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**Blindness and Self-understanding:  
On Garshin's *Chetyre Dnia*\***

Just past the mid-way point of *Chetyre dnia* ('Four Days', 1877), Vsevolod Garshin's first literary success, the hero, Ivanov, reflects on his recently killing a man and on the seeming senselessness of his role in the Russo-Turkish war:

Я не могу не думать о нем. Неужели я бросил все милое, дорогое, шел сюда тысячеверстным походом, голодал, холодал, мучился от зноя; неужели наконец я лежу теперь в этих муках — только ради того, чтобы этот несчастный перестал жить? А ведь разве я сделал что-нибудь полезное для военных целей, кроме этого убийства?

Убийство, убийца . . . И кто же? Я!

Когда я затеял итти драться, мать и Маша не отговаривали меня, хотя и плакали надо мною. Ослепленный идеею, я не видел этих слез. Я не понимал (теперь я понял), что я делал с близкими мне существами.<sup>1</sup>

The cause of every action that Ivanov considers in this section is revealed in the last two sentences. If he had not been blinded by the idea (*osleplennyi ideeiu*) that prompted him to take part in the war effort, he would have seen his mother's and girlfriend's tears and, thus, what he was doing to them. Moreover, all he has done since he enlisted — giving up what was dear to him, marching one thousand versts, enduring hunger, extreme cold and heat, killing the man who is lying near him, suffering torments of conscience — resulted from his decision to enlist. The decision is another action that is effected by the idea, an idea that overwhelms Ivanov to such an extent that he does not appre-

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\* The author expresses his thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

<sup>1</sup> V. M. Garshin, *Sochineniia* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1938), pp. 35–6. Subsequent references to this story are taken from this edition and will be incorporated in the text parenthetically.

ciate the ramifications of any of the actions he considers. At the story's most rudimentary level, the blinding idea that overwhelms Ivanov plays a part in causing most of the events that he recalls and all the events that take place in *Chetyre dnia*; the idea is not simply Ivanov's explanation or excuse. This understanding of the role of the blinding idea in the story has received little attention in Garshin scholarship.

The only study to treat in any detail Ivanov's being 'blinded by an idea' is G. A. Bialyi's carefully researched *V. M. Garshin i literaturnaia bor'ba vos'midesiatykh godov*.<sup>2</sup> Bialyi examines the contemporary societal and political meaning of this phrase, *blinded by the idea* (*osleplennyi ideei*), and the words that shortly follow it, *I didn't realize — now I do* (*Ia ne ponimal (teper' ia ponial)*), and underscores how the fictional-world shift in the hero's awareness from blinding idealism to realization reflects a real-world swing from support for the war effort to the enlightened disillusionment that members of revolutionary-democratic circles experienced during the Russo-Turkish war (39–40). This reading is fundamental to Bialyi's political interpretation of Garshin's oeuvre. Bialyi scrupulously reads the periodicals and press of the time to reveal how *Chetyre dnia*, as well as Garshin's other war stories, express 'тенденции радикального народничества' and 'стояли на крайнем левом фланге литературы той поры' (58).<sup>3</sup> Along with this political message, the fundamental content of the story, to Bialyi's mind, is the process of Ivanov's becoming sober or clear-minded (*protsess otrezvleniia*), freed up, one might say, from the force of the idea (43). In this paper, like Bialyi, I am interested in this process and what the portrayal of blindness means for the story, but my reading proposes that, although he may be taking an obviously political stance in *Chetyre dnia*, Garshin also is using this state of blindness or oblivion to comment on the effects of war (as did such famous storytellers as Homer and Tolstoy before him), and to explore how an individual confronts his singleness of perspective, an issue that would resonate through Garshin's subsequent fiction.

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<sup>2</sup> G. A. Bialyi, *V. M. Garshin i literaturnaia bor'ba vos'midesiatykh godov* (Moskva-Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1937).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the socio-political context in which Garshin wrote *Chetyre dnia* and for some responses to the story, see A. Latynina, *Vsevolod Garshin: Tvorchestvo i sud'ba*. (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), pp. 64–74.

