

The Word and Time: Historical Reality in the Prose of Valentin Pikul

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Abstract. *The article examines the historical themes in the works of the writer, his desire to convey the patriotic feelings of the Russian people through artistic imagery. In his novels, there is a clear contrast between positive and negative characters, the struggle between good and evil, and the conflict between the sense of duty to the Motherland and betrayal. These elements create a vivid picture of the historical era and allow the reader to dive deeper into the events of the past.*

Key words: *patriotism and national consciousness, historical heritage and cultural memory, war and military conflicts, battles and combat tactics, the contrast between heroism and betrayal, artistic image and its expressive means, statehood and national identity, outstanding historical figures and their contribution to history, social and political ideals, stylistic techniques of historical reconstruction in literature.*

Valentin Savvich Pikul often becomes a true discoverer of unexplored pages of history for his readers. In his novels, events come to life that were previously known only to a narrow circle of specialists - historians, archivists, and researchers. Thanks to his deep interest in the past, Pikul does not just retell facts, but creates an engaging narrative that can awaken interest in Russian history even in an uninitiated reader. One of the main principles of his work was striving for accuracy, combined with a artistic interpretation of events. In his works, he skillfully combined documentary precision with vivid emotions, making history accessible and interesting. He uncovered little-known plots related to diplomatic intrigues, military strategies, political upheavals, and the destinies of remarkable historical figures. Pikul himself repeatedly emphasized the ideological focus of his work, saying: "The main thing for me is patriotic ideal."

His books are infused with respect for history and pride in national heritage, while the heroes often embody high moral ideals—honor, devotion to the homeland, and a sense of duty. Through the lens of their fates, the author seeks to show that history is not just a collection of dates and events, but a living narrative filled with passions, struggles, and a quest for justice.

Russian history is rich in both triumphant victories and tragic defeats, accompanied by complex diplomatic intrigues. One of the most tense periods of the 18th century was the Seven Years' War, which affected the interests of many European states. In his novel "Feather and Sword," V. Pikul addresses this time, showing it through the lens of the activities of a French diplomat whose fate intertwines with large-scale international processes. Using this figure, the author illustrates the complex web of political and military interests of European powers, where each country pursued its own goals, often engaging in conflicts and alliances for purely pragmatic reasons. In this context, Pikul reveals not only the motives of Western states but also the internal contradictions of Russian politics. We see how the selfishness, incompetence, and even cowardice of certain Russian officials coexist with genuine patriotism and loyalty to the ideals of national independence.

One of these outstanding heroes was General Pyotr Saltykov—a modest yet talented military commander who avoided court intrigues and struggles for influence. The author emphasizes his independent character and strategic genius, which led to the crushing defeat of the Prussian army of Frederick II. It was Saltykov who became the decisive figure in a number of key battles, embodying the ideals of military valor and a deep understanding of the needs of ordinary soldiers. However, his independence did not go unnoticed by enemies, and the repercussions were reflected in his further position in the Russian army. Despite significant victories and military successes, the Seven Years' War ultimately did not bring Russia tangible benefits. Diplomatic maneuvers, shifts in political courses, and international circumstances nullified military achievements. This paradox is a striking illustration of how politics can turn even the most impressive victories into inconspicuous episodes of history.

Elizabeth was succeeded by the German Catherine II. Her reign is described in the novel "The Favorite. It was the "golden age" of the Russian nobility. The main artistic principle of Pikul is to show the era through historical figures. There are many of them in the novel. But the leading characters are Catherine and Potemkin. The tsarina appears as a strong-willed and intelligent woman, familiar with prominent European philosophers. She has the ability to "make people feel good about themselves. people, knows the interests of the country and serves them. But at the same time she is a cunning, sometimes insidious and cruel ruler, too amorous to be impassive. The figure of "His Serene Highness" Prince Potemkin is also contradictory. He is a shrewd, cunning man and courtier, often unprincipled, sometimes very rude. But the writer notes one very important trait, which probably made the prince a notable personality in our history. It relates him to Volynsky in "The Word and the Deed," Saltykov, Gorchakov in "The Battle of the Iron Chancellors," our generals and naval commanders in "Favorit. This is patriotism. The range of historical eras described by the novelist is great.

In 1987, Pikul completed a cycle of novels about the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. These events have already been reflected in literature: in A. Stepanov's Port Arthur and A. Novikov-Priboy's Tsushima. But Pikul tells about the war in his own way. The writer believes that history The writer believes that history does not tolerate templates with which we approach certain events and personalities. He reminds us that although we are used to considering the Tsushima battle a defeat of the tsarist fleet, we forget about the high patriotism of sailors, when sailors and officers knew that they would die, but fought to the last breath defending the honor of Russia.

In the last novel of his epic "Katorga" Pikul tells about Sakhalin. An unknown page of history is revealed. When the Japanese came to the island, the exiles began to defend their terrible, cruel prison. The writer psychologically accurately identified the origins of the patriotism of these criminals. Despite all the vices of their character and upbringing, they remain Russian and fight, die for their homeland.

Great impression was made by the novel "At the Last Line" about an adventurer Grishka Rasputin and the last years of the royal house of Romanov. The writer showed the moral and spiritual squalor of those in power. People who were in the hands of the country's fate were themselves a toy in the hands of the dark peasant and mystic Rasputin.

Pikul's novels are built on contrasts, on the opposition of patriots and traitors; honest, loyal people and careerists, hawkers; brave and cowards. Before us a gallery of interesting and significant, fateful and insignificant figures. But at the same time, the writer is not always justified in digging intimate details, sticking out and relishing them. Perhaps this is one reason why some people consider Pikul's novels tabloid.

We must highly appreciate the fact that Valentin Pikul has become a guide to the world of history for many people, bringing its pages to life and filling them with vivid, memorable images. Thanks to his novels, history ceases to be a dry collection of dates and events — it becomes dramatic, emotionally rich, and deeply personal. The writer does not just recount the facts but gives them artistic interpretation, allowing the reader to feel the atmosphere of the past, understand the character of people from that era, their aspirations, ideals, and fates.

It is important to remember that Pikul's creativity continues the centuries-old tradition of Russian and Soviet historical literature, which has left a profound mark on the culture of our country. Russian writers, starting from Pushkin and Lermontov, Zagorskina and Tolstoy, Tynyanov and Yan, created works capable of not only conveying the spirit of bygone eras but also revealing their inner complexity. Tolstoy and Merezhkovsky, Yesenin and Tsenskiy, Borshchagovsky and many other authors enriched historical prose and poetry with powerful artistic images, through which the past is presented to us in detail, without losing its depth.

This tradition makes literature an important tool for understanding and rethinking history. Through works of art, we not only learn new facts but also start to see the past in a new light, understanding its influence on the present. Writers like Pikule help people feel their native history in a special way, awakening interest in studying the past and its heritage.

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