

**THE CATEGORY OF LOVE IN THE MILITARY PROSE OF  
Y.V.BONDAREV**

*Isaeva Gulnora Abdukadirovna*

*Bukhara State University (Bukhara, Uzbekistan)*

**Abstract:** *This article examines the concept of love in Y.V.Bondarev's novella «Battalions ask for fire» and the novel «Hot snow». It traces the evolution in the portrayal of love during wartime and focuses on the role of women in shaping the protagonist's fate.*

**Keywords:** *Y.V.Bondarev, war literature, war, love, compassion, self-sacrifice, motherhood.*

The theme of love, suffering, and compassion during wartime permeates all of Bondarev's work. In his military prose, the writer addresses that solid and unchanging foundation in human life that has always been and should remain its core.

The heroines of Bondarev's military prose are almost the same age, with certain features resembling each other, which many critics emphasize, basing their reasoning about Bondarev's female characters on this fact. However, behind the external similarity of the heroines lies their deep inner dissimilarity. The image of Shura, a medical instructor from the novella «Battalions ask for fire», is complex. She sincerely loves Captain Boris Yermakov, but she feels the temporariness and insecurity of their relationship: «Who is she? A field wife... A mistress. For the duration of the war...» [1, p. 27]. After being wounded, Yermakov ended up in the hospital and never once wrote to Shura. There's an explanation for this - the hospital had been moved from place to place many times, but even while in the battalion, Boris never seriously told Shura that he loved her. In Shura, the call for a home, family, and motherhood lives, while with Yermakov, «everything is temporary, everything is unreliable» [1, p. 29]. These thoughts give the heroine no peace, and, finding no support in Boris, Shura tries to find it in Senior Lieutenant Kondratiev, with whom she feels at ease and calm. Shura's feelings towards Kondratiev, whom she considers an «unprotected boy», more closely resemble maternal care and affection. The heroine takes care of him in every way and even speaks to Kondratiev with «condescending tenderness», as if to a child.

Several days of fighting, breaking out of encirclement, constantly feeling on the brink of life and death, and losing people who had become like family to Yermakov, change many things in the hero, marking the beginning of his spiritual maturation. Meeting Shura at the crossing, Boris finally realizes how dear she is to him, and Shura hears for the first time his long-awaited words of love. In our opinion, it is

fundamentally important to the artistic structure of the story «Battalions ask for fire» that the spiritual connection between Boris and Shura occurs against the backdrop of the river. The landscape sketches of the Dnieper in «Battalions...» throughout the narrative have a gloomy, anxious character. They are dominated by black, cold tones («black water», «cold violet-tinged water», «cold blue», etc.), which is due to the nature of the action's development and its extreme tension. In the finale of the work, the description of the river is filled with completely different coloristic shades, conveying the silence and tranquility of the natural world and the characters' state of mind (for more details, see: [5, pp. 56-64;]).

In the final pages of the story, the idea of love's eternity and its all-conquering power resonates: «They (Boris and Shura) walked along the banks of the Dnieper, further and further from the crossing. The voices of people behind them gradually faded, and the gentle fire of dawn shimmered. The damp sand of the deserted beaches rustled, where the traces of their boots remained - apparently, the first traces of a man and a woman walking together here during the war» [1, p. 186]. In this episode, the war recedes into the background, overshadowed by the image of two people in love, symbolized by their joined footprints in the sand. In the writer's subsequent works, a significant evolution is observed in the portrayal of female characters and wartime love, the essence of which O. N. Mikhailov aptly defined: «In the novel “Hot snow”, there is a trend towards weakening the sensual and emphasizing the spiritual aspect in depicting wartime love: from the entirely ‘earthly’ Shura to Zoya Yelagina, who is so moral and pure that she is frightened by the mere possibility of being touched, while wounded, by strange men's hands» [4, p. 90]. Zoya Yelagina's external plainness, which the characters initially notice («Why didn't I notice before that she was unattractive?» [2, p. 24] - Kuznetsov reflects, observing the medical instructor on the march. Drozdovsky has a similar impression of Zoya's appearance: «What did I find in her? If only she were beautiful - and even that's not there... There's nothing!» [2, p. 136]), gradually fades into the background. After some time, Kuznetsov, looking at Zoya, thinks: «What an extraordinary face she has. Generally unattractive. Only the eyes» [2, p. 124]. The extraordinary depth of the heroine's experiences shines through her «sorrowful» and «radiant» eyes. The motif of inner light is essential for Zoya's characterization. The mention of her eyes serves as a leitmotif throughout the novel, giving special prominence and artistic weight to seemingly unremarkable elements of the work's subject matter. As we can see, in the portrait description of the heroine, there is a clear shift in emphasis, delving deeper into her inner world. To highlight Zoya's essential nature, the symbolism of color is also employed. Throughout the narrative, she is accompanied by the epithet «white» (white half-coat, neat white felt boots, white embroidered gloves, white forehead, skin, etc.), which becomes the main

characteristic of the heroine and emphasizes her purity of soul, tenderness, and fragility.

The main essence of Zoya Yelagina's character is inner beauty, sacrifice, and patience. Zoya performs a daily feat of selfless love at the front. The heroine's sisterly love is directed at all the people surrounding her. Serving others is the fundamental characteristic of the spiritual image of all Bondarev's heroines, who, in the inhuman conditions of war, did not lose their humanity and love for people, but rather increased them. Zoya remains true to herself in her dramatic relationship with Lieutenant Drozdovsky, who brings her suffering. Drozdovsky's rudeness and offensive jealousy are the result and consequence of his egocentrism. He constantly tramples on the dignity of the woman who loves him. The state of self-absorption so consumes the lieutenant that even when alone with Zoya, he remains completely focused on himself, unable to overcome his own self-centeredness and truly enter the world of another person. But even when facing her lover's open rudeness and malice, Zoya humbly bears her life's cross, not rejecting Drozdovsky, although spiritually distancing herself from him. According to O. N. Mikhailov, «For the theatrical scenery erected by Drozdovsky's selfish fantasy to finally collapse, and for him to discover the true face of war - as crude, heavy, everyday, 'black' work, for him to feel the collapse and pitiful nature of his desire for personal triumph, he must lose his Zoya» [4, p. 89].

Simultaneously, in the novel «Hot snow», a new, complex feeling develops between Zoya and Kuznetsov, bringing their kindred souls closer. Depicting the genesis of their relationship, Bondarev explores the theme of love intertwined with pity, pain for another person, and self-sacrifice. The feeling between Zoya and Kuznetsov cannot yet be called love in the full sense of the word. It is a kind of premonition of love, born in the moment when Kuznetsov shielded Zoya with his body during battle, ready to die protecting her from shrapnel. The author's retrospection is characteristic: «Perhaps this came from the depths of the ages; perhaps then, due to an irresistible instinct, a man so selflessly and devotedly protected a woman for the continuation of the human race on earth» [2, p. 260]. In moments of extreme tension during the fight, Zoya, with a woman's intuition, discerns the true nature of each of the rivals. She keenly perceives the full depth of Kuznetsov's moral character. The characters' movement, their striving towards each other and towards love, is only beginning, which makes Zoya's death all the more tragic. Her demise becomes a profound shock for Kuznetsov, Drozdovsky, and all the soldiers, prompting them to seriously reassess many of their actions. Thus, women's fates pass through the lives of almost all of Bondarev's male characters, illuminating them with a special light. The author endows his heroines with qualities that allow them to subtly, gradually, and

sometimes even unconsciously or intuitively influence the course of the heroes' thoughts and guide their spiritual aspirations in the necessary direction.

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