The most famous antecedent of the excuse of blindness in wartime storytelling probably appears in Homer's *Iliad*, of which Garshin surely knew.<sup>4</sup> When Agamemnon addresses Achilles and the army, he excuses the losses he may have caused them with the words:

‘When tall Hector with that flashing helmet of his  
kept slaughtering Argives pinned against our ships —  
how could I once forget that madness, that frenzy,  
the Ruin that blinded *me* from that first day?  
But since I *was* blinded and Zeus stole my wits,  
I am intent on setting things to rights, at once’.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Iliad* such events are common. Ruin is not the only force that can overpower an individual's decision-making: madness seizes; tricks blind; frenzy grips, seizes, and blinds; fear blinds; anguish rakes; hunger drives; and individuals can be blinded, lost in their inhuman rage. But in the *Iliad*, of course, the power to bring about these feelings and actions in men belong to the gods. Very little is left to time, fate, or chance, because what happens in the world of the *Iliad* is part of a god-determined scheme. As Homer's narrator explains, ‘the will of Zeus will always overpower the will of men’ (435). The characters of the *Iliad* know too well this aspect of their existence. When Agamemnon seeks exoneration before his men, he uses the words, ‘[a] god impels all things to their fulfilment: / Ruin, eldest daughter of Zeus, she blinds us all, / that fatal madness’ (491), and Achilles explains his actions to the Argives thus: ‘Father Zeus — / great are the blinding frenzies you deal out to men! / If not, I swear, Atrides could never have roused / the fury in me, the rage that would not die, / or wrenched the girl against my will — / stubborn, implacable man’ (497). Despite the heroic, even

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<sup>4</sup> In the brief autobiography he wrote in 1884, Garshin implies that he was familiar with the *Iliad* as a grammar school student (‘Avtobiografiia V.M. Garshina’, in V.M. Garshin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* (Moskva-Leningrad: Academia, 1934), III, 14).

<sup>5</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Robert Fagles (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 492–3; emphasis in the translation. Subsequent references to this work are taken from this edition and will be incorporated in the text parenthetically.

superhuman, efforts of Homer's characters, one senses that, because of the gods' input and because of the feelings that overcome the characters and keep them from always acting reasonably, they rarely exercise their will freely and rarely worry about self-understanding. Homer's characters do feel sadness, despair, frustration, futility, loss, shame, and guilt, but they know that they alone are not to blame for pain they caused, and this understanding of the relevance of their feelings and of their world order seems to permit them readily to express their feelings and talk with those whom their actions have harmed.

Garshin's character also accounts for his actions by speaking of how the idea blinded him, but he understands that he cannot blame Zeus or any Zeus-like being, and, because he is physically isolated to the side of the field, he does not have the same opportunity to express his feelings to others and, thus, potentially to relieve himself of these feelings. Garshin creates a different scenario. In *Chetyre dnia*, the task for Garshin's character is to clarify his actions to himself when he alone feels responsible for them. He may feel guilt because of these actions, but, as V.D. Porudominskii rightly observes, Garshin is unable in *Chetyre dnia* to state with conviction that anyone is to blame for what happens in the story.<sup>6</sup> My brief reflection on the *Iliad* suggests that, in order to focus on how a wartime act affects an individual, Garshin employs an age-old situation in war literature: when an occasion, feeling, or emotion overpowers an individual's ability to decide his course of action. Homer makes such situations common in his epic, but they are fleeting, reminding us of the power of the gods and the basic human feelings that can arise in individuals in wartime. These moments inform our understanding of an individual's intentions, actions, feelings, and responsibilities during wartime and thus offer glimpses of an individ-

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<sup>6</sup> V. Porudominskii, *Garshin* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1962), p. 86. On Ivanov's guilty feelings, Peter Henry also points to Ivanov's dilemma: 'Ivanov is weighed down by guilt at having killed this man. [. . .] This is the traumatic realization by an ordinary and humane person, unaware of any bloodthirsty instincts within himself whatever, that he has become guilty without fault. He has committed an enormous crime and mortal sin, and this sense of personal guilt and the agonized inner monologue become the main burden of the story.' See Peter Henry, *A Hamlet of his Time: Vsevolod Garshin. The Man, his Works, and his Milieu* (Oxford: Willem A. Meeuws, 1983), pp. 46-7.

ual's psychology, but they are not the focus of any section in the *Iliad*. For Garshin, such situations and their results are not fleeting; they comprise most of *Chetyre dnia*. They define Ivanov and his efforts to understand himself. As Ivanov lies on the field he must contend with questions about the ways in which time, fate, and chance delivered his present circumstances.

