

# REWRITING UNDER IDEOLOGICAL PRESSURE: A. FADEYEV'S THE YOUNG GUARD

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**Abstract:** The study analyses A. Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard* (1946, 1951), a political command in Stalinist era, inspired by historical events of the Second World War. Although included in the Socialist Realism canon, the novel had a difficult destiny, as it was rewritten under A. Zhdanov's close assistance after Stalin's critical reaction to the 1947 film adaptation. The novel may be regarded as a victim of the Soviet myth-making machine and a case of ideological fictionalization, imbued with the main Stalinist motives. The article unveils the tension between the initial creative project inspired by the anti-fascist movement in Krasnodon (1946) and the imposed party direction reflected in the second edition of the novel (1951), which became the official version of the actual events.

**Keywords:** A. Fadeyev's *The Young Guard*, Soviet myth-making machine, Socialist Realism canon, ideological fictionalization,;

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## Introduction

The special destiny of a popular Soviet novel is the focus of this study, revealing relevant political-cultural aspects of the Stalinist era. Alexander Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard* may have been the success and the curse of his life. In this respect, post-Soviet voices affirmed that the novel's meandering fate, along with the Thaw changes may have contributed to Fadeyev's suicide. And this may be considered an exaggeration if it was not for the writer's ascension within VAPP (*Vserossiyskaya Assotsiatsia proletarskikh pisateley*) in the late '20s, and then his status as co-founder of the Union of Soviet Writers and chairman (1946-1954), as well as his extensive editorial work in the Stalinist era. His position was considered both "orthodox from the party point of view and at the same time reasonably moderate and centrist."<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, it presents the political-cultural background and specificity of the war representation in Soviet literature. Secondly, it unveils the ideological reasons and their literary articulation in the novel *The Young Guard*.

The premises of this paper are based on Katerina Clark's

methodological ground, according to which the writings of the Socialist Realism must be viewed as popular literature.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the phenomenon of *kul'turnost`* was a programmatic facet in the Stalinist context, preoccupied with notions of legitimation and picking up the banner. Another starting point of this article consists in the idea that the Soviet war literature assumed some (pre)revolutionary and Bolshevik myths and developed them in the Stalinist era: the graveside oaths; the great family (seen both as the community of people with the same ideas and ideals, but also as the Soviet Union); the mentor-disciple/ father-son relationship. As for the war representation (visible especially in Fadeyev's case), it reverberates the patriotic tones of the Civil War writings and represents reality after stripping off the unnecessary and irrelevant details (*ottalkivanie*) in order to add the desirable nuances.<sup>3</sup>

## Methodological and conceptual aspects

While analyzing the Soviet war prose, we propose four main perspectives on Soviet war literature<sup>4</sup>. The first one is better historically delineated – revolutionary perspective, during the



coexistence of various literary circles. That is when the coining of the term “Soviet literature”<sup>5</sup> took place; this perspective is focused on the First World War and Russian Civil War. The following perspectives refer to the Second World War or the “Great Fatherland War”. The second perspective is the heroic-romantic (where we place Fadeyev’s afore-mentioned novel, V. Polevoi’s *A Story About a Real Man* and others, broadly during the Stalinist era). The third one – the psychological perspective – refers to the Thaw era, although there were other forerunners even during the Second World War. It is mainly known as the literature that received the title of “lieutenants’ prose” (*leitenanskaya proza*) or the “new war prose” focused on “trench truth” (*okopnaia pravda*), with the plot reduced to a piece of land (*pyad’ zemli*). Among strong representatives of this generation of writers called *okopniki*, we mention Yu. Bondarev, G. Baklanov, V. Bogomolov, E. Kazakevich, O. Gonchar, V. Grossman, K. Simonov, and V. Bykov. And the fourth perspective on war is the philosophical one (manifest during the post-Stalinist years), where L. Leonov (*The Russian Forest*) and Yu. Bondarev (the second stage of his creation – *The Shore, The Choice*) occupy the main position. This philosophical perspective is echoed in writings of P. Proskurin, V. Rasputin, C. Aitmatov, and E. Nosov.

