich. I'm a Female Soldier, I'm Also a Woman [M]. Lv Ningsi, trans. Kyushu Publishing House, 2015:402-403. (in Chinese)
- [7] Guo Xiaoli, Sun Jingxuan. The Structure and Evolvement of Russian Messianic Consciousness [J]. Russian Studies, 2009(2): 117. (in Chinese)
- [8] [Russia] Ni Berdiaev. Russian Thought [M]. Lei Yongsheng, Qiu Shoujuan, trans. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1995:67. (in Chinese)
- [9] Xie Fei, Yin Hong. Movies Need to Enter the Human Level: Dialogue with Xie Fei [J]. Contemporary Cinema, 2019: 26. (in Chinese)
- [10] Ni Berdiaev. Self-awareness [M]. Wang Jianzhao, trans. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007: 387. (in Chinese)
- [11] Solovyov. The Meaning of Love [M]. Dong You, Yang Lang, trans. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1996:53. (in Chinese)