This 'blind' state seems to have been more important to Garshin than commentators (including Bialyi) have observed. It does, after all, appear in a different form in a noteworthy position in the story's structure — in the story's opening passage:

Я помню, как мы бежали по лесу, как жужжали пули, как падали отрываемые ими ветки, как мы продирались сквозь кусты боярышника. Выстрелы стали чаще. Сквозь опушку показалось что-то красное, мелькавшее там и сям. Сидоров, молоденький солдатик первой роты («как он попал в нашу цепь?» — мелькнуло у меня в голове), вдруг присел к земле и молча оглянулся на меня большими испуганными глазами. Из рта у него текла струя крови. Да, я это хорошо помню. Я помню также, как уже почти на опушке, в густых кустах, я увидел . . . его. Он был огромный, толстый турок, но я бежал прямо на него, хотя я слаб и худ. Что-то хлопнуло, что-то, как мне показалось, огромное пролетело мимо; в ушах зазвенело. «Это он в меня выстрелил», — подумал я. А он с воплем ужаса прижался спиной к густому кусту боярышника. Можно было обойти куст, но от страха он не помнил ничего и лез на колючие ветви. Одним ударом я вышиб у него ружье, другим воткнул куда-то свой штык. Что-то не то зарычало, не то застонало. Потом я побежал дальше. Наши кричали «ура!», падали, стреляли. Помню, и я сделал несколько выстрелов, уже выйдя из лесу, на поляне. Вдруг «ура» раздалось громче, и мы сразу двинулись вперед. Т.е. не мы, а наши, потому что я остался (29–30; emphasis in the original).

In this passage Garshin takes care in showing that, for Ivanov, all happenings during the skirmish are spontaneous and unpredictable. The minimal descriptions and the pace with which they are recalled comment both on the frenzied moods of fear and uncertainty that mark the

characters' expressions and, subsequently, on the lack of determinacy in the characters' actions in the skirmish. These privately experienced moments reveal that the skirmish does not have collective meaning — the cheering is part of the setting — and that Ivanov's senses, not his patriotic well-being or shared hatred of the enemy, are triggered. Ivanov does not assist Sidorov, but perceives him as if he were a branch or bullet. The frenetic mood of the fighting overwhelms Ivanov, and he and others appear as a part of the natural whole. Garshin makes such behaviour harsh and unforgiving and at all times stresses that Ivanov is detached from what is happening around him and is quite unsure of what to do. Garshin portrays Ivanov as being isolated from the possibility of reflecting carefully on his actions — as being blinded from seeing other possible actions or from seeing the consequences of his present actions. From the story's opening we know that acting blindly has negative, even dire, results, but also that such blind actions are common in war.

The opening is vivid, and Peter Henry suggests that the first-person narrative style in this opening passage involves the reader totally. The tone is nervous, fragmentary, intense,<sup>7</sup> and, as Karl Kramer explains, it 'anticipates the impressionist rendering of events in several ways: the narrator describes the battle precisely as he perceived it; he frequently fails to draw conclusions as to what has actually happened, because at the moment of occurrence he himself does not fully comprehend the event.'<sup>8</sup> Garshin's narrative approach emphasizes the personal reaction to the skirmish and underscores the form of blindness or numbness that overcomes Ivanov. Ivanov does not analyse the cause of the other soldiers' bleeding, screams, growls, or moans, and this lack of analysis echoes his seeming indifference to his mother's and Masha's tears. His reflexive actions and their unconsidered consequences join the two types of scenes of 'blindness', and, even though the skirmish takes up a small space in the narrative, with such an introduction Garshin clearly introduces such topics as unconscious behaviour and action in

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<sup>7</sup> Henry, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Karl D. Kramer, 'Impressionist Tendencies in the Work of Vsevolod Garshin,' in Peter Henry, Vladimir Porudominsky, and Mikhail Girshman (eds.), *Vsevolod Garshin at the Turn of the Century. An International Symposium in Three Volumes* (Oxford: Northgate Press, 2000), I, 201.

combat, thus providing a preface to the more detailed chronicling of consequences that Ivanov's seemingly unmindful actions caused.