The heroic-romantic perspective may be considered specific during the ’40s. It is recognizable in the tone of the story, the lyrical-romantic elements and heroic pathos, with the same literary motives (small and great family, initiation, death as a symbol, relationship between father-son/ mentor-disciple etc.). Despite the fact that this period is known for other types of novels, with a different perspective on war (naturalistic, psychological, some philosophical features) that influenced the Thaw period, *The Young Guard* combines features of many war Stalinist writings. In this respect, we mention A. Tolstoy’s *The Russian Character* (1944) and V. Vasilevskaya’s *The Rainbow* (1942), as well as poems written by A. Surkov, K. Simonov, N. Tikhonov, P. Antokolsky or, probably the most popular of all, A. Tvardovsky’s *Vasily Tyorkin* (1941-1945).

First of all, we seek to conceptualize the phrase “ideological fictionalization” as specific not only to the proletarian and then Soviet literature, but especially in Fadeyev’s case of rewriting his novel according to precise indications from above. More specifically, adding chapters with the prominent role of the party leaders in the resistance movement in Lugansk area. The rationale for this addition lies in the reduction of the spontaneity and fecklessness of the Krasnodon underground activity on the one hand, and in the illustration of the powerful link between generations, on the other. Picking up the banner became thus one of the central motives of the novel. This motif conferred a deeper significance to the relation mentor-disciple and weight to heroic actions of the Krasnodon youth during fascist occupation. Moreover, the novel gained a wider perspective or largeness in connecting the local Krasnodon underground activity with actions of neighbouring towns and villages of the region. It also showed partisans’ network and even the advancing Red Army (see the chapters on Ekaterina Protsenko’s activity after the arrest of the young guardians).

In this way, another obsessive requirement of the Soviet (rigid wing) criticism regarding the war prose was fulfilled – *massshtabnost’* (or the huge proportions of events). That was supposed to diminish the rising of the “new war prose”.

Ideological historicization was the shaping factor in the rewriting process of *The Young Guard*. It is thus significant that Fadeyev’s second edition became canonical and it was also respected when opening the museum complex dedicated to the young guardians in Krasnodon in 1970 (after several variants of a simple museum opened in 1944). The rewritten novel may be considered a merge of verisimilitude and idealism, a juxtaposition of realist and utopian elements, placed in the mythic mode in Katerina Clark’s terms.<sup>6</sup> The novel is also a junction between quasi-historical facts (ideologically manipulated) and fiction under historical accuracy pretenses to serve the Soviet myth-making machine.<sup>7</sup> The result is the marvelous production of a long lasting and still standing myth of “The Young Guard” as an ideological construct and important ingredient of the cult of the Great Fatherland War. As such, it was successfully established during the Brezhnev era in order to fill the void after de-Stalinization process<sup>8</sup>, with an instrumentation of social rituals<sup>9</sup> performed around the monuments dedicated to war heroes.<sup>10</sup>

#### Rewriting *The Young Guard* – Between Ideological Historicization and Fictionalization

The problem of war and its representation in the Soviet literature was discussed at the Convention of Writers in Moscow on March 31, 1943. In I. Antokolsky’s vision war was a “school of suffering” or in I. Ehrenburg’s opinion a “source of frenzy, tension of hatred and fervent love.”<sup>11</sup> Alexander Fadeyev pointed out the “special liberating and vigilante character against the most reactionary forces of history” and the “historic mission of Soviet art to express the heroic strong and noble aspects of the Soviet people.”<sup>12</sup>

According to his expressed opinion and the desirable directions from above, Fadeyev rewrote the novel. It seems that a special committee gathered in order to establish and complete the picture of the Soviet resistance of the Lugansk region. This is how new characters appeared – Barakov, Liutikov – communist leaders, supposed resistance fighters. Given the fascist procedure to neutralize all members of the communist party when establishing their new rule in occupied territories, it was highly unlikely for former revolutionaries to be alive.

Under these circumstances, the very nature of the literary act didn’t matter, along with author’s intention, as the fictional facts were corrected according to the ideological requirements of the party. Thus, the novel became a necessary item in the Soviet myth-making process and in the propagandistic machine. Fadeyev stated that he “didn’t want to offer the history of ‘The Young Guard’, but to depict the Soviet man under occupation from the youth perspective, to offer the perspective of the entire society, including the youth as the future of this society.”<sup>13</sup> Despite his attempts to bring light

on the nature of the literary work, Alexander Fadeyev had to change even the details about his characters, according to real aspects. That was the case of the hero Boris Glavani (in the first edition) and Glavan in the second edition, rectifying even his Moldavian roots (from Soroca and not Tiraspol).

