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## THE INTERPRETATION OF THE AFGHAN WAR IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE

**Mirotin Oleg Dmitriyevich**

Termiz davlat pedagogika instituti

Rus tili va adabiyoti kafedrasi o'qituvchisi

e-mail: schuhargoacademy@gmail.com

+99890-247-36-45

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20589243>

**Annotation:** This article is a historical and literary study of the representation of the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989) in contemporary Russian literature. The texts selected for analysis include both official and unofficial works produced within the territory of the former USSR as well as abroad, encompassing journalistic writing, poetry, and literary fiction.

**Keywords:** journalistic prose, poetry, literary fiction.

These works are described and analyzed with two objectives. First, the study examines the creative trends that emerge in the literature on this subject. Second, it evaluates the extent to which the genre of Russian-language literature about the Afghan War has changed over the past decade. To provide a context for this body of literature, the introduction discusses the application of the socialist realist method to military themes and outlines the legacy of Second World War novels in Russian literature.

The article also provides a brief overview of the history of Russian–Afghan relations and an account of the decade-long military intervention. The second chapter documents the decline of official censorship during the 1980s and reveals growing criticism of the Soviet Army's role in Afghanistan. The third chapter discusses the development of journalistic writing as a genre and notes the unprecedented openness brought about by Soviet investigative journalism. The fourth chapter presents an overview of songs and poetry devoted to the conflict, beginning with the magnitizdat works of amateur singer-songwriters and extending to the later contributions of professional poets. The fifth chapter analyzes novels and short stories about the war. It traces a wide range of literary works—from pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet propagandistic interpretations to ideologically independent, personal perspectives that incorporate lyricism, satire, and fantasy.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the works of Alexander Prokhanov. It analyzes the literary development of a writer who initially supported the military campaign in his works, but later came to reflect the disintegration of the Party consensus regarding the interpretation and portrayal of events in Afghanistan.



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Oleg Yermakov's works on this subject, distinguished by their lyricism and stylistic experimentation, mark a new direction in contemporary Russian war literature. The analysis demonstrates that literature about the Afghan War represents a sharp break from the last official Soviet military works, which had been shaped by the principles of socialist realism. This rupture is evident in the open and subjective nature of journalistic accounts, as well as in the pronounced anti-war orientation of published songs and poetry. In particular, Oleg Yermakov's prose continues the traditions of unofficial, dissident war literature.

However, the scope of this study also includes journalistic works, which Russian critics after the Second World War regarded as a traditional component of Soviet war literature. Furthermore, the study encompasses not only émigré authors but also citizens of the former Soviet Union. This approach is justified by the recent dissolution of the USSR and the collapse of the Communist Party, events that have led to the rapid disappearance of older classifications of Russian literature that were previously based on an author's citizenship.

The study also includes a brief examination of the principles of socialist realism—the official artistic method for much of the Soviet period—as well as their application to military themes and the legacy of Second World War novels in Russian literature. It can be seen that these principles, and the works produced under their influence, remained relatively stable throughout the post-war period. The main exception was a small but significant dissident trend within war literature. Socialist realism continued to dominate until the period of the Soviet Union's military involvement in Afghanistan.

In order to provide a political and historical context for the relatively under-researched literature on the war, attention is given to documenting Russian-Afghan relations from the earliest imperial contacts in 1464 through to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989. This historical background highlights Russia's expansion southward, its nineteenth-century rivalry with Great Britain, and its more recent relations with the United States.

At the same time, Russia's gradual southward expansion is also notable for its traditionally cautious approach to involvement in the complexities of Afghanistan. Brezhnev's decision to launch an invasion on ideological grounds ignored military realities and marked a departure from earlier cautious policies. The Soviet army now found itself confronting an enemy that, in certain respects, was able to replicate the partisan tactics it had itself effectively used during the Great Patriotic War against the Germans.





The soldiers composed songs, but the authorities deemed them to express a pessimistic mood and consequently suppressed them. The second stage began around 1984, when the official press started to widely publicize the bravery of soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. This journalistic campaign continued until 1987, when Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost" initiated a third stage in the portrayal of the war. From that point on, journalists and authors of literary works began to depict the individual and subjective aspects of the conflict. Although poetry and songs had been created since the beginning of the war, they eventually began to appear in officially approved publications.

Until the mid-1980s, criticism was almost nonexistent, as authors were not permitted to depict Soviet soldiers in combat. Moreover, the description and evaluation of the literature that began to emerge from that time largely remained in the background, with rare exceptions; attention was instead focused on social issues such as determining responsibility for the war or providing adequate support for disabled veterans.

War-related journalistic works—a form of literary journalism based on officially documented facts—underwent changes in the 1980s not only in political orientation but also in aesthetic form. Initially, the genre evolved from hagiographic accounts of Afghan War heroes rooted in the tradition of Great Patriotic War journalism into compelling first-person narratives, investigative reporting, and collections of soldiers' letters that expressed emotions previously considered incompatible with patriotism. Some authors, such as Artyom Borovik and Svetlana Alexievich, incorporated their own subjective impressions into depictions of the war, resulting in particularly vivid representations of events.

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