It is clear in this passage that Ivanov is acting without a plan and without understanding, and this image has caused Alla Latynina to interpret the scene not as 'военный эпизод, в котором люди принимают участие, подчиняясь некоему разумному плану, но как цепь нелепых и случайных действий, которые должен совершать человек, не понимая их смысла.'<sup>9</sup> Latynina's references to absurd and chance actions, and to Ivanov's acting without knowing what he was doing, echo R. F. Christian's and Gary Saul Morson's observations on Tolstoy's depictions of battle and skirmishes, primarily of depictions in *Voina i mir* (*War and Peace*, 1865-9). In Tolstoy's battle scenes, Christian observes, war is unpredictable,<sup>10</sup> unreal, and '[n]obody really knows what is happening or what will happen' (115); Morson concurs, noting that 'sheer chaos prevails when men are actually fighting.'<sup>11</sup> We read such portrayals most memorably, perhaps, in *Voina i mir* when Tolstoy's major characters observe or take part in battle. Prince Andrei's early battle experiences at Schöngraben, for instance, reveal his greenness in battle, as well as the unexpectedness that characterises Tolstoy's battle scenes: '«Что это такое? — думал князь Андрей, подъезжая к этой толпе солдат. — Это не может быть цепь, потому что они в куче! Не может быть атака, потому что они не двигаются; не может быть каре: они не так стоят».'<sup>12</sup> Less than three weeks later at Austerlitz, Prince Andrei is in battle again, and just before his famous fall in that battle, we see him acting without a plan or understanding as he tries to carry forward a standard and lead a battalion into battle. Bullets are whistling, men are running in all directions, and soldiers are falling and moaning all around Prince

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<sup>9</sup> Latynina, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> R.F. Christian, *Tolstoy's 'War and Peace': A Study* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> L.N. Tolstói, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1960-65), IV, 246-7. Subsequent references to Tolstoy's works are taken from this edition, and volume and page numbers will be incorporated in the text parenthetically.

Andrei (IV, 379–80). This scene is clearly similar to Garshin's, yet this and other examples of how Garshin's characters act without a plan or understanding should not be taken to suggest that Garshin borrowed this sentiment from Tolstoy, though it would have been difficult for Garshin to write a war story and not include images that Tolstoy had employed.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, many images that appear in Tolstoy's fictional writings on war appear in *Chetyre dnia*. In Tolstoy's *Nabeg* ('The Raid', 1853) and *Rubka lesa* ('The Wood-felling', 1855) we learn of characters who enter battle blinded by such feelings as vanity and fear, and who reflect on cowardice and bravery, trying, it seems, to come to terms with the feelings they show or wish they could show.<sup>14</sup> In *Sevastopol' v mae* ('Sevastopol in May', 1855) we read of cowardly Pest who participates in a skirmish, '[р]ешительно не отдавая себе отчета, где и зачем он был' (II, 140), and who bayonets an enemy soldier without realizing it (II, 142). We learn of how Praskukhin, in the few seconds as he dies, terrifies himself by the groans he unconsciously makes (II, 145), and of Mikhailov, who wonders in a moment of remorse what caused him to join the army (II, 145). In addition, Tolstoy's narrator tells us of '[с]отни свежих окровавленных тел людей, за два часа тому назад полных разнообразных, высоких и мелких надежд и желаний' (II, 148), and this transition recalls Bialyi's observations on the political elements of *Chetyre dnia* and the naïve ambitions of Ivanov. Similarly, in *Sevastopol' v avguste 1855 goda* ('Sevastopol in August 1855', 1856) an officer muses on how, on the one hand, because of images of the heroic deeds of others, he 'возгорелся честолюбием' and thus was caused to enlist (II, 167), and on the other, how he was convinced by friends (and by retrospective knowledge) 'что он сделал величайшую глупость, поступив в действующую армию' (II, 167)