On the other hand, the Soviet authorities did their best to adjust real aspects to be faithful to the official “historical” depiction of the novel. In this respect, Sergey Tyulenev’s relatives had to change their documents to become “Tyulenin” exactly as in the novel. Moreover, several destinies were crippled: the girls Vyrikova and Lyadskaya presented as traitors in the novel had a harsh real life during the postwar period. They were both tried and sent to labour camps for decades for an alleged treason without even knowing each other in real life.

While auctorial independence was a matter of the past during the Stalinist period, Fadeyev had to accept the directive to represent the idea of legitimation of the new generation. While in the first edition of the novel the main characters are adventurous and full of initiative teenagers, heroes of a partly clumsy and childish resistance, the second edition introduces the previously approved figures who prepared and lead the young generation into actions against the Germans. The new edition of the novel has two points of interest: the Bolshevik leaders with the experience of the Civil War and Revolution and the young restless and patriotic inhabitants of Krasnodon in action.

The irony is that the transformations of the substance of the novel according to the party pressure became one of the best examples of ideological fictionalization of those years. Consequently, the Soviet critics exalted the new version of *The Young Guard* and appreciated the “romantic young spirit kept in the second edition, yet with a much more solid real basis.”<sup>14</sup>

The author himself mentioned that being captivated by the activity of the young people of Krasnodon, he lost the sense of proportion so that the “lyrical beginning overshadowed the rest.” As such, the first edition of the novel was dominated by the expression of this lyrical structure in the detriment of any other aspect.<sup>15</sup> This superiority of the lyrical aspect was considered by some critics as “uniformity”. As a consequence, the writer was reproached the lack of development of the Bolshevik activity in the region and the inconsistent mentioning of the representatives of the party. Moreover, the critics pointed out as the inconsequence of applying the “typification principle” so dear to Socialist Realism.

Nevertheless, the main argument of detractors remained the “negligence of the party principle” (*partijnost*). It was dismantled by A. Bushmin who mentioned the fact that that very principle didn’t necessarily suppose the representation of party members; the artistic portrayal of children and teenagers would have been enough. But this was uttered in a different era (beginning of the ‘80s), when the boundaries and principles of Socialist Realism were discussed, pushed, neglected and negotiated.

Katerina Clark discussed this vague principle of *partijnost* as being accomplished by a series of artistic means and by

syntax (in the sense of conventional order of events according to the structure of the work). It mainly represented a ritual of affirming loyalty toward the state.<sup>16</sup> In the case of *The Young Guard*, the representation of the elder generation and the motif of passing the baton were crucial. They both confer a glorious image to the party in the dark years of the war and also revealed some mechanisms of the Soviet power and its rhetoric.

### From Hero to Positive Hero

The relation between reality and literature was also considered of an utmost importance while discussing N. G. Chernyshevsky’s novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863). The Soviet hermeneutics highlighted the existence and birth not only of the prototype of the positive hero, inspired by real models, but also of the implementation of life principles for the new type of people. Soviet critics and historians disputed whether the prototype determined the construction of the positive hero in Chernyshevsky’s case or the literary work contributed to popularizing ideas and implementing them.

Socialist Realism, the impeccable example of fusion between political ideas and literary forms, encouraged the inspiration from real cases, recommending the adjustment and delineation of the hero according to the Soviet socialist standards. In Elena Senyavskaya’s vision, that was done by taking an already formed popular hero/heroine, transforming him/her into a symbol to serve a propagandistic purpose. A true phenomenon developed of “mass copying” of literary heroes and heroines inspired by real life.<sup>17</sup> Other Russian wars generated the same process of transforming historical figures into symbols, but the communist rule raised this phenomenon to a different level. It reaffirmed social examples of heroism in people’s conscience and induced a *sui-generis* mentality of the so-called new born “Soviet people”. Seen from this perspective, the new chapters of *The Young Guard* were vital for resuscitating and maintaining readers’ interest toward the role of the party and of communist mentors in the underground fight. The novel contributed thus to the maintenance of the myth-making function and establishing national heroes.