<sup>13</sup> Garshin's contemporaries noted similarities with Tolstoy's renderings of war, too. See, for instance, the 1885 comments of F. Zmiev, a critic for *Nov'*, recorded in Latynina, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> For the discussion on bravery between Captain Khlopov and the narrator in *Nabeg*, see II, 8–9; for the narrator's sense of what bravery is, see II, 32; for Ensign Alanin's heedless rush into battle, see II, 31–3. For the discussion on fear and possible cowardice between Company Commander Bolkhov and the narrator in *Rubka lesa*, see II, 70–2; for the narrator's efforts to conceal his fear as a cannon ball passes him and Bolkhov, see II, 72–3; for the narrator's reflections on bravery, see II, 89.



— feelings and sentiments which anticipate ones that Garshin develops in *Chetyre dnia*. Finally, like Alanin in *Nabeg* (II, 31-3), Nikolai and Petia Rostov in *Voina i mir* rush into battle blinded by some idea or overcome by an indescribable energy (IV, 198-9; VII, 172-3), and, in a rare scene in Tolstoy when a character reviews his actions in a skirmish, Nikolai reflects on his performance in combat, chiding himself for his fears (IV, 201-2).<sup>15</sup> Each of these actions or images shares something with Ivanov's feelings or actions in *Chetyre dnia*, but Garshin, unlike, for the most part, Tolstoy, uses the images to characterize one response to a wartime act — killing another man — and the extent to which that act stays with an individual.

Of course, Tolstoy does use war as a means to prompt such major characters as Prince Andrei and Pierre to reflect on their lives, but this reflection is of a different sort from Ivanov's. As Vladimir Korolenko rightly emphasises in a brief comparison of Prince Andrei's lying on the battlefield after the battle at Austerlitz with Ivanov's lying off to the side of the field after his skirmish, Prince Andrei is looking at the sky and struggling with questions about the 'infinite' (*beskonechnost'*), whereas Ivanov is concerned with the fact of what has happened on the field.<sup>16</sup> Following Prince Andrei (and Pierre) after battle scenes, we see that near death and injury in war, as well as war more generally, are significant catalysts that stimulate their philosophical deliberations about life and career. War moves Prince Andrei and Pierre to reflect on who they are and how they should live. It pushes Ivanov to wonder how he could have performed those absurd and chance actions, to borrow from Latynina — that is, how he could have killed a man and hurt his family. Prince Andrei's and Pierre's reflections are no less important than Ivanov's, but they are different, and this difference indicates a noteworthy distinction between Tolstoy's war writing and Garshin's.

On the whole, Tolstoy offers a broader picture, keying more on the overall nature of skirmishes and battles and on questions quite unrelated to what occurred on the battlefield a short time ago (of life and

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<sup>15</sup> On Petia Rostov's vitality, see Donna Tussing Orwin, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 72-3.

<sup>16</sup> V.I.G. Korolenko, 'Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin', in D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii (ed.), *Istoriia Russkoi Literatury XIX Veka* (Moskva: Mir, 1911), IV, 340-1. See also Henry, p. 51.

career), than on the effects of such activities on an individual. Certainly, Tolstoy is providing the ‘truth’ of war generally and a means to prompt his major characters to reflect on the meaning of their lives or career, whereas Garshin is exploring how unanticipated wartime acts affect Ivanov. The scenes from Tolstoy’s works appear in their texts momentarily, providing the reader with glimpses into the psychology of some characters that help to create a fuller appreciation for the far-reaching effects of war and how such an extreme situation as war can prompt Tolstoy’s major characters to ponder their significance in the world. As I suggest above, in Tolstoy’s war stories we rarely encounter situations in which characters reflect in detail on actions which occur in a skirmish and for which they are responsible, whereas these reflections comprise most of Garshin’s story. Tolstoy’s narrator in *Sevastopol’ v dekabre mesiatse* (‘Sevastopol in December’, 1855) suggests that war in its authentic expression appears as ‘blood, sufferings, death’ (II, 100), and, to reveal the fullness of this observation, Tolstoy offers a collection of experiences and thoughts. Garshin’s focus is much more specific, but Tolstoy’s examples serve to show how similar material can be used to different ends.

What makes Garshin’s portrayal specific is his persistent focus on Ivanov’s quest for self-understanding as it relates directly to his participation in military activities. This quest is prompted by his efforts to make sense of what happened to him on the field. His reflection on the skirmish leads directly to a fuller detailing of his physical separation from his company to the side of the field, and this fuller detailing eventually focuses on the time before the skirmish that opens the story — that is, the time recalled by Ivanov in the section quoted at the start of this paper. At this moment of physical separation Ivanov is constrained by physical, even natural, limitations, but freed up to the activities of his mind, and he is forced to consider his past actions. At this point in the story, when Ivanov is gaining consciousness after the skirmish, Garshin introduces the path the narrative will follow and emphasises a fundamental reason for Ivanov to seek fuller self-understanding — isolation. Garshin has the narrative shift temporally between the past, present, and future, and in addition carefully balances images of isolation, images that pervade all his prose writings: Ivanov has only just come to be isolated physically from his comrades, but as the remainder of the story unfolds, his thoughts and recollections reveal that he has

been isolated in another way from the time he chose to join the army. The thoughts and recollections that return to him during these four days both demand his attention and reveal that, when he sought to secure a place in the more public war effort, he did so at the price of locking himself away from family and acquaintances and obscuring his own identity. During the four days, his struggle for self-understanding — not for survival — highlights both the powerful and earnest persuasiveness that impressions of war can have on an individual and the ease with which one can forsake a previous sense of self and other commitments. Garshin is clear that self-understanding can demand more energy than committing oneself to a cause or idea, and also that self-understanding is near impossible in the throes of battle. Ivanov's efforts to understand himself hinge on these two moments of blindness when he acted without a clear image either of himself or of what the consequences of his decision to enlist might be. The rub here, Garshin makes very clear — as did writers before him — is that war has powers that can obstruct foresight and other perspectives in the present. In contrast, Ivanov's time on the field is a time to focus on what he did when blinded, and thus it is a time to free himself from the blindness and to understand himself.

In portraying Ivanov's efforts to understand himself, Garshin meditates on what it means to act mindfully. He has Ivanov consider his own intentions, the truth of his convictions and actions, the validity of other perspectives on an act, and the reality of his ignorance. This ignorance was brought to his attention before the skirmish, but Ivanov apparently could not acknowledge it. When Ivanov enlisted, his acquaintances responded thus: 'Ну, юродивый! Лезет, сам не зная чего!' (36). Edmund Yarwood has suggested that this interaction between Ivanov and his acquaintances draws attention to his isolation, and I would agree that Ivanov's inability to appreciate the meanings of his acquaintances' words reflects a form of isolation.<sup>17</sup> Ivanov's blindness or 'not knowing', which his acquaintances observed, expresses the distance between them and him. The reactions of his acquaintances suggest Ivanov is acting extraordinarily, perhaps participating in the world differently, in a way that provokes unusual responses from others. The idea gave him a different sense of being and caused him to act dif-

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<sup>17</sup> Edmund Yarwood, *Vsevolod Garshin* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), pp. 88–9.