Rewriting the novel was considered a great deed of civic responsibility (although an ideologized one). The act of rewriting was in the view of Soviet criticism the result of collaboration between the author and the reader. It represented writer’s receptivity toward the voice of the era and social interests, embracing the party mindedness and loyalty toward the politically tailored truth of life. The relationship between reality and representation, between history and fictionalization followed the dicta of Socialist Realism. Alexander Fadeyev pointed out the relation of the novel with its historical background, mentioning the used sources, among which interviews with survivors and relatives of the young heroes and heroines, letters, diaries. Under such difficult circumstances of genesis, the writer was caught between what Bushmin called the “feeling of responsibility



toward history” and the “artistic rationality that required the limitation of characters for a better portrayal of some of them.”<sup>18</sup> The result was, as the author himself put it, “a real history and, at the same time, artistic creativity; a novel.”<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusive Notes

While rewriting the novel meant bringing forth the required general image (*masshtabnost'*) of the war, it also meant inserting some dissonant notes regarding the lyrical unity of the first edition of *The Young Guard*. Therefore, the lyricism was interrupted by pages of chronicle concerning the activity of party leaders in Vorshilovgrad/Lugansk. Some pages give the impression of artificial additions (or intrusions) into the novel's organic structure. That is especially true about chapter three that represented the central part of the picture preparing the evacuation, the “state mechanism of the war.”<sup>20</sup> However, critics of those days (and even those of several decades later) supported the superiority of the second edition of the novel. Some critics expressed the artistic and ideational qualities of the second edition and pointed out the “optimist paths despite the tragic ending.”<sup>21</sup> They preferred the “general representation of the war” and the “rehabilitation of the historical truth” to the organic coherence and compositional

unity of the first edition. Despite the strictly followed party direction in the second edition of Fadeyev's novel, K. Simonov wrote that “although the second edition was ‘complete’, it wasn't better.”<sup>22</sup>

The arguments for rewriting the novel are in contradiction with the status of the literary work and with historical reality. Although Fadeyev explained tirelessly the difference between the fictional inspiration from real events and the historical events, he however stated the necessity of editing the novel and introducing the new heroes. The heroes' fictional existence doesn't have to be influenced by new historical documents, but there was confusion in the realm of Soviet literary theory and criticism, especially visible in this case – confusion between author and narrator, between real and fictional, historical and historicized events. Over seventy years after the publication of the second edition of *The Young Guard*, the novel remains an example of ideological fictionalization, imbued with the main Stalinist motives.

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### Notes:

1. R. Cockrell, “Aleksandr Fadeyev as Literary Theorist (1927–1932),” *Slavic East European Review* 64, no. 3, (1986): 340.
2. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, third edition (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), XI.
3. R. Cockrell, “Aleksandr Fadeyev,” 346.
4. See details in Olga Grădinaru, *Războiul sovietic – între idealizare și demitizare* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2018).
5. The term was coined by Alexander Voronsky, probably the most notable literary critic of the late '20s.
6. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 36–41.
7. A similar case is B. Polevoi's *A Story About a Real Man*, inspired by the pilot Alexei Maresiev.
8. Gabriela Welch, “Memoria celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial în Uniunea Sovietică: sacrificiu, victorie, cult” in Andi Mihalache and Adrian Cioflâncă, *Istoria recentă altfel: perspective culturale* (Iași: Editura Universității A. I. Cuza, 2013), 299.
9. C. Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: The Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 25.
10. S. Kruk, “Semiotics of Visual Iconicity in Leninist “Monumental” Propaganda,” *Visual Communication* 7, no. 1 (2008): 27–56.
11. A. Bushmin, Aleksandr Fadeyev. Cherty tvorcheskoi individual'nosti, Izdanie vtoroe, dopolnennoe. (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983), 177.
12. Ibid., 178.
13. S. Rybak, “Pisatel' -boets” in A. Fadeev, *Molodaya gvardia* (Chișinău: Literatura artistică, 1977), 655.
14. Ibid., 667.
15. S. Gerasimov, A. Fadeev: Vospominania sovremennikov. (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel, 1965), 461.
16. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 13.
17. Elena Senyavskaya, *Psikhologia voyny v XX veke: istoricheskii opyt Rossii* (Moskva: Rosspen, 1999).
18. Bushmin, Aleksandr Fadeyev, 181.
19. A. Fadeyev, “Vstrecha s chitateliymi,” in *Sobranie sochinenii v 5-ti t. Rabota nad romanom „Molodaya gvardia”*, t. 4. (Moskva: Goslitizdat, 1960), 400.
20. V. G. Boborykin, *Ob istorii sozdania romana A. A. Fadeyeva ‘Molodaya Gvardia’* (Moskva: Prosvechenie, 1988), 213.
21. P. Kuprianovsky, P. Shalis, *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura otechestvennoi voyny (seminarii)* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe iz-vo ministerstva prosveschenia RSFSR, 1955), 76.
22. A. Bushmin, op. cit., 187.

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