ferently, and, apparently, without attention. Garshin suggests that the idea isolated elements of Ivanov's usual self. Ivanov could not act in ways that the idea did not propose. His time alone on the field presents forces that cause him to search out that self again and to break the control of this perspective by freeing his consciousness to other perspectives. Differently from before, he now takes other reactions into account, and only now does he see the possible rightness in these perspectives. Only now does he suffer because of what his decision and action caused. We might say, then, that the physical isolation allows for the possibility of mental *de-isolation*, of freeing himself from both the control of the idea and the blinding singleness of perspective it produced in him. In the story Ivanov is caught between the truth of his blind intentions and that of his actions. Figuratively speaking, he is caught in a 'no man's land', the truth of which he can neither change nor escape. The thoughts that come to Ivanov in the passage with which I opened this paper hint at the previously unacknowledged fullness of his intentions: that is, the juxtaposition of what he wants, or hopes to do, with what he actually does. How the two compare and are evaluated promote Ivanov's self-understanding, and Garshin uses this juxtaposition to this very end. Ivanov's choices, he admits, are not always right ones and he does not merely justify his actions. He sees his own wrongs and misunderstanding when he considers the actions from other viewpoints and with the advantage of hindsight. But he also reveals how his decisions could seem just or noble at the anxious moment when they were made, as well as how he may not have known their full implications. In Ivanov's mind various 'right' actions appear against his awareness that he could follow only one 'right' path. These debates express a truism: To ask what might be the right choice to make during wartime is to reveal that there is no fully satisfactory answer. More generally, we see Ivanov's feelings embodied as a debating moral self rather than a selfless agent only when he is free from the blinding control of the idea that caused him to join up and run into battle. Ivanov realizes his self, achieves some self-understanding, some identity — that is to say, he sees and thinks without being blinded by the idea and its baggage — when he appreciates more fully what he has done and what is around him. He has, to all intents and purposes, worked off the control of the idea to reveal that previous and usual self and to gain a clearer view of the world and his actions in it. Garshin acknowledges

the requirements for mindful action but suggests, however, that mindfulness sometimes might be an unachievable state.

In *Chetyre dnia* Garshin portrays a character who becomes sensitive to the fullness of his actions. Awareness is broadened through solitary wondering in limited and intense conditions, and this lone thinking reveals a hypersensitive individual who relies on his conscience for direction. Played out against the opening passages that candidly depict the fragility of human life, his recollections and wonderings question the significance of an individual life to others and to oneself. Ivanov wonders not just about how war can claim lives, but also about how he can affect other individuals and how anyone can affect the outcome of events. These musings are heightened by the reality of the skirmish that surrounds Ivanov: his internal world blends with the external one. War is not just the backdrop and cause of these thoughts; it also symbolizes the inner tribulation he undergoes and the unconsidered actions he recalls. He is alone not with the big questions of war, but with questions about his own blind and clear-sighted actions, and thus points he makes are anti-war insofar as they are 'anti-self'. Ivanov sees his present and the hypothetical future clouded by his past choices, the results of which he cannot escape. Much of the point of *Chetyre dnia* consists in Ivanov's obligation and ability to work through his thoughts and actions. In the largest part of the story, when Ivanov is to the side of the field, he alone is able to determine what he did and to realize that he did some things he had not expected to do. This process, on the one hand, reveals that he is not only a selfless agent for an idea, but also a debating moral self. Ivanov is able to evaluate and to reflect, because he becomes aware of the relative nature of his thoughts and actions. On the other hand, the need to experience the process comments on his earlier inability to engage his acquaintances or the blinding idea as a debating moral self.

The last ten lines of *Chetyre dnia* locate Ivanov in a military hospital, where he recovers from surgery on his leg and shares his experiences. When Ivanov closes the story by saying, 'Я могу говорить и рассказываю им все, что здесь написано' (40), he explains that the story we have just read is offered verbatim to those who are standing

around him.<sup>18</sup> In one sense, Ivanov offers a way for others to see what he did not see, and thus he provides the insight to a skirmish that narrators of Tolstoy's war stories did. In another sense, in telling the story, Ivanov has the chance to share his feelings, even cleanse himself of some responsibility, as Homer's characters might do. Despite these and other ties to Homer and Tolstoy that I have mentioned above, in *Chetyre dnia* Garshin — unlike either Homer or Tolstoy — explores the mental effects war has on one hero when he is acting in war, when his physical mobility is restricted and he reflects on his actions, and when he can relate his actions. This exploration provides Garshin with the means to consider the ways in which war affects an individual and how an individual might confront his own singleness of perspective. Read thus, *Chetyre dnia* appears not solely as a meditation on war, but also as a consideration of what it means to act blindly and a presentation of the struggle for self-understanding that such an act will demand.

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<sup>18</sup> *Chetyre dnia* can be read as retrospective narrative and inner monologue (Henry, p. 44). I read it as a retrospective narrative. For a study that reads the story as an early attempt at direct interior monologue, see Vladimir Tumanov, "“Ecce Bellum”. Garshin's “Four Days”", in *Vsevolod Garshin at the Turn of the Century*. I, 127–145.